I'm writing to you about your application to study BA Landscape Architecture (K3K4) in the Department of Landscape Architecture 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 digital delivery combined with face-to-face teaching in small groups in Sheffield, where social distancing can be maintained. In this email, I'll explain what this will mean for your studies on BA Landscape Architecture.

Course content

There's no change to the overall learning outcomes of the course. You'll still obtain a thorough understanding of Landscape Architecture and a wide range of discipline-specific and transferable skills.

Teaching

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

As you know, the majority of our teaching comprises a mix of lectures, tutorials, site visits and practicals and we will be using a blended learning approach, combining online teaching and in-person small group activities, where social distancing can be maintained.

It's not possible to social distance in a crowded lecture theatre, so we'll be delivering all our lectures online. Lectures are primarily presentations by one of our subject experts, and online delivery suits the format well. We've made recorded lectures available online for several years, but in 2020-21 we'll be delivering them live as well, with an opportunity for students to submit comments and questions in real time.

For our interactive classes, 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 on our project sites or our larger teaching rooms on campus, where we can maintain social distancing. The digital sessions will be live and fully interactive, for example group video calls.

Throughout the last semester, we have been using our online learning platform, Blackboard, to act as a virtual studio. Staff have found that studio sessions are possible, with tutors in designated chat rooms and whole group Q&A sessions at the end of the day. Students are able to present their work online during a review session and tutors can draw on and annotate work, in real time, to supplement their verbal feedback.

Reviews can also be enriched by using software that enables individual pieces of work to be displayed together, allowing students to gain inspiration from each others' work as well as presenting a selection of their own work.
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.

Location of teaching

Site-based teaching (teaching students outside in landscape settings) has always been an important part of our teaching and we intend that this will continue, using the government health guidance.

We aim to also use our studios in the Arts Tower for some parts of our course delivery, and especially our small group teaching. This depends on government guidance and the arrangements that can be made to enable the building to be used safely. This is currently being reviewed. Should that not be possible we will be using alternative spaces across the University's campus.

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.

Assessment

Modules will be assessed as normal. All assessments are based on coursework, consisting mainly of practice-based outputs with some written submissions. These are submitted electronically and marked online. There are no exams.

Accreditation

The Landscape Institute has confirmed that changes to delivery unique to the current circumstances will not affect accreditation. Upon graduating, you'll still be eligible to register on the Pathway to Chartership to work towards Chartered membership of the Landscape Institute.

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 will need a microphone and camera to contribute fully in virtual discussions. If you are concerned that you might not be able to afford equipment or have a broadband connection to study remotely, please contact the University's Financial Support Team (financialhelp@sheffield.ac.uk). The University can provide laptops on loan or a grant depending on your circumstances.
You will require access to Blackboard Collaborate for online lectures. The minimum specification to run this can be found here.

Additionally, you may prefer purchasing a computer that is capable of running software used during your course. Our recommended specifications can be found under the 'Compulsory study aids' section on our webpage.

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 Manager Helen Morris at h.morris@sheffield.ac.uk.

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,

Professor Anna Jorgensen
Head of Department
Department of Landscape Architecture