



Subject Benchmark Statement

Sociology

April 2026



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About this Statement

This QAA Subject Benchmark Statement for Sociology 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)
 - internationalisation
 - 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 Sociology
- a prospective student thinking about undertaking a course in Sociology
- an employer, to find out about the knowledge and skills generally expected of Sociology graduates.

Relationship to legislation

The responsibility for academic standards lies with the higher education provider which awards the course. 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 Sociology degree

1.1 Sociology is the study of how people shape and are shaped by the world they live in and their relations with others. As an established discipline, Sociology draws on evidence to promote a critical understanding and active engagement in society, informing interventions that address social issues locally, nationally and globally. As a result, Sociology graduates are well prepared for, and make a significant contribution to, a wide and diverse range of roles across the private, public and voluntary sectors.

1.2 As a core social science discipline, Sociology is concerned with the social world, and the social dimensions of human and non-human interactions. It combines theoretical and evidence-based approaches, with students learning to apply and assess theories and methods in the discipline. Through forming and articulating evidence-based arguments, students are able to develop the critical skills necessary for analysing complex social issues.

1.3 Sociology provides research and analysis that informs debates about society and contributes to discussions across all forms of media with key stakeholders, policy makers, and interest groups. Sociologists can work with, and learn from, other disciplines, offering a unique perspective to understanding and addressing social problems and issues.

Purposes and characteristics of a Sociology degree

1.4 Studying Sociology can serve three interconnected purposes:

Academic: Sociology provides conceptual frameworks and methodological tools for systematic social analysis. It is a discipline that contributes to a deeper understanding of a broad range of social issues, cultivating critical thinking about social structures and challenging taken-for-granted assumptions through theoretical diversity and methodological rigour.

Vocational: Studying Sociology develops transferable skills valued across sectors, including research design and analysis, critical evaluation, communication, and problem-solving. Students learn to understand social behaviour, analyse trends and formulate evidence-based recommendations to social problems.

Professional: Sociology focuses on understanding diversity, inequalities and social transformations. Through the development of core skills, it equips students with the skills to prepare them for roles in a broad and diverse range of graduate-level careers.

1.5 These purposes interact dynamically:

- theoretical understanding enhances research capabilities
- practical experience deepens theoretical comprehension
- professional engagement applies sociological insights to real-world problems.

This integration enables graduates to move between analytical thinking and practical application, addressing complex social challenges effectively.

Equity, diversity and inclusion

1.6 Developing knowledge and understanding of equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) is central to the discipline of Sociology. Given its historical and contemporary focus on stratification and differential access to wealth and power, Sociology is uniquely equipped to offer explanations of inequalities such as those related to race/ethnicity, social class, gender, sexuality, disability, religion and age (and the ways in which these intersect). As a discipline,

Sociology prioritises an understanding of the social drivers and structures that (re)produce inequality, rather than focusing predominantly on individual actions and responsibility. Therefore, there is an expectation that all Sociology courses have matters relating to (in)equality, diversity and inclusion embedded into the curriculum.

1.7 EDI is central to the design and implementation of contemporary Sociology curricula. Legislation requires institutions to ensure that both staff and students are treated fairly under the law and are not discriminated against. However, inclusion and engagement needs can go beyond the confines of equalities legislation and be considered during all aspects of the student journey. This includes giving thought to the ways in which students are part of, and accounted for, in the curriculum design, the content of the course, the delivery of learning and teaching, and assessment and feedback practices. It is important for all those involved to consider the diversity of the student population and ensure that all students are given the opportunity to succeed.

1.8 Difficult and sometimes controversial topics will likely be studied during a Sociology programme. Students should be supported to make use of evidence to help express their arguments and engage with diverse perspectives in a safe and inclusive learning environment, while critically reflecting on their views. Sociologists ensure that curriculum content and learning resources are accessible and responsive to a diverse student population, and staff supported to do this in ways that are appropriate for their programme. This includes the development of more inclusive Sociology curricula to ensure that students critically examine and challenge the theories and research that have historically been dominant within the discipline. Inclusivity (and creating inclusive curricula) is an ongoing process. Local quality assurance and enhancement processes within institutions can consider and promote equality of opportunity for students, while removing barriers to learning and participation wherever possible. Students have diverse needs depending on their circumstances, and Sociology courses should be inclusive for all students, recognising the different types of exclusion students face as well as multiple forms of exclusion which might impact accessibility. Course teams should, wherever possible, ensure that all students are equally respected in settings they attend as part of their course, for example on campus, course trips or placements, regardless of their race/ethnicity, gender, disability, age, sexuality or other aspects of their identity.

