



Subject Benchmark Statement

Geography

December 2019

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How can I use this document?

This is the Subject Benchmark Statement for Geography. It defines the academic standards that can be expected of a graduate, in terms of what they might know, do and understand at the end of their studies, and describes the nature of the subject.

The [UK Quality Code for Higher Education](#) (Quality Code) sets out the Expectations and Core Practices that all providers of UK higher education are required to meet. Providers in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland must also meet the Common Practices in the Quality Code.

The Quality Assurance Agency for UK Higher Education (QAA) has also published a set of [Advice and Guidance](#), divided into 12 themes, and a number of other resources that support the mandatory part of the Quality Code. Subject Benchmark Statements sit alongside these resources to help providers develop courses and refine curricula but are not part of the regulated requirements for higher education providers in the UK.

This Statement is intended to support you if you are:

- involved in the design, delivery and review of courses of study in geography or related subjects
- a prospective student thinking about studying this subject or a current student of the subject, to find out what may be involved
- an employer, to find out about the knowledge and skills generally expected of a graduate this subject.

Subject Benchmark Statements provide general guidance for articulating the learning outcomes associated with the course but are not intended to represent a national curriculum in a subject or to prescribe set approaches to teaching, learning or assessment. Instead, they allow for flexibility and innovation in course design within a framework agreed by the subject community.

It may be helpful to refer to the relevant Advice and Guidance when using this Statement.

Explanations of unfamiliar terms used in this Subject Benchmark Statement can be found in QAA's [Glossary](#).

About the Statement

This Subject Benchmark Statement refers to bachelor's degrees with honours, including the higher education levels 4, 5 and 6 of the integrated master's qualification in geography.¹

It has been produced by a group of subject specialists drawn from, and acting on behalf of, the subject community. The process is facilitated by QAA, as is the full consultation with the wider academic community and stakeholder groups each Statement goes through.

In order to ensure the continuing currency of Subject Benchmark Statements, QAA initiates regular reviews of their content, five years after first publication, and every seven years subsequently, or in response to significant changes in the discipline.

Relationship to legislation

Higher education providers are responsible for meeting the requirements of legislation and any other regulatory requirements placed upon them, for example by funding bodies. This Statement does not interpret legislation, nor does it incorporate statutory or regulatory requirements. The responsibility for academic standards remains with the higher education provider who awards the degree.

Higher education providers may need to consider other reference points in addition to this Statement in designing, delivering and reviewing courses. These may include requirements set out by Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs) and industry or employer expectations.

Sources of information about other requirements and examples of guidance and good practice are signposted within the Subject Benchmark Statement where appropriate. Individual higher education providers will decide how they use this information.

Summary of changes from the previous Subject Benchmark Statement (2014)

This version of the Statement forms its fourth edition, following initial publication of the Subject Benchmark Statement in 2000 and review and revision in 2007 and 2014.

This latest version of the Statement is the consequence of the revision to the [UK Quality Code for Higher Education](#) which was published in 2018. It has been revised to update references to the Quality Code and other minor changes within the sector. Changes have been made by QAA and confirmed by the Chair of the most recent review group.

There have been minor revisions to the subject-specific content, namely:

- 1 'visualisation' has been added to paragraph 3.12
- 2 'data rich' has been added to paragraph 3.14
- 3 reference to 'informed judgements' has been made in paragraph 4.5 and to the evidence base and data sets in paragraph 4.6
- 4 additional reference has been made to the ethics of research in paragraphs 4.7 and 4.9.

¹ Bachelor's degrees are at level 6 in *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* and level 10 in *The Framework for Qualifications of Higher Education Institutions in Scotland*, as published in [The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies](#)

1 Introduction

1.1 Geography occupies a distinctive place in the world of learning, offering an integrated study of the complex reciprocal relationships between human societies and the physical, chemical and biological components of the Earth. Geographers study place, space and time, recognising the great differences and dynamics in cultures, political systems, economies, landscapes and environments across the world, and the links between them.

1.2 In the UK higher education system, geography is a significant subject. Both BA and BSc degree courses are found; in some cases, these are differentiated sharply in terms of curriculum content. A close link between teaching and research, in addition to geography's international standing as a rigorous and applied subject, enhances the attraction of geography courses.

1.3 The subject is characterised by a breadth of subject matter in which the traditional division has been between human and physical geography. A third category, environmental geography, embraces courses that deal explicitly with the relationships between people and the natural environment. This also builds upon the role of geography taught in schools as the main discussion platform for environmental topics and issues.

