



# Subject Benchmark Statement

History

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## About this Statement

This document is a QAA Subject Benchmark Statement for History 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 History, including course design, content and assessment 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 History
- a prospective student thinking about undertaking a course in History
- an employer, to find out about the knowledge and skills generally expected of History 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 a History degree

## Context

1.1 Provision in the subject in the four nations of the UK is extensive, including single, joint, combined honours and interdisciplinary undergraduate courses, as well as a wide range of master's courses. This Subject Benchmark Statement is focused on single honours bachelor's courses leading to a named award in History. However, the recommendations made are equally relevant to History modules offered in joint or combined degrees, or in interdisciplinary courses that include a historical element.

1.2 The focus on students completing bachelor's degrees with honours means that explicit comment is not made on lower qualifications and exit points. However, the criteria relating to courses are relevant to every stage of progression towards the bachelor's degree with honours, from induction onwards.

1.3 Organisational patterns vary across the sector: in some higher education providers History is a distinct department or other unit; in others it is part of a broader subject cluster. This document will refer to 'departments or History subject groups' to reflect the breadth of the sector.

## Purposes of a History degree

1.4 History courses involve extensive and intensive study of the past, from the origins of humankind to recent events, examining change and continuity across all aspects of society, politics, economics, culture, ideas and physical environments.

1.5 As such, history as a discipline is closely allied to other humanities, arts and social sciences. Students of history develop the capabilities, skills and competencies common to those disciplinary areas, including the ability to:

- work independently, while engaging with supervision and guidance
- work as part of a team as an effective collaborator
- formulate and pursue clearly defined questions and enquiries
- demonstrate appropriate means of identifying, finding, retrieving, sorting and exchanging information
- gather, organise and deploy evidence, data and information
- undertake the analysis of evidence
- recognise strengths and weaknesses in the arguments of others
- show analytical ability and the capacity to consider and solve problems (including those to which there is no single solution)
- demonstrate conceptual grasp and the ability to shape arguments
- show intellectual integrity, maturity and independence
- exhibit imaginative insight and creativity
- demonstrate self-discipline and self-direction
- show initiative and questioning habits
- show awareness of academic integrity and ethical issues and responsibilities that arise from research and the reuse of the research and writing of others
- exhibit structure, coherence and clarity of oral and written expression
- show skills around digital literacy
- reflect on their own progress and make use of feedback provided
- appreciate and engage in contemporary debates relating to global sustainability and global perspectives.

1.6 However, history also provides a distinct education by cultivating a strong sense of the past, an awareness of the development of differing values, systems and societies, and the fostering of critical yet open-minded attitudes. The study of history instils ways of thinking and habits of learning which are intrinsic to the subject, while being no less transferable. These include an appreciation of the complexity of the past and historical enquiry; a respect for historical context; the ability to conduct robust, rigorous analysis of historical evidence; a raised awareness of the historical processes unfolding in the present time; and a deeper understanding of why the world is as it is today.

1.7 As a result, on graduating with an honours degree in History, students should be able to:

- ask relevant, cogent, and focused historical questions
- know where and how to access relevant and precise historical knowledge
- conduct structured enquiries that consist of setting tasks, gathering, sifting, selecting, organising, synthesising and analysing appropriate and often large quantities of evidence, including primary sources and secondary scholarship
- use valid and relevant evidence and argument
- employ effective bibliographic skills
- display analytical skills, including the recognition that not all statements are of equal validity; that there are ways of testing them; that historians operate by rules of evidence which, though themselves subject to critical evaluation, are also a component of intellectual integrity and maturity more generally
- critically and empathetically analyse primary sources, addressing questions of genre, content, perspective and purpose. Primary sources include any form of evidence from the past that is under examination, including textual, visual, material and oral sources
- understand the problems inherent in the historical record itself: awareness of a range of viewpoints and ways to evaluate them; appreciation of the range of problems involved in the interpretation of complex, ambiguous, conflicting and often incomplete material; and comprehension of the limitations of knowledge and dangers of simplistic explanations. These capacities provide an enhanced ability to critically analyse broader historical claims in public life
- appreciate complexity and diversity of situations, events and mentalities in the past and, by extension, present; history is an anti-reductionist subject that fosters intellectual maturity
- understand how people have existed, acted and thought in the always-different context of the past. History involves encountering the past's otherness and learning to understand unfamiliar structures, cultures and belief systems. These forms of understanding illuminate the influence of the past on the present; they also foster empathy, and respect for difference
- sustain a reasoned line of argument in the face of others, to listen, to engage in sustained debate, to amend views as necessary in the light of evidence and argument
- marshal an argument in pursuit of meaningful questions about the past and, by implication, the present and future.

