Course Information Sheet for entry in 2025-26: MSc by Research in Earth Sciences

Course facts

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

About the course

The Earth sciences are the focus of scientific understanding about this and other planets, embracing 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.

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. You will work alongside each other in the same general research area. Research themes in the department are:

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

Academic activity across research groups is also strongly encouraged.

While the focus of the MSc is on your development to conduct independent research, there are formal courses available both within the Department of Earth Sciences and other departments in the Maths, Physical and Life Sciences (MPLS) Division. Formal 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. These allow the structured course components to be tailored to your individual research 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 these opportunities might be remunerated.

You will be encouraged to present your research at national and international meetings and publish in internationally-recognised science journals. You may also choose to take part in outreach activities, explaining to the public and schoolchildren the exciting science conducted in the department. Within the department you will be part of a community of over eighty research students including students enrolled on other related courses.

Attendance

The course is full-time and requires attendance in Oxford. Full-time students are subject to the University's 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 world-class 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.
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 at DPhil level, the specialist research facilities are world class. This is whether you require access to supercomputers, local workstations or state of the art mass spectrometers. In addition to the department facilities, 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 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; SEM 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. With other graduate students, you will organise you own seminar program and also attend the department’s informal and formal seminar series. You will also have access to the Research Common Room (RCR) where they organise 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. 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 meet individually with your lead supervisor and have meetings with any member of the supervisory team 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 250 pages after two or, at most, three years from the date of admission. To be successfully awarded a MSc(Res) in Earth Sciences you will need to defend your thesis orally (*viva voce*) in front of two appointed examiners.

Changes to this 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 you commence your course. These might include significant changes made necessary by any pandemic, epidemic or local health emergency. For further information, please see the University's Terms and Conditions (http://www.graduate.ox.ac.uk/terms) and our page on changes to courses (http://www.graduate.ox.ac.uk/coursechanges).

Costs

Annual course fees

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

Fees for the 2025-26 academic year at the University of Oxford

Fee status	Annual Course fees
Home	£10,070
Overseas	£33,370

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 cost information (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 information section 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, please be aware that fees will usually increase annually. Information about how much fees and other costs may increase is set out in the University's Terms and Conditions (http://www.graduate.ox.ac.uk/terms).

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

The University continuation charge, per term for entry in 2025-26 is £672, 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 is likely to be in the region of £100 to £600. 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.

Additional cost information

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.

The likely living costs for the 2025-26 academic year are published below. These costs are based on a single, full-time graduate student, with no dependants, living in Oxford. We provide the cost per month so you can multiply up by the number of months you expect to live in Oxford.

Likely living costs for one month

	Lower range	Upper range
Food	£330	£515
Accommodation	£790	£955
Personal items	£200	£335
Social activities	£45	£100
Study costs	£40	£90
Other	£20	£40
Total	£1,425	£2,035

Likely living costs for nine months

	Lower range	Upper range
Food	£2,970	£4,635
Accommodation	£7,110	£8,595
Personal items	£1,800	£3,015
Social activities	£405	£900
Study costs	£360	£810
Other	£180	£360
Total	£12,825	£18,315

Likely living costs for twelve months

	Lower range	Upper range
Food	£3,960	£6,180
Accommodation	£9,480	£11,460
Personal items	£2,400	£4,020
Social activities	£540	£1,200
Study costs	£480	£1,080
Other	£240	£480
Total	£17,100	£24,420

When planning your finances for any future years of study at Oxford beyond the 2025-26 academic year, it is suggested that you allow for potential increases in living expenses of 4% each year – although this rate may vary depending on the national economic situation.

More information about how these figures have been calculated is available at www.graduate.ox.ac.uk/livingcosts.

Document accessibility

If you require a more accessible version of this document please contact Graduate Admissions and Recruitment by email (graduate.admissions@admin.ox.ac.uk) or via the online form (http://www.graduate.ox.ac.uk/ask/form).