1.4 The spectrum of bachelor's degree courses in the UK requires diverse theoretical approaches in order to make available the full suite of analytic and interpretative tools provided by the natural and social sciences, by the humanities, and by information technologies that include, for example, those employed within geographic information science (GISci) and remote sensing.

1.5 Geography has strong links with other subjects in the sciences, social sciences and humanities. These strong links mean that geography may also be studied in joint or combined degrees (for example, with anthropology, archaeology, biology, earth science, economics, environmental science, geology, history, mathematics, sociology, planning, and politics) or in modular courses. In most cases there are Subject Benchmark Statements relevant to the non-geographical components of joint and combined degrees which may be referred to alongside this Statement.

1.6 The breadth of geography means that many of its core constituents may be approached through a number of routes, and this Statement does not intend to be prescriptive. Providers offering degree courses in geography are free to decide upon the details of content and organisation. A valued characteristic of the subject is its plurality of ways of knowing and understanding the world, and the depth to which individual specialisms are studied varies according to the nature of specific departments. Appendix A illustrates some of the subfields within the subject. Nevertheless, Section 3 does suggest that there are some common areas of knowledge, with accompanying modes of understanding. These areas are echoed in Section 6, where they are developed into the concept of levels of achievement.

1.7 Progression within higher-level study of a subject such as geography is likely to involve some measure of specialisation. In the initial stages of a degree course, students achieve a basic knowledge and understanding of a range of different approaches to the subject. Thereafter, progression and specialisation inform critical reflection about both the subject's diversity and its unifying themes. By the end of a course, students are able to situate their chosen specialisms within a wider understanding of the subject. Given the emphasis on diversity, it is important that potential students are fully informed of the particular nature and strengths of individual courses.

2 Aims of an honours degree course in geography

2.1 The aims identified in this Subject Benchmark Statement are appropriate to single honours geography courses, and proportionally to those courses where geography is studied in a joint or combined degree, or as part of a modular degree framework. The application of the benchmark standards allows for this variety of provision. Unless otherwise indicated, some proportionality is likely with degree courses that are not single honours, in the depth and breadth of engagement with the subject knowledge and skills outlined in the following sections.

2.2 An essential and characteristic aspect of geography is the role of fieldwork and other forms of experiential learning in the development of knowledge and understanding. Rigorous fieldwork and experiential learning are underpinned by knowledge of, and skills in, the theoretical and methodological approaches that inform their conduct. Experiential learning contributes significantly to curiosity and enquiry about human and physical environments, the development of discerning observation and measurement, and recognition of the importance of scale. Graduates understand the evolution and significance of the distinctiveness of places and environments, including different approaches to their interpretation, and a parallel understanding of the role of spatial linkages in social and physical processes (see also Section 3).

2.3 Within the context of understanding the distinctiveness of place and environment, a geography graduate possesses a substantive depth of knowledge through specialisation within substantive subfields of the subject. Through progression within a degree course these may be situated within both physical and human geography, within either physical or human geography, or at the interface of the two, including within environmental geography. Exemplar and indicative subfields are listed in Appendix A; this is not intended to list all subfields nor to be prescriptive. This detailed knowledge is underpinned by a skill set that facilitates a critical awareness of relevant philosophies, how data for the subfields are gathered, how they are displayed, analysed, critically appraised and interpreted, and of the roles of scale, space and time in shaping relationships, differences, and change.

2.4 Through a diversity of provision in degree courses, students acquire a range of academic and generic skills (Section 4). Geography graduates have learned to interpret and analyse information and to tackle geographical issues through the deployment of skills specific to the geographer and professional researcher, including the use of appropriate information and communication technologies (ICT) (Section 5). They are well placed to make use of, and contribute to, the development of interdisciplinary aspects of knowledge.

2.5 Geography fosters a range of personal attributes relevant to the world beyond higher education, which promote the ability of geographers to engage in lifelong learning, to consider ethics and values, to contribute to the wider community, and to gain employment. Some graduates choose to develop specialist research skills in social or natural sciences, or the humanities; the subject prepares all graduates to compete for a wide variety of employment.

3 Subject knowledge and understanding

3.1 It is anticipated that single honours degree courses in geography address the areas of knowledge and understanding described in the following paragraphs so that graduates are conversant with these aspects of the subject. Other degree courses containing geography address these areas proportionally according to the subject balance within, and goals of, such courses. As they progress, students develop a greater depth of knowledge and gain an understanding of the vital contribution made by research in their subject.

3.2 Geographers can articulate the knowledge, understanding, skills and approaches that characterise the discipline as a whole. They understand the place of their discipline in contributing a holistic perspective on natural and human worlds, interactions, and processes that is distinctive of geography compared with other disciplines. They understand the complex relationships between natural and human aspects of environments and landscapes. They appreciate the geographical meanings of concepts encompassing:

- knowledge of environments being the result of natural processes
- knowledge of environments and landscapes as the result of human activity
- a critically informed understanding of ways of representing and interpreting the world.

