The Royal Agricultural University

Programme Specification:

MSc Agroecology

Postgraduate Diploma Agroecology

Postgraduate Certificate Regenerative Farming

Academic year 2024/25

PROGRAMME SPECIFICATION [ACADEMIC YEAR 2024/25]

This Programme Specification is designed for prospective students, current students, academic staff and potential employers. It provides a concise summary of the main features of the programme and the intended learning outcomes that a typical student might reasonably be expected to achieve and demonstrate if he/she takes full advantage of the learning opportunities that are provided. More detailed information on the teaching, learning and assessment methods, learning outcomes and content of each module can be found in the Module descriptors.

Section 1 – Material Programme Information

Validating body	The Royal Agricultural University
Teaching Institution	The Royal Agricultural University
Subject Area	Agricultural Science and Practice (ASP)
Entry Award(s)	MSc Agroecology Postgraduate Diploma Agroecology Postgraduate Certificate Regenerative Farming
Final Award and exit route(s)	MSc Agroecology Postgraduate Diploma Agroecology Postgraduate Certificate Regenerative Farming
Programme title	MSc Agroecology
Location(s) of study	RAU Cirencester
Full time study	1 Year
Part-time study	2 Years
Language of study	English
Programme start month	September and January
Period of validation	September 2024 - August 2029
Name of Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Body	Not Applicable
Type of Accreditation	Not Applicable
Accreditation due for renewal	Not Applicable
Entry requirements (this should be the standard University entry requirements unless otherwise approved by the Academic Board)	An Undergraduate Honours Degree (2:2 or above) from a UK university or overseas equivalent, or a professional qualification and/or experience considered to be equivalent to the above. For information on international qualifications, please, see our country specific pages. For countries not listed please contact admissions@rau.ac.uk
Non-standard application	We welcome applications from applicants with non-standard qualifications who are able to demonstrate knowledge, experience and skills developed in the workplace or elsewhere and which are relevant to the programme of study. Applicants will need to use their personal statement to provide further details supported by a CV. All non-standard applications will be considered by the Programme Manager on a case-by-case basis and applicants can expect that an interview may be required as part of the admissions process.
English language	If English is not your first language, you will need to reach the requirements outlined in our English language requirements for the level of study. For postgraduate taught programmes this is IELTS Academic min. overall 6.5 with no element below 5.5(or equivalent). English language tests usually have a validity of 2 years from the date the test is taken.
Interviews	Interviews are usually required for non-standard applications.
UCAS Code	N/A

Quercus Code	AGRE
HECoS Code	100864
QAA Subject Benchmark Statement(s) and other reference points	Master's Degrees (February 2020); Agriculture, Horticulture, Forestry, Food and Consumer Sciences (2019); Earth Sciences, Environmental Sciences and Environmental Studies (2023)
Academic level on Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ)	Level 7
Approval at AQSC	03 July 2024

Section 2 - Programme Structure

The structure of all University awards complies with the University's Academic Regulations for Taught Programmes which includes information about the:

- Rules for progression between the stages of a programme;
- Consequences of failure for referrals, compensation and exist awards;
- Calculation and classification of awards.

The format of the programme is a mixture of residential learning and blended learning approaches supported by a range of learning materials and activities presented on the RAU VLE.

MSc Agroecology (180 credits) – *September start*
The accumulation of 180 credits through the assessment of programme elements as detailed below:

Module code	Module title	Level	Credit value	Core/ Elective	Semester
Level 7					
4744	Organic and Regenerative Systems	7	15	Core	1
4745	Fundamentals of Agroecology	7	15	Core	1
4038a	Integrated Agricultural Systems	7	15	Core	1
4413	Research Skills	7	15	Core	1
4414	Dissertation	7	45	Core	1+2
4746	Agroecological Principles in Practice	7	15	Core	2
4756	Applied Farmland Ecology (FWAG)	7	15	Core	2
4203	Small Scale Farming and Local Food Supply	7	15	Core	2
4747	Management of Woodlands and the Natural Environment	7	15	Elective	2
4727	Managing Global Soils in a Changing Climate	7	15	Elective	2
4722	Climate Change and Sustainability	7	15	Elective	2
	Total credits: MSc Agroecology		**180**		

The majority of students studying the MSc degree part time study over two years and submit the dissertation as the final element in the August of the final year.

