

Information package MSc Marine Biology 2026

1. Programme information sources

In order to prepare yourself well, we advise you to carefully read and study this document, with important information regarding your degree programme. In this document, you can find:

- a) *'How to prepare for your degree programme'* provides a step-by-step guide to prepare for your degree programme before (and soon after) arriving in Groningen.
- b) The *'Course unit schedule'* contains a schedule of the course units in our master programme.

Furthermore, you can find information online:

[Ocasys](#) is our online course unit catalogue. Here you can find detailed information about all mandatory and elective course units in our master programme. Please ensure to use the 2026/2027 setting, when you consult Ocasys. Some information may still be in concept modus and will be updated soon.

2. Instructions and deadlines

Considering the preparation and start of your degree programme, we request you to inform us about these issues:

- **Before June 25:** Fill in the [Degree Confirmation Form](#) to inform us that you are planning to start your master's degree programme in September at the University of Groningen. After receiving the form, we will register you for the mandatory courses.

Please note: You may have already confirmed your attendance to the Admission Office, please note that this is a separate procedure and we request your confirmation as well.

In case you plan to start your master degree programme in Groningen:

- **During the summer months:** Familiarize yourself with all information documents regarding your degree programme, as mentioned in this letter.
- **During the summer months:** We expect that the formal introduction to our programme will be on site on Friday 28th of August. You will be informed about the introduction in July/August. Plan your arrival in Groningen such that you can participate in all introduction events.

In case you have any questions about (the preparations for) your degree programme, please feel free to contact your academic advisor (Maartje Giesbers) by e-mail (academicadvisor.MScBIO@rug.nl). She will be happy to answer your questions.



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How to prepare for your degree programme

This information concerns the Master's degree programme

Marine Biology (MB)



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Study programme

This document describes the best way to prepare for the Master's degree programme Marine Biology. It involves matters such as the content of the study programme, planning, organizing individual study elements, various administrative issues and a description of the main sources of information.

The Marine Biology Master's degree programme is one of the four master programmes run by the **BioSciences Programme Team**. This team, which consists of a programme coordinator, an [academic advisor](#) and a programme assistant is responsible for the daily (administrative) operations of the master degree programmes Biomolecular Sciences, Biology, Marine Biology, and Ecology & Evolution. Each degree programme is led by a Programme Director that is responsible for the content and quality of their respective degree programme. During the duration of the programme, you may receive messages from the Programme team from the general email address msc.biosciences@rug.nl.

The last section of this document contains an extensive FAQ section with accompanying answers. In case you have any remaining questions, please do not hesitate to contact the [Academic Advisor](#).

Tracks

The Marine Biology Master's degree programme allows you to choose between a research (R) track (in which your focus will be on research) and a Science, Business & Policy ([SBP](#)) track.

We recommend giving some thought to which track you want to follow *before* you start your Master's programme, even though you do not actually need to make a definitive choice yet. If you do a research project with a minimum student workload of 30 ECTS in your first year, it can count towards either of the two profiles. Should you decide to continue in the research track, this means that your second research project needs to have a workload of at least 40 ECTS. You can make your definitive choice of track based on the experience and knowledge you gain during the first project.

Study element	Research track	SBP track	Entry requirements
<i>Principles of Biological Oceanography</i>	5 ECTS	5 ECTS	
<i>Principles of Marine Biology</i>	5 ECTS	5 ECTS	
<i>Principles of Population Genetics in Natural Populations</i>	5 ECTS	5 ECTS	
<i>Marine Conservation</i>	5 ECTS	5 ECTS	
Research Project	40 or 30 ECTS	40 or 30 ECTS	
Research Project	30 or 40 ECTS	30 or 40 ECTS	RP
Colloquium	5 ECTS	5 ECTS	RP
Electives	≤ 25 ECTS	≤ 5 ECTS	
SBP courses (2 nd year)	-	20 ECTS	
SBP Work Placement (2 nd year)	-	40 ECTS	SBP courses + RP
Total	120 ECTS	120 ECTS	



Research Projects

During the programme, you will conduct two research projects, with a study load of 30 ECTS and 40 ECTS. You are not allowed to start the second research project before completing the first project.

