



Subject Benchmark Statement

History of Art, Architecture
and Design

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About this Statement

This QAA Subject Benchmark Statement for History of Art, Architecture and Design defines what can be expected of a graduate 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. They are sector-owned reference points, developed and written by academics. Subject Benchmark Statements also describe the nature and characteristics of awards in a particular discipline 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:
 - equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI)
 - accessibility and the needs of disabled students
 - education for sustainable development (ESD)
 - employability, entrepreneurship and enterprise education (EEE)
 - generative artificial intelligence (GenAI)
- 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 when considering whether the design of a course and the threshold standards of achievement are comparable with those of other higher education providers. Furthermore, statements can support professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs) with their definitions and interpretations of academic standards.

You may want to read this document if you are:

- involved in the design, delivery and review of courses in History of Art, Architecture and Design
- a prospective student thinking about undertaking a course in History of Art, Architecture and Design
- an employer, to find out about the knowledge and skills generally expected of History of Art, Architecture and Design 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 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, Subject Benchmark Statements are part of the current quality arrangements in Scotland, Wales and 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 a 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 when designing, delivering and reviewing courses. These may include requirements set out by PSRBs and industry or employer expectations. In 2024, QAA published an update to the [Quality Code](#), which will be helpful when using this Statement.

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 of Art, Architecture and Design degree

1.1 History of Art, Architecture and Design (HAAD) occupies a distinctive place in the way the world is seen and heard, learnt, and understood. Images, objects, sounds, designs and the built environment fundamentally shaped human societies, and in turn inform future ones. Art, architecture and design historians shine light on forms of visual and material culture that make up the intricacies of everyday life in many fields of activity, including religion and politics, science and economics, and health and wellbeing. Building on this variety, HAAD courses provide students with the flexibility to cultivate, according to their interests, an inclusive sense of the past, and trace its significance in the present by exposing knowledge and qualities of making, and mechanisms of impact on contemporary practices. Art, design and architecture are central pillars of what makes us human, and their study reveals the decisions that construct dominant ideologies or resistance to hegemony at the intersections of class, ethnicity/race, gender, health and the environment.

1.2 HAAD is an established area across diverse subjects, both in terms of the histories studied and of the methods and goals of study. Besides HAAD courses, disciplines that make up this group of subjects are taught on a wide variety of single and combined honours degrees. HAAD adopts a distinctive combination of historical and object-focused approaches and continues to be an integral component of most degrees in Fine Art; Design; Architecture; History, Museum and Heritage Studies; Curatorial Practice; and Photography, Film and Media Studies. Courses in many other single subject degrees, as well as degrees in Area Studies, Social Sciences and Humanities, may also include components or modules in HAAD.

Purposes and characteristics of a History of Art, Architecture and Design degree

1.3 HAAD courses address a wide range of entities which are referred to as artefacts in this document. In terms of their medium, artefacts can encompass painting, sculpture, architecture and applied arts, as well as lens or screen-based media and performance art. Additional subcategories may include, but are not limited to: sand, mural, panel, canvas or screen painting, drawings, mosaics, stained-glass, prints and book illumination for painting; carvings, reliefs and statues for sculpture; buildings, gardens, monuments, landmarks, axiomatic structures and installations for architecture; vehicles, furniture, jewellery and clothing for applied arts; and happenings and sound art for performance; photography, film, television, video, social media and computer games for lens and screen-based media. HAAD courses engage with critical, historical and theoretical writing and other discursive forms in all these categories and subcategories.

1.4 Historically, the discipline of HAAD studied the role artefacts play in society by prioritising their intrinsic artistic or design qualities. While the relative validity of the terms art and design is retained in the discipline, they are today recognised as historical constructs rooted in European colonial expansion, the philosophies of Enlightenment and the institutional structures of modernity. The notions of visual and material culture describe the comprehensive chronological and geographical scope of the discipline, and they align with the aspiration of HAAD courses to analyse the role artefacts have played in human societies in a global variety of regions and chronological periods. In this context, the idea of originality associated with the terms art and design continues to underpin a significant set of artefacts in the artworld; and it generates a productive tension between socio-economic conditioning of visual and material culture and eventual instances of free human creativity.

1.5 HAAD is distinguished by a concern with the visual and material aspects of artefacts in both the past and the present, and it continues to adopt and develop methodologies for their description, which may include formalism, iconography, semiotics, materiality, and spatial or functional analysis. The study of HAAD equips its graduates with the ability to investigate complex visual and material structures, reconstruct their making and establish their impact mechanisms.

