



**Subject benchmark statement**  
**Communication, media, film**  
**and cultural studies**

**Draft for consultation December 2007**

# **Contents**

<b>Preface</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>Foreword</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Defining principles</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Nature and scope of the subject</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Subject knowledge and understanding</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Subject skills</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Generic skills</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Learning, teaching and assessment</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Benchmark standards</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Appendix A: Membership of the review group for the subject benchmark statement for communications, media, film and cultural studies</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Appendix B: Membership of the original benchmarking group for communications, media, film and cultural studies</b>	<b>15</b>

## Preface

Subject benchmark statements provide a means for the academic community to describe the nature and characteristics of programmes in a specific subject or subject area. They also represent general expectations about standards for the award of qualifications at a given level in terms of the attributes and capabilities that those possessing qualifications should have demonstrated.

This subject benchmark statement, together with others published concurrently, refers to the **bachelor's degree with honours**<sup>1</sup>. In addition, some subject benchmark statements provide guidance on integrated master's awards.

Subject benchmark statements are used for a variety of purposes. Primarily, they are an important external source of reference for higher education institutions (HEIs) when new programmes are being designed and developed in a subject area. They provide general guidance for articulating the learning outcomes associated with the programme but are not a specification of a detailed curriculum in the subject.

Subject benchmark statements also provide support to HEIs in pursuit of internal quality assurance. They enable the learning outcomes specified for a particular programme to be reviewed and evaluated against agreed general expectations about standards. Subject benchmark statements allow for flexibility and innovation in programme design and can stimulate academic discussion and debate upon the content of new and existing programmes within an agreed overall framework. Their use in supporting programme design, delivery and review within HEIs is supportive of moves towards an emphasis on institutional responsibility for standards and quality.

Subject benchmark statements may also be of interest to prospective students and employers, seeking information about the nature and standards of awards in a given subject or subject area.

The relationship between the standards set out in this document and those produced by professional, statutory or regulatory bodies for individual disciplines will be a matter for individual HEIs to consider in detail.

This subject benchmark statement represents a revised version of the original published in 2002. The review process was overseen by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) as part of a periodic review of all subject benchmark statements published in this year. The review and subsequent revision of the subject benchmark statement was undertaken by a group of subject specialists drawn from, and acting on behalf of, the subject community. The revised subject benchmark statement went through a full consultation with the wider academic community and stakeholder groups.

QAA publishes and distributes this subject benchmark statement and other subject benchmark statements developed by similar subject-specific groups.

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<sup>1</sup> This is equivalent to the honours degree in the *Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework* (level 10) and in the *Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales* (level 6).

The Disability Equality Duty (DED) came into force on 4 December 2006<sup>2</sup>. The DED requires public authorities, including HEIs, to act proactively on disability equality issues. The Duty complements the individual rights focus of the *Disability Discrimination Act* and is aimed at improving public services and outcomes for disabled people as a whole. Responsibility for making sure that such duty is met lies with HEIs.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission<sup>3</sup> has published guidance<sup>4</sup> to help HEIs prepare for the implementation of the Duty and provided illustrative examples on how to take the Duty forward. HEIs are encouraged to read this guidance when considering their approach to engaging with components of the Academic Infrastructure<sup>5</sup>, of which subject benchmark statements are a part.

Additional information that may assist HEIs when engaging with subject benchmark statements can be found in the *Code of Practice (revised) for providers of post-16 education and related services*<sup>6</sup>, and also through the Equality Challenge Unit<sup>7</sup> which is established to promote equality and diversity in higher education.

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<sup>2</sup> In England, Scotland and Wales.

<sup>3</sup> On 1 October 2007, the Equal Opportunities Commission, the Commission for Racial Equality and the Disability Rights Commission merged into the new Equality and Human Rights Commission.