Electives

Elective credits can be filled by: additional master courses or elective courses, and/or a research assignment (5-20 ECTS).

Planning semester 1

Course units

Students in the Marine Biology Master's degree programme start their programme in September with a number of mandatory course units (see table above). You do not need to enrol yourself for the four mandatory courses.

If you wish to enrol for **elective courses** in the first semester, you can register yourself via Ocasys. Many elective course units have a limited capacity so it is important to register for them well in advance. In case there is no space available in a course, you may participate in that course unit during your second year.

Submit the [Degree Confirmation Form](#) before **June 25**. Upon receiving the form, we will register you for the mandatory courses.

All important information about course units, programme and schedules can be found on the Student Portal and on [Ocasys](#). Upon arrival in Groningen, we will introduce you to the internal Student Portal, for which you will need a [personal computer account](#). We recommend to already familiarize yourself with the [Student Portal](#) before arrival.

Study Mentor

An important characteristic of our Master's degree programme is that you yourself have to choose which course units, research projects, individual assignments (colloquium / research assignment) you want to do and when to do them (during the two years nominally allocated for the programme). This allows tailoring the degree programme to your interests. You do need to discuss these choices with your **study mentor** first, to ensure that your plans meet the requirements of the programme.

The study mentor will be your main point of contact throughout the entire Master's programme. A mentor will be assigned to you after the start of your Master programme, usually during one of the first obligatory courses. You are solely responsible maintaining contact with your mentor during your entire programme.

A **Study mentor** is assigned to you during the first semester.



Planning semester 2

Research project

During the first weeks of the first semester, we will publish a selection of Master projects suitable as a first research project for all Marine Biology students. This will include suggestions from all research groups involved in Marine Biology. You can indicate your preferences for your first project and the Marine Biology staff will do their best to place you in one of the projects you choose. Also be prepared that some subjects are more popular than others and that we cannot accommodate all students first choices.

Most students will start their **first research project** in the second semester

After securing your research project, you should contact the examiner assigned to this project discuss your plans and timeline for the project.

Formalizing individual study elements: Programme Proposal Form

Because the Master's programme involves many optional components, there is a risk that students include study elements that do not meet the minimum requirements, e.g. an unsuitable research topic, a project that is too limited in time or subject matter, too little student workload, unauthorized supervisor, etc. The Board of Examiners is responsible for ensuring that the Master's degree programme maintains an acceptable level, which is why you require its approval for each individual study component before starting it.

You will need to complete a **Programme Proposal Form** for each individual study element and discuss this with your **study mentor**. You need to send the form to msc.biosciences@rug.nl and will hear within a few weeks whether the component has been approved or not. If you do not request approval of an individual study element in advance, you will be running a real risk: If the component is rejected after you have completed it, the ECTS credit points gained for that component will not count towards your Master's degree programme. So make sure to submit your Programme Proposal Form as early as possible before starting a new individual programme element, to prevent a potential problem!

Once you have found a first **research project**, discuss your plans with your mentor and complete the **Programme Proposal Form** with all relevant information for your first individual study component. Submit your form by email to the Programme Management (msc.biosciences@rug.nl) for approval by the Board of Examiners.

You do not need to enter your entire study plan on the Programme Proposal Form. You will probably decide on other/further individual study elements (second research project, colloquium) sometime during your first research project. This will be a good moment to include your new plans to your existing Programme Proposal Form and submit that to the Programme Management. And so on.

Planning year 2

During the second year of the programme, most students in the **Research track** will conduct their second research project, colloquium and additional electives to fulfil the requirement of a total of 120 ECTS.

