

Designing your study programme MFN

You can find the detailed programme and schedules in 'Document 3 – MFN programme 2020-2021'. You can use Document 2 and 3 to design your own programme. In document 3 you can find blank schedules and start to prepare drafts.

In August you may be present at the Study Day (depending on the possibilities for you to be present in Wageningen). During this Study Day (or at home, if being here is not possible), you will start making a draft of your own study programme! Do not worry, it is a draft which means you will discuss it with your study advisor, change it again, deviate from your initial plan, find new interesting courses, meet your study advisor, suddenly find an interesting thesis with fieldwork very soon, changing your schedule, ask your study advisor if all your plans are possible, etc...till you have a final plan. And that final programme should be [officially approved](#)! But let's wait for that till the end of your 1st year, or beginning of your 2nd...

So, first you are going to design your 1st draft! How to prepare this draft? Look at the steps and tips below, answer the questions (just for yourself), get a blank schedule and start designing your programme!

Step 1: Why did I enrol for this programme?

What do you want? Why did you choose for the MSc Forest and Nature Conservation? What are your interests? Write down some keywords.

Step 2: Choosing a specialisation

Which specialisation do you want to choose? And what could be an alternative?

Step 3: Choices in the common part

All students must do courses from the 'common part' of the programme. But which courses you will have to do, depends mostly on your background and your future.

Background

- If your level of statistics is not sufficient and you want to choose specialisation Ecology or Management, it could be useful to choose [MAT-15403, Statistics 2](#). However, this course is of bachelor level and you can only do this as an additional course, and it can't be included in your master.
How do you know if your level is not sufficient? Read the course description of Statistics 2.
In doubt? Discuss this topic with your study advisor
- If your level of mathematics is not sufficient and you want to choose specialisation Ecology, it could be useful to choose [MAT-14903, Mathematics 2](#). But this course is bachelor level and can only be attended as an additional course. Read the course description and discuss with your study advisor.
- Research methodology (YRM-21306, REG-31306): Depending on your BSc or BA programme you have had one or more courses in research methodology. If you have extensive knowledge of research methodology, please discuss with your study advisor which course is still useful from the common part.

- Former HBO-students (Dutch and Belgian students only): Many HBO-students have been working in teams on (consultancy related) assignments. Therefore they can opt to replace the academic consultancy training (YMC-60809) or research master cluster (YEI-60312) of the common part by four mos-modules (YMC-60400).
- Do you have work experience? If you have more than five years work experience at a sufficient level, or three years of very relevant working experience: you could opt for an exemption for your internship. Discuss this during your intake meeting.
- Extensive experience in consultancy, or work(!) experience in teams? You could opt for an exemption for the academic consultancy training (YMC-60809), but do not forget that you still must do the course [YMC-60300; modular skills training](#).

Future plans

- If you plan to choose the specialisation Policy and Society you are advised to choose YRM-21306 in period 1. [But, this also depends on your background knowledge in research methodology](#).
- If you want to do Ecology, you are advised to choose REG-31806 in period 1. [But, see also background knowledge in research methodology](#).
- If you choose specialisation Management it starts to get more complicated. Because in this case the choice between YRM-21306 and REG-31806 will depend on the choice for the chairgroup where you are going to do your thesis!
 - Do you think you are going to do your thesis at the FNP-chairgroup: select YRM-21306.
 - Do you think your future thesis will be at the FEM, PEN or WEC/REG-chairgroup: select REG-31806.

This is an important, but sometimes difficult decision. Discuss with your studyadvisor if needed!

- Are you interested in a scientific career? Thinking about a PhD in the future? Then you choose [YWU-60312; The Research Master Cluster](#) from the common part of the programme.
- Are you not so much into science, but thinking about another career in advice, policy, consultancy? Then choose [YMC-60809](#), combined with [YMC-60300 the modular skills trainings](#).

Internship: schedule this after step 4 or 5

During your 2nd year, usually at the end (but this is not required!) of your MSc programme you plan your internship of 24 ects, i.e. 16 weeks. The advantage of the internship is that scheduling is not bound to the academic year and periods.

