



# **Subject Benchmark Statement**

## **Social Policy: Draft for consultation**

October 2015

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## How can I use this document?

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

Explanations of unfamiliar terms used in this Subject Benchmark Statement can be found in the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education's glossary.<sup>1</sup>

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<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 (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.

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<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/2015/05/ESG\\_endorsed-with-changed-foreword.pdf](http://www.enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/ESG_endorsed-with-changed-foreword.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.

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<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 Social Policy.<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 code in the Joint Academic Coding System (JACS):<sup>9</sup>

L113	Economic policy
L150	Political economics
L231	Public administration
L400	Social policy
L410	UK social policy
L420	International social policy
L430	Public policy
L431	Health policy
L432	Welfare policy
L433	Education policy
L434	Transport policy
L435	Security policy
L436	Emergency services policy
L437	Criminal justice policy
L490	Social policy not elsewhere classified

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

This Subject Benchmark Statement for Social Policy builds on and extends the work started by its predecessors.<sup>10</sup> It continues to reflect many of the themes and ideas incorporated in the previous Subject Benchmark Statements. At the same time, developments within the subject and sectoral changes have influenced its subject matter and how it is taught, necessitating certain adjustments and additions to key themes and topics.

While previous statements were entitled Social Policy and Administration, this third Statement omits administration from its title. The focus on administration can be traced to the historical origins of Social Policy as an area of teaching and learning in higher education in the early twentieth century that was concerned with professionalising the planning, organisation and delivery of social services in the inter-war period. The administration of social services certainly remains a core element of the subject of Social Policy as a field of

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<sup>7</sup> Bachelor's degrees are at level 6 in *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (2008) and level 10 in the *Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework* (2001), and master's degrees are at level 7 and level 11 respectively.

<sup>8</sup> Further information is available in the *Recognition scheme for Subject Benchmark statements*, available at: [www.gaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/Recognition-scheme-for-subject-benchmark-statements.aspx](http://www.gaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/Recognition-scheme-for-subject-benchmark-statements.aspx).

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

<sup>10</sup> QAA Social Policy and Administration (2007) statement; Social Policy and Administration and Social Work statement (2000).

academic study and as a political and professional practice, but no longer defines it. The diverse theoretical perspectives, approaches and concerns of the subject warrant this change in the Statement title; this is also reflected in the fact that few Social Policy degrees exist today with administration in the title.

# 1 Introduction

1.1 Social Policy is a field of study that makes important contributions to contemporary debate by applying scientific knowledge, rigorous analysis and critical reflection to a broad range of issues of concern; it equips students with the insights and skills needed to engage with and address core challenges of today with respect to social and economic justice, environmental issues, cultural dialogue and political articulation. As reflected in the benchmarking statement, Social Policy offers a vibrant, diverse and highly relevant programme of study.

1.2 Societal changes over the past decade have had profound effects on the concerns of Social Policy as a subject of academic study. It is increasingly recognised that many issues studied in Social Policy have international dimensions which are reflected in the growth of global social policy programmes. There is also stronger attention to the impacts of higher income countries' policies on social and economic provision in lower income ones. Equally important have been changes to social policy as a political practice within the UK. For example, nationalist struggles for devolution and/or independence continue to influence the development of distinct policy trajectories in major social policy areas and divergent policy-making regimes. At the same time, there are growing points of convergence between social policy and criminal justice systems, and between social policy and the environment, including that crime and the environment are increasingly recognised as factors influencing social and personal well-being. Similarly the banking crisis that erupted in the Global North in 2007, and its aftermath, have highlighted the significance of economic policy and financial services for students of Social Policy in the UK, while the involvement of commercial for-profit organisations in social provision is also attracting a far greater share of attention.

1.3 The introduction of student tuition fees in most of the UK, and their significant increase in 2010 in England, the growth of private educational providers, and the changing nature of government support for lifelong learning have profoundly reshaped the landscape of teaching and learning in diverse ways. These sectoral changes, together with the principles and effects of successive government budgets and policies of retrenchment in the UK and beyond, have themselves become popular topics within Social Policy study programmes.

1.4 The last decade has seen the embedding of skills and employability in higher education UK Social Policy teaching. There are clear expectations about the knowledge, competencies and employability skills of graduates. Prospective students are encouraged to choose between programmes of study by reference to skills outcomes and the prospects of employment as a direct result of study. They are encouraged to use these benchmarks to inform their assessment of the quality of the teaching they receive and their experience of study overall. At the same time, employer-led initiatives on sector-specific skill requirements continue, and employers are increasingly involved in designing and sponsoring programmes of academic study across UK higher education providers.