Accessibility and the needs of disabled students

1.9 Sociology courses are committed to accessibility in its broadest form, embedding a commitment to inclusivity from the design of the course through to delivery and practice. Accessibility is about making the course accessible to all. Accessibility should be part of course design, and delivery should make all aspects of the course, including teaching, assessment, activities and fieldtrips, accessible without the need for individual requests for adjustments.

1.10 Sociology courses should be flexible and accessible. This can apply to admissions, learning resources, fieldwork and fieldtrips, and teamwork activities. Sociology courses should build in accessibility and embed inclusive practice to ensure disabled students are not singled out so that adjustments are part of the design of the course.

1.11 Accessibility onto the course: Entry procedures and considerations include enabling access for students from non-standard academic backgrounds. Furthermore, foundation year studies may support or be offered to those transitioning into the subject.

1.12 Accessibility while studying: Following entry and enrolment, ongoing teaching and learning considerations include the importance of digital accessibility, especially in blended learning environments where materials can be accessed by all students. Classrooms and

study spaces should be accessible for all students, recognising the specific accessibility needs of disabled people. Inclusive language and approaches that avoid positioning disabled people as 'other' or 'the object of study' are a priority. Similarly, research and pedagogic approaches that explore the lived experiences of disabled people are valued. This includes creating communities of care within the curriculum, recognising that many students who cannot attend extracurricular activities can still be welcomed and involved.

Education for sustainable development

1.13 Sustainable development can be understood as an aspirational, ongoing process of addressing social, environmental and economic concerns to create a better world. Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) is the process of creating curriculum structures and subject-relevant content to support and enact sustainable development. More specifically, it promotes:

- an understanding of the political, social and economic conditions and dependencies that support communities around the world
- an awareness of the mutual relationships between human activity, non-humans and the planet's climate, ecology and biodiversity. This awareness can include an understanding of how this relationship has changed over time
- a well-informed sense of how to prioritise and enact collaborative and sustainable forms of development, action and organisation with, and for, present and future communities.

1.14 ESD is not solely about environmental issues. Instead, it focuses on the connections between social, economic and environmental factors. ESD is an educational change agenda grounded in transformative learning and critical pedagogy. It can be understood as a lens that permits us to look critically at the world and to envision how it might be, and it equips us to deliver that vision.

1.15 ESD develops competencies, skills, attributes and values, and explores how they link to subject knowledge and knowledge of sustainable development. ESD supports learners across all academic disciplines and subject areas to create and pursue visions of a better world. ESD supports students to develop their creativity, thinking outside the box, and effectively influencing and communicating beyond academic disciplines. Thus, attention to students' communication skills, including the use of digital media, is considered an important companion to ESD.

1.16 Sociology provides a powerful lens to look critically at the interdependence of environmental integrity, social justice and economic prosperity, while acknowledging that environmental resources are finite and are as necessary for the reproduction of social institutions as much as they are necessary for the reproduction of life.

1.17 Studying Sociology can provide students with a robust framework for engaging with multiple dimensions of ESD as conceived by the [2015 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#). At the same time, the critical nature of the sociological discipline can nurture an intellectually sound and evidence-based critique of the position of the SDGs vis-à-vis local, regional and global social processes.

1.18 A focus on ESD should underpin not just the curriculum but also teaching and learning practices and assessment. Indeed, it may be useful to consider the three-fold focus outlined in the [QAA/Advance HE guidance on ESD](#), which emphasises the importance of exploring (i) ways of thinking, (ii) ways of practising, and (iii) ways of being in relation to ESD. ESD can benefit from innovative learning and teaching practices. The interdisciplinary nature of ESD

encourages collaborative, co-created problem-based learning, bringing together students, tutors and possibly external partners to test ideas, share knowledge and develop solutions to address real-life challenges and advance sustainability goals.