3.3 The concept of spatial variation is fundamental to the subject, meaning that geography graduates are able to demonstrate knowledge and explanations of spatial distributions in both physical and human phenomena. They are able to explain the pattern and dynamic nature of spatial variations in earth surface processes, water, landforms, climate, vegetation and soils. They also recognise the ways in which spatial relations are an inherent and important feature of economic, social, cultural and political activity, and how they reflect, reproduce and remake social relations. Geographers are aware of the importance of spatial dimensions in broader debates and issues involving policy.

3.4 An appreciation of temporal change is central to an understanding of the human and physical worlds, their development, interaction and interdependence. Geographers understand the dynamics and rates of change at different temporal and spatial scales and can evaluate the processes shaping the geographies of the past, present and future. They are able to evaluate modelling approaches that help predict future change and strategies to mitigate negative impacts of change on society. An understanding of change is necessary across all areas of the subject; for example, in historical geography, environmental and climate change, and Quaternary science.

3.5 Geographers have a critical awareness of the significance of spatial and temporal scale for natural processes, human processes and their interactions and analysis. They comprehend how such processes operate across local, regional and global scales to produce particular geographies. They are also aware of how the scale of study can impact upon the conclusions that may be drawn from any particular study.

3.6 The way in which the distinctiveness of a particular place is constituted and remade by physical and human processes is understood by geographers, as is the influence of place-specific characteristics on such processes and how these may change through time. Geographers demonstrate an awareness of the constitution of places outside their own immediate everyday experience and are aware of the global context of their learning.

3.7 Geographers are able to use critically a systems framework to conceptualise patterns, processes, interactions and change in the physical world. They know how to incorporate into this framework:

- natural environmental impacts on human activity (for example, natural hazards)
- human impacts on biophysical systems (for example, air pollution, deforestation, desertification), and on components of the climate system
- the management of environments and landscapes.

3.8 Geographers demonstrate knowledge of the main dimensions and scales of economic, social, political and environmental inequality and difference, are familiar with a range of interpretations of these processes, and are aware that scale itself can be contested and politicised. A critical evaluation of the concepts underlying development and sustainability needs to be an integral part of the knowledge base of the student.

3.9 Geographers have a clear understanding of the drivers of change in the natural world over space and time, demonstrating knowledge of the interactions between climate, ecosystems, and landscapes. They understand controls on fluxes of energy and matter within and between the earth's surface and the atmosphere. They are aware of typical rates of change, and of methods and approaches used to study change in the natural world. Concepts such as thresholds, intrinsic and extrinsic drivers, along with approaches such as biogeochemical cycles, sediment and water budgets and environmental reconstruction, underpin this knowledge of spatial and temporal change in biophysical environments.

3.10 Geographers have a critical understanding of the history of the subject and are aware of how changes in the subject itself have influenced its development. A historical perspective of geography portrays it as a dynamic, plural and contested intellectual subject. This requires an appreciation of the diverse approaches to geographical investigation and of the subject's changing relationships with related fields of inquiry in the natural sciences, the social sciences, and the arts and humanities. Geographers possess a critical awareness of the distinctive contribution they have made, and continue to make, within and beyond academia.

3.11 The literal derivation of the term geography is 'earth-writing'. Geographers show knowledge and critical understanding of the diverse manners of representation of the human and physical worlds, and are aware of how representation can itself affect interpretation. Maps have an important historical role as representations of the world, and geographers are conversant with their modern forms and dimensions. However, geographers also have a similar depth of understanding of other representational forms, including texts, visual images and digital technologies.

3.12 It is vital that geographers have a firm grasp of the principles of research design, the main methodological strategies used in the analysis and interpretation of geographical information, and show a critical understanding of the appropriate contexts for their use. There is variation in the methodologies taught in different courses. However, courses should develop familiarity with a range of methodologies, including those used in data collection and analysis; field and laboratory work and process modelling; programming; ethnography; focus groups; interviewing; archival work; visualisation; discourse and textural analysis; and participant observation.

3.13 It is important to emphasise numeracy and numeric skills. Geographers require skills in the presentation, interpretation, analysis and communication of quantitative data. They are familiar with a range of statistical techniques, including simple descriptive statistics, inferential tests and relational statistics such as correlation and regression; principles of research design and ways to collect data; the retrieval and manipulation of secondary data

sets; and geospatial technologies such as digital cartography, geographic information systems (GIS) and remote sensing. Attention is given to spatial statistics, to issues of spatial dependency, to spatial difference and to the effects of scale.

