



**QAA**

# Subject benchmark statement

**Welsh**

**2008**

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## 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 and higher education institutions 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 following version of the subject benchmark statement for Welsh was prepared as part of QAA's process of periodical review of subject benchmark statements.

Compared to the original version of the statement published in 2002, many of the changes are minor. The statement contains, for example, a number of verbal changes, some intended to promote clarity, some intended to ensure a more exact correlation between the Welsh and English versions, and some intended to ensure conformity with standard QAA terminology. Other changes - while relatively minor in extent - are, nevertheless, significant, reflecting the fact that Welsh as an academic discipline is vital and flexible and is adapting continuously in response to current developments. For example, in the short time since the original statement was published, the use of electronic sources and electronic learning has become ever more relevant to Welsh as to other academic disciplines, and parts of the statement have been adapted to reflect this development. Other changes reflect the way in which less traditional areas of study, such as creative writing and sociolinguistics, and less traditional assessment methods, such as those that prioritise oral communication skills, have now become firmly embedded in degree programmes in Welsh. In order to reflect an increasing emphasis on interdisciplinarity, it was considered necessary to cite a broader range of disciplines that can enrich the academic study of the language and its literature. Lastly, but most importantly, it was considered appropriate to highlight the diversity of the linguistic backgrounds of students who choose to follow degree programmes in Welsh in order to emphasise that the study of Welsh at the highest academic level is not the preserve of any one cultural group.

As Chair of the review group I would like to express my sincere thanks to all my fellow group members for their enthusiastic and constructive contributions to our discussions, and especially to Professor Peredur Lynch who acted as the group's meticulous and efficient Secretary. Thanks are also due to Dr Julian Ellis, QAA's Officer for Wales, for facilitating our discussions and for his expert and patient counsel and guidance.

Professor Gruffydd Aled Williams  
Chair, Review group for the subject benchmark statement for Welsh

**December 2007**

# 1 Introduction

1.1 The aim of this subject benchmark statement is to provide details of the nature and standards of degree schemes that include Welsh as:

- a main element in a degree scheme leading to the final qualification
- a substantial element in a degree scheme leading to the final qualification.

## 2 Defining principles

2.1 Welsh is a broad and varied academic discipline characterised by thorough, disciplined study. It involves creating, presenting and interpreting written and oral texts, as well as the nature and history of the language and the opportunities which are open to it in today's world. Studying Welsh fosters a flexible and open-minded attitude and also the ability to evaluate different concepts and to present them using appropriate spoken and written language; it enables students to discuss and interpret the cultures and values of the past as well as developments in the modern world.

2.2 Welsh does not exist in a vacuum. It is open to all the influences of the contemporary international world of which Wales is a part. The forms of literary expression and of communicating in Welsh are more diverse now than they have ever been. The language itself faces significant changes that place a particular responsibility on everyone who is concerned with the subject to safeguard its basis and attributes as it develops and as the range of opportunities and new ways of using Welsh present themselves.

2.3 The discipline that is fostered among students studying Welsh considers the form, structure and language of texts, their cultural context, their historical significance and literary merit, the concepts reflected in them, and the relationship between Welsh and other fields. Students have the chance to study the inter-relationship of literary texts and the relationship between literature and other media. The study of the language itself encompasses its history and development, its social context, and phonology, orthography, grammar, morphology, semantics and vocabulary.

2.4 Degree schemes in Welsh should:

- offer a broad and balanced syllabus
- encourage enthusiasm for the subject
- enable students to appreciate the cultural and social significance of Welsh
- be an exciting and satisfying teaching and learning experience
- foster a range of subject-specific skills together with other generic skills, ie a range of skills that are valuable for a variety of different vocations, including communication skills, literacy skills, analytical skills, critical skills, research skills, the ability to think in the abstract and the ability to cooperate
- help students to understand and appreciate the expressive power of language
- foster the habit of reading literature in a critical and analytical fashion
- foster an understanding of the creative process and of the value of works of literature
- lay a foundation for further study within the subject itself and within related areas.