1.8 History's reciprocal relationship with other subjects can also have an important influence on the student's experience of the subject and the abilities gained: interdisciplinarity more broadly brings fresh approaches, perspectives and ways of investigation and conceptualisation. It may be that in some combinations or in some departments or history

subject groups, students also benefit from the experience of fieldwork and field trips; archival study; international mobility schemes; work-based learning; language-learning; numeracy and quantitative methods.

## **Characteristics of a History degree**

1.9 Questioning, exploration, debate and discovery through independent engagement with sources and scholarship, and the ability to formulate independent arguments are integral to the study of history. History courses do not impart knowledge and skills to be passively absorbed. Further, history differs from many subjects in that historians do not recognise a specific body of required knowledge or a core with surrounding options. There is therefore healthy variation in how the vast body of knowledge, understanding and competencies which constitutes the subject is approached in different courses.

1.10 Within History courses, too, teaching and learning takes a variety of forms; courses legitimately combine different approaches. This variety arises from the different interests and abilities of individual scholars and their students; from the demands of the material under investigation; and from the fact that departments or subject groups in different providers have access to different combinations of resources. Each course defines its own desired learning outcomes in ways that command credibility and recognises the need to ensure academic standards by means of the professional scrutiny provided by internal peer review and external examiners.

1.11 Assessment also has valuable variety. All departments or subject groups develop clear assessment policies which are consistent with the learning outcomes of their degree schemes. Policy documentation specifies clearly what students are expected to learn, how their work will be assessed, and the relationship between the two. At the same time, departments and subject groups consider and explain the relationship between formative and summative assessment; that is, between assessment designed as feedback on progress, and assessment that is primarily for degree award and classification purposes.

## **Equality, diversity and inclusion**

1.12 The discipline of history seeks to recover the diversity of human organisation and experience in the past, and to recognise the enduring legacies of the past in the present. History is therefore an inherently multi-perspectival discipline; practitioners of the discipline strive to understand the development of differing ideas, experiences, values, systems and societies, based on a commitment to a reasoned and evidence-based approach to studying the past.

1.13 Students of history recognise that historical knowledge is contingent on the credibility of evidence and interpretation, and thus subject to revision, adaptation, controversy and change. History is not a comfortable subject; it includes confronting uncomfortable and unsettling aspects of the past, elements of which may continue to resonate and inspire controversy and debate today, but which are an unavoidable part of the process of historical recovery and essential to the rigour of historical enquiry. History operates best when its practitioners reflect the diversity of human society and thought, bringing different perspectives and life experiences to bear on the past, and engage in self-reflection and critique to test and question both their own and the discipline's approaches to studying the past. In particular, history has the capacity to create a balanced understanding of the past through examination of non-dominant and traditionally marginalised cultures.

1.14 Similarly, the wider community of historians is an inclusive learning community, with a shared commitment to and responsibility for equality, diversity and inclusion in the content and delivery of History courses. It recognises the need to address the systemic imbalances in

the study of history, by engaging in widening participation and inclusive curriculum agendas, and by countering the under-representation of marginalised groups in History courses. It also engages closely with work to decolonise the curriculum, including challenging Eurocentric conceptual frameworks and the dismantling of subject practices that perpetuate inequities.

1.15 History graduates are distinguished not only by the ways of thinking, habits of learning and intellectual inquisitiveness outlined above, but also by the versatility and breadth of skills they possess, including written and verbal communication across multiple formats, analytical thinking, creative problem-solving, collection and classification of information, interpretation and evaluation. In this way, History graduates are equipped with the resourcefulness of mind and skills to make a comprehensive contribution to societal development, operating across global contexts, attuned to social justice, environmental responsibility, and the quest to tackle both new and historical global challenges.

