

Biological Sciences

For the 20th year, Cambridge tops the Biological Sciences table, its tenure strengthened once more by fiercely high entry standards – with new undergraduates averaging 222 UCAS tariff points. Cambridge also boasts the best graduate prospects and second-highest research quality rating. But based on the outcomes of the Research Excellence Framework 2021, it is Dundee that tops all 94 universities in our table for its strength in biological sciences research, while tying with Edinburgh overall in fourth place. Performing strongly across all measures, Oxford is in second position for the third year running, while St Andrews moves up seven places into third position.

The upper reaches of our table are dominated by universities with old foundations across the UK. In 17th place, Leeds Beckett is the top-ranked modern university, while Ulster in Northern Ireland (29th overall) claims rates of employment second only to Cambridge – with 91.3% of its biological sciences graduates in high-skilled jobs and/or further study 15 months on from their degrees. The post-1992 universities do best on rates of student satisfaction: Canterbury Christ Church is top for the wider experience, followed by Leeds Beckett, and the same universities swap places for students' evaluation of teaching quality, both measures derived from the National Student Survey.

"This is a broad degree that unlocks the mysteries of all living things, from microbes and plants to animals and humans. It offers a solid foundation on the living world and essential skills sought by employers in addition to exploring areas of biology that interest you," notes Dr Tara Pirie, lecturer in ecology and conservation, School of Biosciences, University of Surrey.

Nearly one in five (19.1%) of biological sciences graduates were engaged in further study 15 months after the undergraduate degrees, according to the most recent Graduate Outcomes survey, while 39.1% were in high-skilled jobs and 4% were combining work with studying – placing the biological sciences in the lower half (44th) of our 70-subject employment index. For starting salaries, they place =46th.

Of the specialisms within the grouping, biology is the most popular – with applications over 24,700 and nearly 3,900 new students in 2023 – slightly more than the year before and halting three prior consecutive years of declining demand. It is closely followed by molecular biology, biophysics and biochemistry, which had over 3,700 enrolments in the same admissions round, while zoology attracted almost 1,800 new students.

There has been growing interest in the study of ecology and environmental biology, although three years of increasing applications and enrolments came to an end in 2023's admissions cycle, when numbers dipped to just over 10,400 applications and just under 2,100 new student enrolments. Many of the leading universities will demand two sciences at A-level, or the equivalent – usually biology and chemistry – for any of the biological sciences.

	Teaching quality %	Student experience %	Research quality %	Entry standards (UCAS points)	Graduate prospects %	Overall score
1 Cambridge	86.9	81.2	73.5	222	94.3	100
2 Oxford	83.1	69.8	69.5	197	89.4	94.8
3 St Andrews	85.7	81.5	49.5	206	88.7	94.7
=4 Dundee	84.7	78.2	78	175	82.4	94.1
=4 Edinburgh	79.2	80.4	69.2	196	86.2	94.1
6 Durham	89.2	82.1	44	180	89.6	93.5
=7 Bristol	85.3	85.4	67.2	164	83.2	93.2

