



# Subject Benchmark Statement

**Anthropology**

February 2015

# Contents

How can I use this document? .....	1
About Subject Benchmark Statements .....	2
About this Subject Benchmark Statement .....	4
1 Introduction .....	6
2 Nature and extent of anthropology .....	7
3 Subject knowledge and understanding .....	10
4 Subject-specific and generic skills .....	13
5 Teaching, learning and assessment .....	15
6 Benchmark standards .....	17
7 Employability .....	19
Appendix: Membership of the benchmarking and review groups for the Subject Benchmark Statement for anthropology .....	20

## How can I use this document?

This document is a Subject Benchmark Statement for anthropology 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 anthropology or related subjects
- a prospective student thinking about studying anthropology, 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 anthropology.

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.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> The QAA glossary is available at: [www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us/glossary](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us/glossary).

## About Subject Benchmark Statements

Subject Benchmark Statements form part of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code) which sets out the Expectations that all providers of UK higher education reviewed by QAA are required to meet.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup>

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:<sup>4</sup>

- *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.<sup>5</sup> 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.

---

<sup>2</sup> The Quality Code, available at [www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code](http://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.enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/ESG\\_3edition-2.pdf](http://www.enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/ESG_3edition-2.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> Part A: Setting and Maintaining Academic Standards, available at: [www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code/quality-code-part-a](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code/quality-code-part-a).

<sup>4</sup> Individual Chapters are available at: [www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code/quality-code-part-b](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code/quality-code-part-b).

<sup>5</sup> 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](http://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.<sup>6</sup>

## **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.

---

<sup>6</sup> See further the *UK Quality Code for Higher Education: General Introduction*, available at: [www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication/?PubID=181](http://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 anthropology.<sup>7</sup>

This version of the Statement forms its third edition, following initial publication in 2002 and review and revision in 2007.<sup>8</sup>

### 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 sections in the Joint Academic Coding System (JACS), but the use of these codes is dependent on the programme design.<sup>9</sup> The top level codes are listed in order of significance, although this is not intended to be a definitive list:

L (Social Studies); C (Biological Sciences); Q (Linguistics, Classics and related subjects); B (Subjects Allied to Medicine); P (Mass Communication and Documentation); D (Veterinary Sciences, Agriculture and related subjects); F (Physical Sciences); I (Computer Sciences); J (Technologies).

### Summary of changes from the previous Subject Benchmark Statement (2007)

The review group agreed that while the Subject Benchmark Statement for anthropology, minimally amended in 2007, had served the subject area well, it needed refreshing and updating. Many emergent themes and current interests identified in 2002 and 2007 have become established in the subject and there are now new focuses of interest that could not have been predicted then. The list of current interests and themes in anthropology in 'Section 2: Nature and extent of anthropology' of this Statement are not intended to be either definitive or representative of the current diversity of interests and approaches within anthropology. They are examples which indicate the dynamic nature of anthropology and its proactive and responsive tendencies.

More significantly, the review group agreed that the benchmark standards as articulated at the threshold level in the 2007 document did not adequately represent the achievements of graduates in anthropology in the UK, particularly in relation to their critical engagement with the subject. While the benchmark standards themselves have not been substantially altered, it was felt that the distinction between threshold and typical achievement presented together with the benchmark standards in the form of a table was not helpful. The threshold standards have therefore been revised and only these are included.

There has been, in recent years, an emphasis on the 'employability' of graduates across all higher education providers. In anthropology relevant and pertinent statements of employability have been produced by individual departments or in specific subject areas. Such statements generally outline the kind of skills and capacities students of anthropology develop that are increasingly valuable in the current world of work. While the review group agreed that 'employability' is but one aspect of a student's education, it was thought helpful

---

<sup>7</sup> Bachelor's degrees are at level 6 in *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* and level 10 in the *Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework*, available at: [www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code/qualifications](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code/qualifications).

<sup>8</sup> 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](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=190).

<sup>9</sup> Further information about JACS is available at: [www.hesa.ac.uk/content/view/1776/649/](http://www.hesa.ac.uk/content/view/1776/649/).

to collate some of the transferable skills that students in anthropology can be expected to acquire in the form of an employability statement. This is provided in the Statement in the knowledge that the need for different kinds of reflexive and critical capacities and skills are increasingly sought by employers in a globally connected world.

