



# Subject Benchmark Statement

Archaeology

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## About this Statement

This document is a QAA Subject Benchmark Statement for Archaeology that defines what can be expected of a graduate in the subject, in terms of what they might know, do and understand at the end of their studies. Subject Benchmark Statements also describe the nature and characteristics of awards in a particular subject or area. Subject Benchmark Statements are published in QAA's capacity as a membership organisation on behalf of the higher education sector. A summary of the Statement is also available on the QAA website.

Key changes from the previous Subject Benchmark Statement include:

- a revised structure for the Statement which includes the introduction of cross-cutting themes of:
  - equality, diversity and inclusion
  - education for sustainable development
  - employability, entrepreneurship and enterprise education
- a comprehensive review updating the context and purposes of Archaeology, including course design and content in order to inform and underpin the revised benchmark standards.

## How can I use this document?

Subject Benchmark Statements are often used by higher education providers in the design and development of new courses in the relevant subject, as they provide a framework for specifying intended learning outcomes in an academic or vocational discipline. They are also used as a reference point when reviewing or revalidating degree courses. They may be used by external examiners in considering whether the design of a course and the threshold standards of achievement are comparable with other higher education providers. They also provide professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs) with the academic standards expected of students.

Subject Benchmark Statements provide general guidance for articulating the learning outcomes associated with a course but are not intended to represent a national curriculum in a subject or to prescribe set approaches to teaching, learning or assessment. Instead, they allow for flexibility and innovation in course design within a framework agreed by the subject community.

You may want to read this document if you are:

- involved in the design, delivery and review of courses in Archaeology
- a prospective student thinking about undertaking a course in Archaeology
- an employer, to find out about the knowledge and skills generally expected of Archaeology graduates.

## Relationship to legislation and regulation

The responsibility for academic standards lies with the higher education provider who awards the degree. Higher education providers are responsible for meeting the requirements of legislation and any other regulatory requirements placed upon them by their relevant funding and regulatory bodies. This Statement does not interpret legislation, nor does it incorporate statutory or regulatory requirements.

The regulatory status of the Statement will differ with regard to the educational jurisdictions of the UK. In England, Subject Benchmark Statements are not sector-recognised standards as set out under the Office for Students' [regulatory framework](#). However, they are specified

as a key reference point, as appropriate, for academic standards in Wales under [Quality Assessment Framework for Wales](#) and in Scotland as part of the [Quality Enhancement Framework](#). Subject Benchmark Statements are part of the current quality requirements in Northern Ireland. Because the Statement describes outcomes and attributes expected at the threshold standard of achievement in a UK-wide context, many higher education providers will use them as an enhancement tool for course design and approval, and for subsequent monitoring and review, in addition to helping demonstrate the security of academic standards.

## **Additional sector reference points**

Higher education providers are likely to consider other reference points in addition to this Statement in designing, delivering and reviewing courses. These may include requirements set out by PSRBs and industry or employer expectations. QAA has also published [Advice and Guidance](#) to support the [Quality Code](#) which will be helpful when using this Statement, for example, in [course design](#), [learning and teaching](#), [external expertise](#) and [monitoring and evaluation](#).

Explanations of unfamiliar terms used in this Subject Benchmark Statement can be found in [QAA's Glossary](#). Sources of information about other requirements and examples of guidance and good practice are signposted within the Statement where appropriate.

# 1 Context and purposes of an Archaeology degree

## Context

1.1 Archaeology provides a unique perspective on the human past and on what it is to be human. As the only subject that addresses the entire human past in all its temporal and spatial dimensions, archaeology offers a vital perspective on how we shape our future collectively. Archaeology is fundamental to exploring how our own society and other societies across the world came into being, how they changed over time and how we create and perceive those narratives. While looking back at the human past, archaeology is also a process of the present. It helps us to understand who we are, the challenges we face and to reflect on varied perspectives of the past. These perspectives can be as contested and traumatic as they are celebratory and uplifting. Since one of the key characteristics of an archaeological investigation is time depth, the ability to examine the effects of process within a well-understood chronological framework is necessary for the study of contemporary concerns such as human impact on ecosystems, globalisation and sustainability.

1.2 Archaeology is an activity which enables people to understand, interpret and appreciate the tangible and intangible remains of the past and how we interact and value them in the present. It is concerned with understanding humankind - not simply knowing about physical remains from all periods of the past but also appreciating how these interconnect, influence us, and shape our understanding of people and places, today and in the future. Archaeology is about the joy of discovery and the creation of knowledge; it is about the shaping and sharing of stories, some of which have been lost for centuries, some of which may challenge us and open up new ways of looking at places that we live in and visit. It provides an opportunity for us to reconnect with the past and create new tangible links to it via the examination and exploration of cultural material and historic places. While archaeology is an active and collaborative process that brings time depth and breadth of knowledge to our thinking about the past and the challenges we face as a society today, it also thrives on debate and discussion and has space for multiple narratives. It encompasses and draws on the natural environment, identity, science, politics, humanities, arts and culture to create understanding of our place in the world today.

1.3 Archaeology emerged as an independent subject in the mid-nineteenth century within the context of European colonialism and emerging nationalism and it has long been of interest and relevance to the wider public. During the last 150 years, there have been many changes of emphasis as new discoveries, perspectives and sociopolitical contexts have influenced developments, but the main focus has remained the discovery and interpretation of the material remains of past societies and how these have influenced narratives in present-day contexts. Important changes have arisen through improved understanding of the nature of the material record and its interplay with the development of new scientific techniques of recovery and analysis, such as 3D modelling and imaging. Others have emerged from theoretical developments affecting the kinds of questions asked by archaeologists about their material, as well as significant developments in geochronology and our understanding of environmental fluctuations. Today, archaeology has become a distinct discipline with its own methodological, scientific and theoretical frameworks which draw critically on a rich archive of past work. Its broad remit makes archaeology a natural vehicle for multi-vocality and inclusivity and respect for other ways of life. It also provides the knowledge and critical skills to evaluate the evidence-base for claims about the past and historical processes and this empowers students to engage positively in the debate around the history of global diversity.

