

30 September 2020

Dear PBS Undergraduates,

Before you start in Cambridge next week we wanted to welcome you, and let you know a little of what to expect from your course given the current COVID crisis.

When the crisis began in March we activated our emergency “Silver Team”, which is composed of the Head and Deputy Heads, as well as other individuals related to education, research and health and safety. With guidelines set by Silver Team we have worked very hard over the summer to adapt our PBS courses and teaching methods for the current situation. We are very grateful to our PBS student reps for taking soundings from students about our proposed teaching plans. We gained a lot of insights from the student perspective in this consultation, which we used to improve our plan. Some of the decisions we have had to make require some challenging trade-offs, although we hope others may have additional benefits (for example, studies show that students often prefer the flexibility offered by lectures being on-line). With all decisions we have had to carefully balance our responsibility to educate you all, with the equally weighty responsibility for everyone’s health and safety (students and staff). The situation is also a dynamic one, in which circumstances can change within a few weeks – or even days. Under the direction of our Silver Team we have devised procedures which we hope are robust to changing circumstances (such as a potential outbreak of COVID in Cambridge). Nevertheless, we are keeping everything under regular review and can change the procedures we have in place if circumstances allow during the course of the academic year.

We will be introducing some new channels of communication to ensure we are responsive to your concerns as this dynamic situation develops. These will include new termly catch up sessions with the teaching leadership teams, new mid-termly surveys of your learning experience, and a new dedicated email address for any student to make suggestions for improving our online teaching provision at any time. We will also be setting up new platforms for you to interact more with each other online, including a dedicated ‘Microsoft Teams’ group for each year group, and new termly ‘Life After PBS’ events with PBS alumni. We also look forward to working with your year group representatives this year to find ways of making your experience this year as

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rewarding as possible. Our PBS year reps will be particularly important this year, so do consider volunteering. You will hear more about all of this at your inductions next week.

Being Cambridge, a major aspect of your course will be the supervisions organised by your Colleges. Colleges have also been working hard to develop their protocols, and this is where opportunities for face-to-face teaching (when agreed by both student and academic) will arise. In line with previous announcements from the Vice Chancellor, we have determined that no face-to-face large group or class teaching can take place within the department's own buildings. This decision reflects the difficulties in achieving social distancing for a larger number of people within our old buildings with narrow corridors and restricted spaces. While this means that the Psychology library will not be directly accessible, we have put in place a click and collect system allowing you to order books from the library online and collect them from reception. These arrangements will remain under review for subsequent terms as the COVID crisis develops.

Our policies for Part II projects follow guidelines set by the British Psychological Society (BPS), which advises that students should not directly test human (or other animal) participants. Instead, we are offering a range of other possibilities such on-line experiments and existing data set analysis, which are reflected in the varied list of projects for Part II students. We are working on COVID safe spaces for Part II Research Dissertation/Project supervisions (where all parties are happy to meet in person) and details will be provided to Part II students at inductions next week.

We look forward to seeing you all next week!

Professor Mark Johnson, Head of Department
Dr Kate Plaisted, Deputy Head of Department, Teaching
Dr Lee de-Wit, Director of the PBS Tripos