Students in the **SBP track** will start the second year with the two mandatory courses in the SBP programme, followed by the Work Placement of 40 ECTS. We advise SBP students to conduct their colloquium in year 1, so the entire second year can be devoted to SBP.



Graduation

In order to obtain your degree, you need to submit your complete study programme via Progress Portal for assessment by the Board of Examiners. You are advised to complete this step of your **diploma application** before starting your second research project, when you have obtained approximately 80 ECTS and completed your first research project. Deadlines for submitting your study programme to meet scheduled graduation ceremony dates can be found on the Student Portal.

Information and communication

In the Master's degree programme, you will have a lot more responsibility for obtaining information about schedules, the programme, registration, administrative matters, etc., than in your previous education programme. The most important sources of information on the Master's degree programme are:

- The [Student Portal on Brightspace](#): for the latest news and announcements, important forms, information about study and internships abroad, tips for preparing for the labour market, information on graduation, contact details, etc. The Student Portal is explained in [these instructions](#) and upon arrival in Groningen.
- *Study Mentor*: for all information about programme content, discussing your study plan, agreeing on your Programme Proposal Form, contacts abroad. A mentor will be assigned to you during the first semester.
- [Academic Advisor](#): for all other questions or possible flaws in information. Also, report any extraordinary circumstances affecting your study progress (illness, handicap, family matters, pregnancy, etc.), immediately to your Academic Advisor! Conversations with the Academic Advisor are always 100% confidential.
- BioSciences Programme Team: msc.biosciences@rug.nl
- Other standard University of Groningen information systems: *e-mail*, *Progress Portal*, *Ocasys*, etc. In addition, these systems will be explained in [these instructions](#) and upon arrival in Groningen.



Frequently Asked Questions

- **How does the document 'Course Unit Schedule' work?**

The Course Unit Schedule shows all course units that we offer in our programmes, and the time periods in which they are scheduled. Please note that this is the schedule for the duration of one academic year, to be used by first-year and second-year students in the master. The academic year is divided into two semesters, which are divided into two periods of 10 weeks (Period Ia and Ib for Semester I, and Period 2a and 2b for Semester II). During each 10-week period, you can take a maximum of three (consecutive) courses (15 ECTS).

Page 2 of the Course unit schedule document explains the abbreviations. Note the difference between fulltime course units, non-fulltime course units, and special course units:

A) Fulltime course units usually have a study load of 5 ECTS and can be recognized by being scheduled in only 3 or 4 weeks. Examples in the Marine Biology Master's programme are: Principles of Biological Oceanography, Principles of Marine Biology, and Marine Conservation. Of course, one cannot participate in multiple fulltime courses simultaneously.

B) Non-fulltime course units usually have a study load of 5 ECTS and can be recognized by being scheduled for about 5-10 weeks

Use [Ocasys](#) for course unit descriptions and the [time table generator](#) for day-to-day schedules. Don't be misled by these day-to-day schedules of some fulltime course units; They sometimes have only few scheduled lectures, but also in these course units you will be working fulltime, for example because of non-scheduled group assignments, preparing presentations, writing assignments, self-study, etc. More detailed course information is commonly shared by the course coordinator in the respective Brightspace course page.

- **What is the difference between 'Master courses' and 'Elective courses'?**

You can find a list of all available course units in the [Marine Biology Master's Degree programme on Ocasys](#). It is compulsory to include 20 ECTS of programme-topic related course units ('Master courses') in your two-year study programme. The mandatory Master courses for the Marine Biology programme award you with 20 ECTS. Any additional master courses from the list of Compulsory Master course units will count as elective in your programme.

Available course units that are not mentioned on the Master course unit list can only count as 'electives' in your programme (20 ECTS for the research profile). The difference between Master courses and Elective course units is that the latter do not necessarily involve the general topic of your degree programme and are followed to broaden rather than to deepen your knowledge (as Master courses do).

