

Course Information Sheet for entry in 2026-27: MSc by Research in Earth Sciences



Course facts

Mode of study	Full Time Only
Expected length	2 to 3 years

About the course

The MSc by Research in Earth Sciences is a research-based course focused on independent study. Students undertake original research in areas such as geophysics, planetary evolution, palaeobiology, climate, and natural hazards.

The Earth sciences focus upon the scientific understanding of this and other planets. It embraces a large range of fundamental topics including the evolution of life, how climate has changed in the past and will change in the future, the nature of planetary surfaces and interiors and the processes underlying natural hazards like earthquakes and volcanoes.

The main aspect of the course is an original research project, which develops research skills, knowledge and expertise in an area of cutting-edge science. In many ways, the course is very similar to the DPhil in Earth Sciences, the key difference being that a DPhil project would normally take longer to complete and would be expected to make more significant advances in the field of research. The MSc by Research offers an alternative to a DPhil, for students wishing to undertake a shorter research degree.

To learn more about the research topics you'll have the opportunity to explore, please refer to the *Research areas* section on this page.

You will typically join a research group and work alongside other research students, postdoctoral researchers and academics all of whom provide additional support and advice for the department's research students.

We also strongly encourage collaborating and academic activity across research groups.

While the focus of the MSc is on your development to conduct independent research, there are also a range of courses and other learning opportunities available both within the Department of Earth Sciences and other departments in the Maths, Physical and Life Sciences (MPLS) Division. These courses are organised through the MPLS Graduate Academic Programme and include generic skills such as advice on science writing, as well as subject specific specialist courses such as advanced computer skills. These courses allow your research programme to be tailored to your individual project needs.

There may also be opportunities for you to gain teaching experience by demonstrating laboratory classes to undergraduates, assisting on undergraduate fieldtrips or in tutorial teaching, some of which may be remunerated.

You will be expected to present your research at both national and international meetings and publish in internationally-recognised science journals.

The department performs a large number of outreach activities, which you can choose to be a part of. These outreach events involve explaining (and demonstrating) the exciting science conducted in the department to schoolchildren and the general public. As a member of the department you will be part of a large and vibrant community of researchers working across the frontiers of the earth sciences.

Attendance

The course is full-time and requires attendance in Oxford. Full-time students are subject to the [University's Residence requirements](https://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/graduate/after-you-apply/accommodation/residence-requirements). (<https://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/graduate/after-you-apply/accommodation/residence-requirements>)

Provision exists for students on some courses to undertake their research in a 'well-founded laboratory' outside of the University. This may require travel to and attendance at a site that is not located in Oxford. Where known, existing collaborations will be outlined on this page. Please read the course information carefully, including the additional information about course fees and costs.

Resources to support your study

As a graduate student, you will have access to the University's wide range of resources including libraries, museums, galleries, digital resources and IT services.

The Bodleian Libraries is the largest library system in the UK. It includes the main Bodleian Library and libraries across Oxford, including major research libraries and faculty, department and institute libraries. Together, the Libraries hold more

than 13 million printed items, provide access to e-journals, and contain outstanding special collections including rare books and manuscripts, classical papyri, maps, music, art and printed ephemera.

The University's IT Services is available to all students to support with core university IT systems and tools, as well as many other services and facilities. IT Services also offers a range of IT learning courses for students to support with learning and research, as well as [guidance on what technology to bring with you as a new student \(https://www.it.ox.ac.uk/what-to-bring\)](https://www.it.ox.ac.uk/what-to-bring) at Oxford.

The Department of Earth Sciences occupies a building specifically designed for the teaching and research needs of geoscientists. Whatever the area of the Earth sciences you have chosen to study, the specialist research facilities are world class. This is whether you require access to supercomputers, local workstations or the state of the art laboratory and analytical facilities. In addition, the University library and e-resources provide access to archived and recent research journals. Research facilities are also available across the Maths, Physical and Life Sciences Division and take advantage of the department's strong links with the local DIAMOND synchrotron high energy light source and Oxford University Museum of Natural History.