Internationalisation

1.19 Internationalisation refers to a strategic commitment to support students' understanding of the diverse ways in which Sociology engages with social issues, both locally and globally. Internationalisation offers an opportunity for mutual learning, and to broaden key theories beyond the European 'founding fathers'. An internationalised Sociology curriculum further aims to ensure that students are supported to understand a range of global perspectives; particularly important when many of the challenges we face as a society are 'global' challenges. We advise course teams to utilise resources from the [European Sociological Association](#) and the [International Sociological Association](#) to support the development of an international curriculum.

1.20 Internationalisation responds to a growing need for shared, cross-cultural learning. Students (and staff) benefit from engaging with international perspectives, collaboratively critiquing Western forms of knowledge, and exploring a broader range of theories and forms of knowledge, to identify what is relevant to all societies and what is relevant to societies with specific characteristics.

1.21 Internationalisation should be pursued not just through the innovation of curricula, but also through diverse pedagogical approaches, including:

- the contribution of international guest lecturers
- the promotion of students' mobility, such as field trips, studying abroad, and international placements
- the exploration of collaborations with institutions in the Global South for meaningful engagement in alternative sociological standpoints
- the celebration of students' diverse cultural backgrounds as sources of alternative sociological standpoints
- the promotion of Collaborative Online International Learning.

1.22 An international curriculum facilitates students' reflection on how sociological research and professional practices are shaped by the cultural and social contexts, influencing 'how', and 'what' is researched. To facilitate this, the use of diverse data sources in teaching (such as the [United Nations Refugee Agency](#) (UNHCR), and the [World Health Organisation](#) (WHO) is encouraged. Along with promoting a more robust knowledge of global social processes, such sources are also essential to understanding emerging issues on a regional or local scale.

1.23 Internationalisation may be facilitated by interdisciplinary collaboration between programmes, subjects or departments. As an example, working groups may be developed where students from different disciplines are invited to work cooperatively to imagine the solution to a real-world challenge or dilemma. An interdisciplinary context facilitates diverse insights that can contribute to a broader and more complex approach to social issues. Interdisciplinary collaboration therefore empowers the sociological imagination in analysing processes that go beyond national or local dimensions.

1.24 Internationalisation can respond to the needs, interests and ambitions of an increasingly diverse student population. It can also enhance opportunities to align curricula with the social capital and cultural capital that students bring into higher education. This

highlights the need for inclusive pedagogical practices that reflect demographic changes and support students to engage in sociological thinking, drawing on their diverse experiences and perspectives. At the same time, internationalisation invites teachers and assessors to consider different cultural expectations in the reception of feedback.

1.25 Internationalisation requires teaching practices that value the unique knowledge that students bring with them into the teaching situation. For example, encouraging dialogue between students and their teachers that helps students to see themselves as legitimate and valued contributors to knowledge within the learning environment.

1.26 Internationalisation may support student outcomes, equipping students with cross-cultural knowledge, competences and skills. In so doing, students can position themselves in global job markets and as global citizens, capable of actively participating in diverse geographical and cultural settings.

Employability, entrepreneurship and enterprise education

1.27 [Employability, enterprise and entrepreneurship education](#) (EEE 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.

1.28 Sociology and EEE education form a powerful partnership. At its core, the study of Sociology encourages and develops the skills of critical and strategic thinking, application of knowledge, problem-solving and communication. Through Sociology, students develop a keen awareness of civic and social responsibility, raising questions which challenge accepted norms, along with analytical skills which enable them to identify emerging social trends.

1.29 Through research training, students learn creative, analytical and exploratory skills, enabling them to connect data, ideas, concepts and academic evidence. Sociology students also have in-depth knowledge of ethical practice, diversity, inclusion and intersectionality alongside global perspectives. EEE education therefore supports the study of Sociology and has great benefit not just to students' future employment, but to the academic study itself.

