



# **Subject benchmark statement**

## **Education studies**

**Draft for consultation January 2007**

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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 such 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 was produced by a group of subject specialists drawn from, and acting on behalf of, the subject community. The final draft subject benchmark statement went through a full consultation with the wider academic community and stakeholder groups. The process was overseen by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA). This subject benchmark statement will be revised no later than five years from its publication date, to reflect developments in the subject area and the experiences of HEIs and others who have been working with it. The review process will be overseen by QAA in collaboration with the subject community.

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* (DDA) 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 Disability Rights Commission (DRC) has published guidance<sup>3</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>4</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 DRC revised *Code of Practice: Post-16 Education*<sup>5</sup>, and also through the Equality Challenge Unit<sup>6</sup> which is established to promote equality and diversity in higher education.

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

<sup>3</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 the DRC at [www.drc-gb.org/library/publications/disability\\_equality\\_duty/further\\_and\\_higher\\_education.aspx](http://www.drc-gb.org/library/publications/disability_equality_duty/further_and_higher_education.aspx)

<sup>4</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>5</sup> Copies of the DRC revised *Code of Practice: Post-16 Education* may be obtained from the DRC at [www.drc-gb.org/employers\\_and\\_service\\_provider/education/higher\\_education.aspx](http://www.drc-gb.org/employers_and_service_provider/education/higher_education.aspx)

<sup>6</sup> Equality Challenge Unit: [www.ecu.ac.uk/](http://www.ecu.ac.uk/)

## **Foreword**

The original subject benchmark statement for education studies, published in 2000, aimed to ensure a comprehensive view of the subject while not constraining those designing courses in this area. It was intended that the statement would offer support in the continuing growth of education studies within higher education (HE) and, as such, it was hoped that it would encourage and enhance the process of development. When these subject benchmark statements were first compiled, it was on the understanding that they would be regularly reviewed and amended to reflect changes in the subject and the experiences of institutions and academics working with them. This revised subject benchmark statement is the result of that review process.

In recent years, education studies has grown a great deal in terms of both numbers of students and courses available. With this in mind, the review group for education studies began by seeking opinions from the subject community on the continuing suitability of the existing subject benchmark statement. The general consensus arising out of this exercise was that this subject benchmark statement still proved to be useful and reflected the spirit in which it had been written. Thus, it was suggested that only minor changes were required. However, the original division of the benchmark standards into three categories of 'threshold', 'modal' and 'best' in terms of student attainment had caused users some confusion as to their purpose and interpretation. While many of the amendments made in the revision process involve updating content and terminology, the three categories have now been replaced with one set of benchmark standards.

We hope that the communities who use this subject benchmark statement will continue to find it to be of value in the development of education studies as a subject within HE.

**January 2007**

# 1 Introduction

1.1 This subject benchmark statement has been prepared to assist HEIs and higher education providers in the design and development of courses in education studies. Particular attention has been paid to the identification of the distinctive features of the subject, setting these within the overall context of the programmes and awards of the HEI.

1.2 It is recognised that education studies is often set in the context of programmes which themselves have broader contexts, and this is taken into account in this subject benchmark statement.

1.3 This subject benchmark statement is provided to assist the design of undergraduate degree programmes in education studies. The benchmark standards express minimum or threshold performance for students successfully completing such programmes. This is not a statement for awards and should be used only for general comparative purposes.

1.4 While this subject benchmark statement is focused on programmes which lead to honours degrees, studies in areas of education often provide academic foundations for professional groups in many formal and informal fields of education. It is therefore anticipated that this subject benchmark statement might offer useful points of reference for the design of other programmes in which education studies have a part to play. Likewise, this subject benchmark statement could be drawn on for the design of other undergraduate programmes such as early childhood education or youth and community education<sup>7</sup>.

1.5 The information about the subject benchmark statement for education studies does not set out any specific or detailed requirements for course content, methods of teaching, learning, or assessment. HEIs will be expected to make their own decisions on these matters, and demonstrate how these are designed to meet the subject benchmark statement.

## 2 Nature and extent of education studies

2.1 Education studies has evolved from its origins in the theoretical basis for teacher education devised during the 1960s for the Bachelor of Education degree. It is now a subject in its own right with an identity, distinct from the National Standards for Teacher Training. The academic community has constructed the subject in a variety of forms and any course is a selection from a wide array of content and methods.