<sup>4</sup> Copies of the guidance *Further and higher education institutions and the Disability Equality Duty, Guidance for Principals, Vice-Chancellors, governing boards and senior managers working in further education colleges and HEIs in England, Scotland and Wales*, may be obtained from [www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/forbusinessesandorganisation/publicauthorities/disabilityequalityd/pages/disabilitye.aspx](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/forbusinessesandorganisation/publicauthorities/disabilityequalityd/pages/disabilitye.aspx)

<sup>5</sup> An explanation of the Academic Infrastructure, and the roles of subject benchmark statements within it, is available at [www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure)

<sup>6</sup> Copies of the *Code of Practice (revised) for providers of post-16 education and related services*, published by the Disability Rights Commission, may be obtained from [www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/publicationsandresources/Disability/Pages/Education.aspx](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/publicationsandresources/Disability/Pages/Education.aspx)

<sup>7</sup> Equality Challenge Unit, [www.ecu.ac.uk](http://www.ecu.ac.uk)

## **Foreword**

The subject benchmark statement for communication, media, film and cultural studies, published in 2002, was designed to provide a framework within which individual departments or subject teams could recognise themselves and their students, and within which they could continue to develop. In an academic area characterised by continued expansion, the rapidly changing nature of its fields of study, the constant development of approaches to, and professional and creative practices within these fields, the benchmark statement aimed to serve an enabling, rather than a regulatory, function. Reports, from both the subject association and its members throughout the UK, have suggested that the statement has served this purpose, proving to be robust and useful for departments as an external source of reference in designing and developing new programmes and in articulating clearly and with an appropriate degree of comparability their current programmes of study. The review group has therefore made minimal changes in producing this revised benchmark statement. We have shortened the Introduction, updated terminology, where this seemed appropriate, and made some small amendments in the interests of clarity. Finally, we have modified the presentation of section 8 on Benchmark standards, in light of recommendations from QAA and of the development of European standards and guidelines.

**November 2007**

# 1 Introduction

1.1 Human social life depends upon the constant development and varied uses of modes of communication and upon shared and contested understandings of the world, necessitating the systematic study of communication and culture, and of their mediation through a variety of channels. In a regional, national and global order in which the cultural and communications industries play an increasingly central role and forms of social and political organisation and creative expression are touched at every point by media forms and practices, such study becomes even more vital. Degree programmes in communication, media, film and cultural studies have responded to the challenges posed by the general requirements of understanding the role of symbolic structures in human interaction, and by the specific tasks involved in addressing their changing role in contemporary societies.

1.2 Such programmes have drawn on a number of disciplinary origins within areas of the arts, humanities and social sciences. Increasingly, they have also drawn on the concepts, competencies and knowledges developed within the major areas of creative and professional practice in the cultural, film and communications industries, and on insights from design, business, computing and advanced technologies. The fields of study which have developed have in turn forged distinctive and original approaches to the areas of communications, media, film and culture, exploring the limits and producing the partial thawing of older disciplines through their inter and multidisciplinary approaches to the exploration of new and emerging objects of study and practice.

1.3 Much of this work has involved the development and testing of concepts and theories capable of mapping the complexity of these fields, concepts and theories which are, inevitably, and quite properly, contested. These have included:

- the ways in which cultural and media organisations intersect with general political and economic processes (questions of 'political economy')
- the ways in which accounts of the world are created and how they mediate symbolically between the individual and society (questions of 'representation')
- the ways in which questions of creative and cultural value are experienced and understood (questions of 'aesthetics')
- the ways in which social interactions may operate through circulating meanings and systems of representations (questions of 'discourse')
- the ways in which people appropriate and use cultural texts and practices (questions of 'consumption')
- the ways in which understandings of self and the world are formed in relation to such texts and practices (questions of 'identity')
- the relations between systems of meanings and relations of social and political power and inequality (questions of 'ideology').

1.4 Communication, media, film and cultural studies have also developed wider understandings of the diversity of forms of culture, as well as new understandings of the increasingly pivotal roles which communications, media and culture play in the social, economic and political organisation of contemporary societies. In exploring the centrality of forms of media, communicative and expressive practice in contemporary life, they have emphasised that the continuing regeneration and development of creative professional practice within the media and cultural industries requires systematic, critical and reflective education. Finally, they have reappraised the received cultural traditions and canons and explored the ways in which media, communication and cultural activities and processes are central to the organisation of everyday social and psychological life, and to the ways in which groups conceive their identities.

1.5 Degree programmes in communication, media, film and cultural studies are characterised by a diversity of emphases, drawing in different ways on the disciplinary and professional sources outlined above, and offering a range of approaches to theoretical, critical, practical and creative work within these fields. Often combining the search for thorough knowledge and understanding with the development of students' creative and reflexive capacities in innovative ways, they offer programmes relevant to students' futures, both in work and as citizens. The benchmarking group for communication, media, film and cultural studies has sought to reflect in this statement both the central concerns and understandings common to these fields and the richness represented by their diversity.