2.5 In higher education, Welsh is characterised by various pedagogical and intellectual aspects. The chief aim of this subject benchmark statement is to identify guidelines that may form the basis of degree programmes that appreciate the products of the past as well as encompassing and promoting new developments and the relevance of Welsh for today's world.

### **3 The nature and scope of Welsh**

3.1 Several HEIs within Wales offer Welsh as a single and a joint honours subject and also as part of other schemes. Welsh is the medium of instruction in the majority of these cases. This statement relates to degree schemes in which Welsh is a substantial element (at least 80 credits at level 2 or 3), including distance learning schemes and lifelong learning provision. It also relates to Welsh studies schemes, where there is an emphasis on learning the language and where a number of texts are studied in the original language.

3.2 The subject's core is the Welsh language, its nature, history and current position, and Welsh literature in all periods. Literary studies may include drama, film, television, radio, new media, journalism, folklore and creative writing. Welsh is characterised by its long history and the strength of its literary tradition since the early Middle Ages. Degree schemes vary. Some offer the opportunity for detailed study of particular periods, or types of literature, or aspects of the language's history and development; but everyone who gains an honours degree in Welsh should have a fundamental knowledge of the language and a broad understanding of the development of Welsh literature from its beginnings until today.

3.3 Students who graduate in Welsh include native speakers, second-language students, and those who begin to learn the language as part of a degree scheme. The same language standards apply to all graduates in Welsh. A central feature of every degree scheme will be the means proposed to maintain these standards both in writing and orally.

3.4 Although Wales itself is the focus of any degree in Welsh, the study does not confine itself to the geographical limits of the country. A degree in Welsh can include studying one or more of the other Celtic languages and their literatures, works in other languages and similar multilingual situations.

3.5 A fruitful relationship exists between Welsh and a number of other academic disciplines, for example, literary theory, linguistics, modern languages, English, media studies, classical studies, gender studies, history, archaeology, politics and sociology. The study of Welsh offers many opportunities for interdisciplinary and comparative studies.

3.6 Welsh as a subject has developed greatly over recent years and it continues to develop in several directions. The language and literary tradition are the abiding core, but new methods exist of studying this traditional material, and the position and domains of the language change constantly. It is extremely important that teaching is supported by research of the highest standard.



## 4 Knowledge and understanding

4.1 The nature of degree programmes in Welsh varies from institution to institution, with a variety of options and combinations available within the subject. The nature of the degree scheme also affects the range of knowledge with which students are expected to be familiar. Students who gain a single honours degree in Welsh may be expected to possess the majority of the following characteristics and students with Welsh as a substantial part of their degree (at least 80 credits at level 2 or 3) may be expected to possess several of them.

- Knowledge of the attributes of the Welsh language. This will include familiarity with the standards of contemporary literary Welsh and an ability to use it effectively for intellectual, creative and practical purposes. It will also include awareness of other written linguistic registers and of their appropriateness in certain contexts. It will additionally encompass oral fluency, as well as an awareness of the appropriate use of different oral registers.
- A knowledge of how to describe and analyse language using appropriate technical terms. This will include applying knowledge to understand examples of language from different periods and to recognise significant differences between contemporary Welsh and the Welsh of earlier periods.
- A general awareness of the development of the Welsh language over time and of the main periods in the history of the language.
- A knowledge of the social conditions that affect the development of Welsh and of ways to restore and promote the language.
- A knowledge of Welsh literature throughout the centuries. The precise elements encountered will differ from scheme to scheme, but students studying for a single honours degree in Welsh should be familiar with a range of significant texts from the earliest periods to the present day.
- A knowledge of Welsh literary history and of the historical, social and intellectual factors that have influenced Welsh literature over time.
- Knowing how to treat works of literature critically, using technical vocabulary where appropriate, and discussing their content from the point of view of comprehension and imagination, linguistic and stylistic features, and craftsmanship.
- The identification of different literary modes and genres and their characteristics. This includes familiarity with those modes that are especially associated with Welsh (for example, *cynghanedd*) as well as more general literary modes.
- An awareness of the various ways of studying literature, including a perception of the relevance of critical and theoretical concepts.
- Knowledge, where relevant, of the connections between Welsh literature and literature in other languages and of the place of Welsh literary texts within international cultural patterns.
- An awareness of the function of language and literature in fostering, maintaining and developing Welsh national identity.
- Familiarity with the standard reference sources for Welsh language and culture, in both printed and electronic format.

