

Course Information Sheet for entry in 2025-26: MSc in Water Science, Policy and Management



Course facts

Mode of study	Full Time Only
Expected length	12 months

About the course

The MSc in Water Science, Policy and Management aims to equip the next generation of water professionals with the blend of skills necessary to make a significant contribution to sustainable water management pathways across competing priorities of water for ecosystems, food, energy, economic growth and human consumption.

Course structure

The course objectives are assessed through three themes: water science, water and society, and water management, delivered through seven core modules.

Teaching takes place through lectures, seminars and field visits, including a one-week field trip during the Easter vacation. Contact hours are usually between 12-15 hours per week.

The course is broken down into three thematic areas:

1. Water science

The water science theme modules develop knowledge and understanding in physical, chemical, and epidemiological aspects of water science in temperate, tropical and semi-arid zones. It provides a foundation in basic processes in each key subject area, as well as interactions throughout the hydrological cycle, and the role of society in altering natural hydrological processes and ecosystem function, and the impact this has on health. Typically, the following modules are offered within this theme: Climate & Catchment Processes, Water & Health and Water Risks & Responses.

2. Water and society

The water and society theme modules explore how contested domains of power, interests and knowledge influence water decision-making, illustrated through institutional, socio-economic and policy analysis. This covers areas of water security and governance, law and regulation, water economics, water finance, water access, ownership and rights, water for development, climate change, water risks, and interactions between the state and civil society within dynamic and varied political, cultural, social and economic contexts. Typically, the following modules are offered within this theme: Economics, Law & Governance of Water, Water Policy and Water-Society Interactions & Sustainable Development.

3. Water management

The water management theme and module integrates the knowledge and understanding of water developed in the other thematic areas to better enable you to tackle the big water management challenges that we face. Geographic case studies are developed to compare the trade-offs that occur between science and society in these contexts. Interactions with experts with different perspectives and expertise will help you to understand the challenges faced by water managers.

Elective modules

These offer a tutorial-style teaching and discussion environment within smaller groups, based on a suite of contemporary research themes that reflect the specific interests of core faculty and visiting research associates. The teaching aim is to foster discussion and debate between academic staff and students to identify and explore theory, methods and practice in an academic space that encourages a critical dialogue.

In previous years electives included topics such as:

- Wastewater and sludge treatment
- The law and science of climate litigation
- Flood risk management
- Valuing Nature: ethical frameworks and policy implications
- Global environmental change and food systems.

Students select one elective module in Michaelmas Term and one elective module in Hilary Term.

Field trips

Field trips typically include a residential field trip within the UK as part of the induction to the course, a one-week residential field trip during the Easter vacation and day field trips throughout the year to explore various aspects of water management.

Dissertation

An independent and original dissertation is an integral component of the course. In order to equip you with the necessary skills to undertake high quality research, a suite of training activities is offered to develop key transferable skills in order for you to be able to execute high quality independent and original research, and to expose you to applied research methods used widely in academic and professional research.

Research skills

Core faculty staff will lead a series of training sessions that will build core transferable research skills in the natural and social sciences.

Components include:

- research ethics
- academic writing
- research design
- hydrological modelling
- water quality evaluation
- qualitative and quantitative research methods
- fieldwork health and safety.

The skills training will focus on both strengthening capabilities to conduct high quality research for your dissertation and on future professional development.

The department has several research clusters, in biodiversity, ecosystems and conservation; climate systems and policy; landscape dynamics; technological life; economy and society; environmental interactions, and political worlds, which hold seminars throughout term-time. Graduate students are encouraged to attend these seminars.

Research skills training are provided in preparation for the dissertation. As well as developing an understanding of the research process, these sessions will cover such things as social surveys, data analysis and statistical techniques. Throughout the course, fieldtrips and visits to external organisations support the lectures and seminars and deliver valuable skills training.

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 University of Oxford has an extensive library system and the Radcliffe Science Library is the main lending service within the University for the material required for the course. The Social Sciences Library also holds collections which are valuable for you pursuing your geography programme.

There is a dedicated social space for MSc students where you can meet and discuss your studies. Where appropriate, you will be able to use the departmental laboratories for your dissertation research.

Supervision

The course has an Academic Director and a Course Director who look after the day to day running of the course. You will have a personal advisor who is a member of the School's academic staff and who provides academic welfare support. The allocation of graduate supervision for this course is the responsibility of the School of Geography and the Environment 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 School of Geography and the Environment.

Assessment

The seven course modules are assessed by written examination and/or submission. The two elective modules which are each assessed through an essay. You will also be assessed on your individual dissertation, which will have been produced independently and contain original work.

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	£25,300
Overseas	£34,120

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.

Most costs associated with compulsory fieldwork are paid for by the department. This excludes the costs associated with obtaining the appropriate visa required to attend the non-UK based field trips. Non-EEA nationals might require a visa in order to travel to the country where the field trip is being held and any costs associated with obtaining the appropriate travel visa is the responsibility of the student. Students will also have to pay for some meals during the field course. Furthermore, as part of your course requirements you need to develop and research a dissertation topic. Depending on your choice of topic and the field work research required to complete it, you may incur additional costs (eg relating to travel, accommodation, field assistants, lab fees and/or research visas). You will need to meet these additional costs, although you may be able to apply for small grants/bursaries 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>).