Subject Benchmark Statement

Languages, Cultures and Societies

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Contents

About this Statement

This document is a QAA Subject Benchmark Statement for Languages, Cultures and Societies 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 are an established part of the quality assurance arrangements in UK higher education, but not a regulatory requirement. They are sector-owned reference points, developed and written by academics on behalf of their subject. 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 an expert quality body 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
    - accessibility and the needs of disabled students
    - education for sustainable development
    - employability, entrepreneurship and enterprise education
- a comprehensive review updating the context and purposes, 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 not intended to prescribe any particular approaches to teaching, learning or assessment. Rather, they provide a framework, agreed by the subject community, that forms the basis on which those responsible for curriculum design, approval and update can reflect upon a course, and its component modules. This allows for flexibility and innovation in course design while providing a broadly accepted external reference point for that discipline.

They may also be used as a reference point by external examiners in considering whether the design of a course and the threshold standards of achievement are comparable with those of other higher education providers. They also support professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs) with the academic standards expected of students.

You may want to read this document if you are:

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

Relationship to legislation

The responsibility for academic standards lies with the higher education provider which 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 depending on 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 the Quality Assessment Framework for Wales and in Scotland as part of the Quality Enhancement Framework. Subject Benchmark Statements are part of the current quality arrangements 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 Languages, Cultures and Societies degree

Context

1.1   This Subject Benchmark Statement refers to the provision of undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in Languages, Cultures and Societies (LCS) in the four nations of the UK. It includes single, joint and combined degrees with honours at undergraduate level (Bachelor of Arts in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, Master of Arts in Scotland) and a range of postgraduate master's courses. In LCS disciplines, joint and combined honours degrees are increasingly common, whether combining two or more languages, or combining language(s) with one or more other subjects in the humanities, social sciences or sciences.

1.2   In discussing undergraduate courses, this Statement assumes students complete a degree with honours. However, the context it discusses is relevant to every stage of progression towards the degree with honours, from induction onwards, including non-honours qualifications and exit points (certificates, diplomas and designated or ordinary degrees).

1.3   Many students of other subjects are able to enrich their degree by studying languages as elective modules, for example through an institution-wide languages programme, usually with a focus on developing language proficiency. The Statement sets out the standards achieved by graduates of LCS degrees as defined in paragraph 1.1, but students of languages as electives will also, depending on the level and extent of study, develop some of the skills and attributes described here.

1.4   At postgraduate level, provision of professionally oriented LCS courses is widespread, most notably in the fields of translation and interpreting. Reflecting the interdisciplinary nature of the subject area, topics emerging out of expertise in LCS are often integrated into comparative and multidisciplinary courses exploring particular periods or themes, such as Medieval and Renaissance Studies, Critical and Cultural Theory, and Environmental Humanities.

1.5   Organisational patterns vary across the sector. In some higher education institutions, degrees in LCS are based in a distinct academic school or other unit, while in others they are part of a broader subject cluster. This document refers to all degree courses in Languages, Cultures and Societies to reflect the breadth and diversity of the sector.

1.6   Through the critical, analytical and practical skills they build, LCS courses share substantial common ground with English and Linguistics. The Subject Benchmark Statement for the latter incorporates material relevant to courses in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), which are not covered by this Subject Benchmark Statement.

Purposes and characteristics of a Languages, Cultures and Societies degree

1.7   LCS courses share as core features the attainment of communicative proficiency in a language, and the study of aspects of linguistics, cultures and societies, from a broad range of disciplinary and interdisciplinary perspectives. They may be focused on one or more human languages, past and present, from those with millions of speakers in one or more nation-states, to regional, indigenous and/or minoritised languages.

1.8   LCS degrees typically require a period of immersive learning to enhance linguistic proficiency and cultural competence. In this context, immersive learning refers to a physical

placement, or digital space, where the student is able to work predominantly in the target language and culture. Such opportunities are of fundamental value for developing the key skills of language acquisition, cultural understanding and intercultural competence that are at the heart of LCS degrees. Depending on the language(s) studied, placements may happen in the UK or Ireland (particularly for students of Celtic languages) or involve international travel (for students of other European, Arabic and Asian languages). Such placements vary in length from a few weeks to a full academic year (the latter often referred to as the 'year abroad') and take a range of different forms which can be tailored to student interests and requirements, including study, community and internships.

1.9   LCS degrees are vital to the economy and society of the UK and its nations. They equip students with the practical, analytical and communicative skills relevant for a diverse, globalised and interdependent world in which the ability to understand, engage with and mediate between languages, cultures and societies is crucial (British Academy 2016, British Academy et al 2020). LCS graduates find employment in a wide variety of sectors in the UK and internationally, including public policy and the civil and diplomatic service, charities and non-governmental organisations, communication, marketing and public relations, translation and interpreting, education, publishing and the creative industries, digital media and digital conservation, audit and consultancy, business and commerce.

