



Subject Benchmark Statement

Social Policy

April 2026



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About this Statement

This QAA Subject Benchmark Statement for Social Policy 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 (Gen AI)
- 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 Social Policy
- a prospective student thinking about undertaking a course in Social Policy
- an employer, to find out about the knowledge and skills generally expected of Social Policy 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 Social Policy degree

1.1 This Subject Benchmark Statement sets out the context and purposes of degrees in Social Policy. The intention of the Statement is to present a framework for the teaching and assessment of Social Policy programmes and the expected knowledge and standards to be attained by students completing undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes.

1.2 This Subject Benchmark Statement recognises that Social Policy may be taught within joint honours programmes and as standalone modules within wider social science programmes. Such modules can be at undergraduate and postgraduate level. In such instances, the Subject Benchmark Statement can be used to identify the specific contribution of Social Policy to social sciences and ensure the aims and purpose of the discipline are reflected in joint honours programmes and standalone modules.

1.3 Social Policy is used to refer to both a discipline and specific practices and activities. In this Statement, where capitalised (that is, Social Policy) we are referring to the discipline, and when set out in lower case (that is, social policy) we are referring to practices and activities by the state and other bodies in such areas as education, health, care, social security, pensions and housing. Collectively, these services form a variety of welfare systems which can be explored in isolation or collectively within Social Policy.

1.4 Social Policy is distinctive in its subject matter, as it critically examines policies and practices through the lens of human welfare, often underpinned by the critical interrogation of social need, social justice, and resource distribution. The subject aims to identify, describe and explain social problems. Social Policy does not stop at analysis of current interventions to improve human welfare but also advocates for alternative policy approaches. Consequently, Social Policy is both an academic as well as an applied and problem-oriented subject: bridging the gap between academic theory and policy practice. To this end, Social Policy draws on a range of other academic subjects to be applied to its core focus on human needs and welfare.

1.5 Social Policy scrutinises the governmental and non-governmental division and allocation of financial, in-kind and informal welfare resources in society.

1.6 Social Policy critically examines the ways that this division and allocation directly and indirectly improve or harm the human welfare conditions of populations and groups. This includes a particular focus on visible and invisible divisions in society that can predetermine the outcomes of policy, such as class, gender, sex, race/ethnicity, age, disability and sexual orientation.

1.7 Within the UK context, devolution to Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales has shifted responsibility for social policy away from central government, enabling devolved administrations to design and deliver services that respond more directly to regional needs and priorities. This includes awareness of regional devolution and the role of local governments in welfare provision. Students should understand how social policy operates across local, national and international levels, including the principle of subsidiarity, emphasising the importance of addressing social needs at the most immediate level capable of doing so.

1.8 Social policies affect us across our lives (at the level of individuals, families, communities or wider society) and welfare systems are integral to our lived experiences. Our lives are also shaped by welfare systems over the life course. The nature of welfare systems and forms of support provided are central issues in popular discussions and political debates.

1.9 The historical roots of Social Policy in Social Administration reflect its early emphasis on the organisation and delivery of welfare services, particularly in the (UK) context of industrialisation from the late 1800s through to the post-Second World War reconstruction and the development of state welfare systems. Social Administration focused on the practical governance of welfare institutions – such as health, housing, and social care – alongside questions of efficiency, accountability and equity. This legacy remains relevant today, as understanding the operational and managerial dimensions of welfare provision continues to inform debates about policy implementation, service quality and the relationship between state, market and voluntary sectors within contemporary social policy.

1.10 Social Policy requires understanding of contexts of polycrises.¹ Events such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the cost-of-living crisis, and escalating housing shortages have highlighted the need for rapid yet informed policy responses that protect vulnerable populations and maintain social cohesion. Through critical evaluation of welfare systems, service delivery and governance, Social Policy equips graduates to design interventions that address immediate needs while fostering long-term resilience and reform. In this way, the discipline contributes not only to crisis management but also to shaping equitable and sustainable welfare futures. Embedding reflective practice, scenario-based learning, and skills in communication and conflict resolution within curricula ensures students develop resilience and professional agility, enabling them to contribute meaningfully to crisis management and long-term welfare reform.

1.11 While Social Policy is concerned with analysing the role of states in providing welfare systems, the scope of inquiry has always been much broader and incorporating the roles of individuals, families, commercial organisations and community and voluntary sectors in providing welfare. As such, the study of Social Policy encompasses welfare states, but also the broader welfare systems and organisations involved in the delivery of welfare.

1.12 Subsequently, Social Policy inquiry can focus on state provision, funding and regulation of an array of welfare services and benefits provided by different institutions across four primary sectors: state, commercial/private, voluntary/community and families.

1.13 Welfare systems and social policy have been shaped by intersecting ideologies and systemic discrimination, with racism recognised as a fundamental driver of inequality alongside other sources such as gender, disability and sexuality. These structural biases influence access to essential services, including health care, housing, education and energy, perpetuating patterns of exclusion and disadvantage across diverse communities. Acknowledging these dynamics is critical for understanding how policy design and practice can reproduce or challenge injustice, and for ensuring that Social Policy education equips graduates to address multiple forms of discrimination as barriers to social justice.

1.14 Social policy must recognise the centrality of environmental sustainability in shaping welfare systems and future policy agendas. Traditional anthropocentric approaches, which prioritise human needs without considering ecological limits, risk exacerbating social and environmental inequalities. Embedding an understanding of the interdependence between human wellbeing and planetary health within the discipline ensures that graduates can critically engage with policies addressing climate change, energy transition and resource distribution, promoting sustainable and just outcomes for all communities.

1.15 Welfare services can constitute a minimal safety net or an expansive array of provision, depending on the political motivation of governments and social conventions. Social Policy analyses critically interrogate these variations and changes over time to understand the intent, design and consequences of different welfare systems.

¹ Several problems happening simultaneously, causing confusion and aggravating each other.

Purposes and characteristics of a Social Policy degree

1.16 Social Policy has a particular interest in entitlement to benefits and welfare services, engaging with concepts such as, but not limited to, human need, social rights, citizenship, equality and social justice to investigate how welfare entitlement and support is established and changes.

1.17 Within its broader theoretical frameworks, Social Policy offers critical assessments of different welfare regimes, systems of governance and the intended and unintended consequences of social policies. Analysis of social policies is concerned with access to, experiences of and outcomes from welfare systems. Consequently, Social Policy students must develop an appreciation of the design, implementation and evaluation of social policies and broader theories of policy making.

