

Expectations of teaching and assessment in Hilary Term 2021

This document presents the final version of the Expectations for Teaching in HT21 produced by ESG and confirmed for publication. It is a reflection of practice across the diverse collegiate University, following consultation with divisions, departments, faculties, colleges and the Student Union and building on our experiences in Michaelmas term. It has been reviewed by HTCG, 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 Hilary Term, assuming that the University is at Business Continuity Level 3 and Department for Education Teaching Tier 3² (i.e. limited on-site activity permitted where it cannot be undertaken remotely). 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.

The Hilary Term 2021 statement has been developed by the Education Steering Group. It continues to take account of advice from QAA³ whilst having been updated to incorporate the consequences of the latest Department for Education guidance⁴, and local business continuity and assurance activities which have taken place. 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.

¹ [Guidance on quality and standards during the COVID-19 pandemic](#), Office for Students, (28 January 2021).

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).

⁴ [Students returning to, and starting higher education, in spring term 2021: guidance for higher education providers](#), (January 2021).

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 and to local risk assessments. Special arrangements are in place for students in Oxford. These 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. In-person teaching and assessment can only be made available for a limited number of courses permitted under government guidance. For all other students, teaching and assessment will be online. In order to provide certainty, sought by staff and students, teaching and assessment in Hilary Term will continue as described, minimising further disruption part way through the term. However, should there be significant change to current government restrictions on travel and in-person teaching then these plans will be reviewed.
3. The necessary levels of teaching resource have been augmented by the significant additional resource and staff effort that is being put into flexible and inclusive teaching.
4. We are committed to supporting all students during the pandemic, given the disruption faced by all. All students, at all levels of study, are encouraged to maintain a contemporaneous log of disruption to their studies caused by the pandemic (e.g. period of illness, disruption caused by periods of self-isolation, any restrictions on access to resources) so that they have a record to hand if they wish to submit a Mitigating Circumstances notice to Examiners (MCE). The MCE process allows students to make examiners aware of anything related to the pandemic that may have affected learning, revision, coursework submissions and examinations, alongside any personal circumstances which may have had a substantial impact on their academic performance.

The following describes what academic provision students can expect at the beginning of Hilary Term 2021. 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 and flexible focus on tutorials or supervisions and high levels of personalised feedback and support. We will endeavour to 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) All 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. Video recordings available from the Replay service will have automated captions added as standard.

- c) 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. All seminars will take place online. Some students will have to restructure their work with the advice of their supervisors, to take account of inaccessible resources. Processes are in place to apply for funding extensions and hardship support, depending on current funding arrangements. Research students who unable to work on their research at all due to the impact of coronavirus, can apply to suspend their status.
- d) The virtual learning environment (Canvas for most students) will be the single entry point for course information and teaching materials.
- e) Libraries will prioritise remote and low-contact services including increased availability of online resources. Opening hours and study spaces are subject to restrictions, but seats can be booked in several libraries and print collections can also be accessed through scan & deliver and click & collect services. 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. Capacity for study space is growing during the term with library spaces being augmented by spaces in departmental buildings. Service updates are regularly posted on the Bodleian Libraries website.
- f) Practicals and laboratories may be adapted for online learning or scheduled for later in the year. We will ensure that the practical component meets any requirements for professional or external accreditation where necessary.
- g) Field work trips may be delayed into later in the year or be conducted remotely. Where they are able to go ahead, they are subject to enhanced risk assessments.
- h) Year-abroad and other placements, primarily within the Faculty of Medieval and Modern Languages, 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.
- i) Assessment of all courses will maintain the rigour of Oxford degrees. Candidates will usually be expected to complete the same number of papers or assessments as usual. With the exception of one medical exam, all exams in Hilary Term will be taken online or converted to alternative assessment. Alternative arrangements will

be put in place for students taking the one in-person medical exam who are self-isolating. The University has outlined a comprehensive package of mitigation measures, designed to ensure all students receive fair grades, in light of this year's exceptional circumstances.

- j) Dissertations or project work will be adapted for the context such they involve the same intellectual rigour, and the same level of academic support, as normal. Some 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.
5. 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](#).
 6. Support and welfare services will be available to students in residence and those studying 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 online sessions to discuss careers matters with matriculated students in all years. Counselling, disability advice and other welfare support remains available and has been enhanced by the University's launch of the [Mental Health Task Force](#) and [Togetherall online support system](#). [Study skills resources](#) specific to studying remotely are available on Canvas.
 7. 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 Hilary 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.