

Course Information Sheet for entry in 2025-26: MSc in Comparative Social Policy



Course facts

Mode of study	Full Time Only
Expected length	12 months

About the course

The MSc in Comparative Social Policy explores welfare systems and policy developments across a range of countries with an OECD focus. The comparative element is a key part of the course, and is one feature that makes the course at Oxford unique.

The central aim of the course is to provide high quality graduate level research training in social policy, taking a comparative perspective, learning especially from the most highly-developed welfare states. More specific aims are to develop your capacity to:

- analyse, interpret and review the major concepts, theoretical approaches and historical and contemporary issues in social policy and welfare state development in a range of OECD countries;
- analyse and compare specific areas of social policy (for example income support, health or labour market) in different countries, drawing on both empirical data and broader theoretical literature; and
- undertake quantitative and qualitative reviews as part of the research methods paper, to understand the major issues involved in research design and technical analysis in social policy related research.

You will study a core paper in comparative social policy and social policy analysis. This paper covers the theories, principles, history and institutions of social policy, and is taught via a closely-linked package of lectures, seminars, small working groups and individual tutorials. You will also engage in detailed work on social policy analysis through lectures, seminars and presentations.

The research methods skills, covering quantitative and qualitative methods, are taught in a mix of lectures, classes, workshops and 'hands-on' computer lab based weekly training sessions. In addition, there is a course on the principles of comparative research design.

You will also have the opportunity to take two specialist courses from a list of options focusing on particular topics and sub-fields of social policy. You are examined in one of these option courses. Recent options offered include comparative education policies, gender and family policies, healthcare and health inequality, labour market policies, political economy of social policy and poverty.

During the first and second terms, the majority of learning is classroom-based, complemented by independent reading, tutorials and formative and summative assessments. The third term involves largely supervised and self-directed study for the remaining summative assessments, exam revision, and further development of the MSc thesis; an additional lecture and question/answer sessions is typically offered on an optional basis to support students in preparing for exams and/or assessments and using various methodologies for thesis projects.

The department runs several seminar series – one on social policy, one on social intervention, and one on research methods – during the year, providing the opportunity to hear external expert speakers. In addition, there is a regular colloquium at which members of the department present and discuss their research, creating an excellent chance for staff and students to learn more about each other's ideas or receive input on their own research. DPhil and MPhil students also belong to one of the department's research groups, which provide an opportunity to present their work and explore themed areas in more depth with colleagues with similar interests.

Attendance

The course is full-time and requires attendance in Oxford. Full-time students are subject to the University's Residence requirements.

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 provides a workspace and computer room for masters' students and has its own IT provision and specialist IT support staff. You will have access to the Bodleian Social Science Library, in addition to other University libraries, and the centrally provided electronic resources.

The department has a common room open to both staff and students. Barnett House Thursday coffee mornings are held fortnightly and these occasions provide excellent opportunities for talking to academics and research staff, and fellow students.

Supervision

The allocation of graduate supervision for the course is the responsibility of the Department of Social Policy and Intervention and it is not always possible to accommodate the precise 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 Social Policy and Intervention. Efforts will be made to match the research interests of supervisees and supervisors.

In the case of students who require specific help to adjust to an academic programme or to a new range of skills, the supervisor will work with them to ensure that they have additional support.

Students will have approximately eight to twelve meetings with their supervisor, distributed over three terms.

Assessment

Your performance will be assessed through formative and summative assignments/papers. Knowledge of the substantive areas of social policy is assessed by a combination of examinations and/or submitted coursework assignments throughout the year. The examination will cover comparative social policy and social policy analysis; the summative assignment will focus on your chosen area of specialism as represented in the option paper in which you choose to be assessed. Research methods will be assessed by a series of assessments throughout the year using a combination of assignments. In addition, you will be required to provide a dissertation.

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 fees for entry in 2025-26

Fee status	Annual Course fees
Home	£23,400
Overseas	£36,250

Information about 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>).

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 cost information.

Additional cost information

There are no compulsory elements of this course that entail additional costs beyond fees and living costs. However, as part of your course requirements, you may need to choose a dissertation, a project or a thesis topic. Please note that, depending on your choice of topic and the research required to complete it, you may incur additional expenses, such as travel expenses, research expenses, and field trips. You will need to meet these additional costs, although you may be able to apply for small grants from your department and/or college to help you cover some of these expenses.

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>).