1.18 Social Policy is concerned with resource distribution decisions to provide a variety of welfare services. This encompasses cash transfers (such as social security), funding of in-kind services (such as education and health care), their regulation and wider public finance practices and budgetary systems.

1.19 Social Policy is also concerned with developing research informed evidence for dissemination which considers power relations alongside ideological and political debates in setting welfare goals, the nature of the policy making process and the role of different welfare providers.

1.20 Social Policy is normatively focused; as such, its students should acknowledge their own individual values, the values of others and insights from research to inform their understanding of the subject and its practices and activities.

1.21 Social Policy is constantly adapting and evolving in its analysis of human welfare. Increasingly, efforts to decolonise curricula have encouraged reflection within academia on the prominence of ways of thinking, for example Eurocentric worldviews, and has inspired reviews of programmes and content. Fostering such an approach within Social Policy requires attention be given to the foundation of the subject which can inform how programmes seek to pursue decolonisation in their own design and practice.

1.22 The development, focus and approach of Social Policy has a particular UK history. There has been a shift towards greater awareness of international and global considerations, the history of welfare services and its role in the creation of Britain as a nation state often pays little attention to the role of empire and colonisation.

1.23 The definition of the subject and the power dynamics within the development of social policies in the UK are informed by Britain's past as an empire through to its decline and the establishment of the Commonwealth. This includes the role of many people from across the Commonwealth in the rebuilding of Britain through industry and the welfare state after the Second World War.

1.24 Analysis is not purely historical but must also consider ongoing legacies and practices. Decolonial frameworks should also be applied in analysis of the internationalisation of social policy, and funding for social policy interventions by international organisations are often contingent on colonial ideas, values, interests, approaches and policies.

1.25 The development of knowledge within Social Policy, and its canonical texts which guided the early development of the subject, were often blind to the implications of colonial practices, power dynamics and consequences for human welfare. Core concepts were often developed within universalist frameworks which paid insufficient attention to diversity of experiences, conditions and welfare needs.

1.26 Nor was attention given to the global majority understandings of key concepts fundamental to Social Policy analysis. Consequently, it is important that Social Policy analysis broadens its focus to address the lack of (historical) interest in other places, other histories and other trajectories to wellbeing.

1.27 Due to the history of the discipline, it can never be fully decolonised; therefore, it is important for Social Policy to pay attention to its history and the consequences this has for contemporary understanding and analysis of social policies past, present and future. Teaching within the discipline should make efforts to diversify student learning through wider theories, knowledge and analyses which challenge the legacy of colonial and neocolonial assumptions and thinking often embedded within the discipline.

1.28 Students of Social Policy develop an openness to understanding the varied origins and diverse nature of welfare systems, alongside an appreciation of theories which provide critical insight into the diverse lives of social policy users.

Equity, diversity and inclusion

1.29 Access to the teaching of Social Policy prior to higher education is relatively limited in the UK. This will likely mean students have varied starting points for engaging with the discipline. Teaching of Social Policy should therefore be mindful of supporting students who may not have formally studied Social Policy but will have engaged with relevant key issues through lived experience and media coverage and public debates over social issues.

1.30 The diverse backgrounds of Social Policy students is a strength of the discipline but presents challenges in ensuring all can reach their potential. Academic programmes cannot themselves reverse structural inequalities nor overcome life course differences which have shaped students' respective paths to Social Policy. However, by basing teaching and learning practices on principles of equity we can acknowledge that different circumstances and needs may require different forms of support to achieve good degree outcomes.

1.31 Social Policy programme, teaching and learning design should reflect upon students' diverse needs. Provision should ensure that appropriate support is available, and efforts are made to address awarding gaps – starting with protected characteristics under the [Equality Act 2010](#) and relevant equality legislation in Northern Ireland (including socio-economic status) and broadening to all relevant categories of student and recognising that students may embody multiple identities which might impact on their ability to engage with the programme.

1.32 Social Policy programmes are designed to provide all students with relevant support they need to realise their potential. This will require programme designs and pedagogical practices which foster inclusion and belonging within lectures, seminars and other teaching and assessment formats.

1.33 Social Policy programmes support the development of analysis, critical thinking and communication skills within teaching and learning environments which are conducive for students to express diverse views through constructive dialogue.

1.34 Programme and module design in Social Policy can offer students opportunities to review and, where appropriate, co-construct curricula.

1.35 Equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) principles can guide academic, pedagogical and administrative practices, processes and behaviours across all aspects of Social Policy programmes. For the purposes of this Statement, we define each term as:

- equity: providing everyone with unique resources and opportunities they need to reach an equal outcome
- diversity: recognising, respecting and valuing students' different backgrounds and mindsets
- inclusion: creating an environment that recognises the dignity and humanity of all.

1.36 Programme, teaching and assessment design should adhere to good EDI practices, such as the [QAA resource on Creating Inclusive Subject Communities](#).

1.37 As a discipline focused on contemporary (and historical) debates about EDI and on broader policy initiatives which take forward, or regress, these policy aims, Social Policy programmes equip students not only to be aware of EDI issues but apply them in a critical approach to social policy debates.

1.38 The teaching of Social Policy contributes to the development of students' capacity for self-reflection and, in particular, their ability to listen to, reflect on, and interact with the views and beliefs of others; and to take account of their own normative and moral positions in order to understand how human needs are experienced and how social problems are addressed.

1.39 Social Policy graduates will be able to effectively reflect on how their work is inclusive of diversity, and how their own life experiences and identity may shape their viewpoints and approaches. In positions of leadership, Social Policy graduates understand the value of diversity in effective team-working and problem-solving, how their own background and experiences may influence their decision-making and demonstrate professional values of equity and inclusion in their work with others.

Accessibility and the needs of disabled students

1.40 In line with best practices of inclusive education and conform to stipulations of the Equality Act 2010 (and relevant legislation in Northern Ireland: [Disability Discrimination Act 1995](#) and [Special Educational Needs and Disability \(Northern Ireland\) Order 2005](#)), teaching teams in Social Policy (both on degree courses and individual modules) take a proactive and anticipatory approach to accessibility in teaching, learning and assessment, accounting for any particular needs of disabled students. For more information, please see the [Disabled Students Commission](#) website.

1.41 Social Policy is a subject that attracts students from a wide range of backgrounds, and it values the unique perspectives that students bring to their studies thanks to these diverse experiences and viewpoints. Programme design as well as teaching approaches at module level create spaces and opportunities for all students, including those with disabilities, to learn from each other and to thus benefit in their learning from this inclusive diversity.