2.2 Essentially, education studies is concerned with understanding how people develop and learn throughout their lives, and the nature of knowledge and critical engagement with ways of knowing and understanding. It offers intellectually rigorous analysis of educational processes, systems and approaches, and their cultural, societal, political and historical contexts. Many courses include the study of broader

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<sup>7</sup> At the time of reviewing the subject benchmark statement for education studies, there is interest in developing separate subject benchmark statements for these subject areas. With this in mind, the Review group has retained the broad perspective of the original subject benchmark statement to allow these programmes to continue to use it, as appropriate, until new subject benchmark statements are recognised and published by QAA.

perspectives such as international education, economic relationships, the effects of globalisation and the role of education in human rights and ecological issues. All include critique of current policies and practice and challenge assumptions.

2.3 There are differing theoretical models for education studies. It can be seen as a 'subject' defined by its curriculum content and drawing selectively upon the methods of the contributory disciplines of psychology, sociology, philosophy, history and economics. Others regard education studies as a 'discipline' with its own academic community, its own distinctive discourse and methods of enquiry.

2.4 Graduates are able to participate in constantly changing discourses exemplified by reference to debate about values, personal and social engagement, and how these relate to communities and societies. Students have opportunities to develop their critical capabilities through the selection, analysis and synthesis of relevant perspectives, and to be able to justify different positions on educational matters.

2.5 While not a programme of training in itself, an education studies course provides the knowledge, understanding and critical analysis to inform current and future professionals. The subject offers individuals a strong basis for the wide range of employment opportunities now available in educational institutions, as well as in other organisations and economic enterprises engaged in education and training.

2.6 The subject benchmark statement has been constructed under a number of strands that reflect the nature of education studies. These are:

- knowledge and understanding
- application
- reflection
- transferable skills.

2.7 While it can be helpful to specify these as discrete strands for the purposes of discussion, planning and assessment, it is also important to recognise that they exist as a single unity. The connection between these strands is therefore of particular significance as it encourages an appropriate development of integrated theories and practices within education studies. The 'transferable skills' are generally derived from the other three strands. These are used as the basis of the organisation of the benchmark standards in section 7.

### **3 The subject in context**

3.1 Like many subjects, education studies is in a constant state of change and development, and this statement is set in time and place.

3.2 Education studies provides an academic basis for practitioners in formal and informal contexts of education as well as a framework for understanding some aspects of human and social development. These contexts and phases encompass a diverse range of groups within educational settings: education administration; community development; health/social care environments; human resources and the voluntary sector.

3.3 Once the purpose of a programme in education studies is determined, the specific knowledge, skills, understandings and attitudes may be identified. The particular content and focus of any given programme will vary according to the stated aims and rationale, but will be demonstrably appropriate to the needs of the target group.

3.4 Education studies has been seen as an important subject in its own right as well as a partner in a number of subject combinations within joint honours programmes. Thus, students combine education studies with sports science, English, drama, religious studies, geography and similar. It is seen as a very useful area of study for students planning careers that involve working with people in a variety of contexts. For some education studies students, employability will relate directly to teaching. However, others will consider working in areas such as personnel management, welfare and health services, retail, publishing and a wide range of other areas. Education studies may also be of value to students who wish to understand their own development as reflective lifelong learners.

## **4 Defining principles**

4.1 All programmes in education studies will relate to a set of principles. Programmes should:

- draw on a wide range of intellectual resources, theoretical perspectives and academic disciplines to illuminate understanding of education and the contexts within which it takes place
- provide students with a broad and balanced knowledge and understanding of the principal features of education in a wide range of contexts
- encourage students to engage with fundamental questions concerning the aims and values of education and its relationship to society
- provide opportunities for students to appreciate the problematic nature of educational theory, policy and practice
- encourage the interrogation of educational processes in a wide variety of contexts
- develop in students the ability to construct and sustain a reasoned argument about educational issues in a clear, lucid and coherent manner
- promote a range of qualities in students including intellectual independence and critical engagement with evidence.

## **5 Subject strands**

### **Knowledge and understanding**

5.1 A necessary feature of an undergraduate honours degree in education studies is an intellectually rigorous study of educational processes, and the cultural, political and historical contexts within which they are embedded. While individual courses within degree programmes may have a focus upon particular age groups, or learning and teaching, or particular contexts and education systems, they will provide students with opportunities to engage in critical reflection and debate. Students should have the opportunity to engage with a number of different perspectives and to evaluate aims and values, means and ends, and the validity of the education issues in question.

5.2 In order to achieve this, students will need to draw upon contemporary research and other relevant educational literature. Students will also require an awareness of relevant concepts and theories from across a range of appropriate disciplines.