1.6 As an interdisciplinary group itself, the benchmarking group has also been aware of the overlap of disciplinary boundaries between its work and that of colleagues in fields such as art and design, business and management studies, dance, drama and performance studies, English, history of art, architecture and design, linguistics, music, and sociology. We expect that some degree programmes may wish to draw on benchmark statements from these and other subject groups, as appropriate, in drawing up their degree programme specifications. Some degree programmes which focus primarily on areas of professional practice may wish to reference the standards set by professional bodies.

1.7 The focus of this document is on the single honours degree programme. We recognise, however, that communication, media, film and cultural studies may also be found in combined and joint honours degree programmes. Just as single honours programmes in these fields will combine, in different ways, components from the following statements, we expect that combined and joint honours programmes will draw from them as appropriate.

1.8 We see the primary function of the benchmark statements as an enabling, rather than a regulatory, one. We have sought to provide a framework for undergraduate degree programmes in these fields within which individual departments, or subject teams, can recognise themselves and their students, and within which they will be able to continue to develop. Such continued development and diversity of practice is central to these fields and to the development of their students' potential.

## **2 Defining principles**

2.1 As fields of study, communication, media, film and cultural studies are distinguished by their focus on cultural and communicative activities as central forces in shaping everyday social and psychological life, as well as senses of identity in the organisation of economic and political activity; in the construction of public culture; in the creation of new expressive forms; and as the basis for a range of professional practices.

2.2 Within these fields of study, degree programmes are characterised by a diversity of emphases. Titles may include, for example, broadcasting; communication studies; cultural studies; film or screen studies; journalism; media production; media studies; popular culture; public relations; and publishing. In addition, some degree programmes:

- range across the general areas of culture and/or communications and media, while others focus on a particular practice such as film, photography or journalism
- pay particular attention to the practical or technical aspects of communication, media and cultural technologies while others focus on their economic or business applications, their industrial and management structures and methods, their social uses, and/or their symbolic, aesthetic or affective possibilities

- contain a significant historical component, while others emphasise contemporary developments. Some concentrate on established media and areas of cultural activity, while others pay special attention to new and emerging media, cultural or communicative forms
- include the study of the most fundamental modes of human communication (spoken and written language, visual and aural communication, face-to-face and interpersonal communication, and group dynamics). Some focus on specific media, cultural and aesthetic systems (for example, print media, film, television, radio, popular music or new forms of digital and computer-mediated communication). Some examine forms of material culture and everyday cultural practices (for example, popular cultural forms and practices, the organisation of public and private spaces, cultural institutions such as galleries, museums and theatres, and relationships between canonical and popular cultural forms)
- focus primarily on professional practices and their associated creative, business and management, intellectual and/or technical skills, while others either do not offer any direct experience of media/cultural production, or offer experience of practice primarily as a means to critical reflection.

2.3 Nevertheless, degree programmes within communication, media, film and cultural studies share the aim of producing graduates who have an informed, critical and creative approach both to understanding media, culture and communications in contemporary society, and to their own forms of media, communicative and expressive practice. Whilst these programmes are committed to enabling students to meet the challenges of employment (including self-employment) in a society in which the cultural and communications industries play an increasingly central role, they emphasise that the fostering of employability requires the development of students' creative, intellectual, analytical and research skills.

2.4 In furthering students' academic and personal development, programmes within communication, media, film and cultural studies are committed to forms of pedagogy that place emphasis on developing critical and creative independence, flexibility, sensitivity to audience, and self-reflexiveness, across individual and group work, and critical and production work.

### **3 Nature and scope of the subject**

3.1 For all their range and diversity, work in the fields of communication, media, film and cultural studies are linked by a shared recognition of a number of propositions.

- People's lives, especially in the modern world, are thoroughly imbued with a great variety of communicative, cultural and aesthetic systems and practices, including the many forms of mass media.
- The cultural, media and communication industries are significant areas of employment, and responsible creative professional practice within these industries require systematic, critical and reflective education.
- Communicative, cultural and media industries play key roles in generating symbolic resources through which people individually and collectively imagine the past, define the present, and develop projects for the future.
- Communicative and cultural activities and processes are central to the organisation of everyday social and psychological life, offering a range of aesthetic pleasures and social engagements, and providing central resources for the formation and expression of personal and collective identities.