# 1 Introduction

1.1 Anthropology encompasses the study of humans as complex organisms with the capacity for language, thought, and culture. Its commitment to the integrated study of both diversity and commonality among people throughout the world gives it a distinctive place in the field of learning. It is a subject that seeks to be holistic and comparative as well as critical and reflexive. Some of the most lively debates within the subject are the product of the diversity of positions and approaches that its practitioners embrace and defend in pursuing their common goal of understanding what it is to be human.

1.2 Anthropology may focus on the uniqueness of each group and their cultural products or the similarities between groups. It may extend to the study of individual lives or to specific societies, to groups within societies or to transnational and global movements.

1.3 Anthropologists investigate the substantive processes that shape human diversity, and they do so through a variety of approaches including especially ethnography and ethnographic approaches, as well as historical and archaeological analyses, comparative studies of non-human species and laboratory analyses. Anthropology can be located in the humanities, social sciences and the life sciences, and has been described as the most scientific of the humanities and the most humanistic of the sciences.

## Defining principles

1.4 All anthropological investigation and theory is defined by its adherence to two broad questions underlying human complexity. What is it that binds people and groups together? What is it that separates them, divides them, or underwrites their diversity? As a result, a comparative approach serves the entire range of anthropology.

1.5 Degree programmes in anthropology aim to develop a critical awareness and understanding of human cultural and/or biological diversity from socio-cultural, evolutionary or adaptive perspectives. Given the subject's continually changing scope, programmes also seek to develop the learner's appreciation of the dynamic character of anthropology and its constituent elements.

1.6 Besides being offered as a single honours subject, anthropology frequently features in joint and combined honours degrees, and as a constituent subject within modular programmes. These combinations are valuable for the educational diversity and intellectual vigour they promote, and nothing in what follows is intended to prescribe or constrain closely the form and content of such fractional anthropology programmes and their subject mixes.



## 2 Nature and extent of anthropology

2.1 Anthropology is a dynamic subject, characterised by rapid change and diversification, so that the present Statement represents the subject as it stands in 2014: it is not intended to be complete and final. The description that follows is a guide for teaching and developing the subject at undergraduate level, but there may be sound intellectual reasons for maintaining programmes that cover only some part of the range indicated in this Subject Benchmark Statement, or for extending beyond the views set out in these guidelines.

2.2 Anthropology as a subject is concerned with the empirical study, often through ethnographic fieldwork, of the social, cultural and biological diversity of humans. Its various branches embrace the study of human relations (both biological and social).

2.3 Anthropology can be divided into a number of specialisations, although the boundaries between these are rarely exclusive and change over time. Currently, the major divisions are social anthropology and biological anthropology. These are further subdivided into other specialisations including economic, environmental, forensic, medical and visual anthropology as well as ethnobotany, ethnomusicology and palaeoanthropology.

### Social anthropology

2.4 Social and cultural anthropology covers virtually every aspect of human social activity, from kinship, material culture and cognition to economics, politics and religion. The distinction between social and cultural anthropology indicates a historic divergence between the genealogies of British and North American anthropology. The former has been principally concerned with the study of society, the functioning of social groups, and social organisation, while in the latter cultural anthropology constituted one of the 'four fields' (along with archaeology, linguistics, and physical anthropology) and has been concerned with cultural forms and systems of meaning. This divergence was greatest in the mid-twentieth century, since when the interests and concerns of both British and American anthropology have tended to merge. The boundaries between social and cultural anthropology are accordingly neither specific nor distinct, and in the UK are usually subsumed under the single heading of 'social anthropology'.

2.5 Anthropologists focus on human interaction, for example, with other humans, animals, plants, microbes, spirits, materials and technologies. They may study the organisation of social life in small rural communities as well as in big cities and online environments. They work at various levels of scale, ranging from individual biographies to studies of nations, regions, and transnational and virtual networks, including online communities. Anthropologists are concerned with everyday practices and experiences, as well as the ways these are represented and made sense of by various social actors.