1.6 HAAD courses combine description with critical contextual study to map the ways artefacts are products of their time and can fundamentally shape the world as well. They may use written sources ranging from historical and literary texts to archival records and scientific evidence from multispectral imaging to chemical analysis, thereby providing interdisciplinary training that crosses traditional boundaries in the arts, humanities and sciences. For HAAD courses, the production and consumption of artefacts are key concerns. They investigate negotiations between patrons, clients, communities, designers and makers around beliefs, aspirations, desires, finances and artistic choices, together with the modalities of access and ideological or lifestyle impact on beholders, users and customers.

1.7 The contextual study of visual and material culture moves beyond reconstructing the dominant ideology of images and objects. HAAD courses identify inequalities of power in global and local contexts, as well as in private and public settings, adopting and developing methodologies to examine historical and contemporary inequalities that are centred on class, ethnicity/race, gender, sexuality and health, and to recognise marginalised histories within the field. Similarly, by analysing artefacts and natural and built environments, students develop their inferential understanding of sustainability in current and future societies.

1.8 Approaches to the historical and contemporary forms of display are an integral part of HAAD courses. Galleries, museums, collections, heritage sites, festivals, shows and other forms of real-world displays preserve and offer access to physical artefacts, and many have partnership agreements with HAAD courses. Apart from serving as an anchor for the visual and material legacy of humanity, strategies of display in these institutions significantly shape the reception of artefacts and their impact on society. HAAD courses combine the study of artefacts with digital technologies of access and display, ranging from enhanced reproductions to immersive environments, and they are in the forefront of pioneering or adopting innovative approaches in digital humanities. Both in institutional and in digital contexts, they address the impact of preservation and display on access and environmental sustainability.

1.9 HAAD courses attract students from a wide range of academic backgrounds and combine creative and discursive approaches that are directly relevant to many fields of employment. Graduates command a range of the analytical, critical and synthetical skills that are fostered by training in visual and material literacy and historical investigation. These skills prepare them for graduate careers, ranging from the public sector to creative industries. Many go on to postgraduate study in the subject area or related areas, or follow vocational routes in museums, galleries, heritage institutions and in the art market.

Equity, diversity and inclusion

1.10 HAAD courses aim to provide a safe and supportive physical and virtual learning environment that meets and exceeds the EDI legislation in the Equality Act 2010 in England, Wales, and Scotland and the comparable set of equality and anti-discrimination legislation in Northern Ireland, protecting individuals from discrimination based on age, disability, gender, ethnicity/race, religious belief, political opinion, and sexual orientation.

1.11 HAAD courses aim to offer an inclusive learning environment that is considerate of the broad lived experiences of its students and accommodates different perspectives and

intersectional histories. The courses take an object-centred approach to encourage students to think about the ideas, contexts and structures out of which various visual and material cultures have arisen. Students can participate in understandings of identity by sharing their stories, curating their journeys and forming their canon. By presenting up-to-date discourse surrounding object provenance in museum collections, students can critically explore the social and political contexts in which artworks enter public and private collections. They can also develop an understanding of the ideologies that have shaped the marginalisation of some demographic and community histories within the field, and the power structures that have facilitated that marginalisation. This object-centred ethos provides equity in the access to culture and its interpretation, re-centring marginalised and non-dominant voices and enabling a more critical and nuanced understanding of our collective past. A shared commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion questions the assumptions of traditional Eurocentric narratives to challenge inherited ideas and to develop an understanding of the historical, social and institutional contexts from which current EDI values arise, and how these may evolve or be debated.

1.12 Multiple communities shape the teaching and learning of HAAD disciplines, making them more diverse and inclusive. For example, course leaders and developers often collaborate with the educational departments in museums and galleries, the heritage sector, and other cultural institutions with public access policies and corporate commitments to EDI. HAAD topics are a constant feature of digital and analogue media, public lectures and continuing education programmes. This supports pluralistic viewpoints and narratives, engages broad publics and incites people to learn in diverse contexts. A particular strength of HAAD courses is their potential for impacting positively on mental health and wellbeing: engaging with the arts, and with their aesthetic, imaginative and emotional elements, can stimulate physiological and psychological effects that help manage emotional expression, reduce depression and anxiety and build resilience across age groups.

Accessibility and the needs of disabled students

1.13 HAAD courses are centred on teaching and learning methods and modes of assessment that are fully accessible to all students. They have long been recognised not just for their measurable personal and societal benefits, but also for their specific impact on belonging and wellbeing. The use of hybrid and blended learning, where appropriate, accommodates diversity in the learning community. Teaching in HAAD comprises analogue and digital learning methods – from traditional classroom formats to virtual environments – that enable live and non-synchronous modes of engagement. Subject delivery centres on building key competences and skills, as well as confidence and independence, that enshrine access, participation, equity of experience and parity of esteem for all learners. HAAD courses are inclusive and responsive to those learners who identify as disabled, neurodivergent and require forms of reasonable adjustment, in line with the Equality Act 2010, the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 in Northern Ireland, and Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) legislation and guidance. Access to degrees for all students is proactively and flexibly considered.