## **5 Skills**

### **Subject skills**

5.1 Graduates for whom Welsh is a substantial part of their degree scheme will possess many analytical and critical skills in the area of language and literature. The emphasis in each institution and of each degree scheme will necessarily be different, but graduates might be expected to have mastered to some extent or to a significant degree:

- practical linguistic skills including possession of sufficient language resources to discuss complex topics in a polished fashion, both orally and in writing
- the ability to analyse language and its use in different situations
- the ability to assemble and convey information about literary texts and to treat them critically, orally and in writing
- to respond appropriately to the use of language and imagination in literature
- to consider literature in its historical, social and intellectual context
- to recognise literary conventions and appreciate their use and function in relationship to particular literary genres
- technical skills appropriate to the discipline, such as producing bibliographies and referring to print and electronic sources in a consistent and standard fashion
- where appropriate, the ability to use the language for the purpose of creative writing.

### **Generic skills**

5.2 Graduates in Welsh will possess many skills that will be useful and relevant in several contexts. These include the ability to:

- express themselves proficiently in Welsh, both orally and in writing
- frame consistent, coherent arguments in a convincing fashion
- develop the habit of independent thought
- respond critically, analysing and summarising the arguments and opinions of others
- work independently and to gather information in an organised and purposeful fashion from various sources, evaluate it critically, selecting significant and valid elements; and present it in a coherent, meaningful way
- understand and develop complex concepts and to treat them critically and analytically
- work in a detailed and thorough way
- work as part of a team
- demonstrate organisational skills in relation to set tasks, including effective time management
- use information and communication technology skills, including the ability to gather, assess, and use information from electronic sources

- edit work and present it in a clear and accomplished form
- understand material produced in another language or other languages and translate it into Welsh or reproduce it in Welsh in a way that is consistent with the characteristics of the language.

## **6 Teaching, learning and assessment**

### **Teaching and learning**

6.1 A degree scheme in Welsh should enable students to foster the skills referred to above. The precise content of degree schemes will vary across institutions, but the objectives of each scheme, as well as the learning outcomes for each module, should be clear and unambiguous.

### **Teaching and learning methods**

6.2 Various methods are employed in the teaching of Welsh. The lecture allows the teacher to present a designed view of the field and to set out the parameters of the curriculum. It may also be used to offer illustrative studies of a particular topic. However, students ought not to conclude that the material presented in a lecture is sufficient to understand the subject. Reading lists are essential for promoting further study.

6.3 Discussion and interaction with educators and peers, orally and in writing, are an essential part of the educational process: these skills are vital as regards the subject itself and also give students an opportunity to nurture generic skills. These skills can be promoted mainly through seminars, tutorials, workshops and coursework. Electronic means of teaching and learning are also appropriate in most contexts, including distance learning.

6.4 There are also other teaching and learning methods, for example, language classes to practice particular linguistic skills; reading classes to work through primary sources; work experience, with students themselves analysing their experience and progress.

6.5 The programme specification of each scheme will clearly show the breadth of learning and teaching methods provided for students. They can be expected to include several of the following, depending on the aim of the module:

- lectures
- seminars
- tutorials
- language classes
- text-reading classes
- fieldwork
- work experience
- workshops

- directing a dissertation or project
- guided learning
- e-learning methods.

### **Progression and progress**

6.6 The teaching process will promote growing maturity, although this does not necessarily mean that each level will be taught separately. The details of each programme specification will indicate clearly the progression over the period of the degree. Different categories of students will have different starting points, for example, there is a difference between the educational experiences of second and first-language students and beginners. This is taken into account in the teaching process, and especially when providing modules on linguistic skills.

