

Subject Benchmark Statement: History

The Basics

This document is a summary of the Subject Benchmark Statement for History. 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: equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI); the requirements of disabled students; education for sustainable development (ESD); and enterprise and entrepreneurship.

Section 2 covers distinctive features of the course, including curriculum design, partnership arrangements, flexibility of delivery, progression and ongoing monitoring processes. Section 3 explains any features relevant to teaching, learning and assessment activities for the subject. Section 4 describes the benchmark standards of achievement reached by all graduates with a bachelor's degree with honours in the subject, with some subjects also including achievement at master's level.



Why study a degree in History?

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. History 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.

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.

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.



What are the main teaching and learning approaches in history?

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.

Within History courses, teaching and learning take 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.



How are students assessed?

The assessment of History courses includes a mix of methods that are accessible to disabled students and students from varying educational and cultural backgrounds within different learning situations.

Where individual students may be disadvantaged by particular assessment methods, adjustments to those assessments are considered while ensuring fairness across the full cohort. The procedures used for assessment cover the subject knowledge, abilities and skills developed through the degree course.

Students undertake a range of formative and summative assessment tasks reflecting the wide variety of ways in which they can produce cogent, reasoned historical arguments communicated through a range of modes. These include assessments that emphasise communication skills, both written and oral, an ability to work with historical evidence and address historical problems in depth through structured historical enquiry.



Benchmark Standards

The minimum threshold standards that a student will have demonstrated when they are awarded an honours degree in History are outlined on **pages 15-16** 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 18** 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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