1.30 Embedded EEE education within Sociology programmes empowers students to become future change-makers, driving innovation and transformation in both the workplace and wider society. Beyond employment, EEE education provides competencies to help students build a rewarding and self-determined professional life; well placed to add social, cultural, environmental and economic value to society throughout their careers.

1.31 Embedding EEE education into Sociology courses can, where possible, be supported through placements, industry-academic partnerships and applied projects. This supports networking, and mirrors real-world problem-solving opportunities through live projects, and community-led initiatives. Cross-disciplinary work with students from other disciplines will, where feasible and appropriate, also help to ensure that Sociology students are flexible and prepared for changing [global](#) labour markets.

1.32 Applied activities may, where possible, include consultancy projects or problem-solving tasks co-created with businesses, voluntary organisations or community partners. Such activities enable students to test sociological theory in practice and to explore innovative solutions either individually or in teams. These experiences nurture adaptability, initiative and resilience; these are core skills in a changing labour market.

1.33 Course teams should collaborate with colleagues in careers services, partnership delivery, alumni, social enterprises and sector employers to design and deliver EEE education and to create pathways for students. This may take the form of, for example, visiting lectures, master classes and client briefs – with appropriate career learning tasks scaffolded around such opportunities to maximise their benefit for students. Reflective and reflexive practice can also consolidate learning, supporting emotional awareness and action planning.

1.34 Sociology programmes therefore facilitate opportunities for students to learn broader competencies and capabilities, including:

- critical thinking and problem-solving
- time management and project planning
- evidence-based communication using a range of formats
- effective debate and argumentation
- digital literacy, including the use of digital collaboration tools to support project planning and collaborative teamwork
- engagement with, and a critical understanding of, Generative AI (see paragraphs 1.36-1.42)
- understanding [global challenges](#)
- quantitative, qualitative and mixed data analysis using industry-standard tools.

These skills underpin students' ability to address real-world challenges, contributing to organisational development, and generating market insights rooted in social understanding.

Generative artificial intelligence

1.35 Generative AI (GenAI) refers to text and image-based probability models that produce content in response to prompts. Their proliferation presents both opportunities and challenges that Sociology programmes are uniquely equipped to address. As technologies transform society, Sociology programmes can engage with change in an open, constructive and critical way.

1.36 Sociology is grounded in fostering critical and creative skills, active citizenship and the scrutiny of inequalities. Engagement with GenAI means critically examining broader structures of power, wealth and environmental impact, ensuring that the discipline continues to offer vital insights into an evolving technological landscape.

1.37 GenAI can be approached as a tool and a reality. Sociology programmes support students in using new tools responsibly and ethically, equipping them with skills to navigate emerging social realities and a shifting job market. Encouraging creative and experimental engagement with GenAI, including collaborations across disciplines and with [employers](#), will be essential.

1.38 Sociology offers a critical perspective on technological change, highlighting [power](#), [inequality](#), algorithmic bias and [environmental impact](#). The discipline invites reflection about creativity, authorship and the role of the sociological imagination in an AI-driven world. It draws on existing strengths, such as from Science and Technology Studies and the Sociology of Scientific Knowledge.

1.39 Preparing students for the workplace means that academic and support staff stay informed about technological developments, ensuring graduates possess the skills and ethical frameworks necessary to succeed. Future applications of GenAI remain uncertain, and critical thinking and ethical decision-making will be important assets for Sociology graduates.

1.40 Creative teaching integrates GenAI to enhance digital literacy while remaining rooted in core disciplinary questions. Students should be encouraged to engage critically with new tools – understanding not only what GenAI can facilitate, but also what is lost when dialogue and human creativity are replaced, so that marginalised voices are not erased.

1.41 Assessment practices are likely to evolve, and Sociology programmes can offer guidance on when and how the use of GenAI is appropriate and where it is not, in line with wider institutional policy and guidance. Assessments may include explicit criteria for ethical use of AI tools, for example transparency statements, citation of prompts, and human oversight.

2 Distinctive features of a Sociology degree

Design

2.1 Sociology courses are designed to provide students with an education in the theoretical, methodological, analytical and practical aspects of the discipline, as well as the relationships between its concepts and principles. Students are expected to develop a range of skills that will enable them to examine how social structures and institutions shape, and are shaped by, human agency. They are also expected to understand social phenomena at global, community and personal levels, and how these levels are connected.