MSc Agroecology (180 credits) – Part time – *September start*					
Module code	**Module title**	**Level**	**Credit value**	**Core/ Elective**	**Semester**
Year 1					
4745	Fundamentals of Agroecology	7	15	Core	1
4744	Organic and Regenerative Systems	7	15	Core	1
4038A	Integrated Agricultural Systems	7	15	Core	1
4746	Agroecological Principles in Practice	7	15	Core	2
4756	Applied Farmland Ecology	7	15	Core	2
Plus, one elective module in Semester 2 from the list below:					
4747	Management of Woodlands and the Natural Environment	7	15	Elective	2
4727	Managing Global Soils in a Changing Climate	7	15	Elective	2
4722	Climate Change and Sustainability	7	15	Elective	2
Year 2					
4413	Research Skills	7	15	Core	1
4414	Dissertation	7	45	Core	1+2
4203	Small Scale Farming and Local Food Supply	7	15	Core	2
Plus, one elective module in Semester 2 from the list below:					
4747	Management of Woodlands and the Natural Environment	7	15	Elective	2
4727	Managing Global Soils in a Changing Climate	7	15	Elective	2
4722	Climate Change and Sustainability	7	15	Elective	2
	Total credits: MSc Agroecology		**180**		

PG Diploma Agroecology (120 credits) – *September start*
The accumulation of 120 credits (or more) at level 7 through the assessment of programme elements as detailed below:

Module code	Module title	Level	Credit value	Core/ Elective	Semester
Level 7					
4745	Fundamentals of Agroecology	7	15	Core	1
4744	Organic and Regenerative Systems	7	15	Core	1
4038a	Integrated Agricultural Systems	7	15	Core	1
4756	Applied Farmland Ecology (FWAG)	7	15	Core	2
4746	Agroecological Principles in Practice	7	15	Core	2
4203	Small Scale Farming and Local Food Supply	7	15	Core	2
4747	Management of Woodlands and the Natural Environment	7	15	Elective	2
4727	Managing Global Soils in a Changing Climate	7	15	Elective	2
4722	Climate Change and Sustainability	7	15	Elective	2
	Total credits: PG Diploma Agroecology		**120**		

PG Certificate Regenerative Farming (60 credits) – *September start*
The accumulation of 60 credits (or more) at level 7 through the assessment of programme elements as detailed below:

Module code	Module title	Level	Credit value	Core/ Elective	Semester
Level 7					
4744	Organic and Regenerative Systems	7	15	Core	1
4745	Fundamentals of Agroecology	7	15	Core	1
4746	Agroecological Principles in Practice	7	15	Core	2
4756	Applied Farmland Ecology (FWAG)	7	15	Core	2
	Total credits: PG Certificate Regenerative Farming		**60**		

MSc Agroecology (180 credits) – *January start*
The accumulation of 180 credits through the assessment of programme elements as detailed below:

Module code	Module title	Level	Credit value	Core/ Elective	Semester
Level 7					
4746	Agroecological Principles in Practice	7	15	Core	Spring
4756	Applied Farmland Ecology (FWAG)	7	15	Core	Spring
4203	Small Scale Farming and Local Food Supply	7	15	Core	Spring

4747	Management of Woodlands and the Natural Environment	7	15	Elective	Spring
4727	Managing Global Soils in a Changing Climate	7	15	Elective	Spring
4722	Climate Change and Sustainability	7	15	Elective	Spring
4744	Organic and Regenerative Systems	7	15	Core	Autumn
4745	Fundamentals of Agroecology	7	15	Core	Autumn
4038a	Integrated Agricultural Systems	7	15	Core	Autumn
4413	Research Skills	7	15	Core	Autumn
4414	Dissertation	7	45	Core	Spring + Autumn
	Total credits: MSc Agroecology		**180**		

PG Diploma Agroecology (120 credits) – *January start*

The accumulation of 120 credits (or more) at level 7 through the assessment of programme elements as detailed below:

Module code	Module title	Level	Credit value	Core/ Elective	Semester
Level 7					
4756	Applied Farmland Ecology (FWAG)	7	15	Core	Spring
4746	Agroecological Principles in Practice	7	15	Core	Spring
4203	Small Scale Farming and Local Food Supply	7	15	Core	Spring
4747	Management of Woodlands and the Natural Environment	7	15	Elective	Spring
4727	Managing Global Soils in a Changing Climate	7	15	Elective	Spring
4722	Climate Change and Sustainability	7	15	Elective	Spring
4744	Organic and Regenerative Systems	7	15	Core	Autumn
4038a	Integrated Agricultural Systems	7	15	Core	Autumn
4745	Fundamentals of Agroecology	7	15	Core	Autumn
	Total credits: PG Diploma Agroecology		**120**		

PG Certificate Regenerative Farming (60 credits) – *January start*

The accumulation of 60 credits (or more) at level 7 through the assessment of programme elements as detailed below:

Module code	Module title	Level	Credit value	Core/ Elective	Semester
Level 7					
4746	Agroecological Principles in Practice	7	15	Core	Spring
4756	Applied Farmland Ecology (FWAG)	7	15	Core	Spring
4744	Organic and Regenerative Systems	7	15	Core	Autumn
4745	Fundamentals of Agroecology	7	15	Core	Autumn
	Total credits:		**60**		

	PG Certificate Regenerative Farming				

Section 3 – Programme overview and Programme Aims

Programme Overview

The programme can be joined either in September on in January. January starters will join the cohort that began their studies in September (for instance students beginning studies in January 2025 will join students who began their studies in September 2024) and will continue taking modules in the September of the year of entry.

This programme is designed to equip learners to pursue careers in, or in support of, agroecological and regenerative food ecosystems. Agroecology is an evidence-supported approach to addressing the needs of people and the planet. Agroecology focuses on ecological and regenerative approaches to farming, to environmental stewardship and to the social, cultural and governance dimensions of food systems.

The programme focuses on developing essential skills, methods and approaches to work in a variety of capacities ranging from managing land agroecologically, advising on agroecology initiatives, and/or developing effective policy to support this increasingly important sector of contemporary food systems. There is an emphasis on personal & professional development throughout the programme with a focus on skills such as effective communication, collaborative working, critical and creative thinking, reflective and reflexive practice.

The programme is designed to be both an introduction to Agroecology and regenerative farming practices for those who are new to these approaches, as well as an opportunity to deepen both knowledge and application in these areas for those already familiar with them. Throughout the programme students will have exposure to a wide range of professionals working in agroecological initiatives and in a variety of different contexts. These will include farmers and farm managers, farm advisors, ecologists and ecological consultants, researchers, and entrepreneurs in agroecological initiatives. Farm visits and experience of a wide range of agroecological sites provide contextual learning throughout the programme.

This research-informed programme will:

- Introduce students to the fundamentals of Agroecology from historical, theoretical, and contextual perspectives
- Introduce applied agroecological approaches and practices through on-farm visits, visiting lecturers, and opportunities to engage hands-on with land management methods
- Offer dedicated modules designed to enhance the skills and knowledge of farm advisors already working in this field or to support individuals wanting to move toward advisory roles.
- Provide contextual and applicable knowledge for developing or managing organic, regenerative and other agroecological enterprises.

The format of the programme is a mixture of residential learning and blended learning approaches supported by a range of learning materials and activities presented on the RAU VLE.

Regular trips and external engagement with agroecological initiatives are a key feature of the programme. These trips may include trips to farms, estates (such as Bathurst Estate), research and educational sites (such as FarmEd), and RAU Zerodig site.
Educational research informs the teaching, seminar facilitation, and student supervision on the modules. Evaluations at module and programme level enable reflection, reflexive responses and re-evaluation of the teaching and assessment of modules.

The Master's Degree can be obtained by accumulating 180 credits through successful completion of 8 taught modules and a dissertation (worth 60 credits).

A Postgraduate Diploma can be obtained by accumulating 120 credits through successful completion of 8 taught modules without the dissertation.

A Postgraduate Certificate can be obtained by accumulating 60 credits through successful completion of four core modules.

Programme Aims

The programme aims to support individuals wanting to shift from studies or work in non-agricultural disciplines and who want to adopt an agroecological orientation. It will also be of interest to those already active in some aspect of sustainable food systems and who wish to deepen their knowledge, skills and work in this area.