- **Are there any course units that are worth mentioning, because they differ from most other course units?**

Yes, here are the most important ones, see also [Ocasys](#) for more details:

- [Laboratory Animal Science](#) is a course unit that you are only allowed to follow (and must follow) in case you are going to do a research project involving animal experimentation. Before registering for this course, your plans for the first (or second) research project need to be decided.
- [Orientation on non-Academic Careers](#) is a course unit for Master students who want to examine the possibilities of a career outside the academy. This is a non-fulltime course which students usually take while they are doing one of their research projects. In small groups (3-4 students) a case delivered by a company in the Netherlands or a neighbouring country is solved. The case report will be presented to the participating company during an excursion to all participating companies.



- iGEM is a worldwide competition on synthetic biology, in which the RUG partakes every other year. You can receive maximally 20 ECTS of elective study points for participation. Selection takes place during wintertime.

- **Can I choose two course units that are scheduled in the same time period?**

Usually no, because most course units are scheduled as full-time course units, so you won't be able to do something else (or be at a different location), such as following another course unit (full-time or part-time), preparing a colloquium or doing research. However, it is possible to combine a fulltime course unit with a lecture series course unit in which one or two lectures are scheduled during the month.

- **Can I follow a course unit at the same time as the research project?**

Always consult with your supervisor well in advance before planning a course unit! They must approve your plans. In practice, it is usually possible to interrupt a research project to follow a course unit, but if you can avoid doing this then you should. The time that you cannot spend on your research (usually 3 weeks per 5 ECTS course unit) is added to the end of your research project to ensure you earn the required number of ECTS for the project.

- **How should I plan my programme?**

All students start their programme in September with the series of mandatory Master course units. They continue the programme with an additional Master course, elective or essay, and then complete the first year with a research project of 30 or 40 ECTS. We recommend aiming for approximately 60 ECTS in the first year.

- **I plan to follow the SBP track. How should I plan my programme?**

The most logical course of action is to follow the SBP component of the programme in the second year (course units and the SBP work placement with a total of 60 ECTS, from September up to the summer break). You can follow all the other components in the first year: research project (≥ 30 ECTS), Master courses (20 ECTS) and electives (≥ 5 ECTS), which can consist of extra research or course units. You can also plan your colloquium (5 ECTS) at the end of the first year.

- **How long does a research project take?**

A full working week for a research project is 40 hours. One ECTS credit point is equivalent to 28 hours. A research project of 30 ECTS is equivalent to $30 \times 28 = 840$ hours, or 21 weeks (5 months) of full-time work. This amounts to about one complete semester, including holidays. A research project of 40 ECTS is equivalent to 28 weeks, or 6.5 months of full-time work.

- **What happens if I need more time to complete my research project?**

During the Midterm evaluation, which takes place halfway through your research project, you and your supervisor(s) will discuss the progress in the project. In case the scope of the project is larger than anticipated as indicated on your Programme Proposal Form, you can submit an additional request for a complementary research assignment (elective of 5-20 ECTS). When your project takes longer due to circumstances other than additional experiments/workload, contact your academic advisor.

- **How far do I need to plan ahead?**

You do not have to, nor can you, draw up a detailed study plan for your entire Master's degree programme straightaway (see above). Make sure that at the start of the programme you have a rough idea of which study components you might want to follow during the coming two years, and discuss this with your mentor. Hand in the first **Programme Proposal Form** as soon as you know the details of the first research project. Consult with your study mentor when you are filling in the further details and planning of study plan.



- **Can I work on study elements during the summer break?**

This is not prohibited, but your supervisors will tell you whether this is practically feasible. Many research groups will have a few staff members who continue working through the holidays, so there will often be someone present to provide supervision. But first consult with your supervisors on whether this is both possible and feasible. Obviously, if you work on your colloquium you will need supervision, which will not be possible if your supervisor is on holiday leave. Moreover, there are colloquium requirements regarding the minimum number of scientific staff who must be present during your presentation, which will be difficult to arrange in the holiday season.

