UNDERGRADUATE ADMISSIONS AND OUTREACH
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Earth Sciences (BA Geology) (three-year course); (MEarthSci) (four-year course) Course Information Sheet for entry in 2026

Entry requirements

Visit Admission requirements for 2026 entry to view a summary table of each undergraduate course's entry requirements.

If English is not your first language you may also need to meet our English language requirements.

About the course

Earth Sciences is the study of the planet we live upon. The broad scope and rapidly-advancing nature of the subject is reflected in the course at Oxford, which provides sound and broadly-based scientific training.

We combine physics, chemistry and biology with geology, geography and palaeontology to answer fundamental questions about the origin, development, and future of the Earth.

You will be trained in the skills required for the interpretation of rock materials and geological phenomena as well as applying theory and techniques from other disciplines to the study of the Earth and the environment.

You will learn about how our planet works, and address some of the major issues of our times: from the origin of the solar system, the Earth and life, to the climate system and the fate of glaciers and ice sheets.

The diverse range of courses cover processes from the Earth's interior, as mapped by seismic waves, to the evolution of the Earth's crust documented in the rocks at its surface.

The department has an international reputation, and houses state-of-the-art laboratories and computing facilities.

Students and academic staff mix and work together. Offices and teaching labs are close together, creating an atmosphere in which students not only focus on their course, but also get a feel for the discoveries emerging from current research.

Fieldwork/work placements/international opportunities

The Earth Sciences course includes several field courses. These courses link closely to material covered in lectures, and convey the practice of geology, geophysics, geochemistry, and palaeontology in the field environment. This work culminates in an independent project to study and map an area chosen by the student. Many of the field courses take place out of term time.

The Department covers the costs of field classes (i.e. travel, accommodation), so that there are no additional charges for students, and provides safety and geological equipment.

Previous field courses have taken students to Scotland, Spain, Cornwall, Greece, and Bermuda, and the independent mapping projects have occurred globally.

A typical week

During Years 1–3, your work is divided between lectures, tutorials, and practical classes.

In Year 4 you have the opportunity for independent work on special topics or in a research laboratory.

Students will find that their scheduled teaching time breaks down approximately as follows for each year:

- Year 1: Lectures 55%, Practicals 45%
- Year 2: Lectures 55%, Practicals 45%
- Year 3: Lectures 60%, Practicals 40%
- Year 4: Project 50%, Seminars 50%

Students are expected to spend at least 40 hours a week studying, including the scheduled teaching, so a good portion of students' time should be spent on private study.

Significant self-study is expected of all students – for further details see workload and independent study information. Undergraduate courses at Oxford are full-time during term time.

Tutorials are usually 2-4 students and a tutor. Class sizes may vary depending on the options you choose. There would usually be no more than around 20 students though classes for some of the more popular papers may be up to 40 students.

Other than the field courses, all teaching takes place in the department and most tutorials, classes, and lectures are delivered by members of the Earth Sciences Department. All are world-leading experts with years of experience in teaching and research. Some teaching may also be delivered by postdoctoral researchers from the department who are experts in their area of research. Postdoctoral researchers and postgraduate students from the Department will also assist in practical sessions and on field courses.

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 studying at doctoral level.

To find out more about how our teaching year is structured, visit our Academic Year page.

Course structure

YEAR 1	
COURSES Students take all courses in five parallel streams: • Planet Earth • Fundamentals of geology I • Fundamentals of geology II • Physics, chemistry and biology for Earth Sciences • Mathematics	**ASSESSMENT** First University Examinations: Theory and Practical

YEAR 1	
Field courses • Pembroke field course • Arran field course • Local field courses	

YEAR 2	
COURSES Students take all courses in five parallel streams: • Earth deformation and materials • Sedimentary environments and palaeobiology • Petrology • Geochemistry, climate and carbon cycle • Mathematical and geophysical tools Field courses: • Dorset field course • Somerset field course • Assynt field course	**ASSESSMENT** Part A1 Examinations: Theory and Practical

YEAR 3	
COURSES Students take a combination of core and optional papers, which currently include the following: • Natural resources • Biological and physical oceanography • Climate dynamics • Vector calculus and continuum mechanics • Geodynamics • Volcanology, igneous processes and petrogenesis	**ASSESSMENT** Part A2 Examinations: Theory

YEAR 3	
• Quantitative palaeobiology • Plate tectonics • Analytical methods • Chemistry of Earth's interior • Geophysics of the deep Earth One field course, which has previously taken place in Spain and Cornwall. Independent mapping project (conducted over summer break between Years 2 and 3) Extended essay on a topic of your choosing.	