1.5 Social Policy is well placed to engage with these developments. Its emphasis on both theoretical understanding and applied knowledge is more relevant than ever for students and their prospective employers across the public, commercial, voluntary, and charitable sectors. Many of the core subject-specific and generic skills which characterise the subject (such as analytical and research skills; communication skills) enhance the employability of Social Policy graduates.



1.6 Social Policy is a dynamic discipline that continues to thrive as a popular choice among students in higher education in the UK and internationally; this is a reflection of the enduring relevance of the subject content and skills to students, whether they are vocationally or academically oriented, or are simply seeking to equip themselves with the lifelong-learning and critical-reflection skills that make for informed, active global citizens.

## 2 The nature and extent of Social Policy

2.1 The subject of Social Policy is concerned with the distribution and organisation of human welfare and well-being within societies. It focuses on the ways in which different societies understand and respond to the social needs of their populations. The subject is characterised by the following principles:

- the rigorous linking of theoretical analysis with empirical enquiry
- the identification and understanding of different value positions
- a willingness to engage with a range of intellectual traditions and other subjects
- the belief that students should acquire the skills and qualities that enable them to become active and informed citizens.

2.2 Social Policy is an interdisciplinary and applied subject that pays particular attention to analysing the distribution, organisation and delivery of resources in response to social needs, preferences and expectations which affect the circumstances of individuals, groups and societies. The subject draws on ideas and methods from subjects such as economics, political science and sociology, and insights from a range of other subjects including criminology, development studies, human geography, social anthropology, social psychology and social work, and its relationships with these areas are constantly evolving. It draws upon theoretical perspectives and empirical evidence to study the ways in which societies provide for the social needs of their members through structures and systems of distribution, redistribution, regulation, provision and empowerment. It makes use of a wide range of research methods and evaluation, and emphasises the ethical, rigorous collection and analysis of data, whatever its form. It is also highly comparative across time and place.

2.3 Social Policy has a strong focus on those aspects of the economy, policy and society that are necessary to human existence, individual well-being and quality of life. These include: adequate food and shelter; a safe and sustainable environment; the promotion of health and the treatment of illness; and the social, physical, environmental, educational and financial resources to enable individuals to lead independent lives and participate fully in their societies. Social Policy recognises the essentially interdependent nature of human existence and the need to study human welfare in a wider social context rather than a purely individual or psychological one.

2.4 Social Policy also focuses on wider structural and cultural issues, including different approaches to social control, risk and regulation; poverty, inequality and exclusion; discrimination and empowerment; the role of beliefs and ideologies; policy making and implementation processes; and the institutional composition of different welfare systems.

2.5 Social Policy is taught in a variety of settings in higher education, including as single, joint and combined programmes, and as elements of programmes across a variety of cognate subjects. Social Policy is generally taught and learnt through a focus on substantive policy areas and social issues, or through theoretical and methodological approaches to enhance the exploration and understanding of these substantive areas. The Subject Benchmark Statement provides an indicative list of the themes and topics that are commonly found within UK Social Policy degrees. This is neither an exhaustive nor prescriptive list. While the thematic categories are likely to encompass features common to almost all Social Policy programmes, it is acknowledged (and encouraged) that degree curricula are likely to include various combinations of the topics provided under these thematic headings, as well as including additional topics to those listed.

2.6 **Social Policy Fields and Social Problems** (listed in alphabetical order): Crime and Criminal Justice; Education; Family and Childhood; Health and Social Care; Housing and Urban Regeneration; Income Maintenance and Social Security; Migration; Poverty, Inequality and Social Exclusion; Work, Employment, and Labour Markets.

2.7 **Social Groups, Difference and Inequalities:** Children and Young People; Disability; Ethnicity; Gender; Older Age; Religion; Social Class; Sexuality.

2.8 **Conceptual and Theoretical Frameworks:** Citizenship and Human Rights; Needs and Social Justice; Philosophies of Welfare; Political Economy of Welfare and Welfare Regimes; Political and Social Theory.

2.9 **Dynamics of Social Change and Policymaking: Demography and Population Change;** Environmental Sustainability and Climate Change; Globalisation and Transnationalisation; History and Development of Welfare Systems; Mass and Social Media; New Social Movements; Policy-Making Process; Politics and Public Opinion.

2.10 **Organisation and Delivery of Welfare:** Devolution and Local Governance; The Economics of Welfare; Mixed Economies of Welfare; Management of Public Services; Supranational Policy Governance; Service User Engagement and Advocacy.

2.11 **Researching Social Problems and Policy Analysis:** Social Research Methods; Policy Evaluation and Policy Analysis; Comparative Social Policy; Ethics of Policy Research.