1.42 To ensure that all aspects of teaching, learning and assessment in Social Policy modules and courses are inclusive and accessible, providers should take account of the following areas.

- Programme design should integrate diverse modes of teaching and assessment types, to engage students in their learning through a variety of approaches.
- Clear information is given to students from the start with regards to expectations and available support.
- Full access to adequate learning resources, including assistive technology, is given to students with disabilities to support their individual learning.
- For assessments, reasonable adjustment is available to students through clearly communicated channels, enabling students to access alternative assessments and/or

obtain additional support to create equitable learning opportunities for all. These are typically outlined within institutional student support plans.

1.43 Where placements are a component of the curriculum, additional support should be provided to any students with disabilities who may face barriers in accessing such placements, and alternative forms of work-based learning ought to be offered if necessary.

Education for sustainable development

1.44 As noted above, Social Policy is constantly adapting and evolving to integrate contemporary social problems and challenges into its analysis of human welfare. Sustainable development has taken a central role in debates of human welfare, clearly aligning human existence with environmental boundaries and limits. Thus, sustainable development can be both a topic of study itself and a cross-cutting topic interwoven across a Social Policy programme.

1.45 The [UN Sustainable Development Goals](#) (UN SDGs) are a call to action to end poverty and inequality, protect the planet, and ensure that all people enjoy health, justice and prosperity.

1.46 Across the discipline of Social Policy there is clear alignment, both directly and indirectly, with the UN SDGs. Many areas of the discipline contribute to understanding and advancing these goals. But the discipline can contribute to the attainment of many of the SDGs through several different topics and debates explored within programmes.

1.47 Student engagement with UN SDGs is an entry point into critical analysis of the contribution of welfare systems to sustainability and broader debates regarding eco-social policy.

1.48 Students of Social Policy should have opportunity to explore the unique and essential role of welfare provision and its relationship to, for example, labour markets and the economy in shaping the consequences of human action on the natural environment. This can include awareness of how welfare policies will need to be reformed to address future challenges arising from climate, demographic and technological changes.

1.49 Academics delivering programmes will likely be working across several sustainable development goals which can be drawn into the design of programmes in diverse and engaging ways to support student learning. This will also give attention to the increasing internationalisation and global nature of social problems and the need for sustainable welfare interventions.

1.50 Additionally, programme design within Social Policy can draw on current resources to support the development of their curricula, such as the [QAA and Advance HE Education for Sustainable Development](#). Additionally, attention should be given to the [Inner Development Goals](#): to better identify, understand, develop, integrate and communicate the personal skills and attributes needed for sustainable development.

1.51 While sustainability and environmental topics can form a core part of Social Policy learning, it is important that programmes seek to integrate awareness of sustainability across all aspects of teaching and learning to ensure students graduate with awareness of the complex ways in which sustainability underpins all aspects of human welfare.

1.52 Social Policy can offer opportunities to investigate, debate and critique the concept of sustainability, the diverse ideological and political influences on the term and how it is pursued (or not) through social and wider public and economic policies. Inclusive within such analysis, attention should be given to the role of climate change in deepening privilege (for

example racial, gender, economic, ability) on local, national and global scales as well as the implications of climate change for the development and delivery of welfare services. This can empower students with competencies and intellectual capabilities to support sustainability and ethical ways of living within their own lives and those of their wider community.

1.53 Sustainability should also be considered in relation to ongoing lifelong learning beyond the degree. Social Policy by its nature is engaged with ever-changing economic, political and social contexts. Such changes may prompt revisions in policy or be caused by policy implementation. Students should graduate with a broader skills set to be able to engage in ever-evolving policy debates with the critical thinking and analytical skills their degrees offer.

Employability, entrepreneurship and enterprise education

1.54 In the context of Social Policy degree programmes (undergraduate or master's level), employability, entrepreneurship and enterprising education (EEE) can provide new approaches to engage students in problem solving, creative thinking and the acquisition of experience within real-world policy and practice contexts. It can provide a useful and effective way through which to foster critical thinking skills and generate and implement innovative ideas in the context of solving social problems as well as competencies which can serve them in diverse post-graduation employment and careers. Further guidance can be found in the QAA document: [Enterprise and Entrepreneurship Education: Guidance for UK Higher Education Providers](#).

1.55 Programmes can also consider how EEE provides competencies to help students lead a rewarding, self-determined professional life and seek to establish appropriate opportunities with wider provider careers services and other networks which can increase student awareness of and engagement with the importance of Social Policy to diverse career opportunities.

1.56 Engagement with EEE within Social Policy programmes can support students to learn independently, explore new avenues of knowledge with confidence, and think in a critical, creative and enterprising manner. Through teaching and assessment practices students can foster key skills which allow them to function effectively in a complex and ever-changing society. This can be enabled by using authentic assessment practices (assessments that replicate within academic settings as much as possible real-world scenarios), where appropriate within programme designs. Opportunities should also encourage students to apply disciplinary knowledge to employment contexts (whether through placements, authentic assessments or other relevant practices). Such designs can seek to integrate real-world fidelity to the diverse organisations graduates will often secure future employment with.

1.57 The development of EEE may be considered in relation to placements and work or volunteer-based activities, and programmes will likely offer such opportunities as appropriate to wider programme outcomes. Such opportunities need to ensure they are accessible to all students and align with EDI principles and accessibility stated above. Moreover, these can add real-world applicability to the study of Social Policy, helping students to relate to the discipline and deepen their understanding.

1.58 While valuable, placement-based, and/or work-informed learning is not the only way to develop EEE within programmes. Diverse assessment practices which seek to embed authenticity with real-world activities and the development of learning contexts which support student creativity and critical thinking are also viable developments for integrating EEE into Social Policy curricula.

1.59 It is important to recognise that Social Policy graduates enter diverse careers, primarily within the public and voluntary sectors but also the private sector. Especially where Social Policy is taught within or alongside other disciplines (for example, joint honours programmes or modules embedded in other degree programmes, especially Sociology, Politics, Criminology and Economics). Social Policy as a discipline combines academic and applied knowledges and skills which can facilitate EEE without sacrificing academic or discipline-specific content.

Generative artificial intelligence

1.60 Given the increasing relevance of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) in professional and academic life, students of Social Policy should be provided with opportunities to critically engage with such tools, to develop skills for their ethical, effective and reflective use in future employment and (where permitted and appropriate) in academic contexts.

