

Course Information Sheet for entry in 2025-26: PGCE (Biology)



Course facts

Mode of study	Full Time Only
Expected length	12 months

About the course

The Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) is a one-year course that offers you the opportunity to train to teach the secondary age group in one of the leading educational establishments in the country.

The Times Higher Education World University Rankings 2023 places the University of Oxford's PGCE as 1st in the UK for Degrees in Education for the eleventh year running. Over many years, it has consistently received the highest possible designation (Outstanding) from Ofsted in inspections. The University of Oxford's Department of Education has a long history in initial teacher education, dating back to 1892.

The department works in partnership with over 37 secondary comprehensive schools in Oxfordshire and neighbouring counties, with most being within 30 miles of Oxford. The programme has been developed with colleagues from Oxfordshire partnership schools and covers the key professional skills of:

- lesson planning and preparation
- assessment, recording and reporting
- responding to individual learning needs
- classroom and behaviour management.

The course works on an internship model (the Oxford Internship Scheme) which recognises the different roles of university and schools in teacher education and the need for a truly collaborative partnership. Such collaboration involves joint responsibility within the partnership for the planning, delivery and assessment of the programme. Student teachers are known as interns during the PGCE course.

In addition to being awarded the PGCE qualification, successful interns are also recommended for Qualified Teacher Status, which indicates that they have met the requirements of the Government's Teachers' Standards.

The teaching of the sciences in state secondary schools is normally organised within a single Science department or faculty to which teachers from the different sciences contribute their respective expertise. Such a structure is reflected in the Oxford Department which, while actively recruiting for trainee teachers of the separate sciences – biology, chemistry and physics – works as a co-ordinated team of scientists.

The course aims to produce high quality teachers of the sciences across the 11-19 age range who will not only become competent teachers but will quickly become innovative leaders in their field. Interns will gain expertise in the different strategies for teaching science, and will get insights into the way that pupils learn across the whole range of attainments, aptitudes and pupil differences.

Interns will learn how to turn their own subject knowledge into a form that can be appreciated by pupils and will think critically about the aims and practicalities of teaching science in schools. To attain these goals, interns work with each other, the University tutors and their mentors in schools as adult learners, motivated to take responsibility for their own learning. The learning is structured through workshops, seminars, discussions, focussed assignments, school-based activities and sympathetic, expert, supervision and support.

There are opportunities to prepare science lessons, in particular, by trying out practical work both here in the department as well as in school. Between them the science tutors cover such subjects as biology, chemistry, physics, earth and environmental sciences. All have extensive experience of teaching and are involved in curriculum developments and research in science education at national and international level.

Rather than attempt to train all interns to teach in a particular way, we aim to build on your existing strengths – as good scientists and as mature, autonomous, motivated personalities – to help you teach in the way most suited to you and your school pupils.

The course aims to help you to:

- develop as a professional;
- explore your pre-conceptions about science and teaching science, and draw on your teaching experiences in a positive and reflective way;

- have opportunities to use research and academic study to inform your thinking and practice;
- learn how you can plan and teach engaging lessons which build on pupils' prior knowledge and support them to become confident learners of science;
- organise and manage school science lessons which are safe and secure learning environments; and
- contribute to pupils' understanding of science in society, citizenship and development of literacy and mathematical skills.

Course structure

The course begins with an orientation experience in September in a primary school of your choice.

This is followed by the first week in the University of Oxford's Department of Education. The rest of the autumn term is made up of 'joint weeks' with two days spent in the University and three days in school. You will be attached to the same state secondary school for the majority of the year, which makes it possible for you to get to know teachers and pupils in the school and to understand the school's policies and practices.

The spring term consists primarily of school experience and for the summer term, interns move to a second school so that they have the opportunity to consolidate and extend their understanding and experience of learning and teaching.

