



THE UNIVERSITY
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MSc Environmental Sustainability



Dr. Aidan Keane | 20 November 2025

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Meet the programme team

- Dr Aidan Keane
 - Programme Director for MSc Environmental Sustainability
 - Senior Lecturer
 - My interests lie in understanding how human behaviour and decision-making affect the outcomes of conservation interventions in complex social-ecological systems
- Dr. Teresa Armijos Burneo (Cohort Lead)
- Toby Gormley (Student Advisor)
- Course organisers & academic staff delivering teaching modules



Why study this MSc?

- Ensuring the environmental sustainability of society is one of the major challenges facing humanity in the 21st century.
- This includes: combatting climate change, and ensuring just transitions to sustainability which require changes in behaviour of organisations and individuals.
- This programme explores these and other related topical questions.



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Why study this MSc?

- You will be encouraged to think across different disciplines and consider scientific, community-local, and policy perspectives to better understand and foster sustainability in the Global South and Global North.



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What will you learn?

- What is Sustainability?
- What are the debates and challenges surrounding different approaches to SD?
- Critical social and global issues and ways to address these to benefit individuals, communities, societies and nature considering justice



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Why study this MSc at Edinburgh?

- Great Cultural Location
- History and Reputation
- International Environment
- Arts Scene – Music and other activities
- Outdoor activities - Nature
- Sustainability choices



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Programme structure

Find a full list of compulsory and option courses on the [Degree Programme Tables](#)

Compulsory Courses	Semester	Credits
Principles of Environmental Sustainability	Semester 1	20
Ecosystems and Global Change	Semester 1	20
Case Studies in Sustainable Development	Semester 2	20
Applied Research Skills in Environment and Society	Semester 2	20
Dissertation	April - August	60
2 option courses	1 per semester	40



Teaching and assessment

- You will experience a range of teaching and assessment styles while you are studying
- Courses can be delivered through a mix of in-class learning, discussion groups, field visits, and use of computer software
- Assessments include essays, group presentations and projects, exams and blogs



Dissertation

- An opportunity to explore, in-depth, a topic of your choice in relation to the programme, with the support of an academic supervisor
- Can be desk-based research or fieldwork
- Typically 10,000 – 15,000 words
- You may also have the option to complete a dissertation project in partnership with an external organisation or local community. Recent partners include: Edinburgh Shoreline, Volunteer groups in Burntisland, UNESCO and Centre for Sustainable Forests and Landscapes



Possible dissertation topics

- Energy Transition
- Sustainable Food Production
- Environmental Justice
- Waste Management
- Climate Change Policy Processes
- Climate Change Adaptation
- Environmental Change
- Disaster Risk
- Resilience and Vulnerability
- Agriculture and Sustainability
- Just Transitions to Sustainability



What a typical week looks like...

Semester 1, Week 4	
Classes	Timetable
Principles of Environmental Sustainability – Lecture & Seminar	Tues, 09:00-13:00
Principles of Environmental Sustainability – Seminar Discussion	Wed, 11:10-13:00
Ecosystems and Global Change – Lecture	Thurs, 09:00-13:00
Option course: Political Ecology – Lecture	Mon, 10:00-13:00
Total class hours	Roughly 13hrs

- Please note that the option course listed is just an example – hours will vary depending on the option courses you choose.



Other activities

- You will also need to take into account your independent study hours:
~25 hours per week across the semester.
- Students engage with teaching staff and other students in classes and seminars, on field trips, via cohort activities and through dissertation supervision
- Independent study can take place wherever suits you best (e.g. at home; in one of the University libraries; in the dedicated Masters Hub, located in the ECCI building)



Field trips

- We have previously visited the **Botanic Gardens** to conduct a half day activity as a cohort, during Welcome Week
- In Semester 1, we have also previously visited the **National Mining Museum of Scotland** to explore Justice and transition to low carbon society
- Please note that field course locations may vary year to year, but will always align with course learning outcomes



Field trips

- Through 'Case Studies in Sustainable Development', students have also visited the **Isle of Eigg**, a small island in the Scottish Inner Hebrides, and NGO and consultancy firms in Scotland's central belt
- On this course, students observe 'real-world' examples of sustainable development in local & national government, private businesses, NGOs, and local community partnerships across Scotland
- You may have other short fieldtrips depending on the courses you choose





*What does
Sustainability
mean in
practice?*

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On completion of this MSc, you will be able to:

- **assess the sustainability of policies, programmes and projects at scales ranging from the local to the global**
- **critically analyse environmental problems** using knowledge from different disciplines, leading to well-founded and considered solutions
- **advocate sustainable development** and engage in informed debate on current environmental controversies



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On completion of this MSc, you will be able to:

- be comfortable using interdisciplinary approaches to summarise technical scientific documents for use in policy, business strategies and other local and international initiatives.
- speak about, and understand environmental sustainability from multiple perspectives and appreciate the complexity of development, conservation, **environmental justice and sustainability**
- Work in teams and individually to solve problems and propose creative solutions to sustainability issues



Career opportunities

- This programme will prepare you for a wide range of roles within:
 - environmental consultancy
 - national and local government
 - non-profit organisations
 - environmental agencies
 - education or research at community
 - national or international levels
- Examples of where our graduates have gained employment:
 - Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations
 - Carnegie Wave Energy
 - E.ON
 - Friends of the Earth
 - The Scottish Government
 - Transport for London
 - Zero Waste Scotland



When to apply?

- Due to high demand for this programme, we operate on a series of early application deadlines.
- We strongly recommend you apply as early as possible.
- You should avoid applying to more than one degree. Applicants who can demonstrate their understanding and commitment to a specific programme are preferred.
- If you plan to apply to more than one programme, you should discuss your choices with us before you submit your application.
- Where possible, we may make an alternative programme offer if you have been unsuccessful in your chosen programme.



Student cohort

- We welcome students from biological, environmental or physical science, geography, social science or other relevant subject backgrounds
- 344 applicants for 2025 entry
- 25 new students on programme in 2025/26



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Scholarships and funding

- Featured funding
 - [Mastercard Foundation Scholarships](#)
 - [Chevening Scholarships](#)
- School of GeoSciences scholarships
 - [See potential funding for GeoSciences students](#)
- You are encouraged to research the range of potential scholarships and other funding outside the University for which you may be eligible.
 - [Search for funding](#)



Next steps...

<https://edin.ac/student-chat-pg>



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Contact details for follow-up questions

- We apologise if we did not get through all of your questions in the time allotted for this session. If you have further questions that have not been answered, please email: futurestudents@ed.ac.uk
- Alternatively, you can contact Dr Aidan Keane at:
aidan.keane@ed.ac.uk





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Thank you

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