1.4 Archaeology sits firmly within the triangle of science, arts and professional practice. Much research and teaching in archaeology is therefore multi or interdisciplinary - a particular topic or theme may be approached from different perspectives, and with different

methodologies. Archaeology differs from Classics which focuses on the Mediterranean civilisations of Ancient Greece and Rome. Classics is therefore a subject with a more specific geographical and chronological focus which concentrates on ancient textual evidence as well as artistic and architectural achievement, although archaeology's methodologies complement these approaches. History is primarily concerned with oral, written and transcribed records; while there may be significant overlaps in temporal, social and theoretical interests, particularly for the later periods, the study of History does not generally apply scientific techniques (for example, to investigate the movement of human populations or human diet) or fieldwork. Archaeology may also be differentiated from Heritage Management which includes heritage interpretation, heritage resource management and museum studies. However, strong links with other subjects mean that archaeology is often studied in joint or combined honours courses (for example, with history, geography, anthropology, classics and cultural heritage, English, natural sciences or forensic science) but it is a subject distinct from these. It is likewise related to, but distinct from, conservation science and heritage studies.

## **Purposes of an Archaeology degree**

1.5 Archaeology has been taught as a distinct subject by UK higher education providers for well over a century, yet few incoming students today have the opportunity to undertake formal courses in the subject prior to going to university. As such, one of the purposes of an Archaeology degree is to lay out the foundations of an understanding of the human past. However, the broad-based nature of the subject and the skills it instils in its graduates provides a strong grounding for a wide range of career paths and opportunities. Archaeology thus enables students who may have limited their options through their choices at school to re-engage with STEM topics or Arts/Humanities in new ways. The archaeology graduate will be well equipped with transferable skills arising from the mix of humanities and science training, engagement with theory and practice, and individual and team-based learning, together with the intellectual curiosity to continue learning, and the skills to benefit from challenging work environments. Archaeology also offers voluntary involvement, via continuing education courses, local and national societies, museums and heritage groups. Graduates who are not employed within the professional sector will have many opportunities for lifelong learning and to share their expertise within their own communities. Progression and employment routes for archaeology graduates are varied and include, but are not limited to, master's courses (increasingly a prerequisite for research degrees); museums; the multifaceted profession of commercial archaeology; local authorities; the wider tourism, heritage and media sectors; and a wide array of more general graduate positions. The purpose of an archaeology degree, therefore, is to provide both subject-specific skills and a wealth of transferable skills for graduates entering the workplace or voluntary sector.

## **Characteristics of an Archaeology degree**

1.6 Despite the interdisciplinary nature of the subject, and the varied pathways taken by different Archaeology courses, all degree courses containing a substantial component (at least 50%) of archaeology will offer a platform of knowledge and understanding in certain areas. These will include the origins and development of archaeology and its value in the modern world, embracing the legal and policy frameworks for research and professional practice, and the historical, social, cultural, ethical and political contexts for archaeological investigation, management and interpretation. This content should recognise the wider public interest in, and value of, the fragile and non-renewable nature of the archaeological resource and the need for sustainable approaches to its use and conservation. In addition, students are expected to be familiar with the diverse sources of evidence used by archaeologists, as well as the theoretical basis of the discipline and current approaches to interpretation. While students will have a broad and comparative knowledge of the archaeology of geographical regions and chronological periods, they are expected to have a

deeper understanding of one or more distinct classes of archaeological material, or of specific archaeological periods. They should also recognise the importance of the recovery, recording and management of primary data through practical experience in the field (with adjustments in place as required for disabled students) or through collections-based, records-based, or artefact-based study and skills development and be aware of methodologies for quantifying, analysing and interpreting this data. This will include the concepts and application of scientific methods, the integration of chronometric, environmental and materials science data with archaeological models, the use of analogy and experiment in archaeological analysis and interpretation, and an understanding of the causes of variation in the reliability (bias) of different classes of evidence from archaeological contexts (such as taphonomy; cultural and non-cultural transformations; depositional processes; and recovery procedures).

1.7 In the case of degree courses where archaeology constitutes 50% or less of the total (including joint and combined honours courses, and those cases where archaeology units are taken as optional components within other kinds of modularised courses), the delivery of an appropriate platform of knowledge and understanding should be integral to the design of each individual archaeology module. In such situations, both the knowledge and understanding attained by students, and the teaching environment, will be consistent with the standards expressed in this Subject Benchmark Statement. For those courses that include other subjects alongside archaeology, guidance on appropriate levels of attainment will be articulated in the relevant Subject Benchmark Statement.

## **Equality, diversity and inclusion**

1.8 Archaeology is an inherently interdisciplinary subject dealing with interpretations of the past and their relevance to the present and the future of humanity. Its deep-time and cross-cultural perspective offers unique potential for multivocality, but this is not always fulfilled, and archaeologists must take responsibility for improving this situation. Teaching, learning and assessment styles in the discipline are broad and emphasise equally practical field and laboratory practices as well as more traditional communication skills, including written assignments in a variety of different formats as well as oral and media presentations. Despite increasing efforts, archaeology still struggles with some traditional boundaries to participation, including ethnic diversity, access for disabled people and barriers on the basis of gender and socioeconomic background. In part, these are a legacy of the origins of archaeology as very hierarchical, traditional in outlook, fieldwork-based and focused on the past and material culture of a limited range of groups in society. In order to develop, archaeology takes a proactive approach to challenging negative stereotypes and emphasise the inherently diverse range of perspectives which exist on the human past. Archaeology should always emphasise the fluidity of our understandings of the past and the opportunity it offers to challenge our modern western conventions of practice. As explored in paragraph 2.4 for instance, archaeology has the power to raise students' awareness of, and begin to address, the continuing impacts of colonialism. Archaeologists should reflect critically on their practices to ensure increased participation and must actively engage much more equitably with external communities, whether in schools, community groups, or in public spaces. Archaeology strives to develop a considered and thoughtful language with which to express ideas and concepts in ways that facilitate inclusion and reduce exclusivity.

