

University of Cambridge

**GENERAL BOARD'S EDUCATION COMMITTEE**

<b>Item: Preparations for Michaelmas Term 2021</b>
<b>Date of Committee meeting: 19 May 2021</b>
<b>Author:</b> [REDACTED]
<b>Brief description:</b> <p>This paper describes expectations of how taught and research courses will be delivered in Michaelmas Term 2021 based on a current understanding of public health requirements, and reflects recent changes to restrictions that the government has gradually lifted since January 2021.</p> <p>Colleagues should be alert to the need to revise our expectations and plans for the next academic year if new public health restrictions are introduced, for instance, if new Covid-19 variants become a greater public health risk.</p>
<b>The General Board's Education Committee is asked to:</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Approve</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Comment <input type="checkbox"/> Note <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please state...)
<b>Report contents and attachments list:</b> n/a
<b>Other comments:</b>
<b>Suggested contextual reading:</b> Cited in the paper



## DRAFT Michaelmas Term 2021

This paper describes expectations of how taught and research courses will be delivered in Michaelmas Term 2021. It is based on a current understanding of what public health requirements might be at the start of the academic year, and reflects recent changes to restrictions that the government has gradually lifted since January 2021. It is envisaged that Covid-19 case numbers will continue to decline in response to the roll-out of current vaccines. Colleagues should be alert to the need to revise our expectations and plans for the next academic year if new public health restrictions are introduced, for instance, if new Covid-19 variants become a greater public health risk.

The position will be reviewed in Michaelmas Term before any decisions about the delivery of teaching and assessments in Lent and Easter Terms are made.

Plans for the next academic year build on the successes of the Collegiate University's health and safety measures to manage Covid cases and limit the health risks to staff and students since March 2020. These successes are due to:

- The high level of participation in asymptomatic testing among students
- The University's symptomatic testing programme for staff and students
- The high level of support for, and cooperation with, health measures among staff and students
- The flexibility, adaptability and creativity of staff and students to teach and learn in changing circumstances.

The establishment of expectations and principles for the delivery of education reflects the approach taken in summer 2020 to announce to students ahead of the new academic year the nature of education they can expect at Cambridge under current conditions. This enables the University to:

- Plan with some confidence for Michaelmas Term.
- Manage students' expectations
- Meet our responsibilities under consumer law to inform offer holders of changes to advertised courses.

Similar statements were issued during summer 2020<sup>1, 2</sup>.

## Principles for delivering education in Michaelmas Term 2021

1. **Cambridge will welcome students into residence next academic year.** We look forward to welcoming new and continuing students to Cambridge in the Michaelmas Term and we are committed to offering them the fullest possible educational and student experience.
2. **The academic year will start at the normal time and term dates remain unchanged.** Michaelmas Term will start on Tuesday 5 October and end on Friday 3 December, although some postgraduate courses may start earlier and end later than this as

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cam.ac.uk/coronavirus/news/statement-made-by-the-university-and-colleges-of-cambridge-sent-to-all-students-at-the-university-by>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.cam.ac.uk/coronavirus/news/message-for-students-from-professor-graham-virgo-academic-year-2020-21-further-information>

previously advertised. New and returning undergraduate and postgraduate students may need to be flexible in their travel plans at this stage to allow, for example, for a staggered return to residence; more advice about arrangements for the start of term will follow in July.

3. **All full-time students will be expected to be in Cambridge for the start of the academic year**, subject to the restrictions imposed by the need for a possible arrival of students at University and any unforeseen difficulties travelling to Cambridge. This principle recognises that students who may have studied remotely during the previous academic year because of their increased susceptibility to infectious diseases have likely since been vaccinated.<sup>3</sup> Students that are overseas and at increased susceptibility to infectious diseases who are not yet fully vaccinated and so unable to travel may request temporary permission to study remotely. International students experiencing difficulties travelling to Cambridge, for example as the result of travel bans, may request temporary permission from their College or Faculty/Department as appropriate to study remotely, and will be enabled to do so. The need to self-isolate on arrival in the UK will not be accepted as a valid reason for seeking permissions to study remotely. More advice on permissions to study remotely for students currently overseas will follow.
4. **Teaching will be delivered by a blend of in-person and online teaching, with in-person teaching increasing as restrictions ease.** Teaching staff will continue to adapt course delivery, timetables and locations to provide this blended approach. The balance of this blended delivery will be informed by the size of classes and classrooms, any social distancing requirements in place at the time<sup>4</sup>, and the safety of staff and students. The teaching of seminars, practicals and supervisions in person will take place wherever possible, subject to risk assessments. In Michaelmas Term, large lectures will continue to be delivered online and recorded.<sup>5</sup> Guidance will be provided about use of previously recorded lectures. If large-scale lecturing in person becomes permissible, the University will reintroduce it as soon as possible.
5. **Students will be given full access to learning facilities**, including laboratories, libraries and museums, wherever possible, with appropriate safety measures in place to enable this to happen
6. **Full-time research students** will be expected to be in Cambridge and will be given access to University facilities wherever possible. Exceptions will continue to be made on a temporary basis for students overseas who face difficulties travelling to Cambridge. The need to self-isolate on arrival in the UK will not be accepted as a valid reason for seeking permissions to study remotely.
7. **Minimising risk:** the University and colleges will continue to risk assess buildings and activities on an ongoing basis and as and when government advice and restrictions change. Students can expect to find cleaning regimes in place and where necessary restrictions to the volume of people allowed to gather in small indoor spaces. In some areas students will be expected to wear masks unless they have a medical reason not to do so. We will continue to promote health and infection control measures across the

