

Message from Professor Robin Mason – Pro-Vice-Chancellor (International)

Thank you to those who have already been in touch with the Study Abroad Team, and Exchange Tutors about arrangements for your study abroad in the academic year 2020/21; and for your patience while we worked through options for all of you due to study overseas next year.

As mentioned in the last update, I convened a group before Easter to consider options for students due to undertake study abroad in 20/21. Two of the key principles that guided the group's work are:

- Student mobility is to be supported and encouraged, to the extent that this is possible.
- Students should be given options, to the extent that this is possible.

The group's aim was therefore to provide a series of options and recommendations to allow students to gain an international experience during their studies, while recognising the unprecedented constraints placed on study and travel overseas currently imposed through COVID-19. This letter updates you on those options, which were approved on Monday 11 May by the University's Executive Board.

As I am sure you are aware, the situation for study abroad in 2020/21 remains highly uncertain due to reasons outside of our control. The latest FCO guidance advises British nationals against all non-essential international travel for an indefinite period. While the situation may change, there remains a good chance that physical mobility will not be available for semester one for at least some of our students. Some partners have told us already that they are postponing/cancelling mobility for semester one; others have already indicated that they will be opening up courses online to exchange students.

In outlining options for you, we have therefore taken as the central scenario that physical mobility is unlikely to be available in semester one. We have also considered the nature of your individual degree programme and studies in order to provide as broad a range of options as possible while taking into account specific programme requirements.

Programmes with study abroad fall into one of two sets:

- **Set A** programmes have a compulsory year abroad as part of the programme; and in some cases, the final year of study requires there to have been a prior year abroad. For programmes in Set A, there is no programme without a study abroad element, to which a student can transfer.
- **Set B:** All other programmes with study abroad fall into Set B.

The current list of set A programmes is given at the end of this letter.

We are now asking you to:

- **Check which set your programme falls into and refer to the options (described below) for that set.**
- **Discuss these options as a next step with your department.**
- **Indicate your preferred option [by completing this online form](#) by **Friday 5th June 2020**.**

Each option bears a set of dependencies and implications, and it is for this reason that you must discuss your choice with your department and gain their approval for your choice. **Your department will be in contact with you shortly to start this discussion.**

SET A

If your programme falls within Set A, the options we are now asking you to decide upon for the academic year 2020/21 are as follows:

- Option 1:** **Continue:** you opt to undertake virtual (online) mobility in semester 1 (if physical mobility is not possible), followed by physical mobility in semester 2 (or whenever this becomes possible).
- Option 2:** **Defer:** you choose to take a leave-of-absence for the academic year 2020/21, return to your studies in 2021/22 and go abroad for a full year in 2021/22 (assuming this is then an available option).

SET B

For academic year 2020/21, Options for Set B programmes are:

- Option 1:** **Continue:** you opt to undertake virtual (online) mobility in semester 1 (if physical mobility is not possible), followed by physical mobility in semester 2 (or whenever this becomes possible).
- Option 2:** **Invert:** you choose to undertake your final year studies in Birmingham in the forthcoming academic year 2020/21, and then undertake your year abroad studies in the academic year 2021/22. In this option, you will graduate in summer 2022.
- Option 3:** **Cancel:** you choose to transfer to an equivalent programme without study abroad. (For instance, if you are registered on BA Political Science with a Year Abroad, you can choose to revert to BA Political Science.) In this case, you will progress directly to your Final year in 2020/21 and graduate in summer 2021.
- Option 4:** **Defer:** you choose to take a leave-of-absence for the academic year 2020/21, return to your studies in 2021/22 and go abroad for a full year in 2021/22, before progressing to final year in 2022/23.

We also know that a small number of students have applied for a traineeship or international work placement as one of their options for study abroad in 2020/21. If this is one of your choices, your department will also be able to discuss options with you for next year.

There are risks attached to some of these options that you should discuss with your departments. For example, the Continue option is subject to there being sufficient virtual mobility places with partners. Virtual mobility may or may not be with your current allocated partner, depending on what they are offering in terms of mobility, but we will aim as far as possible to match to relevant language/country/region in line with your degree programme. With the Defer and Invert options, these rely on there being sufficient study abroad places available in 2021/22 (and travel restrictions being lifted, of course); it cannot be guaranteed that your current allocated placement would be available in 2021/22. You should discuss these and other risks with your department.

By asking you to indicate an option now, our aim is to gain a greater understanding of your plans in order to enable them as far as possible (for example, liaising with partner institutions where relevant for those students who have indicated that their preference is to Continue). Once you have confirmed

your preferred option, your department will contact you to discuss the next steps for your study abroad choice.

So, to repeat:

- Check which set your programme falls into.
- Discuss the relevant options with your department; they will be in touch with you shortly.
- Indicate your preferred option [in this online form by Friday 5th June 2020](#).

I hope that you and your family and friends continue to remain safe.

Best wishes,

Professor Robin Mason
Pro-Vice-Chancellor (International)

Set A programmes

BA Modern Languages FT
BA Mod Lang with Business Management FT
BA French Studies/Geography*
BA French Studies/History*
BA German Studies/History*
BA Hispanic Studies/History*
BA Russian Studies/History*
BA French Studies/Maths*
BA Modern Languages and English*
BA Modern Languages and History of Art*
BA Russian Studies and International Relations*
BA Modern Languages and Music*
BA Liberal Arts and Sciences
BSc Liberal Arts and Sciences
MSci Geography
MSci Geology
MSci Geology and Physical Geography

* Programmes with joint honours options may be able to choose Cancel (i.e., transfer to 3-year programme) if sufficient credits/pre-requisites have been taken. Departments will advise.