- Communications, media and culture play increasingly pivotal roles in economic and political organisation at local, regional, national, international and global levels. Their public forms are often organised by large-scale institutions whose structures, operations, regulations and performances require sustained analysis.
- Opportunities to participate actively in the central sites of public culture and communication are differentially distributed in ways that are linked to prevailing structures of economic and symbolic power, and central axes of social division such as ethnicity, gender, nationality, sexuality, and social class.
- Beyond large-scale institutions, many other groups, communities and individual producers contribute to the communicative life of any society, often in ways which produce challenging or oppositional forms of understanding and symbolic and affective life.
- There is a vital need for informed debate on the political, legal and ethical aspects of communication and culture that takes into account the above points, and which considers the importance of access and inclusion in public communicative life for a democratic society.

3.2 Degree programmes in communication, media, film and cultural studies vary in the emphasis given to these concerns, and to the multiple issues they raise. These differences of focus connect in turn with the different sources of conceptualisation and practice that feed work within the fields. These sources are:

- the theories and methods of enquiry developed within the arts and humanities (aesthetics, art history and art criticism, history, law, literary and textual analysis, philosophy, and theatre and performance studies)
- the theories and research methodologies developed within the major social sciences (anthropology, economics, geography, linguistics, political science, psychology (including psychoanalysis), and sociology)
- the concepts, competencies and knowledges developed within the major areas of creative and professional practice in the cultural, media and communications industries
- the theories and research methodologies of applied arts and sciences (design, business, computing and advanced technology).

3.3 As a whole, programmes in communication, media, film and cultural studies are multidisciplinary and, in many cases interdisciplinary, seeking to draw from all, or most, of the above. Nonetheless, individual degree programmes use these sets of resources in different ways and in varying combinations. Strongly interdisciplinary programmes may counterpoise different approaches, using a range of methodological frameworks. In other cases where programmes fall more readily into a particular disciplinary field, there is likely to be an emphasis on different positions within that discipline. Professional and/or technical elements feature strongly in some programmes, while others may position themselves more firmly in an experimental mode, or use practice work by students mainly to inform critical understanding.

3.4 No degree programme will give equal attention to all these elements. Most programmes, however, promote a combination of understandings and skills. Many that emphasise critical engagement also require students to produce a substantial piece of self-managed research and/or a creative production or portfolio of work demonstrating their command of specific skills. Similarly, programmes that concentrate primarily on media practice or production also require students to develop analytical and research skills together with a critical grasp of their responsibilities as practitioners, and awareness of the dynamics, whether cultural, economic, ethical, legal, political, social or affective, which shape working environments.

3.5 Since programmes differ in their focus and degree of specialisation it is neither possible nor desirable to define a prescriptive knowledge or skills base. The following sections give an indication of the areas of knowledge and understanding, and of the subject specific and generic skills which will be appropriate within these fields of study; they should not be taken as a checklist.

## **4 Subject knowledge and understanding**

### **Communications, culture and society**

4.1 Graduates of programmes in these fields will demonstrate knowledge and understanding drawn from the following:

- an understanding of the roles of communication systems, modes of representations and systems of meaning in the ordering of societies
- an awareness of the economic forces which frame the media, cultural and creative industries, and the role of such industries in specific areas of contemporary political and cultural life
- a comparative understanding of the roles that media and/or cultural institutions play in different societies
- an understanding of the roles of cultural practices and cultural institutions in society
- an understanding of particular media forms and genres, and the way in which they organise understandings, meanings and affects
- an understanding of the role of technology in terms of media production, access and use
- an understanding of the ways in which participatory access to the central sites of public culture and communication is distributed along axes of social division, such as disability, class, ethnicity, gender, nationality, and sexuality
- an understanding of the dynamics of public and everyday discourses in the shaping of culture and society
- an understanding of the ways in which different social groups may make use of cultural texts and products in the construction of social and cultural realities, cultural maps and frames of reference.

### **Histories**

4.2 Graduates of programmes in these fields will demonstrate knowledge and understanding drawn from the following:

- an understanding of the development of media and cultural forms in a local, regional, national, international or global context
- an understanding of the social, cultural and political histories from which different media and cultural institutions, modes of communication, practices and structures have emerged
- a historically informed knowledge of the contribution of media organisations to the shaping of the modern world
- an understanding of the interconnectedness of texts and contexts, and of the shifting configurations of communicative, cultural and aesthetic practices and systems
- an understanding of the historical evolution of particular genres, aesthetic traditions and forms, and of their current characteristics and possible future developments

- an understanding of the history of communication and media technologies, and a recognition of the different ways in which the history of, and current developments in, media and communication can be understood in relation to technological change
- an understanding of the historical development of practices of cultural consumption (including subcultural forms and everyday lived practices)
- an awareness of the ways in which critical and cultural theories and concepts have developed within particular contexts.