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<sup>3</sup> This position will be reviewed if new Covid variants cause public health concerns for those already vaccinated.

<sup>4</sup> It is anticipated that social distancing of at least 1 metre may be necessary in University centrally-managed buildings.

<sup>5</sup> Staff are expected to record lectures but exceptions are permitted where the content of the session would risk the safety or security of students or staff.

University, and communicate and implement changes to any of these measures resulting from local-lockdown requirements as required.

8. **Quarantine:** full-time students that need to quarantine upon their arrival in the UK will be given guidance as to how this will operate.
9. **Support:** Alongside teaching, Colleges are committed to providing a welcoming home environment and pastoral support to their students, complemented by the University's centralised student support including the University Counselling Service, Disability Resource Centre, Careers Service, support for mature students, student parents and care leavers. These services will continue to be provided, either in person where risk assessments permit, or via real time face-to-face technology. For more information on our welfare support, see <https://www.studentwellbeing.admin.cam.ac.uk> and your own College's website.

The University will issue a further statement to current and prospective students by the end of July to confirm if any course changes are necessary during the next academic year. Current and prospective students will be notified of any course changes through our established processes as set out in the Terms of Admission (undergraduates) and contractual terms (postgraduates). Colleges will also provide more detailed guidance about returning to Cambridge and the practicalities of student life by September.

**GBEC members are asked to advise on the appropriateness of these principles. In particular, they are asked to consider**

1. **Principle 2, the start of the academic year and term dates, given disruption to A-level education in the last two years, and if and how this might prompt changes to undergraduate student induction particularly as regards Freshers' week and the possible introduction of a re-Freshers' week.**
2. **Principle 3, the implications of a staggered start to the term and matters that would need to be considered**
3. **Principle 3, the expectation that all students should be in Cambridge with few exceptions, including the expectation that students with increase susceptibility to infectious disease would be fully vaccinated by the start of the next academic year.**
4. **Principle 3, to whom full-time students apply for permission to study remotely: It is proposed**
  - a. **Undergraduate students (inc. integrated masters students) – apply to colleges**
  - b. **Postgraduate students, apply to relevant Faculty/Department**
5. **Principle 3, whether any increase in the cost of travel alone would be considered an acceptable reason for requesting remote study**

## **Recorded lectures**

Principle 4 permits the recording of lectures and follows the approach to online lectures in 2019/20. Note that in October 2020 GBEC approved a clarifying statement on recording

lectures which made it a requirement for the academic year with only a small number of exceptions<sup>6</sup>.

We note that some staff will want to re-use lectures from last year. We propose that this might be acceptable in Michaelmas Term if complemented by other modes of non-recorded teaching but that GBEC should revisit policy on recorded lectures.

**GBEC members are asked to discuss and advise on the re-use of recorded lectures, including any quality implications.**

**GBEC members are asked whether, should it become safe to host large lectures, they should continue to be recorded.**

### **Online courses**

GBEC previously permitted some non-matriculated and non-degree courses to be delivered wholly online on a temporary basis for 2019/20. These courses included undergraduate and postgraduate certificates and diplomas, and some short credit-bearing courses, run principally at the Institute of Continuing Education, the Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership and the Faculty of Education. The Education Quality and Policy Office has received a request that this permission be extended for a further year given both a) the ongoing public health restrictions and uncertainty, b) that the courses concerned are exempt from residency requirements, c) that they were successfully delivered online in 2020/21.

**GBEC members are asked to approve the extension of temporary permission for these courses to be delivered online-only for a further year in 2021/22.**

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.educationalpolicy.admin.cam.ac.uk/supporting-students/policy-recordings/clarifying-statement-recording-lectures>