1.61 Such engagement with GenAI should consider both benefits and risks. Where permitted, GenAI can offer specific gains in the learning process through:

- the use as a supportive tool for initial reflections on study topics
- the use for proofreading, formatting, editing, the creation of alt text (alternative text) or the enhancement of presentations across a wide range of assessments and study activities
- practicing its use from a critical perspective, enabling students to evaluate the quality of GenAI outputs.

1.62 Engagement with GenAI, however, also needs to develop an awareness of general risks, such as:

- the unethical use of GenAI – for example, passing on GenAI-created content as a student's own assessment work
- the uncritical use of GenAI – for example, using GenAI to summarise readings without checking accuracy, which undermines students' development of their own reading, analytical and research skills; or using GenAI without awareness of its tendency to reproduce existing biases
- the potentially negative impact of GenAI usage on students' ability to develop and strengthen their own critical faculties and to acquire, through their learning, their own authentic voice
- GenAI outputs risk reinforcing colonial, Western-centric knowledge production and, as such, students need to be able to critique and challenge information provided, in line with the focus on decolonising the curriculum
- students should be informed about and encouraged to participate in debate around the ethical, legal, environmental and social consequences of GenAI, and social policy responses to these consequences.

1.63 Considering these potential benefits and risks, and to ensure that students pursue their studies with integrity and develop the graduate skills required in contemporary labour markets, developers of Social Policy courses consider carefully how GenAI can be integrated into teaching and learning practices as well as into assessments, so that students

develop both essential applied skills in using GenAI and the capacity to critically scrutinise its outputs and to reflect on associated risks.

1.64 Social Policy degrees enable skills development in critical analysis, rigorous research, evaluation and applied reasoning, through which they promote employability. In employment contexts that are increasingly impacted by GenAI, Social Policy degrees provide opportunities to equip students with competences to effectively deploy GenAI tools for the purposes of analysis and presentation in an ethically responsible and appropriate manner, while developing a strong critical awareness of the limitations, in-built biases and potential societal harms of GenAI instruments.

1.65 Institutions will have their own policies on the use of GenAI to which Social Policy degrees programmes will have to adhere to. Within these usages, students should be taught about the risks, limitations and environmental consequences of GenAI use.

1.66 Further guidance can be found on the QAA website: [Generative artificial intelligence](#).

2 Distinctive features of the Social Policy degree

Design

2.1 A Social Policy degree requires students to engage with theoretical and empirical debates regarding social problems and human welfare (individual and collective). While historically set within a national framework, programmes increasingly incorporate global and international dynamics. Degrees in Social Policy should be designed so that students are able to address four fundamental questions in relation to any social problem: *what* is done by social policies, *how* is it done, *why* has this been done, and *whether* it should be done, *who* it is done to and *who* is it done by?

2.2 The design of a Social Policy programme should incorporate the following:

- a distinct focus on the concept of welfare, welfare systems and entitlement to access welfare support
- a specific focus on policies directed to and impacting upon social welfare, for example, in relation to social security, health, education and housing
- the rigorous linking of theoretical analysis with empirical enquiry
- the identification and understanding of different value positions, ideologies and evidence bases which inform welfare debates, and policy design and implementation
- the development of academic and practical knowledge regarding the development, implementation and evaluation of policies designed to influence social circumstances.

2.3 Whether studied as a programme or discrete modules within other disciplines, Social Policy analysis should ensure that students are able to integrate interdisciplinary knowledge to study welfare issues and policies. Modules may explore an array of topics but should typically contain modules analysing key welfare theories and concepts, policy analysis and research methods. Such knowledge should equip students to apply their knowledge across varied welfare debates, and be able to identify, apply and critique:

- how social issues are conceived, and social problems constructed
- how interventions are justified, and provision established
- the resource distribution, design and administration of interventions and assess their consequences
- the historic, environmental, global/international factors and discriminatory attitudes and policies which influence welfare provision, adopting a multi-sectoral approach which gives attention beyond the state to other providers of welfare support.

2.4 Social Policy degrees should equip students with the skills and competencies to identify social problems, evaluate the effectiveness of social welfare interventions, and produce and communicate (through various formats) policy recommendations. This requires that, in addition to understanding welfare debates, students develop knowledge of research methods and a critical appreciation of policy-making theories and evidence-based policy. Students should possess the skills and knowledge required to:

- conduct policy analysis across varied professional settings
- communicate research and recommendations in a variety of formats suitable to professional, policy-orientated professions and lay audience
- develop innovative solutions to enhance individual and/or collective welfare.

2.5 Degrees in Social Policy provide students with the opportunity to contribute to debates on theoretical, ideological, environmental and resource issues, as well as evaluate evidence and conduct research. Understanding should include awareness of multi-sectoral nature of providing welfare and how provision is developed in national, international and global contexts. Additionally, it offers students the opportunity to understand impacts of colonial and Western influences on the subject, both academically and in practice.

2.6 Social Policy education can incorporate elements of social administration and will have several overlaps with [Public Policy and Administration](#). This recognises a shared history and encourages students of Social Policy to acquire knowledge of leadership, management, and day-to-day operation of welfare institutions which is integral to the discipline's historical and practical foundations. Programmes should aim to embed reflective practice alongside interpersonal skills such as communication and conflict resolution which will strengthen students' capacity to navigate the complexities of service delivery and governance.

2.7 Review of programme design and provision should integrate student contributions. This will likely take several forms: from module evaluations, staff-student meetings, and curriculum review processes which may also involve co-production between academics, students and other stakeholders.

Progression

2.8 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 Social Policy 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 an 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.

2.9 It is expected that a student who has graduated with a second-class or higher Social Policy undergraduate degree would be capable of undertaking postgraduate study in Social Policy 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.

2.10 Undergraduates studying Social Policy 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 overlaps between different disciplines, creating further opportunities for interdisciplinary study.

2.11 Any student enrolled in a standard undergraduate honours degree course in Social Policy, 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

2.12 At providers in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, the duration of a full-time Social Policy course leading to a standard undergraduate degree is typically three years, or four years for a course involving a year abroad (such as a programme involving languages) or a

placement year, or for an integrated master's degree. 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.

2.13 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, online, and/or through hybrid learning, arranged in terms, by semester, year-long, block or other formats. These may be offered in full-time 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. 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.

Partnership

2.14 Degree-awarding bodies may deliver courses in partnership with other providers through validation and franchising arrangements. Others may work with partners who deliver specific elements of the course through placement learning or as part of a degree apprenticeship. Subject Benchmark Statements, such as this one, play an important role in helping partners design provision that contributes to threshold standards being met in a specific subject area.