1.9 Archaeology degrees have a long tradition of being open to people from non-standard academic backgrounds. However, much more remains to be done to ensure the equitable inclusion of under-represented groups, most notably ethnic minority students, students from less affluent backgrounds, and otherwise disadvantaged students, including students with caring responsibilities, neurodiverse students and students with physical and/or mental health considerations. Greater attention should be paid to under-represented groups at all stages from outreach to marketing and recruitment, to education and career

progression after graduation, in order to provide externally visible role models who can convey the clear message that archaeology is a global and diverse subject of enormous relevance to contemporary society. In addition, robust feedback mechanisms should be in place for students to highlight deficiencies and co-create possible solutions to barriers to participation, including ensuring accessibility for all students, particularly for practical elements of teaching, learning and extracurricular experience.

## **Sustainability**

1.10 The core skills provided by all Archaeology degrees align with the learning outcomes suggested by the [Education for Sustainable Development Guidance](#) produced by Advance HE and QAA (March 2021). These include critical thinking, self-awareness, collaborative competencies, anticipatory and strategic thinking. Archaeology both encourages and embeds partnerships and interdependence between economic, social and environmental factors. By developing a deep understanding of what life was like in the past for people and non-humans, archaeology can actively contribute to the narratives about how we create a vision of a better world. Indeed, as the only subject that deals with the entirety of the human past, archaeology offers a critical perspective on how we now shape that future. In particular, the discipline is uniquely placed to foster an appreciation of the fragile and finite nature of the archaeological resource and the need for sustainable approaches to its use and conservation. Moreover, archaeology is directly involved with the development of sustainable and ethical heritage and tourism industries across the world. Emphasis should be placed on conveying this value to a wider society, both within local and regional communities and government organisations who are in a position to determine future outcomes.

## **Enterprise and entrepreneurship**

1.11 Enterprise and entrepreneurship education supports behaviours, attributes and competencies that are likely to have a significant impact on the individual student in terms of successful careers. It prepares students for changing environments and provides enhanced impact through placements and activities that build links between academic institutions and external organisations. Beyond employment, entrepreneurship education provides competencies to help students lead a rewarding, self-determined, professional life, well placed to add social, cultural and economic value to society through their careers.

1.12 In relation to archaeology, the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CifA) is the leading professional body representing archaeologists working in the UK and overseas. CifA champions professionalism in archaeology by setting standards, improving career prospects and promoting best practice. In collaboration with UAUK (University Archaeology UK), it is now possible for providers of Archaeology degrees to apply for accreditation. University degrees are assessed through a competency matrix, which is aligned with the National Occupational Standards for Archaeological Practice (NOS). NOS are designed to be flexible, and therefore a good way of encompassing the great variety of subjects covered in UK Archaeology degrees and align directly to the design principles set out within this document. To gain accreditation, providers must demonstrate that the core relevant NOS are covered by a particular degree or pathway. Indeed, many of the key NOS are already successfully covered by this Subject Benchmark Statement.

1.13 This close collaboration between CifA and university degrees has resulted in a mutually beneficial relationship between the two sectors. Indeed, the ethos of joint UAUK/CifA governance of the professional accreditation scheme necessitates a process that represents both organisations equally while benefitting both.

1.14 Archaeology, however, should not be seen exclusively as a vocational choice of degree subject. Career prospects are wide and embrace a range of related employment sectors from tourism and heritage to non-governmental organisations involved in sustainability, environmental and developmental work at regional, national and international levels, as well as more generic graduate employment pathways, all of which value the transferable skills embedded in an Archaeology degree.

## **2 Distinctive features of an Archaeology degree**

### **Design**

2.1 Archaeology within higher education is designed to provide a broad-based and intellectually rigorous course of education and learning, while recognising the vocational application of the subject's knowledge base and skills. Understanding the interplay between theories, methods and interpretation is central to any Archaeology course, and achieved by involving students directly in the recovery and analysis of primary material via involvement in departmental or other approved research projects. Departmental teaching and research courses, therefore, commonly underpin each other. Given that archaeology teaching is research-led, and master's courses and postgraduate research students are well distributed throughout the sector, all Archaeology undergraduates learn within lively and stimulating research cultures and work with primary research materials. The undergraduate learning experience frequently involves the same excitement of discovery as that of the professional researcher; archaeology being one of a very few degree subjects in which an undergraduate can make a direct and unique contribution to knowledge through a new discovery.

2.2 Four key contexts provide the foundation on which Archaeology degree courses are designed:

- social
- ethical and professional
- theoretical
- scientific.

### **The social context**

2.3 Archaeology is concerned with the intersection of past, present and future in the sense of furnishing and evaluating narrative accounts of past cultures and societies - both prehistoric and historic - through the lens of contemporary problems and perspectives. Thus, archaeology engages with other subjects studying the same cultures through sources of evidence such as art, architecture, visual culture (variously analysed in terms of form, style, function, chronology, context and social meaning), the sensory, the biological and material sciences and, for the historical periods, texts, documents and oral histories and memory.

2.4 Archaeology is also embedded in the events, structures and development of the contemporary world. It is through this entanglement with contemporary constructs such as class, colonialism, ethnicity and gender that archaeology now derives much of its critical power as an intellectual subject. Archaeology is often a contested subject, with different stakeholders and communities disagreeing over interpretation and appropriate action towards the remains of the past, their display, and use in contemporary narratives. The subject provides material resources through which identity can be created, challenged and denied at many levels in society. Archaeology recognises and raises awareness of the profound legacy and of the multiple aspects of colonialism. Exploration of ways of decolonising the subject through measures such as the reconsideration of teaching content and structures, and revision of reading list composition, is underway, but continued engagement with relevant issues in collections and heritage management, inclusive field practice, anti-racist and anti-colonial behaviours and processes, and openness towards alternative theoretical perspectives, is essential.