## **Processes and practices**

4.3 Graduates of programmes in these fields will demonstrate knowledge and understanding drawn from the following:

- an understanding of the processes linking production, circulation and consumption
- an understanding of the processes, both verbal and non-verbal, whereby people manage communication face-to-face and in the context of groups
- an awareness of the processes of cultural and subcultural formations and their dynamics
- an understanding of key production processes and professional practices relevant to media, cultural and communicative industries, and of ways of conceptualising creativity and authorship
- an understanding of professional, technical and formal choices which realise, develop or challenge existing practices and traditions, and of the possibilities and constraints involved in production processes
- a knowledge of the legal, ethical and regulatory frameworks which affect media and cultural production, circulation, and consumption
- an understanding of how media, cultural and creative organisations operate and are managed
- an understanding of the material conditions of media and cultural consumption, and of the cultural contexts in which people appropriate, use and make sense of media and cultural products
- an awareness of how media products might be understood within broader concepts of culture.

## **Forms and aesthetics**

4.4 Graduates of programmes in these fields will demonstrate knowledge and understanding drawn from the following:

- an understanding of the aesthetic and formal qualities at play, and their relation to meanings, in particular cultural forms
- an insight into the cultural and social ways in which aesthetic judgements are constructed and aesthetic processes experienced
- an understanding of the student's own creative processes and practice through engagement in one or more production practices
- an examination of the role that aesthetic and other pleasures and judgements may play in the production and maintenance of social relations
- an awareness of a range of works (in one or more media) which generate different kinds of aesthetic pleasures
- an understanding of the narrative processes, generic forms and modes of representation at work in media and cultural texts

- an understanding of the ways in which specific media and their attendant technologies make possible different kinds of aesthetic effects and forms
- an understanding of the audio, visual and verbal conventions through which sounds, images and words make meaning
- an understanding of the ways in which people engage with cultural texts and practices and make meaning from them.

## **Culture and identity**

4.5 Graduates of programmes in these fields will demonstrate knowledge and understanding drawn from the following:

- an appreciation of the complexity of the term 'culture' and an understanding of how it has developed
- an understanding of the ways in which identities are constructed and contested through engagements with culture
- an understanding of how disability, class, ethnicity, gender, religion, nationality, sexuality and other social divisions play key roles in terms of both access to the media and modes of representation in media texts
- an insight into the different modes of global, international, national and local cultural experience and their interaction in particular instances
- an understanding of the ways in which forms of media and cultural consumption are embedded in everyday life, and serve as ways of claiming and understanding identities
- an understanding of the relationship between discourse, culture and identity.

## **5 Subject skills**

5.1 The specific focus and breadth of range of individual degree programmes will determine not only the knowledge bases on which they draw, but also the balance of skills and approaches developed within them. Graduates will demonstrate, as appropriate, some of the following subject-specific skills.

### **Skills of intellectual analysis**

5.2 The ability to:

- engage critically with major thinkers, debates and intellectual paradigms within the field and put them to productive use
- understand forms of communication, media and culture as they have emerged historically and appreciate the processes through which they have come into being, with reference to social, cultural and technological change
- examine such forms critically with appropriate reference to the social and cultural contexts and diversity of contemporary society, and have an understanding of how different social groups variously make use of, and engage with, forms of communication, media and culture
- analyse closely, interpret and show the exercise of critical judgement in the understanding and, as appropriate, evaluation of these forms
- develop substantive and detailed knowledge and understanding in one or more designated areas of the field
- consider and evaluate their own work in a reflexive manner, with reference to academic and/or professional issues, debates and conventions.

## **Research skills**

5.3 The ability to:

- carry out various forms of research for essays, projects, creative productions or dissertations involving sustained independent enquiry
- formulate appropriate research questions and employ appropriate methods and resources for exploring those questions
- evaluate and draw upon the range of sources and the conceptual frameworks appropriate to research in the chosen area
- draw on the strengths and understand the limits of the major quantitative and/or qualitative research methods, and be able to apply this knowledge critically in their own work
- draw and reflect upon the relevance and impact of their own cultural commitments and positioning to the practice of research
- explore matters which may be new and emerging, drawing upon a variety of personal skills and upon a variety of academic and non-academic sources.