## **Sustainability**

1.16 The study of history addresses social, environmental and economic concerns with the aim of creating a better world. The discipline can contribute towards achievement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, partly in terms of disciplinary content, and partly via disciplinary method (QAA and Advance HE, [Education for Sustainable Development Guidance](#)). Environmental history in particular brings to the fore understanding of the interaction between nature and culture; how humans have affected the natural environments of the past; and how current problems are legacies of the past. However, public history, economic history and cultural history also focus on key aspects of sustainability.

1.17 History courses can also contribute to sustainability through their connection with heritage and work around conservation, preservation and learning from the past to plan for the future. In this respect, there are demonstrable links between the subfields of environmental history and public history.

1.18 More broadly, history prepares students to meet sustainability needs and challenges through its inherent attention to issues of change, continuity and causation; its demand for multi-perspectivity and multi-factorial understanding of events, issues and problems; its appreciation of the relationships between economic, political, cultural, social and environmental factors and systems; its ability to observe processes taking place in more than one place and more than one time; and its acknowledgement that there are rarely simple answers to problems. In fostering this critical mindset, history therefore equips graduates to respond creatively and flexibly not only to current environmental needs, but those not yet identified and those that may emerge in the future.

## **Entrepreneurship and enterprise education**

1.19 Enterprise and entrepreneurship education supports behaviours, attributes and competencies that are likely to have a significant impact on the individual student in terms of future-ready employability and 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 (see Partnership on page 10). Beyond employment, entrepreneurship education develops 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.

1.20 History courses provide excellent grounding in this regard, with employability skills embedded in all modules and explicitly delivered through teaching and assessment methods focusing on 'real world' tasks such as writing policy papers, collaborative group work and oral presentations. The agility, flexibility and independence promoted by historical study promotes



career resilience and helps graduates to sustain successful career trajectories. Many employers are especially interested in History graduates because of their particular training and approach, based on robust questioning, rigorous evidence-gathering, and applying multi-perspectival approaches in coming to reasoned and reasonable judgements. Because they are able to recognise and mediate for their own bias and to prioritise in their thinking, History graduates display an ability to think quickly and adapt to the demands of the task at hand. The practice of working across a wide range of historical sources requires History students to be proficient in the retrieval, selection, interpretation, analysis and synthesis of information from extensive datasets, both analogue and digital, and to be able to summarise complex knowledge and form and communicate clear, reasoned arguments to a variety of audiences.

1.21 History courses help students to recognise, reflect on and communicate the value of these behaviours, develop attributes and competencies as they progress through and beyond university, as well as enhance those they already bring with them. History courses produce in-demand graduates who work in a wide variety of careers both related and unrelated to history, including education, public administration, law, HR, business and finance, marketing, PR and sales. [Prospects](#) and [HESA](#) provide data on graduate outcomes that is updated annually.

## 2 Distinctive features of a History degree

### Design

2.1 History provision across the sector is characterised by a diversity of periods, cultures, methodologies and conceptual assumptions. Nevertheless, there are a number of central and distinctive features.

