I'm writing to you about your application to study BA Quantitative Social Sciences (L435) in the Sheffield Methods Institute 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 Quantitative Social Sciences.

Course content

There's no change to the overall learning outcomes of the course. You'll still obtain proficiency in data literacy and analysis, an advanced understanding of a range of quantitative methods in the social sciences 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.

The core modules are all the same but we've made some changes to the range of optional modules we'll be offering. Adjusting our teaching methods over the summer, and then delivering the new blended model in the autumn, will place considerable extra demands on our staff's time, and we aren't going to be able to offer all the options we were hoping to. Unfortunately, the module SMI102 Economy, Society and Public Policy (ESPP) won't be running this year. However, a wide range of other modules will still be available to you.

Finally, we've removed the 20 'unrestricted' credits available at Level 1. Because of the challenges of managing module selection during the pandemic, the University has suspended unrestricted credits for 2020-21. In their place, you will be able to select another 20 credit module from the wide range of options across the social sciences as listed in the BA Quantitative Social Sciences regulations. You'll also still be able to choose a foreign language module.

Please rest assured that there will still be a wide selection of modules for you to choose from and you'll still acquire all the knowledge, understanding and academic skills you'll need for Levels 2 and 3.

Teaching

As you may know, the majority of our teaching comprises lectures, seminars and workshops, 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.

It's not possible to social distance in a busy 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 seminars and workshops, 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. 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 always 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.

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 connected to the internet (unfortunately a tablet won't be suitable), and 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.

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 friendly SMI Learning and Teaching team at smi@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 a recent open day which you might find useful.

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

Best wishes

Prof Andrew Dickerson
Head of Department
Sheffield Methods Institute