2.6 The focus of social anthropology is on the relations that connect social and cultural phenomena, including seemingly disparate social phenomena ranging from poetry, sexuality and kinship to bureaucracy, nationalism and religion. It thus characteristically links or cuts across the borders of other subjects. Anthropology is therefore well placed to defy conventional wisdom, questioning assumed regularity (for example, in economic behaviour), or difference (for example, in gender and sexuality).

2.7 Social anthropologists are characteristically interested in the practical workings among specific human populations of large-scale social phenomena such as regional and state policies and interventions, new social movements, war and conflict, and environmental degradation. In a contemporary global world, they seek to identify local specificities of understanding and interpretation in the context of the wider social

environments that shape them, and tend to shift between the global and the local focusing on social relations at each level.

2.8 Many anthropologists are interested in the applied and policy aspects of the subject. They are interested in both an anthropology of policy and governance and in the practice of policy and governance. They may work within and alongside both government and non-government organisations including health, social welfare and development agencies. They are attuned to the ethics and ethical limits of collaboration with different organisations and institutions.

2.9 Social anthropology explores the role of meanings, ambiguities and contradictions of social life: it looks at patterns of sociality and the underlying logics of social behaviour. Consequently it addresses the diversity of positions and perspectives to be found within any social group.

2.10 The subject has both ethical and reflexive dimensions. It has a keen sense of how anthropologists create their objects of study and how anthropologists may contribute to processes of change in the societies they study. Anthropologists are aware of the obligations that arise from ethnographic fieldwork that relies on developing social relationships in the field, and of what is at stake in the different forms of text and image in which its findings are presented. Increasingly anthropologists are reflecting on the collaborative forms in which anthropological knowledge is produced.

2.11 Social anthropology is distinguished from other social science subjects by its holistic aspirations and the attention it gives to the diversity of culture and societies across the world. Its comparative approach gives the subject a capacity to examine the premises which inform other fields of study. It also differs in its commitment to fieldwork and ethnographic research methods and to the relevance and illumination provided by micro studies.

2.12 Specialisations within social anthropology shift as its objects of study are transformed and as new intellectual paradigms appear. Well defined specialisms currently include, but are not confined to, medical anthropology, visual anthropology, ethnomusicology, development anthropology, environmental anthropology, museum anthropology and material culture.

2.13 Current themes and approaches include: anthropologies of new global forms of financialisation and militarisation; anthropologies of ethics and value; and anthropologies of materialities and affect; anthrozoology; business anthropology; cognitive anthropology; design anthropology; multi-species ethnography; and sensory anthropology.

2.14 The subject has been enlivened by, and has contributed to, approaches found in other subjects, such as philosophy, archaeology, the histories of science, technology and art, politics, geography, psychology, psychoanalysis and linguistics. Anthropology plays a central role in interdisciplinary fields, such as science and technology studies, cultural studies, development studies and feminist scholarship.

## **Biological anthropology**

2.15 Biological anthropology draws upon, and connects with, other subjects within the life sciences. As with these areas, its subject matter is unified by evolutionary paradigms, and there is a corresponding focus on evolutionary mechanisms and adaptive perspectives.

2.16 Major, well defined areas of study include primatology, covering the evolutionary systematics, ecology and adaptive diversity of non-human primates. Biological anthropology also has extensive links to ethnology, psychology and other life sciences. Palaeoanthropology focuses on interpreting the human evolutionary record and reconstructing the ecology and behaviour of earlier human groups, and has similarly strong links with archaeology, and earth and evolutionary sciences. Comparative human biology encompasses the study of contemporary human genetic and phenotypic diversity, with auxology - the study of human growth patterns - as one particularly well established aspect, while the evolutionary implications of developmental and epigenetic processes is an expanding area. Human adaptability includes biological aspects of human ecology, such as responses to climatic stressors, nutrition and disease, and is a major contributor to anthropological studies of population structure and demography. Evolutionary approaches to the study of human behaviour, cognition and culture are also an important theme within biological anthropology, incorporating study of human cognitive evolution (so linking to evolutionary psychology), the evolution of language, and studies of culture as an evolutionary process and its co-evolution with genes (cultural evolution and gene-culture co-evolution).

