

An aerial photograph of a coastal town, likely in Norway, showing a dense cluster of buildings, a harbor with several boats, and a large mountain in the background under a clear sky.

Subject Benchmark Statement: Geography

The Basics

This document is a summary of the Subject Benchmark Statement for Geography. It is specifically designed to provide a short and accessible overview of the main Statement 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: equity, equality, diversity and inclusion (EEDI); 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 Geography?

Geography occupies a distinctive place in the world of learning, offering an integrated study of the complex reciprocal relationships between societies and environments. Geographers study through the concepts of scale, place, space and time. They recognise the commonalities, differences and dynamics in populations and cultures, political systems, economies, landscapes and environments across the world, as well as the links between them.

The study of geography encompasses the diversity of contexts and the different types of knowledge that inform the study of environments and societies, and the interactions between the two, at a range of scales. Geography courses encourage holistic thinking across social and natural sciences, arts and humanities. They provide the intellectual foundations, tools and practical experiences to enable graduates to integrate and apply a variety of fields of knowledge and forms of enquiry and to gather and evaluate evidence in the creation of innovative, inclusive and equitable solutions. Geography courses also develop a range of personal attributes, geocapabilities and skills with applied, real-world relevance beyond higher education. Geography is both a STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) and a SHAPE (Social Sciences, Humanities and Arts) subject, and its courses develop graduates who use their skills to lead the response to emerging strategic priorities. As such, Geography courses develop graduates who are well placed to help identify and address economic, environmental and social challenges at a range of scales. The specialist research skills provided by Geography courses also make geographers adept at assessing risks, considering ethics and participating in civic engagement. This leads to a rewarding, self-determined professional life.



What are the main teaching and learning approaches in geography?

Teaching, learning and assessment styles in the discipline are diverse and students of geography engage with course materials in a variety of ways which may include classroom, online or blended/ hybrid learning, independent study, or a mixture of options, full or part-time. Degree courses in Geography will characteristically have recourse to a wide range of learning and teaching styles, as befits the intellectual heritage of a discipline whose concerns are with both environment and society. Courses enable students to experience active and reflective learning through exposure to a range of teaching approaches. For example: lectures; seminars; tutorials; supervisions or other small-group formats; directed self-study; reading and library use; laboratory practical classes, including the use of scientific laboratories and advanced computer facilities; fieldwork, both taught and self-organised; a range of student-centred learning opportunities, which might include virtual learning environments, self-directed study, simulations, problem-based learning, teamwork, volunteering, work-integrated learning and international exchanges; e-learning and distance learning.

An education in geography involves a considered engagement with the world. Fieldwork and experiential learning constitute essential aspects of this engagement.

Within honours degree courses in Geography, it is anticipated that some form of independent research work is supported throughout the degree. Students experience the entire research process, from framing enquiry to communicating findings.



How are students assessed?

An assessment and feedback for learning strategy will allow all students to demonstrate their level of attainment, and reflect upon and discuss their progress. Students of geography are likely to encounter a variety of assessment methods in their degree course, where appropriate: written work of varying lengths (essays, reports, press releases, consultancy reports, briefing papers, annotated bibliographies, article critiques); the creation of digital resources (web pages, blogs, audio and video podcasts); oral presentations (debates, conference-style poster presentations, seminars); practical work (in the field, scientific and computer laboratories, and relating to quantitative and qualitative analyses); unseen and seen examinations with a range of types of questions/tasks; reflective learning journals; independent research dissertations and capstone projects (and proposals for these); work-integrated assessments.

The assessment of Geography courses includes a mix of methods that are accessible to all students. Where individual students may be disadvantaged by particular assessment methods, adjustments to those assessments are considered while ensuring fairness across the full cohort.



Benchmark Standards

The minimum threshold standards that a student will have demonstrated when they are awarded an honours degree in Geography are outlined on **pages 18-22** 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: 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.

The Statement was developed by a group of subject experts drawn from across the sector. Details of the Advisory Group can be found on **page 24** of the 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.

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