I'm writing to you about your application to study the Polymers for Advanced Technologies MSc programme in the Department of Chemistry 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 in polymer chemistry.

**Course content**

There are no changes to the overall learning outcomes of the course. You will still cover all of the core knowledge and experimental skills that are essential for all students pursuing careers in polymer chemistry, along with topics that allow you to experience the frontiers of the subject, and will develop the wide range of scientific and transferable skills that make Chemists such valuable graduates.

Although we have to accommodate the new protocols for the 2020-21 academic year, all the modules you will study remain the same.

Please rest assured that you will still be studying all the key aspects of polymer chemistry and you will still acquire the knowledge, understanding and skills you will need for future years.

**Teaching**

The majority of our teaching comprises lectures, workshops and practicals, and we will still be using these formats in 2020-21. Teaching will be spread across the usual two semesters and will start the week commencing Monday 26 October.

It is not possible to social distance in a crowded lecture theatre, so we will be delivering much of our material online. Staff will provide recorded lectures for students to follow, take notes and digest in their own time, with the guidance of a schedule provided by the lecturer. These are supported by, eg, written material, online quizzes, further reading, exercises, or whatever best helps to engage you in your learning for that module.

Lecture material will be supported by workshops. It is expected that these will mostly be delivered via a live video link where you will be encouraged to take an active role in developing your understanding of the chemistry with the help of the lecturer.

Our academic staff will be available as usual to answer questions and talk to you about your studies. It may not be possible for these sessions to take place in person, but if not you will be able to make an audio or video call.

You will have a regular programme of practical classes, and we expect to deliver the full amount of laboratory time that we usually offer, allowing you to gain the practical skills you require to be able to be a practising polymer chemist. Chemistry has a strong practical element, and we have made it a priority not to reduce this component of our course.

**Research projects**

An irreplaceable part of any masters programme is the opportunity to develop research skills, and we are committed to delivering the learning outcomes of this part of our study. Current restrictions would mean that students can have access to research labs to do practical research on a carefully timetabled basis. We
would intend to deliver this experience for you, barring changes to the advice on social distancing, however plans are in place to deliver the same learning outcomes by other means if needed.

Learning resources

Most of our learning resources are already available online. 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.

All the software that you might require is either free or a license is provided by the Department/University.

Assessment

Most coursework assignments are already completed electronically, and submitted and marked online.

We're still finalising our plans for exams. At the moment these 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 desktop computer connected to the internet, although you may need a microphone and camera to contribute fully in virtual discussions.

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 us at chemistry-admissions@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.

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

Best wishes

Professor Graham Leggett
Head of Department
Department of Chemistry