

Overview of the Conservation Science MSc at Imperial College London

A review of five completed years

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Introduction to the report

The MSc in Conservation Science is about to complete its sixth year. The course was founded to meet a need, within the conservation sector, for graduates schooled to a high standard on the broad range of themes that feed into the goal of biodiversity conservation. The one year course is run by Imperial College London in collaboration with three supporting conservation organisations; The Zoological Society London (ZSL), Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew (Kew) and Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust (DWCT). The course is taught by visiting lectures from a diverse range of research departments and conservation organisations. The MSc is overseen by the course directors; Prof E.J. Milner-Gulland, Dr Colin Clubbe, Dr John Fa and Dr Marcus Rowcliffe. Lecturers take place in the first six months at the Silwood Park Campus of Imperial College London and are complimented by a visit to each of the supporting organisations. The second six-month period is devoted to an extended, self-lead research project. The dissertation typically has two supervisors, one of whom is based at the Silwood park campus.

This review aims to provide a structured assessment the course's current attainment of its goal to produce graduates with the skillset necessary for work within the conservation sector, identify core areas of success and highlight potential areas for improvement. The overview looks at the types of graduates the course attracts and accepts and how both alumni and professionals working within the conservation sector perceive the course in terms of its content and the types of graduates it is producing.

Methods

In order to obtain the data necessary to undertake this comprehensive review of the Conservation Science course three separated data sets have been gathered, analysed and compared.

Data on all applicants to the course (successful, unsuccessful, withdrawn and deferred) has been maintained to enable the identification of trends in the number and demographic characteristics of course applicants over time. An anonymous form of this data set has been used to determine these trends and to highlight the characteristics of successful applicants.

Two further anonymous data sets were obtained from online questionnaire surveys hosted on www.surveymonkey.com that were utilised to gather information from course graduates and conservation professionals respectively.

Course alumni were asked about their opinions of the course structure and content, they were also asked to share their thoughts on the impact the course has had on their ability to gain future employment. Trends in employment within course alumni were determined by profiling graduates work history after completing the course. Students were contacted with requests to fill out the

questionnaire by email using the Imperial College Conservation Science MSc graduate mailing list and Facebook group.

The conservation professionals surveyed by this review included people with direct links to the course, such as visiting lecturers, and those whose knowledge and experience of the course comes through their employment of course alumni. These stakeholders in graduate's future roles were surveyed in order to gain an understanding of how the course is perceived in the conservation sector and to determine the strengths and weaknesses of the graduates it produces. Stakeholders that were contacted with a request to undertake the online survey included visiting lecturers to the course, supervisors of alumni thesis, staff working at the three supporting organisations and individuals working at two of the largest NGOs with offices in the UK, Flora and Fauna International and Birdlife International. In addition to these groups course alumni were asked to pass on an invitation to complete the survey to their current employers.

Closed and open-ended questions were used for both groups. This structure allows for key subjects to be analysed quantitatively and gives respondents the opportunity to elaborate on themes so that a holistic picture of attitudes towards the course, its management and its graduates could be determined.

Finally both stakeholders and students were asked to contribute to a SWOT analysis of the course. SWOT analysis is an exercise undertaken to evaluate the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats of a project or business venture. The Strengths and Weaknesses are typically internal and current whilst Opportunities and Threats are based in the future and external.

Surveys were open to both graduates and conservation professionals for approximately three weeks and reminder emails were sent on multiple occasions.

Findings related to the application process

Total applicants

Approximately 558 applications to the Conservation Science MSc course have been received at the time that this analysis took place. The number is approximate as some possible repeat applications within the anonymous data set were impossible to distinguish from a separate application. Application figures have risen steadily for the first four years of the course but appear to have seen a slight decline for the 2012 intake (table 1).

151 applicants have successfully taken up a place on the course to date with approximately 30 more due to start in September. The course aims to have an intake of 30 students per year and has seen small variations in class size between 2007 and 2008) (table 1).

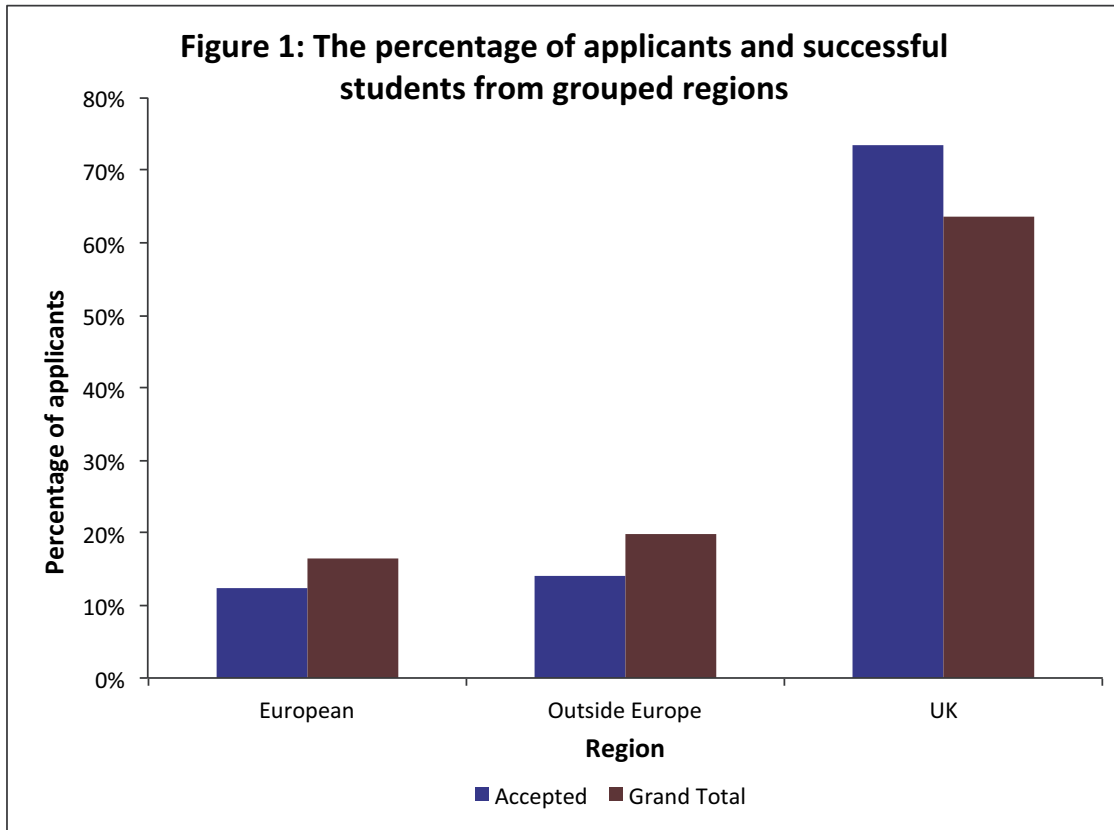
Table 1: Applications and class sizes for the period of analysis

	Year					
	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Number of Applicants	52	84	104	120	120	77
Number of Applicants	30	27	28	31	35	30*

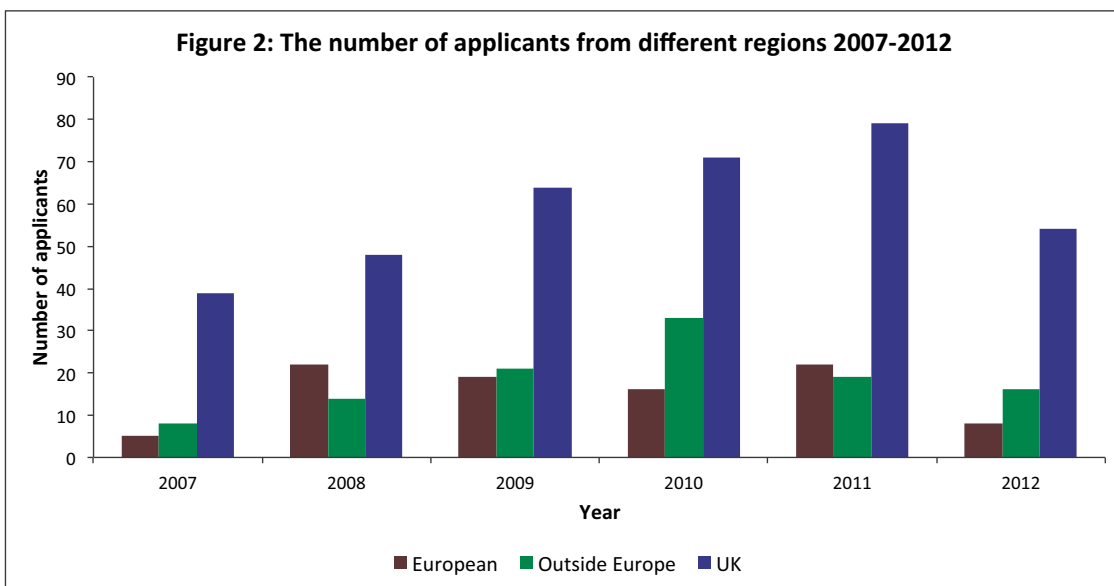
* Estimated

Nationality of applicants

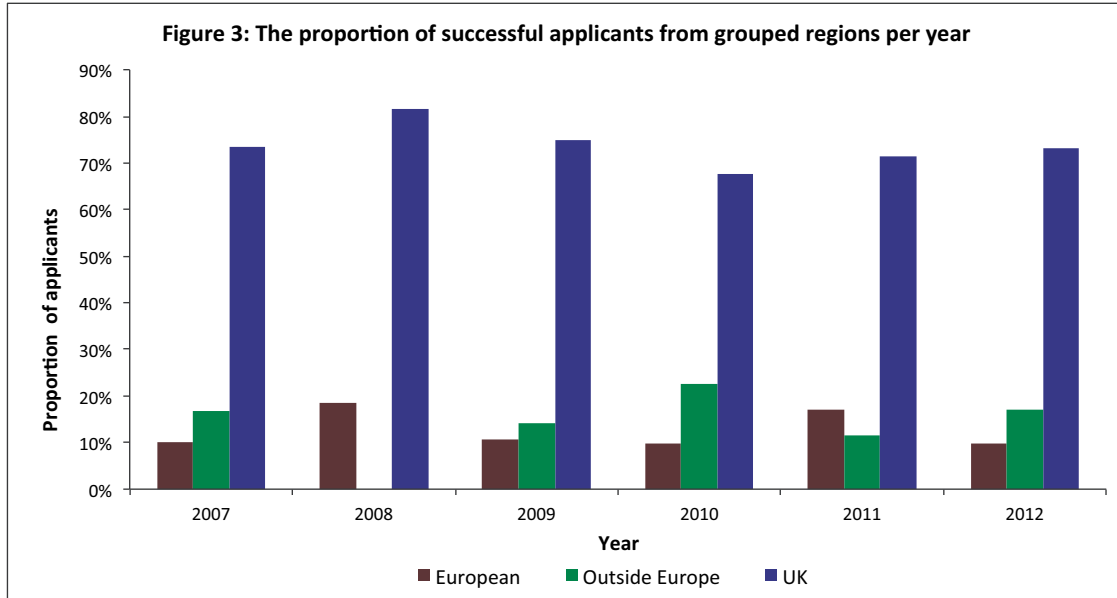
A total of 62 unique nationalities, excluding joint nationality holders, have applied to the course. Prospective students from the UK have been the most common applicants with European students and those from outside Europe applying in similar proportions. Non UK students have been accepted onto the course at percentages slightly lower than the proportion of applications would suggest (figure 1).



