

Subject benchmark statement

Housing studies

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How can I use this document?

This document is a subject benchmark statement for housing studies that defines what can be expected of a graduate in the subject, in terms of what they might know, do and understand at the end of their studies.

You may want to read this document if you are:

- involved in the design, delivery and review of programmes of study in housing studies or related subjects
- a prospective student thinking about studying housing studies, 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 in housing studies.

Explanations of unfamiliar terms used in this subject benchmark statement can be found in the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education's (QAA's) glossary.¹

¹ The QAA glossary is available at: www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us/glossary.

About subject benchmark statements

Subject benchmark statements form part of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code) which sets out the Expectations that all providers of UK higher education reviewed by QAA are required to meet.² They are a component of *Part A: Setting and maintaining academic standards*, which includes the Expectation that higher education providers 'consider and take account of relevant subject benchmark statements' in order to secure threshold academic standards.³

Subject benchmark statements describe the nature of study and the academic standards expected of graduates in specific subject areas, and in respect of particular qualifications. They provide a picture of what graduates in a particular subject might reasonably be expected to know, do and understand at the end of their programme of study.

Subject benchmark statements are used as reference points in the design, delivery and review of academic programmes. They provide general guidance for articulating the learning outcomes associated with the programme 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 programme design within a framework agreed by the subject community. Further guidance about programme design, development and approval, learning and teaching, assessment of students, and programme monitoring and review is available in *Part B: Assuring and enhancing academic quality* of the Quality Code in the following Chapters:⁴

- *Chapter B1: Programme design, development and approval*
- *Chapter B3: Learning and teaching*
- *Chapter B6: Assessment of students and the recognition of prior learning*
- *Chapter B8: Programme monitoring and review.*

For some subject areas, higher education providers may need to consider other reference points in addition to the subject benchmark statement in designing, delivering and reviewing programmes. These may include requirements set out by professional, statutory and regulatory bodies; national occupational standards and industry or employer expectations. In such cases, the subject benchmark statement may provide additional guidance around academic standards not covered by these requirements.⁵ The relationship between academic and professional or regulatory requirements is made clear within individual statements, but it is the responsibility of individual higher education providers to decide how they use this information. The responsibility for academic standards remains with the higher education provider who awards the degree.

Subject benchmark statements are written and maintained by subject specialists drawn from and acting on behalf of the subject community. The process is facilitated by QAA. 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.

² The Quality Code, available at www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code, aligns with the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*, available at: www.engq.eu/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/ESG_3edition-2.pdf.

³ *Part A: Setting and maintaining academic standards*, available at: www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code/quality-code-part-a.

⁴ Individual Chapters are available at: www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code/quality-code-part-b.

⁵ See further *Part A: Setting and maintaining academic standards*, available at: www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code/quality-code-part-a.

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. The Quality Code does not interpret legislation nor does it incorporate statutory or regulatory requirements. Sources of information about other requirements and examples of guidance and good practice are signposted within the subject benchmark statement where appropriate. Higher education providers are responsible for how they use these resources.⁶

Equality and diversity

The Quality Code embeds consideration of equality and diversity matters throughout. Promoting equality involves treating everyone with equal dignity and worth, while also raising aspirations and supporting achievement for people with diverse requirements, entitlements and backgrounds. An inclusive environment for learning anticipates the varied requirements of learners, and aims to ensure that all students have equal access to educational opportunities. Higher education providers, staff and students all have a role in, and responsibility for, promoting equality.

Equality of opportunity involves enabling access for people who have differing individual requirements as well as eliminating arbitrary and unnecessary barriers to learning. In addition, disabled students and non-disabled students are offered learning opportunities that are equally accessible to them, by means of inclusive design wherever possible and by means of reasonable individual adjustments wherever necessary.

⁶ See further the *UK Quality Code for Higher Education: General Introduction*, available at: www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication/?PubID=181.