2.17 Biological anthropology also displays obvious overlaps of method and subject matter with medical sciences such as anatomy, physiology, genetics, epidemiology and nutrition, with its contribution to forensic sciences especially evident. However, biological anthropology differs from such cognate subjects in important respects. The scale and detail of available information exceeds that of other life sciences, and human biological patterning contrasts with that of most other species. Biological anthropology is distinguished from the medical sciences not only by the absence of any clinical prioritisation, but also by an emphasis on variability and a bias towards the group as the focus of study. It also differs from medicine in its explicit emphasis on comparative and adaptive frameworks within which to set its findings.

2.18 Another distinguishing feature of biological anthropology reflects the necessity to incorporate socio-cultural perspectives within its analyses. Since humans are invariably social, any study of human biological diversity cannot afford to ignore social influences.

2.19 Biology also affects the ways in which humans respond to their environments, including social environments, and social structures are founded upon systems of cognition, communication and behavioural flexibility that have an underlying biological basis. There are accordingly complex and deep interactions between the social and biological dimensions of human variability that are not only of interest in their own right, but which have extensive applications in, for example, areas of health, food policies and development projects.

2.20 Biological anthropology has been characterised by the rapid development and expansion of new sub-areas. Examples include the growth of primatology to encompass aspects of behavioural ecology and socio-biology; phylogeny and phylogenetic comparative studies; the development of molecular, life history, community ecology perspectives and palaeogenomics within human evolutionary studies; and the rapid expansion of biosocial investigations of contemporary human groups, including such aspects as energetics, lifestyle and well-being, parent-infant interactions, as well as the more established areas of medical anthropology and nutrition. Incorporation of perspectives from social anthropology is an especially prominent feature of such studies. The evolutionary study of contemporary human behaviour, culture and cognition has been a particularly rapid growth area (see 2.16) and serves to further align biological anthropology with sociocultural approaches.

## **3 Subject knowledge and understanding**

### **Constituents of an anthropology degree**

3.1 Reflecting its multidisciplinary nature, the constituent elements of an anthropology degree programme depend on whether the degree is in social anthropology, biological anthropology or a combination of the two. Some programmes have a specific focus on a sub-area of the subject (for example engaged anthropology, ethnomusicology, material culture, medical anthropology, museum studies, primate conservation, or visual anthropology).

3.2 Depending on the programme design, specific focus and intended outcomes, some of the following areas are likely to be studied in a single honours degree, but the lists are not prescriptive. The original benchmarking group's view was that there was great importance in the principle that academics are free to design their anthropology programmes according to their own subject and research priorities, and this continues to be supported in the subject community.

3.3 Anthropology is both evidence-based and theoretical. The following are areas of core knowledge that may be expected of students studying anthropology, but their representation and weighting may legitimately vary significantly according to the aims and scope of particular degree programmes. The following identification of subject areas is neither exclusive nor definitive, and does not constitute a 'checklist' covered by every programme.

### **Knowledge and understanding**

#### **Social and biological anthropology**

3.4 Depending upon their programme, students gain:

- an understanding of social anthropology as the comparative study of human societies, and of biological anthropology as the study of past and contemporary human and non-human primates in evolutionary and adaptive perspectives
- an appreciation of the importance of empirical fieldwork as the primary method of gathering data and as a basis for the generation of anthropological theory. Depending on the focus of study this might include, for example, participant observation and other qualitative means of data gathering among contemporary populations, excavation and contextual studies in palaeoanthropology, the study of non-human primate groups, and the collection of data on aspects of human biological diversity, diet and other factors affecting the biological health of human populations
- a detailed knowledge of specific themes in social and/or biological anthropology and the intellectual debates concerning them, such as gender, religion, kinship, nationalism, exchange, material culture, human genetics, evolution and primate behaviour
- a realisation that knowledge is contested; that anthropology by its nature is dynamic, constantly generating new priorities and theories; and that the peoples with whom anthropologists have traditionally worked may also contest anthropological representations
- an informed awareness of, and sensitivity to, human diversity, an appreciation of its scope and complexity, and recognition of the richness of experience and potential that it provides.