3.14 Geolocated data and geospatial technologies are increasingly central to geography in a digital and data-rich world. Geographers study how digital worlds are created and analysed through the study of GISci, and apply that knowledge through the use of GIS and remote sensing.

3.15 Geographical knowledge and understanding inform concern about the Earth and its people: the subject is intrinsically global and international. Geographers compare and contrast processes occurring in different parts of the world. They critically analyse global, national, regional and local issues and their work proposes ways of mitigating human and physical problems and of addressing new challenges. Geographers can take a global view, but are able to inter-relate global and local perspectives. Geographers are aware of the relevance of geographical concepts, techniques and expertise to problem-solving, wealth creation, poverty reduction and improving the quality of life and well-being, for example, in the context of climate change, urban and rural planning, hazard assessment, sustainability and environmental management. However, awareness of this is balanced by recognition of their limitations, a critical understanding of their broader social, political and environmental contexts and the ethical implications of their application.

3.16 Geography is intrinsically a field-based subject. Field experience is an essential part of geographical learning and all geographers require the opportunity to plan, undertake and report significant fieldwork during their course. Students are familiar with, and practice methods and strategies of, field research in human and/or physical geography, taking a critical view of the challenges and opportunities of field-based research.

4 Skills, abilities and attributes

4.1 Geography courses furnish students with subject-specific and wider intellectual and generic skills that together provide the basis for employability and lifelong learning. Geographers have the ability to work on a wide range of applied research. Students learn 'through' geography in addition to learning 'about' geography. The attention given to skills facilitates academic performance, career prospects and contributions to the wider community.

4.2 Given the rich diversity of geography degrees and the range of options in which students are able to specialise, it is unwise to be too rigid or prescriptive in setting out the skills that graduates are likely to possess. Nonetheless, in broad terms, they are able to demonstrate competence in most of the skills, abilities and attributes itemised in this Subject Benchmark Statement.

4.3 While recognising and valuing the diversity of good practice, it is useful to emphasise some of the general principles underpinning successful acquisition of skills. The skills dimension is best planned in conjunction with the knowledge-based curriculum, so that the relationship between the two is given detailed consideration. Skills are taught, practiced and assessed within a curriculum framework that is balanced, coherent and progressive, so that the level of challenge and achievement is gradually increased throughout, taking students to the frontiers of research.

Intellectual and subject-specific skills

4.4 Geography enhances a range of intellectual skills and abilities that are acquired through use of its learning resources, frequent practise of its methods and immersion in appropriate research contexts. Some of these skills are subject-specific, but all are relevant and transferable to other intellectual contexts. Geographers are adept at bringing together perspectives from multiple disciplines, thinking laterally across debates, synthesising materials, and holding ideas in creative tension.

4.5 Geographers use a variety of sources of evidence and are able to apply appropriate forms of both quantitative and qualitative analysis, making informed judgements based on the evidence available. Geographers are numerate and able to establish the appropriate spatial and temporal scales for the purpose of their analysis.

4.6 Geographers are skilled in specific quantitative and qualitative techniques and understand the appropriate context for their use. They learn to interrogate multiple data sources and recognise gaps in the evidence base. They learn not to misapply data and have an appreciation of the situations when conclusions drawn from data are ambiguous or uncertain.

4.7 The range of intellectual and subject-specific skills developed through a geographical education generally includes:

- spatial awareness and observation
- abstraction and synthesis of information
- developing a reasoned argument
- assessing the merits of contrasting theories and explanations
- numeracy and statistical literacy
- the handling of large datasets
- preparing effective maps, diagrams and visualisations
- primary data generation, collection and recording, and the use of secondary data sets (both quantitative and qualitative)

- critically evaluating, interpreting and combining different types of geographical evidence (for example, texts, imagery, archival data, maps, digitised and laboratory data)
- analysis and problem-solving through quantitative and qualitative methods
- planning, designing and executing a piece of rigorous research or enquiry, both independently and in groups, including the production of a final report
- conducting fieldwork and field data collection
- employing a variety of interpretative methods (for example, participant observation, ethnographic interviews, and auto-ethnography)
- employing a variety of social survey methods (for example, questionnaire surveys and structured interviews)
- employing a variety of science laboratory skills and methods (for example, soil, water and plant sample preparation, microscopy, particle size analysis, soil and water chemical analysis)
- methods for the collection and analysis of spatial and environmental information (for example, GIS, remote sensing, statistical and mathematical modelling)
- taking responsibility for learning and reflection upon that learning
- recognising the moral, ethical and safety issues involved in all aspects of geographical enquiry
- understanding the appropriate and ethical use of evidence and data.