### **The ethical and professional context**

2.5 Ethics are rightly a topic of the greatest importance in archaeology. Institutions and departments will have their own standards and policies for any learning, teaching, research

and other activities that involve human participants and/or raise other ethical issues. They will be responsible for issuing certification which demonstrates that any project meets acceptable ethical standards and will, if necessary, require changes to the materials, methods or reporting strategy. This applies to any student research project or work.

2.6 The treatment of human remains, in particular, requires ethical consideration and there are important debates around, for example, the finding, study and storage of human and non-human primate, including hominin, remains. These should always be treated with dignity and respect regardless of their age and provenance, and it is important to be open and transparent and to act with integrity in the treatment of all biological remains. The Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA) and the British Association for Biological Anthropology and Osteoarchaeology (BABAO) both publish useful guidelines and resources for further study. Ethical concerns also arise when working with cultural objects or human remains acquired illegally, trafficked or sold, and for any project which involves living participants and generates and stores personal information. For fieldwork overseas, it will be important to make appropriate collaborative arrangements with local scholars and organisations, and also to obtain appropriate research permits for any work undertaken. Ethics are also relevant to professional conduct - for example, damage to reputation or the misrepresentation of views - and to issues such as plagiarism of the work of others. Overall, archaeology curricula should explicitly embed consideration of the ethics of archaeological practice and the real-world uses of archaeology, particularly in relation to less privileged social groups, and the facilitation of equitable engagement with stakeholders beyond the traditional academic and professional archaeological community. Examples from around the world, suitably contextualised, can illustrate both the challenges and possible moves towards their solution and can be compared with contemporary local practice.

2.7 Employment opportunities are diverse and bring their own requirements for professional standards and bodies to set, measure and enforce standards. For archaeologists, there is CIfA and the Institute of Archaeologists of Ireland. In the wider historic environment sector, the Institute for Historic Building Conservation, the Institute for Conservation, and the Society for Museum Archaeology fulfil similar roles for the built historic environment and for the conservation of cultural heritage respectively. Similar associations exist in other countries. The European Association of Archaeologists, a membership association for the whole continent, promotes its own Code of Practice and Principles of Conduct. Similar bodies exist for other countries and continents. In many countries, artefacts, monuments and landscapes of the past are protected through government guidance, national legislation and international treaty - for example, the Valletta and Faro Conventions, and the World Heritage Convention. Archaeology and wider cultural heritage are also often cared for and managed within legislation and organisational structures with wider remits which also include the natural heritage involving ecology and landscape, such as national parks. Increasingly, links are being forged between heritage and sustainability initiatives through local authority and charitable trust work such as the Wildlife Trusts.

2.8 These developments have not only led to greatly increased employment opportunities for Archaeology graduates (documented by the labour market intelligence project, Profiling the Profession) but have encouraged archaeologists to reflect on the role of the past in the present and their own position within the process of knowledge creation. Concerns within the professional sector have focused on professional obligations to work in the public interest, demonstrate the public benefit of archaeological work and deliver public value, leading to greater potential for increased links between the various archaeological communities. A scheme for professional (PSRB) accreditation of Archaeology degrees developed jointly by CIfA and University Archaeology UK has been operating since 2019 (see paragraph 1.12).

## The theoretical context

2.9 Archaeology is both a practical and an intellectual discipline, with theory and practice intertwining to create a unique way of investigating, interpreting and presenting the past. Historically, archaeological theory has undergone a series of paradigm shifts influenced by the retrieval of new data, broader intellectual developments, and changes in the wider political and social context. Archaeology draws upon many other disciplines including, but not restricted to, anthropology, the physical sciences, evolutionary biology, history, philosophy, sociology, ecology and geography, and increasingly it actively contributes to these fields. This interdisciplinarity has resulted in many different ways of interpreting the past and the vitality of theoretical debate within the subject is one of its intellectual attractions as a higher education subject.

2.10 The multiplicity of theoretical perspectives means that archaeologists are involved in addressing some of the biggest questions about what it is to be human, cultural similarity and diversity, and the place of humans in the global ecosystem. These debates relate just as much to the future as to the past, and they encompass key questions relevant for modern society - such as, how have people adapted to, and created, changing environments? How do societies generate resilience to adverse conditions, like pandemics? How is life lived by people in radically different cultural traditions, and how can effective communication be fostered across boundaries? With its uniquely long-term and global comparative perspective, archaeology has much to contribute to contemporary challenges.

2.11 Four elements of archaeology can be recognised:

- 1 Archaeologists work at many different temporal and spatial scales ranging from considerations of complex societies down to the details of individual lived experiences. Integrating these different understandings of social and material worlds unites the many periods and areas which archaeologists study into a holistic discipline of past cultures and human lives. It enables us to explore the myriad different ways of being human in the past, which in turn can inform how we choose to live in the future.
- 2 Social life is now conceived as interconnected, a network of relationships rather than simply a set of formal structures and institutions that need describing. Archaeological theory addresses the question of change and variation within such complex webs. It draws critically on the immense archive of past societies preserved through material remains to provide interpretations and to seek understanding of variation through comparison.
- 3 Archaeologists place their findings within a wider context and whether the scale is regional or global, the driving aim is to make archaeology relevant for people thinking about their own place in the world. Archaeology is also fundamentally interdisciplinary, influencing and contributing to other cognate disciplines such as forensic science and environmental science.
- 4 The self-reflexive nature of contemporary archaeological theory and practice acknowledges the manner in which the past informs the present, and vice versa. Archaeological education, thus, necessarily incorporates a critical evaluation of the history of the subject from its colonial legacies, including abuses of the past, through to more recent considerations of how the past shapes modern individual, cultural and national identities, and plays a central role in their formation. Archaeologists are also aware of the multiple public engagements with the past, through a variety of media, which influence debate in many areas of modern life.