1.14 The methods of delivering HAAD courses are diverse and dynamic. The student experience encompasses a mix of traditional lectures, seminars and tutorials, group and one-to-one teaching as well as self-reflective and peer-learning activities. Off-campus study experiences play an important role; these include trips to museums, galleries, libraries, archives, special collections and artists' studios as well as visits to see art, architecture and design that can only be experienced in situ. Emphasis is also placed on the role of digital and generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) technologies from documentation and interrogation (research) to writing and presentation (resolution). The diverse methods and contexts of delivery means that the subject is highly accessible to all students. All learning

materials and assessment processes are designed to be flexible and can be adjusted in order to accommodate individual student needs.

1.15 HAAD is a highly accessible subject. No subject prerequisites are required to study HAAD, and where HAAD operates as a central part of studio-based courses, entry requirements may be based on portfolios and interviews, rather than solely on academic qualifications. Architecture courses containing HAAD modules may be subject to the requirements of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBS). HAAD courses are predicated on systems of equal opportunity, and their inclusivity has meant that they have been central to higher education's programmes of widening access and participation.

Education for sustainable development

1.16 The study of HAAD has an intrinsic link to the production, consumption and conservation of artefacts. At the same time, material and visual culture can offer critical perspectives on sustainability issues and can be powerful vehicles for driving positive change towards [UN Sustainable Development goals \(2015\)](#), including social justice (goals 10 and 16), gender equality (goal 5), health and wellbeing (goal 3), sustainable consumption and production (goal 12), habitat degradation (goals 14 and 15) and climate change (goal 13). Courses focusing on the history of architecture are also likely to include practices and artefacts which bear upon the sustainability, inclusivity and resilience of cities and settlements (goal 11), and industry and infrastructure (goal 9). HAAD courses consider infrastructure in the accessibility and conservation of artefacts, and in the multiple histories and perspectives that form the many facets of material and visual culture.

1.17 HAAD nurtures understanding of global interconnections and interdependencies, the impact of sustainability issues on different places and communities, and the potential of art as a space for cross-cultural understanding. HAAD may include the wider consequences of creative production and its use of resources, such as those that impact on the environment (including negatively, as with toxic etching grounds and energy usages for collection conservation), or artefacts that have cultural sensitivity, such as those that concern human remains. Artefacts may critically foreground their own environmental footprint through visual and material choices. HAAD courses can examine the processes needed to identify historical actions that inform today's environmental and sustainability needs, particularly in the areas of production and conservation. By learning to account for the multifaceted, and sometimes contradictory, relationships of artefacts with sustainability issues, HAAD students are better equipped to navigate the ethical and ecological complexities of material and visual culture.

1.18 Learning approaches on HAAD courses critically frame the study of artefacts and their processes of production regarding environmental concerns. Beyond curricular content, physical access to artefacts may be considered also in this context. Field trips and site visits weigh the importance of studying originals against the environmental footprint of the activities themselves, and they combine local resources with global destinations as mitigation. Similarly, HAAD courses reflect on the sustainability issues at stake in digital technologies. These technologies may be used to diversify access and experiences for many, but they also have inequitable impact on the global majority. Impacts include, for example, the energy and water consumption of datacentres, the biases of GenAI models and Large Language Models, and the social justice implications of digitising heritage. However, the opportunity to make resources and knowledge available digitally can also serve to increase access and reduce the environmental impact of travel. HAAD courses are likely to consider critical interventions around digital art and its sustainability. Digital and physical access to artefacts is also at the heart of the recognition that informed engagement with visual and material culture improves health and wellbeing.

Employability, entrepreneurship and enterprise education

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

1.20 HAAD courses help students to understand and reflect on the richness and diversity of cultural expression and the contexts that shape it. They offer opportunities for analytical thinking and teamwork, encourage an appreciation for artistic expression and innovation, and provide insight into art markets and the systems underpinning them. This awareness fosters students' entrepreneurial spirit, equipping them with the cultural sensitivity essential to understand complex social contexts and relationships in an increasingly interconnected and multicultural world. HAAD students are alert to the value of the cultural economy and understand visual and material culture as an enterprising activity (artefacts are produced, circulated, consumed and disseminated within an economic system). This knowledge prepares graduates to recognise opportunities and identify potential ways to make new and different kinds of value. The study of HAAD also equips students with the knowledge of the contexts, approaches and practices that comprise the museum, heritage and gallery sectors: how they operate, the factors that shape the sectors, and role of art history within these areas of practice.

