Frequently asked questions about studying Earth Science at the University of Glasgow

Further information:

Earth Science degree: [http://www.gla.ac.uk/undergraduate/degrees/earthscience/](http://www.gla.ac.uk/undergraduate/degrees/earthscience/)

Earth Science graduates on their careers: [http://www.gla.ac.uk/schools/ges/careersa-z/](http://www.gla.ac.uk/schools/ges/careersa-z/)

Why study Earth Science at Glasgow?: [http://www.gla.ac.uk/schools/ges/whyglasgow/](http://www.gla.ac.uk/schools/ges/whyglasgow/)

Geographical & Earth Sciences at Glasgow on Twitter: @GESUofG

School of Geographical & Earth Sciences: [http://www.gla.ac.uk/schools/ges/](http://www.gla.ac.uk/schools/ges/)

University Prospectus: [http://www.gla.ac.uk/prospectuses/](http://www.gla.ac.uk/prospectuses/)

Contact us: ges-enquiries@glasgow.ac.uk

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What is Earth Science?
Earth Science is, as the name suggests, the Science of the Earth. It involves the study of the whole Earth, its structure, composition, history and resources. It is concerned with the interactions of the Earth's deep geology with surface processes and climates. It involves extensive field work and laboratory work. It is a suitable programme for all those with an enquiring mind and an interest in the past, present and future of our planet. All individual branches of Science are touched on, in that there are elements of Chemistry, Biology, Physics, Physical Geography, and Maths, and all are applied to generate a comprehensive understanding of our home planet.

Entry requirements?
The University sets the tariff for entry to Science programmes. You can find the requirements for admission on a particular year on the University website or Prospectus – and it is also printed on the Earth Science Open Day Brochure. Whilst you are required to specify on your UCAS application that your intention is to enter for a specific degree (such as Earth Sciences – F600), you will typically enter to do Science and take three subjects in 1st year. This flexibility is a great advantage because it ensures that students do not commit themselves to a particular degree and allows students to change their minds and switch to a different degree subject. Typically students only make their final degree choice between 2nd and 3rd year.

How crucial is a science background?
A science background is certainly helpful, but it is definitely not essential, and we make no assumptions about your background in the delivery of our courses. Many students in the past have come into Earth Science with an arts or social sciences background, and have graduated with excellent degrees and gone on to successful geoscience careers. Entry to a BSc degree requires school passes in some Science subjects but details are available in the prospectus. Earth Science is such a broad subject that there is no way that any individual can have the “ideal” background.

Are any joint honours programmes available?
We believe it is crucial for all our graduates to get a thorough grounding in the core disciplines of Earth Science, however a wide choice of specialisation is available in the honours programme via our option system. Around 30% of the honours programme is made up of options, which allows students to choose the areas where they wish to specialise. Consequently if you wish to become an Earth Scientist with an interest in physical geography or biology or chemistry, etc. there are sets of Earth Science options that allow you to tailor your degree accordingly. You would still graduate with an Earth Science degree having done all the core disciplines. We only offer one joint degree, with Archaeology.
What is an adviser of studies?
On entry to the University of Glasgow you will be assigned an adviser of studies who will guide you through the academic decisions that you need to make. Your adviser will typically be based in the School appropriate for your degree choice, and will meet you periodically throughout your university career to discuss course choices and any other issues.

Can you take a year abroad?
Yes! There are many possibilities for taking a year or semester away from Glasgow. That is not to say that students wish to escape! However a year abroad can be very beneficial for a number of different reasons and there are several Universities where we know that there is a good match between their courses and ours. The most common destinations for a year abroad in Earth Sciences include: New Zealand, Australia, Canada and the USA. We would recommend either 2\textsuperscript{nd} or 3\textsuperscript{rd} year as the ideal time to take a year abroad.

Why Glasgow for Earth Science?
Well, where to start? Here's a few reasons…

1. The west of Scotland is probably the best place in the UK to study Earth Science, simply because of our proximity to the stunning local geology. It must be noted that the vast majority of other Universities run field trips to the west coast of Scotland. It is no coincidence that many fundamental advances in the development of Earth Science are based on observations made on Scottish rocks. We maximise this advantage.

2. In national surveys, our students consistently express their very high levels of satisfaction with ALL aspects of the degree programme.

3. The programme has a simple overall structure but is extremely flexible with a wide range of option choice built around an essential core that features two independent projects in final year.