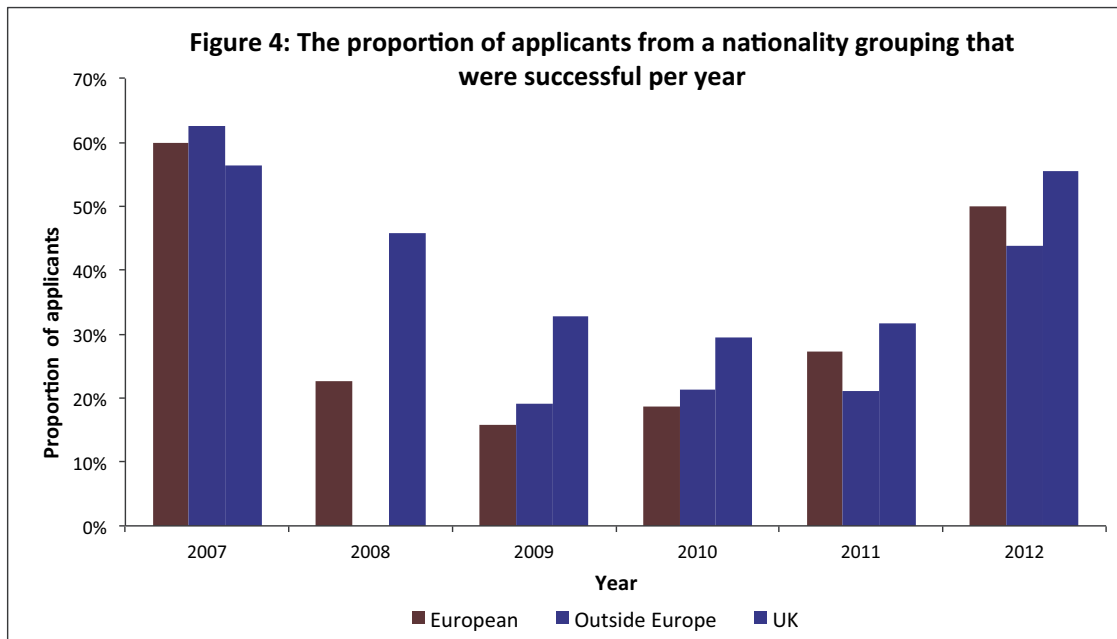
Both the number and proportion of applicants from different regions has remained relatively constant over the 6 years being analysed. Fluctuations in the number of applicants from different regions (figure 2) have followed the pattern of steady increase and a reduction for 2012 seen for the total number of applicants (table 1).



Similarly the proportion of students from different regions who successfully take up a place on the course has not shown much variation over the 6 years with the notable exception of an absence of students from outside Europe in 2008. Approximately 75% of the yearly intake comes from the UK (figure 3).



Of key interest to this review is to determine if applicants from a particular region are more successful at achieving a place on the course than those from different nationality groupings. Figure 4 shows that the proportion of applicants from the UK that were successful in gaining a place on the course has typically been slightly higher than those from the other two region categories.



A lack of trend or domination by a single grouping suggests that applicants are being chosen on individual merit and that their nationality is not a determining factor in achieving a place on the course.

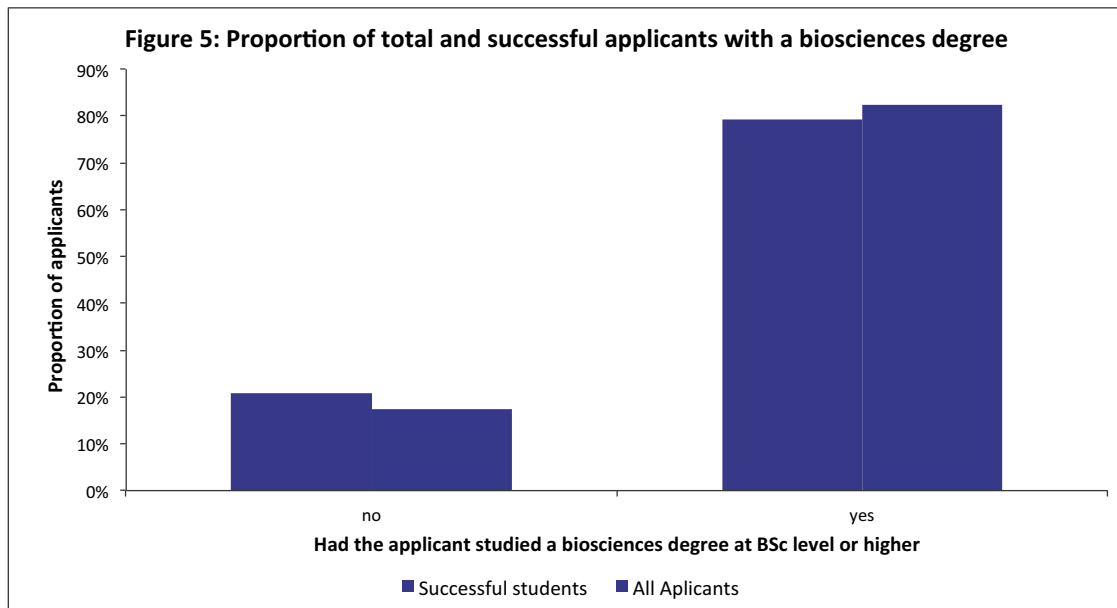
Applicants prior studies

A large majority of students applying to the course had previously undertaken higher education courses with a biosciences focus. This pattern is also seen in the number of students that successfully took up places on the course (table 2).

Table 2: The number of applicants and course participants with a biosciences qualification at degree level or higher

	Studied bioscience BSc or higher?	
	No	Yes
All applicants	97	457
Accepted students	40	152

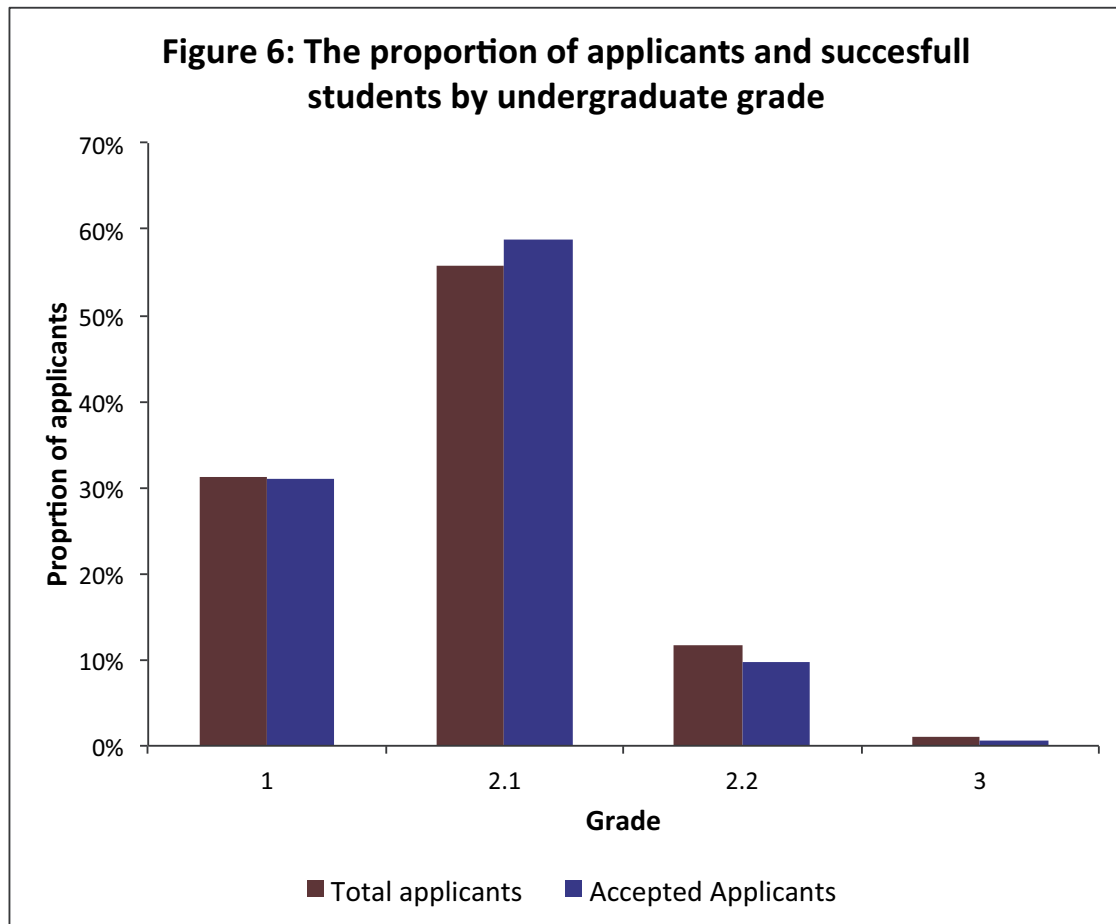
When the proportion of applicants with and without a biosciences qualification gaining a place on the course was assessed the percentage of successful students without biosciences degrees is slightly higher than the proportion of applicants might suggest (Figure 5).



As biodiversity conservation is a multidisciplinary field this increase may represent a selection in favour of increasing the diversity of backgrounds within the class for this highly participatory course. It should also be noted that applicants not coming from more traditional biology based courses are likely to be making a significant change of direction in terms of their future careers and as such are likely to have put considerable time and thought into the application process making them inherently strong candidates.

In addition to the subjects students had previously studied the impact of their grades on their likelihood to be accepted onto the course was also assessed. Where feasible grades from overseas students were converted into the UK undergraduate grading boundaries. For some prospective students for the 2012 cohort the grades assessed are their predicted scores.

The majority of applicant had grades that equated to a 1st or 2:1 (figure 6).

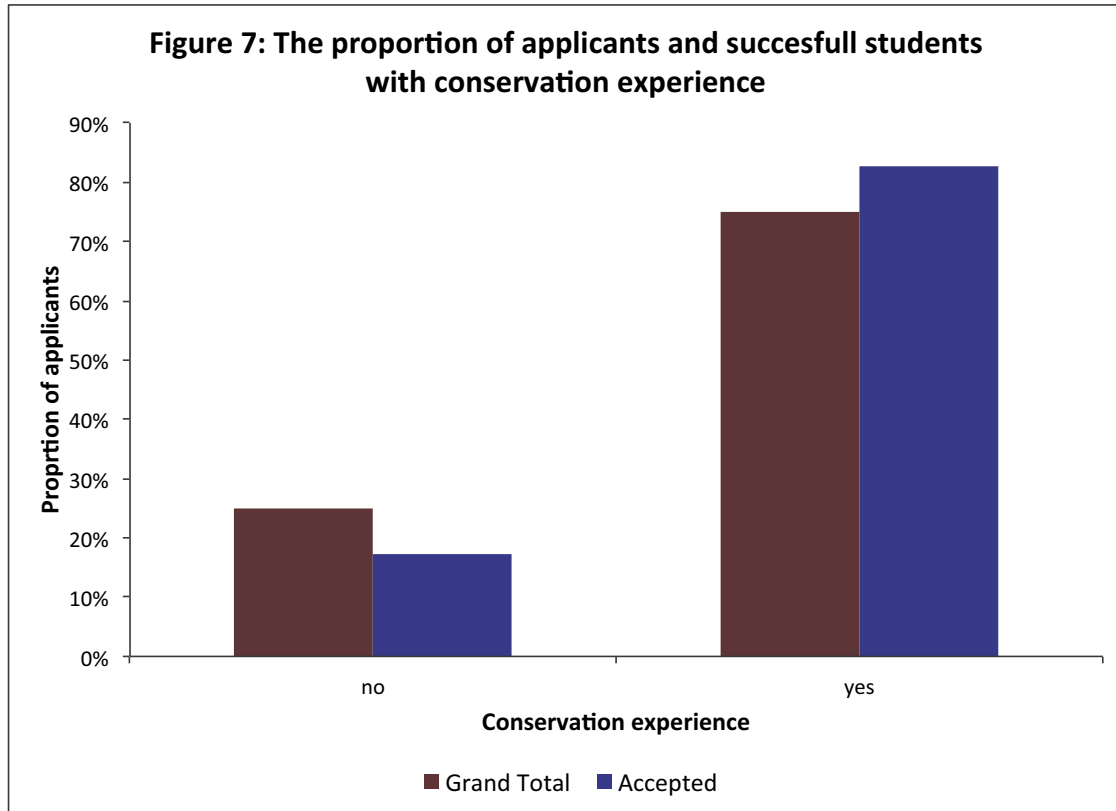


The proportion of students with a specific grade that are successful in taking up a place on the course is very similar to the proportion applying for the course. This suggests that student’s grades are not a key determinant of selection onto the course. It was noted during the analysis that a large percentage of students with 1st class degrees, 37%, have withdrawn their applications. Had these students remained in contention for selection it is likely that the proportion of students taking up places on the course with 1st class degrees would have been higher. Withdrawal rates were 19% for 2:1 and >2% for all others combined.