1.21 Enterprise, entrepreneurship and employability skills are fostered through experiential learning and assessment methods, including the provision of practical opportunities within the curriculum and in extracurricular activities that complement the curriculum. This involves challenge-led or real-world tasks such as collaborative projects, curatorial activity, collections care, the creation and evaluation of digital and real-world interpretation and engagement, addressing commercial challenges, internships and work placements, site visits, and public programming. Such provision is particularly effective when delivered in partnership with creative practitioners, arts organisations and businesses. HAAD courses produce in-demand graduates who work in a variety of areas within art and design, such as the museum, heritage and gallery sectors, auction houses, studios, and the commercial enterprises, as well as graduates who pursue careers in the broader areas of education, communications, management, consultancy, civil service and the creative industries. HAAD graduates contribute significantly to sustainable economic growth in the creative industries and cultural sector, which together add huge value to the UK economy (£156 billion in 2024).

Generative artificial intelligence

1.22 Generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) carries significant implications for the ways in which we deliver and assess the HAAD curriculum. Institutional guidelines regarding the use of GenAI in assessment, and in academic integrity more broadly, are discussed with students to ensure they are understood within the context of HAAD. Students are given clear and adaptable guidance on ethical aspects of the use of GenAI, such as transparency, accuracy, fairness and respect for privacy. Guidance may also cover intellectual property rights and legal compliance issues, prevention of illegal bias and discrimination, and human oversight and accountability.

1.23 GenAI is being used to contribute to, and to generate, new artefacts and approaches to visual and material culture. This raises new questions about issues concerning creativity, arts and design education, authorship and intellectual property that have been central to

HAAD curricula for some time. Current and ongoing debates about the open, inclusive and ethical use of artificial intelligence, its impact in terms of sustainability and on the climate, and creative choice are relevant to the study of HAAD. When considering how GenAI may fit into curricula, those designing courses reflect critically and carefully on current and potential future uses, exploring how GenAI may complement existing forms of teaching and learning, and contextualising it as a tool rather than a replacement for individual agency, imagination and creativity.

1.24 With regard to learning and teaching, there are opportunities for curricula to introduce a critical and reflective engagement with GenAI, and students are provided with clear guidance about its use in the achievement of learning outcomes. Courses create open and inclusive learning environments that actively encourage students to disclose their use of GenAI, and to ask questions and express anxieties they may have about it. While the inappropriate use of GenAI may undermine learning and the development of students' capacities, the judicious use of GenAI can be enabling for students. For example, it may support them to access course materials more readily, more fully and more creatively, and increase access to materials from a broader range of contexts.

1.25 The technology can be used, alongside other methods, to encourage slow, careful and contextual examination of artefacts. Using GenAI as part of teaching and learning can ensure students remain up to date with technological developments as well as debates surrounding its uses. Accordingly, they benefit from opportunities to increase their levels of confidence in navigating the GenAI environment independently. Learning which emphasises agency, decision-making and critical reflection helps students to develop and extend their confidence in the use of developing technologies, and thus to make informed decisions about when, why and how they might use GenAI, or indeed choose not to. Critical GenAI fluency will also enhance graduates' employability skills.

1.26 With regard to assessment, GenAI can provide new, creative opportunities for students to experiment with writing and presentation styles, and to develop their own voices. Use of GenAI may offer opportunities for a broader portfolio of forms of assessment that are relevant to the subject area, such as the creation of virtual objects and exhibitions, new forms of formal and contextual analysis, and AI-generated video/film outputs. Concerns remain about limitations on the data that GenAI tools are trained on, and biases in the data; the consumption of energy in running and producing outputs using GenAI; and the potential for uncritical use to undermine students' capacities for learning.

2 Distinctive features of HAAD courses

Design

2.1 HAAD courses are designed to give students the opportunity to explore visual and material cultures across a range of temporal, geographic and cultural contexts. A variety of media are studied, and interdisciplinary perspectives are engaged. Teaching embeds exploration of complex issues around gender, sexuality, class, race, faith, politics and the environment as these pertain to the production, dissemination and interpretation of art, design and architecture over time. Artefacts are products of their time, and so programmes are attentive to the varying ways in which these have been created, used, encountered and understood in different periods and cultural contexts, from the ancient to the contemporary.

2.2 HAAD courses are designed to instil subject-specific skills of visual and material literacy, interdisciplinary cultural awareness, and independent critical thinking through object-based learning. Interdisciplinarity is an important feature of HAAD courses: the study of artefacts, creative practices and cultural processes requires engagement with a diverse mix of visual, literary, textual, tactile, spatial and aural data, transcending traditional disciplinary boundaries in the arts, humanities and sciences. HAAD courses cover the acquisition of transferable skills, including communication and digital literacy, and embed employability across their curriculum.

2.3 Course design teams make use of institutional guidance and external reference points to assist them in determining programme specifications and learning outcomes, setting appropriate levels of challenge and framing curriculum content. The design of courses will consider how content, learning and teaching in each year will provide the necessary knowledge, skills and ways of thinking to allow all students to subsequently progress to more complex problems and phenomena (see also paragraph 3.3).

