I'm writing to you about your application to study the Quantum Photonics and Nanomaterials MSc(Res) programme in the Department of Physics and Astronomy 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 obtain proficiency in learning independently, and planning and carrying out an advanced experimental or theoretical project in a research environment in the area of quantum photonic and nanomaterials. You will also acquire an advanced understanding of several aspects of modern physics, in particular quantum mechanics, optics, solid state physics and other related areas as well as 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 content and structure of the MSc(Res) course.

Teaching

Teaching will be spread across the usual two semesters with students starting on Monday 26 October.

It is not possible to socially distance in a crowded lecture theatre, so we'll be delivering much of our material online. This will be a mixture of (usually 10-20) minute videos introducing you to the material with roughly six hours of videos per week covering both your core and optional modules. These are supported by eg, written material, online quizzes, further reading, exercises, or whatever suits that module best. All students will have access to online material.

This will be supported by at least one timetabled interactive class of ~50 minutes per module which will allow you to ask questions, go through derivations, have live interactive quizzes, and do whatever best suits the learning objectives of the module that week. The schedule of your project work in laboratories will be agreed by you and your supervisor and will be optimised in such a way that it is spent on key practical skills. Things like data analysis and report writing can be done on computers either in the university computer labs, or at home.

Our academic staff will be also available as usual to answer questions and talk to you about your studies. It will be possible for these sessions to take place either in person or over email, an audio or video call.

Learning resources

Most of our learning resources are already available online, and this includes all the core reading for our MSc(Res) 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.

All software you might require is either free or a license is provided by the department/university and will run on up-to-date Windows or Mac operating systems (and probably Linux, although that is not guaranteed).
Assessment

Coursework assignments will be submitted and marked online. In many cases they can be written using word processing software (Word or LaTeX being the most common), but for some mathematical work it is easiest for it to be written (neatly) longhand and photographed 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. Most assessment will likely be through some mixture of short reports/essays, online quizzes (eg, multiple choice), or ‘open book’ exams where you have a limited time to complete the assessment (usually a few hours), but have access to your notes, textbooks, and the internet to help you. For each module the assessment methods will be chosen to best match the learning objectives of that course.

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).

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 fast-moving and unpredictable, 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 me at d.krizhanovskii@sheffield.ac.uk.

Learning Support

Please also let either Prof. David Mowbray (d.mowbray@sheffield.ac.uk) or Dr Katherine Inskip (k.inskip@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

Professor Dmitry Krizhanovskii
MSc(Res) Quantum Photonics and Nanomaterials course director
Department of Physics and Astronomy