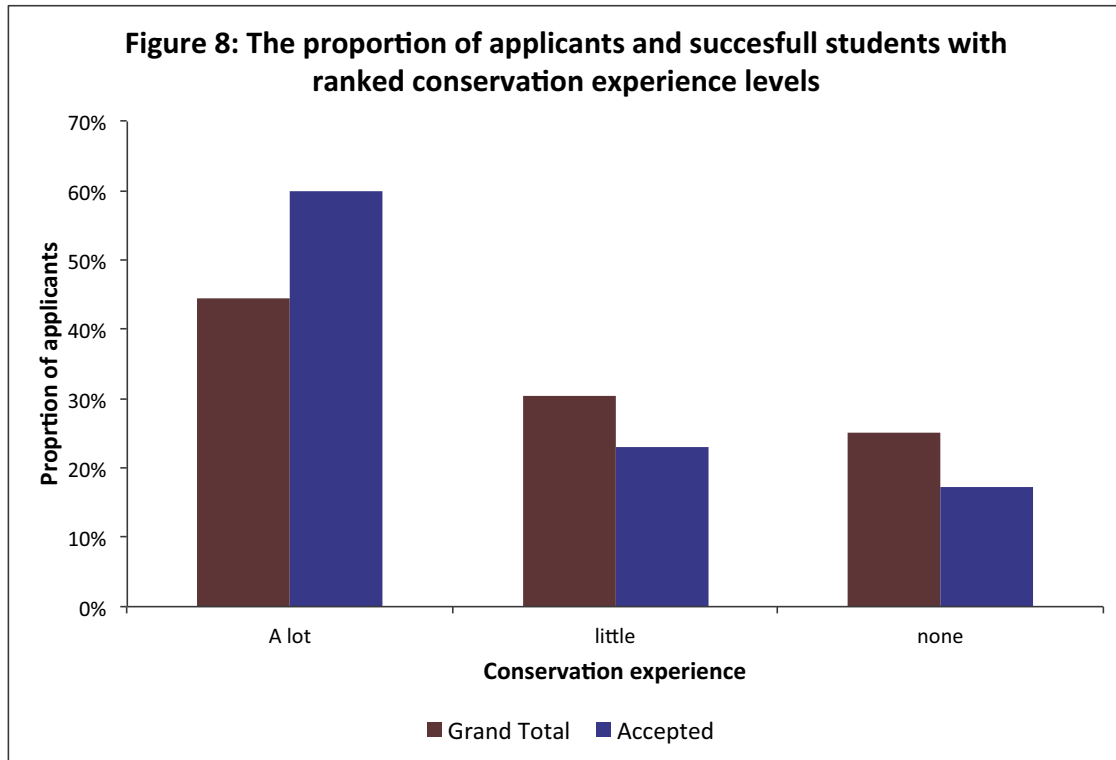
Applicants prior conservation experience

The nature of the course and the style in which it is taught means that students with previous experience of conservation are the likely to benefit from, and contribute the most, to the course as a result of being able to feed their own experiences into group activities and discussions.

A large majority of the applicants had previous conservation experience and this majority was enhanced amongst successful applicants (figure 7).

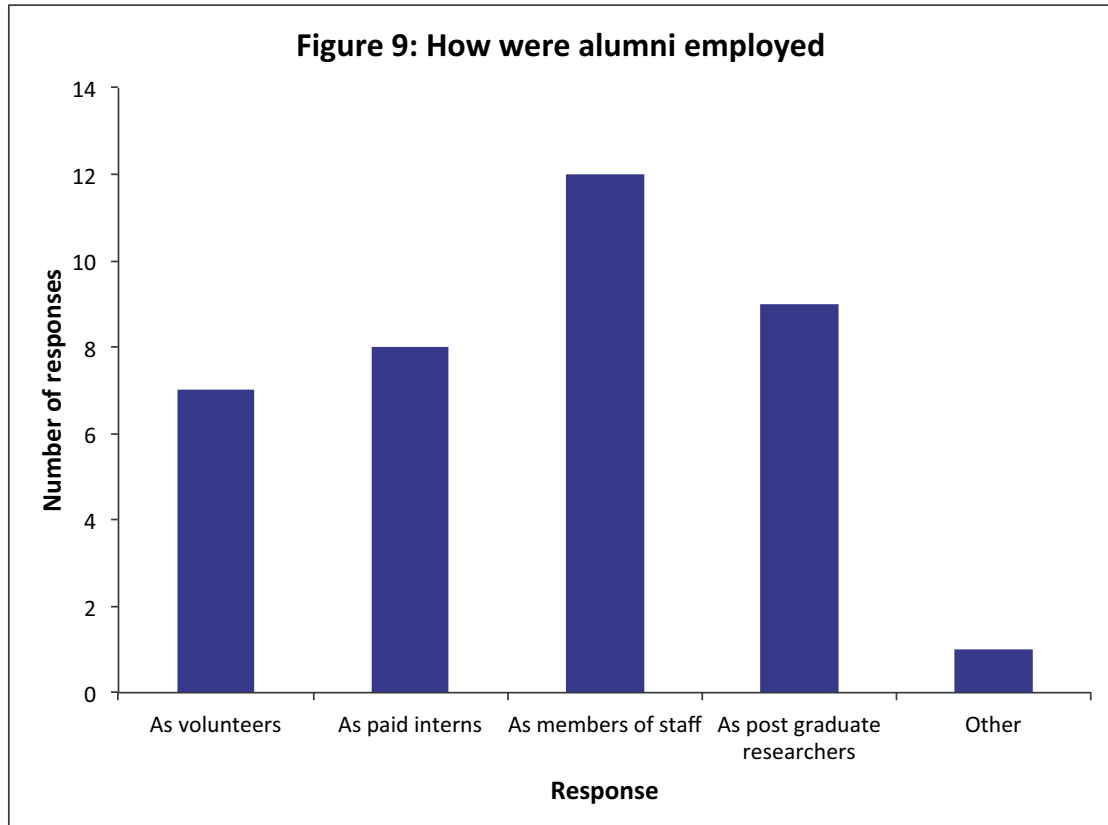


With previous experience stated as a key attribute of a high quality applicant it is perhaps surprising that previous experience does not appear to be selected for more strongly. Students past experiences were subsequently quantified as either “a lot of past experience”, “a little past experience” and “no past experience”. Figure 8 shows the presence of a selection bias towards students with “a lot of past experience” and against applicants from the other two categorisations. Individuals from these other categories make up a smaller proportion of classes than the number of applicants would suggest.

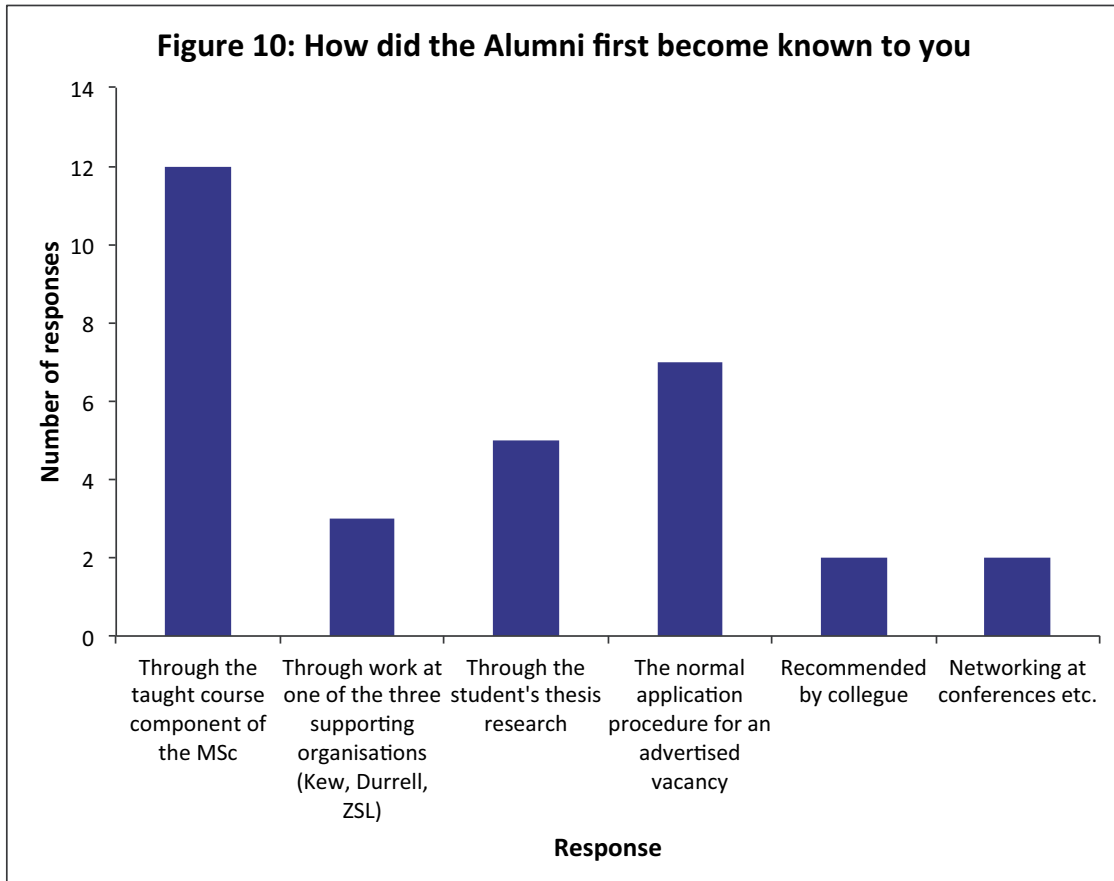


Findings from the stakeholder questionnaire

26 respondents provided answers to the questions in the online stakeholder questionnaire. Over 75% of these respondents said that they working alongside or employing alumni from the Conservation Science MSc course in their professional capacity. The range of roles in which the Conservation Science alumni have been employed by the respondents or their organisations is shown in figure 9.



In the majority of cases alumni become known to respondents through stakeholder’s direct participation in the course; either at Imperial College London, one of the three supporting organisations or by supervising the students thesis (figure 10).



Stakeholder opinions of alumni’s knowledge, skills and ability

Stakeholder opinions of alumni’s ability and skills were highly positive with the majority finding the graduates they employed or worked alongside highly capable (table 3).

Table 3: The Conservation Science graduates from Imperial College I have worked with had the skills my organisation looks for in a young conservation scientist.

Response	Frequency of response
Strongly agree	7
Agree	8
Neither agree nor disagree	2
Strongly disagree	1

When asked to state which particular desirable skills or qualities graduates exhibited most strongly enthusiasm, adaptability and breadth of knowledge were most frequently recognised. The role of the courses structure and style in fostering desirable characteristics amongst it’s alumni was stated as being of key importance by the two most detailed responses received.

“These are well-rounded graduates. They have a good sense (and often practical experience of) conservation challenges... This year I have been on the selection panel for 2 recruitments where recent CS graduates were successful. This was in large part because they could respond to an increasingly difficult level of questioning - they did not 'freeze' but started to debate, bringing in relevant examples.”

“[Graduates have] a good rounded knowledge of the linkage between people and conservation. Rather than the perhaps stereotyped focus on wildlife/ecology, graduates seemed much more aware of the social issues linked to conservation and therefore in a much better position to contribute to our conservation work”

Stakeholders did feel that graduates were lacking in certain areas with 50% of respondents stating that the graduates they recruited or worked with had skills or knowledge gap. When asked to elaborate on the nature of the deficiencies most mentioned subjects and skills that are quite specific to or have a particular prominence in certain types of role or organisation. Skills closely linked to operating within NGOs such as financial and project management formed one cluster of the identified weakness with some research-linked skills such as statistical analysis, GIS and laboratory skills forming the second areas discussed. Some of these skills fall outside the current remit of the course.

“[Graduates were lacking] only the type of skills that comes with experience such as financial management”

“[Graduates were lacking] the basics of project management. Although we can train in this, it would be invaluable if you could give us more of a head start! Perhaps it could be offered as an "add on" if not possible to fit into the already crowded curriculum.”