Generic skills

4.8 Additionally, as a result of studying a degree course in geography, students develop generic skills in the following areas:

- learning and studying, developing autonomous learning and metacognition
- decision-making and prioritising tasks
- record-keeping and archiving
- synthesising, contextualising and critically evaluating information of different styles and from different sources
- oral, written and graphical communication
- information and data handling and retrieval
- an understanding of intellectual property and copyright
- communication in formats appropriate to the audience
- the ability to work in groups and teams and to recognise and respect the viewpoints of others.

Personal attributes and social skills

4.9 In addition, geography fosters the development of a range of personal attributes, including:

- motivation
- ability to work responsibly, autonomously and with others
- self-awareness and self-management
- self-confidence
- empathy and insight
- intellectual integrity and ethical behaviour
- awareness of responsibility as a local, national and international citizen with a global perspective
- the skills to engage in lifelong learning
- flexibility and adaptability, including a creative approach to problem-solving.

5 Teaching, learning and assessment

5.1 Geography implements pedagogic innovation and develops teaching methods. The range of teaching and learning contexts is continually evolving, for example, with the development of flexible, virtual and distance-learning environments, work and community-based learning, and the increasing use of self-determined learning.

5.2 Courses enable students to experience active and reflective learning through exposure to a range of teaching approaches. For example:

- lectures
- seminars, tutorials, supervisions or other small-group formats
- directed self-study, reading and library use
- laboratory practical classes, including the use of scientific laboratories and advanced computer facilities
- fieldwork, both taught and self-organised
- a range of student-centred learning opportunities, which might include virtual learning environments, self-directed study, problem-based learning, teamwork and work-based learning
- e-learning
- distance learning.

5.3 Given the importance of the development of technical skills in a variety of areas of geography, facilitating access to libraries, information systems, laboratories, equipment and technical resources is essential.

5.4 An education in geography involves an active engagement with the external world. Fieldwork and experiential learning constitutes an essential aspect of this engagement and thus has a variety of roles in:

- providing an opportunity to apply theoretical, technical and scientific laboratory methods and findings to more complex, uncontrolled field environments
- identifying problems and framing research questions, testing hypotheses and designing research
- encouraging consideration of the ethical aspects of research processes
- developing a sense of place, identity, awareness of difference, and sensitivity to others
- promoting generic skills such as teamwork and observation.

5.5 Within most honours degree courses in geography, it is anticipated that some form of independent research work is a required element. Students experience the entire research process, from framing enquiry to communicating findings. Independent research is often communicated in the form of a dissertation presented in the later stages of the course. Other formats could include research posters, journal articles or work-placement reports. This independent research may involve field-based data collection, or other forms of primary or secondary research. Regardless of the nature of the research, the student's learning requires critical reflection on the potential risks as well as the moral and ethical issues of the research project. On joint and combined honours courses, students still conduct independent research work, although this may be in an interdisciplinary context or outside geography.

5.6 The balance within a degree course of these teaching and learning styles, and of the associated assessment methods, will clearly vary from one higher education provider to another, consistent with the overall mission, aims and objectives of both the provider and the course. However, honours degree courses in geography will characteristically have recourse to a wide range of learning and teaching styles, as befits the intellectual heritage of a

discipline whose concerns are with both environment and society.

Assessment

5.7 An assessment and feedback strategy will support learning and allow students to demonstrate their level of attainment and discuss their progress; this is enabled by a learning and teaching policy that promotes these outcomes. For each method of assessment the aims, requirements and marking criteria are clearly defined and aligned, allowing appropriate progression throughout the degree course. Such a strategy reflects the variety of abilities and skills developed within the curriculum, the types of teaching methods and learning contexts used, and the learning outcomes of the degree course. Moreover, it recognises the value of formative assessment for promoting deep reflective learning. Students are given opportunities to take part in self-assessment and peer review, and to work individually and in groups. Students are encouraged to demonstrate their full range of abilities, with providers offering a mix of assessment methods that are, overall, equally accessible to students from varying educational backgrounds and in different learning situations.

5.8 Students of geography are likely to encounter the following assessment methods in their degree course, where appropriate:

- essays and reports of varying lengths (press releases, consultancy reports, briefing papers, annotated bibliographies, article critiques)
- the creation of online resources (web pages, blogs, audio and video podcasts)
- oral presentations (debates, conference-style poster presentations, seminars)
- practical work (in the field, scientific and computer laboratories, and relating to quantitative and qualitative analyses)
- unseen and seen examinations with a range of types of questions/tasks
- reflective learning journals
- independent research dissertations and capstone projects (and proposals for these)
- work-based assessments.

