I'm writing to you about your application to study the MSc Science Communication in the Department of Animal and Plant Sciences at the University of Sheffield. As you know, the University will be adjusting how it delivers its courses in the autumn to accommodate the social distancing measures required to combat the coronavirus pandemic. The current plans involve a blend of face-to-face teaching in small groups in Sheffield, where social distancing can be maintained, supported by digital delivery. In this email, I'll explain what this will mean for your studies on the Science Communication course.

**Course content**

Most importantly, there's no change to the overall learning outcomes of the course. You'll still learn to communicate science using a variety of different media, gain an advanced understanding of the principles of science communication, and develop a wide range of transferable skills. However, to accommodate the new protocols for the 2020-21 academic year, we have made some adjustments to the structure of your MSc. All modules on this programme are core, and they will all be offered this year. You'll still acquire the advanced knowledge, understanding and academic skills appropriate for a masters-level degree.

**Teaching**

The majority of our teaching comprises seminars and practical skills sessions, and we'll still be using these formats in 2020-21. Teaching will be spread across the usual three semesters (including the summer dissertation), however the first semester will be shortened to 8 weeks with the revised start date for masters courses of Monday 26 October.

For our interactive classes, e.g., practical and small group sessions, we'll be using a combination of face-to-face and digital teaching. You'll have regular, timetabled sessions of both types. The face-to-face sessions will take place in small groups, so that we can use our larger teaching rooms and still maintain social distancing. Our face-to-face teaching has always taken place across the University's campus, and this won't change in 2020-21. It's not possible to social distance in all teaching rooms, so some sessions will be delivered online where it is appropriate to do so. The digital sessions will be live and fully interactive, for example group video meetings and regular drop-ins with staff.

Your project dissertation will run June-August 2021, and we expect by that point to be able to offer a full range of projects including external placements.

Our academic staff will be available as usual for tutorials and other one-to-one meetings. It may not be possible for these sessions to take place in person, but if not you'll be able to make an audio or video call.

**Learning resources**

Most of our learning resources are already available online, and module leads will ensure that all core reading is available via our online learning environment. Our physical libraries
will be open as soon as it’s safe to do so, and our librarians are committed to providing as full a service as possible, taking into account social distancing requirements and all the latest government advice.

**Assessment**

The majority of assessment at masters level is via a range of coursework assignments. These will take place regularly through the year, and will consist of a broad range of submissions. Submissions are already completed and marked online.

**Costs**

The tuition fee for the course will stay the same, and we don’t expect students will incur additional costs as a result of the changes we’re making. You’ll be able to participate in all the online activities using a regular laptop connected to the internet, although you will need a microphone and camera to contribute fully in virtual discussions.

**Further information**

I hope this email has given you an idea of what to expect when you join us in the autumn. As you’ll be aware, this pandemic is a fast-moving and unpredictable phenomenon, and we might need to make further changes as the situation develops and the University responds to updates in public health guidance. Please be assured that we’ll be approaching the next year as a single departmental family of staff and students together, and we’re committed to ensuring that you’re supported, and that you still receive a world-class university education here at Sheffield.

If you have any questions or concerns, please get in touch with our Director of Postgraduate Teaching, Dr Tom Webb at aps-pgt-applicants@sheffield.ac.uk. Please keep looking out for emails from the University and checking our frequently asked questions, which are updated regularly with all the latest developments. We also have some on demand content from our recent online open day which you might find useful.

I hope you enjoy what’s left of the summer, and stay safe.

Best wishes,

Professor Rob Freckleton and Dr Tom Webb
Head of Department and Director of Postgraduate Teaching