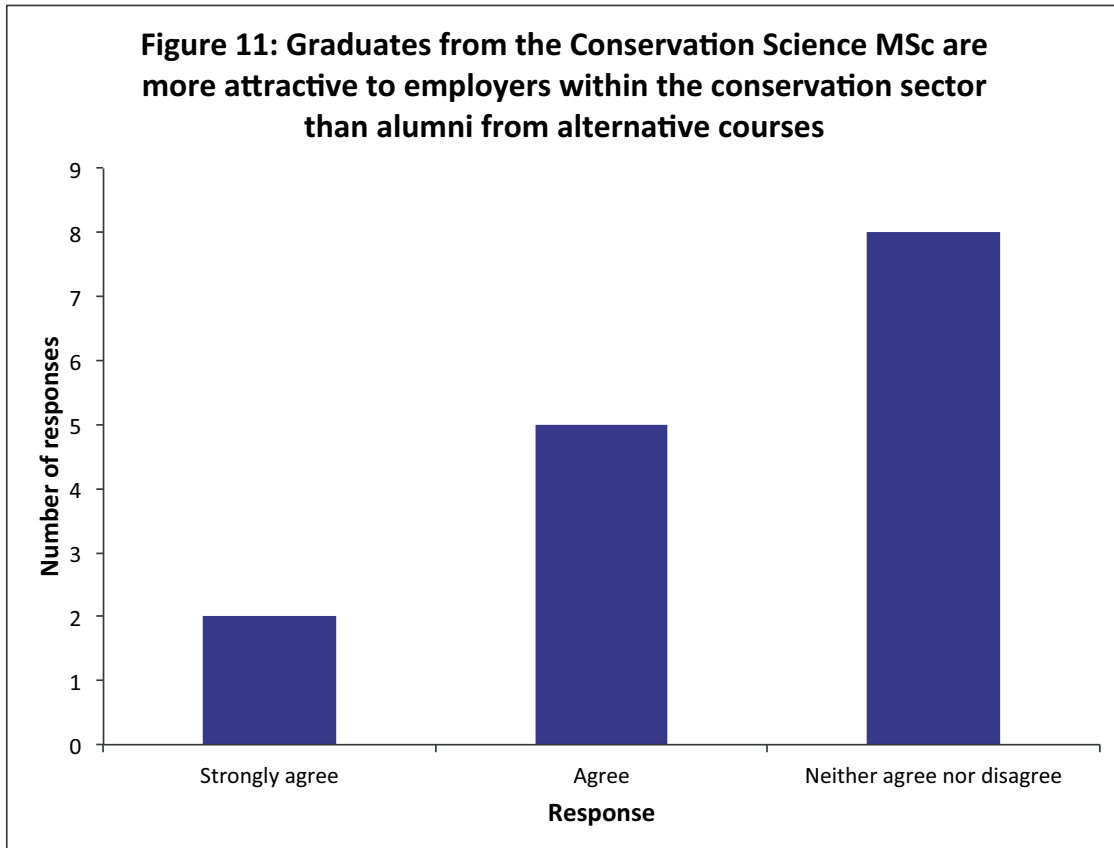
Stakeholder opinions of how employers view graduates

The stakeholder respondents believe that the course is highly regarded by employers with a large majority agreeing that employers view applicants who are alumni from the course in a positive light (table 4).

Table 4: Employers view applicants who have graduate from the Conservation Science MSc favourably.

Response	Frequency of response
Strongly agree	1
Agree	13
Neither agree nor disagree	1

Stakeholders were also often of the opinion that Conservation Science alumni were more attractive to employers than those from other courses (figure 11).



Stakeholders general comments

Stakeholders who took the opportunity to leave a final comment about the course were highly complimentary.

"I teach on 12 MSc courses and find the IC group one of the best."

"It is a great course. I think the partnership between 4 institutions with such a global reputation is fantastic. They are all so complementary. There is no course like it. Prof EJ Milner-Gulland and the other course directors have put real thought and attention into ensuring the course is coherent and builds the range of skills needed by conservation scientists today. The students get extraordinary exposure to a range of experts from many disciplines. The course really is second to none."

"EJ is brilliant."

Findings from the alumni questionnaire

63 students gave answers to the online questionnaire. Respondents came from all 5 completed years of the course (table 5) and the majority had experience of conservation work through different sources before taking up a place on the MSc (table 6).

Table 5: In which year did you attend the Conservation Science MSc

Year	Number of respondents
2007	10
2008	8
2009	20
2010	17
2011	8

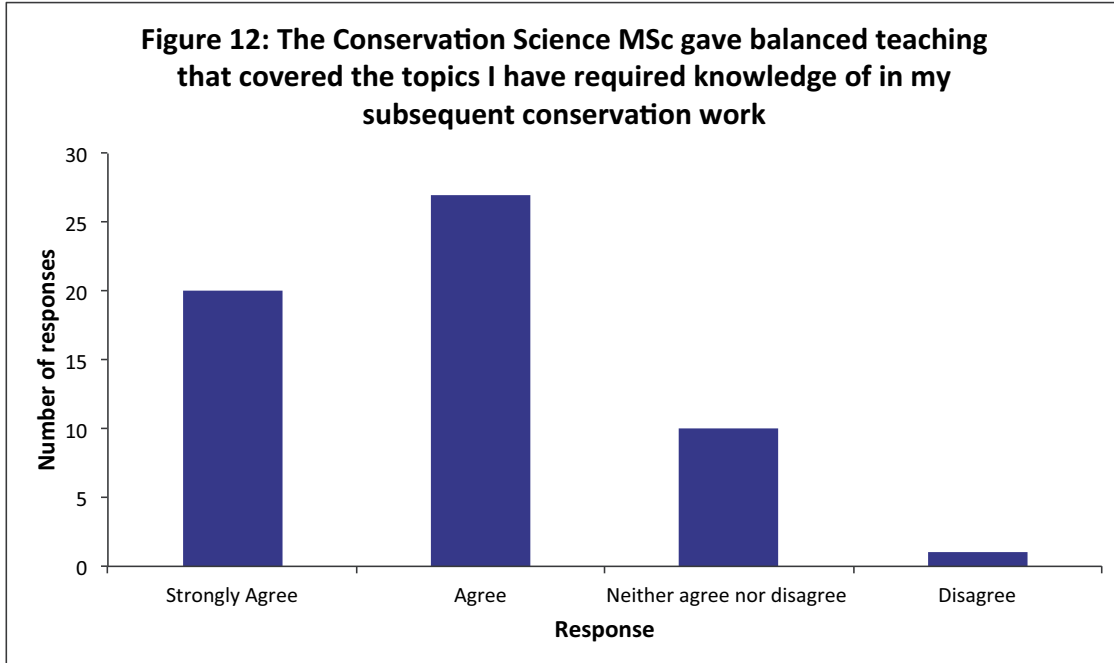
Table 6: Before beginning the MSc what previous conservation experience did you have?

Experience	Frequency of response
Volunteered for conservation organization	45
Worked for a conservation organization	14
Conservation linked research	27
No experience	5
Other	3

Alumni opinions of course content

Alumni were positive about the course content, the majority stating that the course covered key areas for working within the conservation sector (figure 12).

Some respondents felt that certain themes had been over represented during the course however there was considerable variation in the areas reported with personal preferences for certain subject areas within conservation clearly dictating many responses. Table 7 shows aggregated responses regarding over represented areas. Whilst most areas feature infrequently the subject of ex-situ conservation, which most likely overlaps with the reported repetition of subjects covered during the time spent on Jersey with DWCT is one area that may be worth investigating.



“I think in general the balance between different 'themes' was pretty good. I was happy with the level of biology, economics and social science we received. I think towards the very end of the 2nd term I started to notice more repetition of the topics covered by different lecturers and perhaps; at this point there may have been scope do something else more applied which would have been of direct use to the research projects”

Table 7: Please tell us about any areas or themes that you felt were over represented in the taught course

Grouped over represented themes	Frequency of response
Repetition in the DWCT course on Jersey	6
Ex-situ conservation	4
Lectures in general	3
Species specific conservation	3
Local people and social aspects of conservation	3
Fisheries science	1
Group discussion	1
Tropical forests	1
UK conservation	1
Overseas conservation	1
African conservation	1
REDD	1

The range of subjects that students felt were underrepresented was greater than those that they felt were overrepresented reflecting the breadth of subjects that combine to make up the discipline of biodiversity conservation and the short time scale available to cover such diverse subject matter (table 8). Statistics and the statistical analysis program R was the area students most frequently cited as not being given enough coverage. Similarly a limited introduction to GIS techniques and application was often mentioned as being insufficient.

Table 8: Please tell us about any areas or themes that you felt were under represented in the taught course

Grouped Under Represented themes	Frequency of response
Statistical analysis and R	19
GIS	9
Ecological field skills	7
Politics/legislation/policy	6
UK conservation	5
Project management	3
Conservation Education	3
Ecology theory	3
Plant conservation	2
Community and landscape scale conservation	2
Economics	2
Grant applications/fundraising	2
Marine conservation	2
Infectious disease	1
Project planning	1
Conservation behaviour	1
Advice for job hunting	1
Structure of conservation initiatives	1
Species ID Skills	1
Case studies	1
Campaigning	1

“Knowledge of GIS is highly desired within the field of conservation, the 3 day course was not sufficient. I will have to take a specific course if I want to understand GIS. Other courses studies the 2 week R course, I felt it was a shame that Conservation Science only had a 5 day course.”

In addition to skills linked with research there was also requests for a greater range of practical ecological survey techniques to be taught along with subjects related to conservation legislation and conservation within the United Kingdom.

“More focus on the practical element of wildlife conservation (beyond talking to local people!), such as surveying techniques (e.g camera trapping... would've been fun to try and camera trap rabbits in Silwood for example). A more balanced covering of all stakeholders such as the political aspect, or dealing with other organisations (such as development organisations) also working in the area...”

“There could be more detail on international and regional conservation and natural resource use policy (e.g. things like the EU Common Fisheries Policy or Common Agricultural Policy). This might involve lectures by policy makers describing how policies are thought up and agreed upon, and what the role of scientific research is in this.”

These calls for greater coverage of certain subjects likely represent a personal interest or knowledge requirement for certain roles within the conservation sector and any expansion of these themes within the current taught syllabus is likely to require the elimination of something else due to the “jam-packed” nature of the syllabus. However the frequency with which some subjects are covered highlights clear areas where the course could place a greater emphasis.

Alumni opinions on skills acquisition.

Many of the themes already encountered in student’s opinions of the courses content were repeated when questions were asked concerning the courses success in teaching skills valuable to work within the conservation sector.

Students agreed that the course provided them with useful skills for working in the conservation sector (table 9). Only 6 respondents reported that any skills had been over emphasised, half of whom quoted “discussions and reading groups”.

Table 9: The Conservation Science course gave me many skills that are useful when working in the employment arena

Response	Frequency of response
Strongly Agree	15
Agree	37
Neither agree nor disagree	5
Disagree	1

Statistical analysis and GIS were again mentioned this time as the principal skills students felt had been underrepresented during the course (table 10).