5.3 Degree programmes should enable students to demonstrate that they have acquired the ability to understand theoretical knowledge and research evidence about:

- the processes of learning, including some of the key paradigms and their impact on educational practices
- the effects of social, economic and cultural factors on learning, including politics and education policies, moral, religious and philosophical underpinnings, and issues of social justice
- formal and informal contexts for learning. Educational contexts will include some understanding of their own education system and other education systems, and the values underpinning their organisation
- the complex interactions between education and its contexts, and relationships with other disciplines and professions.

5.4 Courses should provide opportunities for students to:

- analyse educational issues systematically
- evaluate education policy in an informed and systematic way
- accommodate to new principles and new knowledge
- apply key principles across educational systems.

## **Application**

5.5 Programmes should enable students to apply their subject knowledge and understanding through:

- the analysis of complex situations concerning human learning and development in particular contexts, including their own learning
- the use of examples of the implementation of policies in practice
- the accommodation of new ideas and the provision of well argued conclusions relating to issues, such as the impact of globalisation on education systems, social justice, sustainable development, social inclusion and the knowledge economy
- consideration of the international and intercultural dimension of education, the effect of the increasing use of the internet, and the impact of increased worldwide mobility.

## **Reflection**

5.6 Courses should provide opportunities for students to:

- reflect on their own value systems, development and practices
- question concepts and theories encountered in their studies
- interrogate the assumptions underpinning theory and research
- reflect on their own development and practices.

## **Transferable skills**

5.7 These transferable skills are derived from the three preceding strands. They are characteristic of education but need not be unique to it. Courses should be designed so that, by the end of their degree programme, students should be able to demonstrate ability to:

- construct and communicate oral and written arguments
- use information and communication technology (ICT), including word processing, databases, internet communication, information retrieval and online searches
- interpret and present relevant numerical information
- work with others, as a result of the development of interpersonal skills, to demonstrate the capacity to plan, to share goals, and work as a member of a team
- improve their own learning and performance, including the development of study and research skills, information retrieval, and a capacity to plan and manage learning, and to reflect on their own learning
- analyse, synthesise, evaluate, and identify problems and solutions.

5.8 Students following courses leading to a teaching qualification may also have to comply with other national requirements.

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

6.1 The ways in which teaching and learning take place in education studies should reflect and inform the principles of the subject itself. Attention therefore has to be given to the ways in which students develop:

- knowledge and understanding
- application of key principles to related contexts
- the ability to reflect on salient issues
- transferable skills.

6.2 It is of paramount importance that these are not treated as discrete or separate aspects of education studies, but cohere to form a unified discipline. There is therefore an understanding that teaching, learning and assessment will be closely interrelated, and be seen by students to be related.

6.3 Approaches to assessment will be expected to support student learning, and the teaching which promotes that learning. This should be made explicit, with aims, tasks and criteria for grading clearly defined. Assessment should reflect the developing abilities of students. Students are entitled to demonstrate the full range of their knowledge and understanding as well as their capacity to apply and reflect these abilities. In particular, students are likely to have to undertake a range of appropriate methods of assessment, which derive from the policies and approaches to teaching and learning in particular courses and modules.

6.4 Teaching, learning and assessment have to be interrelated, with synoptic thinking being at the heart of work in education studies. Assessment should help support and develop the abilities of students. The application of benchmark standards should, in turn, support all teaching and learning.

## **7 Benchmark standards**

7.1 The following benchmark standards are defined for students studying a single honours degree in education studies. It is understood that students may follow an education studies programme in a wide range of academic and professional contexts including, for example, a joint honours programme; programmes with 'major' and 'minor' studies; or a professionally focused honours programme. No judgement is made about how much subject knowledge and understanding might be required in a joint honours programme. Where students study education studies as part of a degree programme, HEIs will need to clarify the extent to which the benchmark standards should be met.

7.2 Where students are undertaking the study of education as part of a programme of professional training, their stance on the benchmark standards on application (paragraph 7.5) will be contextualised within that programme. Similarly, professionals undertaking a post-experience honours degree programme covered by these benchmark standards might well focus on a specialist theme, such as mathematics education, special education, or lifelong learning, and will demonstrate a deeper awareness of this area. It would be appropriate that such students would demonstrate their learning only in a specific area or areas relevant to their academic or professional context. Individual HEIs will wish to articulate their stance with regard to the benchmark standards in light of their own student groups and perspectives, and programme specifications will amplify the connections between the benchmark standards and the programme's desired learning outcomes.