4. Staff are active enthusiastic researchers working at the leading edge of their fields, however, in our view, the School is an ideal size to generate a friendly “family-like” atmosphere avoiding the anonymity of very large research focused units.

5. We have very well equipped research laboratories, but these are not just for staff. Undergraduate students have full access to these facilities for their final year independent laboratory projects; a unique aspect of our degree programme.

6. We have developed an unparalleled geoscience field teaching resource on our campus “Rock around the University” that is embedded throughout the degree programme.

7. Our students have an enviable record of gaining employment in geosciences. Professionals from industry are directly involved in teaching applied option courses.
8. Earth Science students (and staff) typically like the outdoors, and with the Highlands and Islands on our doorstep there is no better place to be.

9. Teaching laboratories are extremely well equipped and were completely refurbished during the summer of 2013.

10. Arguably the most important reason of all .... CHOICE. The structure of 1st and 2nd year at Glasgow University is such that students are not forced to choose their degree path until the end of 2nd year.

... but please don’t just take our word on all this. Come and visit on one of the Open or Applicants’ Visit days and crucially, whilst here, chat to students who are doing the courses. Ask them what it is like doing Earth Sciences in Glasgow. You can also contact us (ges-enquiries@glasgow.ac.uk) to arrange a visit.

What is “GUESS”?
The Glasgow University Earth Science Society is a very active student society, organising numerous popular social events throughout the year. Typically organised by 3rd and 4th year students, GUESS makes all students very welcome and they contribute hugely to the friendly atmosphere of the School.

Where do the field trips go and how much do they cost?
Field work is an essential and highly enjoyable component of any Earth Science or Geology degree. Our proximity to fantastic local geology allows for a number of day trips.

The University does charge a standard fee, although this does not cover the costs of field excursions. There are small charges for the non-residential day field trips; in Level 1 this is currently an additional £20 (which also covers laboratory manuals and a hand lens).

The 2nd year Arran residential field course (5 nights) is compulsory for all those intending to take an Earth Science degree, and costs around £130 plus self-catering costs.

The costs of the three 3rd year compulsory residential field classes for Earth Science students (Mull, Ardnamurchan, and Oban) along with 4 non-residential day excursions, does vary from year to year, but would typically be around £450 for 3 weeks of staff-led fieldwork.

In addition, students are required to fund their own 21 day independent mapping project, where costs will vary depending on the field location chosen, type of accommodation, etc. There are additional costs associated with the optional (i.e. not compulsory) field courses in final year (to NE England and southern Spain). [All costs are indicative only, and can vary.]

Does a Glasgow degree offer good job prospects?
Earth Sciences represent a major area of growth within the employment market, a growth that has been sustained for a number of years. Figures in national surveys suggest that our graduates have excellent success in gaining geological employment in comparison to other Universities. Feedback from employers also suggests that Glasgow graduates are strongly favoured because of the breadth and depth of their geological knowledge, their strong grounding in field skills, and their ability to think on their feet. We like to think that a small part of this is due to the excellent training the students receive.
Can you come from abroad for a year?
Yes. A year or semester in Glasgow allows you to experience a bit of Scottish Geology and culture. If it appears from the Course handbook that the timing of the assessments doesn’t fit too well with the period when you are able to be in Glasgow, don’t worry we will always attempt to adjust the timing to meet your individual requirements. Please contact us for further details.

Is the programme accredited?
No, not at present. We are not aware of any employer who has ever asked one of our students about accreditation. Both we, and it seems potential employers, are confident that our undergraduate degree is of the highest quality. Accreditation tends to impose certain restrictions on programme design that we believe currently do not adequately represent the needs of a modern Earth Science graduate.

FAQ about 1st year Earth Science

What other courses can you take?
In first year, students spend a third of their time doing Earth Science courses. Timetabling does restrict the subjects available to you a little, but virtually all other 1st year science courses are compatible with doing the two 1st year Earth Science courses. In 1st year you are required to take a total of 80 credits of science subjects. A very common combination would be Earth Science 1, Geography 1, and Archaeology 1; In reality the possible combinations of subjects are far too numerous to list here. First year in the University of Glasgow does provide the ideal opportunity to explore other subjects and your adviser of studies will help you chose a combination of subjects which reflects your particular strengths and interests.