Table 10: Please tell us about any skills that you felt were under represented in the taught course

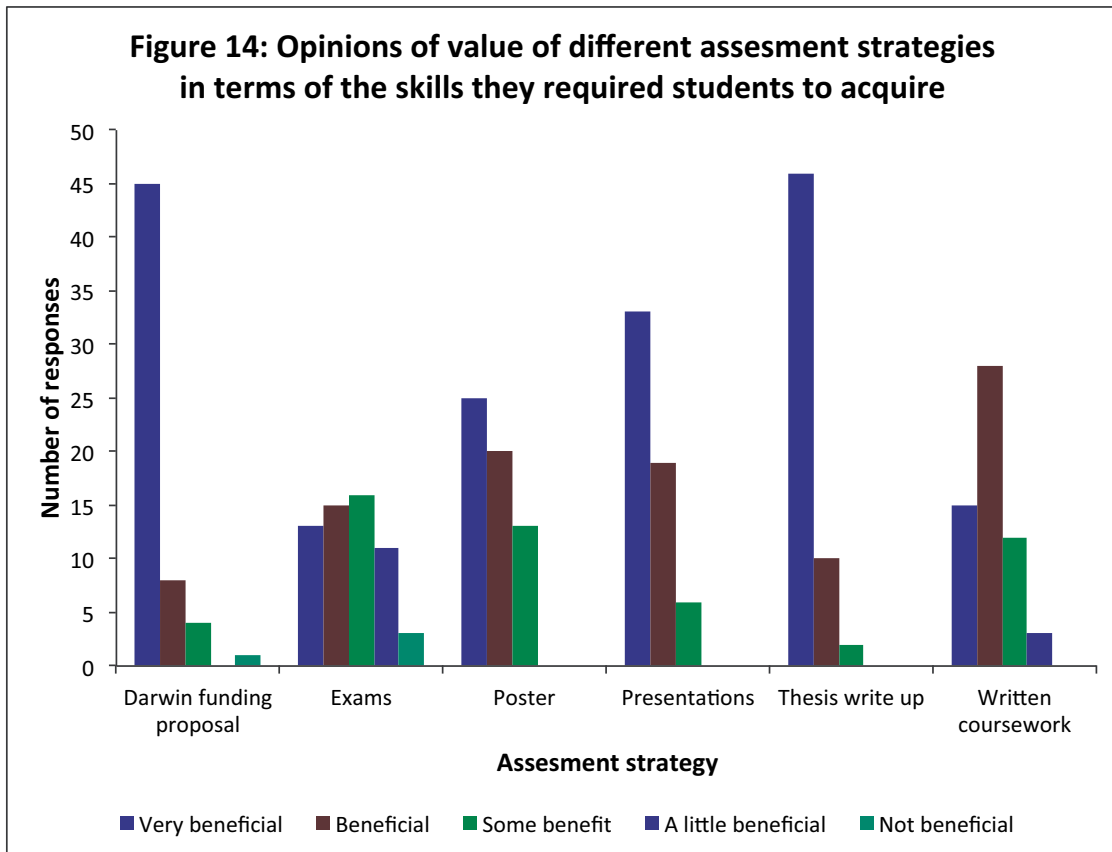
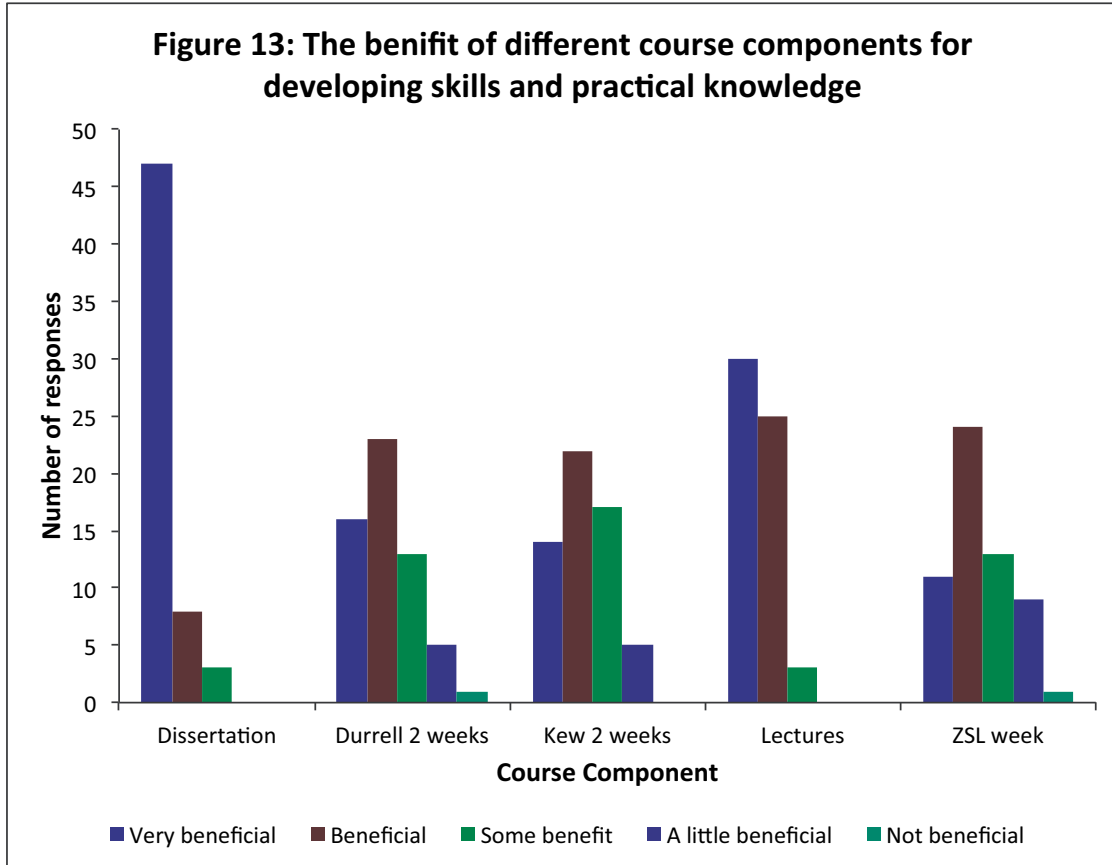
Grouped Under Represented skills	Frequency of response
Statistical analysis and R	16
GIS	12
Project management	3
Funding applications	4
Project planning	1
Practical field skills	5
Science communication	2
Survey methods	3

Student opinions on the merit of different course components

Students largely felt that all the separate components of the course were beneficial in terms of helping them to build knowledge and skills that are of practical use for graduates aiming to work in the conservation sector (Figure 13). The time spent at the three supporting organisations was given a more mixed review but the majority of students still reported these periods away from Imperial were “Beneficial” or “Very beneficial”. Students found that the extended period of personally lead study offered by the Dissertation was the most beneficial.

Similarly the student’s thesis was seen as one of the two most beneficial of the assessment strategies utilised on the course alongside the mock Darwin Initiative funding proposal (Figure 14). The written course work assessments associated with the time spent at ZSL and Kew Gardens was given a mixed review. Exams were the most poorly received assessment type and the only one where the majority of students found them not to be “Beneficial” or “Very beneficial”.

“I would bin the exams, I don't understand what relevance exams have to future employment.”



Reported outcomes of students work on the MSc course

In addition to asking students to share their opinions on how the course has prepared them for work within the conservation sector they were also asked to identify outcomes from their work on the MSc that can help to promote their skills in a highly competitive job market.

A publication record and conference presentations can both enhance a prospective applicants CV. Some of the respondents have either published work undertaken on the MSc or are in the process of doing so (table 11). These publications have typically arisen from work conducted as part of their thesis. Additionally 14% of respondents had given oral presentations on work they carried out during the MSc at scientific conferences and meetings and 17% had exhibited posters.

Table 11: Reported publications, completed or in progress, as a result of work undertaken on the MSc course.

Publication outcome	Frequency of response
Reports	14
Peer reviewed articles (Published)	4
Peer reviewed articles (In review)	2
Peer reviewed articles (In preparation)	15
Non-academic publications	2

Students were also able to report direct conservation outcomes as a result of the work they undertook during the MSc including:

“Analysis, results and recommendations from my thesis were used in a recommendation paper to the St. Lucia government on conservation of the St Lucia Parrot.”

“[My work] led to conservation measures being applied in a protected area.”

“My thesis showed how important bear hunting is for acceptance levels of bears in Croatia. As far as I know the study was used during negotiations between Croatia and EU to determine the status of the bear and so to enable Croatia to continue hunting bears at sustainable levels”

“Some of the ideas put forward in the written coursework were adopted in the recent development of open ocean monitoring of MPAs [Marine Protected Areas]. Stereo Baited Remote Underwater Videography has been adapted for pelagic use as SISSTAs [Stereo Imaging System for Shark and Tuna Assessment]... and will be deployed in Chagos later this year. Ideas to deploy them in a grid system for spatial comparison over MPA boundaries have been adapted for comparison of abundances at seamounts.”

Alumni employment

Perceptions of the courses in terms of facilitating future employment

By introducing students to many conservation practitioners through a large range of external lecturers, thesis supervisors and time spent at the supporting institutions the course aims to provide students with many networking opportunities. When asked which course components were the most beneficial for making contacts relevant to future employment the diversity of networking opportunities offered by the lectures and the extended collaboration during the dissertation component were reported as being most beneficial (table 12). A large majority of alumni respondents felt that employers think highly of the course and 60% agreed that undertaking the Conservation Science MSc made them more employable than graduates from alternative courses (table 13).

Table 12: The frequency of course components reported as the most beneficial for meeting contacts (in terms of future employment or collaboration).

Course Component	Frequency of response
Dissertation	27
Lectures	18
DWCT Course (two weeks)	3
ZSL visit (one week)	3
Kew visit (two weeks)	1
Darwin proposal	1

Table 13: Alumni perceptions of the courses reputation amongst employers and in comparison to alternative courses.

Response	Undertaking the course was beneficial in terms of finding conservation work	Employers view the conservation Science MSc favourably	The course makes me more employable than alternative MSc's
Strongly Agree	28	20	14
Agree	12	22	18
Neither agree nor disagree	9	9	19
Disagree	3	1	2
Strongly disagree	1	0	0

"I'm doing a PhD with the same organization I did my MSc project with"

"[I now work for] WCS. Contact made through my project supervisor, who I was originally put in touch with by EJ."

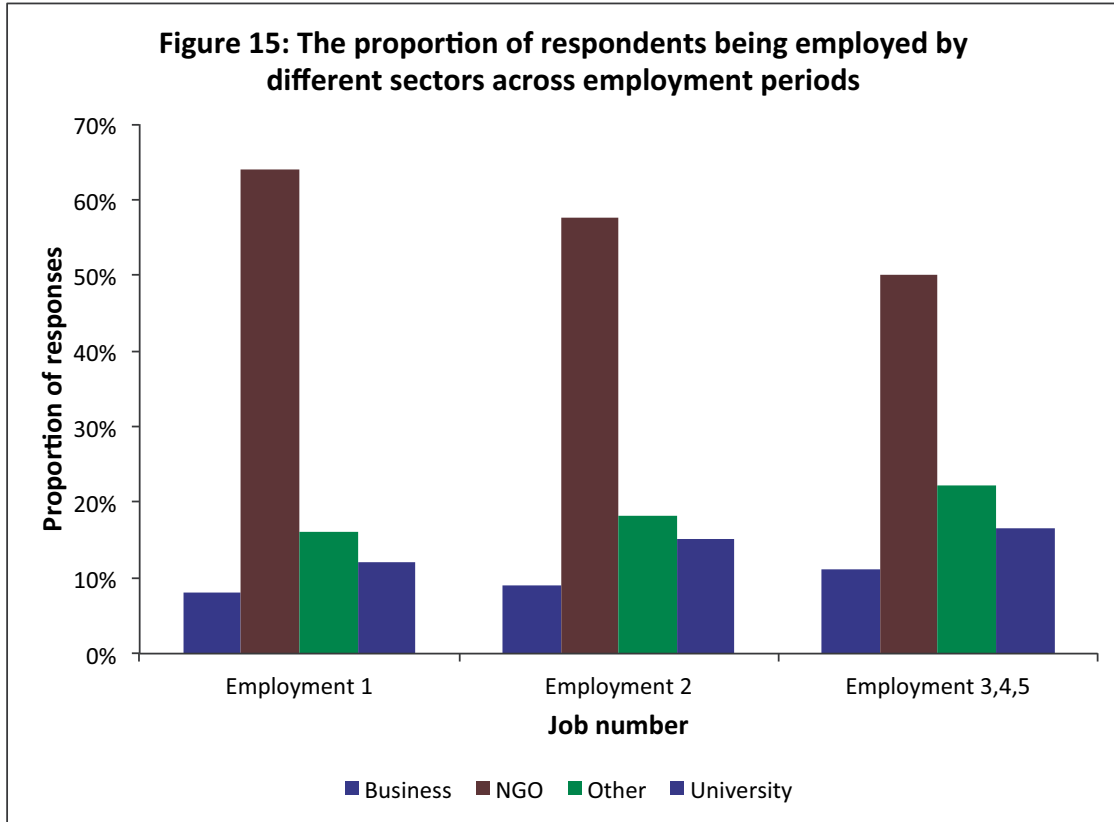
Patterns in alumni employment

Post graduation all respondents had gained employment, the majority had undertaken at least one period of paid employment within a conservation organisation and many alumni had undertaken work in several different capacities (table 14).