7.3 The following set of benchmark standards is the performance specified for a student successfully completing a programme leading to an honours award. The following standards do not prescribe levels of performance. A graduate in education studies may demonstrate achievement of these outcomes at different levels and to a greater or lesser extent. However, as benchmark standards, there is an expectation that as a minimum all graduates should be able to demonstrate achievement in all of these areas.

### **Knowledge and understanding**

7.4 On graduating with an honours degree in education studies, students will demonstrate:

- an awareness of the underlying values and principles relevant to education studies and a developing personal stance which draws on their knowledge and understanding
- a critical understanding of the diversity of learners and the complexities of the education process
- an understanding of the complexity of the interaction between learning and contexts, and the range of ways in which participants (including learners and teachers) can influence the learning process
- a critical understanding of the societal and organisational structures and purposes of educational systems, and the possible implications for learners and the learning process.

## **Application**

7.5 On graduating with an honours degree in education studies, students will be able to demonstrate an ability to:

- critically analyse educational concepts, theories and issues of policy in a systematic way
- identify and critically reflect on potential connections and discontinuities between each of the aspects of subject knowledge and their application in educational policies and contexts
- accommodate new principles and understandings
- select a range of relevant primary and secondary sources, including theoretical and research-based evidence, to extend their knowledge and understanding
- use a range of evidence to formulate appropriate and justified ways forward and potential changes in practice.

## **Reflection**

7.6 On graduating with an honours degree in education studies, students will be able to demonstrate:

- the ability to reflect on their own and others' value systems
- the ability to use their knowledge and understanding critically to locate and justify a personal position in relation to the subject
- an understanding of the significance and limitations of theory and research.

## **Transferable skills**

### **Communication and presentation**

7.7 On graduating with an honours degree in education studies, students will be able to organise and articulate opinions and arguments in speech and writing using relevant specialist vocabulary.

### **ICT**

7.8 On graduating with an honours degree in education studies, students will be able to use ICT in their study and other appropriate situations.

### **Application of numbers**

7.9 On graduating with an honours degree in education studies, students will be able to:

- collect and apply numerical data, as appropriate
- present data in a variety of formats including graphical and tabular
- analyse and interpret both qualitative and quantitative data.

### **Working with others**

7.10 On graduating with an honours degree in education studies, students will have the ability to collaborate and plan as part of a team, to carry out roles allocated by the team and take the lead where appropriate, and to fulfil agreed responsibilities.

### **Improving own learning and performance**

7.11 On graduating with an honours degree in education studies, students will be able to articulate their own approaches to learning and organise an effective work pattern including working to deadlines.

### **Analytical and problem solving skills**

7.12 On graduating with an honours degree in education studies, students will be able to process and synthesise empirical and theoretical data, to create new syntheses and to present and justify a chosen position having drawn on relevant theoretical perspectives.

## **Appendix A – Membership of the review group for the subject benchmark statement for education studies**

|                          |  |
|--------------------------|--|
| Professor Steve Bartlett | University of Wolverhampton (also representing ESCalate, the Higher Education Academy Education Subject Centre, advanced learning and teaching in education) |
| Dr Daphne Evans          | Trinity College Carmarthen   |
| Dr Alan Hodgkinson       | University of Chester  |
| Dr Hugh Somervell        | University of Worcester  |
| Dr Chris Wakeman         | Staffordshire University   |
| Dr Stephen Ward          | Bath Spa University  |

## **Appendix B – Membership of the original subject benchmarking group for education studies**

|                                |  |
|--------------------------------|--|
| Professor W Carr               | University of Sheffield  |
| Dr L Caul Stranmillis          | University College: A College of the Queen's University of Belfast |
| Ms S B Clipson-Boyles          | Oxford Brookes University  |
| Dr G Crozier                   | Bath Spa University College  |
| Professor T David              | Canterbury Christ Church University College                        |
| Mr M D Fallows                 | University of Plymouth   |
| Mr J Graham                    | University of East London  |
| Ms K A Jacques                 | St Martin's College, Lancaster                                     |
| Professor P Mahony             | Roehampton Institute London  |
| Dr D Matheson                  | University College Northampton                                     |
| Professor B McGettrick (Chair) | University of Glasgow  |
| Dr B MacGilchrist              | Institute of Education, University of London                       |
| Professor P Mahony             | Roehampton Institute London  |
| Mrs J G Menmuir                | University of Strathclyde  |
| Professor K L Oglesby          | Manchester Metropolitan University                                 |
| Professor I Reid               | University of Loughborough   |
| Dr M Robinson                  | University of Brighton   |