



BSc (Hons) Physical Geography

Programme Specification

Primary Purpose

Course management and quality assurance.

Secondary Purpose

Detailed information for students, staff and employers. Current students should refer to the related Course Handbook for further detail.

Disclaimer

The University of Portsmouth has checked the information given in this Programme Specification. We will endeavour to deliver the course in keeping with this Programme Specification; however, changes may sometimes be required arising from annual monitoring, student feedback, review and update of units and courses. Where this activity leads to significant changes to units and courses, there will be prior consultation of students and others, wherever possible, and the University will take all reasonable steps to minimize disruption to students. It is also possible that the University may not be able to offer a unit or course for reasons outside of its control, for example; the absence of a member of staff or low student registration numbers. Where this is the case, the University will endeavour to inform applicants and students as soon as possible. Where appropriate, the University will facilitate the transfer of affected students to another suitable course.

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Course Details

1. Named Awards

BSc (Hons) Physical Geography

2. Course Code (and UCAS Code if applicable)

C1595F/S, F840

3. Awarding Body

University of Portsmouth

4. Teaching Institution

University of Portsmouth

5. Accrediting Body

N/A

6. QAA Benchmark Groups

Geography

7. Document Control Information

July 2017

8. Effective Session

2018/19

9. Author

Dr Carol Ekinsmyth

10. Faculty

Science

11. Department

Geography

Curriculum

12. Educational Aims

- to examine the breadth of the Physical Geography discipline
- to explore Physical Geography's place among the sciences
- to develop and refine student's intellectual and critical abilities so that they can define, investigate, analyse and synthesise problems, form judgements, make decisions and demonstrate their competence in such skills
- foster an active and self-reflective learning approach to enable students to engage with life-long learning

13. Reference Points

- University of Portsmouth Curricula Framework Document
- The scholarship and research expertise of academic members of staff
- QAA Code of Practice for the Assurance of Academic Quality and Standards in Higher Education
- National Qualifications Framework
- Geography Subject Benchmark Statements (SBS)

14. General Learning Outcomes

Level 4

Certificates of Higher Education are awarded to students who have demonstrated:

- knowledge of the underlying concepts and principles associated with their area(s) of study, and an ability to evaluate and interpret these within the context of that area of study
- an ability to present, evaluate and interpret qualitative and quantitative data, in order to develop lines of argument and make sound judgements in accordance with basic theories and concepts of their subject(s) of study

Typically, holders of the qualification will be able to:

- evaluate the appropriateness of different approaches to solving problems related to their area(s) of study and/or work
- communicate the results of their study/work accurately and reliably, and with structured and coherent arguments
- undertake further training and develop new skills within a structured and managed environment

And holders will have:

- the qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring the exercise of some personal responsibility

Level 5

Diplomas in Higher Education are awarded to students who have demonstrated:

- knowledge and critical understanding of the well-established principles of their area(s) of study, and of the way in which those principles have developed
- ability to apply underlying concepts and principles outside the context in which they were first studied, including, where appropriate, the application of those principles in an employment context
- knowledge of the main methods of enquiry in the subject(s) relevant to the named award, and ability to evaluate critically the appropriateness of different approaches to solving problems in the field of study
- an understanding of the limits of their knowledge, and how this influences analyses and interpretations based on that knowledge

Typically, holders of the qualification will be able to:

- use a range of established techniques to initiate and undertake critical analysis of information, and to propose solutions to problems arising from that analysis
- effectively communicate information, arguments and analysis in a variety of forms to specialist and non-specialist audiences, and deploy key techniques of the discipline effectively
- undertake further training, develop existing skills and acquire new competences that will enable them to assume significant responsibility within organisations

And holders will have:

- the qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring the exercise of personal responsibility and decision-making

Level 6

Bachelor's degrees/Bachelor's degrees with honours are awarded to students who have demonstrated:

- a systematic understanding of key aspects of their field of study, including acquisition of coherent and detailed knowledge, at least some of which is at, or informed by, the forefront of defined aspects of a discipline
- an ability to deploy accurately established techniques of analysis and enquiry within a discipline
- conceptual understanding that enables the student:
 - to devise and sustain arguments, and/or to solve problems, using ideas and techniques, some of which are at the forefront of a discipline
 - to describe and comment upon particular aspects of current research, or equivalent advanced scholarship, in the discipline
- an appreciation of the uncertainty, ambiguity and limits of knowledge
- the ability to manage their own learning, and to make use of scholarly reviews and primary sources (for example, refereed research articles and/or original materials appropriate to the discipline)

