

The Royal Agricultural University

Programme Specification:

MSc Sustainable Agriculture and Food Security

Postgraduate Diploma in Sustainable Agriculture and Food Security

Postgraduate Certificate in Sustainable Agriculture and Food Security

**(RAU Joint Institute for Advanced Agritechnology at
Qingdao Agricultural University (RAU at QAU))**

2026-27

PROGRAMME SPECIFICATION [ACADEMIC YEAR 2026-27]

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

Section 1 – Material Programme Information

Criteria	Detail
Validating body	The Royal Agricultural University
Teaching Institution	Qingdao Agricultural University (QAU)
Subject Area	Other Subject Areas (Partners)
Entry Award(s)	MSc Sustainable Agriculture and Food Security
Final Award and exit route(s)	MSc Sustainable Agriculture and Food Security Postgraduate Diploma in Sustainable Agriculture and Food Security Postgraduate Certificate in Sustainable Agriculture and Food Security
Programme title	MSc Sustainable Agriculture and Food Security
Location(s) of study	Qingdao Agricultural University (QAU)
Full time study	2 years
Part-time study	N/A
Language of study	English
Programme start month	September
Period of validation	September 2023 – August 2029
Name of Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Body	Not applicable
Type of Accreditation	Not applicable
Accreditation due for renewal	Not applicable
UCAS Code	Not applicable
Quercus Code	QAUSAFS1F
HECoS Code	Not applicable
QAA Subject Benchmark Statement(s) and other reference points	<u>Agriculture, Horticulture, Forestry, Food, Nutrition and Consumer Sciences</u> <u>Master's Degree Characteristics Statement, Feb 2020</u>
Academic level on Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ)	Level 7
Approval at AQSC	July 2023

Entry Requirements

Criteria	Detail
Entry requirements (this should be the standard University entry requirements unless otherwise approved by the Academic Board)	A minimum of GPA 2.9 which is equivalent to 2:2 honours degree from a UK university. Mature candidates with significant relevant work experience and lower academic qualifications may also be considered for entry, following interview with the programme managers.
English language	English language at or above equivalent IELTS score of 6.5 average with no element below 5.5. or Obtained first degree in an English-speaking country. or Pass RAU internal integrated English language proficiency (EAP reading and writing) test 60%.

Section 2 - Programme Structure

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

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

MSc Sustainable Agriculture and Food Security (180 credits)

The accumulation of 180 credits through the assessment of programme elements as detailed below:

Year 1:

Semester 1: Students will undertake English language studies

Semester 2: Study modules

Module code	Module title	Level	Credit value	Core/ Elective	Semester
Q4000	Sustainable Agricultural Systems	7	30	Core	2
Q4751	International Rural Development and Food Security	7	30	Core	2
Q4413	Research Skills	7	15	Core	2

Year 2:

Semester 3: Study modules

Semester 4: Dissertation writing

Module code	Module title	Level	Credit value	Core/ Elective	Semester
Q4002	Applied Natural and Environmental Science	7	30	Core	3
Q4001	Leadership and Business Strategy	7	30	Core	3
Q4414	Research Dissertation	7	45	Core	3+4

Postgraduate Diploma in Sustainable Agriculture and Food Security (120 credits)

Year 1:

Semester 1: Students will undertake English language studies

Semester 2: Study modules

Module code	Module title	Level	Credit value	Core/ Elective	Semester
Q4000	Sustainable Agricultural Systems	7	30	Core	2
Q4751	International Rural Development and Food Security	7	30	Core	2

Year 2:

Semester 3: Study modules

Module code	Module title	Level	Credit value	Core/ Elective	Semester
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Q4002	Applied Natural and Environmental Science	7	30	Core	3
Q4001	Leadership and Business Strategy	7	30	Core	3

Postgraduate Certificate in Sustainable Agriculture and Food Security (60 credits)

Year 1:

Semester 1: Students will undertake English language studies

Semester 2: Study modules

Module code	Module title	Level	Credit value	Core/ Elective	Semester
Q4000	Sustainable Agricultural Systems	7	30	Core	2
Q4751	International Rural Development and Food Security	7	30	Core	2

Section 3 – Programme overview and Programme Aims

Over recent years, the impact of climate change and concerns about food security have risen-up the global agenda as many people continue to experience the fragility of food supply chains and devastating environmental, social and economic crisis. The M.Sc. programme in Sustainable Agriculture and Food Security is specifically designed to address sustainable agriculture and food security globally. The programme is relevant to local and international graduates, and engages with theories, concepts and approaches associated with food production, while looking for viable solutions to sustainable agriculture and food security in various contexts and scenarios.