2.4 Digital resources and environments are integral to this; for example, HAAD students typically engage with digital reproductions, databases, virtual exhibitions and digital archives, with asynchronous learning opportunities provided through virtual learning platforms. Importantly, HAAD courses also incorporate opportunities for fieldwork and for object-based, site-specific and real-world learning in, for example, heritage sites, galleries and museums. Course design may incorporate external partnerships as well.

2.5 HAAD courses deploy diverse modes of assessment, both independent and group based. Assessment constitutes a balance of formative and summative tasks, which constructively aligns with course content and learning methods. The assessment portfolio is designed to enable students to demonstrate critical thinking and analysis, to evaluate and synthesise information from a wide range of sources in order to construct a well-evidenced argument, and to achieve a high standard of verbal/non-verbal and written communication.

Progression

2.6 Over the course of a standard undergraduate degree with honours (FHEQ Level 6; FQHEIS Level 10) or, if available, an integrated master's degree (FHEQ Level 7; FQHEIS Level 11), a HAAD 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 builds towards the final achievement of meeting the threshold (and, if specified, higher-level) subject-specific and generic skills listed in this Statement. This will usually include successful completion and the award of credit for the full range of learning and assessment, including any practical components.

2.7 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 HAAD or a related discipline. Entry requirements to postgraduate courses are, however, determined by individual providers and may require specified levels of achievement at undergraduate level.

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

2.9 Any student enrolled in a standard undergraduate honours degree course in HAAD may exit earlier and be eligible for a Certificate of Higher Education (FHEQ Level 4; FQHEIS Level 8), a Diploma of Higher Education (FHEQ Level 5; FQHEIS Level 9), or other awards depending upon the levels of study completed to a satisfactory standard.

Flexibility

2.10 At providers in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, the duration of a full-time course leading to a bachelor's degree is typically three years and is set at Level 6 of the FHEQ. Degrees involving a year abroad or a placement year can take up to four years.

2.11 In Scotland, a bachelor's/ordinary degree is set at three years at Level 9 on the SCQF/FQHEIS. A bachelor's degree with honours, which is the most typical route for students, is designed to include four years of study, and is set at Level 10 of the SCQF/FQHEIS. In addition, a number of Scottish universities have a long tradition of labelling certain undergraduate academic degrees as a Master of Arts (MA). This title reflects historic Scottish custom and practice with an MA/ordinary degree at Level 9 and MA with Honours at Level 10 on the SCQF/FQHEIS.

2.12 Integrated master's degree courses typically include study equivalent to at least four full-time academic years in England, Wales and Northern Ireland; and five in Scotland, of which study equivalent to at least one full-time academic year is at Level 7 of the FHEQ and Level 11 on the SCQF/FQHEIS. The courses are designed to meet the qualification descriptors in full (FHEQ Level 6 and SCQF/FQHEIS Level 10 and FHEQ Level 7 and SCQF/FQHEIS Level 11).

2.13 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 to those achieved on full-time routes.

2.14 Higher education providers structure the courses they offer to support students' learning and attainment. Depending on the educational mission of the provider, this may include opportunities to engage in learning on campus/site, online, and/or through hybrid learning, arranged in terms, by semester, year-long, block, or other formats. These may be offered in full and/or part-time modes of study and credit may be accumulated through the completion of micro-credentials, short-accredited learning, recognition of prior learning or accreditation of prior experiential learning.

Partnerships

2.15 HAAD courses and modules may incorporate partnerships. These range from formal agreements whereby credit-bearing aspects of a programme are delivered jointly by

providers and industry partners, to more informal partnerships that enrich student experience through extra-curricular opportunities such as site visits, outreach activity and placements. These partnerships can also be part of higher degree apprenticeship programme development across FHEQ Level 6 and 7. Partnerships are often formed with organisations within the arts, heritage and creative industry sectors. They foster experiential learning through active engagement, centring on historical enquiry, critical analysis and creative problem-solving. Partnerships enable professional practices to be reflected in teaching, learning and assessment modes. Where partnerships are a formal part of a course, they are aligned with and support curriculum content and delivery. Formal partnership activity is therefore compatible with course learning outcomes and is reviewed regularly to ensure this is so. All forms of partnership are developed and deployed in a manner that ensures the sustainability and resilience of delivery.

2.16 Partnerships prioritise inclusion and access, both physical and intellectual. Providers ensure that equal opportunity is given to all students to engage with learning activities delivered by or in collaboration with partners, regardless of whether these are credit-bearing or extracurricular. Off-site learning, apprenticeships and remote placements are designed and delivered in accordance with relevant policies and procedures regarding health and safety, safeguarding, EDI and immigration, with risks being effectively assessed and managed. Where partners are responsible for delivering learning activities, for example through placements, apprenticeships and taught components, this is underpinned by a formal contract.

