

Welcome & Return to campus information

Dear All,

Welcome to the new academic year – the whole staff are excited to welcome all students back to the department and to meet all our new undergraduate, masters and doctoral students – it promises to be a year like no other, but one that we are all enthusiastic to share with you! As you can imagine, many things will be different this year, but many things will be similar – I'll try to explain here as best as I can how we imagine the forthcoming academic year will look, how we have made changes and how we hope to provide the best tuition and learning possible in a thriving and dedicated Department of Music.

Returning to University:

Firstly, it is worth stating that any decisions that we take as a department relating to the return to university are governed by the University of Aberdeen and by the Scottish Government – we can't take unilateral decisions (even if we might want to!) and any decisions we do make are fully in line with the protocols as set out by the university. For more information on the university's guidance on returning to campus and any concerns relating to Coronavirus and your studies, you should visit [here](#). With a little searching, you should be able to find everything you need to know about student life, accommodation and more general aspects of being a student during this pandemic. I will try to give more information about arrangements that are specific to the study of music and our department – of course, if there is anything you don't understand or I've missed, please do get in contact (p.cooke@abdn.ac.uk).

Blended Learning:

The department will be following the university's 'blended learning' policy for the coming semester – this means that many of the lectures, seminars and tutorials will take place online using different software (Blackboard, Zoom etc), but some smaller scale teaching activities will take place on campus, provided social distancing can be adhered to. Each course will be different, some may be entirely online, some may have a larger amount of on campus teaching than others – much of this will depend on the nature of the course, the amount of students in the class and the decisions of the course coordinator. The university has plenty of information about blended learning on the website, including six commitments that they have made to every student. This can be found [here](#). If your course happens to be online only, that doesn't mean it is any less important than one that has more face-to-face teaching, it just means it is different – some things work really well online, some less so – that is just the way of things. There is no hierarchy of courses.

You may find some courses are taught 'live' online at a certain time each week (what is known as *synchronously*), you may find some courses include recorded lectures that you can access at any time of the day (what is called *asynchronously*), some may blend both. What we can assure you, is that all the relevant materials will be there and lecturers have taken an immense amount of time thinking about how to deliver these courses to you in the best way possible. Your course coordinators will put all the information you need in the relevant course guides and I will be asking them to contact each class to explain things in detail. Of course, if you have any questions please do

contact the course coordinators. It is worth stating that staff will be just as accessible as ever, with advertised student hours replacing office hours, and also via email.

Practice Facilities:

A question that I am getting asked more and more is regarding the use of practice facilities in the department, and I completely understand that this is an area that is causing some concern. We expect to have practice rooms available for your use, with necessary restrictions to ensure your safety as soon as possible – I'll be in touch very soon with confirmation of the new usage guide. The same applies to the percussion annexe, and to the use of the chapel organ (although the organ is not within the department's remit).

Instrumental Lessons:

As things currently stand, we are intending for individual instrumental lessons with your tutor will take place online. This is the only option in the current situation – when we know more about practice rooms and spaces we may be able to change our stance. We aim to review this in October. Please do get in touch with your instrumental tutor for more information, or our performance coordinator Pauline Black (paulineblack@abdn.ac.uk).

Ensembles:

Many of you have also been in touch about whether ensembles will be able to meet and rehearse this coming semester, and again I completely understand that this would be of paramount importance. As a department (in consultation with senior members of the university) we have decided that there will be no ensemble rehearsals or concerts in this coming semester – it just isn't either feasible complying with social distancing and it isn't ethically right to insist on students gathering *en masse* as part of a degree programme. But that doesn't mean that ensembles can't form online, can't be in touch and can't prepare for what we hope will be performances after Christmas. As many of you will have seen, there are many creative and imaginative ways to do this via Zoom and the like. It is our hope that this will only be for as short a time as possible. I would love to see videos splashed across social media of department ensembles doing interesting and exciting musical ventures – it is all of our responsibilities to make sure the department is as busy and creative as usual to the outside world during this period of uncertainty.

Staffing Changes:

Just to finish off...there are some comings and goings in the department this academic year. After five years as a teaching fellow Dr Jeremy Coleman has moved on to a new position at the University of Malta, and we wish him all the best for this new adventure – Jeremy has been an integral part of music-making in Aberdeen during this period and we will miss him greatly.

[Prof Pete Stollery](#) has moved to one day a week, but will no doubt be as prominent as ever in his many musical interests and endeavours.

We welcome [Prof Chris Collins](#) to the department as Professor of Music (as well as Head of School) and [Dr John De Simone](#) as Senior Lecturer in Composition (he was previously a teaching fellow).

We also welcome [Dr Matthew Machin-Autenrieth](#) as our new Lecturer in Ethnomusicology – Matthew is currently in the middle of a prestigious research grant, so we won't see as much of him as we would like for a while but some of you may encounter him in 'Introduction to Ethnomusicology' after Christmas. We will also be welcoming two new teaching fellows for the new

academic year – these positions are currently being advertised, so I have no idea who they might be!
Exciting times, I think you will agree!

Hopefully this has helped to answer a few questions – it may have actually opened up a can of worms and you may have questions galore – this is completely understandable, I am more than happy to try and answer any questions/queries/concerns that you may have. This will be a challenging and different year, make no doubt, but it is my hope that it will be a successful, exciting and thoroughly musical year that will live long in the memory.

All best wishes,

PAC

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