## The scientific context

2.12 Archaeological science is the application of scientific techniques to archaeological problems, whose methodologies and innovations are ultimately shared across a broad range of sciences, including physics, chemistry, biochemistry, biology, medicine, forensics and geoscience, alongside environmental, digital and materials science. The use of quantitative approaches, hypothesis testing and an awareness of scientific techniques should be part of the toolkit of every archaeologist. Archaeological science is interdisciplinary and collaborative by nature, contributing to a diverse range of major research themes. These include:

- the formation, preservation and conservation of the archaeological record
- remote sensing and prospection of past landscapes and settlements
- the materials science of portable objects and the built environment
- hominin evolution, behaviour and culture
- human mobility and migration
- the origin and transformations of societies and economies
- human, animal and plant ecology
- diet and human-animal-plant relations
- global human health and disease
- human impact on landscape evolution and climate change.

2.13 Archaeological science enables artefact characterisation, composition and manufacturing processes to be investigated and thereby provides insights into networks of supply, exchange and interaction. Techniques such as radiocarbon dating also provide and refine the chronometric frameworks that are indispensable to understanding change over time.

2.14 Conservation science reveals the processes that cause the deterioration of sites, monuments and organic and inorganic artefacts. It facilitates the development of materials and techniques for their restoration and the long-term conservation and sustainability of tangible heritage for future generations.

2.15 Biological and environmental science adds fundamental knowledge to our understanding of landscape use, subsistence strategies, health and social life. The study of human, animal and plant remains, alongside biomolecular techniques such as isotope, protein, genetic and residue analysis, facilitates the understanding of adaptation, resilience and dietary change. These techniques are contributing to the discovery of new hominin ancestors, giving us an understanding of their interactions and genetic relationships. Further applications identify mobility and migration of human and animal populations on a global scale. This continues to revolutionise our understanding of many major ecological, social and economic transitions, highlighting the rich diversity of the human past.

2.16 Experimental archaeology reveals the actions and processes which create the archaeological record as recovered by the discipline. This strand of the discipline explores past experiences and skills as well as enriching our understanding of the complexities of past lives.

2.17 Digital literacy and creativity are critical in the data collection, analysis, interpretation and visualisation of the past. Scientific practice in archaeology is undertaken within, and informs, global ethical frameworks. Through the development and application of scientific methodologies, archaeology continuously contributes to wider science agendas.

## Implications for the design of Archaeology degree courses

2.18 The four contexts outlined above are the foundation stones upon which all Archaeology degrees, both single and combined honours, are designed and built. However, degree courses vary in their aims, objectives and emphases as a reflection of the diversity, vitality and confidence of the subject. The integration of the humanities and sciences underpins degree courses given that this interdisciplinarity is as much philosophical as practical/methodological.

2.19 Individual degree courses are located at different points within a triangle drawn between the complementary archaeologies of the humanities, sciences and professional practice. A department teaching single and combined honours degrees will inevitably position the courses it offers at different locations within this range. All courses will nevertheless stress the contexts, interdisciplinarity and overarching practice that departments seek to instil in their students.

## Accessibility

2.20 The principal learning and teaching methods that an Archaeology student may experience will depend on the aims and objectives of the course, given the wide range of subject-specific and transferable skills being developed. To ensure students who struggle with particular forms of teaching and learning scenarios are not disadvantaged, methods used within an individual course should be as varied as possible. They are likely to comprise an appropriate combination of the following:

- directed reading of the specialist literature (including books and periodicals)
- lectures that inform by capturing interest and exciting curiosity
- seminars that provide the context for group work and small-group discussions
- tutorials and supervisions for structured regular contact with tutors and supervisors
- hands-on practical exercises and science-based experiments, with reasonable adjustments to support accessibility, as required
- laboratory-based demonstrations, artefact handling and identification work
- practical exercises, hands-on experience and demonstrations (indoor and outdoor) in excavation and survey methodologies, with reasonable adjustments to support accessibility, as required
- in-person or virtual visits to appropriate monuments, structures and collections for direct experience of material covered by the course, with reasonable adjustments to support accessibility, as required
- placement or workplace experience with an archaeological or heritage-related organisation
- exercises and demonstrations (indoor and outdoor/analogue and digital) in practical archaeology methodologies, with reasonable adjustments to support accessibility, as required
- tutorials and supervisions for structured regular contact with tutors and supervisors
- participation in outreach, community archaeology and widening-participation activities
- a range of self-guided, student-centred learning practices
- accessible technology-enhanced learning to ensure equality of access
- team-based exercises, with consideration of neurodiverse students, and adjustments in place as required.

2.21 While there is a recognition that teaching and assessments may need to be adjusted or tailored to the requirements of individuals to ensure inclusiveness and well-being, different formats should be offered to all students and expectations should be

transparent. Care must be taken not to create a two-tier system that singles out students with additional requirements. Fieldwork in particular may present practical difficulties for some students and no one-size-fits-all approach is likely to be sufficient; individual circumstances should be taken into account in agreeing adjustments to teaching and learning methods for disabled students. In addition, all practical efforts should be made to ensure equal access to extracurricular activities such as field trips, placements and volunteering opportunities, given the often hidden costs (including opportunity costs) involved. The timing of religious observances and school holidays may be considered when setting deadlines. It should be remembered that perceptions of assessment may differ according to the cultural and experiential backgrounds of both assessors and their students. Clear and accessible guidance outlining assessment criteria at different stages of the degree must be provided.

## **Progression**

2.22 Over the course of a degree with honours (FHEQ Level 6; FQHEIS Level 10), an Archaeology student will progress from one year of study to the next in line with the regulatory framework for each institution. However, it is expected that each year would see the attainment of certain levels of knowledge, expertise and experience which builds towards the final achievement of meeting all of the threshold-level subject-specific and generic skills listed in this Statement. Upon graduation from an undergraduate degree, it would be expected that a student who had achieved a second-class degree or higher would be capable of, and equipped for, undertaking postgraduate study in Archaeology or an associated discipline.