2.17 Partnerships offer opportunities for students to further their employability skills, build networks and enhance their professional development. By encouraging the development of professional competencies and reflective practices, they facilitate the long-term progression of students from their degree programme into their careers. Partnerships are also expected to be beneficial to host organisations, with students contributing to the documentation and sharing of diverse narratives, methods and innovations, all of which are key to the evolving landscape of art, architecture and design history.

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. Considering the student voice will form part of this. 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. Providers will use external reviewers as part of periodic review to gain an independent perspective on any proposed changes and ensure threshold standards are achieved and content is appropriate for the subject.

2.20 The external examining 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,

can play an important role in supporting external examiners in advising on whether threshold standards are being met in a specific subject area.

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

3 Content, structure and delivery

3.1 This section explores how the content of the curriculum for HAAD courses shapes the likely teaching and learning strategy and employs assessment methods that discriminate between different levels of attainment and allow students to demonstrate they have met the relevant learning outcomes and benchmark standards.

Content

3.2 HAAD courses explore how artefacts are made and how they change the world. They are characterised by a diversity of historical periods, geographical places and cultural contexts, studied in depth and comparatively (see paragraph 1.1). HAAD courses are taught in a variety of institutional settings and subject groupings, and they often reflect interdisciplinary synergies (see paragraph 1.2). The content of individual courses and modules will therefore vary very widely, according to local circumstances, staff expertise and resources.

3.3 HAAD courses typically begin with an introduction to core disciplinary skills and ways of thinking. In later years, modules narrow in focus and increase in historical and critical depth, often culminating in a major project in the final year.

3.4 Research-informed teaching plays a major part in the delivery of HAAD courses and the interaction between teaching, scholarship and research makes an indispensable contribution to the dynamism of the subject. In many cases, interaction with local and regional collections, through partnerships with external organisations, provides special pedagogic opportunities for students. Such connections may also be forged at national and international level to enrich the curriculum.

3.5 HAAD courses cultivate historiographical awareness through study of the complex and contested histories of the discipline, including the inherent partiality of historical knowledge and the cultural specificity of notions of 'art, architecture and design'. They also examine the physical properties of artefacts and often include elements of object-led and collections-based learning. HAAD courses cover the contemporary contexts for historical knowledge, including political discourses and professional practices in the arts, heritage and creative cultural industries.

Teaching and learning

3.6 Teaching and learning methods in HAAD develop a set of specific competences and skills centred on analysis, interpretation, discussion and resolution in a range of forms from written essays and timed examinations to verbal/non-verbal presentations, online discussions, reports, logbooks, blogs, audio or video essays and an array of analogous assignment formats. Visual and material literacy, critical thinking and effective communication underpin the subject's teaching and learning strategies. These are fluid and respond to the needs of learners in an often rapidly changing educational environment. They take into account recent debates about digital literacy and remote, experiential and collaborative learning as well as GenAI in the humanities.

3.7 HAAD courses and modules are designed to be inclusive in terms of their academic content and emphasise belonging and wellbeing. They are foregrounded by fair access, participation and student-centred learning in design as well as delivery. As such, HAAD teaching and learning draws on a dynamic combination of traditional pedagogic models in the humanities, such as lectures, seminars and tutorials, and facilitated and self-directed activities that may include study visits to museums, galleries, libraries, archives, studios and other relevant spaces, sites, institutions or organisations that form an integral aspect of the

discipline's specific academic and professional identity. Placements, apprenticeships and partnerships feature on some courses.

3.8 Engaging with sector-wide best practice and cultivating innovation, HAAD courses may draw on the following teaching and learning methods and approaches. These are not exhaustive lists, and examples are indicative rather than prescriptive. They can be tailored to in-person, online or hybrid formats, enabling students to engage critically with visual and material culture through virtual archives and accessible online resources.

Methods

- Lectures which introduce the subject discipline's historiography, methodologies and conceptual frameworks, as well as areas of specialist study.
- Seminars which offer space for the close reading of key texts, group discussion and the presentation of research.
- Tutorials which provide the opportunity for individual support, particularly in relation to formative and summative feedback.
- Informal sessions designed around self-reflection and peer feedback.
- Formal or informal student presentations (individual or group).
- Quizzes or slide tests (used formatively).
- Blogs, logbooks and reports.
- Informal sessions designed around set or student-directed reading.
- Mediated online discussion, critique and evaluation.
- Group debate or mini conference.
- Digital, video, time-based, or moving image presentations.
- Technology-enhanced learning for the examination of artefacts and related databases for research.
- Experiential learning such as study visits (facilitated or student-led) which involve encountering and sometimes handling artefacts.
- Other types of authentic learning such as placement or workplace experience.

