

Biology Information Sheet for entry in 2021

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, and 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 a blurring of the distinctions between 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 modular structure of the Oxford Biology course encourages a cross-disciplinary approach. The options system in the second and third years allows students to study either a general background encompassing a comprehensive range of topics, or specialise in detailed aspects of animals, plants, cells or ecology. The course now incorporates an optional fourth year, meaning students can either leave after three years with a BA or choose to stay on and complete an extended project under the supervision of an academic member of staff (which can be lab or field-based), in addition to advanced research skills training.

The Biology degree is taught jointly by the Departments of Plant Sciences and Zoology, 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](#).

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 fourth year consists of an extended project, which can be lab or field based, plus advanced research skills training.

Skills training is an integral part of teaching across all years and there is a compulsory one-week field trip for all first-year students to Pembrokeshire to study ecology. Skills training in second year is also compulsory and covers a whole range of more advanced practical and quantitative skills essential for a modern biologist. At the end of 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 and overseas), genome sequencing and genome editing. In the third year, students specialise on a narrower range of options but skills training continues – this time in the form of learning how to engage with and critique a scientific paper. All overseas work 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

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- Research skills: around six hours of laboratory 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, third and fourth years, variable hours are also spent on research projects.

In the second and third years, variable hours are also spent on coursework elements. Tutorials are usually 2-4 students and a tutor. Lectures and practical class sizes will vary depending on the options chosen. They will normally range from around 115 students in the class to as few as 20 students in the class. 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 postgraduate students who are usually studying at doctorate level.

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

Course structure

YEAR 1	
<p>COURSES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The three compulsory themes are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Diversity of life How to build a phenotype Ecology and evolution Compulsory skills training including a mini-project in the first term A week-long field course in Wales in the summer term 	<p>ASSESSMENT</p> <p>Three written exam papers (assessing lecture material and research skills); assessed practical write-ups</p>
YEAR 2	
<p>COURSES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In Year 2 there is greater specialisation, and you can choose from three of four themes from: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Genomes and molecular biology Cell and developmental biology Behaviour and physiology of organisms Ecology and evolution Students can choose from a range of extended skills training courses, lasting for either one or two weeks 	<p>ASSESSMENT</p> <p>Two written exam papers; practical write-ups; coursework</p>
YEAR 3	
<p>COURSES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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 <p><i>A full list of current options is available on the Biology website.</i></p>	<p>ASSESSMENT</p> <p>Three written exam papers (including a scientific paper critique); two pieces of coursework</p>
YEAR 4 (OPTIONAL MBiol*)	
<p>COURSES</p>	<p>ASSESSMENT</p> <p>Research project</p>

<p>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. Progression to the fourth year is contingent on satisfactory academic performance in the first three years, and those who successfully complete the fourth year will leave with an MBiol.</p>	
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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 each course in accordance with the descriptions 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](#).

Teaching delivery

At the time of writing course information sheets for 2021/22 entry, the COVID-19 pandemic was still impacting the University. A range of measures have been put in place to comply with Government legislation and guidance in response to the pandemic, and to help keep students, staff and the wider community safe.

Inevitably, some changes have been necessary to teaching and student services during the pandemic (for example, a greater amount of online teaching and examinations, and restrictions on numbers allowed to access facilities at one time).

Whatever the circumstances in the 2021/22 academic year, the University will deliver core services and learning outcomes for each course, even though the modes of delivery may change.

All course information sheets should be read in the above context, and we will keep offer holders and students regularly informed if circumstances change. Further details are available on our [website](#) and within the [Student Terms and Conditions](#).

Fees

These annual fees are for full-time students who begin this undergraduate course here in 2021.

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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)	£37, 510

Note: Following the UK's departure from the EU, most EU students starting a course in 2021/22 will no longer be eligible to pay fees at the 'Home' rate and will instead be charged the higher 'Overseas' rate. This change will not apply to Irish nationals living in the UK or Ireland, who will continue to be charged fees at the 'Home' rate for the duration of their course.

The government has issued guidance stating that EU, other EEA, and Swiss nationals who have been granted settled or pre-settled status in the UK under the EU settlement scheme may be eligible for 'Home fee' status and student loan support, subject to meeting residency requirements. However, until the government formally updates its fee status regulations the University is unable to confirm fee statuses for students who may qualify on this basis. We will contact you directly if we need further information from you to determine your fee status.

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

Additional Fees and Charges Information for Biology

First-year students are required to undertake a one-week residential field course to West Wales (Orierton Field Studies Centre near Pembroke) in the summer term. 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 fieldtrips away from Oxford:

- Tenerife: to study the systematics, diversity and ecology of the local plant communities;
- Skomer and Wytham: to study the field ecology of birds, split between the island of Skomer and our field-study centre in Oxford;

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- Borneo: to study the tropical rainforest ecology of both animals and plants.

As a guide, costs for the overseas optional courses in 2018 were £625 for Tenerife, plus whatever students spent on lunches and evening meals during the week, and £950 for Borneo, plus the return flights to Kota Kinabalu, Malaysia. The Skomer/Wytham trip is currently under development but we estimate costs will be in the range of £400-500

If you stay on for the 4th year, as part of your course requirements, you will undertake a project. There may be additional expenses associated with the Project, depending on your choice of topic and the research required to complete it. Such expenses are mainly associated with fieldwork rather than laboratory projects.

Further details on fieldtrips and projects can be found on the [Biology website](#).

**** This section is an updated version of the University's course listing webpage.**

Living costs

Your living costs will vary significantly dependent on your lifestyle. These are estimated to be between £1,175 and £1,710 per month in 2021-2022. Each year of an undergraduate course usually consists of three terms of eight weeks each but you may need to be in Oxford for longer. As a guide, you may wish to budget over a nine-month period to ensure you also have sufficient funds during the holidays to meet essential costs.

Living costs breakdown

	Per month		Total for 9 months	
	Lower range	Upper range	Lower range	Upper range
Food	£280	£400	£2,520	£3,600
Accommodation (including utilities)	£655	£790	£5,895	£7,110
Personal items	£130	£250	£1,170	£2,250
Social activities	£45	£115	£405	£1,035
Study costs	£45	£100	£405	£900
Other	£20	£55	£180	£495
Total	£1,175	£1,710	£10,575	£15,390

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In order to provide these likely living costs, the University and the Oxford University Students' Union 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 likely lower and upper ranges above are based on a single student with no dependants living in college accommodation (including utility bills) and are provided for information only.

When planning your finances for future years of study at Oxford beyond 2021-22, you should allow for an estimated increase in living expenses of 3% each year.

Document accessibility

If you require an accessible version of the document, please contact Undergraduate Admissions by email (uao.comms@admin.ox.ac.uk) or via the online form (<http://www.ox.ac.uk/ask>).

Please note, at the time of publishing the CIS, further details regarding the availability and eligibility of financial support for some EU students with settled or pre-settled status remained outstanding. Confirmation about funding arrangements for the year abroad were also outstanding. Any updates impacting students will be published on the Oxford and the EU webpage.