=7 Bath	86.8	86.8	49.2	166	89.8	93.2
9 Imperial College	77.5	74	63.2	192	89.9	92.9
=10 Glasgow	84	75.5	55.8	204	82.2	92.8
=10 Loughborough	84.6	88.1	66.8	151	84.9	92.8
12 York	83.5	82.6	66	155	86.8	92.6
=13 Strathclyde	80.3	74	65.8	210	78.8	92.5
=13 Sheffield	84.7	82.7	70.2	154	82.9	92.5
15 Queen's, Belfast	81.1	82.8	69.2	146	87.4	92
16 University College London	77.9	81.5	64	180	84.6	91.9
17 Leeds Beckett	93	92.1	38	—	82.6*	91.8
18 Surrey	87.7	86.4	58	131	83.3	90.8
19 Lancaster	86.3	86.1	59.1	150	75.6	90
20 Manchester	75.8	70.4	69.5	167	82.8	89.7
21 Liverpool	79.2	78.1	68.2	146	80.9	89.5
22 Exeter	82.5	81.6	60.5	159	75.3	89.3
23 King's College London	78.6	80.7	50	162	84.3	89.2
=24 Warwick	82.5	80.1	46.5	157	82.4	88.9
=24 Aston	86.9	85.4	46	114	87.1	88.9
26 Cardiff	78.1	76.4	53.5	150	86.6	88.8
27 Birmingham	79.9	79.5	57	150	81.1	88.7
28 Aberdeen	85.6	84.3	33.2	177	76.7	88.6
29 Ulster	80.9	80.8	53.5	109	91.3	88.5
=30 Stirling	82.3	83.5	45.8	175	73.7	88.3
=30 Southampton	78.3	79.7	53.5	145	84	88.3
32 East Anglia	83.6	81.4	56	127	80.1	88.1
33 Leeds	76.3	74.6	52	155	85.1	87.9
34 Swansea	85.3	81.8	64.2	131	70.3	87.6
35 Queen Mary, London	79.4	79.7	50.5	138	82.6	87.5
36 Glasgow Caledonian	85.9	81.1	61	151	65.4	87.4
37 Reading	88.1	83.9	54	120	72.6	87.2
38 Leicester	79.9	79.1	53.5	128	81.6	87.1
39 Essex	86.5	85.4	42.5	107	82.2	86.9
40 Liverpool John Moores	86.4	84.1	28.7	126	83.8	86.6
41 Nottingham	78.4	75.8	50.2	139	80.5	86.4
42 Aberystwyth	88.2	87.3	48.8	117	70.4	86.3
43 Gloucestershire	91.3	87.9	25.8	103	82.4	86.2
44 Portsmouth	84.9	80.2	41.2	109	82.2	86
45 Northumbria	75.4	76.9	53.5	134	80.1	85.7
46 Newcastle	75.1	77.1	58.8	140	75.3	85.6
47 Bangor	77.5	70.8	67.5	114	77.5*	85.4
=48 Plymouth	83.3	78.9	42.9	130	75	85.3
=48 Manchester Metropolitan	84.7	85.6	44.8	121	71.9	85.3
=50 St George's, London	72.6	65.6	50.2	141	85.7	85.2
=50 Sussex	78.8	77.6	49.8	145	72.3	85.2
=50 Abertay	87.2	81.5	—	142	88.2	85.2
=53 Royal Holloway	77.2	79	43.5	123	82.4	85
=53 Kent	82.6	77.5	50	121	73.9	85
=55 West of England	88.7	87.6	42.8	114	67.3	84.8

Biological Sciences cont.

	Teaching quality %	Student experience %	Research quality %	Entry standards (UCAS points)	Graduate prospects %	Overall score
=55 Keele	79.5	80.3	39.2	122	80.5	84.8
57 Oxford Brookes	82.6	82.3	39.5	115	77	84.6
58 Heriot-Watt	76	73.8	32.8	164	77.5	84.4
59 Coventry	85.6	79	47.2	81	77.7	83.9
60 Brighton	85.5	78.6	50.5	100	68.3	83.4
61 Nottingham Trent	87	80.9	43.5	116	63.8	83.1
62 Staffordshire	83.9	63.2	30.8	—	80	82.9
=63 Salford	85.1	79.4	37	124	66.3	82.8
=63 Hull	82.8	78.4	42	115	69.4	82.8
=65 Lincoln	92.2	87.1	—	116	76.2	82.7
=65 Teesside	78.2	71.9	35	105	83.3*	82.7
67 West of Scotland	89.9	84.3	30.8	139	55.7	82.3
68 Edinburgh Napier	87	85.4	—	155	68.5	81.9
69 Robert Gordon	79.3	74	—	165	78.9	81.8
70 Sheffield Hallam	85.5	81.3	16.8	103	76.2	81.6
71 Hertfordshire	75.8	64.9	48	100	78.8	81.5
=72 Bournemouth	84.3	81.3	29.2	102	69.7	81.3
=72 Royal Veterinary College	84.4	83	—	122	79.1	81.3
74 Anglia Ruskin	92.3	87.9	33.8	93	56.5	81
75 Kingston	78.8	79.6	38.5	106	68.6	80.8
76 Huddersfield	76.6	74.8	24	119	76.8	80.7
=77 Liverpool Hope	81.6	81	—	119	80.3*	80.6
=77 Bedfordshire	89.1	89.5	—	97	74.4*	80.6
79 Canterbury Christ Church	92.4	92.3	9.5	72	70.8	80.5
80 Edge Hill	79.2	72.5	13.8	113	79	80
81 Cardiff Metropolitan	79.8	72.6	—	119	82.9	79.8
82 Worcester	81.9	78	7.8	104	75.8	79.3
83 Derby	79.7	77.7	—	110	80.5	79.2
84 Bath Spa	86.7	84.9	—	97	72.5	79.1
85 Roehampton	78.1	74.9	37.5	88	—	79
86 Greenwich	77.6	77.5	—	108	82.3	78.9
87 Westminster	78.5	80.3	36.8	110	58.9	78.7
88 Brunel	79.9	77.6	—	119	70.8	77.6
89 Bradford	78.7	81.3	—	114	70.2	77.3
90 Cumbria	85.2	75.6	—	119	59.2	76.1
91 Wolverhampton	81.9	72.2	—	106	56.7	73.6
92 Chester	63.1	67.3	6.2	113	72.6	73.1
93 Northampton	68.6	66.4	14	88	62.5	71.6
94 South Wales	77.4	55.2	16.2	105	51	71.4