2.2 Sociology examines the social structures that enable an understanding of patterns of social interaction and conflict that happen regardless of individual action. As an academic discipline, Sociology combines empirical methodologies and theoretical frameworks to produce meaningful interpretations of social interactions. This approach avoids the limitations of purely empirical analysis and the disconnect that can arise from abstract theories that are difficult to apply to real-world situations.

2.3 Sociology, as a core social science discipline, provides intellectual, methodological and analytical tools relevant to other subjects associated with the analysis of social life and society. Sociology may be studied as a single honours degree but also has connections to (and is often studied alongside) a range of subjects, including health and life sciences, [Psychology](#), [Philosophy](#), [Education Studies](#), legal studies, [Politics and International Relations](#), [Geography](#), [Economics](#), [Social Policy](#), [History](#), and other humanities disciplines. Following a programme of study, graduates and students should be able to understand and appreciate the distinctiveness of Sociology – for example, regarding social standpoints, social explanations, levels of analysis, the value of theory, and evidence – as well as its shared concerns with other disciplines.

Progression

2.4 As a discipline, Sociology embraces diversity and recognises the students' lived experiences brought to Sociology courses. Entry onto a Sociology degree can vary considerably, with entry routes including a broad range of disciplinary and experiential backgrounds.

2.5 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 Sociology 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 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.

2.6 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 a wide range of social science areas or related disciplines. Entry requirements to postgraduate courses are, however, determined by individual providers and may require specified levels of achievement at undergraduate level.

2.7 Undergraduates studying Sociology 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.

2.8 Any student enrolled in a standard undergraduate honours degree course in Sociology, 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

2.9 Teaching, learning and approaches to assessment will vary across Sociology programmes of study, reflecting differences in departmental/school orientations, aims, specialisms and interests. However, it is expected that all Sociology courses will value approaches that incorporate varied and flexible learning and teaching styles, to reflect the diverse learning needs of Sociology students. As such, students can expect to be taught and assessed in a wide variety of ways.

2.10 In England, Wales and Northern Ireland, the duration of a full-time course leading to a standard undergraduate degree is typically three years, or four years for a course involving a year abroad 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.

2.11 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 in physical spaces, online and/or through hybrid learning, arranged in terms, by semester, year-long, block or other formats. These may be offered as full-time and/or part-time modes of study and credit may be accumulated through the completion of micro-credentials, short-course accredited learning, the recognition of prior learning or the accreditation of prior experiential learning.

Partnership

2.12 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.

2.13 Although Sociology has no specific employer body or organisation that accredits Sociology degrees, providers work closely with professional associations such as the British Sociological Association, the European Sociological Association and the International Sociological Association to ensure provision meets social and educational needs.

Monitoring and review

2.14 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.

2.15 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.

2.16 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.

3 Content, structure and delivery

Content

3.1 Sociology is both a theoretical and empirical discipline, focusing on the diverse ways that individuals, groups and social structures are relational, from the local to the global.

3.2 Sociology covers a broad range of themes relating to how humans interact with each other and their physical, natural and virtual worlds. It can extend beyond any one temporal or regional context encompassing historical, cross-cultural and transnational analysis. Sociology can also focus exclusively on a single area in the present day.

3.3 Sociology embraces a diversity of areas and approaches to the study of social life and society through:

- contextualising human agency socially and historically; for example, it examines social problems, considering the interrelation between human agency and systemic variables – such as class, ethnicity, gender and others – rather than as simply individual failures
- connecting personal experiences to broader social contexts and historical forces, it analyses both the macro-level structures (institutions, systems) and micro-level interactions (face-to-face encounters)
- analysing patterns and relationships in society using all forms of data across a range of methodologies, including quantitative data and methods (such as statistics and surveys), qualitative research designs (for example, interviews and ethnography), mixed and creative methods (including poetic inquiry and sensory methods)
- considering how resources, power and opportunities are often distributed unequally across groups based on class, ethnicity, gender and other factors, such as disability and sexuality
- investigating how social norms, values and roles are constructed, maintained and changed over time
- emphasising that Sociology is a discipline that evolves to help the understanding of wider social changes and transformations
- considering local and global responses to global challenges such as climate change, environmental degradation or public health issues.