Approaches

Object-based

- close looking at artefacts
- object-based research projects
- material, laboratory, and technical analysis
- collections-based and curatorial tasks.

Experiential

- site visits
- student-led gallery talks
- study abroad
- art making.

Collaborative

- group discussion and debate
- peer-review and peer-assessment
- group research
- student-led learning.

Problem-based

- live brief
- simulation of museum and heritage, art market, creative industry and other

- professional scenarios
- role-playing
- independent research projects.

Authentic

- curating or co-curating an exhibition
- placement in industry
- public-facing projects
- critical engagement with GenAI.

Creative

- artistic and creative responses to artefacts and narratives
- play and game-based learning
- experimental and iterative problem-solving
- storytelling.

Digital

- GIS and network mapping
- quantitative and big data analysis
- 3D modelling and reconstruction
- creating and responding to artefacts and resources in virtual and augmented reality.

Assessment

3.9 Assessment is an essential part of the learning process, and formative and summative feedback points that provide opportunities for students to reflect on teaching and learning are built into the design of courses and modules. Learning outcomes and assessment criteria are communicated to students via course and module handbooks.

3.10 Effectively designed assessments support the learning of all students, offer flexibility to accommodate their differing needs and interests, and are aligned with the curriculum and its learning outcomes. A range of formative and summative assessments, as well as methods of self-assessment and peer assessment, provide opportunities for students to test, demonstrate and extend their knowledge, understanding and skills, and for educators to understand students' progress and adapt teaching accordingly. The range and variety of HAAD courses serve as the basis for engaging assessment experiences that are fair and rigorous and encourage deep learning in the subject area.

3.11 Assessment methods reflect content and learning outcomes. Repeated opportunities for self-assessment and peer assessment help students to develop as confident independent learners who reflect critically on their own capacities as well as the subject matter. Those designing assessment consider methods and outputs that will give students opportunities to demonstrate their own capacities throughout the assessment process. This may include, for example, using forms of in-person, offline, real-world and/or peer assessment.

3.12 The advent of GenAI has raised important questions for assessment. The technology provides opportunities for students to experiment with writing and presentation styles and develop their own voices. However, GenAI can pose a risk to students' learning and developing confidence. Those designing courses and modules therefore consider opportunities for a broader portfolio of forms of assessment that are relevant to the subject area in order to protect the learning process and the rigour and creative opportunity of assessment.

3.13 The list below provides a general indication and is not an exhaustive or prescriptive list of the range of current assessment practice in HAAD, which includes independent and group work. Peer assessment and/or self-assessment may be appropriate in some cases. Assessment methods will be inclusive by design. Considerations for accessibility and inclusivity will determine forms of assessment.

Methods designed and administered by teaching staff

- tests of visual knowledge
- tests of formal and contextual analysis
- quizzes or slide tests
- exams (seen and unseen).

Written and spoken methods with defined criteria that afford students choice

- independent research projects
- verbal/non-verbal presentations
- reflective logbooks or diaries
- case studies
- written assignments (for example, essays).

Methods which enable visual, auditory and/or creative outputs

- videos, video essays
- photo essays
- audio files, podcasts, sound essays
- live briefs
- online discussions, webpages, blog sites, interactive digital applications
- 3D models, reconstructions explorations of VR, AR, XR.

Methods reflecting experience gained in industry or through partnership

- real-world and virtual exhibitions
- work placement diaries and/or reports, internship diaries and/or reports, treatment reports
- evidence of experience with public programming and/or other learning engagement activities portfolios showcasing a variety of work, which may include some or all the above approaches.

4 Benchmark standards

Introduction

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

4.2 The vast majority of students will perform significantly better than the minimum threshold standards. Each higher education provider has its own method of determining what appropriate evidence of this achievement will be and should refer to [Annex D in The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies](#). 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.

4.3 Please note that the minimum threshold standards are not intended to specify universal competence standards for a discipline. If a provider chooses to develop competence standards (as defined by the Equality Act 2010) as part of a programme specification, these can be informed by the relevant Subject Benchmark Statement along with any PSRB requirements. In these circumstances, providers should follow the most recent guidance from the [Equality and Human Rights Commission](#).

4.4 This section describes two levels of achievement: threshold and typical. Threshold is defined as the minimum acceptable standard of an honours graduate in HAAD, corresponding to a third-class degree. Typical is defined as the standard attained by most honours graduates, corresponding to a second-class degree. This section also describes the postgraduate standards that specify performance for a student completing a course leading to a master's degree at Level 7 (in England, Northern Ireland and Wales) and Level 11 (in Scotland).

