I'm writing to you about your application to study BA Politics (L210) in the Department of Politics and International Relations 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 BA Politics.

**Course content and Teaching**

There's no change to the overall learning outcomes of the course. You'll still obtain an advanced understanding of Politics and International Relations and 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 Level 1. We are happy to report that all the core and optional modules advertised are all running, 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.

As you know, the majority of our teaching comprises lectures and seminars, and we'll still be using these formats in 2020-21. Teaching will be spread across the usual two semesters and will start the week commencing Monday 28 September.

However, in order to ensure suitable social distancing and to protect the welfare of our students we have altered our teaching patterns. 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 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. Our face-to-face teaching has always taken place across the University's campus, and this won't change in 2020-21. We have also introduced a greater diversity of asynchronous content delivery in order to provide students with increased resources to support their learning, along with asynchronous activities for students to engage with to expand their knowledge and skill set. As part of this we have 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.

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, 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 will not be running exams for this academic year, and so will be focusing on an increased variety of coursework assignments.

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.

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, Sarah Moga at s.l.moga@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 Ruth Blakeley
Head of Department
Department of Politics and International Relations