

A collage of various mosaic tiles with different patterns and colors, including floral, geometric, and animal designs.

Subject Benchmark Statement: Area Studies

The Basics

This summary is designed to provide a short and accessible overview of the Subject Benchmark Statement for Area Studies 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 graduates with a bachelor's degree with honours in the subject, with some subjects also including achievement at master's level.



Why study a degree in Area Studies?

As a subject discipline, Area Studies provides students the opportunity to undertake in-depth study of the culture, economy, history, languages, politics and society of one or more particular areas or regions, however defined. Area Studies courses are diverse, flexible and multidisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary, marrying approaches and frameworks from the arts, humanities and the social sciences. Such an approach enables students in Area Studies to acquire a unique depth and breadth of insight into the social, cultural, political, economic and environmental context and dynamic of an area or region, and the communities associated with them, as well as an integrated set of skills which are valued in many contexts beyond higher education.

Area Studies graduates are distinguished not only by the agility, breadth and flexibility of thinking, habits of learning and intellectual inquisitiveness outlined above, but also by the versatility and breadth of skills they possess. These include written and verbal and/or non-verbal communication across multiple formats; analytical thinking; creative problem-solving; collection and classification of information; interpretation and evaluation. Area Studies graduates are critical thinkers who are self-aware, empathetic and resourceful. They possess the skills and capacities to make a comprehensive contribution to societal development, operating across global contexts. They are attuned to social justice, environmental responsibility, and the quest to tackle global challenges.



What are the main teaching and learning approaches in Area Studies?

Degree courses in Area Studies employ a wide variety of teaching approaches and share a number of teaching and learning methods with other humanities and social science disciplines. They are designed to provide students with an integrative education, benefitting from multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary and cross-cultural areas of specialisation. They are characterised by a multi and interdisciplinary approach that encourages thinking across and between two or more disciplines. With this interplay of disciplines from across the humanities and social sciences and theoretical approaches, a balanced study of the history, literatures, cultures and religions, as well as the political and socioeconomic context of diverse regions, is achieved in a variety of ways.

Typically, Area Studies students benefit from a variety of pedagogical approaches, and from a range and choice of modules that allow them to progress through a course with increasing levels of specialisation. Indeed, many courses in Area Studies achieve their aims by specifying a core study requirement placed within a wider context of specialised offerings. Such offerings generally increase as the student progresses through the course, allowing them to develop specialised knowledge within the broader field across their studies. The learning experience may include simulation exercises, debates, research seminars, work placements, visits to places of special interest, and others - such as project-based learning and a variety of forms of civic engagement. Area Studies degrees often offer language learning and/or residence abroad with the aim of enhancing linguistic proficiency and/or intercultural skills and understanding.



How are students assessed?

In Area Studies, a variety of assessment methods is employed. Diversity and plurality in assessment provides students with an opportunity to engage in and demonstrate a full range of abilities, and to engage with the norms of a variety of disciplines. Variety in assessment enables students from diverse backgrounds to show what they have learnt and what they can do.

While all forms of assessment encourage students to engage with the subject, some assessments focus on the development of key competencies in reading, writing, critical analysis and intellectual synthesis, whereas others allow students to explore themes or approaches which concern them personally and to bring their knowledge, understanding and experiences to the fore. Assessments may include unseen written examinations (online or in-person), essays, verbal and/or non-verbal presentations, extended essays and dissertations, as well as reflective or creative outputs.

The assessment of Area Studies courses includes a mix of methods that are accessible to disabled students and students from varying educational and cultural backgrounds within different learning situations. Where individual students may be disadvantaged by particular assessment methods, adjustments to those assessments are considered in conjunction with the provider's procedures, while ensuring fairness across the full cohort. The procedures used for assessment cover the subject knowledge (breadth and depth), abilities and skills developed through the degree course, and assessment design is aimed at alignment with teaching and learning approaches, and desired learning outcomes.



Benchmark Standards

The threshold standards that a student will have demonstrated when they are awarded an honours degree in Area Studies are outlined on **pages 17-18** 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 20** of the full Statement.

Read the full Subject Benchmark Statement

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



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