Subject knowledge, understanding and skills

Threshold level (honours degree)	Typical level (honours degree)
Analyse and interpret the visual and material culture of more than one geographical region and/or chronological period.	Devise and sustain arguments relating to the knowledge and understanding of the visual and material culture of more than one geographical region and/or chronological period.
Describe and comment upon the materials and techniques through which artefacts are constructed in the cultures studied.	Devise and sustain arguments relating to the knowledge and understanding of the materials and techniques through which artefacts are constructed in the cultures studied.
Follow current debates and approaches to the discipline.	Demonstrate sound knowledge of current debates and approaches to the discipline and accurately deploy established techniques of interpretation.
Demonstrate some familiarity with professional practice in the arts and creative cultural industries, including museums, galleries and the heritage sector.	Engage with professional practice in the arts and creative cultural industries, including museums, galleries and the heritage sector that can be used to devise arguments and solve problems.

Analyse the ways art, design and architecture contribute to and reflect upon the formation of cultures and identities.	Apply theories to the ways art, design and architecture contribute to and reflect upon the formation of cultures and identities.
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Subject-specific skills and abilities

Threshold level (honours degree)	Typical level (honours degree)
Apply basic skills of observation and visual and material description in analysis.	Deploy skills of observation and visual and material description to the interpretation of artefacts and the elaboration of arguments.
Situate artefacts within appropriate environmental, historical and cultural contexts.	Situate artefacts within appropriate historical and cultural contexts to advance enquiry within the HAAD disciplines.
Use evidence from relevant interdisciplinary sources (visual, verbal, textual, technical, primary and secondary) in relation to current issues and enquiries in the HAAD disciplines.	Locate, use and evaluate evidence from relevant interdisciplinary sources (visual, verbal, textual, technical, primary and secondary) to advance inquiry within the HAAD disciplines.
Demonstrate awareness of methodologies, theories and approaches established in the HAAD discipline areas.	Deploy appropriate methodologies, theories and approaches established in the HAAD discipline areas.
Show some ability to produce relevant arguments and concepts supported by visual, textual or other appropriate evidence.	Consistently demonstrate an ability to produce cohesive, well-structured and relevant arguments supported by visual, textual or other appropriate evidence.
Discern the difference between alternative arguments and approaches.	Demonstrate critical judgement and the ability to evaluate alternative arguments and to engage with competing approaches.

Generic intellectual skills

Communicate comprehensibly in a variety of media, using visual aids where necessary.	Communicate effectively in a variety of media with specialist and non-specialist audiences, using visual aids where necessary.
Undertake information gathering and basic research with guidance and support.	Conduct self-directed research demonstrating a capacity for effective and verifiable information retrieval, critical review and organisation relevant to a given task.
Display open-mindedness: be receptive to unfamiliar artefacts, issues, values and ideas.	Demonstrate the ability to take an inclusive approach to interpretation by taking into account the ideas, contexts and structures out of which various visual and material cultures have arisen.
Identify underlying values and ethics within culture and society.	Identify and examine underlying values and ethics within culture and society.

Transferable skills

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

- present knowledge or an argument that is comprehensible to others while

demonstrating a sound technical proficiency of written English work as part of a team as an effective collaborator

- research and study effectively in a guided and structured environment
- appreciate and engage in contemporary debates relating to culture and society, for example around inequality and sustainability
- use digital technologies (including GenAI, used and applied ethically) to research, select and communicate information
- work diligently, to take appropriate decisions and meet assessment deadlines
- take responsibility for their own work, understanding questions of academic integrity
- reflect on their own progress, making appropriate use of feedback to further intellectual development and improve performance
- identify and examine underlying values and ethics both within culture and society and on a personal level
- exhibit some awareness of the inherent uncertainty, ambiguities and the limits of knowledge.

Master's level

4.6 On graduating with a master's degree in HAAD, students should typically be able to:

- demonstrate sophisticated and nuanced visual literacy
- systematically and critically engage with texts and artefacts, as well as theories and methods for examining visual and material culture
- demonstrate awareness of how methodologies and research trends in the discipline have challenged assumptions and interpretations of art, architecture or design
- use unfamiliar arguments and artefacts constructively, while engaging critically with prominent, familiar or established ideas within the discipline
- demonstrate advanced knowledge of the place of HAAD in relation to larger social and political contexts
- form a systematic and critically engaged approach to the representation of art in museums, galleries and the heritage sector
- demonstrate comprehensive grounding in skills of analysis, argument and expression
- assemble data from a variety of relevant primary and secondary sources, and discern connections between them
- recognise their own academic strengths and weaknesses, and reflect on their performance and progress
- identify the relationship between different intellectual approaches and choose those appropriate to a particular instance
- carry out a self-directed, original research project
- communicate ideas and structured arguments effectively to specialist and non-specialist audiences.

5 Membership of the Advisory Group

Membership of the Advisory Group for the Subject Benchmark Statement for History of Art, Architecture and Design 2026

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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 Subject Benchmark Statement for Art & Design from 2016.

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