- a) Time depth: awareness of continuity and change over an extended time span is central to developing a historical awareness. It leads to an understanding of historical processes, and it opens the way to the insights which stem from a juxtaposition of past and present. Courses introduce students to the issues of continuity and change and give them experience of the intellectual benefits accruing from the study of history over an extended period. Courses which cover a relatively short time span demonstrate how they provide students with a long-term perspective on their subject matter.
- b) Geographical range: students study the history of more than one society, culture or place. Among other benefits, this opens the way to appreciation for and understanding of comparative perspectives. Where a single country is the predominant focus of the course, that course incorporates serious and sustained comparison with others and should be multiperspectival. History's ability to promote understanding between cultures and traditions, in local, national and global contexts, and the opportunities it affords to explore traditions and identities, remain distinctively important features deriving from the study of the subject.
- c) Primary sources: opportunity for close work on source material originating in the period studied is essential. This often comprises written documents, but can also refer to artefacts, material and visual evidence, oral sources, and so on. Students carry out intensive critical work on such source material, interrogating and interpreting evidence with rigour and reasoned judgement in pursuit of structured historical enquiry. This can take place in any type of module, not simply modules dedicated to independent research. Source work is a necessary part of learning the characteristics of the subject because it imparts important awareness of research methods, academic integrity and ethical standards to be observed in research.
- d) Critical awareness: all History students reflect critically on the nature of their subject, its social rationale, its theoretical underpinnings, its ethical dimensions and its intellectual standing. While this may take place in a module whose predominant focus is on historiography (the study of writing on history) or on historical method, History students are expected to demonstrate wider historiographical and methodological awareness and understanding in all modules they undertake, and also in independent extended pieces of coursework. Students also receive appropriate guidance in, and are able to demonstrate their application of, appropriate research ethics; this may include, but is not limited to, compliance with specific and detailed codes and policies covering research ethics developed both by higher education institutions and archival repositories. History students are also acquainted with the subject's protocols and expectations regarding the quotation and reproduction of the work of others in their own work.
- e) Diversity of specialisms: history comprises many varieties, each with a distinctive focus and theoretical orientation, for example political, economic, social, gender, cultural and many others. Students are introduced to some of these varieties of approach; the aim is not comprehensiveness but a critical awareness that there are many principles of selection and modes of enquiry. Where a course is strongly based

on one type of specialism, serious comparisons are made with the contribution of others to historical understanding.

- f) An extended piece of work, often but not always referred to as a dissertation or final year project: the student is enabled to formulate, execute and complete an independent, extended piece of work under appropriate supervision. In most cases this will be based on historical source material; alternatively, it may take the form of an in-depth historiographical enquiry, such as a critical evaluation of a particular historical controversy, or the work of a particular historian. It may be freestanding or be linked to a taught module.

## **Accessibility**

2.2 History courses are designed to be highly accessible with a wide and inclusive range of teaching and learning methods and assessments used to support the needs of as many students as possible from as wide a range of backgrounds as possible. Departments or History subject groups keep up to date with legislation and best practice in this area, as well as engaging in discussion with their students to ensure accessible arrangements. They take advantage of the flexibility afforded by digital learning and resources to make teaching and learning in history accessible. They pay particular attention to areas of practical challenge, such as those faced by disabled students, students with mental and physical health conditions, students with caring responsibilities, commuter students, those from under-privileged socio-economic backgrounds and those who keep religious observance, in terms of classroom experience, flexible learning resources and work on field trips, placements and visits.

## **Progression**

2.3 Over the course of a degree with honours (FHEQ Level 6; FQHEIS Level 10) a History student will progress from one year of study to the next, in line with the regulations and processes for each institution. The variety and flexibility of History courses means that there is no mechanical progression; knowledge and skills are acquired and developed cumulatively. Subject matter varies, and the course may make heavier and/or more sophisticated demands on students over time, but the general process is one of developing and reinforcing similar skills and qualities throughout the course. Qualitative advances may be achieved in a number of ways, for instance through increasing conceptual sophistication, increasing interpretative skills, increasing ability to pose, refine and pursue historical enquiries, increasing capacity for sustained written and/or oral analysis, greater independence of learning, and so on. Departments are not therefore expected to conform to any one model, but determine how their particular courses are designed to provide students with the means to gain in competence, insight and performance over the duration of the course.

2.4 Because history is a non-sequential subject, there is no fixed order of progression from one type of module to another. There is no reason in principle why, for example, modules covering a broad chronological or geographical range are more strongly represented at the beginning than later in the course, or that close documentary study of a narrow period is undertaken towards the end of the course. However, it is the responsibility of departments to clearly articulate how a given course facilitates progression over the period of study.

2.5 Ultimately, 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 History or an associated discipline.

2.6 Joint honours undergraduates will achieve elements of the specific and generic skills for the subject but will add others according to the subjects covered in a joint programme.

