



Subject benchmark statement

Education studies: Draft for consultation

September 2014

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How can I use this document?

This document is a subject benchmark statement for education 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 education studies or related subjects
- a prospective student thinking about studying education 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 education 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, 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, available at: www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code/quality-code-part-b.

⁵ See further Quality Code, *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 education studies.⁷

This version of the statement forms its third edition, following initial publication in 2000 and review and revision 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), but not limited to:

X300 (Academic studies in education).⁹

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

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 programmes in this area. It was intended that the statement would offer support in the continuing growth of education studies within higher education and, as such, it was hoped that it would encourage and enhance the process of development. In 2007, minor changes were made to the statement, and the benchmark standards were simplified to present only 'threshold' student attainment rather than three levels of performance. This level of revision reflected the view of the subject community that the existing document remained useful and reflected the spirit in which it had been written.

The current review group concluded that this remained the case, with the existing subject benchmark statement largely fit for purpose as a valuable reference tool. Minor changes have been made to bring it up to date, focusing on contemporary developments such as the impact of technology on education, the importance of global perspectives, the role of education in social justice, and current contexts for education studies.

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).

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

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

1 Introduction

1.1 This subject benchmark statement has been prepared to assist higher education providers in the design and development of programmes 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 provider.

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 The benchmark standards express the minimum or threshold performance for students successfully completing bachelor's degrees with honours in education studies.

1.4 While this subject benchmark statement is focused on programmes which lead to bachelor's degrees with honours, 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 may offer useful points of reference for the design of other programmes in which education studies have a part to play.

1.5 This subject benchmark statement for education studies does not set out any specific or detailed requirements for programme content, methods of teaching, learning, or assessment. Higher education providers make their own decisions on these matters, and demonstrate how these are designed to align with the subject benchmark statement.

2 Nature and extent of education studies

2.1 Education studies has evolved from its origins in teacher education to a subject in its own right. The academic community has constructed the subject in a variety of forms and any programme 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, historical and economic contexts. Many programmes include the study of broader perspectives such as international education, economic relationships, the effects of globalisation and the role of education in human rights and ecological issues. They all include critique of current policies and practice and challenge assumptions.

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

2.4 Graduates are able to participate in and contest 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 An education studies programme provides the knowledge, understanding and critical analysis to inform current and future professionals. This may be achieved through learning in the workplace. The subject offers individuals a strong basis for a wide range of further education, training and employment opportunities.

2.6 This 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 study of 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, such as administration, post-16 learning, children's services, community development, and personal and professional development.

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

3.4 Education studies is a distinctive 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 subjects.

3.5 Education studies may be of value to students who wish to understand their own development as reflective lifelong learners. It is seen as a very useful area of study for students planning careers that involve a range of roles in relation to learning, whatever the context. These include supporting and leading the learning of others, for example as a mentor or coach.

4 Defining principles

4.1 All programmes in education studies:

- draw on a wide range of intellectual resources, theoretical and ethical perspectives and academic subjects 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, values and outcomes 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 learning and 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 a bachelor's degree with honours 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 modules within degree programmes may have a focus upon particular age groups, or learning and teaching, or particular contexts and education systems, they provide students with opportunities to engage in critical reflection and debate. Students 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 draw upon contemporary research and other relevant educational literature. Students also require an awareness of relevant concepts, theories and interdisciplinary approaches from across a range of appropriate subjects.

5.3 Degree programmes 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 cultural, societal, political, historical, technological and economic contexts on learning, including 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
- a range of research perspectives and methodologies applied to education
- the complex interactions between education and its contexts, and relationships with other subjects and professions.

5.4 Programmes provide opportunities for students to:

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

Application

5.5 Programmes 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 and social inclusion
- consideration of the international and intercultural dimension of education, the effect of new technologies, and the impact of increased worldwide mobility.

Reflection

5.6 Programmes 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.

Transferable skills

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

- construct and communicate oral and written arguments
- make effective use of technology
- interpret and present relevant numerical information
- work effectively with others as part of a team, taking different roles
- improve their own learning and performance, through the development of study and research skills, and a capacity to plan, manage and reflect on their own learning
- identify, synthesise, evaluate, and analyse problems and solutions
- respond positively and constructively to changing environments.

6 Teaching, learning and assessment

6.1 The ways in which teaching and learning take place in education studies reflect and inform the principles of the subject itself. Attention is therefore 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 subject. There is an understanding that teaching, learning and assessment are closely interrelated, and are seen by students to be related.

6.3 Approaches to assessment challenge and support all student learning and the teaching which promotes that learning. This is made explicit, with aims, tasks and criteria for grading clearly defined. Students have opportunities to demonstrate the full range of their knowledge and understanding. In particular, students are likely to experience a range of appropriate methods of assessment, which derive from the policies and approaches to teaching and learning in particular programmes and modules. Assessment is characterised by innovative practice and formative feedback which develops the learning of students.

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

7.3 The following set of benchmark standards specify performance for a student successfully completing a programme leading to an honours award, at the threshold. The following standards do not describe levels of performance above the threshold. As benchmark standards, there is an expectation that as a minimum all graduates are able to demonstrate achievement in all of these areas. Furthermore, a graduate in education studies may demonstrate achievement of these outcomes at different levels and to a greater or lesser extent.

Knowledge and understanding

7.4 On graduating with an honours degree in education studies, students should demonstrate a critical understanding of:

- the underlying values, theories and concepts relevant to education
- the diversity of learners and the complexities of the education process
- the complexity of the interaction between learning and local and global contexts, and the extent to which participants (including learners and teachers) can influence the learning process
- 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 should be able to demonstrate the ability to:

- analyse educational concepts, theories and issues of policy in a systematic way
- identify and 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 should 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 should be able to organise and articulate opinions and arguments in speech and writing using relevant specialist vocabulary.

Technology

7.8 On graduating with an honours degree in education studies, students should be able to use technology effectively to enhance critical and reflective study.

Application of numerical skills

7.9 On graduating with an honours degree in education studies, students should 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 should 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 should 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 should 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: Membership of benchmarking and review groups for the subject benchmark statement for education studies

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

| | |
|----------------------------------|---|
| Professor Steve Bartlett (chair) | University of Wolverhampton |
| Dr Victoria Armstrong | St Mary's University College |
| Dr Phil Bassett | Glyndŵr University |
| Mike Binder | Bradford College |
| Dr Will Curtis | University of Warwick |
| Dr Jan Derry | Institute of Education |
| Professor Gary McCulloch | Institute of Education |
| | Society for Educational Studies |
| Alison McLauchlin | University of Hertfordshire |
| Dr Mark Murphy | University of Glasgow |
| | British Education Studies Association (BESA) |
| Dr Mark O'Hara | Birmingham City University |
| Dr Vanita Sundaram | University of York |
| Janet Bohrer | Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education |

Student reader

| | |
|--------------------|----------------------------------|
| Joanna Frith-Jones | University of Central Lancashire |
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Membership of the review group for the subject benchmark statement for education studies (2007)

Details provided below are as published in the second edition of the subject benchmark statement for education studies.

| | |
|----------------------------------|--|
| Professor Steve Bartlett (Chair) | 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 |
| Professor Stephen Ward | Bath Spa University |

Membership of the original benchmarking group for the subject benchmark statement for education studies (2000)

Details provided below are as published in the original subject benchmark statement 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 |
| Dr B MacGilchrist | Institute of Education, University of London |
| Professor P Mahony | Roehampton Institute London |
| Dr D Matheson | University College Northampton |
| Professor B McGettrick (Chair) | University of Glasgow |
| 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 |

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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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