University of Birmingham

Frequently asked questions

Applying for our degree programmes

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What are the best combinations of A-level subjects for a Chemistry degree?

Chemistry, Physics and Mathematics, or Chemistry, Biology and Mathematics are the two best combinations of three A-level subjects to take if you plan to study Chemistry at degree level; however, the minimum requirement is that you are studying Chemistry and we consider applicants who are taking a wide range of subjects at A-level.

Do I need A-level Maths?

No; however Mathematics at A-level will stand you in excellent stead for starting a Chemistry degree. All students at Birmingham Chemistry take a Maths module in Year 1, with those without A-level Maths taking a second Introductory Maths module in the first semester. Importantly, both of these modules are taught by staff from Chemistry and cover those aspects of Maths which you will need to understand the more physical and theoretical aspects of our courses.

What are the typical A-level entry requirements?

Our standard A-level entry requirements for students applying in 2013/14 are:

MSci programmes: AAB

BSc programmes: ABB.

We treat each application individually, making sure we make an offer that is tailored to you. To this end, all promising applicants within the UK are invited in attend an Applicant Visit Day. Following this, our offer will usually be based on three subjects, one of which must be Chemistry and the offer decision will be based on

- The subjects you are taking at A-level (most important)
- Your past examination results (GCSEs and AS results)
- Your personal statement
- Your school/college reference

Do you accept other qualifications besides A-levels?

Yes, we welcome applications from students studying other **courses (http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/students/requirements/requirements-ug/index.aspx)** , such as the International Baccalaureate, European Bacc., Scottish Highers etc. Please refer to the specific course details for our typical IB offer ranges; for all other qualifications, please contact a member of the **Admissions Team (mailto:ug-chemistry-admissions@lists.bham.ac.uk)** .

Will I be invited to an Applicant Visit Day?

Yes, all promising applicants who are based in the UK will be invited to attend an Applicant Visit Day.

What happens on an Applicant Visit Day?

If, after having reviewed your UCAS application, we are keen to make you an offer, we shall invite you to attend one of our Applicant Visit Days, which we hold weekly from November through to March.

Attending one of these Days will not only provide us with an opportunity discuss your application with you, but will also provide you with a valuable opportunity to see the School, our beautiful campus and the halls of residence, as well as chat to members of staff, and perhaps more importantly, to some of our current students. Importantly, the Applicant Visit Day will also provide you with an opportunity to experience our teaching methods at first-hand, including a lecture, lab work and a problem-based learning activity.

We want these days to provide you with the information you need in order to make an informed decision as to whether or not to choose Birmingham when you make your firm and insurance decisions. Obviously you can **contact us (mailto:ug-chemistry-admissions@lists.bham.ac.uk)** at any time, before or after attending an Applicant Visit Day, for more information.

What if I am unable to attend an Applicant Visit Day?

We generally do not make offers to home applicants whom we have not met. However, we acknowledge that there are also reasons why you may be unable to attend one of our Applicant Visit Days, in which case, please let us know and we will arrange to conduct a telephone interview.

When do you make offers?

We make offers throughout the admissions cycle and generally very soon after we have met an applicant on one of our Applicant Visit Days.

What happens when we make you an offer?

If we make you an offer, we will take into account the qualifications you already have and then set out clearly in writing any subjects and grades that are the conditions of our offer. Our letter from Birmingham Chemistry is followed up soon after with the official offer, which is made by the University based upon our recommendations.

Is there any advantage to applying early?

No, we recognise that schools and colleges deal with UCAS applications in different ways; some encourage their students to submit their applications early, others do

not. We therefore make offers throughout the cycle and generally after we have met an applicant on one of our Applicant Visit Days.

Should I do an MSci or a BSc degree?

Many students worry about this question when making their UCAS application. To allay these concerns, a major benefit of our degree structure is its flexibility: students enrolled on BSc programmes can transfer on to the MSci programme and vice versa. The first two years of both degree types are the same; thus the decision can be delayed until the end of Year 2. It is for this reason that our entry requirements for both BSc and MSci degree programmes are the same.

As a very rough guide, students who are considering a scientific career usually take an MSci degree, whilst those who are considering other directions, such as teaching, accountancy or law, usually take a BSc degree.

What is the difference between an MSci and MChem programme?

Nothing, different universities use different terms to describe their four-year taught undergraduate masters degree programmes and both are equally recognised by potential employers.

Should I be considering the Foundation Year programme?