## Social anthropology

3.5 Social anthropology is characterised by self-reflection regarding both the nature of our knowledge of social context and of the role of the anthropologist or ethnographer in the collection and presentation of data. Depending upon their programme, students gain:

- acquaintance with the theory and history of anthropology, including the achievements associated with British, continental European and North American scholarship. Since important schools of anthropology have developed outside Europe and North America, and are sometimes critical of 'metropolitan' perspectives, attention may also be paid to these developments as far as possible within language constraints
- ability to recognise, assess and make use of different theoretical approaches within the subject, and a critical awareness of links to cognate bodies of theory, such as sociology, philosophy, history, linguistic and feminist theory, and the natural sciences
- knowledge of the values, ethics and traditions of different cultures and geographical areas, including a detailed knowledge of particular areas of the world which may be presented as regional courses. Areas covered in particular departments vary with staff expertise and research interests
- familiarity with a range of methods of representing and analysing data, which might include primary and secondary texts, film and other visual media, oral sources, statistical data and multimedia
- critical awareness of ethical issues related to the study of social worlds and their representation in the form of text or images
- familiarity with ethnographic and material culture collections in museums and other institutions, with awareness of current discussions concerning the collection, presentation and curation of these collections
- critical awareness of different interpretations of sickness, health, disease and curing in different cultures and of the complex interrelationship between social, biological and environmental influences in the health of human communities
- awareness of the ways in which anthropological knowledge may be applied (and misapplied) in a range of practical situations
- awareness of social and historical change, and knowledge of some paradigms and modes (including indigenous ones) for explaining it
- ability to recognise and analyse relations of power which include those of gender, sexuality, class, ability, ethnicity and race and how they act to include and exclude various categories of person
- critical awareness of the mechanisms, both implicit and explicit, of racism, classism, sexism and homophobia as well as the limits to describing certain behaviours in these terms
- appreciation of the interconnections between various aspects of social and cultural life, belief systems, global forces, individual behaviour and the physical environment
- awareness of how humans understand and relate to non-human beings and life-forms.

## **Biological anthropology**

3.6 Depending upon their programme, students develop an awareness of evolutionary principles and biological processes relevant to the study of human evolution and adaptation, which inform understanding of the following:

- major aspects of human evolution, including the significant fossil evidence and its contextual associations, and behavioural and ecological reconstructions based on these and the implications of emerging molecular data
- the similarities and contrasts between humans and other primates, and their significance for human adaptive success
- selected aspects of primate diversity, and acquaintance with relevant concepts of primatology and the behavioural sciences
- aspects of human genetic and/or phenotypic diversity, their evolutionary implications and significance for schemes categorising human variability
- the role of human osteology and forensic anthropology in understanding human variation, epidemiology and forensic identification of human remains
- an awareness of developmental and epigenetic processes; the range and flexibility of individual biological responses, and awareness of the distinction between such adaptability and population adaptation
- biosocial perspectives on human ecology, for example, subsistence and dietary diversity, and comparative study of health, well-being and disease across societies and/or over time
- consideration of human life history patterns, reproductive influences, and population size and structure, and aspects of applied anthropology, including development studies
- approaches to the evolutionary study of human behaviour, cognition and culture
- the developing role of palaeogeonomics for understanding human evolutionary relationships.

3.7 Whatever the details of their programme, students are aware of the nature, complexity and richness of human biological diversity and have an appreciation of its social and ethical implications.

## 4 Subject-specific and generic skills

The abilities and qualities of mind that a student studying anthropology acquires incorporate both subject-specific and generic skills, which include those set out in the following sections.

