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Biology Course Information Sheet for entry in 2024

Biology is an exciting and rapidly developing subject area with great relevance to addressing global challenges from disease and poverty to biodiversity loss and climate change.

The study of living things has undergone tremendous expansion in recent years. Topics such as cell biology, developmental biology, evolutionary biology and ecology, all of which are covered in the course, are advancing at a great pace. This expansion has been accompanied by an integration of different biological disciplines. A biologist with an interest in tropical plants may well use many of the tools and techniques that are indispensable to a molecular geneticist.

The structure of the Oxford Biology course encourages a cross-disciplinary approach. Following an introduction to fundamental biological principles in the first year, the options system in the second and third years allows students to specialise in detailed aspects of animals, plants, cells or ecology of their choosing. The options system encompasses a comprehensive range of topics.

The course offers advanced research skills training, and an optional fourth year. This means students can either leave after three years with a BA or choose to stay on and complete an extended project (which can be lab or field based) under the supervision of an academic member of staff. Progression to the 4-year MBiol is contingent on satisfactory academic performance in the first three years.

The Biology degree is taught by the Department of Biology, with almost all teaching taking place in the University's Science Area. Additional resources include the Oxford University Museum of Natural History, the Botanic Garden, the Herbarium, the Arboretum, the John Krebs Field Station and Wytham Woods.

Skills training is an integral part of teaching across all years and there is a compulsory field trip for all first-year students to study ecology.

Compulsory skills training in the first year includes carefully selected dissections that have been designed with animal welfare and conservation principles in mind.

Skills training in the second year is also compulsory and covers a whole range of more advanced practical and quantitative skills essential for a modern biologist. In the second year, students can choose from a range of extended skills courses that last one or two weeks. Examples include ecological fieldwork (in the UK or overseas), genome sequencing and genome editing.

In the third year, students specialise on a narrower range of options, and skills training continues in the form of journal clubs and computer classes. Please note that despite the University's efforts to subsidise the course, field-work in the second, third and fourth years requires financial contributions from the student.

A typical week

In the first year, your typical weekly timetable can be broken down into the following categories:

- Lectures: around eight hours a week
- Research skills: around six hours of laboratory practical demonstrations (practicals), one hour of computer practicals and one hour of synthesis sessions each week
- Tutorials: one hour a week, plus preparation time.

In the second and third years, the lecture and research skills workload remains roughly the same although there is a greater element of choice over the subjects studied.

Lectures and practical class sizes will vary depending on the options chosen, ranging from up to 120 students in the class to as few as 20 students in the class. In the second, third and fourth years, variable hours are also spent on research projects.

Most tutorials, classes, and lectures are delivered by staff who are tutors in their subject. Many are world-leading experts with years of experience in teaching and research. Some teaching may also be delivered by trained PhD students and early career researchers with hands-on research experience.

To find out more about how our teaching year is structured, visit our [Academic Year](#) page.

Course structure

YEAR 1	
COURSES <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The three compulsory themes are:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Diversity of life○ Building a phenotype○ Ecology and evolution• Compulsory skills training including a mini-project in the first term• A field course in the summer term	ASSESSMENT <p>Three written exam papers (assessing lecture material and research skills); assessed practical write-ups</p>
YEAR 2	
COURSES <ul style="list-style-type: none">• In Year 2 there is greater specialisation, and you can choose from three of four themes from:	ASSESSMENT <p>Two written exam papers; coursework</p>

YEAR 2

- Genomics and Host-microbe interactions
- Cell and developmental biology
- Organisms - behaviour and physiology
- Ecology and evolution
- Compulsory skills training, including a range of extended skills training courses, lasting for either one or two weeks

YEAR 3

COURSES

- The course broadens into a choice of eight options arising from the four second year themes. Students select a minimum of four of the eight options.
- Regular skills training regardless of course choices

A full list of current options is available on the [Biology website](#).

ASSESSMENT

Three written exam papers; coursework

YEAR 4 (Optional MBiol*)

COURSES

The fourth year will give you the chance to pursue an in-depth research project under the supervision of an academic member of staff.