2.7 In a standard three-year undergraduate honours degree qualification, students may exit earlier and 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. 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**

2.8 Much that has been said under Accessibility on page 9 can apply here too: History courses can be taught and assessed in an increasingly flexible way that works with the strengths and needs of the individual student. The non-linear nature of the discipline affords significant potential for flexible delivery of content; indeed, the discipline has long attracted part-time students, especially mature students.

## **Partnership**

2.9 History graduates develop a wide range of transferable skills and therefore enter a great variety of occupations. As such, it is appropriate that they can engage in activities which will support them into diverse future careers, provided these activities meet some of the learning outcomes of a History degree. Therefore, work placements or work-related projects may be provided where appropriate to students' needs through association with history-related organisations, groups or projects such as museums, archives, or community, heritage or public history contexts, but they may also take place outside history-related organisations. The guiding principle for these activities is that they either apply established historical skills through experiential learning or develop new skills which can be applied elsewhere in the history curriculum. All such learning and reflective practice helps students to understand and articulate the skills that they gain from their degree course.

## **Monitoring and review**

2.10 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 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 or inform future course planning.

2.11 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.

2.12 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.

## **3 Content, structure and delivery**

### **Content**

3.1 The breadth and depth of the content of a History degree vary according to the location of the degree course within History departments or subject groups, and the number of modules taken. However, the platform of knowledge and understanding outlined in section 1 and the distinctive features and diversity of specialisms in History courses outlined in section 2 ensure that the content of History courses provides all History graduates with a broad and relevant range of knowledge and skills.

### **Teaching and learning**

3.2 History teaching is student-centred. It empowers students by helping them to develop knowledge, understanding and capabilities. It does so by engagement with subject-specialists who enable structured learning experiences, including development of the capacity for independent study. It is a combination of online and in-person teaching and learning, with delivery in a range of virtual and physical spaces. Learning takes place in classrooms, libraries and physical study spaces; online learning environments; and in the world more broadly, including museums, art galleries and heritage sites.

3.3 History teaching takes many forms. One is the lecture format which can in itself range from traditional teacher-led lectures to more interactive formats, online provision, blended formats and 'flipped' lectures where the students access the lecture online first, and then develop their learning from that in class discussion and reflection. These are all valuable; the lecture format, broadly defined, can inspire students and give them direct entry into a range of information and ideas which they may never, or only very rarely, be able to gather for themselves. Lectures can act as a launch pad into the heart of new subject matter. They enable students to develop their skills in listening, selective note taking, and reflection, and can also have an important social function as a collective and shared experience.

3.4 Complementing the lecture, History students also have the opportunity to engage with the subject matter in a small-group environment, giving more space for student-centred interaction, discussion and debate through seminars and workshops which take place in usually the physical but sometimes virtual classroom. In these sessions students participate in group discussions, give presentations and jointly explore themes and arguments. These group discussions are aimed at improving students' critical engagement and understanding rather than at the acquisition of knowledge per se, and are structured in such a way as to maximise effective student participation. They are normally preceded by a set of preparatory tasks. Such work both deepens students' understanding of a theme or subject and develops oral communication skills. It encourages an analytical and self-critical approach to historical discussion and builds students' self-confidence by hearing or seeing their own contribution engaged with by their peers and tutors. It improves their abilities to marshal historical evidence, to use the language of the discipline and to summarise historical arguments, as well as to think quickly on their feet, to communicate articulately and persuasively with others, and to recognise the value of close collaboration with peers.

3.5 Courses are designed to support students to develop the skills of working independently: enquiring, reading, thinking and writing. Contact hours guide, support and facilitate this process, but independent study is a predominant characteristic of a History course. Bibliographies and other reading and resource advice provide students with the necessary starting points, but students are also encouraged by teaching staff to make imaginative use of physical and online resources to expand their knowledge base and their range of historical approaches.

3.6 All students receive critical and constructive comment on their progress as an integral part of teaching and learning. Interactions with academic staff, whether as part of a regular teaching arrangement, feedback on work, or more occasional meetings, are essential to helping students clarify areas of confusion and gain a better understanding of their own performance as well as of historical themes and issues.