### **Assessment**

6.7 The object of assessment is to discover whether students have achieved the appropriate learning outcomes. However, as well as aiding the process of evaluating students' work, assessment is a valuable part of the educational process and reinforces intellectual development. Assessment may be either formative or summative and the process should provide constructive feedback to students. For that reason, every degree scheme in Welsh should have:

- an assessment strategy that complements the aims of modules within the degree scheme
- a variety of assessment methods that enable students to demonstrate a range of attainments and skills
- clear assessment criteria, especially in relation to the assessment of oral presentations and collaborative work.

6.8 A written examination is one way of demonstrating that students have understood the material for themselves and can apply it intelligently in answering questions. The paper should be carefully structured and the questions carefully framed to ensure that the examination is balanced and unbiased and that it tests more than memory.

6.9 The essay is an essential element in the degree scheme assessment process. However, students need clear instructions so that they do not rely excessively on secondary sources and that they also avoid plagiarism.

6.10 Oral examinations, oral tests and oral presentations are valid methods of assessment.

6.11 The various approved assessment methods may include:

- formal examinations of differing type and length
- language tests and exercises
- coursework, including essays and reviews
- project work, which may be collaborative
- extended essay

- oral assessment, including formal presentations and seminar contributions
- work experience, including formal reports, keeping a diary to assess the experience
- activities that assess particular skills, including information technology, appropriate referencing, producing bibliographies, designing questionnaires, organising fieldwork
- folio work, including creative writing and translation exercises.

6.12 The assessment and supplementary assessment method for each module should be clearly indicated. If more than one method is used to assess a module, then details should be given of the percentage allowed for each piece of assessed work.

## 7 Benchmark standards

7.1 In this section attainment levels are expressed in terms of learning outcomes. They describe what students are expected to be able to achieve after graduating with an honours degree in Welsh.

7.2 The three levels of attainment are:

- **threshold**, or the minimum attainment expected for the award of an honours degree
- **typical**, or the attainment expected from the majority of honours students
- **excellent**, or the attainment expected from excellent students.

7.3 Normally, a hierarchy of terms is used such as 'ability', 'sound ability' and 'developed ability' to differentiate between the attainment levels.

7.4 Although due attention should be given to each element in assessing attainment, the list is not exhaustive and not all elements are of equal weight. Furthermore, in determining the class to be awarded, weak performance in one aspect may be counterbalanced by a stronger performance in another. Special consideration should be given to language attainment when determining the mark for each module.

7.5 Students may gain an honours degree in Welsh if they possess the necessary knowledge and understanding to enable them to present facts and arguments at threshold level; but an honours degree scheme in Welsh aims to encourage students to reach the typical level, at least, and to produce students who will:

- be able to gather and evaluate information independently
- be able to reason and analyse critically
- be able to present facts and arguments proficiently and effectively
- possess a good number of personal and generic skills, eg in communication, research, interpersonal skills and information and communication technology.

7.6 In other words, a successful degree scheme is expected to inspire students to achieve a higher level than the threshold. Students who are judged outstanding will perform at a level significantly higher than typical and will demonstrate elements of mastery and exact understanding of their subject, as well as originality and discernment.

### **Threshold level**

7.7 On graduating with an honours degree in Welsh, students will be expected to be able to demonstrate:

- a grasp of the syntax and attributes of Welsh
- an ability to recognise, appreciate and employ the expressive power of language
- basic communication skills in speech and writing
- a grasp of the technical terms and vocabulary of the discipline
- a knowledge and understanding of the Welsh language, past and present
- a knowledge and understanding of a range of authors, texts and literary genres in Welsh literature from different periods
- an ability to employ language for creative and imaginative purposes
- familiarity with the chief information sources in the field and an ability to gather information from a variety of sources
- familiarity with a number of the ideas and values presented through the language and its literature
- an ability to evaluate primary and secondary sources
- an ability to analyse familiar literary texts
- an ability to respond to an opinion and to express a personal opinion
- an ability to summarise the ideas and arguments of others.