Underlying support for all research groups within the department includes facilities for preparing thin and polished rock sections; IT support; a well-equipped machine shop; computer laboratory; FEG-EPMA and FEG-SEM and a dedicated departmental library. You will have your own desk within a shared graduate student office and access to breakout rooms for small group meetings. Along with other graduate students, you will organise your own seminar programme and also attend the informal and regular departmental seminar series. You will also have access to the Research Common Room (RCR) where students organise regular social events, but also during coffee and lunch have the opportunity to meet and mingle with postdocs and faculty from across all research areas in the department.

Supervision

The allocation of graduate supervision for this course is the responsibility of the Department of Earth Sciences and it is not always possible to accommodate the preferences of incoming graduate students to work with a particular member of staff. However, under exceptional circumstances a supervisor may be found outside the Department of Earth Sciences.

You will have at least two (and sometimes more) supervisors, who are experts in their field, and who provide the project research framework, guidance and mentoring throughout the program. Students benefit from close contact with their project supervisor(s) and it is expected that you will have at least two substantial supervision sessions each term.

You will have the opportunity to arrange individual meetings with your lead supervisor and to arrange meetings with any member of the supervisory team (or other faculty) to discuss your project.

Assessment

All students will be initially admitted to the status of Probationer Research Student (PRS). Within a maximum of four terms as a PRS student you will be expected to apply for transfer of status from Probationer Research Student to MSc(Res) status. A successful transfer of status from PRS to MSc(Res) status will require the submission of written work.

This milestone normally involves a presentation and an interview with two assessors (other than your supervisor) and therefore provides an important experience for the final oral examination.

You will be expected to submit a substantial/original thesis not exceeding 125 pages after two or, at most, three years from the date of admission. To be successfully awarded a MSc by Research in Earth Sciences you will need to defend your thesis orally (*viva voce*) in front of two appointed examiners.

Research areas

You'll have the opportunity to undertake research within the specialised themes of this course, which include:

- Geophysics and Geodynamics
- Planetary Evolution and Materials
- Oceanography, Climate and Palaeoenvironment
- Palaeobiology and Evolution
- Geodesy, Tectonics, Volcanology and Related Hazards
- Earth Resources.

Changes to this course

The University will seek to deliver this course in accordance with the description set out in this course page. 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. The safety of students, staff and visitors is paramount and major changes to delivery or services may have to be made if a pandemic, epidemic or local health emergency occurs. In addition, in certain circumstances, for example due

to visa difficulties or because the health needs of students cannot be met, it may be necessary to make adjustments to course requirements for international study.

Where possible your academic supervisor will not change for the duration of your course. However, it may be necessary to assign a new academic supervisor during the course of study or before registration for reasons which might include illness, sabbatical leave, parental leave or change in employment.

For further information please see our page on [changes to courses](http://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/graduate/courses/changes-to-courses) (<http://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/graduate/courses/changes-to-courses>) and the [provisions of the student contract](http://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/graduate/after-you-apply/your-offer-and-contract) (<http://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/graduate/after-you-apply/your-offer-and-contract>) regarding changes to courses.

Costs

Annual course fees

The fees for this course are charged on an annual basis.

Fees for the 2026-27 academic year at the University of Oxford

Fee status	Annual Course fees
Home	£10,470
Overseas	£34,700

What do course fees cover?

Course fees cover your teaching as well as other academic services and facilities provided to support your studies. Unless specified in the additional information section below, course fees do not cover your accommodation, residential costs or other living costs. They also don't cover any additional costs and charges that are outlined in the additional costs information below.

How long do I need to pay course fees?

Course fees are payable each year, for the duration of your fee liability (your fee liability is the length of time for which you are required to pay course fees). For courses lasting longer than one year fees will usually increase annually, as explained in the University's [Terms and Conditions \(//www.ox.ac.uk/students/new/contract\)](https://www.ox.ac.uk/students/new/contract).

Graduate students who have reached the end of their standard period of fee liability will be required to pay a University continuation charge and/or a college continuation charge.