This course structure reflects the internship model in that it is designed to:

- enable interns to become fully integrated into one school over a long period;
- enable interns to learn about their own teaching in the context of the wider school, rather than focusing initially on their own classroom and only later widening their view;
- allow schools to offer coherent and challenging professional development programmes over the course of the long placement, and in the short placement focus on preparation for continuing professional development;
- enable school-based mentors to see interns' development from the start of the course to a position of competence; and
- offer interns the opportunity to encounter a new school context at a time of the course when they are ready to make critical comparisons.

Course components

There are two interrelated course components: curriculum subject work and the professional development programme.

Curriculum work includes a range of activities related to the teaching of a specific subject in the secondary school. These activities include seminars and workshops in the University, as well as collaborative teaching, solo teaching, observation and discussion in school. The activities are aimed at giving interns competence in teaching their subject, the opportunity to develop a range of teaching strategies, an understanding of wider issues affecting the teaching of those subjects within the whole school curriculum. The work in each subject is organised by the Curriculum Tutor and school mentor for that subject. Part of the work in each subject area is planned for all interns, and part develops from the progress of individual interns.

An experienced teacher (or mentor) co-ordinates the subject related classroom-based activities of the intern. The mentor provides guidance and support and, as the year goes by, judges when and how to increase an intern's experience and responsibilities. The school-based mentor liaises with the Curriculum Tutor from the University to plan tasks and activities for the interns.

Interns complete two written assignments related to their subject teaching. These involve school-based investigation and the critical analysis of relevant research and professional literature.

The professional development programme (PDP) involves a range of activities related to important educational issues. These activities include lectures in the University, weekly seminars in school and a school-led project in the second placement, researching an aspect of the school's provision. These activities are aimed at giving interns an understanding of whole-school and cross-curricular issues, and an appreciation of the contribution which they can make to developing these issues through teaching their own subjects.

The Professional Tutor responsible for interns at the school co-ordinates school-based activities related to general educational issues, called the school professional development programme.

Some aspects of the PDP are planned and organised for all interns by university tutors, who take responsibility for particular issues. The detailed programme for the interns in each school, however, is organised by the Professional Tutor and General Tutor for that school.

Attendance

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

This course will involve travel to your placement school, although most partnership schools do lie within the Oxfordshire county boundaries.

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 Bodleian Education Library, located at the centre of the Department of Education, specialises in material on Education and related fields. As well as a print collection of books and journals, the library provides access to a wide range of online resources. The library also houses a collection of teaching resources in support of subjects covered by the department's secondary PGCE courses. All main teaching rooms are equipped with a range of IT facilities and interns are able to practice teaching with interactive touch screens in some rooms.

Supervision

Interns are supported in their professional development as teachers by both a university curriculum tutor and a general tutor as well as by a mentor and a professional tutor in each school placement. Academic guidance for assignments is given by curriculum and general tutors.

Assessment

Assessment of your progress and achievements are jointly carried out by your schools and the university, and you take part in informal and formal discussions about this. Continuous assessment is used throughout the course and there are no examinations.

Interns' developing practice as a teacher is reviewed at regular intervals, in three-way meetings between the curriculum tutor, mentor and intern, informed by a wide range of evidence. At the end of the course, interns' professional knowledge, understanding, skills and personal attributes are assessed in relation to the standards for Qualified Teacher Status. Interns also complete two examined assignments, within which they are expected to examine practical issues of teaching and learning from different perspectives – drawing on their own teaching, classroom observation and school-based investigation alongside critical reading of research, policy and professional literature.

Successful completion of these written assignments at master's level carries 60 M-level credits, which may be built upon to achieve a full master's degree. All assignments must be passed at master's level for the award of the Postgraduate Certificate in Education with Qualified Teacher Status (QTS), provided that your practice also meets QTS requirements. Those who pass the assignments at Honours level will be awarded a Professional Graduate Certificate in Education with QTS - provided, again, that your practice meets the required QTS standards.

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>). The Department of Education website provides details about the funding opportunities for this course.

Costs

Annual fees for entry in 2025-26

Fee status	Annual Course fees
Home	£9,535
Overseas	£38,410

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

The course involves travelling to placement schools for approximately 120 days and reasonable school travel costs of around £1,048 should be budgeted.

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>).