The programme attracts students from a wide range of backgrounds and experiences. The diversity of the participants is an important dynamic in this programme and plays a key role in discussing and addressing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) related to food and farming. This diversity encourages new and alternative ways of rethinking agricultural and food systems, improvement in livelihoods, and protection of the environment. Students within the programme learn key competencies that are relevant for public administration, international development/funding agencies, research and business sectors.

The programme benefits from research-led teaching, drawing on research in areas including Sustainable and regenerative agriculture, Food safety, quality and security, Environment and soil health. The programme modules and the style of delivery encourage students to reflect upon the discipline content and to apply the concepts learnt to real-world scenarios. The use of examples, opportunities to discuss and debate theory and current issues with peers, and engagement with experts provide students with diverse perspectives and opportunities relevant to today's changing world.

Module pillars and assessment criteria

Inspire

Peer-to-peer learning

Awareness of existing best knowledge systems and practice, and identification of opportunities to improve sustainable agriculture and food security at various scales i.e., locally, nationally and internationally.

Reflect

Apply to your situation

Critically and logically review and application to specific contexts.

Innovate

Use evidence-based approaches

Review of existing knowledge systems, evaluation of innovations, and propose innovative solutions to challenges at various scales i.e., locally, nationally and internationally.

Lead

Teamwork and group activities

Taking account of team motivation, skills, experience and mind-set in the potential adoption of innovation plans.

Section 4 – Programme Sustainability

The programme design directly aligns with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by bridging ecological science, global development and strategic leadership. Core modules like Sustainable Agricultural Systems and Applied Natural and Environmental Science directly address SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) and SDG 15 (Life on Land) by training students in climate-smart, resilient food production methods that safeguard biodiversity. The socio-economic dimensions of food supply are tackled in International Rural Development and Food Security, supporting SDG 1 (No Poverty) and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) through sustainable rural empowerment. Furthermore, Leadership and Business Strategy fosters the institutional innovation required for SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production). Collectively, the curriculum transforms students into global solution-providers capable of advancing sustainable resource management and addressing food insecurity.

Section 5 – Programme intended learning outcomes

On successful completion of the named award, students will be able to demonstrate the following Learning Outcomes (LOs):

Knowledge and Understanding

LO no.	On successful completion of the named award, students will be able to:	Module Code/s
1.	Critically evaluate the principles of agricultural production for both large- and small-scale systems	Q4000, Q4751
2.	Critically evaluate issues of sustainable development considering people, place and planet.	Q4000, Q4751, Q4002
3.	Appraise the complex issues of sustainable management of natural resources.	Q4000, Q4751, Q4002
4.	Decipher and evaluate the impacts of climate science and change on agricultural systems and food supply.	Q4000, Q4751, Q4002
5.	Determine factors influencing the provision of food quality, supply and security.	Q4000, Q4751, Q4002

6.	Ascertain and evaluate the processes of policy formulation in agriculture and food production.	Q4000, Q4751, Q4002
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Intellectual, Professional, Key skills

LO no.	On successful completion of the named award, students will be able to:	Module Code/s
1.	Lead and manage time and resources appropriately in both individual and team situations to enable successful project delivery.	Q4001
2.	Develop lifelong skills which enable the synthesise and analyse of data and information from a wide range of sources to support and evaluate solutions to complex practical problems and policy challenges.	Q4413, Q4414, Q4000
3.	Evaluate, cite and reference sources of data and information with academic integrity in an appropriate manner whilst ensuring the avoidance of plagiarism.	Q4413, Q4414, Q4000
4.	Able to critically and creatively think, design and analyse an investigation to test a hypothesis. collect appropriate results, analyse data and present conclusions using a variety of methods.	Q4413, Q4414
5.	Demonstrate leadership skills to critically access situations for addressing diverse organisational, business and social issues.	Q4001
6.	Demonstrate time and resource management skills in both individual and team situations to enable successful project delivery.	Q4413, Q4414 Q4000

Programme specific skills

LO no.	On successful completion of the named award, students will be able to:	Module Code/s
1.	Appreciate the role of self-reflection and critical analysis in one's own and others personal attributes for a range of situations including resilience, open-mindedness, reflection, ethical consideration, motivation, professional behaviours, and employability.	Q4413, Q4414, Q4001
2.	Demonstrate understanding of complex information analysis to influence decisions and policy within a range of political, economic, and social systems and institutions for strategic decision making.	Q4413, Q4751, Q4414, Q4000
3.	Appraise and develop project management solutions for sustainable agricultural and food assessments by effectively and creatively analysing and reporting of results and findings.	Q4413, Q4414, Q4000
4.	Design effective communication tools and strategies through a variety of mediums on food and agricultural topics to a wide range of audiences.	Q4413, Q4414, Q4000

Section 6 – Approach to Learning and Teaching delivery

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

A Postgraduate Certificate (PGCert) and Postgraduate Diploma (PGDip) can be obtained by the successful completion of modules accumulating 60 credits (PGCert) or 120 credits (PG Dip) as specified in the module map in section 2.

