



Subject Benchmark Statement: Agriculture, Rural Environmental Sciences, Animal Studies, Consumer Science, Forestry, Food, Horticulture and Human Nutrition

The Basics

This summary is designed to provide a short and accessible overview of the Subject Benchmark Statement for Agriculture, Rural Environmental Sciences, Animal Studies, Consumer Science, Forestry, Food, Horticulture and Human Nutrition for students, employers and academics. It is not intended to replace or alter the Subject Benchmark Statement, which should be referred to in the design and approval of courses and when any further detail is required.

Subject Benchmark Statements describe the nature of study and the benchmark academic standards expected of graduates in specific subject areas, and in respect of particular qualifications. They provide a picture of what graduates in a particular subject might reasonably be expected to know, do and understand at the end of their course or programme.

Subject Benchmark Statements are presented in four sections. Section 1 outlines the contextual information - providing the operational landscape, and boundaries, of subject discipline. This includes consideration of the ways in which the discipline addresses wider social goals, specifically in relation to: equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI); the requirements of disabled students; education for sustainable development (ESD); and enterprise and entrepreneurship.

Section 2 covers distinctive features of the course, including curriculum design, partnership arrangements, flexibility of delivery, progression and ongoing monitoring processes. Section 3 explains any features relevant to teaching, learning and assessment activities for the subject. Section 4 describes the benchmark standards of achievement reached by all undergraduates in the subject.

This Subject Benchmark Statement encapsulates the journey 'from field to fork', with the inclusion of allied land-based areas including rural environmental sciences, animal studies, forestry and amenity horticulture with some subjects also including achievement at master's level.



Why study a degree in Agriculture, Rural Environmental Sciences, Animal Studies, Consumer Science, Forestry, Food, Horticulture and Human Nutrition?

As a subject discipline, **Agriculture** courses involve sustainable farming systems and production of food within terrestrial landscapes. These courses broadly include a range of subject areas, including soil management, crop and animal production, natural resource management, environmental protection, farming systems, farm business management and economics.

Horticulture courses mainly focus on developing knowledge of plant biology, physiology, pathology and soil structure, the application of horticultural practices, the management of plant production systems, the management and maintenance of a variety of landscapes to meet social, financial, nutritional and environmental needs, and the underpinning scientific basis of plant breeding and future crops (including technologies). These courses have a theme of sustainability and responsible use of resources throughout.

Forestry courses are mainly concerned with the management of woodlands and forests for market and non-market benefits. Course content may include tree and plant physiology, forest measurement, forest management, forest conservation and ecosystem function, woodland pests and diseases, economics, societal benefits, and carbon management and climate change.

Courses in **Rural Environmental Sciences** are designed to develop the knowledge and skills of those who are involved in a range of environmental land use and management activities.

Animal Studies courses are broadly concerned with the husbandry, welfare and management requirements of non-production animals, including animals kept for their athletic abilities, conservation, recreation or sporting interests of their owners. In addition, courses recognise both the economic and societal benefits of animals to people, while being conscious of how to achieve a 'good life' for animals.

Courses in the areas of **Food Science, Food Technology and Human Nutrition** are designed to develop the knowledge and skills required by those who are involved in the food supply chain. This involves applying knowledge of science, nutrition, food policy and regulations - from sourcing/procurement of raw materials, processing, packaging, storage and retail; to developing and producing innovative, safe, nutritious, affordable and sustainable food solutions, to meet the needs of the growing world population and satisfy changing consumer dietary demands and promote health.

Graduates from qualifications reflected in this Subject Benchmark Statement make a significant contribution to a wide range of sectors including industry, government, non-governmental organisations and education. It is vital that we recognise this and prepare graduates accordingly.



What are the main teaching and learning approaches?

Teaching, learning and assessment styles in the discipline are varied and course teams are encouraged to reflect upon their teaching methods to ensure that they enable the success of all students at all levels. Approaches are encouraged which are active, individualised, accessible and differentiated, and which enable learner choice and independence in a student-led and students-as-partners context. Learning outcomes should be achievable through the methods utilised, taking into account any requirements of professional bodies, if required.

This Subject Benchmark Statement also includes reflection on both the opportunities and challenges posed by generative artificial intelligence and other technologies.



How are students assessed?

Assessment strategy is an integral part of course design and may be formative as well as summative; it is likely to take a number of forms, including continuous assessment and controlled conditions assessment (written, electronic, verbal and non-verbal or practical; closed or open book). This Subject Benchmark Statement is not prescriptive about which assessment methods are used on courses; however, assessments should recognise achievement of learning outcomes and competencies, and effectively differentiate achievement at threshold and higher levels.

Authentic assessment approaches, based on tasks likely to be encountered in the workplace, can benefit employability outcomes for graduates and ease the transition from university to the workplace.

Assessment should be inclusive for all students and, where appropriate, modified and alternative provision with reasonable adjustments should be available to avoid barriers to learning, while ensuring fairness across the full cohort.

Feedback is an important part of the assessment cycle and can be provided in a variety of formats. Formative feedback can benefit student performance and, when used appropriately, boost student confidence and outcomes. The opportunity for personal reflection, and peer and self-assessment, is also a valuable component of assessment. Such feedback and reflection can enable transformative learning and is closer to workplace reality.



Benchmark Standards

The minimum threshold standards that a student will have demonstrated when they are awarded an honours degree in Agriculture, Rural Environmental Sciences, Animal Studies, Consumer Science, Forestry, Food, Horticulture or Human Nutrition, are outlined on **pages 15-21** of the Subject Benchmark Statement. The vast majority of students will perform significantly better than the minimum threshold standards. Each higher education provider has its own method of determining what appropriate evidence of this achievement will be and should refer to [Annex D in The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies](#). This Annex sets out common descriptions of the four main degree outcome classifications for bachelor's degrees with honours - 1st, 2.1, 2.2 and 3rd.

The full statement was developed by subject experts drawn from across the sector. Details of the Advisory Group can be found on **page 23** of the full Statement.

Read the full Subject Benchmark Statement

The [full Subject Benchmark Statement](#) is available on the QAA website.



Subject Benchmark Statements are published in QAA's capacity as a membership organisation on behalf of the higher education sector.

Published - April 2024

© The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2024
Southgate House, Southgate Street, Gloucester GL1 1UB

Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786

Tel: 01452 557000 Web: www.qaa.ac.uk