

I'm writing to you about your successful application to study the BA in Politics and Modern Languages & Cultures 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 BA in Politics and Modern Languages & Cultures.

Preparing for the start of your degree

In the School of Languages & Cultures, we've prepared a [dedicated Intro website](#) for all our students. It will have all the information that you need to get started with your studies at Sheffield. From online registration, live language taster sessions, selecting your modules through to our student societies and arrangements for Intro Week, the SLC Freshers' Site will guide you through induction. Not all the information will be immediately visible on the website, but will progressively become available as we are working towards your registration, module choice and the start of the semester.

Teaching in 2020/21

While our teaching practices have adapted to accommodate social distancing requirements, we're committed to offering high-quality teaching and learning. That won't change and there are no changes to the overall learning outcomes of the course.

In your language studies, you'll still obtain an advanced level of written and spoken proficiency in the languages you choose to study, you will still have the opportunity to develop a detailed and nuanced understanding of the cultures and histories of the countries where those languages are spoken, and you will obtain the same wide range of valuable transferable skills alongside your intercultural awareness and linguistic proficiency.

In the Department of Politics and International Relations, you'll still obtain an advanced understanding of politics and a wide range of transferable skills. However, to accommodate the new protocols for the 2020-21 academic year, the Department has made some adjustments to the content and structure of Level 1. We are happy to report that all the core and optional modules advertised are all running, descriptions of which can be found on our [website](#). However the "Introduction to Global Political Economy" module is moving to semester 2 and the "Introduction to Comparative Politics" module is moving into semester 1.

Teaching will be spread across the usual two semesters and will start the week commencing Monday 28 September.

For 2020-21, we are moving to a 'blended learning' model for all of our courses. This means teaching and learning through a creative mix of study materials prepared in advance and accessible before classes (so-called 'asynchronous' learning), scheduled live online classes (so-called 'synchronous' learning), and some more traditional face-to-face teaching. Through blended learning, we believe we can offer a richer and more inclusive learning environment that allows us to do some things that weren't previously possible when teaching only in a static physical space, such as the traditional lecture theatre.

In terms of languages, Beginners can expect four hours of classes per week, delivered through the blended learning approaches described above. For post-A-level languages, you will have three timetabled hours' language tuition per week taught also via blended learning. The online teaching is delivered through our virtual learning environment (BlackBoard). These digital sessions will be live and fully interactive, for example group video conferencing.

In the Department of Politics and International Relations for our interactive seminars, we'll be using a combination of face-to-face and digital teaching, and you'll 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 social distancing. We have also developed a set of supported independent learning tasks for students to engage in that will give greater depth to their in-class sessions as well as increased opportunities for feedback.

For content modules in both Politics and Languages & Cultures, you will be taught through a similar mix of prepared materials accessed in advance, such as powerpoint presentations, set reading, films and video clips, and scheduled interactive classes online, plus some face-to-face teaching where numbers and teaching space allow.

Staff in the Department of Politics and in the School of Languages & Cultures will be available as usual for personal tutor sessions and other one-to-one meetings, and we will still hold 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, and this includes all the core reading for our Level 1 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

Coursework assignments are already completed electronically, and submitted and marked online. We're still finalising our plans for exams, but we won't be holding formal, invigilated exams in the January/February exam period. It's likely we'll use an 'open book' format instead, where exam questions are made available online and you have a set time to answer them. You'd complete your answers electronically at home, and you'd be able to consult your books and notes. We'll confirm the arrangements for all your assessments in the individual module handbooks you'll receive when you join us.

Fees

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 will need a microphone and camera to contribute fully in virtual discussions. There will be central technical support for all students to ensure that you have the correct working equipment and the know-how to use it effectively in order to make the most of your studies.

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. In the School of English as in the School of Languages & Cultures, we pride ourselves on ensuring that all students are supported, and that is one thing that won't change. We are confident that you will receive a world-class university education here at Sheffield.

If you have any questions or concerns, please get in touch with us via slc-enquiries@sheffield.ac.uk. Please also let us 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 online [applicant open days](#) which you might find useful.

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

Best wishes

Dr Giles Harrington
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School of Languages and Cultures