What are “credits”?
University courses are allocated a certain “credit” weighting that simply indicates the size of each course. Each year a student is required to complete 120 credits in total, such that on completion of the 4 year degree they have acquired 480 credits. Generally in Earth Sciences our courses are either 10 or 20 credits and we think this structure gives the programme flexibility and in terms of options, maximises student choice.

When are the exams?
Exams for all 1st and 2nd year courses occur at the end of each course. So 1st semester courses are examined in December and 2nd semester courses are examined in April/May. A further diet of examinations is available in August for those unable to attend the first sitting or requiring a resit.

How much continuous assessment is done?
Continuous assessment exercises make up 50% of the total assessment for each of the 1st year Earth Science courses. Over the entire Earth Sciences degree programme, the balance between continuous assessment and examination depends a bit on the choice of options but is typically about 40% exams: 60% continuous assessment.
What are the entry requirements for direct entry into 2nd year Earth Science?
If you have exceptional A-level grades in Geology it is possible to gain exemption from 1st year and enter directly into 2nd year Earth Science.

What grades do you need to progress into 2nd year Earth Science?
Earth Science 1001 and EARTH1002 at grade D3 or better.

Will you enjoy the course?
Comments from students who have done Earth Science at level 1 previously are very positive. A high proportion of 1st year Earth Science students choose to progress into 2nd year Earth Science courses.

Comments from course evaluations
A small selection of student comments on individual courses, taken from recent course anonymous evaluation questionnaires:

EARTH1001 – “Teaching was very good, labs likewise - everything was organised clearly and presented engagingly. The staff and lecturers were all approachable and helpful. Overall a very good experience and a great introduction to Earth science.” (L1 student 2011-12)

EARTH1002 - “Lecturers were awesome and overall content was interesting.” (L1 student 2011-12)

FAQ about 2nd year Earth Science

Do the grades that you get in 1st and 2nd year count towards your final degree classification?
No, the grades from 1st year only allow you to progress into 2nd year and grades from 1st and 2nd year constrain progression into 3rd year. Your degree classification will be solely based on your 3rd year (40% weighted) and 4th year (60% weighted) grades.

What other courses can you take?
Your grades from 1st year courses control what 2nd year courses you may enrol in. Hence if you have taken Geography 1 in 1st year and have the required grades from this course you may take Geography 2. Your choice of 2nd year courses and your performance in these courses will ultimately restrict what honours programmes you choose in 3rd year. However, in 2nd year if you wish to you can also take additional courses from the 1st year “menu”.

What grades do you need to progress into 3rd year Earth Science?
If you wish to progress into the 3rd year Earth Science honours programme you will need to pass all Earth Science 2nd year courses at D3 or better, attend the residential field class in Earth 2004 (i.e. Arran) and obtain an average grade of C3 or better in the Earth Science courses (EARTH2001, EARTH2002, EARTH2003, EARTH2004). Should you meet these criteria but your average grade fall below C3 then you will be offered a place on the Earth Studies programme.
Where does the field class go at Easter?
The residential field class in EARTH2004 is held on the Island of Arran for 5 days. An alternative field course is offered to students enrolled in EARTH2004 who decide they do not wish to progress into 3rd year Earth Science.

Does the Geography 2 field class count for Earth Science entry and vice-versa?
No. If you wish to gain entry to 3rd year Earth Science you must attend the Earth Science field course. Entry to 3rd year Geography requires attendance at the Geography 2 field class.

Will you enjoy the course?
Most certainly do.

Comments from course evaluations
A small selection of student comments on individual courses, taken from recent anonymous course evaluation questionnaires:

EARTH2001 - “This is not exclusively for 2P but the whole feel of the department is great, it feels like a great little family, I first took earth science as a second subject now I am 75% sure it will be my honours course” (L2 student 2012-13)

EARTH2003 - “All lecturers were really enthusiastic about the subject and explained things very well. Lab classes were very good too with a good structure.” (L2 student 2012-13)

FAQ about 3rd year Earth Science

Do grades from 3rd year count towards the final degree classification?
Yes. The grades you obtain in 3rd year contribute 40% of the final degree classification.

What option choice is available?
A range of options is offered to 3rd year students. These allow you to tailor your degree to your particular interests. Many of the options focus on the more applied areas of Earth Science and typically by 3rd year students will already have a feel for the area of the subject that they would like to follow as a future career. Many of the Physical Geography options offered within the Geography degree are available as choices within the Earth Science degree. See the course handbook for details of the option courses.