1.10   Graduates of LCS degrees typically:

- have a high standard of proficiency in the language(s) studied, with strong productive, receptive, interactive and mediating skills, making them confident and sophisticated communicators in the language(s) studied.
- are aware of the broader context in which communication takes places, are sensitive to variations in language use and their significance, and are able to deal with uncertainty and ambiguity in communication
- are aware of, and in some cases acquire, competence in relevant language technologies, such as computer-assisted translation, language-processing software, language-learning software and online language corpora
- have an open mindset and are able to see the world through the eyes of others, enabling them to understand and value multiple perspectives
- are able to appreciate, analyse and critically interpret a wide diversity of cultural forms, products and practices, including manifestations of community, local, regional and national cultures; forms of 'high' and 'popular' culture, material culture and digital culture; and the customs and practices of everyday life
- are able to understand, mediate, analyse and compare ideas and events that cross national, cultural or linguistic boundaries, such as current and historical relationships between countries
- are able to address questions and problems comparatively across languages, cultures and societies, whether transnationally and/or with awareness of regional and/or minoritised languages, cultures and societies
- are likely to possess the intercultural skills and language proficiency to facilitate their international mobility, especially where their degree has included a period of international placement.

1.11   LCS degrees also share many features with the other subjects known collectively as SHAPE (Social Sciences, Humanities and the Arts for People and the Economy). Alongside the particular attributes identified above, LCS graduates also develop the capabilities, skills and competencies common to SHAPE subjects, including the ability to:

- work independently while engaging with supervision and guidance, reflecting on their own progress and making use of feedback provided
- work as part of a team as an effective collaborator

- demonstrate initiative, self-discipline and self-direction, for example by managing their working time efficiently
- demonstrate appropriate means of gathering, organising and deploying a range of evidence, data and information
- show analytical ability, questioning habits, 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
- exhibit structure, coherence and clarity of verbal and/or non-verbal communication
- show intellectual integrity, maturity and independence, including the ability to recognise strengths and weaknesses in the arguments of others
- exhibit imaginative insight and creativity
- show awareness of academic integrity and the ethical responsibilities of the researcher
- demonstrate digital literacy skills
- appreciate and engage in contemporary debates relating to global sustainability and global perspectives.

Equality, diversity and inclusion

1.12   LCS courses are inherently outward-looking in their emphasis on making connections between, and developing understanding of, different cultures and societies. They recognise that students are not only diverse in their backgrounds and entry points but also in their motivations for learning. They promote inclusive environments, in which all staff and students feel valued and supported, irrespective of age, gender, race, sexual orientation, dialect or accent, religious or personal beliefs, disability or health conditions, background or personal circumstances.

1.13   LCS courses use a range of pedagogical approaches and technologies to ensure that the curriculum is equally accessible to all students. By deploying a diverse range of assessment methods (including, for example, learning journals, creative outputs, oral presentations), they allow students to demonstrate their knowledge, understanding and proficiency in different ways. Where implemented, online, hybrid or blended learning delivery increase access for students, particularly those who work, commute, study part-time, have caring responsibilities, disabilities, health conditions, learning differences or particular needs.

1.14   An inclusive LCS curriculum supports the perspectives and views represented in speaking, writing or other forms of communication in minority, sign, heritage or constructed languages. LCS courses recognise that multilingualism is a resource that facilitates exchange across difference, helps to preserve the linguistic and cultural heritage of minority and indigenous communities, and provides opportunities to engage with local language communities. Where language rights are part of the curriculum, controversy may ensue; these 'difficult conversations' are part of the process of learning about language.

1.15   LCS courses encourage students to reflect on historical and contemporary forms of injustice and inequality related to imperialism, colonialism, class or gender divisions as they are manifested in different languages, cultures and societies. They also challenge established theoretical paradigms and conceptual frameworks and examine the ways that dominant approaches can perpetuate exclusion. At the same time, course design inevitably involves selecting, and therefore privileging, certain types of knowledge and behaviour and implicitly discriminating against others. It is therefore important to make these selection processes inclusive, collaborative and transparent.

1.16   Inclusive approaches to language teaching in LCS courses avoid exclusionary assumptions of language competence such as 'native-speakerism', which links language ability to ethnicity or nationality rather than measured proficiency. By defining progress, level

and achievement through a framework such as the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) ([Council of Europe 2020](#)), LCS courses recognise the language proficiency reached by all learners and are designed to recognise different paces of language learning. They provide diverse study opportunities that support those who may be challenged by acquiring a new language and reward those who show resilience and high achievements in language proficiency.

1.17   While language teaching on LCS courses has traditionally been prescriptive, given that it models a set of 'standard' grammatical rules to be learnt and applied, it is also important for language learners to encounter examples of linguistic diversity, such as a range of accents and dialects, at appropriate points. Courses thus encourage reflection on how the notion of a 'standard' language is the result of social, cultural, historical and ideological factors. As a result, LCS graduates gain an understanding of the linguistic diversity of their studied languages, the relationship between language and cultural identity, and attitudes to language within the communities where they are spoken.