### Social anthropology

4.1 Depending upon the proportion of social anthropology within their degree programme, students demonstrate an ability to do some or all of the following:

- understand how human beings are shaped by, and interact with, their social, cultural and physical environments, and an appreciation of their social, cultural and biological diversity
- formulate, investigate and discuss anthropologically informed questions, use major theoretical perspectives and concepts in anthropology and critically assess their strengths and limitations
- engage with cultures, populations and groups different from their own, without forgoing a sense of personal judgment, with an awareness of cultural assumptions, including their own, and the ways in which these impact on an interpretation of others
- critically read and interpret texts (including print, oral, film and multimedia) within their historical, social and theoretical contexts and acknowledge practical awareness of the strengths and limitations of ethnographic fieldwork and the different stages and requirements of carrying out an anthropological study
- analyse and recognise the politics of language, indirect forms of communication and theoretical statements, forms of power and claims of authority
- apply anthropological knowledge to a variety of practical situations, personal and professional plans and undertake and present scholarly work that demonstrates an understanding of anthropological aims, methods and theoretical considerations.

### Biological anthropology

4.2 Depending upon the proportion of biological anthropology within their degree programme, students demonstrate an ability to do some or all of the following:

- gain an understanding and appreciation of the Darwinian evolutionary process and our species' place within the natural world
- interpret varied information on aspects of human biological diversity and the ways in which biological and social processes interact
- analyse and evaluate relevant qualitative and quantitative data utilising appropriate techniques
- design and implement a project involving data collection on some aspect(s) of human biological diversity, and to display relevant investigative, analytical and communication skills
- gain an understanding of the scientific process, including the ability to read, evaluate and write scientific reports
- demonstrate awareness of ethical issues associated with biological anthropological methods and theories, including those associated with studying non-human primates, with handling human remains, and with proposals that human behaviour has an evolutionary basis
- demonstrate a deepened understanding of the subject and qualities of mind associated with intellectual reflection, evaluation and synthesis.

## Generic and transferable skills

4.3 Students gain some or all of the following transferable skills:

- the capacity to express their own ideas orally, visually and in writing, to summarise the arguments of others, and to distinguish between the two
- independence of thought and analytical, critical and synoptic skills
- research skills in collecting and collating primary and secondary data
- communication and presentation skills (using oral, visual and written materials and information technology)
- the ability to make a structured argument, reference the works of others, and assess historical evidence
- time, planning and management skills
- the ability to engage, where appropriate, in constructive discussion in group situations and group-work skills
- statistical and computing techniques
- independent learning and critical thinking
- the ability to assess and understand their strengths and weaknesses, and to take action to improve and enhance their capacities
- a reflexive approach to cultural assumptions and premises developed through a deep understanding of other ways of being in the world
- the ability to recognise and challenge ethnocentric assumptions.



## 5 Teaching, learning and assessment

### Teaching and learning

5.1 Reflecting its scope, approaches for promoting student learning in anthropology are appropriately diverse, and are intended to develop students' analytical, problem-solving and communication skills as well as familiarising them with subject content. The particular combination of learning and teaching approaches adopted depends upon the content, aims and focuses of individual degree programmes.

5.2 In addition to imparting subject knowledge, degree programmes aim to cultivate students' intellectual curiosity, and develop their capabilities as active and effective independent learners and reflective thinkers.

5.3 The majority of students encounter anthropology for the first time through higher education study, although some may well have experiential learning of aspects of the subject. To support student learning, higher education providers consider the availability of:

- academic staff whose teaching is informed by research and scholarly activity
- a wide range of easily accessible learning materials such as texts, monographs, multimedia and sample collections, available through libraries, archives, museums or other digital platforms
- programmes that combine coherence and progression with opportunities for flexibility
- clear, informative documentation on programme outlines, content and requirements, programme rationales and progression, and associated resources.

5.4 Basic anthropological terms, concepts and debate may be introduced through lectures which signpost and direct students to further reading and investigation. Lectures also offer the opportunity for academics to develop more complex arguments and themes, often illustrated through their research or specialist interests. Students have the opportunity to develop their own understanding through delivery of papers and presentations, as well as engaging in discussion and debate with tutors and peers, in seminars and tutorials. Other methods of teaching may also include the use of film, debate, workshops, and web-based or virtual tutorials.

5.5 Practical activity is important to the quality of experience on an anthropology programme. Where there is a biological anthropological component to a programme, this may take the form of laboratory work and/or field trips involving observations, measurements and experiments. In social anthropology, practical activities may include study visits to museums, galleries and performances, or research exercises and fieldwork, providing students with the opportunity to engage with unfamiliar social and cultural experiences.

