I'm writing to you about your application to study in the Department of Biomedical Science 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 MSc course.

Course content

There's no change to the overall learning outcomes of the course. You'll still be able to build on your existing scientific knowledge and practical skills to develop an expertise in the subject area of your MSc course. However, to accommodate the new protocols and new starting date for the 2020-21 academic year, we have made some adjustments to the content and structure of the MSc course.

The core and optional modules remain the same, but additional advice will be given on optional module choice to ensure that you do not put an undue amount of work on yourself and maintain a balance across semesters.

Teaching

As you know, the majority of our teaching comprises lectures, seminars and practicals, and we'll still be using these formats in 2020-21. Teaching will be spread across the usual two semesters, however with a new start date the week commencing Monday 26 October. Note that pre-registration and information sessions will begin the week before that.

It's not possible to social distance in a crowded lecture theatre, so we will be delivering our lecture modules online using a blended format. Blackboard is our dedicated on-line platform that all registered students have access to. Staff will be providing recordings of lectures (lecture captures) for students to review, take notes and digest in their own time. Weekly online interactive support sessions with a lecturer will be timetabled. These interactive sessions allow you to consolidate your learning, and provide an opportunity to submit comments and questions in real time. Some core modules will be taught directly via live sessions on Blackboard, and for some modules you may have a mixture of both approaches with the first half of the lecture pre-recorded, and the second half being a live remote teaching session. The department utilised this approach in the lockdown period of the past academic year, and our students agreed it was an approach that had supported their learning.

We recognise that learning new practical skills is an essential component of your course and most likely one of the main reasons to choose our courses. We have reviewed the content of our practical modules and where social distancing is not possible due to the nature of the practical, we have prepared videos that you will watch in order to gain an understanding of the technique. We have also slightly altered the content of our practicals and prepared our
teaching labs, in order to give you the opportunity to develop experimental skills through face-to-face teaching while maintaining a high level of safety and social distancing. Face-to-face sessions will take place in small groups, so that we can maintain social distancing.

The lab-based project begins in the second semester, runs part-time from February to June to fit around your lecture and practical modules, and full time from June to the end of your course in September. At the moment, we do not anticipate that your research project will be affected by the measures in place in the first semester.

From the moment you begin your course, you will be allocated an academic Tutor who will meet you on a one-to-one basis throughout the year to discuss any issue you may have, ensure that you have used all the support available to plan your career progression and future.

In addition, a number of University-wide services are there to help you in every step of your course, and your academic Tutor will be able to guide if you wish to benefit from this support. It may not be possible for you to meet your academic Tutor in person. 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 this includes the vast majority of recommended reading for our MSc modules. 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**

Most coursework assignments are already completed electronically, and submitted and marked online. We have taken into account the new start date of the course and adjusted some deadlines for submission of coursework assignments. Given the ongoing situation, the exams in the Semester 1 exam period in January / February will be online and in an open book format. We’ll confirm the specific arrangements for semester 1 exams in the individual handbooks you will receive when you join us. At the moment the semester 2 exams are planned to be taken in attendance, although this could change depending on the circumstances.

**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 or tablet connected to the internet, although you may need a microphone and camera to contribute fully in virtual discussions. IT support will be available to any students joining in September 2020 through the central university IT service.

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 Biomedical Science Office team at bmspgadmissions@sheffield.ac.uk. Please also let bmsabsence@sheffield.ac.uk know if you have any medical or personal circumstances that might affect how you're able to participate next year.

Further information

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 PGT on-line open days, which you might find useful. International offer holders can also access the international offer holders hub.

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

Best wishes

Kathryn Ayscough
Head of Department
Biomedical Science