

Expectations of Teaching and Assessment in Michaelmas Term 2020

This document presents the final version of the Expectations for Teaching in MT20 produced by ESG and confirmed for publication. It is a reflection of emerging practice across the diverse collegiate University, following consultation with divisions, departments, faculties, colleges and the Student Union. It has been reviewed by MCG, Bronze and Silver groups.

Background

In the academic year 20/21 the University aims to offer an educational experience for all students, whether undergraduate or postgraduate, full time or part time, that preserves Oxford's high quality, personalised education. We are committed to maintaining the highest possible standards of education, with a focus on personalised teaching and supervision from leading academics. Our ambition is to offer a flexible and inclusive educational approach which recognises and minimises the effects of barriers to participation, imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, which may be faced by staff and students. This aligns with the expectations set out by the Office for Students¹ to put in place adapted approaches to teaching and assessment that are broadly equivalent to our usual arrangements, such that we can be confident that the outcomes for students are meaningful and reliable whilst protecting the health of staff and students.

Purpose

This document sets out the expectations of departments, faculties and colleges for teaching and supporting learning at the start of the academic year 20/21, assuming that the University is at Business Continuity Level 2 and Department for Education Teaching Tier 1² (i.e. all buildings open but with mitigation measures including physical distancing in place). These expectations may change according to changing national or local circumstances, whether towards more restricted or more normal conditions, as both the term and the academic year proceed. This document will be reviewed on a termly basis.

This has been developed by the Education Steering Group and by the Teaching and Learning Planning Group which reports to it, and which includes student representation. Account has been taken of advice from QAA³, the Review of Teaching and Assessment in Trinity term and detailed planning and assurance activities which have taken place in preparation for the new academic year. This document is available to students and the public and represents practice across the diverse collegiate University following consultation with divisions, departments, faculties, colleges and the Student Union.

Expectations

1. All teaching and assessment will adhere to the latest national and local public health guidance from the government and the University's Health Measures Advisory Group. At

¹ [Guidance on quality and standards during the COVID-19 pandemic](#), Office for Students, (3 April 2020).

² [Higher education: re-opening buildings and campuses](#), UK Gov, (10 September 2020)

³ [Preserving quality and standards through a time of rapid change](#), QAA, (2 June 2020).

the start of the year this includes maintaining two metre physical distancing, enhanced hygiene regimes, and wearing face coverings in University and college buildings (see face coverings [policy](#) for exemptions and exceptions). Staff and students are expected to self-isolate when unwell and to seek testing at the University-provided [testing and early alert service](#). Where students are self-isolating, they will be provided with continued teaching, and academic and welfare support.

2. The necessary levels of teaching resource will be available, augmented by the significant additional resource and staff effort that is being put into flexible and inclusive teaching.

The following describes what academic provision students can expect at the beginning of Michaelmas Term 2020. Departments, faculties and colleges may explain in detail how these expectations align with their plans for the academic year.

- a) Oxford undergraduate and postgraduate education will remain characterised by their personalised approach, with a strong focus on tutorials or supervisions and high levels of personalised feedback and support. We will maintain the usual levels of student engagement with academic teaching staff. Students will have opportunities to discuss their work regularly with tutors or supervisors and will be provided with personalised feedback on it.
- b) Individual and small-group teaching, including smaller classes, seminars, workshops and supervisions, will take place in-person where possible. Where this is not possible, because local logistical or public health restrictions or conditions prevent it or because of the absence or vulnerabilities of either student or tutor, alternatives will be devised using remote methods to ensure that students receive teaching that achieves the same learning objectives as far as possible.
- c) Large-group teaching will generally take place online, through live-streamed lectures and virtual classes, pre-recorded lectures, asynchronous online activities or a mixture of all three. Live-streamed lectures will be recorded and made available to students, and may make use of enhanced tools to encourage interactivity.
- d) Colleges and departments as appropriate oversee the mix of teaching that students receive. If a full time student's teaching is all online, they will have the opportunity, at least fortnightly in term, of a one-to-one academic tutorial or other meeting which could be a teaching or study skills session or a shorter session to discuss academic progress and pastoral matters. Appropriate arrangements will be made for part-time students.
- e) Research students will work as normally as possible in laboratories, libraries and archives, but subject to the restrictions in place at any time. They will interact with their supervisors regularly, but in some cases some or all such meetings may have to take place remotely. Most seminars will take place as usual, but many will be online. Some students will have to restructure their work with the advice of their supervisors, to take account of inaccessible resources.