### **Typical level**

7.8 On graduating with an honours degree in Welsh, students will be expected to be able to demonstrate:

- a sound grasp of the syntax and attributes of Welsh
- a sound ability to recognise, appreciate and employ the expressive power of language
- clear and effective communication skills, in an appropriate style, in speech and writing, across a range of contexts
- a good grasp of the technical terms and vocabulary of the discipline
- a sound knowledge and understanding of the Welsh language, past and present
- a sound knowledge and understanding of a range of authors, texts and literary genres in Welsh literature from different periods, and the ability to compare them and place them in their broader historical, literary and linguistic context
- a sound ability to employ language for creative and imaginative purposes
- a sound knowledge of the standard information sources in the field and an ability to gather relevant and reliable information from a substantial number of written, oral and electronic sources and use it intelligently and to effect
- familiarity with a good number of the ideas and values presented through the language and its literature and the ability to respond critically to them

- an ability to evaluate primary and secondary sources in a sound and balanced way and to use them to effect
- an ability to analyse familiar and unfamiliar literary texts critically and in detail, and to respond to them in an intelligent and balanced way
- an ability to respond to an opinion, to express a balanced personal opinion, and to present and develop an argument in a clear and logical fashion
- an ability to summarise the ideas and arguments of others in a fair and balanced way.

### **Excellent level**

7.9 On graduating with an honours degree in Welsh, students will be expected to be able to demonstrate:

- an excellent grasp of the syntax and attributes of Welsh
- a developed ability to recognise, appreciate and employ the expressive power of language
- accurate, clear and effective communication skills, in an appropriate style, in speech and writing, across a wide range of contexts
- an excellent grasp of the technical terms and vocabulary of the discipline
- an excellent knowledge and understanding of the Welsh language, historically and contemporary
- an excellent knowledge and understanding of a range of authors, texts and literary genres in Welsh literature from different periods, and a developed ability to compare them and place them in their broader historical, literary and linguistic context
- an excellent ability to employ language for creative and imaginative purposes
- an excellent knowledge of the standard information sources in the field and an ability to gather relevant and reliable information from a wide range of written, oral and electronic sources and use it incisively and to effect
- a mastery of a wide range of the ideas and values presented through the language and its literature and a developed ability to respond critically to them
- a developed ability to evaluate primary and secondary sources in an incisive and balanced way and use them to effect
- a developed ability to analyse familiar and unfamiliar literary texts critically and in detail, and to respond to them in an incisive and balanced way
- a developed ability to respond to an opinion and to express a mature personal opinion, and present and develop an extended argument clearly, logically and coherently
- a developed ability to summarise the ideas and arguments of others in a fair and balanced way.

## **Appendix A: Membership of the review group for the subject benchmark statement for Welsh**

Dr Dylan Foster Evans	Cardiff University
Dr Ian Hughes	Aberystwyth University
Dr Christine Jones	University of Wales, Lampeter
Dr A Cynfael Lake	Swansea University
Professor Peredur I Lynch (Secretary)	Association for the Study of Welsh Language and Literature/Bangor University
Professor Gerwyn Williams	Bangor University
Professor Gruffydd Aled Williams (Chair)	Association for the Study of Welsh Language and Literature/Aberystwyth University



## **Appendix B: Membership of the original benchmarking group for Welsh**

Details below appear as published in the original subject benchmark statement for Welsh (2002).

Professor Sioned Davies	Cardiff University
Dr Bleddyn Owen Huws	University of Wales, Aberystwyth
Dr E Wyn James	Cardiff University
Professor Branwen Jarvis	University of Wales, Bangor
Professor Dafydd Johnston	University of Wales, Swansea
Professor Glyn E Jones	Cardiff University
Dr Brynley F Roberts (Chair)	
Professor D A Thorne	University of Wales, Lampeter
Professor Gruffydd Aled Williams	University of Wales, Aberystwyth