3.7 Teaching methods/learning opportunities are not fixed categories. They will vary from one department or subject group to the next, with each one making legitimate decisions about the most effective curriculum and delivery formats for their students in their context. Teaching and learning methods are kept under review by departments, with due consideration being given, for instance, to student module and course evaluation questionnaires, peer review, the dissemination of good practice from other departments and higher education providers, and intellectual developments in the subject as well as the scholarship of teaching and learning. Teaching and learning methods should also reflect the need to provide an inclusive learning environment and to reflect the goals of Education for Sustainable Development.

3.8 Students are provided with documentation for each individual module which explains what the module is designed to achieve, and the means to its attainment. Students are also provided with an outline of the module structure, information about the nature and amount of assessment, intended learning outcomes and a bibliography or resource list. These module guides are designed to be read by students in relation to institutional documentation which includes details of the degree scheme, criteria for all levels of classification and all forms of assessment in use, the range of available courses, course structures, assessment methods and weightings, and advice about academic integrity and referencing.

## **Assessment**

3.9 Diversity in assessment is vital for two main reasons. First, the full range of a student's abilities is most unlikely to be revealed through any single mode. Second, the diverse educational backgrounds and formal qualifications of students embarking on degree-level study mean that courses should provide all students with opportunities to show what they know, understand and can do. Students will be rewarded for what they are good at, as well as gaining skills and awareness in what they find more challenging.

3.10 Students undertake a range of assignments reflecting the wide variety of ways in which they can produce cogent, reasoned historical arguments communicated through a range of modes. These should include:

- a) assessments that show a student's ability to communicate information and argument effectively as appropriate to the task set. This includes writing in various forms, at varying lengths, for different audiences, such as reviews, reports, essays or a dissertation. It also includes communication in forms outside written prose, such as oral presentations, the creation of videos, websites and databases, and digital history projects
- b) assessments that demonstrate an ability to work with a range of historical evidence, such as source or 'gobbet' exercises, or commentaries
- c) assessments that demonstrate a student's ability to work under pressure of time and think quickly. This may in some cases take the form of a traditional, timed exam, or it may be seen in a range of other tasks, such as 'take home' papers or a task spread over a number of hours or days
- d) assessments that demonstrate an ability to work independently, under supervision

- e) assessments that show an ability to collaborate with others and work effectively as part of a group, such as group presentations or projects
- f) at least one major assignment in which students are assessed on their ability to address historical problems in depth through structured historical enquiry. Students are given the opportunity to pursue a historical enquiry, sustaining and developing it through several stages. Such an exercise involves both task-setting and problem-solving. This is often done through an extended piece of written work, sometimes known as a dissertation or final year project, usually of at least twice the length required for standard coursework essays; however, it may also be assessed in other forms, including 'authentic' assessment tasks such as writing and presenting for different audiences.

3.11 Different modes and weightings of assessment are appropriate to different courses and reflect the particular emphases and concentrations in those courses. Departments or History subject groups develop their own assessment regimes that include the assessment opportunities above in a set of combinations most appropriate for their students and their curriculum. Assessment designers are encouraged to think about assessment ambitiously, inclusively, and with the aims of sustainable education in mind. In any case, however, the overall combination of assessments must enable students to demonstrate all the learning outcomes of their course, and students given clear, timely information on how they will be assessed as well as constructive feedback on their assessments.



## 4 Benchmark standards

### Introduction

4.1 This Subject Benchmark Statement sets out the minimum threshold standards that student will have demonstrated when they are awarded an honours degree in History. Demonstrating these standards over time will show that a student has achieved the range of knowledge, understanding and skills expected of graduates in the subject.

4.2 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. Higher education providers operate, and publish for their students, their own descriptors. This might take the form of a template setting out assessment criteria.

4.3 Where different modes of assessment privilege different qualities (for example, essay writing in examination conditions, extended essays, dissertations, or oral competence) different templates may need to be produced. Such templates or their equivalent may be published in student handbooks.

4.4 Published criteria and grade descriptors are available for all forms of assessment. Criteria at all levels of classification give predominance to positive achievement, making use of the full range of marks set out in marking schemes. Feedback to students on performance indicates the kinds of improvements that would be necessary to achieve a higher mark.