1.18   National and international immersive placements as part of LCS courses promote awareness of linguistic and cultural diversity and enable students to consolidate a range of transferable and life skills, such as personal confidence and resilience. LCS degrees prepare students for international placements by equipping them with the linguistic skills and intercultural awareness that enable them to recognise and adapt to aspects of language use in context, such as different linguistic registers and varieties of language, as well as cultural specificities encountered during their time abroad. Preparing students for international placements might also include alerting them to the possibility that they could encounter different forms of cultural and societal intolerance, and ensuring they are supported to maintain their well-being and good mental health.

Accessibility

1.19   Access to the teaching of languages and cultures prior to higher education is far from uniform across the UK. Higher education institutions recognise the need to support students with a varied range of prior learning experiences. Enabling wider access to the study of LCS courses promotes social cohesion, and cross-cultural and transcultural awareness. Doing so also expresses a desire to reach out beyond our borders.

1.20   LCS courses typically cater for students who are taking up the subject for the first time at university, as well as for those with a secondary qualification in the subject. LCS courses may include heritage and community languages which may not previously have been part of students' formal education. The availability of language courses for beginners in a range of contexts, including degree courses, additional subject credits and institution-wide language programmes, enshrines the principle of accessibility at the heart of our subject and the belief that languages should be for all.

1.21   The expectation of international placements as part of many LCS courses can create barriers to participation. Financial barriers may include visa and living costs. Others might relate to personal circumstances, caring responsibilities or disability. The first priority is to make reasonable accommodations to enable participation in international placements. In situations where those accommodations cannot be made, forms of immersive study such as in-country community engagement activities, virtual mobility and virtual residencies, can enable students unable to undertake an extended period of residence abroad to benefit from the opportunities it affords, both in terms of core linguistic and cultural skills and broader transferable skills.

Sustainability

1.22   The study of Languages, Cultures and Societies includes many opportunities for education on sustainability. LCS courses offer students international and transnational perspectives which invite reflection on questions of equality, peace and social justice in specific contexts and globally. LCS courses can stimulate debate and ethical reflection on cultural and social themes, such as gender roles, the impacts of colonialism or climate change, which are relevant to the UN's sustainable development goals.

1.23   LCS courses thus enable engagement with several of the UN sustainable development goals, in particular:

- ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities (4)
- achieving gender equality (5)
- reducing inequality within and among countries (10)
- promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, providing access to justice for all, and building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels (16).

1.24   They also provide opportunities for comparative approaches to understanding attitudes to nature and climate change. They offer opportunities for students to analyse, evaluate, apply and reformulate knowledge on sustainable visions of the future. They encourage sensitivity to communication across cultures, and the need to understand the perspectives and values of others, in order to find common ground in working to solve global challenges.

1.25   Many LCS courses include immersive placements in international contexts. Notwithstanding the fundamental value of those placements for language acquisition and intercultural competence, as noted in paragraph 1.8, the climate emergency will increasingly require reflection on forms of travel and activities that often rely on air transport and other carbon-intensive behaviours.

Enterprise and entrepreneurship education

1.26   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.

1.27   All LCS students are challenged to understand and engage with languages, cultures and societies other than their own. As a result, LCS graduates are curious, open-minded, and able to recognise and mediate for their own bias. They display a range of enterprise attributes and competencies, including intellectual agility, flexibility, critical thinking, emotional literacy and digital skills. They are able to adapt to changing demands and are ready to continue their learning and professional development as they do so. They confront uncertainty, ambiguity, risk and failure which can help them build resilience and enable them to develop skills of initiative and problem-solving.

1.28   Many LCS students undertake study, teaching or work placements nationally and internationally, operating in one or more languages other than their own. They might also undertake work-based learning at other points in their degree. These placements take place in a range of professional settings, including educational, community, charitable and commercial organisations, and enable students to develop attributes of entrepreneurship,

such as independence and determination in the face of unanticipated challenges and unfamiliar situations.

1.29   LCS students have a sophisticated understanding of language and communication in the real world (including the virtual world). They are alert to cultural and contextual factors which influence how language is used, such as the values ascribed to different registers and varieties of language. Their intercultural awareness and ability to mediate between cultures make them sensitive communicators, negotiators and influencers who are able to operate in a range of professional situations.

1.30   Where students have the opportunity to study linguistics and/or applied linguistics as part of their LCS courses, they are able to apply that knowledge when deepening their specific language expertise and learning new languages, which can be especially relevant in a languages-focused work environment. Courses may include content on sociolinguistics which affords deep insight into real acts of communication, such as formal and informal usage, registers and other forms of language variation, the status of languages and dialects, links between language use and social groups, and intended meaning and the use of language in specific contexts.

1.31   LCS graduates are culturally and digitally literate. They are able to navigate and analyse language, culture and society in the complexity of the contemporary world, which is technology-rich and hyper-connected across national, cultural and linguistic boundaries. They acquire enhanced collaborative skills, making connections and enabling encounters with people from different linguistic, cultural, social and disciplinary backgrounds to their own. They can provide effective leadership, for example by bringing their sensitivity to language use into their workplace. They are open to working productively with technology, for example by reviewing and enhancing the outputs of machine translation.

1.32   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. For more information, refer to the QAA enterprise and entrepreneurship guidance.