Typically, holders of the qualification will be able to:

- apply the methods and techniques that they have learned to review, consolidate, extend and apply their knowledge and understanding, and to initiate and carry out projects
- critically evaluate arguments, assumptions, abstract concepts and data (that may be incomplete), to make judgements, and to frame appropriate questions to achieve a solution - or identify a range of solutions - to a problem
- communicate information, ideas, problems and solutions to both specialist and non-specialist audiences

And holders will have:

- the qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring:
 - the exercise of initiative and personal responsibility
 - decision-making in complex and unpredictable contexts
- the learning ability needed to undertake appropriate further training of a professional or equivalent nature

15. Learning Outcomes

A. Knowledge and Understanding of:

- A.1 Spatial distributions in physical phenomena and understandings about how these form (SBS)
- A.2 Critical awareness of the significance of spatial and temporal scale in physical environmental systems (SBS)
- A.3 Principles, theory, philosophy, historical perspective and practice of Physical Geography (SBS)
- A.4 Diverse forms and methods of representation of the physical world (SBS)
- A.5 Data capture, storage, manipulation and analysis strategies (SBS)
- A.6 Methodological strategies used specifically in the analysis and interpretation of geographical information (SBS)
- A.7 Recognise the moral, legal and ethical issues involved in debates and enquiries (SBS)

B. Cognitive (Intellectual or Thinking) Skills, able to:

- B.1 Assessing the merits of contrasting theories, explanations, policies and methodologies (SBS)
- B.2 Analysing and problem solving (SBS)

- B.3 Decision making (SBS)
- B.4 Critically judging and evaluating the influence of spatial context and evidence (SBS)
- B.5 Critically interpreting data, graphical and cartographical representations and text (SBS)
- B.6 Abstracting, synthesising and visualising information (SBS)
- B.7 Developing a reasoned argument (SBS)
- B.8 Taking responsibility for own learning, and developing habits of reflection upon that learning (SBS)

C. Practical (Professional or Subject) Skills, able to:

- C.1 Combine and interpret different types of geographical evidence (SBS)
- C.2 Apply a range of techniques for the analysis of geographical data and interpret the outcomes (SBS)
- C.3 Employ a variety of field and laboratory-based methods for the collection and analysis of geographical information (SBS)
- C.4 Effectively present geographical information (SBS)
- C.5 Design a research project, apply an appropriate methodology, and present the findings in an appropriate format (SBS)
- C.6 Have the flexibility to adapt to technical changes in the work place environment
- C.7 Work safely in a laboratory and in the field.

D. Transferable (Graduate and Employability) Skills, able to:

- D.1 Communicate ideas, principles and theories effectively by oral, written and visual means (SBS)
- D.2 Work effectively both in teams and independently on given projects or tasks (SBS)
- D.3 Apply basic statistical and numerical skills to geographical information (SBS)
- D.4 Use Information Technology (e.g. Web & Internet, databases, spreadsheets) (SBS)
- D.5 Independent learning and study (SBS)
- D.6 Information handling and retrieval (including use of online computer searches) (SBS)

16. Learning and Teaching Strategies and Methods

Core knowledge and understanding (A1-A7) is acquired through lectures, seminars, workshops, fieldwork, tutorials and directed independent study. A foundation knowledge and understanding is gained at Level 4. As students' progress through Levels 5 and 6, they are expected to develop a greater depth of knowledge and understanding of a selection of key themes covered by the learning outcomes.

Cognitive skills (B1-B8) are promoted via practicals, seminars, tutorials, group discussions, fieldwork, group work and lectures. Learning to apply these thinking skills to geographical issues is obtained through independent project work, group project work, one-to-one discussions with Tutors and fieldwork classes. The Researching Our World unit at Levels 5 is specifically designed to foster these skills.

Learning outcomes C1-C7 are developed through practical classes, lectures and fieldwork. A planned programme of skills training runs through core units at Levels 4 and 5 including Level 4 Information and Communication Skills, Level 4 Applied Geography, Level 4 Introduction to GIS, Level 5 Researching Our World. The Independent Study at Level 6 allows students to use and to demonstrate some of these skills. This programme has a strong emphasis on hands-on activity including practicals in the laboratory and data collection/capture in the field.

Learning outcomes D1-D6 is especially addressed in the following Level 4 units: Information and Communication Skills (D1-D6), Introduction to GIS (D3, D4, D6), and Applied Geography (D1, D2, D6). All skills are further developed at subsequent Levels. Teaching is via tutorials, practical classes, field excursions, workshops and seminars.

