

## FAMES Year Abroad 2020-21

Dear Third-Year Students,

We are writing with an update regarding your Year Abroad. As you know, the pandemic has presented us all with a number of challenges for the year abroad specifically, and so for the past two months, we (the staff, student representatives, instructors and year abroad coordinators at FAMES) have been hard at work to develop a plan that will allow you to retain and improve your language skills in anticipation and perhaps shortened year abroad. The plan, which we call the Year Abroad Preparatory Programme, will initially run in MT but we will extend it into LT if need be. YAPP is NOT meant to replace any time spent abroad but rather to supplement it and to ensure that students make progress in case the YA is shortened.

The next step will be for you to plan for MT (in case you are unable to go abroad of course) together with your Year Abroad Coordinators. They have helped develop YAPP so they will be familiar with your choices. Having said that, please be patient with them and us. We have never done anything like this before, and so we may not have answers right away. Rest assured, however, that just as YAPP was planned with your best interests in mind under these extraordinary circumstances, we will do whatever we can to support you during your third year.

Mikael Adolphson and Yaron Peleg

Co-Chairs, faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies

### 1. Core Principles

- The Year Abroad is an integral and indispensable part of the FAMES Tripos, and we will therefore endeavour to find ways to allow students to spend time in their target language areas. Needless to say, we need to follow FCO guidance but as per discussion recently, it seems clear that even the definition of “essential travel” is not set in stone: “Sometimes we say that only essential travel is advised. Whether travel is essential or not is your own decision. You may have urgent family or business commitments to attend to. Circumstances differ from person to person. Only you can make an informed decision based on the risks.”  
(see <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/how-the-foreign-commonwealth-office-puts-together-travel-advice>). In other words, the Year Abroad travel may be deemed essential, but there also needs to be consultation with the Year Abroad coordinators and risk assessment as usual.
- Some positive news we have received is that the university has committed to including year abroad students in its travel insurance policy from September. To quote the announcement: “The University has agreed to offer free travel insurance for all undergraduate students travelling out for their Year Abroad, including students in AMES, MML and HML. The final details of the insurance package are still being worked out. Any student travelling out after 1 September and whose travel

has been risk assessed and approved by the Faculty in the usual way will be eligible for cover, provided that they apply before they travel. As always with good news, there are some caveats. The University scheme will not cover students who have travelled out before 1 September to begin their first placement (though students in this position may be able to apply to cover later placements). In common with the overwhelming majority of affordable insurers, the scheme will not cover costs incurred through Covid-19-related disruption (repatriation, recovery of belongings, quarantine costs, etc.). The scheme will cover medical costs for treatment for Covid-19, though this treatment will have to be undergone in the relevant country (medical evacuation is not covered).” It is unclear at this point whether the insurance will cover students travelling to places where the FCO has designated them as “essential travel only”.

- For students who are unable to commence their YA in Michaelmas Term, we are committed to flexible and pragmatic plan as per below to allow our students to maximise their year abroad and not be disadvantaged by the impact of COVID19.
- As many students as possible should travel to their YA destinations, where FCO guidance and the virus situation allow. Once in country, their YA experience, including in education or work placements, may be online or limited by local restrictions, but we believe this will still be a valid educational and cultural student experience in the current reality.
- Students should travel as soon as possible within the academic year, with the hope that most or all will be abroad by Jan 2021, should the virus situation remain stable. There may be local quarantine or other transition requirements for arriving students, with associated costs.
- The Year Abroad Preparatory Programme laid out below will allow students a full preparation during MT and still have the possibility of 8 months in the target country.
- If students are unable to commence their year abroad in January, we will continue YAPP through Lent Term, which will still enable students 6 months abroad.
- Students should contact their colleges if they need or desire college residence during YAPP. The Faculty has obviously no control over what colleges can do when it comes to housing students whom they had expected to be abroad, so their practices may differ, but the Faculty will support the students to the greatest extent possible.
- The minimum period abroad for the YA will be waived for all students. 8 months is the norm, but any time in the target country is better than abandoning the YA.
- We will endeavour to offer maximum flexibility in approving work, study placements or other arrangements. Restrictions on type of activity required will be relaxed in order to prioritize getting students in-country.

- If it becomes clear that any part of the cohort will not be able to travel by May 2021, the Faculty will consider contingency plans to abandon the YA for these groups and to address the implications for their education and their Part II.