2   Distinctive features of a Languages, Cultures and Societies degree

Design

2.1   The undergraduate study of Languages, Cultures and Societies is concerned with acquiring or improving proficiency in one or more languages, as well as understanding, analysing, interpreting and engaging with the cultures and societies where the language is spoken. Most often the language studied is one in which the student does not have full proficiency. Engagement with culture and society is deepened by use of the language(s) of study as the teaching medium, though this does not imply that all instruction is necessarily delivered in that way. Learning through the language(s) of study is a matter for policy decision by providers, and such decisions are clearly specified in relation to the aims of the course or module.

2.2   At postgraduate level, courses enable students to pursue critical approaches and develop skills of analysis in greater depth, often through the use of interdisciplinary methodologies, while supporting students' increased autonomy as researchers and critical thinkers. Postgraduate courses are also likely to involve further development of professional and vocational competencies, for example in relation to translation and interpreting.

2.3   LCS courses typically involve the analysis and interpretation of a diverse range of historical and contemporary material, such as literary and visual culture, historical documents and philosophical texts studied in their original language. The critical skills involved, including close reading, comparative analysis and reasoned argument, mean that LCS courses are productively combined as joint degrees with other SHAPE subjects across the arts, humanities and social sciences. They help students to understand the diversity and complexity of the world both past and present, how different perspectives on the world are articulated, and where common ground for resolving global issues might be found.

2.4   LCS courses can also be usefully combined with STEM subjects (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) to enable interdisciplinary and international learning, research and careers. These combinations help students to apply scientific or mathematical skills in another country or culture, and to understand, contribute to the development of, and make use of new technologies across national and linguistic boundaries.

2.5   LCS courses are thus inherently intercultural and support the development of intercultural competence and sensitivity. They enable students to understand how ideas and events cross national, regional and cultural boundaries; to critique the relationships between countries and their communities; and to gain critical insights into the cultures with which they are most familiar. This also makes LCS courses inherently transnational, including reflecting on how communities abroad can have an impact on identities in the 'home' country and how immigrant communities inflect national cultures. LCS courses consider the nature of exchange not only between two cultures but also within linguistic and cultural communities, as well as how those exchanges can change over time.

2.6   There is a wide variety of ways in which courses bring out intercultural and transnational dimensions of LCS. Some encourage exclusive immersion in the language or culture being studied. Others focus on the relationships between cultures, for example through comparative literary studies, intercultural communication or transnational cultural studies.

2.7   LCS courses at both undergraduate and postgraduate level are designed to make space for a diversity of voices, for example through translation and cultural mediation. LCS

courses thus combat the consequences of the hegemony of the Anglophone world through the study of other languages and cultures, encouraging a sense of global citizenship through multilingualism.

Progression

2.8   Over the course of a degree with honours (FHEQ Level 6; FQHEIS Level 10), an LCS student will progress from one level of study to the next in line with the regulations and processes for each institution. However, it is expected that each level would see the attainment of knowledge, expertise and experience that build towards the final achievement of meeting 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 LCS or an associated discipline. Entry requirements to postgraduate courses are, however, determined by individual providers and may require specified levels of achievement at undergraduate level.

2.9   Undergraduates studying LCS courses as part of a joint or combined degree with other subjects will achieve core elements of the specific and generic skills outlined in this Statement and will add others according to the topics covered in the other subject(s) of their degree. Additionally, they may explore the overlap between their subject areas, creating further opportunities for interdisciplinary study.

2.10   In a standard undergraduate honours degree course of three, four or five years in Languages, Cultures and Societies, students may exit earlier and be eligible for a Certificate of Higher Education, a Diploma of Higher Education, or a general degree depending upon the levels of study completed to a satisfactory standard. Integrated master's degrees (FHEQ Level 7; FQHEIS Level 11) are available in the UK and comprise a four-year full-time course or a part-time course of not less than five and not more than eight academic years. Students following part-time routes accumulate academic credit in proportion to the intensity of their study, and their total study time and credit value would be the equivalent of the three, four or five-year degree.

2.11   Documentation for individual courses states the extent to which expected levels of achievement and progression are determined by factors such as the student's starting point; the nature of the language, including its script; the nature or focus of the course; and the purpose for which the language is being studied. However, consistent features include:

- increasing autonomy in student learning, including the ability to identify and plan individual strategies for learning
- growing linguistic proficiency and confidence
- deepening understanding of aspects of the life and multiple cultures of the target language countries, communities or societies
- enhanced skills of critical analysis and interpretation
- enhanced intercultural, interpersonal, professional and communication skills.

Flexibility

2.12   Many LCS courses at undergraduate and postgraduate level offer a range of study modes, including full-time, part-time, distance and online. Modules focusing on language acquisition cater for a wide range of interests and levels of proficiency, from beginner to advanced. Modules for advanced learners can be tailored to develop specialist skills for specific purposes, such as business and media.

2.13   Degrees outside LCS offering the ability to develop language proficiency alongside another subject, for example Engineering, Law or Psychology with a named language component, open up opportunities for professional development for those studying a range of sciences and social sciences and cater for a range of interests and motivations in relation to language learning.