YEAR 4	
RESEARCH Students choose four options (out of eight to ten), generally two in each term. These are subject to change, and currently include: • Planetary science • Structure and dynamics of the Earth's mantle • Coevolution of Earth and life • Palaeobiology • Rock and palaeomagnetism • Topics in climate science • Topics in volcanology • Environmental geophysics Field courses: optional field courses as announced each year. Previous destinations include Greece and Bermuda. Independent work: research project over 2 terms. (Not all options may be available every year – these are subject to change, as explained in the Terms & Conditions and for reasons of staff availability and student demand. The department may add extra options.)	**ASSESSMENT** Part B Examination: Theory, MEarthSci (Earth Sciences)

Most Oxford courses are assessed by examinations. These are typically at the end of the first and last years but you may have assessments at other times and some courses have exams in the second year also. First year examinations are often called Prelims or Moderations, and you need to pass these exams to progress to the second year. You must pass your final year exams, or 'finals', to pass your degree. For more information on assessment for your course, please see the Course Structure.

Finals also determine the classification of your degree. For some courses you may also be assessed on your practical work, or you may be required to submit a dissertation. Please check the assessment details for your course.

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 and information about potential course changes.

You are also referred to the Student Handbook (which is updated every September).

Fees

These annual fees in 2026/27 are for full-time students who begin this undergraduate course here in 2026. Information about how much fees and other costs usually increase each year is set out in the University's Terms and Conditions.

For details of annual increases, please see our guidance on likely increases to fees and charges.

Fee status	Annual Course fees in 2026/27
Home	£9,790
Overseas	£62,820

In the 2027-28 academic year course fees for Home fee status students will rise to £10,050 (in line with the government fee cap.)

Further details about fee status eligibility can be found on the fee status webpage.

Living costs

Living costs for the academic year starting in 2026 are estimated to be between £1,405 and £2,105 for each month you are in Oxford. Students at Oxford can benefit from our world class resources and college provision, which may help to keep costs down. Entitlement to certain types of support may depend on your personal financial circumstances.

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

	Per month		Total for 9 months	
Food	£315	£545	£2,835	£4,905
Accommodation (including utilities)	£825	£990	£7,425	£8,910
Personal items	£160	£310	£1,440	£2,790
Social activities	£50	£130	£450	£1,170
Study costs	£35	£90	£315	£810
Other	£20	£40	£180	£360
Total	**£1,405**	**£2,105**	**£12,645**	**£18,945**

In order to provide these estimated likely living costs (which are rounded to the nearest £5), the University in collaboration with the Oxford SU conducted a living costs survey in May 2025 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 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. When planning your finances for any future years of study in Oxford beyond 2026-27, it is suggested that you allow for potential increases in living expenses of around 4% each year – although this rate may vary depending on the national economic situation.

Additional Fees and Charges Information for Earth Sciences

Students are required to undertake field work in every year of this course: two trips in the first year and another two in the second year, then one trip in the third year and one more in the fourth year. Costs for these trips will covered by the department.

You will also need to undertake a mapping project in the vacation between the 2nd and 3rd year, which for most students will involve fieldwork. The department will contribute £500 to each student, which is considered to be the minimum amount needed to do the project, probably based here in the UK. Additional funding may be available through your college. You are very welcome to go further afield if you prefer but you would need to find or raise any additional funding that you need.

Thanks to external donations, the department provides all field and safety equipment free of charge. The department will also provide first aid kits and additional safety equipment for the mapping project, for a small deposit which is returned to you when you return the equipment.

Regulation - The University of Oxford is regulated by the Office for Students and subscribes to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education student complaints scheme.