

Covid-19 and course delivery: information for 2021 entrants

Since March 2020, the whole of civil society has had to adapt to the Covid-19 public health emergency. In the higher education sector, most teaching has been delivered online for over a year, and we have gained considerable experience in making the best use of the resources at our disposal. At the same time, the wider collegiate university has greatly expanded the online materials available for student learning. Building History students have been understandably frustrated by the enforced changes but have reacted favourably to the quality of the online teaching provided. At the time of writing, there is a broad consensus that the pandemic is receding, but significant risks and uncertainties remain. This note gives you a sense of our expectations for the year ahead.

Our intention is to run the MSt in Building History as near normally as the conditions permit. This means that teaching will be in person wherever possible, and that site visits will resume (students from the current cohort, who have been prevented from visiting sites, may also take part). We will continue to be guided by rules and advice issued by Government and by the university at large for as long as Covid-19 is considered a significant risk to health. Some aspects of the physical environment may be different from pre-pandemic conditions, for example, if social distancing continues to be required. Some lecturers may be more vulnerable than others and reluctant to travel, in which case they may give their lectures online. It is possible that some site visits will be impractical and that others will need to be substituted. If the public health environment deteriorates substantially, we may need to move all teaching online temporarily. If so, we have the experience of the past year to fall back on, and the confidence that we have a well-established system and tailored materials, including 'virtual visits', to ensure that the quality of learning is not impaired.

Of necessity, the experience of the past year has equipped us with a wide range of online teaching resources. Many of these, such as the virtual visits, can now be made available for reference, providing additional layers of study material to which students can refer. We will also continue to use web-conferencing platforms judiciously wherever it enhances learning opportunities or offers real practical benefits.

In this way, digital materials will help support, but not replace, in-person learning. For practical reasons, we will not offer the course online if, as intended, we are delivering it in person, and we will only move teaching online if this is unavoidable. You must therefore be available to attend all the timetabled sessions in Cambridge.

Finally, we urge you to be confident that we and the Faculty of Architecture and History of Art within which we operate, as well as the wider collegiate university, will continue to make every effort to maintain the high quality of student learning which you would expect from Cambridge, and to promote the most effective teaching methods while maximising the range of digital learning resources to support them. We all aim to ensure that your learning experience remains rich and fulfilling.