2.14   LCS courses make widespread use of digital platforms and tools which enable flexibility in relation to different styles of learning and teaching. For example, the use of 'chunked' or 'flipped' classroom techniques can enable more time to be spent in interactive sessions with smaller groups. Use of online materials also enables flexibility in learning pace and consolidation, which is particularly important for language learners tackling more complex grammatical and linguistic material.

Partnership

2.15   At undergraduate level, LCS courses typically include work placements and internships with a range of educational and community organisations, businesses and institutions, some of which can take place remotely. Such opportunities often form part of periods of residence abroad for European, Asian and Arabic languages.

2.16   Partnership opportunities with local authorities and other civic partners can involve community engagement activities, for example supporting the teaching of languages and cultures at primary and secondary level or mentoring young people to develop intercultural competence.

2.17   Through university partnership and exchange agreements, LCS students have the opportunity to live, study and work in other countries. At postgraduate level, work placements or employer-led projects may be integrated into professionally oriented courses.

Monitoring and review

2.18   Degree-awarding bodies, and their collaborative partnerships, 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 are 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.

2.19   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.

2.20   The external examination system 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 other UK higher education providers. External examiners are asked to produce a report each year and make recommendations for changes to modules and assessments (where appropriate). Subject Benchmark Statements, such as this one for LCS, can play an important role in supporting external examiners in advising on whether threshold standards are being met in a specific subject area. It is standard practice

to appoint an external examiner for each language under assessment, and externals typically sit in on or review recordings of language assessments as part of their duties.

3 Content, structure and delivery

Content

3.1 The content of LCS courses varies according to the proportion of time devoted to language acquisition within them, their level, and the linguistic and cultural resources that the students bring to their learning. However, the defining principles outlined in section 1 ensure that any LCS graduate acquires a broad range of content knowledge, language proficiency, cultural awareness and transferable skills. The single honours graduate will normally experience all of the content identified in this section. The joint honours graduate will experience a proportion of the content related to the number of LCS modules included in the degree course.

3.2 The content described in this section is intended as a framework for use by curriculum designers, rather than as a list of topics or skills that must be covered. Given the rapidly changing nature of languages and language uses, the evidence base for additional language learning and teaching, technological developments in language learning and use, and the reasons for learning and using languages, it is essential that curriculum designers remain open to new ideas for the content and design of their courses.

Subject-specific content

3.3 Subject-specific content will typically include the development of communicative proficiency in one or more languages, the development of linguistic and intercultural awareness, a critical understanding of how language structures society (and vice versa), and study of the cultures and societies associated with the language(s) being learned. LCS courses enable critical engagement with issues and debates relating to the cultures and societies being studied, both historical and contemporary, as well as with language-related issues more globally, such as language ideologies, or the place and role of gender in the target language. They provide a balance of language-related and other course content depending on the distinctive features of the course provided. This might include the incorporation of cultural materials in language-oriented modules.

3.4 Through the combination of these different types of course content, LCS courses develop a range of subject-specific skills:

- language proficiency in one or more languages (including an ability to switch from one language to another and understand, interact with and manipulate texts)
- critical study and appreciation of the cultures and societies of the language(s) being studied through analysis of a wide range of literary, cultural, linguistic, visual, historical, political, philosophical and other materials
- awareness of the relationship between language, society and identity
- communication strategies, including the exploitation of paralinguistic features as well as knowledge of pragmatic features and sociolinguistic contexts of language use
- awareness of the existence of different varieties of language and of where they might be encountered
- skills of mediation, interpreting and translation deriving from intercultural competence and sensitivity to cultural difference
- ability to work with technology to support language learning and use
- the ability to undertake comparative and critical analysis of cultures and societies.

Generic, transferable and employability content

3.5 LCS courses provide a distinct education through cultivating an awareness of different values, systems and societies at a global level. Languages equip students with the capacity to engage meaningfully with individuals from different cultures by developing the ability to receive information through the language(s) of study; to produce material or information in the language(s) of study; to interact with others in it; to mediate communication, debates, information and wider concepts; and to develop sensitivity to cultural difference and diversity in all their forms.

3.6 By enhancing sensitivity to language use and meaning, LCS courses develop creative and interpersonal communication skills (from reading for pleasure in the target language through to conversation in spoken language); transactional language skills (from reading for information through to obtaining goods or services); and problem-solving skills through languages (from presenting cases in a debate through to discussion with others). As such, they create graduates with interpersonal competencies relevant to teamwork, diplomacy, negotiation, pedagogy and dispute resolution, but also to everyday social and/or workplace discourse.

Teaching and learning

3.7 The presentation of teaching and learning methods in this section does not imply an order of priority.

Characteristics of the study of Languages, Cultures and Societies

3.8 Methods in teaching and learning vary, depending on the overall aims and objectives of the degree course, the mode of study (in-person or online), the student's starting point, and the nature of the language being studied. The latter may include features such as whether it has a standard written form, or not, and whether it is written in alphabetical or other types of script.

3.9 Language learning at all levels and in all languages is normally intensive, in terms of both teaching contact hours and deployment of a diverse range of learning resources. The need for concentrated and immersive study extends all the way through the language learning process, from initial engagement with a language to advanced levels and beyond. Those learning language as beginners will typically require a greater number of contact hours and more time spent on independent learning.