5.6 Many programmes provide the option of supervised project work. In such projects, students have the opportunity to design and carry out a piece of work involving the collection and analysis of primary data (for example through observation or measurement, mapping exercises, recording interviews, personal narratives or life histories). These exercises may be combined with a dissertation which offers an opportunity for students to experience different stages of the research process from identifying a research question to collecting and analysing data and writing-up.

5.7 Students play an active part in the teaching and learning of anthropology. Many programmes incorporate experiential learning of some kind in which the experience, values and biography of students are used to complement the more orthodox material that

comprises the anthropological canon. Teaching and learning is often supported by virtual platforms, and different programmes make use of social media, blogs and wikis for example.

## Assessment

5.8 Assessment in anthropology is intended to test knowledge and understanding of the theory, content and methods of anthropology. Many of the assessment methods may involve students working in groups. A range of suitably varied assessment modes are incorporated into programme design, both formative and summative. According to the combinations of subjects comprising any particular anthropology programme, assessment is made up of an appropriate mix of some or all of the following:

- unseen and seen timed, written examinations, which are designed to test students' knowledge and understanding of a module or programme subject matter
- essays, to allow the opportunity for students to develop a more discursive account or argument, which is supported by reference to primary or secondary literature, and completed within a prescribed word limit
- seminar presentations, to encourage students to present an argument or a point of view to a peer audience and offer clarification and a reasoned defence, if necessary
- dissertations, independent projects or extended essays, to give students the opportunity to identify a topic and carry out a sustained piece of research (based upon library sources, original or secondary data) within a prescribed word length and under the supervision of a member of staff
- oral examinations, for example, of dissertations, which allow students to defend and discuss their work in detail with examiners
- demonstrations, displays and posters, involving work being prepared in specified ways that demand, for example, presentational, graphical or performance skills
- other writing exercises, including project reports, learning journals, wikis and blogs, notebooks and fieldwork reports
- the presentation of objects, sounds and images in an anthropological context; for example, producing sound scapes, films, curiosity cabinets or websites
- laboratory-based or fieldwork-based projects.

## 6 Benchmark standards

The benchmark standards are intended to be compatible with the wide range of curricula and assessment methods that currently characterise anthropology honours degree programmes in the UK. They constitute a general set of reference points and are not intended to constrain the design of individual programmes. This section is to be interpreted and applied, where relevant, in the context and spirit of the entire Subject Benchmark Statement and not extracted for use as a separate checklist. The threshold standard represents the minimum knowledge and capabilities of an honours graduate. Performance above the threshold is evident in the demonstration of qualities such as analytical ability, perceptiveness, intellectual rigour, creativity and independence of thought.

### Subject knowledge and understanding

#### Social anthropology

6.1 On successful completion of an honours degree programme in social anthropology studies, students should be able to:

- demonstrate an understanding of the nature and extent of human diversity and commonality and account for this using a variety of analytical perspectives
- show understanding and facility in the use of a repertoire of concepts, theories and key research methods
- show an appreciation and understanding of the relationship between local social and cultural forms in relation to global processes and broader historical developments
- indicate a critical awareness of how anthropology is related to other cognate subjects
- demonstrate knowledge and critical understanding of the potential applications of anthropological knowledge in a variety of contexts
- describe and analyse the ways in which human beings shape and are shaped by social, cultural and environmental contexts
- identify and question cultural assumptions
- understand the social and historical processes that influence the objects of anthropological study
- interpret and analyse a variety of oral, musical, visual and textual forms.

#### Biological anthropology

6.2 In addition to relevant benchmark standards listed for social anthropology, students studying biological anthropology acquire the following knowledge and understanding and should be able to:

- describe and analyse aspects of human biological diversity and their influences
- analyse the interactions of biological, environmental and sociocultural influences in selected aspects of human ecology
- describe some of the similarities and contrasts between humans and other primates, and discuss their adaptive significance
- describe and analyse selected aspect(s) of human evolution and associated context(s)
- describe how evolution may have shaped past and present human behaviour and cognition
- describe how genetic and cultural evolution have jointly shaped our species' history.