The University continuation charge, per term for entry in 2026-27 is £656, please be aware that this will increase annually. For part-time students, the termly charge will be half of the termly rate payable by full-time students.

If a college continuation charge applies (not applicable for non-matriculated courses) it will be between £150 and £500, as explained in our [information about continuation charges \(//www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/graduate/fees-and-funding/fees-and-other-charges/continuation-charges\)](https://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/graduate/fees-and-funding/fees-and-other-charges/continuation-charges). Please contact your college for more details, including information about whether your college's continuation charge is applied at a different rate for part-time study.

Where can I find more information about fees?

Our [fees and other charges \(//www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/graduate/fees-and-funding/fees-and-other-charges\)](https://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/graduate/fees-and-funding/fees-and-other-charges) pages provide further information, including details about:

- [course fees and fee liability \(//www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/graduate/fees-and-funding/fees-and-other-charges/courses-fees-and-liability\)](https://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/graduate/fees-and-funding/fees-and-other-charges/courses-fees-and-liability);
- [how your fee status is determined \(//www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/graduate/fees-and-funding/fees-and-other-charges/fee-status\)](https://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/graduate/fees-and-funding/fees-and-other-charges/fee-status);
- [changes to fees and other charges \(//www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/graduate/fees-and-funding/fees-and-other-charges/changes-to-fees-and-charges\)](https://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/graduate/fees-and-funding/fees-and-other-charges/changes-to-fees-and-charges); and
- [continuation charges \(//www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/graduate/fees-and-funding/fees-and-other-charges/continuation-charges\)](https://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/graduate/fees-and-funding/fees-and-other-charges/continuation-charges).

Information about how much fees and other costs will usually increase each academic year is set out in the University's [Terms and Conditions \(//www.ox.ac.uk/students/new/contract\)](https://www.ox.ac.uk/students/new/contract).

Additional costs

Many projects have associated costs such as field work, computing, consumables and laboratory costs. These are usually covered by scholarships advertised by the Department of Earth Sciences, but not always covered by scholarships the students may have been awarded from elsewhere. Students will need to establish with their supervisor whether they have funding available to cover any such costs.

Living costs

In addition to your course fees and any additional course-specific costs, you will need to ensure that you have adequate funds to support your living costs for the duration of your course.

Living costs for full-time study

For the 2026-27 academic year, the range of likely living costs for a single, full-time student is between £1,405 and £2,105 for each month spent in Oxford. We provide the cost per month so you can multiply up by the number of months you expect to live in Oxford. Depending on your circumstances, you may also need to budget for the [costs of a student visa and immigration health surcharge](https://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/graduate/fees-and-funding/living-costs) (<https://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/graduate/fees-and-funding/living-costs>) and/or [living costs for family members or other dependants](https://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/graduate/fees-and-funding/living-costs#field_listing_content_content-item--2) (https://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/graduate/fees-and-funding/living-costs#field_listing_content_content-item--2) that you plan to bring with you to Oxford (if [dependant visa eligibility criteria](https://www.ox.ac.uk/students/visa/before/family) (<https://www.ox.ac.uk/students/visa/before/family>) are met).

Further information about living costs

The current economic climate and periods of high national inflation in recent years make it harder to estimate potential changes to the cost of living over the next few years. For study in Oxford beyond the 2026-27 academic year, it is suggested that you budget for potential increases in living expenses of around 4% each year – although this rate may vary depending on the national economic situation.

A breakdown of likely living costs for one month during the 2026-27 academic year are shown below. These costs are based on a single, full-time graduate student, with no dependants, living in Oxford.

Likely living costs for one month in Oxford during the 2026-27 academic year

	Lower range	Upper range
Food	£315	£545
Accommodation	£825	£990
Personal items	£160	£310
Social activities	£50	£130
Study costs	£35	£90
Other	£20	£40
Total	£1,405	£2,105

For information about how these figures have been calculated as well as tables showing the likely living costs for nine and twelve months, please refer to the [living costs](https://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/graduate/fees-and-funding/living-costs) (<https://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/graduate/fees-and-funding/living-costs>) page of our website.

Document accessibility

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