3.10 Language learning involves regular and extended contact with proficient users of the language, both for explicit teaching of language structures and for exposure to authentic examples of language use and culture. The latter requires frequent and easy access to target language material, including print, film, broadcast and online media.

3.11 A defining characteristic of LCS courses is the use of the language(s) of study as a gateway to the study of the cultures and societies in which they are used. Typically, courses exploit materials in the language(s) of study in a way that is consistent with students' linguistic proficiency at each level. The multidisciplinary nature of many LCS courses means that the study of those cultures and societies involves a wide range of critical methods drawn from the humanities and social sciences more broadly.

3.12 Student learning experiences normally involve exposure to various forms of learning technology. These permit access to authentic materials in the language learned, asynchronous and synchronous online discussion fora, and online reference sources in areas such as grammar, vocabulary and scripts.

3.13   LCS courses explicitly require a measure of learner autonomy and responsibility for the development of linguistic proficiency through independent study. Guided independent study and research enable students to develop ideas beyond the classroom in a structured learning environment. They may be guided and developed alongside and beyond structured learning.

Teaching and learning methods

3.14   Components of LCS courses focusing on the development of language skills usually include some or all of the following methods, either separately or combined in a range of integrated tasks.

- Exposure to the use of material from the cultures being studied. As a general principle, students are exposed to authentic material in the language(s) of study as early as possible in their language-learning journey.
- These forms of target culture material support all aspects of language learning as well as generic, transferable and professional skills, including verbal and non-verbal language use, comprehension, translation and interpreting, and the production of target language through exercises such as summarising, essays and blogs/vlogs.
- Explicit teaching of grammar, assisted by the use of digital resources and/or by guided study of a textbook, together with appropriate exercises.
- The use of a variety of physical and digital language learning resources, typically for independent use, to reinforce knowledge and skills gained in learning.
- The study of literary and other texts in the language(s) of study. Courses vary in the extent to which source material is read in translation, either in teaching or in independent study. Courses may incorporate a progression from study of texts in translation to direct study of texts in the original language, and the teaching of specified modules or parts of modules in the language(s) of study.
- Formative and/or summative feedback on work submitted, including comment, for example, on appropriateness of style, register, presentation as well as correction of grammatical and other errors.
- Development of the four core language skills of reception, production, interaction and mediation, with adjustments as appropriate to accommodate individual circumstances and needs.
- Language acquisition may be complemented by linguistic analysis of syntax, semantics, morphology, phonetics, phonology, pragmatics, historical linguistics and/or sociolinguistics.
- Some courses may give particular prominence to translating and interpreting skills and use of appropriate digital tools.

3.15   Components of LCS courses exploring aspects of target-language cultures and societies share a number of teaching and learning methods with other humanities and social sciences disciplines, including:

- directed study of a wide range of cultural forms, including literary and visual culture (novels, poems, plays, films, photography, graphic novels), audiovisual material, material culture, philosophical texts, and works of cultural, critical and social theory
- guided critical engagement with existing research from monographs and scholarly articles to blog posts and other online sources
- commentaries on extracts from texts or documents and other cultural products, for example, placing in context, interpreting in the light of knowledge of the historical period, identifying strategies of narration or providing linguistic analysis
- data collection and evaluation, for example, from guided use of library resources to independent use of subject bibliographies and online databases

- collecting, selecting, evaluating and presenting information or interpretations of material on a given topic
- peer-assisted learning and collaborative/pair/group work, for example, in the preparation of presentations
- discussion of prepared topics in seminar groups
- creative and/or reflective writing
- supervised independent research leading, at the later stages of a course, to the writing of a dissertation or other major project.

International and national immersive placements

3.16   Many LCS courses with a large language component typically require or offer students the opportunity to spend a period of residence in a target-language country, in the form of a study, work or other immersive placement. Such placements are a particularly valuable component of LCS degrees by providing a unique opportunity to consolidate language acquisition, knowledge and skills in a rich and varied context of use. Simultaneously, they enable profound engagement with other cultures and societies, thereby fostering intercultural awareness and pluricultural capability, qualities of self-reliance and other transferable skills.

3.17   Courses vary in the activities that students are expected to carry out during their placement, the ways in which their activities may be supported, monitored and assessed, and the way in which this part of students' learning is integrated into the overall objectives of the course.

3.18   Immersive placements will typically:

- provide opportunities for, and stimulate contact with, competent speakers of the target language(s)
- optimise the opportunities for linguistic progress, for the development of cultural insight and for academic and personal development resulting from extended contact with a target language environment
- enable students to reflect on and develop their own language learning skills and techniques
- develop intercultural understanding and ethical awareness
- enable students to acquire vocationally oriented experience, where appropriate to the placement and degree course.

3.19   As noted in paragraph 1.21, where students are not required or are unable to spend an extended period of residence abroad, these objectives can be achieved by a variety of methods, including directed intensive language study during vacations, and providing contact with the target language environment through local placements, engagement activities, digital resources and/or virtual mobility.