Table 14: Total respondent employment post MSc

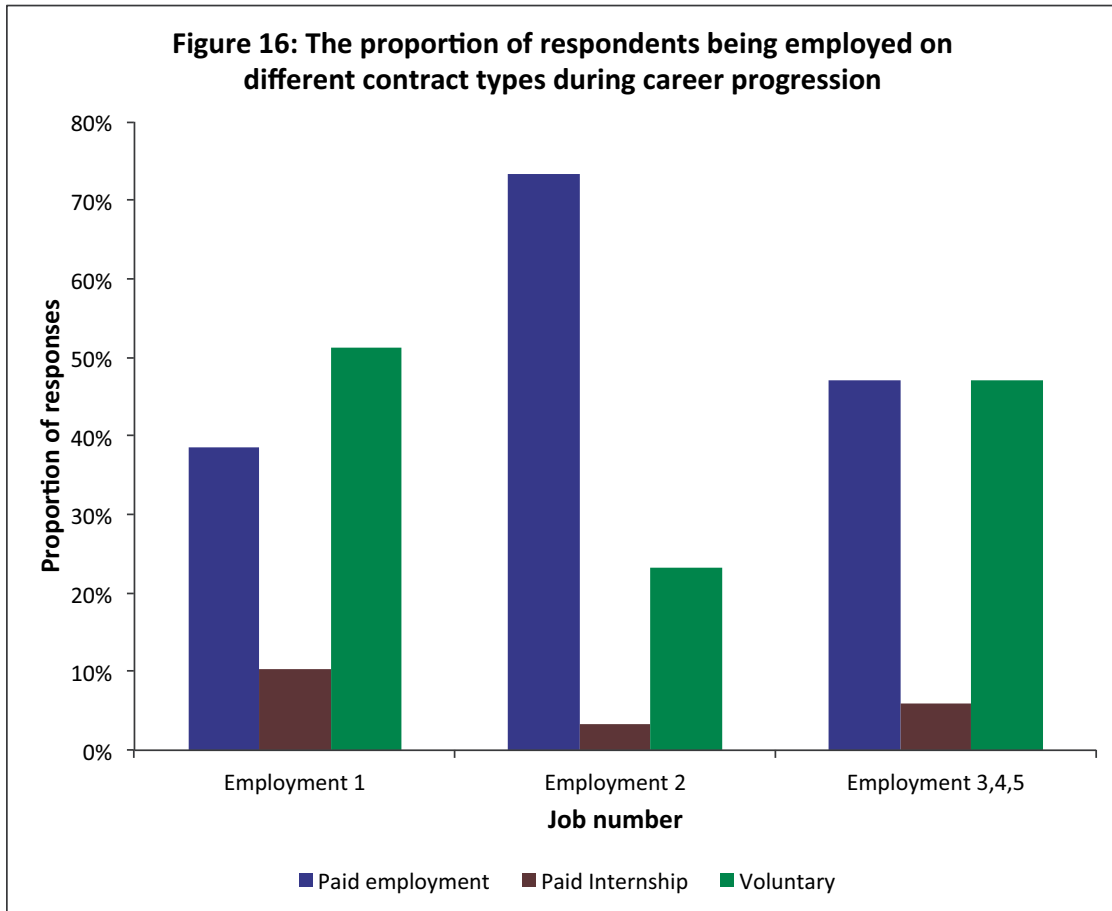
Employment type	Frequency of response
Been employed by a conservation organization	32
Worked as a volunteer at a conservation organization	26
Worked outside of the conservation sector	23
Undertaken further study with a conservation emphasis	14

By asking respondents to identify key characteristics of each employment period it is possible to identify patterns in the types of organisation employing alumni (figure 15), the types of contract they are employed on (figure 16) and employment durations (figure 17) during their career progression. The numbers of respondents who went on to have 3rd, 4th and 5th periods of employment is too small to draw meaningful conclusions from.

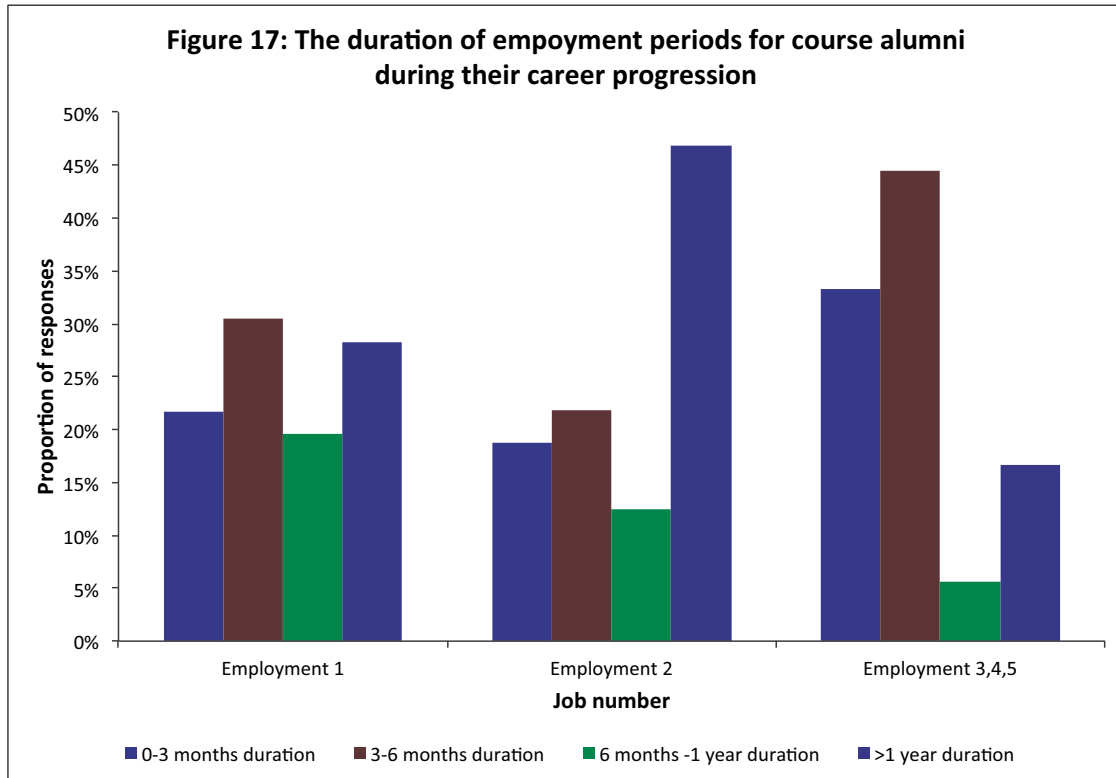


Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO's) employed the large majority of alumni for their first work placement after graduating and continued to be the most significant employer as graduates careers progressed. The majority of alumni that stated employment by universities were taken on as PhD students.

Most alumni are initially employed on a voluntary basis (figure 16), the size of this majority increases when those students who have undertaken PhDs are excluded from consideration.



Graduates have to wait until their second period of employment before the majority are offered paid contracts. An increase in the number of respondents being offered paid work in their second period of employment coincides with an increase in the number being offered long term contracts of a year or more (Figure 17). In contrast new graduates are offered a range of contract types with those of 6 months duration or less being the most common. This majority again increases once students undertaking PhDs are excluded from considerations.



Alumni perceptions of the courses key components and redundant areas

Finally students were asked to comment on the one thing they would change about the course (table 15) and the one thing they would keep the same (table 16). Many students stated that there was nothing they would like to change about the course.

“[I would change] nothing, it was one of the best times of my life...so far, and it's only getting better because of it.”

Those who did give an answer to the question of what to change were very diverse in their opinions with an increase in the amount of statistical analysis again heading the table. Students were also keen to maximise the benefits of spending time with the collaborating organisations.

A greater emphasis on career development was also requested with students highlighting that the diversity of visiting lecturers could be used to give a broad insight on how their organisation selects candidates and more general careers advice.

“I would ensure all lectures have to give some info on employment and how they recommend getting jobs”

An increase in the length of the course was one of the more surprising inclusions. It's presence reflected students overall enjoyment of the course and a desire to be given more time to explore areas of interest in more depth.

“Make it 2 years long because I didn't want it to end!”

“[ideally] It would be longer with more freedom in assignments and exams to focus on the areas of conservation that you personally are aiming to become involved in.”

Table 15: Collated responses to the question “If there was one thing you would change about the course what would it be?”

Grouped recommendations for an area to change	Frequency of response
More statistics	6
Improved time spent at partner organisations	4
More careers development emphasis and advice	4
Make the course longer	3
More transferable skills	3
More practical skills training	2
Improve the allocation of dissertation projects	2
More freedom to choose assessment subjects	2
More GIS	1
The air conditioning in the ConSci room	1
More interaction with other MSc courses (at Silwood)	1
Loose the exams	1
Increase role of partner organisations beyond the course	1
More ecology content	1
More anthropology/social sciences content	1
More on business aspects	1
More conservation history & less case studies	1
Make the course more scientific	1
More marine content	1
Less coverage of ex-situ conservation	1
Option to have the dissertation as a management role	1
Greater insight into organisations	1
More oral presentations	1

There were greater levels of agreement in regards to what to keep the same. Diversity in the form of the course’s breadth and its delivery through a large number of lecturers with diverse backgrounds was one of three key element of the MSc that students wanted to preserve.

“The holistic and integrative approach to the different dimensions of conservation (i.e. biological, socio-economic, political).”

“Conservation professionals teaching the course rather than just academics. This is useful for making contacts and learning about real world examples.”

The second core element was the courses structure and its inclusion of the three collaborating organisations, including visit to their premises in London and

Jersey. The students also saw prof. Milner-Gulland as an integral component of the course.

“E.J’s presence and engagement in our lectures and discussions [was integral].”

“EJ [was crucial]. Her being on sabbatical for our year made the latter half of the course go downhill.”

Table 16: Collated responses to the question “if there were one thing that you think is integral to the course's success and should not be changed, what would it be?”

Grouped recommendations of an area not to be changed	Frequency of response
The range of lecturers	16
Prof EJ Milner-Gulland	8
The course structure	8
The breadth of the course	6
The involvement of partner organisations	4
The visits to the partner organisations	4
Group discussions	4
The courses location at Silwood Park	2
Small class sizes	2
The course’s informal style	1
The dynamics of the student group	1

SWOT ANALYSIS

Throughout the SWOT analysis there was often disagreement between alumni and stakeholders. By comparing and contrasting these opinions it is possible to get a broad and inclusive view of how the course can develop and improve whilst maintaining positively regarded element that contribute to the course's character and current high standing.

Strengths

Strengths are current and internal characteristics that, in this case, give the course an advantage or provide a positive impact in another way. Both students and stakeholders highlighted the diversity and quality of the lecturers as the key strength of the MSc.

“Very good range of courses and great supervision and support for students. Great opportunities to meet active conservation scientists and practitioners.”

“I think one of the major strengths of the course was the level of exposure we received from to so many different conservationists and researchers. Being exposed to this range of opinions and approaches really helped us decide what our interests and priorities were and what our approach to conservation was. The diversity of lecturers was matched by the diversity of techniques and subjects that were covered in the teaching. Many these techniques I am now finding very useful, although admittedly these were not necessarily the techniques I found interesting at the time!”

Table 17: Perceived strengths of the Conservation Science MSc

Strengths summarised	Stakeholders responses	Alumni responses
Diversity of lecturers	6	28
High quality teaching, supervision and support	4	27
Breadth of the course	7	17
The collaborating organisations	5	14
Quality, diversity & prior experience of students	6	7
Course style and structure	0	12
Course directors	0	9
Utilisation of varied and relevant assessment strategies	0	7
Networking opportunities	0	5
Preparation for and support after graduation	0	2
Silwood campus	1	0
Course reputation	0	1

The involvement of the collaborating organisations was another strength that was recognised by both sets of respondents who noted their role in providing opportunities for insight into the working of a leading conservation organisation.