The delivery is through a combination of lectures, seminars, speakers, case studies, workshops and with activities presented through the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) which is also used to host other supporting material including videos, webinars, quizzes, and other relevant presentations.

Teaching will include group discussions, tutorials, facilitated discussions, workshops, guided independent study and a research project. Assessment will be a balance between individual and group work and will consist of a range of critical reports, sustainability plans, policy summaries, oral presentations, critical reflections and dissertation / applied project.

Each module is supported by a comprehensive resource list that is maintained through the RAU Library Talis system.

Teaching mode:

In semester 1 (Year 1), students will focus on learning English for Academic Purpose (EAP) to improve their English proficiency.

In semesters 2 (Year 1) and 3 (Year 2), the teaching mode will be conducted over an 8-week period per module, i.e. Preparation (2wks), teaching (3 weekends, mainly Saturday and Sunday), formative assessment (2wks) and summative assessment (1wk). Details of module arrangements for each semester can be found in Section 2.

During preparation weeks, based on the Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs), lecturers will provide assessment briefs, set up all reading materials, pre-recorded videos, and tasks on international VLE module page, and ready for students to self-study.

The aim of the three weekends face to face teaching is to make sure students have understood and learnt all intended learning outcomes following the designed structure in preparation weeks.

During the formative two weeks, students will discuss questions with fellow students and lecturers through module page forum, email and/or face to face communications. During this period of time, lecturers will set up proper formative assessments to monitor student learning to provide ongoing feedback that can help students to identify their strengths and weaknesses and target areas to achieve intended learning outcomes. More importantly, a series of seminars may be scheduled and delivered by members of Joint Institute Industry and Entrepreneurship Committee who are all local, national or international successful entrepreneurs. This will be not only testing the students ILOs, but will also support their future career development.

In the last week students will be able to complete their summative assessments ready for submission.

In the final semester, students will focus on completion of their Research Dissertation.

Section 7 – Approach to Assessment

Assessments are designed to appraise individual capabilities fairly and consistently. We use clear, descriptive assessment guidelines (made available to students) to grade coursework and examinations and to aid classification. Lecturers communicate their expectations clearly to students and use explicit schema to facilitate consistency of marking within and between modules and to ensure good feedback on individual performance. All examinations and coursework assessments that contribute to degree classifications are subject to scrutiny by the External Examiners.

Assessments are designed to test analytical and other cognitive capabilities in relation to particular module aims and content. Coursework assignments such as individual essays, reports, case study analyses, individual and group-based reports, presentations, and various technique- oriented assessments are used to test these skills.

The Research Dissertation is the capstone demonstration of postgraduate skills, requiring students to conceive, justify, design in detail and execute a substantial piece of academic research. For the most able postgraduate students, the Research Dissertation may generate work of a standard appropriate for submission to practitioner and academic journals in agri-food system and environmental management.

In every module, we place high value on students being able to demonstrate effective communication in its various forms. This priority is reflected not only in how assignments are specified, but also in how they are marked - good command of written and spoken English is vital for work-based projects and for graduate employment.

Some modules have a teamwork requirement and in some, there are group assignments, assessed via presentations and reports. All group assignments allow for an element of individual assessment, in order to recognise differences in individual performance where appropriate. Peer feedback can also play a significant part in team activities and is encouraged.

Overall, the programme is taught and assessed through:

Learning and Teaching			Assessment		
Directed	Independent	Placement	Exam	Coursework	Practical
21.1%	78.9%	0%	0%	100%	0%

Section 8 – Course work grading and feedback

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

The University operates standard pass criteria which can be found in the [RAU Academic Regulations](#) (paragraphs 116-156).

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

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

In addition to assigning a percentage mark to each assessment, the tutor will also provide feedback comments; focussing on the strengths and weaknesses of the work. All marks (grades) are subject to internal moderation and external scrutiny by the programme's External Examiner(s), and final confirmation at the exam board. Students must ensure they retain all coursework in case the External Examiner(s) wishes to see it.