There will also be a mini-conference in which all students have the opportunity to present their work to their peers.

ASSESSMENT

Research project

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* Students can choose to leave after three years and graduate with a BA, or they can continue to a fourth year and graduate with an MBIol. Progression to the MBIol is contingent on satisfactory academic performance in the first three years.

The University will seek to deliver this course in accordance with the description set out above. However, there may be situations in which it is desirable or necessary for the University to make changes in course provision, either before or after registration. For further information, please see the University's [Terms and Conditions](#).

Fees

These annual fees are for full-time students who begin this undergraduate course here in 2024.

Information about how much fees and other costs may increase is set out in the University's Terms and Conditions.

Please note that while the University sets out its annual fees as a single figure, this is a combined figure for both your University and college fees. More information is provided in your [Terms and Conditions](#).

Fee status	Annual Course fees
Home (UK, Republic of Ireland, Channel Islands & Isle of Man)	£9,250
Overseas (including most EU students – see Note below)	£48,620

Note: Irish nationals living in the UK or Ireland, EU, other EEA, and Swiss nationals who have been granted settled or pre-settled status in the UK under the EU settlement scheme are eligible for 'Home fee' status and student loan support, subject to meeting residency requirements. We will contact you directly if we need further information from you to determine your fee status.

Please refer to the [Undergraduate fee status](#) pages for more information.

Living costs

Living costs for the academic year starting in 2024 are estimated to be between £1,345 and £1,955 for each month you are in Oxford. Our academic year is made up of three eight-week terms, so you would not usually need to be in Oxford for much more than six months of the year but may wish to budget over a nine-month period to ensure you also have sufficient funds during the holidays to meet essential costs. For further details please visit our [living costs webpage](#).

Living costs breakdown

	Per month		Total for 9 months	
	Lower range	Upper range	Lower range	Upper range
Food	£315	£495	£2,835	£4,455
Accommodation (including utilities)	£745	£925	£6,705	£8,325
Personal items	£190	£320	£1,710	£2,880
Social activities	£40	£95	£360	£855
Study costs	£35	£85	£315	£765
Other	£20	£35	£180	£315
Total	£1,345	£1,955	£12,105	£17,595

In order to provide these likely living costs (which are rounded to the nearest £5), the University and the Oxford SU conducted a living costs survey to complement existing student expenditure data from a variety of sources, including the UK government's Student Income and Expenditure Survey and the National Union of Students (NUS).

The current economic climate and high national rate of inflation make it very hard to estimate potential changes to the cost of living over the next few years. When planning your finances for any future years of study in Oxford beyond 2024-25, it is suggested that you allow for potential increases in living expenses of around 5% each year – although this rate may vary depending on the national economic situation. UK inflationary increases will be kept under review and the [living costs webpage](#) updated.

Additional Fees and Charges Information for Biology

First-year students are required to undertake a UK-based residential field course in the summer term (typically 6 days). You will study living organisms in a range of environments, both terrestrial and marine, and the content is assessed as part of the first-year examinations. The University covers all costs for this compulsory trip, including food and accommodation.

Towards the end of the second year, you will complete a two-week skills course. A range of courses will be offered and will include three optional field trips away from Oxford. In 2023, the field trips are as follows:

- Tenerife: to study the systematics, diversity and ecology of the local plant communities
- Northern Ireland and Wytham: to study the field ecology of birds, split between Northern Ireland and our field-study centre in Oxford
- Borneo: to study tropical rainforest ecology of both animals and plants

As a guide, estimated costs for these optional courses in 2023 are:

- £675 for Tenerife, plus whatever students spend on lunches and evening meals during the trip
- £425 for Northern Ireland/Wytham, plus whatever students spend on lunches and evening meals during the trip
- £1800 for Borneo

If you stay on for the fourth year, as part of your course requirements, you will undertake a project. Depending on your choice of topic and the research required to complete it, you may have to

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contribute to costs, but only in exceptional circumstances, for example, if you choose to conduct extensive fieldwork in remote locations.

[Further details on field trips](#) can be found on the Biology website.