17. Assessment Strategy

Learning outcomes A1-A7 are assessed through examination and coursework (including essays, project reports, group presentations, portfolios, posters & seminar performance).

Learning outcomes B1-B8 are assessed by coursework and examinations. The Independent Study at Level 6 allows a student to demonstrate their intellectual skills through independent study.

Learning outcomes C1-C7 is through coursework (including project reports, portfolios, oral presentations, poster presentations, group work, & oral examinations) and the Independent Study. Although practical skills may not be tested directly, a student's stage of skill may be gauged from the quality of work presented in the various types of coursework listed above. Students should also be able to demonstrate their understanding of methods through critical appraisal of methods in coursework and examinations. The Independent Study should demonstrate student competence in relevant practical skills.

Learning outcomes D1-D6 is through coursework at all Levels (including project work, portfolios, group projects, presentations & posters, oral examinations & the Independent Study).

18. Course Structure, Progression and Award Requirements

See [Unit Web Search](#)¹ for full details on the course structure and units

Students are required to obtain 360 credits for an honours degree of which 120 are obtained at each Stage. Credits are obtained through the study of units which are worth 20 or 40 credits.

At Level 4, 120 credits are obtained through the study of 6 x 20-credit core units.

At Level 5, students take 5 core units worth 20 credits each, and 1 option units from Physical, Environmental Geography and GIS subjects, each worth 20 credits.

At Level 6, the Independent Study is a core unit worth 40 credits. Students then choose 4 optional units from Physical, Environmental Geography and GIS subjects each worth 20 credits. Advice will be given to students concerning the selection of appropriate Independent Study topics which will be expected to fall within Physical Geography.

Besides the honours degree (360 credits), other exit awards are available as follows: Certificate in Higher Education (120 credits); Diploma in Higher Education (240 credits); Pass Degree (300 credits).

19. Employability Statement

Careers education, information and guidance is embedded within the Level 4 and 5 compulsory tutorial system as well as within the teaching of geography units through the discussion of practical examples. In particular at Level 4 the Applied Geography unit is designed to expose students to the ways in which geographical skills are deployed in the workplace. It does this through case studies in which staff discuss their knowledge transfer activities.

The curriculum develops a range of skills that are relevant to employability. The interdisciplinary nature of the course means that students have to engage with a range of tasks ranging from preparing for traditional academic artefacts to developing and managing practical and applied project work. Undertaking these varied tasks requires self-management as well as the management and collaboration of others. In addition students will be offered the chance to undertake a placement year between L5 and L6.

¹ www.port.ac.uk/unitwebsearch

Career management skills are delivered through the tutorial system at all three levels. At level 4, the personal tutorial system provides opportunities for delivering career management skills via reference to university Web resources and through the assessment of presentation skills within the tutorial system. At Level 5, students have an opportunity to produce a letter of application and CV and receive critical feedback as part of the compulsory Level 5 tutorial system. The tutorials at Level 5 are not credit-rated but they use the university-wide careers module as a template for developing career management skills. The weekly tutorial system enables individual rather than generic feedback to be provided to each student. In addition, the tutorials provide students with an opportunity to become increasingly self-reflexive and think of the career opportunities open to them and reflect on the skills and experiences they could develop for their future careers. The materials used in teaching are a combination of centrally and departmentally produced material. At Level 6 each student has a personal tutor who builds upon the experience of Level 5 to further aid student self-reflection and analysis of their skills profile for employment. There is an optional Employability unit at L6 ('Employability Skills for Geographers').

Links with Employers

Sessions involving past graduates are arranged within the tutorial programme at Level 5 unit to provide current students with information on graduate employment destinations and work place skills of value to employers. At Level 6, individual feedback and development of both career management skills are provided by the individual tutorial system. The department, as part of its departmental strategic plan, has formalised existing links with employers to establish a Professional Advisory Group (PAG). PAG meetings provide a forum for employers to discuss skill profiles they believe appropriate to their profession, thereby informing both curriculum content and increasing student awareness of how their skills profiles match the requirements of specific professions.

Course Management

20. Support for Student Learning

- The Course is managed by the Associate Head Education Extensive induction programme introduces the student to the University and their course.
- Each student has a personal tutor, responsible for pastoral support and guidance.
- University support services include careers, financial advice, housing, counselling etc.
- The Academic Skills Unit (ASK).
- The Additional Support and Disability Advice Centre (ASDAC).
- The Faculty of Science Learning Support Tutors.
- Excellent library facilities.
- The University of Portsmouth has consistently been awarded an excellent rating for student support and guidance in a number of Quality Assurance Agency inspections.
- Student course and unit handbooks provide information about the course structure and University regulations etc.
- Feedback is provided for all assessments.