Monitoring and review

2.15 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 historical monitoring to develop an understanding of student achievement or inform future course planning.

2.16 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.

2.17 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.

2.18 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

This section explores how the content of the curriculum for Social Policy shapes the likely teaching and learning strategy and the modes of assessment that allow students to demonstrate they have met the programme outcomes for their study and using benchmark standards to discriminate between different levels of attainment.

Content

3.1 Taught on diverse degree pathways (as single or joint honours as well as part of broader social science courses and modules), Social Policy is a multifaceted and dynamic subject, the content of which ought to remain responsive to wider societal changes. While it may be inappropriate to be prescriptive in identifying the knowledge and understanding expected of a graduate in Social Policy, a set of core contents and skills can be identified.

3.2 Social Policy teaching in the UK is situated in local, national, international and global contexts, with students acquiring insights into:

- the features of the welfare systems of the UK and its devolved nations
- cross-national differences and commonalities in social policy responses through comparative perspectives (devolved and international)
- global dimensions of social policy and their impact on the national and local level
- the consequences of social policy interventions for the welfare of individuals and social groups
- the application of this knowledge to different fields of social policy, such as, but not limited to: Crime and Criminal Justice; Digital and Technology, Education; Eco-social policy; Family and Childhood; Health and Social Care; Housing and Urban Regeneration; Income Maintenance and Social Security (including Pensions); Migration; Poverty, Inequality and Social Exclusion; and Work, Employment, and Labour Markets.

3.3 Graduates of Social Policy courses in the UK demonstrate knowledge in the following areas.

History and functioning of welfare systems within UK and global contexts – this includes knowledge of:

- the origins and development of welfare institutions within as well as beyond the UK, and the economic, social, demographic and political contexts in which they operate
- historical forces that have shaped entrenched patterns of discrimination – such as colonialism, capitalism and industrialisation, and the differential treatment of marginalised groups – and how these legacies continue to have profound influence on contemporary welfare provision
- the dynamics of social change, such as environmental sustainability and climate change, globalisation, internationalisation and trans-nationalisation; mass and social media, and the role of social movements
- the role, remit, organisation and contemporary activities of the main institutions of UK and global welfare systems, typically including the changing provision, financing and regulation of social security, education, employment, health and social care, and housing

- the universal features of welfare institutions and their common challenges in global contexts with regards to efficacy, equity, sustainability and political support/opposition, drawing on insights from comparative and global social policy
- the ways in which countries organise their social policies and welfare institutions, the political modes through which they determine objectives and the effectiveness with which they realise them
- the role of global and national social policy in sustainability, environmental welfare, and the global climate crisis, including but not limited to sustainable growth (or degrowth) and development; energy and energy policy; and environmental injustices created by climate change across nations and communities (including climate displacement)
- theoretical and conceptual ideas and principles driving the development of the subject, as well as key thinkers, with a critical awareness of the specific historical contexts in which they emerged.

Policy processes related to social policy making – this includes knowledge of:

- the framework, operations and financing of the processes of policy making and implementation, with regards to the complex interplay of multiple stakeholders at diverse levels of governance
- subnational and supranational dimensions of social policy and the influence of international organisations on the conceptualisation of social policy problems and the design of policy solutions
- the operation and impact of non-governmental sources of welfare, including the informal, voluntary and private sectors, and of how these interact within mixed economies of welfare
- elements of social administration, recognising that understanding the leadership, management, and day-to-day operation of welfare institutions strengthen students' capacity to navigate the complexities of service delivery and governance; where suitable, this should embed reflective practice alongside interpersonal skills such as communication and conflict resolution
- the use of digital technologies in the design, implementation and administration of social policy interventions
- public perceptions and attitudes towards social policy and welfare, including the role of information, disinformation and misinformation and the roles of lobbying, campaigning and advocacy in influencing policy making.

Impacts of social policy – this includes knowledge of:

- the different ways in which social policy impacts on the welfare of individuals and social groups, with regards to the potential improvement of social conditions and collective risk management as well as failures in addressing or alleviating social inequalities and disadvantages
- the potentially ambivalent impacts of social policy interventions, with regards to their social control and disciplinary functions, for example in the context of welfare conditionality or the reproduction of existing social inequalities
- methods of delivery of welfare and social services, including the differences between universal versus targeted welfare, conditional and unconditional welfare, means-testing, and broader concepts and debates around eligibility, 'deservingness', 'leakage' and coverage

- the main features of the interrelationships between social policies and differently placed communities, families and individuals, notably those affected by intersectional disadvantages due to socio-economic background, class, ethnic minority, gender identity, sex, disability, religion or sexual orientation
- implications for social policy of the adoption of new technologies, such as GenAI and automation, across core dimensions such as work and employment, education, health and social care, and the administration of welfare services
- the ways in which social policies shape – and are shaped by – environmental and sustainability debates, recognising the role in addressing climate-related inequalities, resource distribution, and the long-term wellbeing of communities and ecosystems
- significant sources of data about social welfare, and the main quantitative and qualitative social research approaches and methods used to collect and analyse data.

Conceptual and theoretical frameworks which influence and shape human welfare – this includes a complex body of knowledge about:

- key concepts such as human needs, human wellbeing, and social welfare; poverty, inequality, and social exclusion; citizenship, human and social rights; equality, equity, and social justice; sustainability and environmental justice; social and cultural difference, diversity and intersectionality
- different theories, philosophies and ideological debates related to human welfare and the role of state, market and other non-state actors in the collective provision of welfare services
- theories of the state and policy making; theories and methods of comparative analysis
- interdisciplinary approaches to social policy topics and issues, with contributions of different social science disciplines coalescing around the applied focus of social policy
- the political economy of welfare and how values and principles are related to political and economic interests.

Engagement with social science research and policy analysis – this includes areas such as:

- ontological and epistemological underpinnings of varied research designs
- identifying suitable research problems related to welfare
- research design principles for quantitative, qualitative and mixed method approaches
- the selection of appropriate techniques and methods in the collection, management, interpretation and analysis of qualitative and quantitative data, including secondary data
- approaches to policy evaluation and policy analysis
- awareness of evidence-based policy debates and the role of social science research for informing policy-making processes
- ethics of social science research.