“The connections the course helped students to form with Kew, ZSL, DWCT and other conservation organisations were invaluable and they continue to be helpful beyond the course.”

Both stakeholders and students also recognised the strength of the student group as a unit that contributes to the course and its objectives.

“Diversity of peer group; good recruitment based on life experience and potential as well as academic qualifications.”

“Another strength was the companionship amongst the students on the course. On the whole things were very amicable and the support of the group was very helpful both during and after the course. I think trips which involved staying overnight (ZSL and DWCT) were key to developing the group friendship”

Weaknesses:

Weaknesses are current and internal characteristics that disadvantage the course or provide a negative impact hindering its ability to meet its objectives. There was less agreement both within and between respondent groups in terms of the weaknesses of the course (table 18). Both groups felt that the largest weakness was not being able to teach all subjects to sufficient depths. Students were most concerned about limited statistical analysis support and the high pace of the course in general whilst stakeholders quoted what they perceived as teaching gaps within the curriculum. All of the reported gaps were different reflecting stakeholder’s valuation of specific skills as a result of their own experience or pertinence within their organisation or department.

“Apparent lack of awareness [amongst graduates] about the funding climate / difficulty of raising funds, without which field conservation can’t happen. I think you need to avoid creating a distinction between fundraisers (UK-based) and people who work in the field. Students often say that I am the first person to have talked to them in detail about the mechanics of fundraising; seems to be a bit of an eye-opener”

Dissertations were another area where there was overall agreement that improvements could be made.

“For some students their dissertation supervisors were pretty much absent or difficult to reach during the dissertation months, other students got luckier and had attentive, helpful supervisors who recognised problems that arose...”

Weaknesses within the structure and organisation of the time spent at the supporting organisations were recognised along with the predominance of “global north” students and the course’s dependence on prof. EJ Milner-Gulland.

“[a weakness of the course is its] Dependence on EJ. She is such an inspiration and students respond to her brand of helpful critique; if she steps back it shows.”

“[The course is] Very dependent on EJ - what would happen if she left?”

Table 18: Perceived weaknesses of the Conservation Science MSc

Weaknesses summarised	Stakeholders responses	Alumni responses
Limited statistics support	1	8
To high paced / topics skimmed over at speed	0	9
Teaching gaps within the curriculum	7 (all different)	0
Emphasis of global north students	3	1
Selecting dissertation process	0	5
Better vetting of thesis supervisors needed	0	4
Dependence on EJ	1	2
Little funding within the course (Scholarships etc.)	2	0
Not research focused enough	0	3
ZSL week	0	3
Kew weeks	0	2
DWCT weeks	0	1
Class size to large	0	2
Topic repetition	0	2
Need more contact with course directors	0	2
Better vetting of thesis projects needed	1	0
Greater prior experience of students	1	0
Limited career development focus	0	1
Variation in lecture quality	0	1
No staff with business experience	0	1
Excess course work	0	1
Based at Silwood	0	1

Opportunities

Opportunities are external and future based chances to improve the courses performance towards its stated goals. Respondents mentioned a very limited number of opportunities and again there was little agreement within and between the two respondent groups (table 19).

The most commonly mentioned opportunity amongst stakeholders was to expand the curriculum of the course however suggestions about how more

information could be fitted into a tightly packed timetable were not forthcoming. Stakeholders also felt that opportunities exist to increase the number of students that are associated with the course either by expanding links to similar MSc courses or by offering modules of the course to students on other MSc courses.

“Build links with other courses that have the overseas component (eg WildCru’s Pathers). Perhaps a joint module with them would allow issues to be debated from different perspectives...”

“So many students from the allied Masters wish they had done the CS course that I would imagine you could double the intake if you wanted to. Perhaps there could be module offerings into the other Masters?”

Table 19: Perceived opportunities of the Conservation Science MSc

Opportunities summarised	Stakeholder responses	Alumni responses
Scholarship fund	2	2
Curriculum expansion	3	0
Make most of time at collaborating institutions	0	4
Increase links with new NGOs / research organisations	0	4
Expand access to careers advice / development / opportunities	0	3
Extend links between alumni in increase their role in the course	0	3
Could increase course intake	2	0
Link with other MSc courses	2	0
Increases statistical analysis / GIS components	0	2
Increase intake from developing countries	1	0
Access to external courses	0	1
Use the Silwood location more	0	1
Use Imperial expertise more	0	1

In contrast alumni respondents felt that the greatest opportunities for improving the course were to build on the courses existing associations by improving and increasing the contact time with the supporting organisations.

“Course directors from external organisations could make the more conservation-focused departments and people within said organisations more available/create more links outside of their own influence for projects.”

Graduates of the course also felt that was an opportunity for greater involvement of alumni with the existing intake. One intriguing recommendation noted the opportunity for a mentor role to be taken on by willing graduates.

“[an opportunity is] the alumni, I for one would be happy to help in any way I can. For example maybe a mentor system, someone you can ask stupid questions to that you might not want to ask staff (like what is a grant). Also mapping the career paths of alumni might be a good way of showing the quality of the course.”

Threats

Threats are external and future based risks to the courses achievement of its intended goals. There was agreement between the respondent groups about the most serious threats to the course (table 20).

Table 20: Perceived threats to the Conservation Science MSc

Threats summarised	Stakeholder responses	Alumni responses
High tuition fees / Low student funding / limited scholarships	4	6
Increasing competition from other courses	3	5
A competitive job market	1	5
Ensure course continues to meet the needs of the job market	0	6
Oversubscription of the course	0	4
Maintaining the course’s high standards & reputation	0	3
Insufficient vetting of external project supervisors	0	2
University funding	1	0
Reliance on EJ	0	1
The future of Silwood park	0	1

High tuition fees discouraging students from taking up places on the course, especially those from developing countries was the number one threat listed. Currently there are limited scholarships available for students and this was an area that many felt could place the course at a disadvantage and create the possibility of missing out on the top class graduates it aims to attract.

“As tuition fees go up, you will need to find more ways of allowing talented yet financially-compromised students to attend (both from the UK and abroad)”

Respondents also felt that with the number biodiversity conservation linked postgraduate courses increasing the Conservation Science MSc may have to work hard to maintain it’s strong reputation.

“This is one of the best MSc courses in conservation but there are also quite a few other courses producing 30+ high quality students a year into a difficult job market.”

The courses strong reputation was also perceived as a threat as some respondents who felt that pressure might be placed on the course to increase its class sizes. This was something that alumni in particular felt would be very detrimental to the quality of the course.

“Popularity of the course could mean that Imperial may view it as a key revenue source and force it to become over subscribed. What makes the course so unique is that you have numbers that allows people to forge strong relationships that go on into future careers, as well allowing staff to be able to manage the students effectively. Too many students could lead to reduced supervision time and less coherence within the group. Since graduating I have worked with 5 classmates from my year and these relationships have helped forged strong professional relationships.”

The final set of threats was related to the pressure on the course to fulfil its mandate of providing high quality graduates for the conservation sector. The increasingly comparative job market was seen as a challenge for the course and its requirement to continue producing graduates with the skills that conservation organisations desire.

As I understand it, the course was created in response to a CCF survey that showed that conservation organisations were not getting people with the right skills (or something like that). In that sense I think there is a danger then if the course doesn't do enough to forge links between the students and NGOs. Advertised jobs are often in short supply but if students have the opportunity to create links (with organisations that actually employ) during the course then the course is doing a better job for both the NGOs and the students.

Discussion and recommendations

This discussion will focus on key areas highlighted within the results from the three data sets analysed. Rather than discussing each individual result it will look at the most apparent trends and identify both their potential causes and, where necessary, possible future courses of action. In general the course (figure 12, table 9), its graduates (table 3), its reputation amongst employers (table 4, figure 11, table 13), and many facets of its structure and teaching staff were reported as being of very high quality by both groups of respondents. Indeed where past students and stakeholders were asked to give responses that related to the courses strengths and quality they stated broad and significant categories and there was large-scale agreement between respondents (Table 16, table 17). When respondents are asked their opinion of weaknesses or areas to be improved their suggestions are of a finer scale and personal nature, reflected in the diversity of responses given and limited agreement between respondents (table 8, table 15, table 18, table 19). As a result it is somewhat unfair that this discussion section will focus heavily on areas where improvements have been suggested and small changes could make the course better still.

Trends in applicants and the application process

The course has succeeded in achieving class sizes that fluctuate around its target class size of 30 students (table 1) and encouraged an increasing number of students until a dip in the number of applicants for 2013. There is insufficient data to determine whether this reduction is temporary or its cause. With tuition fees dramatically increased from when the courses began it may be that potential students are being discouraged from applying and this is an area that the course administrators should be mindful of. The course has also seen a large percentage of applicants with top class undergraduate grades withdrawing their applications. Prof Milner-Gulland reports that this trend in increasing and may be linked to an increase in students selecting for courses where more scholarships are available. High tuition fees, low student funding and limited scholarships were the areas that both alumni and the stakeholder respondents recognised as the number one threat to the course (table 20) whilst the creation of further scholarship funds was seen as the greatest opportunity for increasing the quality of the course (table 19). Some student funding has become available since the course was founded and some respondents may not be aware of this development however greater levels of support for students, both from the UK and overseas, is likely to benefit the course in terms of ensuring its attractiveness to the highest quality graduates.

“With fees going up I think a potential problem for the course is lack of available funding amongst the students. I am a UK student and I found it hard to find funding, eventually getting a personal career development loan from my bank. For international students fees are even higher and there is a definite lack of scholarships available. It would be a great shame if the increase in fees limited the applications for and acceptances of places on the MSc due to lack of funds.”

The course intake has been predominantly from the UK for the past six years (figure 3). Of the remaining students approximately half are European and half from outside Europe. This gives the course a minority intake from developing countries, countries that are of key interest to the discipline of conservation science. The opportunity to increase the intake of developing country students was mentioned by a few student and stakeholder respondents. The study shows that students are not selected for on the grounds of their nationality (Figure 4) but predominantly selected for according to the quantity of past conservation experience they have (Figure 8). The courses emphasis in taking on students with extensive prior conservation experience was highly regarded by both stakeholders and students (table 17).

“These are well-rounded graduates. They have a good sense (and often practical experience of) conservation challenges...”

With this selection criteria being so highly regarded, and the course succeeding in taking on applicants from nationality grouping in the same proportion that they apply, any efforts to increase the diversity of nationalities represented within year groups should be done by increasing the number of applicants from outside the UK rather than a new selection bias. An increase in applicant from overseas could be achieved by greater marketing of the MSc through the partner organisations and conservation groups that course staff and alumni have contact with.

Course structure and components

The course structure, from the time allocated to different modules to the diversity of the taught course and skill specific assessment strategies like the poster design, was widely approved of by the alumni.

“6-month taught & 6-month research is good balance”

All the course's components were stated as being beneficial in terms of helping students to build a knowledge base and skills that are of practical use for working in the conservation sector (Figure 13). The dissertation, with its extended period of personally lead study was widely regarded as the most beneficial course component with the diversity of subject matter introduced in the lectures also highly regarded.

“The course is like a big congress in which you meet loads of important people in your field of work and learn a lot from all of them.”

The assessment strategies were similarly well received (figure 14) and only the exams were reported to not to be “Beneficial” or “Very beneficial” by the majority of alumni. Exams are inherently unpopular however having open book exams was recognised as turning the exams from a memory test to an active research exercise. Recommendations regarding the exams included increasing student choice of the subjects they covered or simply replacing them with an alternative exercise that had a greater emphasis on building relevant skills.

Whilst typically very well received some issues with the dissertation were reported (table 18). Students were keen for potential supervisors to come under closer scrutiny to ensure they were able to give the levels of support they required and were not left without someone to offer advice or direction at crucial times.

“Some of the supervision was poor and I think those lecturers etc. planning to supervise ConSci students should be explicitly told a) how the requirements of the course differ from others at Silwood/Imperial and therefore what they are required to advise on and b) their required commitment. They can then chose whether or not they wish to take on students alone, with other supervisors, or not at all.”