### 4.5 Minimum threshold standards

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

- ask relevant, cogent, and focused historical questions
- know where and how to access relevant and precise historical knowledge
- conduct structured enquiry that consists of setting tasks, gathering, sifting, selecting, organising, synthesising and analysing appropriate and often large quantities of evidence, including primary sources and secondary scholarship
- use valid and relevant evidence and argument
- employ effective bibliographic skills
- display analytical skills, including the recognition that not all statements are of equal validity
- critically and empathetically analyse primary sources, addressing questions of genre, content, perspective and purpose
- understand the problems inherent in the historical record itself: awareness of a range of viewpoints and ways to evaluate them; appreciation of the range of problems involved in the interpretation of complex, ambiguous, conflicting and often incomplete material; and comprehension of the limitations of knowledge and dangers of simplistic explanations
- appreciate complexity and diversity of situations, events and mentalities in the past and, by extension, present
- understand how people have existed, acted and thought in the always-different context of the past
- sustain a reasoned line of argument in the face of others, to listen, to engage in sustained debate, to amend views as necessary in the light of evidence and argument

- marshal an argument in pursuit of meaningful questions about the past and, by implication, the present and future.

### **Generic skills**

4.6 On graduating with an honours degree in History, students should be able to:

- work independently, while engaging with supervision and guidance
- work as part of a team as an effective collaborator
- formulate and pursue clearly defined questions and enquiries
- demonstrate appropriate means of identifying, finding, retrieving, sorting and exchanging information
- gather, organise and deploy evidence, data and information
- undertake the analysis of sources
- recognise strengths and weaknesses in the arguments of others
- show analytical ability and the capacity to consider and solve problems (including those to which there is no single solution)
- demonstrate conceptual grasp and the ability to shape arguments
- show intellectual integrity, maturity and independence
- exhibit imaginative insight and creativity
- demonstrate self-discipline and self-direction
- show initiative and questioning habits
- show awareness of academic integrity and ethical issues and responsibilities that arise from research and the reuse of the research and writing of others
- exhibit structure, coherence and clarity of oral and written expression, as well as digital literacy
- reflect on their own progress and make use of feedback provided
- appreciate and engage in contemporary debates relating to global sustainability and global perspectives.

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

QAA and Advance HE (2021) Education for Sustainable Development Guidance  
[www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code/education-for-sustainable-development](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code/education-for-sustainable-development)

HESA  
[www.graduateoutcomes.ac.uk](http://www.graduateoutcomes.ac.uk)

Prospects  
<https://luminare.prospects.ac.uk/what-do-graduates-do>

## 6 Membership of the Advisory Groups for the Subject Benchmark Statement for History

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

Professor Elaine Fulton (Chair)	University of Birmingham
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QAA would like to thank Professor Elizabeth Cleaver, Professor Michael McLinden and the Disabled Students' Commission for their valued contributions to the development of the Statement.

### Membership of the Advisory Group for the Subject Benchmark Statement for History (2019)

The fourth edition, published in 2019, was revised by QAA to align the content with the revised UK Quality Code for Higher Education, published in 2018. Proposed revisions were checked and verified by a member of the review group of the Subject Benchmark Statement for History from 2014.

Professor Arthur Burns	Royal Historical Society, King's College London
Dr Andy Smith	QAA

### Membership of the Advisory Group for the Subject Benchmark Statement for History (2014)

Details provided below are as published in the third edition of the Subject Benchmark Statement.

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Canterbury Christ Church University,  
The Historical Association  
University of Birmingham  
University of Glasgow  
University of Manchester  
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Sheffield Hallam University  
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### **Membership of the Advisory Group for the Subject Benchmark Statement for History (2007)**

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Lancaster University  
Bath Spa University

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Professor Martin Daunton  
Professor Jackie Eales  
Professor Eric Evans  
Professor Paul Hyland

### **Membership of the Advisory Group for the Subject Benchmark Statement for History (2000)**

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University of Edinburgh  
St Mary's College, Twickenham  
University of Bristol  
University of Wales, Swansea  
University of Lancaster  
University of Wales, Aberystwyth  
Sheffield Hallam University  
Glasgow Caledonian University  
King's College London  
University of Huddersfield  
University of North London

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