About this subject benchmark statement

This subject benchmark statement refers to bachelor's degrees with honours in housing studies.⁷

This version of the statement forms its second edition, following initial publication in 2007.⁸

Note on alignment with higher education sector coding systems

Programmes of study which use this subject benchmark statement as a reference point are generally classified under the following codes in the Joint Academic Coding System (JACS):⁹

K110 (Architectural design theory); K190 (Architecture not elsewhere classified); K200 (Building); K251 (Property development); K310 (Landscape architecture); K400 (Planning (urban, rural & regional)); K410 (Regional planning); K420 (Urban & rural planning); K421 (Urban planning); K422 (Rural planning); K440 (Urban studies); K430 (Planning studies); K460 (Transport planning); K490 (Planning (urban, rural & regional) not elsewhere classified); L100 (Economics); L113 (Economic policy); L217 (Environmentalism); L120 (Microeconomics); L130 (Macroeconomics); L170 (Economic systems); L190 (Economics not elsewhere classified); L231 (Public administration); L232 (UK constitutional studies); L300 (Sociology); L311 (Applied criminology); L360 (Socio-economics); L370 (Social theory); L400 (Social policy); L410 (UK social policy); L430 (Public policy); L431 (Health policy); L432 (Welfare policy); L722 (Urban geography); L728 (Human Demography); L790 (Human & social geography not elsewhere classified); L900 (Others in social studies); M100 (Law by area).

Summary of changes from the previous subject benchmark statement (2007)

The review group (2014) have made minor changes to the original subject benchmark statement. Most notably, within the benchmark standards the typical standards have been removed and the threshold standards have been updated. This includes an additional reference to collaborative working methods, which have become a common factor within the social housing sector, and to housing and partner organisation management of services. Throughout the document there has been additional consideration of the skills graduates require, in relation to the purpose of private and public sector housing and analysis of social, space and environmental problems.

It is expected that the subject of housing studies will continue to develop in response to the needs of society. This revision of the document aims to encourage an outward-facing curriculum. The review has taken into account the need for a perspective that includes further understanding and integration of influences and policy changes that impact on the future needs of the sector.

⁷ Bachelor's degrees are at level 6 in *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (2008) and level 10 in the *Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework* (2001), and master's degrees are at level 7 and level 11 respectively.

⁸ Further information is available in the *Recognition scheme for subject benchmark statements*, available at: www.gaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=190#.VCvYkXhwaic.

⁹ Further information about JACS is available at: www.hesa.ac.uk/content/view/1776/649/.

1 Introduction and defining principles

1.1 The purpose of this subject benchmark statement is to make explicit for the subject community of housing studies the nature and academic standards of bachelor's degrees with honours carrying this subject in their title, or containing housing studies as a significant part of their programme content.

1.2 The guidance set out here is therefore purposefully wider than that required to inform only those associated with professional housing studies programmes. The subject benchmark statement establishes generic academic standards for housing studies and provides a point of reference for programme development. The Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH)¹⁰ continues to influence the learning outcomes of professionally accredited housing programmes, such as foundation degrees, but this subject benchmark statement has evolved quite separately. Academics from the housing studies subject area throughout the UK have worked collaboratively in the production and subsequent review and revision of this subject benchmark statement. While the importance of the CIH's role in representing the requirements of employers in the housing sector is recognised, this subject benchmark statement reflects the rich diversity of the subject area and its provision.

1.3 Housing studies provision may be located within a range of other subject areas such as business and management, town and country planning, sociology, social policy, surveying, and geography, some of which have their own subject benchmark statement. Modules may be independent or shared with other subjects as part of interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary programme provision. Programmes may be completed by full or part-time study or distance or blended learning.

1.4 This subject benchmark statement sets out the knowledge, understanding and skills gained by students completing a housing studies bachelor's degree programme. The statement specifies threshold academic standards for housing graduates at the end of their programme of study. The guidance is designed to assist higher education providers in designing and approving programmes of study and for other quality assurance purposes; external examiners, internal and external academic reviewers in verifying and comparing academic standards; employers and students who would like more information about housing studies and its graduates; and the professional body and other awarding agencies who have an interest in accrediting and reviewing housing programmes.