6 Benchmark standards and levels of achievement

6.1 The performance of all honours graduates in geography may be expressed with reference to the areas of achievement identified: knowledge and understanding (Section 3); and intellectual, subject-specific and generic skills (Section 4).

6.2 The following table expresses performance in terms of learning outcomes at the end of a bachelor's degree with honours. It is important to note that Subject Benchmark Statements are phrased in broad terms, to encourage higher education providers to develop diverse and innovative courses within the overall framework provided by this document. As stated in paragraph 1.6, it is not intended that the benchmark standards are used in a prescriptive manner. These descriptors are intended to aid the preparation of the curriculum.

6.3 Student achievement is demonstrated across all areas of performance (knowledge and understanding, intellectual, subject-specific and generic skills) although not necessarily covering all of the items identified in the table and with due regard for progression through an honours course.

6.4 The table identifies three levels of achievement: threshold, typical and excellent. The first describes the minimum standard to be achieved by an honours graduate; the middle describes the majority of graduates; the last describes a group who exceed typical performance and achieve very highly.

6.5 **Threshold** graduates possess a basic knowledge and understanding of change within human and physical environments, of interrelationships between these environments and of the interdependence of places at various scales. Their view of the subject and its methodologies is strongly influenced by formal teaching and has a limited critical perspective. Competence in essential subject-specific, intellectual and generic skills is demonstrated.

6.6 **Typical** graduates display a critical awareness of the scope and methodologies of the subject, based on a solid foundation of knowledge, consistently demonstrating a command of appropriate subject-specific and generic skills as well as proficiency in most of the higher-level intellectual skills. Typical graduates are also distinguished from the threshold level by a capacity for developing and applying personal perspectives critically to their studies.

6.7 Geography graduates that achieve **excellence** beyond the typical standard are distinguished primarily by superior intellectual skills, which are deployed in the context of wide-ranging knowledge of the various aspects of the subject. The strength of geography's methodological breadth is most clearly demonstrated in its best graduates, who bring originality, insight and superior critical and reflective abilities to bear upon this knowledge, and have the capacity to link theory and practice in identifying and tackling research problems. This quality is evident across the spectrum of assessed work, but is perhaps most clearly demonstrated in independent work, especially dissertations, which may produce outcomes that are at or close to the levels of publishable research, and which represent an advance within subject knowledge.

| | Threshold | Typical | Excellent |
|------------------------------------|--|--|---|
| Knowledge and understanding | Describe and exemplify the nature of change within human environments | Demonstrate comprehension of the nature of change within human environments | Demonstrate critical insight into the nature and causes of change within human environments |
| | Describe and exemplify the nature of change within physical environments | Demonstrate comprehension of the nature of change within physical environments | Demonstrate critical insight into the nature and causes of change within physical environments |
| | Describe and exemplify the reciprocal relationships between physical and human environments | Demonstrate comprehension of the reciprocal relationships between physical and human environments | Demonstrate critical insight of the complexity of the reciprocal relationships between physical and human environments |
| | Describe and exemplify the significance of spatial and temporal relationships as influences upon physical and human environments | Demonstrate comprehension of the significance of spatial and temporal relationships as influences upon physical and human environments | Demonstrate critical insight of the significance of spatial and temporal relationships as influences on physical and human environments |
| | Describe and exemplify the diversity and interdependency of places | Demonstrate comprehension of the diversity and interdependency of places at various spatial scales | Reflect on and appraise the reasons for the diversity and interdependency of places at various spatial scales |
| | Describe and exemplify the diversity of approaches to generation of knowledge and understanding deriving from experience of the epistemologies of the natural and social sciences and humanities | Evaluate the diversity of approaches to the generation of knowledge and understanding deriving from experience of the epistemologies of the natural and social sciences and humanities | Critically appraise the diversity of approaches to the generation of knowledge and understanding deriving from experience of the epistemologies of the natural and social sciences and humanities |
| | Carry out routine investigations as instructed | Apply understanding of geographical concepts in different situations | Apply a reflective understanding of geographical concepts in different situations |
| | Know the difference between accuracy and precision | Apply a systematic approach to accuracy, precision and uncertainty | Critically reflect on the accuracy, precision and uncertainty of research data |