- **Can I enrol for course units in the Ocasys and follow course units without prior approval via the Programme Proposal Form?**

Yes, you can. For Master courses and Elective courses listed on the [Ocasys](#) page of your degree programme, you do not need permission from the Board of Examiners. For courses that are not listed on this page, you need to obtain permission by submitting a request form that can be found on the Board of Examiners page on the Student Portal.

You cannot enrol for mandatory course units yourself; this will be done for you after submitting the [Degree Confirmation Form](#) before 25 June. You can enrol for elective courses yourself in Ocasys.

- **My academic writing skills are somewhat poor. What can I do about this?**

You will be required to write extensive reports and theses during your Master's degree programme. Many students have trouble finding the discipline to write or achieve the proper level of academic quality in their writing. The Student Service Centre (www.rug.nl/ssc) offers various writing course units and has a thesis support group for students who are having difficulty writing their research project reports. The Faculty of Science and Engineering also has similar thesis support groups; these have the added advantage of a focus on science, instead of the broader focus you will find in the support groups for the students of other faculties. Ask your Academic Advisor for more information if you are interested. Make sure you hold your supervisor responsible for providing good supervision: for example, you could agree to have a short meeting once a week to discuss your progress or to submit draft sections of your writing for the supervisor to assess. You could also ask for a workplace in the department where you could work on fixed days. It can also be stimulating to work together with your fellow students on your theses if you cannot find the discipline to spend whole days behind your computer. Contact the Academic Advisor as soon as possible if you are stuck and cannot find a way out.

- **What should I do if exceptional circumstances arise, such as illness, psychological problems, disability, family circumstances, pregnancy, etc.**

Contact your Academic Advisor as soon as possible. Your personal circumstances will always be treated confidentially; the Academic Advisor will never discuss your situation with others (lecturers, parents, etc.) without your explicit permission. In many cases the academic advisor may be able to help and otherwise they will refer you to another service if you so wish.

If your studies are delayed due to such circumstances, financial compensation may be available via the University's Graduation Fund. It is important that you report the circumstances to an Academic Advisor as soon as possible to be eligible for this fund. If you fail to report or report too late, you will not be compensated.

- **I still have questions after reading all information documents. What should I do?**

Please ask your questions to the Academic Advisor (Maartje Giesbers: academicadvisor.MScBIO@rug.nl), she is happy to help you out. Many incoming students find it quite hard to understand all the information before arriving in Groningen as the programme and environment may be very different from what you are used to in your home country. Please do not worry: before and after arrival in Groningen, we will help you as much as possible, so you will soon understand the most important aspects of the programme, and you will settle in well within our faculty. Good luck and we are looking forward to receiving you!