1.5 The benchmark statement provides a framework for developing and delivering a housing studies bachelor's degree programme (including linked programmes such as foundation degrees and degree top-ups). It does not differentiate between modes of study, nor specify how learning outcomes are achieved; rather it contains both indicative and suggestive guidance. Further guidance on foundation degrees can be found in *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland*¹¹ and the *Foundation Degree qualification benchmark*.¹² The Building Futures Group, incorporating the sector skills council for the property, facilities management, housing and cleaning industries, provides additional reference points for the development of foundation degrees.¹³

1.6 This subject benchmark statement has been prepared with the intention of clarifying the essential ingredients of a housing studies bachelor's degree programme. This clearly

¹⁰ Chartered Institute of Housing, available at: www.cih.org/.

¹¹ *Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications in England Wales and Northern Ireland*, available at: www.gaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication/?PubID=2718#.VDJm43hwaid.

¹² *Foundation Degree qualification benchmark*, available at: www.gaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/Foundation-degree-qualification-benchmark-2010.pdf.

¹³ The Building Futures Group, available at: www.thebuildingfuturesgroup.com/.

signals that housing studies has a distinctive identity rather than being seen as a branch of, for example, applied social policy or town and country planning.

1.7 A housing studies curriculum is designed to reflect the spirit of this subject benchmark statement. While learning, teaching and assessment strategies are determined by individual degree-awarding bodies, this subject benchmark statement also provides advice specific to the subject area.

2 Nature and extent of housing studies

2.1 Housing studies is concerned with the production, consumption and experience of housing. It is a field of study which brings together a blend of academic perspectives as well as social experience. These include sociology, economics, politics, law, social policy, management studies, geography, construction, architecture, urban design, neighbourhood planning and the housing market, and how these impact on the environment and wealth.

2.2 Housing studies is a field of study, the starting point of which is a focus on residential buildings and their neighbourhoods, the organisations that provide and manage those buildings and the people who live in them (or who would like to) in equal measure. Health, well-being and social care are primary concerns as well as understanding the social, economic, legal, physical and other processes involved in the production, consumption and exchange of dwellings within a housing system.

2.3 The aim of a housing studies education is to provide graduates with the skills, knowledge and professional ethics which enable an analysis of people and their homes in the context of (or in relation to) social need, social, cultural and economic change and public policy frameworks.

2.4 Housing studies is a multidisciplinary subject, operating within an environment of substantial change. The boundaries of housing studies are, therefore, broad and flexible. As an academic subject, it draws upon a range of theoretical influences and applies these to practical situations. It offers students transferable skills appropriate to a range of employment opportunities associated with people and their homes.

2.5 This subject benchmark statement reflects the broad and flexible nature of the subject and provides a context within which the professional requirements for CIH chartered membership can be delivered. These requirements are contained within the CIH specification for chartered membership.¹⁴

¹⁴ Membership of The Chartered Institute of Housing, available at: www.cih.org/membership

3 Subject knowledge, understanding and skills

3.1 The study of housing draws upon the intellectual traditions and perspective of housing and other social policy research areas. Students gain an understanding of the nature and appropriate use of diverse research strategies.

3.2 The list that follows represents the core knowledge and understanding of a housing studies programme.

- Knowledge of the origins and development of housing. An understanding of the reasons for state intervention in the residential housing market and the changing nature of the production, consumption and experience of housing.
- Knowledge of variable housing markets. An understanding of wider cultural, social and economic factors which underpin national or international housing.
- Knowledge of the institutions responsible for housing provision and legal frameworks. An understanding of the policy context including central-local relations, tiers of governance, and contractual requirements.
- Knowledge of governance at macro, meso and micro levels including different frameworks across the UK, national frameworks and international comparative housing systems. An understanding of regulatory processes and the importance of holding landlords to account.
- Knowledge of the specific models of housing policy formulation and implementation. An understanding of interactions between the housing sector and the wider public policy agenda including welfare reforms, community planning, and crime in community. An understanding of market-oriented approaches while working with vulnerable people as well as inter-collaborative working and managing risk.
- Knowledge of the housing needs of different groups in the population and the extent to which some people may experience advantage or disadvantage according to their position in the housing system.
Knowledge of comparative approaches to international housing systems.
- An understanding of policy responses to common housing problems in different contexts. Knowledge of how the housing system impacts on society welfare, the economy and the environment.
- Knowledge of theoretical perspectives, conceptual frameworks and policy imperatives for housing research. An understanding of different housing research methods and methodologies and their relative strengths and weaknesses; and how to interpret various forms of primary and secondary data sources.
- Knowledge of the ways in which people can be involved in decisions about their neighbourhoods.
- Knowledge of how housing organisations and their partners manage their services. An understanding of business strategies and the various approaches to organising those services. An understanding of service delivery, and the interaction of housing with the wider policy agenda.
- Knowledge of key principles in housing finance and economics. An understanding of supply and demand of housing in the market and in other allocative systems, changing housing systems and their impacts on the wider environment.
- Knowledge of housing design, the housing development process, dwelling upkeep and environmental sustainability. An understanding of forms, methods and issues in renewal, refurbishment and the regeneration of places, place making and place management.