Teaching and learning

3.4 The objectives of any Social Policy degree are to produce independent learners who are competent in a range of knowledge, understanding and skills appropriate to their level of

study. Social Policy shares with other social sciences a range of teaching methods and techniques. Social Policy requires that students directly engage with current debates and arguments surrounding social policy issues. To this end, forms of learning and teaching include an appropriate blend and balance of traditional teaching methods, such as:

- lectures, seminars, tutorials, workshops and laboratory sessions
- whole group, small group and individual teaching
- student-led and tutor-led sessions.

and learning opportunities that draw on appropriate alternative sources, such as:

- work placements and internships
- visits to relevant organisations
- voluntary work for charities and other organisations
- international exchanges
- relevant life experiences (for example, domestic responsibilities and previous work experiences).

3.5 In addition to face-to-face communication, teaching and learning may take place through virtual learning environments (VLEs) and bespoke tutorials and other resources for using specialist quantitative and qualitative data analysis software and/or programming languages. This may be via distance learning, blended learning, and the use of massive open online courses (MOOC).

3.6 A combination of these teaching methods and learning approaches allows students to develop a portfolio of experiences, competencies and skills that prepare them for employment in a range of organisational and occupational settings, many of which involve one or more of the following:

- synthesis and dissemination of complex ideas and arguments
- compilation, comparison and explanation of empirical evidence
- development of case studies
- policy research and evaluation
- teamwork and leadership
- working to specific deadlines
- self-motivation and self-direction
- effective communication to a range of audiences.

3.7 Learning takes place in a variety of settings, including scheduled meetings of tutors and students (for example, in lectures, seminars and workshops, or in a one-to-one dissertation student/supervisor relationship), peer-assisted learning, VLE instruction and support, self-directed study time and preparation for and feedback from assessment. Student development may also include experiential learning.

3.8 Students of Social Policy use a range of learning methods, including:

- critical reading of a wide range of texts, including documents, monographs, scholarly articles, statistics, newspapers, textbooks and sources on the internet
- independent research using both primary and secondary sources and appropriate methods of enquiry
- group discussion for communicating ideas and presenting their own work in a variety of formats, including, for example, debates, case studies, role plays and simulations

- contact with policy makers, professionals and interest groups as well as with service users or organisations representing them and their 'lived experience' of social policy in a variety of settings, and through visits, speakers, websites, public events and experiential learning such as internships, placements or action research for organisations and community groups
- where suitable, offer opportunities to students to attend webinars and other events to encourage their engagement and participation in the wider development and the subject.

3.9 Some students of Social Policy are likely to be mature learners or learners from backgrounds that tend to be at higher risk of disadvantage in traditional academic settings. The needs of all students should be reflected in inclusive learning design and assessment methods, to ensure that all learners can fulfil their potential.

Assessment

3.10 Constructive alignment of learning outcomes and methods of assessment encourages clarity in curriculum design and transparency in the links between assessment and learning. Methods of assessment reflect progression within courses, and assessment strategies include a range of methods which allow students from different backgrounds and with diverse life experience to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of the subject effectively.

3.11 Authentic assessments are recommended as an efficient tool to test the achievement of learning outcomes, notably with regards to skills in critical analysis, problem-solving and communication, and to enable students to explicitly build their employability skills through assessment tasks.

3.12 While Social Policy graduates should be equipped with competences to work within a wider team or effectively deploy GenAI tools for the purposes of analysis and presentation in an ethically responsible and appropriate manner, careful attention must be paid to ensure that, throughout the breadth of assessments on a course in Social Policy, there is sufficient validation of a graduate's independent competency across the range of subject-specific knowledge, skills and abilities. Expectations around independent working and collusion, including any prescriptions on the use of GenAI, should be clear in such cases where a student's independent competency is being assessed. There must be sufficient capacity and resourcing to investigate any suspected misconduct in such assessments to ensure they represent an authentic assessment of a graduate's core competencies. See paragraphs 1.60-1.66.

3.13 Assessments (both formative and summative) ought to be accessible and inclusive through the coherent implementation of the following principles:

- use of varied types of assessments across modules
- provision of alternative assessment formats for students with support plans
- consistent accessibility checks for assessment tasks
- use of clear marking criteria, if possible, including rubrics
- measures to develop assessment literacy throughout the teaching period
- students should be supported to complete assessments with competing deadlines
- monitoring of award gaps to develop interventions if necessary.

3.14 A range of assessment types are used, such as the following:

- essays
- seen and unseen exams
- reports and dissertations
- verbal and non-verbal assignments and presentations
- portfolio assessments
- academic posters
- group and individual work
- tutor-directed and student-directed tasks
- tutor, peer and self-assessment
- seminar performance
- policy briefings
- book reviews, blogs, press releases
- podcasts
- project-based or work-experience reports.

3.15 On single and joint-honours degrees, assessment diversity and the constructive alignment with learning outcomes ought to be evaluated and monitored at programme level, to ensure that Social Policy students are assessed through an adequate range of assessment types across their modules.

3.16 Feedback is an essential part of assessment, which helps students evaluate their progress and identify how they may improve further. As such, Social Policy students receive constructive feedback throughout their studies, with particular attention paid to building skills of self-reflection, critical awareness and problem-solving. Given the contested nature of many core concepts in the subject field and problem definitions underlying policy issues, an appreciation of the multiple approaches that may be legitimately taken to any given question is expected and discussed. Feedback is provided through various mechanisms, including written and spoken comments, group discussion and technology-enhanced systems.

3.17 Feedback should also be mindful to give learners a sense of their strengths and, in the case of academic tuition, development over time, to ensure they are able to identify and communicate these strengths in workplace settings.

4 Benchmark standards

Introduction

4.1 This Subject Benchmark Statement details the required knowledge and understanding, subject-specific skills, generic intellectual skills and generic transferable skills expected of a threshold, typical and excellent graduate at FHEQ Level 6/FQHEIS Level 10, and master's graduate at FHEQ Level 7/FQHEIS Level 11.

4.2 The threshold standard describes the minimally acceptable requirement that a Social Policy student must attain to achieve a third-class Social Policy honours degree. The typical standard describes the required attainment of Social Policy students attaining a second-class Social Policy honours degree. The excellent standard describes the required attainment for a student attaining a first-class Social Policy honours degree.

4.3 It is important to note that a significant proportion of graduates will perform above the 'typical' level. 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.

4.4 Please note that 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, and relevant equality legislation in Northern Ireland) 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](#).

