

## **Expectations of teaching and assessment in Michaelmas Term 2021**

Last updated 24 September 2021

*This document presents the Expectations for Teaching in MT21 produced by Education Steering Group 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 the previous academic year. It has been reviewed by Bronze and Silver groups.*

### **Background**

Throughout the pandemic we have committed to maintaining the highest possible standards of education with a focus on personalised teaching and supervision from leading academics. As we learn to live with COVID-19 and government restrictions on teaching are removed, the collegiate University aims to offer an educational experience which maximises in-person teaching for students in Oxford, alongside continuing to offer options for students who are unable to attend. We will also have contingency plans in place to cope with changing circumstances.

Building on our experiences over the last year, our educational approach for all students, whether undergraduate or postgraduate, full time or part time, will be to return to in-person teaching as much as possible, while retaining online content which is valued by students as inclusive<sup>1</sup>. We are continuing to develop Oxford's flexible and inclusive educational approach which recognises and minimises the effect of barriers to participation through investment in technologies to support learning in and beyond the classroom, offer a variety of assessment types and improve the accessibility of digital resources.

### **Purpose**

This document sets out the expectations of departments, faculties and colleges for teaching and supporting learning at the start of the 2021/22 academic year, assuming that the University is at Business Continuity Level 1 and Department for Education Teaching Tier 1<sup>2</sup>. The assumptions are that all UK students will be able to return for in-person teaching, most international students will be able to travel for the purposes of higher education (with the potential for ongoing red-list restrictions and quarantine requirements in some cases), on-site working will be routine, and there is no legal requirement for social distancing. 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. Account has been taken of advice from QAA and detailed planning and assurance activities which have taken place in preparation for the start of the academic year. This document is available to students and the public and represents practice across the diverse collegiate University following

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<sup>1</sup> See [Blended Learning at Russell Group universities](#), Russell Group, 13 August 2021

<sup>2</sup> [Emergency response stages](#), University of Oxford

consultation with divisions, departments, faculties, colleges, the Disability Advisory Service and the Student Union.

## Expectations

1. In line with the latest Government guidance<sup>3</sup> we are not expecting any legal requirements for social distancing, allowing Oxford's educational approach to return to predominantly in-person teaching. Learning from experiences during the pandemic, in-person teaching will be enhanced by high-quality online resources and, in some instances supplemented by online teaching. We will also have contingency plans if additional restrictions are in place or if local circumstances make this necessary.
2. 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. [The University's guidance for face coverings](#) is that students need not wear face coverings in smaller group teaching, seminars and classes but are encouraged in larger group settings and in crowded or less well-ventilated spaces, and are required in teaching spaces on hospital sites. Students should take a Covid test prior to travelling to university and take two Lateral Flow Device (LFD) tests three to four days apart on arrival. Thereafter [staff and students are expected to take two LFD tests a week](#), reporting results to the NHS and the Oxford University Early Alert Service. Where students are expected to quarantine (after travel) or self-isolate, they will be provided with continued teaching, and academic and welfare support.
3. The necessary levels of teaching space and resource will be available, augmented by the significant additional resource and staff effort that has been put into flexible and inclusive teaching.
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 include the educational details of the contingency planning framework, potential changes that may be made to educational provision and how these changes would be triggered. This should take into account the [information that has already been provided for students and offer holders](#).
5. The following describes the academic provision that students can expect at the beginning of Michaelmas Term 2021. Departments, faculties and colleges may explain in detail how these expectations align with their plans for the academic year.
  - a) Oxford's 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. Most teaching will take place in-person as normal including tutorials, seminars, laboratories, practicals and smaller classes. Large lectures may be online or in-person, with smaller scale lectures normally taking place in-person. All students in Oxford can expect some in-person teaching and this may include some students joining remotely.

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<sup>3</sup> [Higher education COVID-19 operational guidance](#), UK Gov, (17 August 2021)

- b) Fieldwork and overseas research study trips will go ahead, subject to the level of government restrictions applied to international travel, with enhanced risk assessments in place. Trips may take place in smaller groups, be delayed into later in the year or be conducted remotely.
- c) Year-abroad and other placements will go ahead, where possible, with enhanced risk assessments in place. Where this is not possible, virtual resources will be provided. A student will not be required to take up a year abroad or other placement where substantive reasons prevent them from taking up placements. In such cases 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.
- d) 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 exceptional cases some or all such meetings may have to take place remotely. Some students will have to restructure their work with the advice of their supervisors, to take account of inaccessible resources.
- e) Online content which students value as inclusive will be retained. This will normally include digital versions of teaching materials, reading lists and a way of contacting a supervisor/tutor. Lecture recordings will continue to be offered where facilities allow and [pre-recorded content and recordings from previous years may also be made available](#). Recordings available from the Replay service will have automated captions added as standard. The virtual learning environment (Canvas for most students) will be the single entry point for course information and teaching materials.
- f) Where a student has been granted a residency dispensation due to Covid related restrictions, they should discuss their options with their department (and where applicable their college) so they can decide what is best for them depending on their individual circumstances. If it is agreed they can study remotely, then colleges and departments as appropriate will oversee the mix of teaching that the student receives. In such cases taught students will be offered at least fortnightly in term, 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 or those conducting research projects out of term time. This would also apply where a course needs to be taught primarily online this year.
- g) University, departmental and college libraries will be accessible in a number of ways. Opening-hours and reading-spaces will be available as near as normal, with contingency measures in place if required. Scanning services will supplement access to reading-material, alongside increased availability of online resources and online support. 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) Assessment of all courses will maintain the rigour of Oxford degrees with candidates expected to complete the same volume of papers or assessments as usual. Assessments take many forms and may be conducted as in-person invigilated examination; online open book examinations; coursework submissions; oral examinations; and performances. Departments will at the beginning of the academic year inform students of the assessments taking place and what format they will be in. In the event that the pandemic will restrict in-person examinations, departments have in place contingency plans which may include the move to online open book format.
  - i) Dissertations or project work will involve the same level of intellectual rigour and of academic support, as normal. In exceptional cases, projects may have to be designed (and ongoing ones redesigned) to account for the inaccessibility of some resources, such as archives or laboratories.
6. Support and welfare services will be available to students in residence and those starting remotely, self-isolating or in quarantine. Full IT support remains available to students – this includes access to university email, VLEs, web services and licensed software. The Careers Service will offer online and in-person versions of its wide range of services and will adjust the proportions to match demand. Michaelmas term 2021 will see most services and programmes online, including careers fairs, student consultancy, Introduction to..., panel discussions, micro-internships, and 1:1 sessions with Careers Advisers. Some small group workshops may run in person. Counselling, disability advice and other welfare support remain available in a mixed model (online and in-person) and have been enhanced by the University’s launch of the [Mental Health Task Force](#) and [Togetherall online support system](#).
  7. A new package of [academic transition support](#) for undergraduate students newly arriving in 2021/22 is being introduced, in response to the considerable disruption they have experienced to their schooling and learning due to the pandemic. This provides a single destination to access the academic support available from the University, departments and colleges.
  8. In the event that government or local restrictions become more severe or local conditions require it, departments/faculties, colleges and support services have contingency plans which can be enacted so that teaching can continue with social distancing in place. This may include moving some lectures and large classes online, repeating practical sessions in smaller group, rescheduling sessions to later in the year or offering online versions
  9. 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 through the pandemic embody many of the principles of inclusive education intended to eliminate awarding gaps for students with disabilities and for under-represented groups. However, it will continue to be important for colleges, departments and faculties to monitor the impact of any changes to teaching and assessment.