It is not required to do your internship at the same group as your thesis, so you could do an ecological thesis and a more social sciences-oriented internship.

[Already work experience? Check information at background with work experience](#).

You do not need to know what you are going to do yet. When designing your programme you only must consider that you need 16 weeks for your internship (or in the blank schedule: 4 blocks).

Academic Master Cluster: schedule this part after step 4

For the academic master cluster (in studyhandbook, common part, Restricted Optional courses (RO1) you have three different options:

1. RO1A: YMC-60809 Academic Consultancy Training (ACT) and YMC-60300: the Modular Skills Training (MOS): [see interests in a non-scientific career](#)
2. RO1B: [Only for Dutch \(or Belgian\) HBO students: see background HBO students](#)
3. RO1C: YWU-60312 Research Master Cluster (RMC) for future scientists: [see interested in a scientific career](#)

Scheduling this Master Cluster can be a challenge. Usually you choose your specialisation first and the courses that are compulsory or that you like to do as optional courses. Where there is space left in your schedule you do the Master Cluster.

BUT (there is always a 'but'), there are some rules for each option

If you choose option 1 (RO1A: ACT): To participate in this course it is mandatory that you have *"successfully completed at least 12 but preferably 24 credits of MSc-level courses or a first MSc-thesis"*. You cannot schedule this course at the beginning of your MSc.

The course is 9 erts! So you need a full period (1, 2, 3+4, 5 or 6) for this course.

You combine the ACT with MOS: 3 erts of skills trainings. For these skills training you choose two modules of 1,5 erts, or one module of 3 erts, depending on the skills you want to learn or improve.

Usually you combine ACT and MOS, but it is not required! Some students combine one or two MOS with thesis work, or with another course.

Option 2: If you are a former HBO-students: Choose four MOS, for a total of 6 erts! You can either schedule four modules at the same time or spread them throughout your MSc. And it is required that you include either ELS-65500 Argumentation Skills or ELS-66600 Academic Argumentation Skills in Writing and Debate

Option 3: The Research Master Cluster YWU-60312 can only be scheduled AFTER the MSc thesis. You try to start a bit earlier with their MSc thesis (at the end of 1st year) to include this course in the 2nd year).

As mentioned, scheduling this part of your programme can be difficult. Try to schedule one of these courses, **after** choosing your specialisation and other desired courses and discuss with your study advisor.

Step 4: Choices within a specialisation

Specialisation A: Policy and Society

This specialisation has a compulsory course in period 4: [FNP-31806 Social and Political Theory for Forest and Nature Conservation Research](#).

Put this course in your draft schedule.

Then there are three restricted optional clusters (RO1, RO2 and RO3), from which you must choose at least one course each.

When to do ACT: to start your ACT, you must have some (disciplinary) knowledge in your field of study. Therefore, you should have successfully completed at least 12 but preferably 24 credits of MSc-level courses. So, if you want to do the ACT in your first year, your options are period 3 and 4 combined, or 5 or 6. Whatever option you choose, it will have consequences for the courses in the restricted options clusters. For example: if you plan your ACT in period 5, you must choose FNP-31306 Communities Conservation and Development in period 3. And that means that you must take SDC-33306 Methodology for Field Research in the Social Sciences in period 6. Every choice has its pros and cons, it is up to you to weight them.

Planning ACT depends on the planning of your courses, or the other way around: scheduling of courses is depending on the planning of the ACT.

Specialisation B: Management

This specialisation has no mandatory course, but you must choose several courses from three restricted optional clusters (RO1, RO2 and RO3). Some of these choices depend on your interest and your future plans for the thesis.