Abbreviation	Module	Code	Abbreviation	Module	Code
MBS	Academic Skills in Marine Biology	WMMB015-05	Neem Regie	Neem Regie	TEM0110-24
AdvGenEng	Advanced genetic engineering	WMBS006-05	MicroEH	Microbiome in Ecosystem Health	WMBY033-05
Adv Mem	Advanced Membrane Biology	WMBS007-05	Modelling	Practical modelling for biologists	WMBY009-05
Agroecology	Agroecology for Sustainable Landscapes (26-27)	WMEV017-05	Mol. Dyn	Molecular Dynamics	WMB003-05
NM&THR	Nutrition, Metabolism & Translational Health Research	WMBM031-05	MolMEE	Molecular Methods in Ecology and Evolution	WMEV007-05
AdvMicros	Advanced light microscopy	WMBY016-05	MM&ASBio	Molecular Modeling and Analysis in Structural Biology	WMB021-05
AdvPCEcol	Advanced Population & Community Ecology	WMEV008-05	MS	Microbiological safety	WMMP004-01
Adv. Statist.	Advanced Statistics	WMBY018-06	NIOZ	NIOZ-course: www.nioz.nl/marine-masters-en	NA
ASM	Applied Statistics and Machine Learning	WMBM024-05	NBDC	Nutrition, Brain Development and Cognition	WMBM020-05
Eco-farming	Ecology of sustainable farming (27/28)	WMEV009-05	Oceanography	Principles of Biological Oceanography	WMMB003-05
Advances in chemical biology	Advances in chemical biology	WMCH014-05	Orientation on Non-academic Careers	Orientation on Non-academic Careers	WMBY032-05
Adv MamBio	Advanced Mammalian Cell Biology	WMBS022-05	Polar Ecosyst	Polar Ecosystems	WMMB009-05
Behaviour EE	Behaviour, Ecology and Evolution	WMEV003-10	Pop.Genetics	Principles of Populations Genetics in Natural Populations	WMMB005-05
BDAB	Big Data and Applications in Biomedicine	WMBM025-05	ProgC++	Programming C++ for biologists	WMBY010-05
BI&MT	Biophysical Imaging & Manipulation Techniques	WMPH047-05	Prot Enz	Protein and Enzyme Engineering	WMB004-05
Advanced Biocatalysis	Advanced Biocatalysis	WMCH033-05	Res. Prop	Research Proposal Ecology and Evolution	WMEV012-05
BioComp	Practical Computing for Biologists	WMBY008-05	Skills in Science Communication EC	Skills in Science Communication EC	WMCE006-05
Coll.	Colloquium MEME	WMEV001-05	SBP: Science & Policy	Introduction Science & Policy	WMSE002-10
ConsPract	Conservation Ecology Practices	WMEV004-05	SBP: Science & Business	Introduction Science & Business	WMSE001-10
DSB	Data Science in Biomedicine	WMBM023-05	SBP: work placement	Work placement Business and Policy	WMSE003-40
Ecol. Res. Skills	Ecology research skills	WMEV005-10	SkillsBio 1	Skills for Biology 1: Professional Perspectives and Career Orientation	WMBY029-05
Ecosystems shores	Ecosystems Mediterranean Rocky Shores	WMMB010-10	SkillsBio 2	Skills for Biology 2: Quantitative Research Methods	WMBY028-05
EMDA	Evolutionary Medicine Diseases of Affluence	WMBY025-05	Ecology and Ecosystem Sustainability	Ecology and Ecosystem Sustainability	WMEE021-05
EMID	Evolutionary Medicine Infectious Diseases	WMBY024-05	Sustainable Society	Sustainable Society	WMEE020-05
Evol. theory	Evolutionary Theory	WMEV006-05	Synthetic biol. & Systems chem.	Synthetic biology & Systems chemistry	WMCH021-05
EM BM	Electron microscopy of biological macromolecules	WMB011-05	Modelling Energy Systems	Modelling Energy Systems	WMEE025-05
Flyway. Ec	Flyway Ecology 22/23	WMEV010-05	Seq.methods	Next-generation sequencing methods and data analysis	WMB023-05
Gen. EE	Genomics in Ecology & Evolution	WMEV011-08	TBAs	Tropical Biology Association summer field courses	NA
iGEM Competition	International Genetically Engineered Machine competition	WMB013-20	Tools syst	Tools and approaches of systems biology	WMB005-05
Energy, Atmosphere and Resources	Energy, Atmosphere and Resources (EES)	WMEE028-05	Virology	Fundamentals of Virology	WMBY034-05
IntroBR	Introduction to Biomolecular Research	WMB0XX-05	Water management	Transitions in water management	GEMTRWATM
IslandBio	Island Biology	WMEV016-05			
res. methods science and comm	Research Methods in Science Education and Communication	WMCE005-05			
LAS	Laboratory Animal Science	WMBY026-05			
Marine biol.	Principles of Marine Biology	WMMB004-05			
Marine cons.	Marine Conservation	WMMB011-05			
MathBio	Mathematical models for Biology	WMBY031-05			
ModBio	Modelling Complex Biological Systems	WMBY027-05			