2.23 Joint honours undergraduate - for example, those studying archaeology and anthropology or archaeology and classics - will achieve only a proportion of the specific and generic skills listed below but will add others (see paragraph 1.4). Typically, there will be less emphasis on laboratory science and fieldwork in a joint honours course, but this is not always the case - for example, where archaeology is paired with a STEM or social science discipline such as geography or environmental geoscience.

2.24 Integrated master's degrees (FHEQ Level 7; FQHEIS Level 11) are available (MArc) in the UK and comprise a four-year full-time course (five years in Scotland) or a part-time course of not less than five and not more than eight academic years (six and nine in Scotland). Students exiting earlier may be eligible for a Certificate of Higher Education, a Diploma of Higher Education or an honours degree depending upon the levels of study completed to a satisfactory standard. Similarly, in a standard three-year undergraduate honours degree qualification, students may also exit earlier with a Certificate or Diploma depending upon their achievements. Scottish bachelor's degrees with honours are typically designed to include four years of study, which relates to the structure of Scottish primary and secondary education.

## **Flexibility**

2.25 The balance of teaching and learning methods varies between courses according to departmental missions, aims and interests. However, Archaeology courses in all higher education providers include a wide, diverse and flexible range of learning and teaching styles, as befits the intellectual focus of a subject whose core interest is human society, including teaching that is research-led. The best teaching and learning in archaeology are an interactive process from which students and academics gain mutual benefit because of the research-led environment for teaching. Students are encouraged to learn through experience, both as individuals and as members of defined teams, with practicals and experience playing important roles in such provision. Guided reading represents a cornerstone for the establishment of the knowledge base and archaeology utilises a variety

of pedagogic innovations, including the flipped classroom, problem-based learning and involving the students in curriculum design.

2.26 Within most Archaeology honours degree courses there is a requirement that students undertake some form of independent research work, often in the form of project work and/or a dissertation presented in the later stages of the course. This represents an area of the student's learning in which mature and intelligent critical reflection is needed with regard to the potential risks and moral and ethical issues associated with a proposed project.

## **Partnership**

2.27 We have already outlined above the accreditation of Archaeology degrees by ClfA and UAUK. Institutions in Northern Ireland also benefit from connections with the Institute of Archaeologists of Ireland. Archaeology departments have long-standing connections with national heritage bodies: Historic England, Cadw, Historic Scotland and Department for Communities, Northern Ireland. In addition to this, individual departments and institutions often work closely with museums; from the largest UK museums - such as the British Museum, the National Museum Wales, National Museums Scotland and National Museum Northern Ireland - to smaller regional or local museums. Archaeologists work in collaboration with National Parks and the National Trust.

2.28 Archaeology in higher education also utilises county/national archaeological data bases such as Historic Environment Records and the Portable Antiquities Scheme, for example, not least in provision of data to students in the context of their dissertations. There are also partnerships in place between departments and commercial units. These relationships vary from institution to institution but can be anything from lectures or seminars from visiting commercial staff to year-long placements within commercial units. There are also collaborations between departments and volunteer organisations such as local archaeological or historical societies. In recent years there has been a significant rise in community archaeology initiatives, including fieldwork and outreach activities, which can provide a valuable learning environment at multiple levels and deliver significant benefit for all involved. These have involved collaborations between universities, commercial units, national bodies and local communities. In addition to this, partnerships between former Erasmus partners - universities in the EU - continue beyond Brexit. Some of these collaborations have resulted in curriculum development and design, in particular shared fieldwork training (exploring a variety of national archaeological traditions) and courses delivered online, where geography is no barrier to participation.

## **Monitoring and review**

2.29 A major feature of academic quality assurance and enhancement at a higher education institution is having in place monitoring and regular review processes for the courses it delivers. Degree-awarding bodies routinely collect and analyse information and undertake periodic course review according to their own needs. They will draw on a range of external reference points, including this Statement, to ensure that their provision aligns with sector norms. Monitoring and evaluation is a periodic assessment of a course, conducted internally or by external independent evaluators. Evaluation uses information from both current and historic monitoring to develop an understanding of student achievement and inform future course planning.

2.30 Externality is an essential component of the quality assurance system in the UK. Higher education providers will use external reviewers as part of periodic review to gain an external perspective on any proposed changes and ensure threshold standards are achieved and content is appropriate for the subject.

2.31 External examination currently in use across the UK higher education sector also helps to ensure consistency in the way academic standards are secured by degree-awarding bodies. Typically, external examiners will be asked to comment on the types, principles and purposes of assessments being offered to students. They will consider the types of modules on offer to students, the outcomes of a cohort and how these compare to similar provision offered within the UK. External examiners produce a report each year and make recommendations for changes to modules and assessments (where appropriate). Subject Benchmark Statements, such as this one, can play an important role in supporting external examiners in advising on whether threshold standards are being met in a specific subject area.

2.32 Courses with professional and vocational outcomes may also require evaluation and accreditation from professional and regulatory bodies. These are usually done through a combination of site visits and desk-based reviews.

## 3 Content, structure and delivery

### Content

3.1 The range and depth of the content in an Archaeology degree varies according to the location of the degree course within the humanities-science-practice triangle and the number of archaeology modules taken. However, the platform of knowledge and understanding outlined in section 1 ensures that any archaeology graduate has acquired a broad range of skills. The single honours graduate normally has all of the skills identified in this section, and the combined honours graduate normally has most of the skills.