The overarching aims and objectives of the programme are to support the RAU's:
Vision; a world where all communities thrive in harmony with nature;
Mission, equipping a new generation to thrive through change;
Purpose, to cultivate care for the land and all who depend on it.

Section 4 – Programme Sustainability

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals emphasise interconnected environmental, social and economic aspects of sustainable development by putting sustainability at their centre. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) articulate key areas for developmental focus with the aim of "peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future."

The programme places a strong emphasis on SDGs – 2 (Zero Hunger), 3 (Good health and Wellbeing), 4 (Quality Education), 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), 12 (Responsible consumption and production), 13 (Climate Action), 15 (Life on the Land), SDG 17 (Partnerships for the goals)

The programme places emphasis on SDGs - 1 (No Poverty), 5 (Gender Equality), 6 (Clean water and sanitation), 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy), SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions).

Section 5 – Programme Intended Learning Outcomes

The learning outcomes employ those of the QAA Master's degree specification and the QAA Archaeology specification. The learning outcomes draw on specifications for *Agriculture, Horticulture, Forestry, Food and Consumer Sciences (2024)* and *Earth Sciences, Environmental Sciences and Environmental Studies (2023).* There are no specific QAA specifications for Agroecology at this time.

Knowledge and Understanding		
LO no.	On successful completion of the named award, students will be able to:	**Module Code/s**
1.	Understand the historical context and factors that have contributed to the development of agroecology, its articulation and application in different country contexts.	4744, 4745, 4746, 4203
2.	Apply agroecological principles in context	4745, 4756, 4203
3.	Understand the role that organic and regenerative farming principles and practices can play in the ethical and sustainable development of our future food and farming system.	4744,4203
4.	Identify agroecological land management options that are appropriate to locality and how to attract available funding to support these	4745,4756
5.	Recognise the professional, ethical, economic, social, political and policy environment of agroecological initiatives	All modules
6.	Evaluate agroecological initiatives for their engagement with the Sustainable Development Goals and how they contribute to these	All modules
Intellectual, Professional, Key skills		
LO no.	On successful completion of the named award, students will be able to:	**Module Code/s**
1.	(a) Identify appropriate leadership styles for different situations: to enable/mentor, enhance/coach and motivate others in order to improve performance (of self and others) (b) Recognise and address ethical dilemmas and to apply ethical values to situations and choices.	All modules
2.	Demonstrate critical self-awareness, self-reflection and self-management; time management; sensitivity to diversity in people and different situations, and the ability to continue to learn through self-managed study, reflection on practice and experience.	All modules
3.	Demonstrate effective performance within teams and the ability to recognise and utilise individuals' contributions in group processes and to negotiate and persuade or influence others; team selection, delegation, development and management.	All modules

4.	Carry out effective two-way communication: listening, effective oral and written communication of complex ideas and arguments, using a range of media, including the preparation of reports/documents appropriate to the audience.	All modules
5.	Demonstrate effective comprehension and apply digital skills professionally through the use of IT including email and internet, databases, spreadsheets and word processing and be able to carry out; digital recording, analysis interpretation and presentation.	All modules
6.	Think critically and be creative: To manage the creative processes in self and others; The capability to organise thoughts, identify assumptions and evaluate statements in terms of evidence, detect false logic or reasoning, identify implicit values, define terms adequately and generalise creatively but appropriately.	All modules
7.	Solve complex problems and make decisions: establish criteria using appropriate decision-making techniques, apply them to create and evaluate options and then implement and review decisions.	All modules
8.	Identify problems, and design and conduct research either individually or as part of a team.	All modules
9.	Locate, synthesise, analyse and evaluate data and information from a wide range of sources to support and evidence solutions to problems.	All modules

Programme specific skills		
LO no.	On successful completion of the named award, students will be able to:	**Module Code/s**
1.	Effectively communicate agroecological topics, methods, and applications to a range of audiences using a variety of mediums	4278, 4203, 4745,4746,4756
2.	Evaluate the potential for agroecological innovation or intensification to contribute to resilient food ecosystems	4278, 4203, 4745,4746
3.	Research, consult and collaborate with practitioners, policy makers, stakeholders to identify suitable agroecological approaches and solutions in a range of contexts	4278, 4203, 4745,4746
4.	Evaluate how agroecological initiatives address sustainable development goals and/or how they may be adapted to do so effectively	4278, 4203, 4745,4746
5.	Demonstrate effective personal, interpersonal, and professional skills to be effective in advisory, consultancy, education or innovation roles within agroecology	4745,4746

