

BBSRC-NERC funded 'Interdisciplinary Life and Environmental Science Landscape Award' (ILES LA) PhD studentship opportunities

The Open University has partnered with University of Oxford (lead university), Oxford Brookes University, The Pirbright Institute, Diamond Light Source, and ISIS Neutron and Muon Source to launch the [BBSRC-NERC](#) funded [Interdisciplinary Life and Environmental Science Landscape Award \(ILES LA\)](#). This ambitious doctoral training programme will prepare a new generation of creative, collaborative, and entrepreneurial researchers who are equipped to meet the complex, cross-disciplinary challenges the world faces.

The primary aim of ILES LA is to cultivate researchers capable of developing innovative solutions to challenges in and at the intersection of biological and environmental sciences, focusing on five interconnected themes:

- **Climate and Earth**; Advancing understanding of climate and earth systems.
- **Biodiversity and Sustainability**; Sustainable approaches to support food, feed and energy security, manufacturing and biodiversity.
- **Animal and Human Health**; Innovative approaches to understand and support animal and human health.
- **Rules of Life**; Frontier science addressing fundamental questions about biological organisms and ecosystems.
- **Transformative Technologies**; Development of tools and technologies underpinning biological and environmental research.

You can view a full list of research topics within each theme [here](#).

This exciting award is expected to fund at least ten new PhD students at The Open University, across five intakes (2025 – 2029) and to fund students registered at the University of Oxford or Oxford Brookes University who will be co-supervised by researchers at The Open University. Recruitment will be annual.

Entry requirements

As a minimum, applicants should hold or be predicted to achieve the following UK qualifications or their equivalent:

- a first-class or strong upper second-class undergraduate degree with honours in a relevant academic subject (e.g. biochemistry, biology, chemistry, geology, geography, physics, mathematics, statistics, computer science).

International applicants will need to demonstrate that they are sufficiently proficient in English to support successful study at research degree standard before any offer of registration can be made. To find out if you need to prove your English language abilities with an English proficiency test, please see further information [here](#) and on the government student visa website [here](#).

Please note that if you are required to take a test, higher level English language is required for this opportunity. This equates to:

- Minimum overall IELTS academic score 7.5, with no less than 7.0 in each component.

Further information on eligibility including what other tests can be accepted can be found [here](#).

How to apply to The Open University

If you wish to be supervised by Open University academics, or to conduct your research at The Open University, you should apply via the University of Oxford, following the procedure outlined below.

Firstly, please read the general ILESLA admission procedures located on the University of Oxford's website before applying:

- [Interdisciplinary Life and Environmental Science Landscape Award \(ILESLA\)](#)
- [Course information](#)
- [Entry requirements](#)

The application deadline for October 2026 entry is Thursday 8th January 2026 at 12:00 midday UK time.

All applicants to the ILESLA programme must apply via the [Oxford Application Portal](#) and will be assessed through the same admissions process, but will subsequently be offered a place at one or more of the partner universities.

Application Fee Waivers

University of Oxford charges a fee to apply via their admissions portal. For applicants applying to the Open University only, you will be eligible for a fee waiver.

Please contact us at ILESLA@open.ac.uk to obtain your fee waiver code.

Completing the online application form

- The application form will include questions that collect information that would usually be included in a CV/résumé. You should not upload a separate document. If a separate CV/résumé is uploaded, it will be removed from your application.
- Choosing a research theme – Please identify the research theme (Rules of Life, Animal and Human Health, Biodiversity and Sustainability, Climate and Earth and Transformative Technology) which best aligns with your research interests. If your interests span multiple themes please number them in order of priority eg '1. Rules of Life, 2. Biodiversity and Sustainability'. If you are interested in undertaking a project with a partner in the Open Innovation Industrial Consortium, please also add 'Open Innovation Industrial Consortium'.
- Proposing a supervisor – In the 'proposed supervisor' field please enter the name of the Open University supervisor(s) you wish to work with. It is not required that you select a supervisor prior to applying although it is good practise to contact one or more supervisors in advance to discuss possible project topics. If you do not yet know

which supervisors you wish to work with, simply enter 'The Open University'. We encourage you to approach supervisors from across the university who conduct research within the stated themes. Please consult the [LHCS research webpages](#), [The FEES Research webpages](#), [STEM Research Webpages](#), [FASS Research Degree Webpages](#), [WELS Research Degree Webpages](#), [FBL Research Webpages](#) and [The Open University Research site](#) for suitable supervisors. If you have further questions, please contact us via ILES LA@open.ac.uk. Please note that sometimes, despite our best efforts, it might not be possible for you to work with the specified supervisor(s).

- Providing three referees – Academic references are preferred, but one professional reference can be accepted if you have relevant work experience.
- Uploading your academic transcript – You will need to upload your academic transcript for your entry qualification. You should only upload official documents issued by your institution and any transcript not in English should be accompanied by a certified translation.
- Statement of Purpose (maximum 1000 words) - Please provide your statement of purpose in English, describing how your background and research interests relate to the course. Information on what to include in your statement and the headings to use can be found on the [Oxford Application Portal](#).
- Optional [Contextual Information Statement for Doctoral Training Centre Applications 2026 Entry](#) form- We recognise that socio-economic data may not fully capture an individual student's personal circumstances, so if any of the criteria listed in this form apply, we encourage you to submit a statement providing additional detail on your personal circumstances using this contextual statement form.
- Language qualification certificates – Please provide evidence of your English language proficiency if required for you and if available at application stage. Please see information above as to whether this applies to you, and which tests we accept. We recommend academic IELTS but do accept others. If you have not yet undertaken the test, please still do apply and you can send these to us later. We do recommend obtaining these as soon as possible, to avoid delaying the progression of your application. We cannot provide an offer without it (if you require it).

International research student applicants should also see the further information and guidance [here](#). All appointed students will need to adhere to The Open University [Research Degree Regulations](#) for the duration of their study.

Please note that applications will be coordinated centrally by the IESLA lead university, the University of Oxford. This will mean that applications will need to be shared outside of The Open University during the shortlisting and interview stage.

If you are successful in your application to the Open University, we will request further documentation as part of our admissions process.

Funding Information

ILES LA is co-funded by [Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council \(BBSRC\)](#) and [Natural Environment Research Council \(NERC\)](#) and The Open University. Awarded applicants chosen for funded studentships will receive a monthly stipend equating to £22,780 per annum for four years and will also have their tuition fees funded for the four-year funding duration. Where part-time study is chosen, students will study at 50% full-time equivalent (18.5 hours per week), receive £11,390 stipend per year over eight years and have their part-time fees funded for up to eight years. [UKRI training grant terms and conditions](#) will apply. A budget will be provided for project costs during the PhD.

Contact Information

Email: ILES LA@open.ac.uk