3.3 Housing studies comprises a unique blend of skills that contribute to the development of independent learners and reflective practitioners. In this context a reflective practitioner is someone who is able to relate theory and knowledge gained from their academic studies and apply it to housing or other work environments.

3.4 Graduates in housing studies are able to understand a range of influences and policy changes that impact on a person's situation. Generally they have:

- an appreciation of diversity and inequalities in the housing system, the relationships between housing markets and policy implementation and people and their homes
- the ability to interpret the social and environmental implications of the way housing is provided, designed and managed
- the ability to apply and interpret legal principles in relation to the provision and consumption of housing
- the ability to appraise comparative housing systems
- the ability to interpret and use housing research findings
- an appreciation of the range of organisational and management techniques used in housing and to recognise when they may be used
- the ability to interpret, apply and use financial frameworks and accountancy practices
- the ability to employ effective communication with other professionals to resolve housing-related problems
- the ability to integrate all these in the application of their duties.

Generic transferable skills

3.5 Graduates in housing studies generally have:

- independent learning and study skills
- self-management and motivation
- interpersonal and team-working skills
- negotiation and mediation skills
- written and oral communication skills in a variety of contexts and modes
- information gathering, retrieval and application skills
- information and communications technology skills
- numeracy skills
- self-awareness and critical reflection
- creativity, innovation and problem-solving skills.

4 Teaching, learning and assessment

- 4.1 The desired outcomes of a bachelor's degree in housing studies are to produce independent learners who have a range of knowledge, resources and skills appropriate to their level of study, and who have the capacity for independent thought, critical awareness and appreciation of diversity in the analysis of housing issues.
- 4.2 Specific teaching, learning and assessment aims demonstrate a commitment to knowledge acquisition, conceptual understanding, reflection on performance, and the encouragement of lifelong learning.
- 4.3 A housing studies programme has a teaching, learning and assessment strategy which makes explicit and demonstrable the appropriateness of the methods used in relation to the anticipated learning outcomes and skills being developed, linked to the mode of delivery and the student's profile. It is anticipated that the strategy has been informed by internal and external good practice guidance. It includes a variety of approaches to teaching, learning and assessment which reflect and accommodate a variety of learning styles, student needs and opportunities for work-based learning.
- 4.4 It is anticipated that the strategy emphasises a student-centred approach to teaching, learning and assessment. This includes a commitment that students are provided with full and accurate documentation relating to their programme of study. Learning outcomes for each module are specified and achievable. An indication of relevant reading and other resources and the means of assessment are documented and distributed to students. Published criteria are available for all summative methods of assessment.
- 4.5 Teaching and learning methods are likely to include lectures, tutorials, seminars and self-directed study. Other methods including e-learning, group projects, peer working, negotiated learning and (where appropriate) work-based learning are likely to complement the aims and objectives of the programme. It is desirable that there is an opportunity for extended individual research, which may be presented in the form of a dissertation.
- 4.6 The assessment methods adopted aim to measure achievement, both formatively and summatively over the whole of the degree programme. Methods reflect progression within the programme and allow for assessment of both skills and knowledge. Specific assessment tasks ensure that students are able to demonstrate achievement of at least the threshold standard.
- 4.7 The strategy incorporates mechanisms for reviewing teaching, learning and assessment. It is explicit about how the strategy informs and is informed by staff and staff-related development plans.
- 4.8 There is an appropriate mechanism to recognise prior knowledge and experience (with exemptions if and where relevant).