### Subject-specific content

3.2 As appropriate to the breadth and depth of the course being pursued, students will be equipped to:

- critically evaluate, challenge and apply appropriate scholarly, theoretical and scientific principles and concepts to archaeological problems
- practise core fieldwork techniques to observe, record and interpret primary archaeological evidence (with adjustments in place as required for disabled students)
- practise core post-excavation/post-survey techniques such as stratigraphic analysis of field records, phasing and archiving
- practise core techniques of recording, measurement, analysis and interpretation of archaeological material and data
- recognise and communicate the archaeological significance of material remains, landscapes and environmental data
- interpret spatial data by integrating theoretical models, traces surviving in present-day landscapes, and excavation data
- observe and describe different classes of primary archaeological data, and record their characteristics according to defined methodologies
- select and apply appropriate qualitative, quantitative and statistical analyses to process archaeological data, while recognising the potential and limitations of such techniques
- understand how social, cultural and environmental factors interact to bring about change in coupled socio-ecological systems, and how humans and our societies and cultures have shaped and been shaped by these interactions over the course of human evolution
- understand the nature, extent and some of the reasons for contemporary and historical human diversity as seen from a variety of perspectives (for example, social, cultural, ecological, biological and temporal)
- be able to identify and question cultural assumptions in a variety of contexts, such as those still shaped by the legacy of colonialism
- be able to interpret and analyse a variety of textual, oral, visual and digital forms
- be aware of the interactions of biological, environmental and socio-cultural influences in human ecology
- be able to evaluate, compare and synthesise a variety of different forms of evidence to make interpretations about human behaviour in the past and present
- be aware of ethical issues surrounding the legacy and uses of the discipline and to critically evaluate and use relevant modes of communication and engagement

- understand the broader legislative and planning content in which archaeological work may be undertaken, now and in the past.

### **Generic, transferable and employability content**

3.3 Archaeology graduates will be equipped with the following general and widely applicable skills:

- problem solving and lateral thinking to develop solutions through creative thinking in both practical and theoretical contexts, drawing from a range of techniques from across the humanities and sciences
- producing logical and structured arguments supported by analytical and critical reference to relevant evidence
- planning, designing, executing and documenting a course of primary research, working independently and collaboratively as appropriate
- assembling coherent research/project designs
- evaluating one's own and others' opinions critically, from an appreciation of the practice of archaeology in its changing theoretical, methodological, professional, ethical and social contexts
- applying quantitative analysis and digital literacy in practical contexts
- demonstrating a positive and confident approach to practical problems
- demonstrating an innovative approach, creativity, collaboration and risk-taking
- presenting effective presentation for different kinds of audiences
- effectively communicating with a wide range of audiences using a variety of media, including written and oral, and creating effective and appropriate forms of visual presentation
- making effective and appropriate use of relevant digital technology and associated software for the manipulation of digital data
- making critical and effective use of information retrieval skills using analogue and digital resources
- working methodically and accurately, with attention to detail
- reflecting on and being proactive in accessing continuing professional and personal development
- time-management, organisation and planning skills, including assembling coherent research/project designs
- collaborating effectively in a team via experience of working in a group; for example, in the laboratory, in the field or in project work (with reasonable adjustments, if required)
- appreciating the importance of ethical and health and safety procedures and responsibilities (both personal and with regard to others) as well as broader professional frameworks and policies
- appreciating the need for inclusiveness and being sensitive, responsive and proactive in taking personal responsibility for making sure diverse others and different cultures are respected
- engaging with relevant aspects of the broader cultural context of professional practice in any given field, such as equality, diversity and inclusiveness, sustainability, global perspectives, inequality, public engagement, employability, enterprise and creativity.

## Teaching and learning

3.4 Given archaeology's variety of intellectual styles and traditions, the teaching and learning environments developed by different departments reflect their respective position(s) within the humanities-science-practice triangle.

3.5 The interactions between teaching, research and professional practice are key elements of the environment in which Archaeology courses are taught. Staff teaching within Archaeology courses are individually competent to deliver those course units for which they are responsible and collectively able to provide the breadth and depth of specialist and non-specialist subjects embraced by the course as a whole.

3.6 Students reading for an Archaeology degree are taught within an environment conducive to learning, which is intellectually stimulating, and which embraces intellectual diversity. They have access to relevant published literature, digital technologies, including associated software and computing resources, to use those effectively in a group-learning environment, appropriate primary sources, archaeological materials (such as artefacts, archives and comparative collections), field equipment and instrumentation (such as topographic survey systems and geophysical survey facilities) and, for science-based work, properly equipped and staffed laboratories (including layout space, sample preparation facilities and access to analytical instruments). Given the importance for Archaeology graduates of the development of technical skills in a variety of areas of archaeological practice, higher education providers facilitate access to the equipment and technical resources for the pursuit of these within the Archaeology courses they manage.

3.7 Archaeology students are provided with full documentation for their course of study and each component within it, including clear learning objectives. This documentation includes information regarding contextual aspects of the course, together with health and safety instructions for fieldwork and laboratory analysis, and guidance on ethical issues associated with archaeological practice. Where appropriate, documentation will refer to or display accreditation-related information.

3.8 An education in archaeology involves active engagement with the archaeological community and the wider community. Students participate in archaeological projects within and/or outside the higher education provider in which they are studying and are made aware of relevant learned societies and statutory and professional bodies. Practical work (although not necessarily excavation) is the primary means by which archaeological evidence is created, analysed or interpreted, and participatory experience (with reasonable adjustments in place to ensure participation, if required) constitutes an essential aspect of the engagement with professional practice and is therefore part of any course.

## Assessment

3.9 Each Archaeology course contains an explicit assessment strategy as part of its curriculum design. This strategy will clearly and directly reflect the learning outcomes of the course components, support student learning, and enable students to demonstrate progressive levels of attainment. The strategy will reflect the variety of abilities and skills developed within the curriculum tied to the methods of teaching and learning adopted by the particular course.