Why don’t all options run every year?
Although some options do run every year, some are only offered in alternate years. This means that if an option is not available in 3rd year, students will still have the possibility of taking that option in 4th year. This alternating system frees up essential time for the lecturing staff allowing them to maintain their research profile at the cutting edge of their subject. Clearly this is also very beneficial to the teaching programmes. Some options are only offered to 4th year students. These course typically require a bit more experience and students to have completed the Earth Science 3rd year core courses.
When are exams held?
The 1st semester 3rd year Earth Science core courses are examined in December. The 2nd semester core courses and all the option courses are examined in April/May.

Why do Glasgow students do so many field classes?
If you wish to understand the Earth, you have to look at the Earth, that is where the truth resides. All geoscientists require training in field skills and we make the most of our location near classic geological locations. The four residential field classes that students attend prior to their independent field project ensure that our students excel in these independent projects and ultimately flourish in later careers. Many other Universities in the UK provide less training and “balance” this with a much longer period of independent mapping. A student who chooses to do the optional field classes in 4th year, together with the compulsory field classes, does a total of circa 70 days of fieldwork of which over 50 days are with staff. Most students (and staff) find the field classes the most enjoyable part of a very enjoyable degree programme.

What grades do you need to progress into 4th year Earth Science?
An average across the 3rd year Earth Science courses of D3 or better is required to progress into 4th year. In addition because of the importance of field skills in any Earth Science degree, students must obtain a grade of D3 or better in EARTH4002.

Will you enjoy the course?
The 3rd year Earth Science courses are typically thought to be the academically toughest of the years in the programme. They will be challenging. However in many respects the concentration of field classes in this year of the programme means that students find 3rd year is also one of the most enjoyable.

Comments from course evaluations
A small selection of student comments on individual courses, taken from recent course anonymous evaluation questionnaires:

EARTH SCIENCE 3rd year - “This semester has been by far the best of the degree so far. I think the course was fantastic and my enjoyment of the subject has been raised a lot this term. The teaching was fantastic and I would like to say a big thanks to all staff for such a great job, I really can’t fault the teachers in any way. Looking forward to next term.” (L3 student 2012-13)

EARTH4002 - “Enthusiastic lecturers out in the field with a great amount of knowledge on the area was really good.” (L4 student 2012-13)

“Very interesting and gave me huge confidence in my mapping ability. Fun and social as well, giving us a good chance to work and relax with classmates. Accommodation was VERY good!” (L3 student 2011-12)

“The afternoon tea on the first day was a real highlight to the year! The geology was interesting, and the help in the field was very beneficial.” (L3 student 2011-12)

EARTH4013 - “The teaching was wonderful” (L3 student 2012-13)
EARTH4014 - “Lecturer was free to help with questions within and outwith lectures. Coursework was manageable and I felt it enhanced my understanding of the topics before the exam, which increased my confidence. The lecturer has greatly helped me in a topic which, due to a poor background knowledge of chemistry, I thought I would struggle with. Very well done!” (L3 student 2012-13)

EARTH4017 - “Really interesting course and fab lecturer who explained things well. Labs were nice and varied and you always knew what had to be done.” (L3 student 2012-13)

EARTH4023 – “The course is interesting and the teaching staff make it enjoyable. Martin’s labs are very well structured and handing in lab books at the end to get back marked provides good feedback and an indication of what markers expect as answers.” (L3 student 2012-13)

EARTH4024 - “Alan makes this subject interesting and I like how the presentations were done. Was good to know I can do a presentation in front of 60 people and not freak out” (L3 student 2012-13)

EARTH4025 - “Teaching and notes were excellent and the movies on moodle are very helpful.” (L3 student 2011-12)

EARTH4026 - “Cristina always has her door open for you if you have questions ... and she always makes time to go over stuff with you if you are unsure. It makes a real difference.” (L3 student 2011-12)

FAQ about 4th year Earth Science and careers

When are the exams held?
All 4th year courses are examined in the April/May diet. A high proportion of the 4th year is assessed by continuous assessment (ca. 70%).

Why do Glasgow students do two independent projects?
The structure of the independent projects in Glasgow is unique. Traditionally undergraduate Earth Science students in the UK all do a mapping project with variable degrees of independence, some of these projects will involve a minor element of laboratory analysis.