Employed in high-skilled job	39%	Employed in lower-skilled job	19%
Employed in high-skilled job and studying	3%	Employed in lower-skilled job and studying	1%
Studying	19%	Unemployed	6%
High-skilled work (median) salary	£26,000	Low-/medium-skilled salary	£21,000

Building

Building courses include surveying, construction, building services engineering and construction management. They have attracted growing numbers of new students, and in 2023 nearly 6,000 undergraduates were accepted onto degrees. Applicants may be drawn by the firm foundations offered by the subject's career prospects: building ranks ninth for the second consecutive year in our employment table, based on more than four in five graduates being employed in high-skilled jobs and/or furthering their studies within fifteen months of finishing their degrees. Rates of pay are also encouraging too, the £28,500 average annual incomes earned by building graduates tying the subject with civil engineering at =17th place in our salaries index. Degree apprenticeships, although not included in our table, offer an increasingly popular route into the construction industry.

Loughborough moves into the top spot of the Building table this year, from third place in our previous edition, boosted by the best graduate prospects – with almost all (98%) of graduates achieving the desired outcomes of a high-skilled job and/or further study within 15 months of finishing their degrees. Loughborough also leads for research, based on outcomes of the Research Excellence Framework 2021. Nottingham and Ulster are steady in second and fourth place respectively this year, as they were last year. Heriot Watt, which led the Building table's previous edition, slips to third place overall but still has the highest entry standards (158 UCAS points).

Students at the University of the West of England (UWE) were the most satisfied with their teaching quality, our National Student Survey analysis shows, followed by those at Nottingham, Robert Gordon and Nottingham Trent. For the wider experience, UWE and Nottingham claim the highest rates of student satisfaction again, with Liverpool John Moores and Nottingham Trent following them.

"You'll master the art and science of constructing buildings that make people happy and healthy, and, importantly, are inclusive and sustainable," says Dr Chaitali Basu, associate director of digital construction, University of the West of England.

Building

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2 Nottingham	86.7	85.5	59	133	87.5	99
3 Heriot-Watt	75	72.9	59	158	89.6	98.3
4 Ulster	81.7	81.2	54.2	142	87.4	97.8
5 Reading	82.4	79.3	53.5	122	95.7	97.5
6 West of England	86.8	87.2	40.8	119	92.9	96.8
7 University College London	83.3	80.6	61	—	79.2	95.2
=8 Liverpool John Moores	81.7	84.1	28.7	133	90.6	94.8
=8 Northumbria	82.7	80.7	25	144	88	94.8
10 Robert Gordon	86.6	78.6	14	131	95.5	94.6
11 Plymouth	77	71.7	49	122	92	94.1
12 Edinburgh Napier	79.1	75.8	38	139	85.7	93.8
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