3.10 The assessment of Archaeology courses aspires to include a mix of methods that are, overall, 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 discussion with the student concerned, 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. The assessment of work undertaken in practical classes is most likely to be through exercises or project/portfolio submissions. Seminar contributions may be assessed either directly or indirectly. Coursework may be part of the overall assessment of a student's performance or regarded as a pedagogic device for developing research and presentation skills, with formative assessment and regular feedback being provided by the tutor. Feedback and assessment may also be provided by the peer group.

3.11 Students of Archaeology are likely to encounter a range of assessment methods during their course that reflect the range of learning objectives. The following list provides an indication of the range of current practice and is not meant to be a specific checklist against which to measure individual courses:

- an extended personal research project carried out over a prolonged period and involving primary data collection or extensive synthesis of secondary data, to assess powers of data assembly and analysis (including quantitative and qualitative analysis as appropriate), presentation, knowledge deployment, argument and reasoning as well as skills relating to research design, logistics and time management
- essays and assignments prepared to a defined timetable to assess knowledge and understanding of a topic, communication, analytical and presentation skills
- examination through unseen and seen papers under timed conditions requiring written essays and/or multiple-choice questions to assess knowledge base, understanding and analytical skills
- fieldwork and/or laboratory notebooks and reports to assess observational procedures, practical skills and methodologies
- presentations to assess communication skills and group work
- graphical presentations in a variety of media formats, including the production of posters
- presentations in other media and formats - for example, creating a video or webpage, or the observed participation of practical team-based exercises in the field, laboratory and/or classroom, to assess skills in collaboration and group problem solving
- practical exams that test key skills (for example, microscopy and osteological identifications) in a laboratory but under examination conditions (for example, unseen, timed and marked)
- online examinations, multiple-choice questions and electronic workbooks
- annotated bibliographies
- portfolios of work relating to practical exercises
- reports on external placements
- unseen tests.

## 4 Benchmark standards

### Introduction

4.1 This Subject Benchmark Statement sets out the minimum threshold standards that a student will have demonstrated when they are awarded an honours degree in Archaeology. Demonstrating these standards over time will show that a student has achieved the range of knowledge, understanding and skills expected of graduates in archaeology. It applies in full only to those students whose degree course contains a substantial component (at least 50%) of archaeology (see paragraph 1.7 for comments on courses with lesser contributions).

4.2 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: Outcome classification descriptions for FHEQ Level 6 and FQHEIS Level 10 degrees](#). 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.

### Threshold level

#### Subject knowledge, understanding and skills

4.3 On graduating with an honours degree in Archaeology, students should be able to:

- appreciate the chronological and conceptual scope of archaeological endeavour
- demonstrate knowledge of the archaeology of a number of geographical regions
- demonstrate knowledge of the archaeology of a number of chronological periods
- demonstrate understanding of the principles and methods by which archaeological data are acquired and analysed
- demonstrate practical experience of the recovery of primary archaeological data
- describe the variety of theoretical and practical approaches to understanding, constructing, and interpreting the past
- recognise the range of archaeological data and relevant data from other disciplines
- describe the problematic and varied nature of archaeological evidence and data and understand their possibilities and limitations
- gather, analyse and present archaeological evidence from primary and secondary sources
- recognise the range of archaeological data
- recognise the finite nature of the archaeological resource and the need for its sustainable conservation
- research and present an extended piece of archaeological research
- demonstrate knowledge of archaeological and practical skills, particularly in relation to the observation, recording and interpretation of primary data
- describe the development of archaeology as a subject and understand its implications for the discipline today and its cultural context
- demonstrate awareness of the social, cultural and political context of archaeological interpretation and practice
- demonstrate awareness of the impact of archaeological practice, interpretation and representation on other communities, including historically marginalised groups,

and appreciate the need to engage with communities thus affected on an equitable basis

- understand the need for an inclusive discipline and accord respect to diverse others within and beyond archaeology
- demonstrate awareness of the legal and ethical dimensions of archaeology.

### **Generic skills**

4.4 On graduating with an honours degree in Archaeology, students should be able to:

- demonstrate awareness of relevant archaeological concepts and methods in non-archaeological situations
- perform assigned tasks as part of a team, participating in discussion
- bring together information and materials from different sources
- identify problems and questions
- undertake the analysis of factual information
- recognise strengths and weaknesses in the arguments of others
- produce a synthesis of the state of knowledge on a particular subject or topic
- with guidance, undertake tasks independently
- reflect on their own progress and make use of feedback provided
- express themselves effectively, both orally and in writing
- present knowledge or an argument in a way that is comprehensible to others
- use relevant IT to collate, analyse, select and present information (digital literacy)
- make oral presentations utilising visual aids
- demonstrate an ability to comprehend when presented with new ideas or information
- demonstrate skills in recognising and describing material
- demonstrate classification skills in describing, categorising and collating data
- understand the importance of health and safety and of equality, diversity and inclusiveness in the work environment
- appreciate contemporary debates relating to global sustainability, employability and global perspectives including decolonisation and anti-racism
- appreciate the need to act in a sustainable manner
- appreciate and engage in contemporary debates - for example, around inequality, sustainability, globalisation and cultural diversity.

## **5 List of references and further resources**

The Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' codes, guidelines and standards:  
[www.archaeologists.net](http://www.archaeologists.net)

Profiling the Profession of Archaeology:  
<https://profilingtheprofession.org.uk/1-1-size-of-uk-archaeology>

The Chartered Institute for Archaeologists/UAUK degree accreditation details:  
[www.archaeologists.net/Degree Accreditation information for training providers](http://www.archaeologists.net/Degree%20Accreditation%20information%20for%20training%20providers)

The British Association for Biological Anthropology and Osteoarchaeology (BABAO):  
[www.babao.org.uk/publications/ethics-and-standards](http://www.babao.org.uk/publications/ethics-and-standards)

## **6 Membership of the Advisory Groups for the Subject Benchmark Statement for Archaeology**

### **Membership of the Advisory Group for the Subject Benchmark Statement for Archaeology (2022)**

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