Assessment

3.20   LCS courses develop a wide range of knowledge, skills and understanding, not all of which will necessarily be explicitly assessed. Fundamental to the design of assessment is the underlying principle of inclusivity and acknowledgement of a diverse student body. For example, there may be circumstances where alternatives to live or in-person oral examinations are appropriate in the light of specific student needs.

Assessment of language proficiency

3.21   Regular and detailed feedback is an essential element in language learning. The multiplicity of knowledge and transferable skills involved in language learning and teaching is an important factor in enhancing the employability of graduates. It is therefore matched by a wide variety of types of assessment covering the range of coursework, examinations and peer and self-assessment.

3.22   Assessment of target-language skills can be made up of a range of tests and/or assignments designed to demonstrate linguistic proficiency, fluency, accuracy, comprehension, range, interaction, presentation, sociolinguistic and meta-linguistic awareness, as appropriate, in:

- receptive skills (listening and reading)
- productive skills (speaking and writing)
- interactive skills (listening and speaking)
- mediation skills (translating and interpreting).

Each of these may be tested separately or in combination.

3.23   Forms of assessment may provide broad evidence of levels of proficiency and understanding and/or may be used to assess skills in specifically targeted ways. They may include, in in-person, take-home and online format:

- presentations and conversations
- participation in structured oral discussions
- listening comprehension tests
- blogs, vlogs, wikis, podcasts and other contributions to social media
- interpreting between speakers of the source and target languages
- transcription and dictation
- grammar tests
- summarising and reading for gist or inference
- essays and/or extended projects written in the target language(s)
- paraphrasing
- report writing based on target language texts or recordings
- linguistic commentaries
- translation from and into the target language(s)
- prepared translation with commentary and/or post-editing/correction of draft translations, including of translations produced by language technology tools
- drafting target language texts for a defined audience and purpose
- portfolios of evidence, participation in individual and/or group projects
- unseen written examinations testing language comprehension, analysis and production.

3.24   At postgraduate level we might also see:

- extended dissertation, projects and reports
- annotated translations
- posters.

3.25   Where modules or parts of modules have been delivered in the target language, it may also be appropriate for these elements to be assessed partly or wholly in the target language.

Assessment of subject-related studies

3.26   The assessment of modules in linguistic, cultural and social studies is based on a variety of strategies appropriate to the relevant subject. These may include:

- unseen written examinations (online or in person)
- essays with access to information sources, written to a timescale which may vary from 24 hours to several weeks
- open-book examinations
- oral presentations and oral examinations
- reports, written or oral, sometimes using blogs, wikis and other appropriate technologies
- group projects, involving collaboration between students
- extended essays, dissertations and major projects
- placement reports or presentations, verbal and/or non-verbal
- reflective or creative outputs.

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 Languages, Cultures and Societies. Demonstrating these standards over time will show that a student has achieved the range of knowledge, understanding and skills expected of an LCS graduate.

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 the reader should refer to Annex D: Outcome classification descriptions for FHEQ Level 6 and FQHEIS Level 10 degrees (QAA 2019). Annex D sets out common descriptions of the four main degree outcome classifications for undergraduate degrees with honours: 1st, 2.1, 2.2 and 3rd.

4.3   Within the UK, a range of languages may be studied at different levels within a variety of degree courses. The Common European Framework of Reference: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR) (Council of Europe 2020) has been widely adopted as a framework for assessing proficiency in language learning.

4.4   For language components in degrees and elective language learning modules, course or module specifications typically indicate the expected level of achievement with reference to the CEFR criteria and/or other relevant assessment frameworks, such as the HSK proficiency test for Mandarin Chinese.

4.5   The benchmark described below is designed to apply to courses in which the study of one or more languages:

- comprises at least one-third of the total study load
- is undertaken consecutively in all years of the course.

4.6   Such degrees recognise specific languages in the title of the award or refer to broader subject areas such as Modern Languages or Languages, Cultures and Societies.

4.7   Where the study of one or more languages comprises a smaller proportion of the course, students may not be expected to achieve all elements of the benchmark standard.

4.8   The following standards do not prescribe a curriculum for degree courses in LCS. In determining learning outcomes of individual courses, greater or lesser importance may be given to the different areas of skills, knowledge and understanding described below. In some cases, the development of certain skills or aspects of knowledge and understanding may not figure in the course at all. These standards must therefore be read in conjunction with the information given in individual course documentation which makes clear the learning outcomes for that course.

4.9   Course objectives, methods of assessment and learning outcomes are determined according to:

- the nature or focus of the undergraduate degree course being undertaken
- the student's starting point
- the characteristics of the language(s) studied, including its/their script
- the purpose for which the language(s) is/are being studied.

Standard of achievement at threshold level

Language proficiency

4.10   In terms of language proficiency, by the end of a degree with honours (FHEQ Level 6, FHEQIS Level 10), and depending on their starting point, threshold graduates are working towards or operating at level C1 of the CEFR (Proficient User) and are able to:

- understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognise implicit meaning
- express themselves fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions
- use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes
- produce clear, well structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices
- translate complex texts on a wide range of general and specialised subjects from the target language(s), capturing nuances and implications.