| | Threshold | Typical | Excellent |
|--------------------------------|---|---|---|
| Subject-specific skills | Illustrate the issues involved in applying research design and execution skills within the specific context of field-based research | Evaluate the issues involved in applying research design and execution skills within the specific context of field-based research | Formulate a sophisticated and comprehensive analysis of the issues involved in applying research design and execution skills within the specific context of field-based research, including alternative options |
| | Illustrate diversity of techniques and approaches involved in collecting geographical information (for example, instrumentation, remote sensing, cartographic surveying, social survey, observation and the use of textual and archival sources) | Evaluate the diversity of techniques and approaches involved in collecting geographical information (for example, instrumentation, remote sensing, cartographic surveying, social survey, observation and the use of textual and archival sources) | Critically appraise and reflect on use of the diversity of techniques and approaches involved in collecting geographical information (for example, instrumentation, remote sensing, cartographic surveying, social survey, observation and the use of textual and archival sources) |
| | Illustrate both quantitative and qualitative approaches for analysis of geographical information and data and perform basic applications | Evaluate both quantitative and qualitative approaches for analysis of geographical information and data, including competence in the application of a range of these approaches | Critically appraise and reflect on the application of quantitative and qualitative approaches for analysis of geographical data, including excellent and sophisticated application of a range of these approaches |
| | Illustrate diversity of specialised techniques and approaches involved in analysing geographical information (for example, special techniques for the analysis of spatial information, GIS, laboratory techniques, qualitative and quantitative techniques) | Evaluate the diversity of specialised techniques and approaches involved in analysing geographical information (for example, special techniques for the analysis of spatial information, GIS, laboratory techniques, qualitative and quantitative techniques) | Demonstrate a mastery of techniques and approaches involved in analysing geographical information (for example, special techniques for the analysis of spatial information, GIS, laboratory techniques, qualitative and quantitative techniques) and very good judgement of their effectiveness |
| | Illustrate diversity of specialised techniques and approaches involved in presenting geographical knowledge and information (for example, GIS, cartography and different textual strategies) | Evaluate the diversity of specialised techniques and approaches involved in presenting geographical information (for example, GIS, cartography and different textual strategies) | Critically evaluate and reflect on the appropriate application of the diversity of specialised geographical techniques and approaches |

| | Threshold | Typical | Excellent |
|-----------------------|--|---|--|
| | Communicate personal views about geographical issues | Communicate and compare different views about geographical issues | Critically reflect on a range of views about geographical issues and come to a reasoned evaluation |
| Generic skills | Communicate geographical ideas, principles and theories by written, oral and visual means | Communicate geographical ideas, principles and theories effectively and fluently by written, oral and visual means | Communicate geographical ideas, principles and theories with flair, accuracy and sophistication by written, oral and visual means |
| | Present material to support a reasoned argument | Relate material appropriately to the intended audience | Ability to excellently communicate complex arguments to a variety of audiences |
| | Use communications and ICT to select, analyse, present and communicate geographical information | Use communications and ICT effectively and appropriately to select, analyse, present and communicate geographical information | Use communications and ICT with a high level of competence to select, analyse, present and communicate geographical information |
| | Interpret and use numerical and statistical information | Interpret and use numerical and statistical information effectively and appropriately | Interpret and use numerical and statistical information in a sophisticated manner |
| | Apply basic numerical skills to geographical information | Apply more advanced numerical and statistical skills effectively and appropriately to geographical information | Apply sophisticated numerical and statistical skills and techniques effectively and appropriately to geographical information |
| | Undertake independent/self-directed study/learning (including time management) within a supportive framework | Undertake independent/self-directed study/learning (including time management) to achieve consistent, proficient and sustained attainment | Undertake highly autonomous and well organised study/learning and time management to achieve consistent, proficient and sustained attainment |
| | Perform assigned tasks within a group setting and take part in group discussions | Work as a participant or leader of a group and contribute effectively to the achievement of objectives | Demonstrate group leadership and supportive participation of others within a group setting to achieve objectives |
| | | Analyse the process of learning and evaluate personal strengths and weaknesses | Critically reflect on the process of learning, evaluating personal strengths and weaknesses and alternative strategies |

7 Conclusion

7.1 Geography attracts students with a wide range of intellectual backgrounds, interests and experiences, grounded in natural and social sciences and the humanities. A major intellectual task within the subject is to encompass this diversity of contexts and the different types of knowledge that are characteristic of the study of the Earth's physical environments, human societies and the interactions between the two.

7.2 At the same time, recognition that all knowledge is provisional implies that the subject must be aware, not only of the different approaches to that knowledge, but also of how that knowledge is produced and how it changes. These considerations have a major consequence for benchmarking a subject that is more dynamic than many. New concerns and new ways of understanding the world mean that the content and study of geography itself changes.