Undergraduate programmes

4.5 In relation to Level 6 study, the benchmark standards set out the achievement expected of a graduate with a Social Policy single honours degree. However, it is recognised that many students studying Social Policy will be doing so in the context of a joint honours or wider social science degree. In line with the [Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree Awarding Bodies](#), Social Policy graduates are expected to:

- have developed an understanding of a complex body of knowledge
- have developed analytical techniques and problem-solving skills that can be applied in different types of employment
- have developed skills and experience of working in a co-creative, sustainable and socially responsible way
- be able to analyse evidence, arguments and assumptions, to reach sound judgements and to communicate them effectively.

4.6 The benchmark standards which set out the characteristics expected of undergraduate students are not a checklist but rather provide a broad indication of the learning and competencies expected of Social Policy students whether studying single or joint honours degrees or selected Social Policy modules within a wider degree programme. Level 6 standards below are successive and cumulative; therefore, it is assumed that the excellent standard incorporates and extends the typical and threshold levels.

Knowledge and understanding.

4.7 Social Policy graduates are expected to possess the following knowledge and understanding.

| Threshold (3rd class) | Typical (2nd class) | Excellent (1st class) |
|--|--|--|
| Demonstrate factual knowledge of important historical and contemporary social policy events, issues and policies. | Demonstrate in-depth knowledge, understanding and critical awareness of key aspects of Social Policy analysis, including, for example, how social policies operate in local, national and international contexts in developing a sustainable future, with specific reference to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). | Critique the role and evaluate the effects of policies in the main social policy areas across the UK and internationally, including new and emerging issues. |
| Understand and compare how social policies operate across the UK and internationally, with particular emphasis on, but not limited to, health, education, housing, employment, social protection/income maintenance and social care. | Distinguish, compare and critique welfare systems across different parts of the world. | Classify and critically evaluate the rationales for, coherence and effects of different types of welfare states and social policies, including their respective implications for different groups. |
| Discuss, contrast and apply core theories, concepts, perspectives and methods relevant to Social Policy. | Categorise and engage critically with core theories, concepts, perspectives and methods relevant to Social Policy. | Analyse, classify, synthesise and critique core theories, concepts, perspectives and methods relevant to Social Policy. |
| Demonstrate awareness of the UN SDGs. | Apply their knowledge and understanding of UN SDGs across a wide range of social policy issues. | Construct analysis of social problems and social policies which integrate the principles of sustainable development, which embed the UN SDGs. |

Subject-specific skills

4.8 Social Policy graduates are expected to possess the following subject-specific skills.

| Threshold (3rd class) | Typical (2nd class) | Excellent (1st class) |
|--|---|---|
| Recall key characteristics of different social problems. | Utilise key conceptual frameworks to analyse complex social questions, issues and problems. | Construct critical analysis of key social problems and policy responses, and evaluate alternative solutions using relevant analytical tools and research methods. |

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| Summarise and contrast core Social Policy theories, concepts and perspectives. | Understand and apply core theories, concepts and perspectives in Social Policy and appreciate their relevance for other subjects and practitioners. | Critically classify, compare, synthesise and evaluate core Social Policy theories, concepts and perspectives. |
| Recognise how ideology, values, interests and norms can affect and shape social policies. | Distinguish between normative values and empirical claims, and critically reflect on how values underpin and shape policy making and relate to empirical evidence. | Understand the relevance of and apply different ideological positions, values, and norms to the analysis of social policies. |
| Understand and explain the importance of human need and lived experience to social policies. | Demonstrate sensitivity to the values and interests of others to appreciate the diversity of human needs and understand how they can be addressed through social policy analysis and policy making and implementation processes. | Critically evaluate the significance of lived experience to social policy analysis and policies and apply insights from this where relevant. |
| Assess and undertake Social Policy research using relevant methods. | Apply knowledge and experience of research methods to provide informed and critical commentary on the quality of Social Policy research. | Plan, develop and undertake valid and robust Social Policy research using relevant methods and applying appropriate ethical standards. |

Generic intellectual skills

4.9 Social Policy graduates are expected to possess the following generic intellectual skills.

| Threshold (3rd class) | Typical (2nd class) | Excellent (1st class) |
|--|--|---|
| Reasoned arguments: the ability to construct and develop coherent and logical arguments, discuss issues and propose responses. | Independent reasoning: the ability to construct and develop substantiated, evidence-based arguments, discuss issues and solve problems using appropriate information and critical judgement. | Creative and independent reasoning: the ability to construct and develop a coherent, logical, valid and evidence-based argument to discuss issues and solve problems. |
| Analytical skills: the ability to read, listen/watch and accurately summarise, restate and assess content. | Evaluative and analytical skills: the ability to critically and thoroughly assess and summarise assumptions, arguments and evidence from reports, documents and audiovisual sources. | Critical analytical skills: the ability to read, listen/watch material and critically analyse its strength and weaknesses, offering evidence-based alternatives where relevant. |
| Problem-solving skills: the ability to identify challenging social issues and assess alternative responses. | Problem-solving skills: the ability to critically analyse issues and assess alternative evidence-based solutions. | Problem-solving skills: the ability to critically evaluate issues and develop and assess alternative evidence-based responses. |

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| Data collection and research skills: the ability to devise and undertake a research project, including planning, collecting and analysing data and writing, with supervisory support. | Data collection and research skills: the ability to work independently to retrieve, record, synthesise and analyse information gathered from various sources. | Independent research skills: the ability to independently devise and undertake a research project, including planning, collecting and analysing data and writing up results. |
| | | Synthesis skills: the ability to accurately combine and integrate diverse information sources to develop new knowledge or arguments. |

Generic transferable skills

4.10 Social Policy graduates are expected to possess the following generic transferable skills.

| Threshold (3rd class) | Typical (2nd class) | Excellent (1st class) |
|--|--|---|
| Communication and presentation skills: the ability to communicate and present effectively in writing, verbally/non-verbally and visually, to different audiences using appropriate technical aids. | Communication and presentation skills: to communicate effectively with different audiences across a range of formats, including written, verbal/non-verbal and visual, and to use technical aids where appropriate. | Communication and presentation skills: the ability to articulate a coherent and complex argument and communicate ideas effectively both verbally/non-verbally and in writing, and, where appropriate, use technical aids to develop and deliver complex presentations to an audience. |
| Self-directed learning: the ability to plan, organise and prioritise work to meet deadlines. | Self-directed learning: the ability to plan, manage time effectively and work independently. | Self-directed learning: the ability to design projects, organise resources, locate sources and exercise independent judgement. |
| Team and group working: the ability to form, engage and work effectively in groups. | Teamwork skills: the ability to initiate, coordinate and contribute effectively to group work and collective projects. | Team and group working: the ability to initiate, form, engage constructively and work effectively in groups. |
| Technology skills: the ability to use existing and new technologies and show awareness of evolving technologies, including appropriate, specific use of generative artificial intelligence tools. | Technology skills: competent and confident use of a wide range of existing and new technologies to retrieve, analyse and present information, including appropriate, specific use of generative artificial intelligence tools. | Technology skills: proficient ability to use existing, new and evolving technologies, including appropriate, specific use of generative artificial intelligence tools. |

| | | |
|--|---|--|
| Evidence and referencing skills: the ability to accurately reference sources to provide evidence for submitted work. | Evidence and referencing skills: understand and correctly apply standard systems for accurate referencing in texts and reference lists. | Evidence and referencing skills: the ability to locate and accurately reference sources in accordance with academic conventions. |
|--|---|--|