## **Media production skills**

5.4 The ability to:

- produce work which demonstrates the effective manipulation of sound, image and/or the written word
- demonstrate competences in the chosen field of practice
- utilise a range of research skills, for example, research into potential funding sources, audiences, markets or consumption contexts
- produce work showing capability in operational aspects of media production technologies, systems, techniques and professional practices
- manage time, personnel and resources effectively by drawing on planning, organisational, project management and leadership skills
- produce work which demonstrates an understanding of media forms and structures, audiences and specific communication registers
- produce work which is informed by, and contextualised within, relevant theoretical issues and debates.

## **Creative, innovative and imaginative skills**

5.5 The ability to:

- initiate, develop and realise distinctive and creative work within various forms of writing or of aural, visual, audiovisual, sound or other electronic media
- experiment, as appropriate, with forms, conventions, languages, techniques and practices
- draw upon and bring together ideas from different sources of knowledge and from different academic disciplines
- be adaptable, creative and self-reflexive in producing output for a variety of audiences and in a variety of media forms.

## **Skills of social and political citizenship**

5.6 The ability to:

- critically appraise some of the widespread common sense understandings and misunderstandings of communications, media and culture, and the debates and disagreements to which these give rise
- analyse how media and cultural policies are devised and implemented, and the ways in which citizens and cultural communities can play a part in shaping them
- analyse the role which community and participatory media forms may play in contributing to cultural debate and contesting social power
- critically evaluate the contested nature of some objects of study within the fields of communication, media, film and cultural studies, and the social and political implications of the judgements which are made
- show insight into the range of attitudes and values arising from the complexity and diversity of contemporary communications, media, culture and society, and an ability to consider and respond to these.

## **6 Generic skills**

6.1 With varying emphasis, graduates in these subject areas will also be able to:

- work in flexible, creative and independent ways, showing self-discipline, self-direction and reflexivity
- gather, organise and deploy ideas and information in order to formulate arguments cogently, and express them effectively in written, oral or in other forms
- retrieve and generate information, and evaluate sources, in carrying out independent research
- organise and manage supervised, self-directed projects
- communicate effectively in interpersonal settings, in writing and in a variety of media
- work productively in a group or team, showing abilities at different times to listen, contribute and lead effectively
- deliver work to a given length, format, brief and deadline, properly referencing sources and ideas and making use, as appropriate, of a problem-solving approach
- apply entrepreneurial skills in dealing with audiences, clients, consumers, markets, sources and/or users
- put to use a range of information communication technology (ICT) skills from basic competences such as data analysis and word-processing to more complex skills using web-based technology or multimedia, and develop, as appropriate, specific proficiencies in utilising a range of media technologies.

## **7 Learning, teaching and assessment**

### **General**

7.1 Individual programmes within the fields of communication, media, film and cultural studies will articulate their own principles of progression within, and coherence and balance across, the particular curriculum and learning experiences offered to students. Learning, teaching and assessment will be designed to reflect the specific aims, emphases and learning outcomes of the programme, and students should be made aware of these at the outset.

7.2 Students will benefit from exploring a wide range of materials and sources, drawn from a range of academic and non-academic contexts.

7.3 Throughout, learning strategies will acknowledge, respect and encourage a wide variety of learning styles and activities, offering a balance between the provision of information (direct or resource-based) and opportunities for active assimilation, application, questioning, debate and critical reflection.

7.4 Where production knowledge and practice-based learning form a part of the programme's curriculum and delivery strategies, resources should be appropriate and adequate to support this.

## Learning and teaching

7.5 Progression through programmes will lead to an increasing emphasis on student self-direction and self-responsibility in the learning and teaching strategies deployed. Part of this process will involve the ongoing development of communicative competencies among students. Learning and teaching strategies will be oriented towards some of the following learning processes:

- **awareness raising and knowledge acquisition:** the process through which a student is introduced to, and engages with, new areas of knowledge and experience, and broadens and deepens existing knowledges
- **conceptual and critical understanding:** the process whereby a student engages in critical analysis of texts, fields of knowledge, concepts, and cultural and production practices, testing their analysis against received understandings and practices
- **practice experience:** the process through which a student acquires practical experience, skills and the opportunity for creative expression and/or thinking in a range of activities, from empirical research to production work, and receives and gives feedback on their performance
- **critical reflection:** the process through which a student reflects on new knowledge and understandings, and on their own learning experiences and performance, and acquires new awareness and understandings.