Section 6 – Approach to Learning and Teaching delivery

Contributing to agroecological initiatives and their development requires a broad knowledge base which includes agricultural knowledge, ecological and environmental knowledge, and the willingness to innovate in food ecosystems where agroecology is still to gain prominence.

Personal and interpersonal skills are also required as agroecology often engages practitioners in collaborative work and/or may lead to consultancy, advisory, or educational roles. The teaching and learning approach adopted by the programme gives focus to the knowledge and skills needed for these roles.

This programme has been designed to meet a wide diversity of learners, including learners who may not be joining the study from an agricultural background or prior agricultural degree. The programme also aims to support students who have come from an agricultural background either in practical terms or through previous study. As such teaching and learning will accommodate the diversity of backgrounds that learners bring with them to this postgraduate study.

Many postgraduate learners may be combining study with work and/or caring or other responsibilities. Teaching is thus designed to be flexible, to allow full participation for both part-time and full-time students.

Teaching is research-informed in approach as well as in content, supporting a broad range of learning styles and needs as well as the diversity of individuals (representing different ages, backgrounds, nationalities etc) who choose to study agroecology at Master's level. Agroecology is a global, multi-cultural, multi-contextual response to food production, food culture and regional contexts. The programme attends to this diversity through a wide range of case studies, contributors to content, and an understanding of the varied epistemic and ontological perspectives represented by students who join the RAU's postgraduate programmes.

Teaching will include the provision of study material provided on our Gateway Virtual Learning Environment (texts, videos, podcasts, academic papers) for independent study and research.
Study material will be enhanced with lecture content contributed to by RAU faculty as well as by visiting subject lecturers, practitioners, or contributors. Module content is made available, critically engaged with, and deepened through group discussions, tutorials, facilitated discussions, and opportunities for undertaking group work. Farm and other site visits will be a key component of the programme to ensure that knowledge is contextualised in specific locations and applications.

Assessment will be a balance between individual and group work and will consist of a range of reports, oral presentations, critical reflections and a dissertation / applied project. Each module is supported by a comprehensive resource list that is maintained through the RAU Library Talis system.

A number of support services are available to students should they require these. Support services include study skills sessions for students who may need support adjusting to studying in the UK HE context. Students may request, and receive support, for academic writing, dyslexia and disability support as well as pastoral support. The RAU offers an International Orientation for students who would benefit from a dedicated introduction to the UK, its traditions, heritage and culture. An Induction Week is offered to all students joining the programme, which is a week dedicated to providing a foundation for studying at Master's Level at the RAU. The induction week includes an overview of campus facilities (library, Student Support Services, IT services, grounds, gym), expectations for Masters students in academic terms, and throughout this week a focus on community building, enhancing inclusivity, equality and diversity is adopted.

Section 7 – Approach to Assessment

Assessment for the modules (for PGCert and PGDip) is undertaken through a variety of methods, for instance through presentations and written essays, through portfolio submissions comprising of a number of artefacts, through case studies, policy brief, professional reports (such as management plans), surveys (for ecological species assessment), and written exams.

For the Master's degree, students will complete the assessment(s) required for core and elective modules and will take out a substantive piece of independent research. This research will be developed as a dissertation. A dissertation is a formal, structured document, based on some form of original research project. This may be in the form of an experiment, a survey, a literature review etc. Students are expected to develop and demonstrate their research skills and critical ability through the medium of this piece of work. The main purpose of the dissertation is to demonstrate the application of knowledge gained in the taught element of the programme and to show that a research topic can be handled with the right level of academic competence.

Overall, the programme is taught and assessed through*:

	Learning and Teaching			**Assessment**		
	Directed	Independent	Placement	Exam	Coursework	Practical
Year 1	20.83%	79.17%	0.00%	2.50%	90.83%	6.67%

Section 8 – Course work grading and feedback

Assessment is an integral part of the learning experience of students. All University programmes are assessed by a range of assessment activities, each developed to provide the most appropriate means of demonstrating the student's achievement of a specified learning outcome. An assessment may assess more than one learning outcome.