4.11   It is recognised that some of these learning outcomes may not be fully achievable in all circumstances, for example in relation to students who have not been able to undertake an international placement, European students studying some Asian and Arabic languages, students studying languages with a predominantly oral culture or students of sign languages. Some courses may also offer students the option to attain a different level of language proficiency in different languages. In these cases, the CEFR framework (or equivalent) can be used to make clear the standards students are expected to reach by the end of the course. A typical outcome in these cases is CEFR level B2 (Independent User).

Explicit knowledge of language

4.12   At threshold level, students demonstrate awareness, understanding and some knowledge of:

- the structures, registers and varieties of the language(s) of study
- the sociolinguistic contexts in which different registers and varieties might be encountered and used
- the linguistic principles required to analyse the language(s) of study.

Intercultural awareness and pluricultural competence

4.13   Threshold graduates of LCS courses demonstrate awareness, understanding and knowledge of:

- one or more cultures and societies, typically enhanced by a period of residence in the country, or countries, of the language(s) of study, or by an alternative immersive learning experience
- different sociocultural and sociolinguistic perspectives and norms within other cultures and societies
- the similarities and dissimilarities of those cultures or societies in comparison with their own.

4.14   They are also able to:

- deal sensitively with and show respect for cultural diversity and cultural difference through openness to a variety of perspectives and worldviews
- describe and evaluate the viewpoints and practices of their own and other social groups, showing awareness of the implicit values on which judgments and prejudices are frequently based
- identify differences in sociolinguistic and pragmatic conventions, reflect on them, and adjust their communication accordingly
- explain, interpret and discuss aspects of culture and cultural practices with reference to intercultural encounters, reading, film, social media, and so on
- deal with ambiguity in cross-cultural communication
- act effectively as intercultural mediators, helping to maintain positive interaction by interpreting different perspectives and managing ambiguity.

Subject-specific knowledge and skills

4.15   Threshold graduates are able to:

- demonstrate a knowledge and understanding of one or more aspects of the literatures, cultures, linguistic contexts, history, politics, geography, and social and economic structures of the societies of the country or countries of the language(s) of study
- deploy a range of critical methodologies to analyse and interpret diverse cultural materials, media forms and means of communication
- account for how language, image and other means of communication are exploited in particular social and cultural contexts and for particular purposes
- mediate between languages, demonstrating cultural and plurilinguistic competence
- contribute to contemporary debates by drawing on historical, comparative and global perspectives.

General and transferable skills

4.16   At threshold level, LCS graduates demonstrate competence in essential critical and generic skills, including the ability to:

- gather, process and evaluate evidence and information from a variety of sources in different languages
- make appropriate use of digital resources and information technology as a source of information, means of communication and aid to learning
- identify and analyse problems and work towards their resolution
- communicate information, ideas and arguments both verbally and non-verbally
- conduct independent research, organise relevant information, and conceptualise ideas to formulate an appropriate written argument or response
- present formal written material in a way which demonstrates consideration of the effective use of language, referencing and layout
- demonstrate an ability to learn independently and to manage their time effectively
- work as part of a team, cognitively framing collaborative tasks by deciding on aims, processes and steps, co-constructing ideas and solutions, and responding constructively to the strengths and weaknesses of other arguments
- understand the principles of academic integrity and ethics and apply them to their own work, particularly in relation to the reuse of research and writing by other people.

5   List of references and further resources

British Academy, 2016, *Born Global: Implications for Higher Education*
www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/publications/born-global-implications-higher-education

British Academy/AHRC/ASCL/British Council/Universities UK, 2020, *Towards a national languages strategy: education and skills*
www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/publications/towards-national-languages-strategy-education-and-skills

Council of Europe, 2020, *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment*
https://rm.coe.int/common-european-framework-of-reference-for-languages-learning-teaching/16809ea0d4

The British Academy: Social Sciences, Humanities and the Arts for People and the Economy/Environment
www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/this-is-shape

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

QAA (2018) Enterprise and Entrepreneurship Education: Guidance for UK Higher Education Providers
www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code/enterprise-and-entrepreneurship-education

United Nations, Sustainable Development Goals
https://sdgs.un.org/goals

6 Membership of the Advisory Groups for the Subject Benchmark Statement for Languages, Cultures and Societies

Membership of the Advisory Group for the Subject Benchmark Statement for Languages, Cultures and Societies (2023)

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Professor Edward Welch (Deputy Chair)	University of Aberdeen
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QAA would like to thank Ren Hydes-Kelly, student at Newcastle University, for providing the photograph used to accompany the Statement.

Membership of the review group for the Subject Benchmark Statement for Languages, Cultures and Societies (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 the Chair of the review group of the Subject Benchmark Statement for Languages, Cultures and Societies from 2015.

Professor Michael Kelly	University of Southampton
Dr Andy Smith	QAA

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

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Dr Rob Rix	Trinity and All Saints College, Leeds

Professor Richard Towell	University of Salford
Professor David Walker	University of Sheffield
Professor Rhys Williams	University of Wales, Swansea
Ms Vicky Wright	University of Southampton