7.6 Learning and teaching methods reflect the specific aims, emphases and learning outcomes of the degree programme, and will draw on an appropriate balance from among the following:

- lectures; demonstrations; screenings; seminars; workshops; work simulations; tutorials; group and individual project work; live projects; supervised independent learning; open and resource-based learning; e-learning, production practice; and work placements
- large and small group, individual learning, and teaching situations
- tutor-led, student-led and independent learning sessions
- sessions which emphasise primarily knowledge acquisition, skills development (specific and general transferable), and analysis and evaluation
- use of a range of technology systems for accessing data, resources, contacts and literature, and for the acquisition of production skills.

7.7 The learning context will encourage active engagement with cultural and communicative forms and practices, and with examples from the medium/media or cultural practice being studied and, where appropriate, contact with a variety of academic and non-academic speakers, organisations and production voices.

## Assessment

7.8 Assessment is an integral part of the learning process, and will be formative and diagnostic as well as summative and evaluative, providing feedback to students wherever appropriate. In many programmes, particularly those which feature production work, students will be participants in the assessment process through strategies such as the group critique, where students present and discuss their work with peers and tutors.

7.9 Assessment strategies will follow the specific aims, emphases and learning outcomes of the degree programme, and reflect the range and balance of teaching and learning methods used. They will be appropriate to the intended learning processes, the learning context, and the learning needs and stage of progression of the students. Programmes will seek to ensure that, within the variety of approaches taken, assessment is consistent both in the demands it makes on students and in the standards of judgement it applies.

7.10 Accordingly, assessment methods may draw from among the following:

- short and long essays
- analyses of textual and cultural forms and practices
- reviews and reports
- seen and unseen examinations
- individual and group presentations (whether oral and/or technology-based)
- critical self and peer evaluation
- role analyses/evaluations
- logbooks, diaries and autobiographical writing
- individual or group portfolios of work (whether critical, creative, self-reflective, or the outcome of professional practice)
- group and individually produced artefacts, including productions in sound, audiovisual or other media
- individual and group project reports
- research exercises
- tasks aimed at the assessment of specific skills (eg ICT skills, production skills, research skills and skills of application)
- external placement or work-based learning reports.

7.11 Programmes may also require the production of an extended piece of independent investigation and/or a creative production or portfolio of work, typically undertaken in the final year. This may be discursive or production-based, and may be individual or group work. It will usually include a significant component of individually assessed work.

7.12 Overall, assessment will focus on the following areas:

- breadth and depth of subject knowledge and awareness of the history and context(s) of that knowledge
- critical analysis, whether of texts, fields of knowledge, concepts or cultural, or production practices, including the ability to contextualise the analysis and engage in critical debate through discursive argument
- subject-specific and generic skills, including skills of investigation and enquiry, oral and written communicative skills, the use of a range of technology systems for accessing data, resources, contacts and literature, and media production skills and creativity



- critical reflection on issues of practice, on new knowledges and understandings, and on students' own and others' performance against agreed criteria, including the capacity to deploy and evaluate evidence and to express the outcomes of such reflection clearly and fluently.

7.13 In the case of production work, assessment criteria will reflect the specific brief and the overall aims of the programme, and a recognition of relevant professional standards, where appropriate.

## 8 Benchmark standards

### General

8.1 We have emphasised that the fields embraced under communication, media, film and cultural studies are very broad so that no degree programme can embrace all of these elements. Furthermore, individual programmes will vary in the degree of focus or breadth of range they adopt. In general, it may be expected that programmes working with a tighter focus will require greater intensity of knowledge, understanding and skills within their field, drawing as appropriate on those outlined in sections 4 to 6. Programmes which adopt a broader focus will draw more widely on these sections, emphasising interconnections and/or interdisciplinarity. Typically, however, students graduating within these fields will display:

- coherent **knowledge** of the communication, media and cultural forms and processes chosen for study within their degree programme
- **understanding** of a range of concepts, theories and approaches appropriate to the study of those objects and processes, and the capacity to apply these
- **skills** in critical analysis, research, production and communication appropriate to the learning tasks set by their programme, as well as an array of generic and creative skills.