3.4 As such, Sociology courses are typically concerned with:

- the interaction between social structures and human agency in shaping the world, considering continuity and change, both historically and geographically
- evaluations of social constructions, including personal and group identities, collective representations, material cultures, representations of tradition and of the future, 'policy' and the production of change, and the interactions between society and the natural worlds
- intra and inter-group relationships across dimensions which include culture, ethnicity, social class, gender and age – exploring processes of cooperation and conflict
- structures and processes of communication, including communication mediated by technology
- evidence-based research that draws on diverse qualitative and quantitative research strategies, data sources and methods

- reflection on ethics and ethical research practice and the way researchers' (and students') own experiences influence research ethics and practice.

Teaching, learning and assessment

3.5 Teaching, learning and curricula are designed in such a way as to ensure accessibility for all students and to provide evidence that the student has been given the opportunity to attain the required benchmark standards in all areas of performance. Assessments are designed to ensure accessibility and to enable students to demonstrate that they have achieved an appropriate level in the required areas. How students are taught and assessed is determined by individual higher education providers. This section provides recommendations and guidance for the development and application of teaching, learning and assessment methods.

Teaching and learning

3.6 Students studying for an honours degree in Sociology have access to a range of supportive learning resources, including:

- academic staff from the social sciences who are themselves engaged in scholarly activities
- a range of paper and electronic resources, including data sets, policy documents, research texts, monographs and up-to-date journals
- digital technologies, including Generative AI.

3.7 They may also have access to a wide range of extracurricular activities, societies and events that have relevance for the Sociology curricula. Many national and international resources are available from beyond the UK, and these can be used effectively to access a wide range of perspectives on sociological issues.

3.8 Student learning is advanced by interaction with lecturers and peers (encompassing face-to-face, online or in blended/hybrid forms), and by autonomous study. Formative assessment opportunities that allow students to build skills and confidence in advance of final summative assessments can be emphasised wherever possible.

3.9 Teaching and learning activities take the form of lectures, seminars, workshops, computing laboratory classes, tutorials, discussions, collaborative uses of diverse digital media, visits to external sites, and group and individual activities and projects. 'Flipped classroom' approaches may also be used (more information on flipped classrooms can be found [on Advance HE's website](#)).

3.10 Digital technologies can help to facilitate teaching and learning, including the use of GenAI. Engagement with a range of such technologies can develop essential [workplace skills](#). Teaching approaches may encourage students to develop a critical understanding of the impact of GenAI (and other technologies) across a range of areas and associated ethical issues.

3.11 With the study of Sociology there are several distinctive learning and teaching features.

- Teaching and learning approaches support students' experimentation with theory, which should be scaffolded and revisited throughout the levels of study.
- Students may benefit from guided study, making use of a range of teaching materials and resources in order to learn to differentiate between a variety of sources in the

public and sociological domain, to support students to theorise and test theories with peers and tutors, and enable them to rehearse and revise their ideas.

- Teaching approaches – such as small group teaching, critical reading groups, case studies, interactive workshops, and enquiry-led learning – are likely to support students to question and apply knowledge, while weighing up the relative strengths of alternatives according to evidence, logic, fit with other findings, and breadth of explanatory power.
- Decolonisation as a subject includes knowledge, research and theories from across the world, supporting students to understand how some knowledge and perspectives are valued more than others, and students should be able to articulate the impact of colonial legacies today.
- Within teaching and learning spaces, students have the opportunity to gain experience of working together in groups, presenting, discussing and refining their arguments collectively through peer and tutor feedback.
- Teaching and learning approaches that include debates in Sociology may reflect current social, public and civic disputes and encourage dialogue that helps students to develop awareness of their values and an appreciation of how alternative values impact on interpretations of evidence.
- Students may benefit from considering their own positionality and the environment in which they are located, as these may have impact on how they analyse topics and evidence.
- The disciplinary skills of designing, conducting and communicating high-quality research are developed by providing students with opportunities to learn through practical experience, such as supervised individual, group or class research projects.
- Other forms of sociologically informed experiential learning are valued, such as accredited volunteering, fieldwork, live projects, work placements or work-based learning.
- Students have opportunities to practise how to apply Sociology to a variety of social issues through advocacy, community or policy making.