Master's programmes

4.11 The Master's Degree Characteristics Statement which sets out the characteristics expected of Social Policy master's degree students is not a checklist but rather provide a broad indication of the learning and competencies expected of Social Policy students, whether studying for a Social Policy master's degree or Social Policy modules within a wider degree programme.

4.12 Social Policy graduates from master's programmes are expected to possess the following generic transferable skills:

- a sound understanding of the broader social policy landscape, alongside in-depth knowledge of at least one major area of Social Policy, such as, but not limited to, employment, housing, eco-social policies, health, family, pensions, tax, social security, education, social care, gender and social policy, and international and global policies
- a thorough and comprehensive understanding of human needs, social justice, and individual and collective wellbeing in contemporary societies and their relationship to Social Policy analysis
- the capacity to navigate and apply core concepts and theoretical frameworks in Social Policy to critically evaluate research and scholarships
- a sound understanding of a specific dimension or manifestation of social injustices, how they are reproduced, sustained and addressed, including their particular policy context
- the ability to recognise and demonstrate the relevance of norms, values and worldviews in defining social injustices, shaping policy processes and informing policy solutions
- awareness and appreciation of alternative research methods and the ability to design and undertake an independent dissertation or research project with appropriate supervision.

Subject-specific skills

4.13 Students graduating with a **master's degree in Social Policy** are expected to demonstrate the following subject-specific skills:

- in-depth understanding of social policy making, practice and impact, including understanding policy in relevant local, national and international contexts, and significant social and economic differences among jurisdictions, and variations in welfare histories.
- awareness of and ability to undertake comparative analyses of differences in political regime types, policy-making styles and substantive policies
- identify and understand the roles, responsibilities and perspectives of key stakeholders in the social policy landscape – including service users, providers, practitioners,

policymakers and professionals – and the openness of policy-making structures to democratic participation and co-production

- a critical understanding of how social policy making, development and implementation impact upon and are experienced by service users, benefit claimants and the broader public
- a critical understanding and application of equality issues and their intersections to the analysis of social policies
- a critical and reflective understanding of the importance of diversity, equity, inclusion, decolonisation, equality issues and environmental sustainability across all stages of social policy research and practice, in local, national and global contexts, and how these operate in different cultures and countries
- critical and constructive engagement with topical discussions on social injustices and social policy reform nationally and internationally
- critical analysis of how related disciplines contribute to Social Policy analyses.

Generic intellectual skills

4.14 Students graduating with a **master's degree in Social Policy** are expected to demonstrate the following generic transferable skills:

- capacity to assess and apply quantitative, qualitative or mixed methods research
- a developed ability to collect data using appropriate quantitative, qualitative or mixed method approaches
- understanding and application of the principles of ethical research practice
- awareness and appreciation of alternative research methods and the ability to design and undertake an independent dissertation or research project with appropriate supervision
- reflexive capacity to evaluate feedback to improve writing and enhance the quality of argument and analysis
- expertise in scholarly practice, including locating relevant information sources and academic referencing.

Generic transferable skills

4.15 Students graduating with a **master's degree in Social Policy** are expected to demonstrate the following generic transferable skills:

- critical, reflexive and independent approaches to learning
- critical evaluation of, and commitment to, creating social value and public service contributing to social wellbeing
- critically reflective identification of learning needs, to enhance professional practice and personal development
- evaluation and application of practices of engaging productively and contributing effectively in collaborative, multicultural, and diverse environments domestically and globally
- awareness of and familiarity with evolving technologies, including generative artificial intelligence tools, their strengths and limitations, and the ethical implications of their use in research and writing.

5 List of references and further resources

Advance HE and the Disabled Students Commission

www.advance-he.ac.uk/equality-diversity-inclusion/disability-equality-higher-education/disabled-students-commission#DSCresources

Craig, G, Bankole, C and Ali, N with Qureshi, I (2019) *The Missing Dimension. Where is 'race' in social policy teaching and learning?* Social Policy Association

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Creating Inclusive Subject Communities: QAA Advice 2021

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Chau, R, D'Angelo, A, Steel, L, Alabbas, N, Bunce, C, Cameron, E and Strange, G (2023) *The Current and Future State of Social Policy Teaching in UK Higher Education Institutions: 2023 Report*, Social Policy Association

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www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents

Inner Development Goals, Transformational Skills for Sustainable Development

<https://innerdevelopmentgoals.org>

QAA (2024a) *Annex D of the Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree Awarding Bodies*

www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/quality-code/the-frameworks-for-higher-education-qualifications-of-uk-degree-awarding-bodies-2024.pdf

QAA (2024b) *The UK Quality Code for Higher Education*

www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code

QAA (2023) *Maintaining quality and standards in the ChatGPT era: QAA advice on the opportunities and challenges posed by Generative Artificial Intelligence*

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QAA (2022) *Characteristics Statement: Micro-credentials*

www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/quality-code/micro-credentials-characteristics-statement.pdf

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

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QAA Generative Artificial Intelligence

www.qaa.ac.uk/sector-resources/generative-artificial-intelligence

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<https://doi.org/10.1177/02610183221103745>

United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
<https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

6 Membership of the Advisory Group

Membership of the Advisory Group for the Subject Benchmark Statement for Social Policy 2026

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Membership of the Advisory Group for the Subject Benchmark Statement for Social Policy 2019 (minor update)

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 Social Policy from 2016.

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Membership of the Advisory Group for the Subject Benchmark Statement for Social Policy 2016

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Membership of the Advisory Group for the Subject Benchmark Statement for Social Policy and Administration 2007

This edition was produced by the Executive Committee of the Social Policy Association in association with the Joint University Council Social Policy Committee.

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