Section 9 – RAU Graduate Framework

At the RAU we have chosen five values to underpin our learning community. These are the values which we will all work by and for which we want the RAU to be known for. We aim for our graduates to be:

Collaborative

We believe in the power of working together. We are stronger as a community of practice - inspiring each other, identifying shared goals, and providing reciprocal support leads to greater success.

Open-minded

We are receptive to new ideas and we value the diversity of experiences and skills. We are committed to listening to everyone across the RAU community.

Resourceful

We adopt creative approaches to achieve our goals while setting higher standards, promoting professionalism and sustainability.

Responsible

Individually and collectively we take accountability for our actions working with integrity to achieve the highest ethical standards.

Inclusive

We acknowledge the fundamental value and dignity of all individuals and are committed to maintaining an environment that seeks to eliminate all forms of discrimination and respects diverse traditions, heritages, and experiences.



We inspire our graduates...

RAU VALUES Collaborative, Open-minded, Resourceful, Responsible & Inclusive.	
PROFESSIONAL APPROACH To be reflective, self-aware team members with excellent communication skills approaching new challenges with flexibility and confidence.	INNOVATIVE THINKER To have commercial acumen and curiosity, seeking innovative solutions to the real-world.
SUSTAINABLE MINDSET To commit to environment and regeneration, demonstrating an understanding of global complexity and system thinking.	TECHNICALLY SKILLED To enter the workplace as technically and digitally skilled practitioners who value practical knowledge and scientific evidence.

Section 10 – Progression

The skills gained throughout the programme will equip graduates to work in the following sectors:

- ✓ International organizations
- ✓ Government departments
- ✓ Local NGOs and charities
- ✓ Research institutes
- ✓ Universities, including further studies at PhD level.
- ✓ Commercial companies worldwide

The University has links with a wide range of businesses, through our local Growth Hub, Chamber of Commerce, Enterprise partnership and 177 years of successful Alumni, and RAU AT QAU JI Industry and Entrepreneurship Committee which has hundreds of committee members who are all local, national or international successful entrepreneurs.

Students may also choose to further their academic studies with an MSc by Research and/or PhD.

Section 11 – Student support, wellbeing and counselling

Both RAU and QAU offer a wide range of support to students including practical advice and guidance as well as emotional support.

Disability and Neurodivergent support

We support students with a range of disabilities, learning difficulties, and other health and mental health conditions, helping them to access funding via [the Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of Persons with Disabilities](#).

When students inform Student Office they have a disability, they will be offered support based on your specific needs which can include:

- **Alternative exam arrangements** such as extra time, rest breaks, or a smaller room.
- **Access to support workers** such as study skills tutors, specialist mentors, readers and scribes.

Mental Health Support

The RAU China team will work closely with RAU China Office and QAU team to support students with the ups and downs of university life, offering drop-in sessions, providing expert advice and support for students in crisis or with more complex needs, and together the team runs events and campaigns throughout the year to encourage positive wellbeing.

Academic Support Tutor Programme

All students have access to the Academic Support Tutor (AST) programme, which provides high-quality academic support for students. ASTs provide timetabled group tutorials and individual support for students who are most at risk. Group tutorials focus on providing high-quality academic support at the appropriate academic level; advice and guidance in relation to the course; and advice about making study choices on the course (in line with the AST Handbook). Individual support focuses on continuation and may be in person or online.

Section 12 – Enhancing the Quality of Learning and Teaching

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

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

- External Examiner's Reports
- Key statistics including data on retention and achievement
- Results of the Student Satisfaction Surveys
- Feedback from Student Course Representatives
- Annual Programme Monitoring

Although this programme is taught in Qingdao Agricultural University (QAU), China, it will be managed by the RAU Joint Institute (JI) for Advanced AgriTechnology at Qingdao Agricultural University (RAU AT QAU). The RAU AT QAU will be managed by the Joint Management Committee (JMC), which will be chaired by the President of QAU, with a Deputy president / chair from the RAU. All academic matters will be managed by the Academic Committee (AC) according to RAU's Regulations for undergraduate degrees. The AC will be chaired by a senior member of RAU staff and will report to the RAU's Academic Board.

Students reading for this MSc degree will effectively have a contract with the Royal Agricultural University that consists of:

- the terms laid out in the Student Contract document
- this Programme Specification and associated Module documents (Module Reference Sheets, Handbooks etc)
- the RAU's [Regulations](#) and [Policies](#) (adapted for the JI) including the University's [Admissions Policy](#).