



Master of Environmental Policy and Management: A popular programme at Lincoln University goes online!

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Lincoln's Master of Environmental Policy and Management (MEPM) is now in its 6th year, and judging from the steady increase in enrolments and high employment rates of graduates, it is filling a clear need. Awareness of the scale and complexity of global challenges is steadily increasing, and with it, recognition of the urgent need for effective action. As a result, there has been a sharp increase in the number of organisations recruiting for staff with environmental expertise and in students interested in developing their skills in these areas.

With the on-campus MEPM programme well-established, an online version was launched in 2021 as the Faculty of Environment, Society and Design's first online qualification. The two core courses and six 'soft core' courses are available online from 2022, and these can be supplemented with online electives or on-campus block courses from across the university. The online option has proved very attractive. Many of the online students study part-time alongside existing work, and the online version enables students stranded overseas by Covid or living in other parts of the country to upgrade their environmental policy and management skills without having to be in Lincoln.

The Covid disruption, combined with the Lincoln University decision to make Masters level courses 'fees free' until the end of 2022, appears to have been seized upon by many people as an opportunity to reassess their options – in some cases returning to university to complete partial postgraduate study from some years before, and a number expressing a desire to change to a career where they can contribute to addressing some of the global challenges humanity faces.

The MEPM is a 180-credit taught Masters which can be completed in three semesters of full-time study, or spread out over more semesters if studying part-time. It was established as part of a revamp of Lincoln's postgraduate programmes. While the closely related Master of Planning is a specialist programme accredited by the New Zealand Planning Institute (NZPI), the MEPM allows students greater scope to study a range of courses related to environmental policy and environmental management.

The programme has flexibility in both when and how students begin. Study can commence in either the first semester (February) or the second (July). "Staircasing" has proven popular, especially for those returning to study after a prolonged break or changing career. This means starting with either a Postgraduate Certificate (three courses/60 credits), or a Postgraduate Diploma (six courses/120 credits) and after 'testing the waters', transferring to the MEPM (subject to grades).

Students develop advanced research and analytical skills, along with an in-depth understanding of the socio-cultural, political and economic contexts of environmental management, and practical skills. Courses covering sustainability, environmental economics, Māori resource management, planning law, ecology and GIS are common choices.

MEPM graduates are now found in a wide range of positions in government agencies, regional and local councils, environmental and business consultancy firms, industry organisations and businesses, international agencies, non-government organisations (NGOs), and advocacy groups.

Most of the research of the staff and students in the Department of Environmental Management relates to the broad fields of environmental management and sustainability transitions, but academic staff are also active in the day-to-day practice of environmental policy and management. They bring this experience on advising government, local authorities, NGOs and businesses to their courses, providing first-hand opportunities for students to engage with and take direct action to address global challenges locally. This is part of the almost 50 years of environmental policy and management heritage of the university's Department of Environmental Management, and the online MEPM is part of making this expertise and these opportunities accessible to more people as part of responding to Covid and the environmental and social challenges facing the world.