Our **Chemistry Foundation Year programme (F103) (http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/students/courses/fd/chemistry-foundation.aspx)** is specially designed for students who are motivated to study chemistry at degree level but have been away from education for some time and/or whose qualifications do not allow their direct entry on to one of our honours programmes.

We also offer the Birmingham Foundation Academy, which is specially designed for candidates who are motivated to study chemistry at degree level but whose qualifications do not allow their direct entry on to one of our honours programmes and whose first language is not English.

Both of these programmes are also attractive to mature students who may need a period of retraining before beginning a degree.

Do you offer scholarships?

Yes, we are proud to offer a range of high-value scholarships that reward academic excellence and potential. Scholarships are available for home students, ranging from: Excellence Scholarships worth £5000 p.a. and Haworth Scholarships worth £5000 on entry, to Achievement Scholarships guaranteed for all applicants who place Birmingham Chemistry as their firm choice and achieve A*AA. . We also offer scholarships to international students. **View full details and eligibility criteria (/schools/chemistry/undergraduate/scholarships.aspx)** . In addition, the University offers a range of other **scholarships (http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/students/fees/undergraduate/funding/alternative.aspx)** including Music and Sports Scholarships.

Can I take a gap year?

Yes, if you wish to defer starting your degree and take a year out so you can travel or work, then all you need to do is complete the UCAS application as normal ensuring you have the appropriate start-date. We will treat your application in the same way as all the others we receive.

Our courses

We offer a range of **Single Honours and Major-Minor Combined Honours undergraduate degree programmes (/schools/chemistry/undergraduate/index.aspx)** .

All of our MSci programmes are four years in duration. Our BSc programmes are three-year courses.

Can I transfer between BSc and MSci courses?

Yes, since the first two years of our MSci and BSc single honours programmes are the same, it is possible to change your registration from MSci to BSc, and vice versa, at any time in Years 1 and 2; however, you will need to achieve a Year 2 mark of 60%, or higher, in order to remain on the MSci programme.

Are there progression criteria to remain on a particular degree programme?

Yes, in order to remain enrolled on an MSci programme, you will need to achieve a Year 2 mark of 60%, or higher.

Students enrolled on our **MSci Chemistry with Industrial Experience (/undergraduate/courses/chemistry/chemistry-industrial.aspx)** (UCAS code: F104) and **MSci Chemistry with Study Abroad (/undergraduate/courses/chemistry/chemistry-study-abroad-msci.aspx)** (UCAS code: F106) programmes additionally need to achieve a Year 1 mark of 60%, or higher, to remain on these two programmes. If you do not achieve this level, you transfer on to our **MSci Chemistry programme (/undergraduate/courses/chemistry/chemistry-msci.aspx)** (UCAS code: F101).

Is it possible to change my Chemistry course when I arrive at Birmingham?

Yes, providing you satisfy the entry requirements for the degree programme you wish to transfer on to, the flexible nature of our course structure allows you to change courses when you arrive. We encourage students who are considering changing course to discuss this with their personal tutor and if after this, they still wish to transfer, to do so as early as possible, and definitely before they start their second year of study. In some cases, such as transferring between a single honours and a major-minor course, changes need to be made much earlier (usually within the first couple of weeks).

Can I spend time in industry?

Yes, if you are interested in gaining valuable work experience in industry as part of your degree, then you should consider our **MSci Chemistry with Industrial Experience degree programme (F104) (/undergraduate/courses/chemistry/chemistry-industrial.aspx)** .

Do I get paid during my year out in industry?

Yes, typical salaries can be up to £16000 p.a.

Can I spend time studying abroad?

Yes, if you are interested in spending a year studying abroad as part of your degree, then you should consider our Chemistry with Study Abroad degree programme (**MSci F106 (/undergraduate/courses/chemistry/chemistry-study-abroad-msci.aspx)**). Currently, Birmingham has an arrangement with universities in the following countries: France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Finland, Sweden, USA, Canada, Brazil, Singapore, New Zealand and Australia.

Can I combine Chemistry with a Modern Language?

Yes, if you are interested in developing your modern language skills, then you should consider our Chemistry with a Modern Language degree programmes (**MSci F1RY (/undergraduate/courses/chemistry/chemistry-language-msci.aspx)** , **BSc F1R9 (/undergraduate/courses/chemistry/chemistry-language-bsc.aspx)**)

Will I do a research project?