## 2. The Flexible Year Abroad MT

### 2.1. The Year Abroad Preparatory Programme (YAPP)

- For those who cannot travel to their destination country in Michaelmas Term, a 'year abroad preparatory programme' (YAPP) will be put in place, with a focus on MT in the first instance with the goal of sustaining language development until such time when the student can go abroad. YAPP consist of three parts:
  1. Students in YAPP will be offered online instruction potentially via a host university in their target country. The range of hours may differ between programmes, and students will be guided in their choices by their YA coordinator.
  2. Students will have bi-weekly conversation supervisions with native speakers of no less than 1 hour per week either in person or online, if such opportunities are not available through the online programme in the target country.
  3. Students will have 1-2 hours of bi-weekly dissertation supervisions focusing on reading, discussing and critiquing relevant texts in the target language. Some of these supervisions will be with a prospective supervisor, others with advanced postgraduate students with in-depth knowledge of the topic.
  4. We are actively looking for virtual internship opportunities for our students as part of the YAPP. Opportunities differ between different countries, and may not be available to all.

## 3. Language Specific YAPP for MT

### 3.1. Arabic (up to 18 students)

- Online language programmes will be offered by:
  - Teaching Arabic as a Foreign Language Centre at Alexandria University, Egypt
  - The Arab Academy, Egypt
  - Qasid, Jordan
- Dissertation supervisions and with Arabic reading material and conversation supervisions as needed

### 3.2. Persian (2 students combining with Arabic)

- Persian is combined with Arabic, so 3 months of YA in Iran would be sufficient. The online language programme can be started via
  - Dehkoda International Persian Centre online programme in Tehran
  - Mashbad University Persian Centre
- 1-2 hours of biweekly dissertation supervisions. Dissertation supervisors should provide a list of suggested Persian reading materials that are readily available, the student then can inform his private tutors at the approved institutions.

### 3.3. Hebrew (1 student)

- Online language study during YAPP may be obtained through one of the following ways
  - Rotherberg International School at Hebrew University has the appropriate level, but they have not yet committed to providing online teaching for the autumn since their classes are normally in the summer only.
  - Private online tutoring, perhaps via italki.com, with some 15 professional tutors currently listed in Hebrew
- Dissertation supervisions: 1-2 hours every two weeks. Dissertation supervisors should provide a list of suggested Hebrew reading materials that are readily available, which the student can then read with private tutors.

### 3.4. Chinese (up to 11 students)

- All students in Chinese have now committed to going to National Taiwan Normal University starting in mid-September with arrival in Taiwan early in the month to do a 14-day quarantine.

### 3.5. Japanese (4 students)

- The Year Abroad Preparatory Programme for Japanese is still exploring online options (please consult with the Year Abroad coordinator):
  - A J A L T <https://www.ajalt.org/study/business/> may offer online programmes.
  - Dedicated online course. Japataalk (untested online course on internet). [https://www.japataalk.com/en/information\\_0000021.html](https://www.japataalk.com/en/information_0000021.html).
  - Rikkyō University may be able to offer online courses for all of our students. This is now being explored.

- Dissertation text supervisions done by Cambridge supervisors until YA begins.
- Virtual internships in Japan are currently being explored.
- A particular challenge in Japan is the academic year, which starts in April, and the fact that some Japanese universities cannot accommodate for enrolment in January even if international travel is permitted. This means that some students would only be able to start in April of 2021, and since most universities end in mid-July for summer break (excepting Kyoto which ends in mid-September), students would only get 3.5 months of study. For those students, the following options will be considered, assuming they are able to go to Japan in January:
  - Internship in Japan until mid-September
  - Internship in Japan from January
  - Part-time work in Japan, which is allowed up to 40 hrs per week during vacation even while on student visa
  - Further study at summer language programme in Japan, but the level may not be sufficient and they are quite expensive

#### 4. Potential Adjustments to Part II Assessment

- In subjects where the oral exam takes place at the beginning of MT upon students' return from the YA (Arabic, Persian, Japanese), the assessment will be adjusted by our examiners if there has been considerable disruption to the YA.
- The Faculty will additionally have to consider the potential impact on the dissertation for students with disruptions to their YA. One of the main objectives of the YA is to conduct research in the target country, so any contraction of that time may have an impact on the dissertation. Additional supervision hours, as planned in our YAPP, are designed to compensate for such potential lost time and skills training in the target country, but we need to be responsive to any challenges the students may have encountered.
- Part 2 text/translation papers may also need to be adjusted in case the YA is significantly reduced or cancelled altogether.
- In general, we do not anticipate any negative impact on content papers for part 2.