## **Generic skills for both biological and social anthropology**

6.3 On successful completion of an honours degree programme in anthropology, students should be able to:

- discuss and present ideas and interpretations with others in a clear and reasoned way
- recognise some of the ways in which anthropological knowledge is applied and offer commentary upon this
- assess and analyse the ethical implications of research and enquiry
- demonstrate skills in information gathering, analysis, communication and presentation
- undertake independent study and manage their time
- demonstrate elementary capabilities in planning and executing an independent project with a clear outcome
- reflexively question assumptions which are taken for granted.

## 7 Employability

7.1 As well as the generic and transferable skills listed in previous sections, which include the ability to research, analyse, present, question and debate, anthropology graduates gain subject-specific capacities which are valuable to employers.

7.2 Employers are increasingly recognising the need for highly qualified personnel who have a sensitivity to diversity, a cultural awareness, and analytical skills that allow for insightful understanding and translation of other ways of life across the globe. As a critical mode of inquiry, anthropology questions and challenges assumptions which are taken for granted and provides graduates with an ability to appreciate social and cultural difference in a changing world.

7.3 Graduates in anthropology enter a variety of professions including education, museum curation, art and design, social services, forensic sciences, international development, the civil service, government, marketing and advertising, business and finance, publishing, charity organisations, public health, ecology, conservation, heritage, and cultural resource management. A degree in anthropology enables graduates to make a unique contribution to specialised fields. For example, in the civil service and industry, the international range of anthropological enquiry makes anthropology graduates well prepared for cross-cultural partnerships; in health care, anthropological knowledge gives them an edge in understanding the social and cultural aspects of health, illness and healing; and in education in understanding the social and cultural factors that impact on learning.

7.4 The skills that anthropology graduates develop through research-based investigative approaches and through the collation, management and analysis of data, as well as their ability to reflect on the ethics of research and its dissemination, can all fruitfully contribute to employment in the majority of contemporary organisations and institutions.

## **Appendix: Membership of the benchmarking and review groups for the Subject Benchmark Statement for anthropology**

### **Membership of the review group for the Subject Benchmark Statement for anthropology (2015)**

Professor Jeanette Edwards (Chair)	University of Manchester
Dr Emma-Jayne Abbots	University of Wales, Trinity St David
Professor Marcus Banks	University of Oxford
Professor Alan Bilborough	Durham University
Dr Magnus Course	University of Edinburgh
Dr Samantha Hurn	University of Exeter
Professor Lisette Josephides	Queen's University Belfast
Professor Filippo Osella	University of Sussex
Dr Simon Underdown	Oxford Brookes University
Dr David Shankland	Royal Anthropological Institute
Brigitte Stockton	Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education

#### **Student reader**

Craig Best	Brunel University
------------	-------------------

### **Membership of the review group for the Subject Benchmark Statement for anthropology**

Details below appear as published in the second edition of the Subject Benchmark Statement for anthropology (2007).

Professor A Bilborough (Chair)	University of Durham
Dr F Bowie	University of Bristol
Dr J Edwards	University of Manchester
Professor J Hendry	Oxford Brookes University
Dr B Simpson	University of Durham

### **Membership of the original benchmarking group for anthropology**

Details below appear as published in the original Subject Benchmark Statement for anthropology (2002).

Professor A Bilborough (Chair)	University of Durham
Dr F Bowie	University of Wales, Lampeter
Dr J Carsten	University of Edinburgh
Dr J Edwards	University of Manchester
Dr M Fischer	University of Kent at Canterbury
Professor J Hendry	Oxford Brookes University
Professor C Humphrey	University of Cambridge
Dr D James	The London School of Economics and Political Science
Dr T Ramnarine	The Queen's University of Belfast
Dr C Shore	Goldsmiths College, University of London
Dr B Simpson	University of Durham
Dr S Thompson	The School of Oriental and African Studies, London

QAA1088 - Feb 15

© The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2015  
Southgate House, Southgate Street, Gloucester GL1 1UB

Tel: 01452 557 000

Email: [enquiries@qaa.ac.uk](mailto:enquiries@qaa.ac.uk)

Website: [www.qaa.ac.uk](http://www.qaa.ac.uk)

Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786