Yes, it is a requirement that all students graduating from the University of Birmingham have done an element of project work as part of their degree. Students enrolled on both BSc and MSci degree programmes in Chemistry will carry out a research project in their final year. The research project forms a particularly important component of the fourth year for our MSci students, many of whom decide to continue their studies after by enrolling on a PhD programme.

How much does each year count towards my final degree mark?

This depends on which degree programme you are following. In all cases, however, your first year mark does not count towards your final degree mark, although of course you need to pass this year in order to progress on to Year 2. Typically, Year 2 of BSc programmes contributes 25%, and Year 3 75%, to your final degree mark, whilst for MSci programmes, Year 2 contributes 20%, Year 3 40% and Year 4 40%.

Teaching and learning

How many hours of teaching will I have in a typical week?

Compared with many subjects, Chemistry students have lots of contact time with the staff who teach them. For example, in your first year you should expect about 20 hours of contact time per week made up of approximately 12 hours of lectures, tutorials and workshops, and 8 hours of laboratory classes.

Do you offer small-group tutorials?

Yes, our experience shows that students value the opportunity to learn in small groups and benefit from working closely with a member of staff, who runs each session to address individual problems. Our small-group (up to 6 students) tutorials run throughout your first two years alongside lecture courses, which allows you to use these sessions to consolidate the lecture material as well as test your understanding through problem-solving exercises.

What forms of assessment do you use?

Each module is assessed independently and most contain some components of continuous assessment, which usually account for about a quarter to one-third of the marks. We use a wide range of assessment methods to test the various learning outcomes of our courses, including end-of-year examinations, written assignments, oral and poster presentations, computer-based tests, laboratory and project reports. Some modules are completely assessed by coursework.

What feedback will I get?

We place a strong emphasis on providing prompt and informative feedback on all pieces of work that you submit during your studies. Feedback comes in a variety of forms including written feedback on pieces of assessment, class feedback sessions as well as particularly valuable one-on-one discussions with your tutors; however in all cases, the feedback you receive will highlight the good points as well as those areas that require more attention. Continual guidance on how to improve further will increase your performance and understanding of the subject as well as your own personal development.

What about teaching quality?

We review our degree programmes annually and are continually seeking to innovate and enhance our courses. One measure of teaching quality is the National Student Survey (NSS). In the 2013 National Student Survey (NSS), 96% of students graduating from Birmingham Chemistry said they were satisfied with their degree.

What happens if I fail a module?

Students take 120 credits of taught material each year and typically need to pass a minimum of 100 credits in order to be allowed to progress on to the next year. Should you not pass a module first time around, then there is usually an opportunity to re-sit the examination for the module in August. If you pass second time round, then you gain the credits associated with that particular module.

Does the School provide a teaching package for its undergraduates?

Yes, all students in the School are provided with the following materials to support their studies throughout their time at Birmingham:

- safety spectacles
- laboratory book
- all laboratory equipment required throughout your time with us is provided free of charge
- a complete set of laboratory scripts in advance of all lab classes
- access to the University's web-learning platform on which we offer additional learning support for lab classes (and, of course, lecture courses), including video recordings of lab procedures, which can be accessed at any time should you need to learn a new technique or indeed refresh one that you might have not practiced for a while
- your own 'key skills' framework is embedded within our laboratory course programme, which ensures you maintain a record of the techniques you acquire and develop during the course
- lecture notes and additional support material for all courses
- chemistry data book
- membership of the **Royal Society of Chemistry (http://www.rsc.org/)** in your final year of study when arguably it is most valuable as you will be considering your career options
- free membership of the University's Chemistry Society, ChemSoc, throughout your time at Birmingham
- access to University-wide schemes that have been recently introduced to improve employability and skills training for Birmingham graduates (for full details, please see: **http://www.as.bham.ac.uk/careers/index.shtml (http://www.as.bham.ac.uk/careers/index.shtml)**). Two particularly valuable schemes include the Personal Skills Award (see: **http://www.as.bham.ac.uk/psa/index.shtml (http://www.as.bham.ac.uk/psa/index.shtml)**) and 'Progress' which is aimed at developing your study skills.

Can undergraduates do projects with members of staff during the Summer?

Yes, many members of staff allow students to join their research groups in the Summer.

Chemistry at Birmingham

Why Birmingham? (http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/students/birmingham/index.aspx)

What facilities does the School have?

Over the last ten years, the University of Birmingham has invested more than £10M in the infrastructure of the School of Chemistry. Teaching and research laboratories have been refurbished and re-equipped to give our students access to facilities that are among the best in the UK. Most recently, in addition to recent investment in the spectroscopy and analytical facilities in our Undergraduate Teaching Labs, we have further enhanced the practical learning experience with the provision of Video Teaching Facilities.