Assessment

3.12 Assessment occupies an important role in Sociology courses, as students' progress through the programme and engage more widely with the discipline. The distinction between assessment **of** learning and assessment **for** learning – and the importance of both – should be communicated clearly to students.

3.13 Sociology assessment can be informed by approaches to decolonising the curriculum; assessment strategies may recognise that there are different types of knowledge, and differing ways of knowing.

3.14 As assessment practices may reproduce inequalities, it is important that assessments are designed to take account of equality and diversity, ensuring [accessibility](#) and [inclusivity](#) for all students to minimise the need for subsequent adjustments. Providing a choice of assessment approaches for students can be an effective means of increasing accessibility. Assessments should also be regularly reviewed to ensure that they remain fit for purpose.

3.15 There are many diverse and inclusive forms of formative and summative assessment that can be used in Sociology, including posters, idea pitches, autoethnography, reflective assessments and group projects, as well as more conventional essays and exams. Approaches to assessment are increasingly facilitated by digital technologies – for example,

podcasts, videocasts and recorded presentations – and staff and students should be familiar with local institutional policies and developments regarding the integration of technology into teaching and assessment. [GenAI](#) represents an opportunity for developing imaginative assessments, making use of its analytical power.

3.16 Assessments that mirror real-world outputs can support students to think about how concepts and theories are applied, through developing, for example, stakeholder reports, consultation responses, research posters or booklets. These forms of assessment can support learning and understanding and help students develop a range of skills that can be applied post study.

3.17 Practical exercises involving elements of doing and presenting research – or the opportunity to conduct and communicate an entire research project – are deployed to enable students to demonstrate skill in collecting, bringing together and presenting evidence and sociological argument. Practical exercises focus on aspects of the sociological research process, including:

- the framing of sociological questions
- conducting quantitative and qualitative secondary data analysis
- designing, gathering and analysing primary research
- translating research for effective communication with different audiences.

3.18 Practical exercises simultaneously strengthen transferable skills such as confidence in reading, analysing and/or producing a table of numerical data, giving verbal and/or non-verbal presentations or collaborative group working. All these exercises enable the demonstration of discipline-specific research skills. In some courses, accredited volunteering, live projects and work placements afford students opportunities to practise sociological research skills, apply and share sociological knowledge and strengthen transferable skills.

3.19 Many approaches to assessment can be used to strengthen students' [employability skills](#), by exposing them to approaches common in the workplace (such as report writing, portfolios and digital pitches).

3.20 Transparency and clear communication are important in assessment, ensuring students are aware of how they will be assessed and for what purpose. The use of clear assessment rubrics is essential.

3.21 Accessibility is a key feature of assessment design and may include:

- optionality of assessments that allow students to develop their own interests within the framework of the discipline
- assessment guidance which is clear and accessible to all and made available in a format that students can revisit in their own time
- assessments which are part of the ongoing activity throughout their studies, with students receiving feedback through informal feedback which involves their engagement and attendance where possible
- assessments which support learning and help students to develop new knowledge and skills while being flexible enough for learners with reasonable adjustments
- assessments which encourage students to use digital platforms for communication and teaching to assess a range of skills and knowledge.

3.22 When providing feedback to students, thought may be given as to how to ensure it helps them improve subsequent work. Short audio or video recordings can be used where appropriate, for example, as an alternative to written feedback (particularly for formative feedback, when anonymous marking is not required). Peer feedback may also be used for formative purposes.

4 Benchmark standards

Introduction

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

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 outlined below 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 Right Commission](#).