7.3 Nonetheless, there are some fundamental underpinnings in approach that require emphasis and recognition: geography crosses subject boundaries while retaining its uniqueness, it is both quantitative and qualitative in its analysis of natural and social phenomena and their interlinkages, and fieldwork and laboratory study are key components of its teaching strategies. Higher education providers reflect both these underpinnings and ongoing changes in their courses.

Appendix A: Indicative specialisms and areas of geography

This table is indicative, not inclusive, and is in alphabetical order to remove any possible interpretations of unintended prioritisation. Some topics could appear in more than one column, some have distinct specialisms within them that could represent further subdivisions, and some are shared with other subjects.

| Human geography | Physical geography | Environmental Geography | Technologies and methodologies |
|------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Cultural geography | Biogeography and ecology | Environmental management | Cartography |
| Development studies | Climatology | Hazard studies | Fieldwork |
| Economic geography | Earth system science | Regional geography | GIS and GISc |
| Gender studies | Geomorphology | Resource management | Modelling |
| Historical geography | Hydrology | Rural geography | Qualitative methods and analysis |
| Political geography | Meteorology | Sustainable development | Quantitative methods and analysis |
| Social geography | Quaternary science | Tourism studies | Remote sensing |
| Urban geography | Soils | Transport studies | Spatial analysis |

Appendix B: Membership of the benchmarking and review groups for the Subject Benchmark Statement for Geography

Membership of the review group for the Subject Benchmark Statement for Geography (2019)

The fourth edition, published in 2019, was revised by QAA to align the content with the revised UK Quality Code for Higher Education, published in 2018. Proposed revisions were checked and verified by the Chair of the review group of the Subject Benchmark Statement for Geography from 2014.

| | |
|------------------------|----------------------|
| Professor David Thomas | University of Oxford |
| Dr Andy Smith | QAA |

Membership of the review group for the Subject Benchmark Statement for Geography (2014)

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

| | |
|--------------------------------|--|
| Professor David Thomas (Chair) | University of Oxford |
| Dr Graham Bird | Bangor University |
| Dr Sarah Dyer | University of Exeter |
| Professor Martin Evans | University of Manchester |
| Dr Richard Harris | University of Bristol |
| Professor Mike Heffernan | University of Nottingham |
| Dr Jennifer Hill | University of the West of England, Bristol |
| Gill Miller | University of Chester |
| Professor Joanne Sharp | University of Glasgow |
| Dr Catherine Souch | Royal Geographical Society (with the Institute of British Geographers) |
| Dr Helen Walkington | Oxford Brookes University |
| Professor Katie Willis | Royal Holloway, University of London |
| Dr Wendy Woodland | University of the West of England, Bristol |
| QAA officers | |
| Janet Bohrer | QAA |
| Brigitte Stockton | QAA |
| Employer representative | |
| Angela Baker FRGS CGeog, | EuroGeographics |
| Student reader | |
| Mr Hemish Goodeal | King's College London; Institute of Education |

Membership of the review group for the Subject Benchmark Statement for Geography (2007)

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

| | |
|-----------------------|---|
| Dr Lorraine Craig | Imperial College - formerly with the Royal Geographical Society (with the Institute of British Geographers) |
| Professor Ian Simmons | University of Durham |
| Dr Catherine Souch | Royal Geographical Society (with the Institute of British Geographers) |

Membership of the original benchmarking group for geography (2000)

Details are as published in the original Subject Benchmark Statement for Geography.

| | |
|---------------------------|---|
| Dr C T Agnew | University College London |
| Professor M Bradford | University of Manchester |
| Ms S Birkhill | College of St Mark and St John |
| Dr S Buckingham-Hatfield | Brunel University |
| Professor B Chalkley | University of Plymouth |
| Professor K Chapman | University of Aberdeen |
| Dr G Clark | Lancaster University |
| Dr D Gilbert | Royal Holloway, University of London |
| Professor M J Healey | Cheltenham and Gloucester College of Higher Education |
| Professor J A Matthews | University of Wales, Swansea |
| Professor K S Richards | University of Cambridge |
| Professor I G Simmons | University of Durham |
| Professor D J Unwin | Birkbeck College, University of London |
| Dr P E White | University of Sheffield |
| Dr L Craig (ex officio) | Royal Geographical Society (with The Institute of Geographers) |
| Dr R Gardner (ex officio) | Royal Geographical Society (with The Institute of Geographers) |

Corresponding members:

| | |
|---------------------|---|
| Mrs J R Blumhof | University of Hertfordshire |
| Dr D R Green | King's College London |
| Professor A Jenkins | Oxford Brookes University |
| Dr D J Spooner | University of Hull |
| Professor P A Stott | School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London |

Fourth edition – December 2019
QAA2494

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Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786

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