- For writing a thesis with WEC, REG-30306 Animal Ecology is strongly advised, or REG-32806 Wildlife Ecology and Conservation
- For writing a thesis with PEN, PEN-30306 Plant, Vegetation and Systems Ecology is strongly advised, or PEN-30806 Restoration Ecology
- For writing a thesis with FEM, FEM-30306 Forest Ecology and Forest Management is strongly advised, or FEM-30806 Resource Dynamics and Sustainable Utilization
- For writing a thesis with FNP, FNP-31306 Communities, Conservation and Development and/or FNP-31806 Social and Political Theory for Forest and Nature Conservation Research FNP-32306 Decision-Making in Forest and Nature Management: Theory & Practice and/or FNP-32306 Decision-Making in Forest and Nature Management: Theory & Practice is advised. And you need a relevant course in research methodology for social sciences.

When to do ACT: as for the specialisation Policy & Society, you can plan ACT in period 3 and 4 combined, 5 or 6 if you want to include it in your first year and every choice has its own consequences, as explained above.

Specialisation C: Ecology

This specialisation has a compulsory course in period 3: [FEM-31806 Models for Ecological Systems](#). Put this course in your draft schedule.

Next to this mandatory course, you only must choose two courses from one restricted options cluster (RO1).

And as for the specialisation management, some of the choices depend on the chairgroup you wish to write your thesis with.

- For writing a thesis with WEC, REG-30306 Animal Ecology is strongly advised (or REG-32806 from the Management spec.).
- For writing a thesis with PEN, PEN-30306 Plant, Vegetation and Systems Ecology is strongly advised (or PEN-30806 from the Management spec.)
- For writing a thesis with FEM, FEM-30306 Forest Ecology and Forest Management is strongly advised (or FEM-30806 from the Management spec.)

When to do ACT: to start your ACT, you must have some (disciplinary) knowledge in your field of study. Therefore, you should have successfully completed at least 12 but preferably 24 credits of MSc-level courses. In this specialisation you have a mandatory course in period 3. So, if you want to do the ACT in your first year, your options are 5 or 6. Whatever option you choose, it will have consequences for the courses in the restricted options clusters. For example: if you plan your ACT in period 5, you can't take FEM 30306 Forest Ecology and Forest Management and this course is strongly advised if you want to write your thesis with the FEM chairgroup.

If you want ACT in period 6, you cannot do sufficient courses of your specialisation Ecology.

Every choice has its pros and cons, it is up to you to weight them.

Many Ecology students start their thesis in their 1st year and move ACT to their 2nd year.

Specialisation: I don't know yet!

No worries, in the first period there are only courses from the common part to choose. In the second period two specialisations have free choice (the specialisation Policy & Society and Ecology), but if you choose one or both courses from the specialisation Management, you still keep all options open!

The first moment you really must make a choice, is period 3. Ecology has its mandatory course then and for Management or Policy and Society it is also necessary to attend courses in that period.

Step 5: A thesis

The ideal moment to do your thesis, is in the first part of your second year. Why is that so ideal? You will then have taken the necessary courses to prepare in your first year and it gives you the opportunity to end the programme by doing an internship. Jobwise, that is the perfect planning.

However, it is not always possible to implement this ideal planning. Sometimes you must start earlier, or later, for all kind of reasons. We will give you some examples. Suppose you can't do ACT in your first year, or you wish to do the Research Master Cluster (RMC), or you don't know if you wish to do ACT or RMC. Or suppose you must take one or more courses in the second year, but you still wish to (or must) finish your masters in two years.

An option would be to start your thesis in the sixth period of the first year and do ACT or RMC or the courses in the third and fourth of the second year, just before your internship. If it is not possible to do the courses in period 3 and/or 4, then do them alongside your thesis. If you do this, please make sure your supervisor knows your planning and agrees with it.

Can you do your thesis during the summer holidays? Yes, you can, again in consultation with your supervisor. Make sure that your supervisor knows your planning, and you know the presence of your supervisor.

However, if you continue or start your thesis during summer, do schedule some time for a holiday. Maybe you want to visit your family back home, or you just want to go out on a camping trip. Whatever you do, holidays offer you the time to relax, rest, step back and take stock of your personal life, your needs, your desires and future projects. It is like detoxing from work. You really need this detox time; it is one of the best ways to ensure a good productivity when you are back at school.