Threshold level

Subject knowledge, understanding and skills

4.4 A graduate of a Sociology degree should be able to:

- describe and examine a range of key concepts and theoretical approaches
- explain how Sociology can be distinguished from other forms of understanding and explanation
- discuss sociological topics with an appreciation of theory and evidence, responding to current debates and presenting conclusions in a variety of formats
- explain the processes that underpin social change, conflict and social stability
- describe the relationship between individuals, groups, social structures, and the natural and physical environment
- demonstrate awareness of the interconnections of power imbalances, colonial legacies, inequities and injustices
- use specialist knowledge of one or more subtopics within Sociology to construct a sociological argument
- evaluate the use of comparison in Sociology, either looking diachronically across time or synchronically across context
- understand different sociological perspectives on social diversity and inequality while addressing key dimensions and sites of power
- analyse quantitative and qualitative data to understand patterns around social inequalities, their concerns and consequences
- evaluate complex global and local social problems and the influence of global and local forces promote opportunities to contribute to multi and interdisciplinary approaches to social problems
- summarise and explain the findings of empirical sociological research, and offer a critical assessment of frameworks, theories and methods adopted
- evaluate the suitability of a range of research strategies and methods to identify social problems

- be able to use qualitative and quantitative methodologies in research problems and design
- use appropriate research tools for the collection and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data, including the use of appropriate software and basic statistical and interpretative procedures
- analyse the ethical implications of social research in a variety of research settings
- independently plan and complete a Sociology project
- recognise the application of sociological knowledge to social, public, civic and environmental policy and the place and value of sociology in policy.

Transferable skills

4.5 In this Statement, the term transferable skills is defined as being non-technical or subject knowledge related. These are a broad set of skills that enable graduates to be adaptable and creative and to contribute beyond their discipline. These skills include an ability to:

- undertake and present scholarly work using a variety of formats
- assess the merits of competing explanations and provide evidence-based responses
- communicate to others in a variety of contexts
- use digital technology and digital skills when organising and presenting ideas
- demonstrate information retrieval and synthesis of information
- discuss and present ideas with others in a clear and reasoned way
- demonstrate the ability to work independently and work in groups
- understand how to apply research principles and practices in an ethical manner
- appropriately use artificial intelligence and other digital technologies, including Generative AI, and critically evaluate their implications
- present knowledge or an argument in a way that is comprehensible to others
- assert intellectual independence, including undertaking tasks independently (with appropriate guidance and support), conducting self-directed research and demonstrating critical judgement
- use computer-aided techniques for storing, collating and analysing quantitative and qualitative data
- work collaboratively, including undertaking work in a group or team and/or participating in discussions
- identify and examine underlying values and ethics within culture and society as well as on a personal level
- understand the importance of wellbeing, mental health and emotions – and their relationship with learning
- make appropriate use of feedback provided to further their intellectual development.

Master's level study

4.6 In addition to the undergraduate threshold benchmark statements, on graduating with a master's degree in Sociology, graduates should be able to:

- synthesise theoretical, conceptual and empirical research when discussing contemporary social problems
- demonstrate critical awareness of historical, cultural, social, political and environmental contexts and theories that inform and influence Sociology
- critically discuss the interconnections and overlaps of power imbalance, colonial legacies, inequities and injustices

- design and carry out sociological research using both quantitative and qualitative sources
- critically assess appropriate methodologies for dealing with complex problems
- discuss sensitive and ethical issues in Sociology research
- select and use appropriate research tools for collection and/or analysis of quantitative and qualitative data, including software and basic statistical and interpretative procedures
- critically discuss and analyse complex concepts, and work independently and with some originality
- complete a research project, involving the generation of reformulation of data, and informed by a critical understanding of the subject
- critically evaluate social policies and interventions by applying social theories, frameworks and evidence.

5 List of references and further resources

Advance HE Flipped Learning

www.advance-he.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/flipped-learning-0

European Sociological Association

www.europeansociology.org/home

International Sociological Association www.isa-sociology.org/en

QAA (2018) Enterprise and Entrepreneurship Education: Guidance for UK Higher Education Providers

www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code/enterprise-and-entrepreneurship-education

QAA (2021) Education for Sustainable Development Guidance

www.qaa.ac.uk/the-quality-code/education-for-sustainable-development

QAA Advice and Resources on Artificial Intelligence

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

United Nations Take Action for the Sustainable Development Goals:

www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/

6 Membership of the Advisory Group

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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 Sociology from 2016.

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