Students in Glasgow do a fully-fledged research/laboratory project in addition to the mapping project. This research project allows students to engage in independent research using state-of-the-art equipment such as electron microscopes. The project is written up in the format of a research publication. Indeed quite a few of these projects are ultimately published in international scientific journals. Such projects give students who wish to continue in postgraduate study a competitive edge and unique insight into scientific research.
Why do Glasgow students spend less time independent mapping than those from other Universities?
We provide excellent training in geological field skills and consequently we think that students are more than capable of demonstrating their expertise in field mapping in a 21 day period. Such a time period closely matches the fieldwork undertaken by professional geologists, to stay longer in the field would simply increase the costs associated with the exercise for little academic benefit. Unlike some other UK universities, our students complete this field exercise independent of any geological input from our academic staff, however we will only approve mapping areas where we know that students will be able to produce a suitable map. Such an approach yields maximum benefit for the students in their future careers.

What training in transferable skills will you receive?
Transferable skills are embedded throughout the 4 years of the degree programme. Students undertake university training courses in IT skills, as part of individual courses they regularly present seminars, present posters, and undertake group exercises. Earth Science students are also required to use electronic Portfolios in some of their courses, and are encouraged to further utilise these to chart their development of key skills.

Do staff within the School offer summer internships?
A variety of projects are offered each year, typically contributing to active research programmes of the staff.

Does a Glasgow Earth Science degree provide a good basis for further study?
Glasgow Earth Science students regularly obtain positions on very competitive MSc programmes or go on to study for PhD positions.

Will you enjoy the course?
At the risk of a little trumpet blowing… very consistent and positive feedback from surveys such as National Student Survey would certainly suggest this.

Comments from course evaluations
A small selection of student comments on individual courses, taken from recent course anonymous evaluation questionnaires:

**EARTH SCIENCE 4th year** - “Independent mapping was excellent experience and is fantastic for demonstrating ability to work independently to future employers. Lab project choices covered many disciplines in which there was something for everyone.” (L4 student 2012-13)

**EARTH4001** - “Was good to get first hand experience from someone in the industry in teaching the course.” (L4 student 2011-12)

**EARTH4003** - “Independent mapping was a fantastic experience” (L4 student 2012-13)

“Again this part of the course is ideal in the fact that I hope to be using these skills in my future career. When talking to students from other universities who were also in the area, the Glasgow standard seems much higher, and I felt more capable in comparison.” (L4 student 2012-13)

“The whole project provided an excellent opportunity to display the skills we had accumulated from the various level 3 field trips.” (L4 student 2011-12)
EARTH4004 - “Amazing opportunity to work with new equipment and develop strong lab based skills. Was good to have an independent project, to test your own skills and abilities. Got to choose our own topics as well, so could focus on specific areas of interest.” (L4 student 2011-12)

“Really enjoyed the project, staff were always helpful and friendly.” (L4 student 2011-12)

“I loved every minute of it. I loved the independence aspect of it.” (L4 student 2011-12)

“Working directly with staff and gaining experience using laboratory equipment. The independent nature of the project also provides a large sense of accomplishment as the entire project from start to finish comes from yourself.” (L4 student 2011-12)

EARTH4009 – “Lectures were interesting and Rod provided lots of extra material on Moodle to aid understanding.” (L4 student 2012-13)

EARTH4016 - “Brilliant opportunity to tie together all aspects of the course. Class discussions and development of independent thinking were very useful. Teaching was excellent.” (L4 student 2011-12)

“This course allowed me to think for myself and form my own opinions, as well as being greatly interesting and well taught. ..... Overall very satisfying.” (L4 student 2011-12)

EARTH4020 - “The field trip was excellent, tying in so many different aspects of the course we had gained over the last 4 years. The trip was well run, and brilliantly taught. Very interesting.” (L4 student 2011-12)

“The whole field trip was by far the most enjoyable experience of my university career. The teaching staff were very helpful and a joy to be with.” (L4 student 2011-12)

“Fantastic fieldtrip, great geology!” (L4 student 2011-12)

EARTH4022 - “Great course, structured well. Incorporating all different aspects of the oil industry to us. A great introduction to the subject!” (L4 student 2011-12)

“Field trip was fantastic, I learned a great deal and would encourage students to pick this option.” (L4 student 2011-12)