

ILESIA Programme – Open Event

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

1. Programme Structure

Do all students complete rotation projects?

Yes. All students undertake two 10-week rotation projects during the first year to gain skills and explore different research groups.

If I already have a preferred supervisor or project, do I still need to do rotations?

Yes. Rotations are compulsory. Your final DPhil supervisor is confirmed only at the end of the first year.

When do I find out who my rotation supervisors will be?

Rotation opportunities are presented in a project booklet at induction. You will select projects during your first term.

Can my research direction change once I start?

Potentially, yes. The programme is broad, and you may discover new areas. However, you won't be forced into a direction you do not want to pursue.

Are the core training modules in person?

Primarily in person.

2. Supervisors & Project Selection

Should I contact prospective supervisors before applying?

It is not required. Demonstrating awareness of relevant research areas strengthens an application, but applications are not shared with supervisors to avoid conflicts of interest.

Will the supervisor I list on my application necessarily become my supervisor?

No. You are not obliged to work with supervisors named at application, and supervisor assignment occurs after rotations.

Can my final PhD project be jointly supervised across departments or institutions?

Yes, co-supervision across departments or partner organisations is allowed.

What do I list under 'Proposed Supervisor' and 'Project Title'?

If you have a supervisor in mind then name the supervisor and put their university, or the partner name in brackets after the name. If you don't have a supervisor in mind then just put the university or universities you are interested in applying to.

In project title list the main ILESIA research themes you are interested in. Do not add a project title here as we do not recruit to projects.

Can I list collaborative partners (e.g., Natural History Museum)?

Yes, you may note your interest in collaborative partners in your statement. It is optional to list them as proposed advisors. If you do then you must also include a supervisor at one of the relevant universities.

3. Applying to ILESIA vs Direct Department Entry

Do I need separate applications to ILESIA and to departments?

Yes. Applications to ILESIA are independent from direct DPhil applications in departments.

Can I apply to ILESIA and also apply directly to other Oxford DPhils?

Yes. These are separate applications and assessed independently.

Do I need to choose a university (Oxford, partner institutions) when applying?

Yes. Follow the instructions on the how to apply page and indicate the university (institution) you are applying through.

4. Funding, Stipend & Financial Support

Is funding guaranteed if I receive an offer?

Not automatically, but the programme works to match offer-holders to funding wherever possible and we aim to ensure all students receive a full funding package..

What is the stipend?

The stipend is the UKRI minimum plus £2,000 per year (with an additional £1,000 in years 2–4 for Open-IIC students). The UKRI minimum increases annually.

Can I combine ILESIA funding with another scholarship?

Yes. You can combine ILESIA funding with college scholarships and other partial university or external scholarships.

Are there research cost funds available?

Yes. Rotation projects each receive £1,000. PhD projects have access to a research and training support grant (RTSG). Conference and fieldwork funding is available.

Does the programme cover international travel or airfare?

No, airfare for international students is not provided.

Does ILESLA fund conferences?

Yes. Funding is available for conference travel within the RTSG grant.

5. Eligibility & Entry Requirements

What degree classification is required?

Minimum requirement: a 2.1 undergraduate degree.

A strong master's degree can strengthen your application if your undergraduate degree is weaker but is not a mandatory requirement.

Do I need a master's degree to apply?

No, although a master's degree can be an advantage. Integrated master's degrees are considered.

Are graduates from disciplines outside the life sciences eligible?

Yes. Students from chemistry, physics, maths, computational sciences, geography and related backgrounds are welcome if applying to relevant research areas.

Are nursing graduates eligible?

Eligibility depends on alignment with BBSRC remit (no research on named diseases). Nursing applicants should demonstrate fit with approved research themes.

Do unconventional backgrounds disadvantage applicants?

No. Admissions consider potential, motivation, and evidence of relevant skills. A contextual statement may be submitted.

6. International Applicants

Is there a cap on international places?

Up to 30% of offers can be made to international applicants.

Can international students self-fund the difference between home and international fees?

We do not encourage students to self-fund from their own funds bank loans or family loans. We will consider self-funding if the source is an industry or company sponsor.

Are there scholarships specifically for students from developing countries?

You may be eligible for wider institutional scholarships; please check university scholarship listings.

Do international students need to consider visa requirements?

Yes, including the NHS surcharge.

7. English Language Requirements

Do I need to submit IELTS or equivalent?

Full language requirements can be viewed on the Graduate Admissions course page. You must demonstrate English proficiency, but you may qualify for a waiver if:

- You completed a degree in the UK, or
- You completed a degree fully taught in English (case-dependent).

Can English certificates be submitted after the application?

Yes. Check the graduate admissions website for deadlines and waiver rules.

8. Referees & Recommendations

Do referees receive reminders?

No. The system sends one email with the submission deadline.

Can referees use personal email addresses?

Only if institutional emails are unavailable. Additional information may be requested.

Do references need to be academic?

Academic references are preferred. Non-academic references may be included if relevant.

How long must a referee have known me?

No strict minimum; they must know your academic or research capabilities well.

9. Application Format & Components

Is there a word limit for the personal statement?

Yes. You must adhere to the word limit. Full guidance is given on the course page (link from our how-to-apply page)

Can I include personal motivations or inspirations?

Yes. Personal narrative and motivation are welcome.

What experiences should be included under 'relevant employment'?

Include roles relevant to research or skills development. Unrelated part-time work need not be included.

Common pitfalls in statements?

- Overly generic PhD statements not tailored to ILESLA
- Lack of understanding of ILESLA themes
- No reflection on interdisciplinary fit
- Limited evidence of research potential

Can I discuss multiple research interests?

Yes. Being open to interdisciplinary pathways can strengthen your application.

10. Contextual Statements & Extenuating Circumstances

Can I explain low grades or personal circumstances?

Yes. Use the contextual statement section; it is viewed confidentially.

Who reads contextual statements?

A restricted group within the admissions team who assess contextual factors.

11. Internships & Professional Development

When does the 12-week internship occur?

Any time between the end of Year 1 and the start of the final year.

Are internships paid in addition to the stipend?

No. The stipend continues as normal.

Can internships be undertaken with any organisation?

Internships must align with programme requirements and may occur with industry partners, public organisations, or approved alternative hosts.

Are internships available at UKHSA?

Yes, internships with UKHSA may be possible.

12. Admissions Process

Are interviews in person or online?

All interviews are online.

How many interviews will be conducted?

This varies annually based on applicant numbers.

What is included in the interview?

A brief presentation (typically 5 minutes), discussion of research aptitude, and assessment of fit for the programme.

Will supervisors named in my application interview me?

No. Interviewers are independent to avoid conflicts of interest.

Will I be informed if I am on a waiting list?

Yes, candidates on the waiting list will be notified.

13. Colleges & Accommodation

Do I need to choose a college?

You may list a preference, or select “open” if unsure.

Is accommodation guaranteed?

No, but early application increases the likelihood. Colleges increasingly offer matching schemes.

Can I live outside Oxford?

Yes, especially after Year 1 when research locations vary.

14. Additional Practical Questions

Is part-time work allowed?

Work is limited to around 6 hours per week due to research commitments.

Is teaching required?

No, there is no teaching obligation.

Can the four programme years be non-consecutive?

Generally they must be consecutive, though formal leave may be possible in exceptional circumstances.

Can I take time out of study before applying?

Yes. Provide context through your statement or CV.