The University operates standard pass criteria which can be found in the RAU Academic Regulations; (paragraphs 137 – 153).

The normal basis for awards will be the overall average score in the final assessment, graded as follows:

Distinction weighted average of	70% and above
Merit weighted average of	60% - 69%
Pass weighted average of	40% - 59%
Fail average	0% - 39%

In addition to assigning a percentage mark to the work, the tutor adds comments; usually about the strengths and weaknesses of the piece as well as advice about improving the work. All assessment decisions are subject to internal moderation and external scrutiny by the programme's External Examiners. Students must ensure they retain all coursework in case the External Examiner(s) wishes to see it.

Section 9 - Progression

Rapid change in the policy landscape in both the agricultural and the environmental sectors is unfolding at this time. Practically, innovation is needed to address increasingly unpredictable changes in climate, food system, and socio-political contexts. Developing the skills for generating sound policy and applying suitable approaches to these complex events is essential. Graduates from this programme will be well suited to filling a wide variety of currently existing roles, and there are undoubtedly going to be emerging roles and possibilities for employment in the coming years.

The programme has been developed through consultations with the Farm and Wildlife Advisory Group, with the National Trust, and with numerous farmers, growers, and food system innovators and entrepreneurs. Many of the individuals and organisations consulted in the development of the programme will be contributors as Visiting lectures, hosts for farm and land walks, guides to local Wildlife and conservation areas. Contributions such as these give students on the programme direct access to professionals working in a range of disciplines, many of which represent potential progression pathways for students.

Some of the possible progression pathways for graduates include:

- advisory roles in agriculture and environmental regeneration (some may enter the programme already in an advisory capacity but will be enhancing their competencies in this role).
- advisors in the forestry and environment sectors.
- professional roles focused on agroecological and sustainable farming research
- agroecological and sustainable farming education.
- the adoption of agroecological practices in their own farming or land management context.
- roles in organisations or professional bodies responsible for policy or regulation of sustainable agriculture.
- innovating as entrepreneurs in developing and maintaining resilient food systems.
- Progression to studies and research toward a PhD

Section 10 – Student support, wellbeing and counselling

The University is offering a wide range of support to all RAU students including practical advice & guidance as well as emotional support.

Disability & neurodiversity support

We support students with a range of disabilities, learning difficulties, and other health and mental health conditions, helping them to access funding via the Disabled Students Allowance .

When you tell us about a disability, you will be offered support based on your specific needs which can include:

- **Alternative exam arrangements** such as extra time, rest breaks, or a smaller room.

- **Access to support workers** such as study skills tutors, specialist mentors, readers and scribes.

Mental health Support

We are also here to support students with the ups and downs of university life, offering drop-in sessions, providing expert advice and support for students in crisis or with more complex needs, and together the team runs events and campaigns throughout the year to encourage positive wellbeing.

We also can help students to access external counselling sessions and these are generally delivered in collaboration with our long-term partners at Cotswold Counselling.

Academic Support Tutor Programme

Students have access to the Academic Support Tutor (AST) programme which provides high quality academic support for students. ATS provide timetabled group tutorials, and individual support for students most at risk. Group tutorials focus on providing high quality academic support at the appropriate academic level; advice and guidance in relation to the course; and advice about making study choices on the course (commensurate with the supporting AST Handbook). Individual support focus on student continuation (commensurate with The Team around the RAU Student spheres of integration student retention model) and may be in person or online.

Section 11 – Enhancing the Quality of Learning and Teaching

The programme is subject to the University's rigorous quality assurance procedures which involve subject specialist and internal peer review of the course at periodic intervals, normally of 6 years. This process ensures that the programme engages with the applicable national Subject Benchmarks and references the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications.

All programmes are monitored on an annual basis where consideration is given to:

- External Examiner Reports
- Key statistics including data on retention and achievement
- Results of the Student Satisfaction Surveys
- Feedback from Student Delegates from programme committees
- Feedback from Student-Staff Liaison committees
- Annual Programme Monitoring