I'm writing to you about your application to study the MSc Mathematical and Theoretical Physics programme in the School of Mathematics and Statistics 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 this course.

Course content

There's no change to the overall learning outcomes of the course. You'll still cover all of the key skills and important topics in mathematical and theoretical physics, and a wide range of transferable skills. However, we will not be able to offer the optional "Optics and Symplectic Geometry" component of the Geometry I module. All other modules remain available.

Teaching

The majority of our teaching comprises lectures, tutorials and computer practicals, and we will still be using these formats in 2020–21. Teaching will be spread across the usual two semesters and will start in the week commencing Monday 26 October. It is not possible to maintain appropriate social distance in a crowded lecture theatre, so we will be delivering all our lectures online. Lectures are primarily presentations by one of our subject experts, and online delivery suits the format well. We will provide online video lectures of all the required material for your modules, supported by a range of written material, problem sheets and online quizzes.

For our interactive classes, we will be using a combination of face-to-face and digital teaching, and you will have regular, timetabled sessions of each form. The face-to-face sessions will take place in small groups, so that we can use our larger teaching rooms and still maintain required social distancing. Our face-to-face teaching has always taken place across the University's campus, and this won't change in 2020–21. The digital sessions will be live and fully interactive, for example group video calls.

Our academic staff will be available as usual for tutorials and other one-to-one meetings, and will still hold their regular office hours. 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. 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.

Any software you might require for your studies is either free or a license is provided by the University, and will run on up-to-date windows or Mac OS (and probably linux, although that is not guaranteed).
Assessment

Coursework assignments will be submitted and marked online. This may be written using word processing software (Microsoft Word or LaTeX being the most common), or written and photographed/scanned and submitted as an image.

We’re still finalising our plans for exams, but we won’t be holding formal, invigilated exams in the Semester 1 exam period in January/February. For any modules examined in this period, we will use an 'open book' format instead, where exam questions are made available online and you have a certain amount of time to answer and submit them electronically. During this exam, you will be able to consult your books and notes. The majority of our modules use a mixture of assessment methods, including online quizzes, coursework and exams in the summer exam period.

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 might find you want a headset or separate webcam depending on your setup).

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 Learning and Teaching Support team at mas-support@sheffield.ac.uk. Please keep looking out for emails from the University and checking the University of Sheffield frequently asked questions, which are updated regularly with all the latest developments. For department-specific information, you might also like to view on demand content from our recent PGT on-line open days. 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,
Professor Nick Monk
Head of School
School of Mathematics and Statistics