Since learning how to use these state-of-the-art analytical tools is a vital part of your training for a future career in research or in the chemical industry, instruction in the theory behind these techniques, as well as using them in practice, forms an integral part of our undergraduate degree programmes. Click here for more information on the **analytical facilities and instrumentation (/schools/chemistry/undergraduate/facilities.aspx)** that is housed in the School.

Do you have a student-run Chemistry Society?

Yes, we are a very sociable School and have a very active Chemical Society (ChemSoc), which is run by our undergraduates and postgraduates but is very inclusive in getting everyone involved in ChemSoc activities, which include the School's annual black tie ball, various charity events, hosting visiting speakers, and debates.

Fees and finances

Do you offer scholarships?

Yes, we are proud to offer a range of high-value scholarships that reward academic excellence and potential. Scholarships are available for home students, ranging from Excellence Scholarships worth £5000 p.a. and Haworth Scholarships worth £5000 on entry, to Achievement Scholarships guaranteed for all applicants who place Birmingham Chemistry as their firm choice and achieve A*AA. We also offer scholarships to international students. **View full details and eligibility criteria (/schools/chemistry/undergraduate/scholarships.aspx)** . In addition, the University offers a range of other **scholarships (http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/students/fees/undergraduate/funding/alternative.aspx)** including Music and Sports Scholarships.

Does the University provide any financial support in the form of bursaries?

Yes, the University of Birmingham is committed to ensuring that fears about financing do not constrain prospective students from considering University. Click here for the **latest information on financial support (http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/students/fees/undergraduate/index.aspx)** .

How much are the fees?

Tuition fees for home/EU students (http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/students/fees/undergraduate/index.aspx) intending to begin their studies in 2014 will be £9k per annum. Click here for Information on **tuition fees for International students (http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/international/students/finance/index.aspx)** .

Do I pay reduced fees whilst on my year out in industry?

Yes, students on our **Chemistry with Industrial Experience MSci (/undergraduate/courses/chemistry/chemistry-industrial.aspx)** (UCAS code F104) pay significantly reduced fees whilst on their year out. For 2013 entrants, the figure is £1,350. The figure for 2014 entrants has yet to be confirmed; however we expect it to be similar.

Do I pay reduced fees when I am studying abroad at one of Birmingham's partner institutions?

Yes, if you are enrolled on our Chemistry with Study Abroad programme (**MSci: F106 (/undergraduate/courses/chemistry/chemistry-study-abroad-msci.aspx)**), you will pay reduced fees of £1,350 on your year out.

Do I have to pay a laboratory deposit?

No, this is covered by your fees.

Careers

What types of careers do Birmingham Chemistry graduates enter after they have graduated?

Birmingham Chemistry graduates possess excellent core skills in numeracy and literacy, as well as highly-developed problem-solving, team-working, communication and IT skills. These skills, combined with an in-depth knowledge of Chemistry, equip our graduates well for today's fast-changing job market, and ensure they are highly sought after by a breadth of employers across the chemical industries and beyond.

Previous graduates have had successful careers as chemists in the chemical, pharmaceutical, healthcare and food and drink sectors, working for employers including AstraZeneca, GlaxoSmithkline, Procter and Gamble, Reckitt Benckiser, Severn Trent Water, Akzo Nobel and BAE Systems. Others have taken positions as project managers, business analysts, management consultants and accountants in blue-chip companies like Marks and Spencer, RBS, HSBC and Ernst and Young

The employability of our graduates is paramount and employability support is embedded throughout our degree programmes. Working with our team of Careers Advisers you will develop and hone your employability skills from Year 1 onwards, through courses, workshops and seminars. We maintain close contacts with our Alumni, and graduates who are now in senior roles within industry regularly return to Birmingham to participate in seminars and workshops, as well as informal networking, advising students on how to succeed in the jobs market. Skills training is also embedded throughout the course to ensure you develop the skills that employers have said they view as crucial: written and spoken communication skills, presentation skills, team-working, interpersonal skills and problem-solving.

Do many students stop on to do PhDs?

Yes, we are very lucky to have many talented scientists on our undergraduate degree programmes and a significant proportion these take up PhDs on graduating. Whilst some choose to move to a different institute for their PhD studies, the world-class facilities offered by Birmingham encourage many to stay.