8.2 Within this general rubric, individual programmes will combine in different ways components from the following. Individual programmes will build coherent sets of expectations from among them, with appropriately different emphases. The learning outcomes are indicative, and **do not in any sense constitute a checklist**. Typically then, graduates from programmes in communication, media, film and cultural studies will have demonstrated outcomes from among the following:

- knowledge of the central role that communications, media and cultural agencies play at local, national, international and global levels of economic, political and social organisation, along with the ability to explore and articulate the implications of this
- awareness of the historical formation of their particular objects of study, and their contexts and interfaces
- knowledge of appropriate research practices, procedures and traditions, and some awareness of their strengths and limitations
- awareness of the diversity of approaches to understanding communication, media and culture in both historical and contemporary contexts, and of the uses and implications of these approaches
- knowledge of a range of texts, genres, aesthetic forms and cultural practices, and the ability to produce close analysis of these, and to make comparisons and connections
- engagement with forms of critical analysis, argument and debate, expressed through an appropriate command of oral, written and other forms of communication

- understanding of production processes and professional practices within media, cultural and communicative industries
- critically informed competency in the management and operation of production technologies, procedures and processes
- the ability to engage with and to advance creative processes in one or more forms of media or cultural production
- knowledge of a range of communicative situations and cultural practices, along with the ability to produce detailed analyses of these, and to make comparisons and connections
- the ability to consider views, other than their own, and exercise a degree of independent and informed critical judgement in analysis
- the ability to work across a variety of group and independent modes of study, and within these to demonstrate flexibility, creativity and the capacity for critical self-reflection
- the ability to use their knowledge and understanding of communication, cultural and media processes as a basis for the examination of policy and ethical issues, whether in the public domain or in other aspects of democratic participation and citizenship.

### **Threshold level**

8.3 Graduates who have achieved the threshold level in a programme within the fields of communication, media, film and cultural studies will be able to demonstrate sufficient grounding overall in the knowledges outlined in sections 2, 3 and 4, and in the subject-specific and general skills as defined in sections 5 and 6, as emphasised by their particular programme. Their performance, however, is likely to be characterised by imbalances and unevenness in their levels of achievement.

### **Typical level**

8.4 Graduates who achieve the typical level within the fields of communication, media, film and cultural studies will be able to demonstrate systematic knowledge and understanding of the subject and field as outlined in sections 2, 3 and 4, and subject-specific and general skills as defined in sections 5 and 6, as emphasised by their particular programme. They will have demonstrated strengths from among the outcomes listed in 8.2. Their performance will be characterised by a more consistent level of achievement, a greater ability to synthesise and make links between a range of knowledges and skills, and a greater self-reflexivity and awareness of the limits, ambiguities and uncertainties of knowledge.

### **Levels of excellence**

8.5 Graduates who attain above the typical level in a programme within the fields of communication, media, film and cultural studies will display excellence in a range of the knowledges, understandings and abilities required by their programmes. Their work will display independence or originality, engagement with the dynamics of contemporary theoretical debate, and/or of relevant practice, and demonstrate the ability to make innovative connections in practice, research and/or analysis.

## **Appendix A: Membership of the review group for the subject benchmark statement for communication, media, film and cultural studies**

Anita Biressi	Roehampton University
David Clews	The Higher Education Academy Subject Centre for Arts, Design and Media
John Ellis	Royal Holloway, University of London
Christine Geraghty	University of Glasgow
Roy Hanney	The University of Chichester
Stephen Malinder	HEA Subject Centre for Arts, Design and Media
Tim O'Sullivan	De Montfort University
Sue Thornham (Chair)	University of Sussex

## **Appendix B: Membership of the original benchmarking group for communication, media, film and cultural studies**

Details below appear as published in the original subject benchmark statement for communication, media, film and cultural studies (2002).

Professor Rod Allen	City University
Professor Martin Barker	University of Wales, Aberystwyth
Dr Raymond Boyle	University of Stirling
Ms Rosalind Brunt	Sheffield Hallam University
Dr Bernadette Casey	College of St Mark and St John, Plymouth
Professor Ron Cook	University of Salford
Ms Sarah Edge	University of Ulster
Ms Christine Geraghty	Goldsmiths College
Mr Michael Green	University of Birmingham
Dr Karen Lury	University of Glasgow
Dr John Mundy	University of Central Lancashire
Dr Graham Murdock	Loughborough University
Mr Tim O'Sullivan	De Montfort University
Professor Sue Thornham (Chair)	University of Sunderland
Professor John Tulloch	Cardiff University
Dr Tim Wall	University of Central England, Birmingham
Professor Brian Winston	University of Westminster