5 Benchmark standards

5.1 It is assumed that the benchmark standards for housing studies may be met through a wide variety of curricula and assessment modes. It is expected that all students awarded a bachelor's degree with honours meet the threshold standard, set out below, in all areas. The threshold standard describes the minimally acceptable standard that students must achieve to be awarded an honours degree. In addition, where there is an integration of academic and professional requirements, meeting these standards allows students to meet the requirements of the professional body.

Subject knowledge and skills

5.2 On successful completion of an honours degree programme in housing studies, students should be able to:

- demonstrate a basic knowledge of, and provide mainly accurate and detailed information which evaluates the origins and development of housing, the reasons for state intervention in the housing market, the changing nature of the production, consumption and the experience of housing
- identify and appraise the institutions responsible for housing provision, and the appropriate legal frameworks, and examine the policy context including central-local relations, tiers of governance, and contractual requirements
- list, explain and differentiate between the specific models of housing policy formulation and implementation and identify the interactions between the housing sector and the wider public policy agenda
- demonstrate and differentiate between the specific models of housing policy formulation and implementation, and identify the interactions between the housing sector and the wider public policy agenda
- identify and distinguish between the housing needs of different groups in the population and describe and debate the reasons why some people experience advantage or disadvantage in the housing system
- describe and debate comparative approaches to housing systems and analyse policy responses to common housing problems in different social contexts
- contrast theoretical perspectives, conceptual frameworks and policy imperatives for housing research and employ and analyse different research methods and methodologies
- demonstrate how to construct and interpret various forms of primary data sources and how to use and interrogate secondary data sources
- examine and relate the ways in which people can be involved in decisions about their neighbourhoods
- discuss and analyse how housing organisations deliver and manage their services
- recognise and compare business strategies and the various approaches to organising services
- discuss and distinguish between the key principles in housing finance and economics
- describe and examine supply and demand of housing in the market and in other allocative systems
- review and appraise housing design, the housing development process, dwelling upkeep and environmental sustainability
- discuss and compare forms, methods and issues in renewal, refurbishment and regeneration
- work collaboratively in achieving the above.

Generic skills

5.3 On successful completion of an honours degree programme in housing studies, students should be able to:

- take personal responsibility for learning, effectively communicate ideas and demonstrate conceptual understanding
- collaborate with others in assessed and non-assessed learning activities, including other subject professionals
- apply a variety of information and communications technology packages and assemble and evaluate information, including data, from a range of sources
- formulate alternative solutions for resolving problems and responding to issues
- judge and appraise different outcomes
- reflect on and evaluate their personal development.

Appendix: Membership of the benchmarking and review groups for the subject benchmark statement for housing studies

Membership of the review group for the subject benchmark statement for housing studies (2014)

Professor Isobel Anderson	University of Stirling
Julie Clarke	Northumbria University Newcastle

Professor Paddy Gray (Chair)	University of Ulster
Roger Keller	Chartered Institute of Housing
Keith Kintrea	University of Glasgow
Nigel Sprigings	University of Glasgow
Janet Bohrer	QAA
Brigitte Stockton	QAA

Employer representative

Dr Ed Ferrari	Housing Studies Association
	University of Glasgow

Student Reader

Neil Wilkinson	University of Glasgow
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Membership of the original benchmarking group for housing studies (2007)

Details below appear as published in the original subject benchmark statement.

Julie Clark	University of Northumbria at Newcastle
Veronica Coatham (Chair)	University of Central England in Birmingham
Paddy Gray	University of Ulster
Dr Craig Gurney	Cardiff University
Stephen Hills	Sheffield Hallam University
Trevor Humphreys	Chartered Institute of Housing
Jane Kettle	Leeds Metropolitan University
Tony Manzi	University of Westminster
Dr Duncan Smith	University of Stirling
Nigel Sprigings	University of Salford
Rebecca Tunstall	London School of Economics
Jane Wafer	North East Wales Institute

Contributors

Andrew Dixon	University of Central England in Birmingham
Professor Anne Hill	University of Central England in Birmingham
Roger Keller	Chartered Institute of Housing

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Southgate House, Southgate Street, Gloucester GL1 1UB

Tel: 01452 557 000

Email: enquiries@qaa.ac.uk

Website: www.qaa.ac.uk

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