21. Admissions Criteria

A. Academic Admissions Criteria

- Generally, admission offers are made at 280 points which may include the 14-19 diploma, A2-levels, AS-levels, vocational A-levels and other point rated qualifications. Students with A level qualifications will normally be expected to have gained at least 160 points at A2.
- Mature students, European and International students are welcomed
- Professional skills and experience will be recognised

- Other qualifications and experience will be considered on an individual basis: Applicants with non-standard qualifications may be requested to attend interviews
- Current University policy on RPL is applied in an individual basis
- International applicants will be required to have IELTS requirements at 6.0 (or equivalent)
- GCSEs at standard Grade C in Maths and English are normally required as are at least 5 GCSEs at grade C or above

B. Disability

The University makes no distinction in its admissions policy with regard to disability and will endeavour to make all reasonable adjustments in order to make it possible for students to study at Portsmouth on a course of their choice.

22. Evaluation and Enhancement of Standards and Quality in Learning and Teaching

A. Mechanisms for Review and Evaluation

- Associate Head Education's Annual Standards and Quality Evaluative Review.
- Head of Department's Annual Standards and Quality Evaluative Review.
- Unit and Course Level student feedback considered at Board of Studies.
- Unit Assessment Board consideration of student performance for each programme.
- Annual Standards and Quality Reports to Board of Studies, including consideration of Subject and Award External Examiner Reports.
- Periodic Programme Review.
- Student Representatives and Student/Staff Consultative Committees.
- National Student Survey.
- Staff Performance and Development Review.
- Peer Review and Development Framework.
- Faculty Learning and Teaching Committee.

B. Responsibilities for Monitoring and Evaluation

- Unit Co-ordinators for unit content and delivery.
- Associate Head Education for day-to-day running of course.
- Board of Studies with overall responsibilities for operation and content of course.
- Head of Department.
- Associate Dean (Academic).
- Associate Dean (Students).
- Quality Assurance Committee.
- Unit, Award and Progression Board of Examiners.

C. Mechanisms for Gaining Student Feedback

- Student Representation on Board of Studies.
- Student Staff Consultative Committees.
- Unit and Course level student feedback questionnaires.
- University participates in external student surveys, e.g., National Student Survey (NSS), International Student Barometer (ISB).

D. Staff Development Priorities

- Academic staff undertake activities related to research, scholarship, teaching and learning and student support and guidance.
- Annual staff performance and development reviews match development to needs.

- Managers undertake a variety of management development programmes.
- New academic staff required to undertake appropriate University of Portsmouth learning and teaching programmes.
- All academic staff encouraged to seek Higher Education Academy membership.
- Academic staff undertake initial and continuing professional development within the Academic Professional Excellence Framework (APEX) programme which is aligned with the Higher Education Academy (HEA)'s UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF)

23. Assessment Regulations

The current University of Portsmouth academic regulations will apply to this programme (see [Assessment and Regulations²](#)).

24. Role of Externals

Subject External Examiners who will:

- Oversee unit assessment and usually attend Unit Assessment Boards
- Review unit assessment strategy
- Sample assessment artefacts
- Present report to Unit Assessment Boards

Award External Examiners (usually also a Subject External Examiner) who will:

- Oversee and attend Award/Progression Boards
- Scrutinise and endorse the outcomes of assessment
- Ensure that the standard of the award is maintained at a level comparable with that of similar awards elsewhere in the United Kingdom

25. Indicators of Standards and Quality

A. Professional Accreditation/Recognition

N/A

B. Periodic Programme Review (or equivalent)

8th March 2018 confirming the course was fit for purpose.

C. Quality Assurance Agency

QAA Higher Education Review, March 2015, judgements about standards and quality meet UK expectations (*for full report see [Higher Education Review of the University of Portsmouth, March 2015³](#)*).

D. Others

None.

26. Further Information

Further information may be found in:

- Student Handbook
- University of Portsmouth Curriculum Framework Document

² www.port.ac.uk/departments/services/academicregistry/qualitymanagementdivision/assessmentandregulations/

³ www.qaa.ac.uk/en/ReviewsAndReports/Documents/University%20of%20Portsmouth/University-of-Portsmouth-HER-15.pdf

- University of Portsmouth Prospectus
- [University of Portsmouth](#)⁴ and [School/Department](#)⁵ websites

⁴ www.port.ac.uk/

⁵ www.port.ac.uk/department-of-geography/