In contrast the stakeholders noted the importance of insuring all proposed projects are feasible in the time scale available.

The most commonly reported issue with the dissertations was the way in which projects were allocated. Some student’s feel that projects are allocated unfairly and on a first come first serve basis. This student sums up the issues:

“Finding a project was a fairly random process with an element of luck and a lot of confusion. Project ideas came in pretty much from week 1 until Easter with lots of students also approaching researchers with their own ideas. I secured a project quite late on because I wanted a project that interested me, none of the early projects had caught my interest and none of the researchers I had contacted had replied. This placed me at a significant disadvantage to those who had accepted projects early on. Finding a supervisor at Silwood (a requirement) was likewise a fairly random process. By the time I had a project to take to people most Silwood based researchers already had several students and there was no one left who worked in my project area. I ended up with a supervisor who was useful for bouncing ideas off but didn't know much about the details of my project. Also, having accepted a late project meant that when the deadline came for the project grants I had no project to apply with. More guidance should be provided early on about projects, particularly the effect of doing your project with different institutions (NGO, gap year etc.) and the differences between types of projects. It should also be made clear that whilst there is a deadline for having a project proposal there are significant advantages to having a project sorted well before then. I would suggest that projects could be held back until later in the year (say Christmas) and that they could be delivered in a more organised and standardised way than emailing them around. Perhaps anyone wishing to advertise a project should fill in a standard form that could either be emailed around or even better held on blackboard with all the other projects for that year? Deadlines for project grants should be after the deadline for having a project proposal sorted and signed off. I would also suggest that rather than supervision by course directors being on a first come first serve basis there is an application process with a deadline for applying sometime after the deadline for having a project.”

These have been ongoing issues for several years and the course directors have discussed with the student liaison committee about how projects are allocated. Inherent difficulties were found with the idea of “holding projects back” when they are being advertised to multiple universities and subject to adaptation towards a specific students needs. It may be beneficial to take another look at how projects are allocated and certainly worth ensuring that students are aware of the application procedures particular nuances and time scales as early as possible.

Study with the supporting organisations

Both students and stakeholders see the involvement of the partner organisations as a key strength and defining characteristic of the course (table 16 & table 17).

"[a key strength is] practical exposure to the workings of different conservation bodies"

"It is a great course. I think the partnership between 4 institutions with such a global reputation is fantastic. They are all so complementary. There is no course like it."

However the time spent at the supporting organisations was a feature of the course that alumni indicated could be improved (table 12, table 15, table 18 & table 19). Students felt that the time spent at the different supporting organisations could have been improved by increasing the extent to which they contributed towards skills development (figure 13). Students were also keen for the weeks away from Imperial to be better integrated into the course and not act as stand-alone modules. Recommendations for improvement included integrating the weeks better so that the flow from one to the next was more complimentary.

"The 2 weeks at Kew could have been structured differently to develop other skills, if it still comes after DWCT chronologically then these could be linked, skills learnt in one practiced in the other."

Using the time spent at the supporting organisations to practice skills, potentially those introduced during the taught course, would help to integrate the supporting organisations further into the syllabus and potentially allow students to focus on areas or skills of personal interest.

An area that should be improved upon is the apparently small number of opportunities for course participants to network with a large number of staff at the supporting organisations. Table 12 shows a low number of alumni reporting that the time spent at the supporting organisations was beneficial for meeting contacts with a view to future collaboration or employment. With the three organisations containing such a wealth of staff working on a huge diversity of projects this opportunity for matching potential employers with potential employees should be maximised (and will be discussed in greater detail in the next section).

"Make more of ZSL week, [it was a] wasted opportunity. [We] didn't get to speak to any people with experience... There were incredible people there but we didn't get to hear from them."

Whilst there is reportedly room for improvement in relation to the time spent at Kew, DWCT and ZSL the majority of students still reported the value of these periods away from Silwood favourably. With the involvement of the partner organisations representing such a great opportunity for the course participants it is perhaps understandable that this is an area of the course they are keen to perfect.

Addressing teaching gaps

The most common criticism of the course was that it did not have enough of a focus on particular subject areas or skills (table 8, table 10, table 15) or that all subjects couldn't be taught with sufficient depth. As with many of the areas where respondents were asked to make recommendations on areas for improvement there was indecision about the areas they would like to see taught to greater depth and personal preference (or requirement) clearly influenced the responses of both alumni...

"From the research / science point of view I don't think I left the course with strong statistical skills. I understand that not all of us will leave to do research after and that more time on statistics would not be appreciated by all. I'd have liked more GIS - but I also see the value in letting people chose to do it as part of their MSc project."

...and stakeholders.

"A bit more background on charity governance and charitable considerations might be useful (as opposed to working in a business or academic environment)."

The crux of the issue is the limited time available to undertake the taught component whilst maintaining enough time for the thesis. Essentially...

"Conservation is a massive discipline and a year is not long enough to learn anywhere near as much as you need."

Whilst some students recommended extending the length of the course an 18 month or two year MSc is likely to be less attractive to potential applicants who are looking at the MSc as a route into either employment within the conservation sector or further study.

One student recommended internships as a solution that agrees with many alumni's belief that the greatest opportunity for the course is to build on its existing strengths (Table 19). Developing a number of internships, specifically available for new graduates of the Conservation Science MSc, within the supporting organisations would cater for those students looking for further, in-depth experience of certain areas or skills. The supporting organisations would similarly benefit by having a reliable influx of knowledgeable and motivated interns and be able to provide training in the types of skills their organisation requires.

"[Graduates were lacking] only the type of skills that comes with experience such as financial management"

"[Graduates were lacking] the basics of project management. Although we can train in this, it would be invaluable if you could give us more of a head start! Perhaps it could be offered as an "add on" if not possible to fit into the already crowded curriculum."

If each supporting organisations could create five internship opportunities for new Conservation Science MSc graduates then half of each year's intake could be guaranteed a "learning on the job" position after graduating. Students have reported that working for an extended period on a single topic during their dissertation was the most beneficial component in terms of their skills development (figure 13). Integrating this longer-term specialisation with working within a conservation organisation would likely be a very attractive option amongst graduates who are not looking to go directly into a PhD or do not

have a paid position lined up after graduation. Offering internships of this nature would allow the course to maintain its highly regarded diversity of subjects and lecturers (table 16, table 17) and meet a need highlighted by this report for student to be given the opportunity to study certain areas in greater depth than is currently possible.

When student's post-graduation employment patterns are profiled the majority of new graduates undertake short (6 month or less) periods of volunteer work with conservation NGOs before taking a longer-term paid contract (figure 15, figure 16 & figure 17). Short term, un-paid and within an NGO exactly fits the profile of internships the supporting organisations are likely to be able to offer. By co-ordinating these internships with the course, via the course directors, they could be tailored to meet the needs of both the students and the organisation, potentially leading to a greater uptake of students from the course into paid positions within the collaborating organisations.

Statistical analysis and R

Statistical analysis and the computer program "R" were the most frequently mentioned area that was underrepresented on the course (table 8, table 15, table 18). However there wasn't unanimous call for a greater mathematical component to the course and it was recognised that undertaking the statistics course run at Silwood by prof. Crawley and attended by students on other MSc courses would not be suitable for all Conservation Science students. Recommendations to better include statistical analysis throughout the course were made by several alumni.

"R [was underrepresented] - although I wouldn't want to lose 2 extra weeks of other content for the R course I think that general use of the software could be incorporated elsewhere, for example during several of the break-out sessions and perhaps through prompted exercises for informal assessment"

In addition to distributing statistical training throughout the course it might again be possible to create opportunities external to the MSc itself for students with a particular interest in increasing their exposure to mathematical analytical skills. This could be done throughout the internships suggested above or another form of priority access to that statistical analysis expertise available at Silwood. Park.

Conclusions:

This review shows that course is extremely well received by both students and conservation professionals who are stakeholders in the production of high quality graduates with the skillset required by the conservation sector. There is broad agreement about the achievements of the course in meeting key target areas, including attractiveness of its graduates to employers. Contrastingly recommendations for improvement were largely based on personal preferences and had little agreement between respondents, further reflecting the success of the course in meeting core requirements. Suggestions for improvement that met with the greatest levels of consensus were based around perfecting and building

on the courses defining feature, the role of the three supporting conservation organisations, both during the course and after graduation. With competition from an increasing number of similar courses the MSc in Conservation Science will have to continually ensure it is maximising the strength of its learning opportunities for students and meeting the needs of the conservation sector if it is to maintain its excellent reputation. This first five-year review suggests it has a head start in attaining that goal.

Final comments from the alumni respondents

"It was awesome!"

"Thanks!"

"Most enjoyable year of my education - met great people with similar interests and was supported in my dream of a career in conservation. The Alumni network is fantastic and should be maintained!"

"It was a hugely beneficial experience, particularly coming from a non-traditional background for conservation work. It has been behind everything I have done since, which I hope will be true in the future too..."

"Fantastic course I enjoyed it from start to finish and it was generally very well organised despite being in the guinea-pig year. I have no doubt that this MSc has helped me in my career and I have managed to gain paid employment in conservation. Thank you!"

"The Con Sci MSc was the highlight of my education, I would do it again if that was feasible. The dedication and intelligence of my fellow students was inspiring, the level of teaching was fantastic, I hope all the other years of Con Sci have been as good and inspiring to the students as the year I spent on the course. Long may the course continue."

"Brilliant brilliant brilliant. More guided reading before the course starts. More one-on-ones with tutors. More career advice from our tutors"

"I really think it is an excellent course. The huge diversity of lectures, coursework, contacts, people and project opportunities was a real strength and it made the whole experience very positive. Conservation science is such a diverse discipline that it would be difficult and probably to the course's detriment to skew this focus too much. It's a very tough job and phd job market out there right now, but I feel that this course did give me an extra competitive edge in quite a few different ways."

"I was happy with the course, enjoyed it, and felt it set me up well for a career in conservation."

"I thoroughly enjoyed the course, it was a fantastic experience and I would recommend it to anyone looking for a career in Conservation."

"My MSc at Imperial was both socially and academically the best year of my life."

"I really enjoyed the course and Silwood in general. I think it is perceived as THE conservation course to be on and the knowledge and skills it gave me have been a real help! Thanks guys!"

"Excellent course and it's very hard to think of ways by which it could be improved. I feel extremely privileged to have had the opportunity to partake in the course..."

"Overall it was a great course with a brilliant mix of people and projects. The more practical the course can be, the better - lectures that included learning tools for community involvement or having to work out things for ourselves have stuck with me a lot more than those where we sat there and did nothing."

"I would highly recommend it to anyone looking for a career in the conservation sector. Silwood is a wonderful place to live and work, especially during dissertation write-ups. A huge thank you for the efforts of everyone involved in running the course."

"Loved it, would do it again in a heartbeat."

"Fantastic course run by dedicated staff. I love the continued contact between students through the Facebook group and Hotmail as it is a really useful source of information and jobs/PhD's etc."

"Loved the course, it ranks equal first for the best year of my life so far. I also loved the fact that when I started my current job I understood everything we work on to quite a deep level. This has allowed me to get promoted and have quite a lot of high profile successes. I have been recommending the course to people and at least two people have approached me to tell me that they took it because of how I spoke about it. They also both said they were very glad they took my advice!"

"The format is 99.9% perfect. The staff work tirelessly, they provide good support, as well as stirring up opinion within the group (which prepares you for the ensuing disagreement you face in professional life). The guest lecturers are all very well sourced and the topics covered are all very relevant."

"It was brilliant and one of the best years of my life! Also I wanted to put discussion groups in box 29. as one of the things that should not be changed as they are a great way to learn about different topics and gain critical analysis skills, but I was only allowed to put one."

"I had a hell of a time. Thank you!"

"I really loved it :)"

"Having completely changed career direction since doing the course, I can't really comment on how employable it has made me, but personally speaking, it was an amazing year, hard work, but the best thing I've done so far. I felt that I learnt a lot, met a lot of really interesting people, grew emotionally and personally, and it certainly helped me decide upon what I wanted to do in the future. I hope that I might use everything I have learnt from the course one day, and I don't regret taking the course at all."

"E.J is remarkably positive and helpful beyond the duration of the course."