- f) The virtual learning environment (Canvas for most students) will be the single entry point for course information and teaching materials. Video recordings available from the Replay service will have automated captions added as standard.
 - g) University, departmental and college libraries will be accessible in a number of ways. Opening-hours and reading-spaces are subject to restrictions, but slots for reading can be booked in many libraries. Scan-and-deliver and click-and-collect services will supplement access to reading-material, alongside increased availability of online resources. Academic staff will review reading-lists and work with the library service to enable all students to have access as far as is possible to the necessary reading.
 - h) There will be opportunities to engage in practicals and laboratories although capacity may be reduced, times may be staggered or scheduled for later in the year. We will ensure that the practical component meets any requirements for professional or external accreditation where necessary.
 - i) Field work trips will go ahead, where possible, with enhanced risk assessments in place. Trips may take place in smaller groups, be delayed into later in the year or be conducted remotely.
 - j) Year-abroad and other placements will go ahead, where possible, with enhanced risk assessments in place. Where this is not possible virtual alternatives will be provided. A student will not be required to take up a year abroad or other placement against their wishes: alternative arrangements will be devised as appropriate on a case by case basis, taking into account the intended learning outcomes of the course. In some courses, some options or papers which rely on placements will not be offered this year.
 - k) Assessment of all courses will maintain the rigour of Oxford degrees, but will adapt to limited capacity for invigilated examinations and other Covid-induced restrictions.. Candidates will usually be expected to complete the same number of papers or assessments as usual. Most exams in Michaelmas Term will be online; invigilated closed-book examinations will be reserved for those assessments which would be negated by an open-book format or are required to be invigilated by an external regulatory body.
 - l) Dissertations or project work will involve the same volume of work and intellectual rigour, and the same level of academic support, as normal. But projects may have to be designed (and ongoing ones redesigned) to account for the inaccessibility of some resources, such as archives or laboratories. For students carrying out their work in a research group, efforts will be made to substitute the day-to-day research environment through weekly online group meetings, social media groups or similar mechanisms, as appropriate.
3. Support and welfare services will be available to students in residence and those starting remotely. Full IT support remains available to students – this includes access to university email, VLEs, web services and licensed software. The Careers Service remains

available and has increased its provision of 1 to 1 sessions to discuss careers matters with students in all years. Counselling, disability advice and other welfare support remains available and have been enhanced by the University's launch of the [Togetherall online support system](#). New study skills resources specific to studying remotely will be available on Canvas.

4. Students will be notified by their departments of any planned and possible changes to their course in a clear and timely manner. This should take into account the information that has already been provided for [students and offer holders](#)
5. In the event that government restrictions are eased, teaching and assessment in Michaelmas Term will continue as already planned rather than to risk introducing further disruption part way through the term. In the event that government or local restrictions become more severe or local conditions require it, departments/faculties, colleges and support services are preparing contingency plans which can be enacted in the event of a loss of a significant period of in-person teaching, so that we can switch quickly to remote teaching for individuals or entire cohorts. This may include moving elements of courses which are difficult to replicate remotely to later terms (which may be extended) or years of study or obtaining approval for contingent changes such that some course elements are no longer required for students to progress.
6. As a public body, the University has an active duty to consider the impact on equality in all decision making. The steps that we have taken to provide flexible and inclusive teaching in Michaelmas term embody many of the principles of inclusive education intended to eliminate attainment gaps for students with disabilities and for under-represented groups, such as providing recordings of lectures and the introduction of a service to convert files into a wide range of digital and accessible file formats.