2.12 Students develop a range of transferable skills, including many that contribute to employability, such as data collection and analysis, the searching and compiling of literature and evidencing sources, presentation skills, self-reflection and personal resilience, teamwork and the ability to appreciate and evaluate the views of others. The subject seeks to instil in students a capacity to assess critically evidence from a range of academic areas, and to appreciate how social policies are continuously reconstructed and changed. Students learn to understand the contribution to these processes of those who come from different value positions and social, cultural and economic backgrounds. They recognise that some social groups are able to protect, alter or advance their value positions more effectively than others.

## 3 Knowledge, understanding and skills

### Subject knowledge and understanding

3.1 Social Policy is a broad and dynamic subject, the content of which, of necessity, has to remain responsive to wider social changes. It is thus inappropriate to be tightly prescriptive in identifying the knowledge and understanding expected of a graduate in Social Policy.

3.2 Graduates of single honours Social Policy programmes in the UK demonstrate **knowledge** of the:

- origins and development of welfare institutions within and across the UK, and the social and demographic contexts in which they have operated
- role, remit, organisation and contemporary activities of the main institutions of UK welfare systems, including the provision, financing and regulation of social security, education, employment, health and social care, and housing
- framework, operation and financing of the processes of policy making and implementation
- operation and impact of non-governmental sources of welfare, including the informal, voluntary and private sectors, and of how these interact within mixed economies of welfare
- main features of the interrelationships between social policies and differently placed communities, families and individuals
- ways in which other countries organise their social policies and welfare institutions and the effectiveness with which they realise objectives
- subnational and supranational dimensions of social policy, including the role and organisation of the European Union and other regional organisations internationally
- international and global contexts of social policy
- main issues and contemporary policy debates surrounding social, economic, environmental, cultural and political problems in the UK and beyond
- key thinkers in the area and the theoretical and conceptual ideas and principles driving the development of the subject
- significant sources of data about social welfare, and the main quantitative and qualitative social research approaches and methods used to collect and analyse data.

3.3 Graduates demonstrate an understanding of:

- a complex body of knowledge about the key concepts and theories of welfare, including human needs, human well-being, and social welfare; poverty, inequality and social exclusion; citizenship and human rights; needs and social justice; social and cultural difference and diversity; theories of the state and policy making; theories and methods of comparative analysis
- how welfare institutions operate within broader welfare systems
- how devolved administrations approach welfare and how welfare institutions operate within the different legislative contexts of the UK
- impact of contemporary patterns, problems and persistence of social inequalities
- where and in what ways individual and social well-being is not being achieved; and ways in which different social groups and individuals experience, respond to and contest social policies
- interdisciplinary approaches to social policy topics and issues

- the political economy of welfare and how values and principles are related to political and economic interests
- the history of contemporary social problems and of social policy responses to them
- how key drivers such as globalisation and demographic change affects social policy making and the nature of the policy process
- the strengths, weaknesses, limitations and appropriate applications of social research and social research methods, including ethical considerations in their production and use.

## **Subject-specific abilities and skills**

3.4 Graduates in Social Policy demonstrate the ability to:

- use established theories and concepts of social policy and other social sciences to analyse how social needs, social problems and policies themselves are constructed, reconstructed and understood in national, international and global contexts
- distinguish between, critically reflect on and evaluate different theoretical, empirical, normative, moral and political approaches to social problems and issues
- locate, retrieve, interpret, evaluate, and apply, relevant qualitative and quantitative data derived from social surveys and other sources
- undertake individually and/or collaboratively investigations of social questions, issues and problems. This will involve the ability to frame appropriate research questions; identify suitable research problems; and techniques in the collection, management and manipulation of data, including secondary data, and other information; the use of established electronic databases for information retrieval; the construction of coherent and reasoned arguments; and the presentation of clear conclusions and recommendations.

## **Generic skills**

3.5 In addition to subject-specific skills, the study of Social Policy equips graduates with combinations of personal and general skills. These 'soft' skills enhance employability, being highly transferable and valued by potential employers. They also provide a foundation for continuing and lifelong learning and for active engagement as citizens in the wider life of a society. They broadly consist of:

- problem-solving skills: Social Policy encourages problem-based learning, imagination and flexibility in seeking and evaluating alternative solutions, through critical reflection, to social problems
- social research skills: working independently using a range of established social research methods to gather relevant information, manage and manipulate data, and analyse and interpret their meaning
- evaluative and analytical skills: Social Policy produces policy-literate and numerate students, able to summarise, analyse and critique arguments, reports, documents and other written audio-visual and verbal data
- sensitivity to the values and interests of others: the teaching of Social Policy contributes to the development of students' capacity for self-reflection and, in particular, their ability to listen to, reflect on, and interact with, the views and beliefs of others; and to take account of their own normative and moral positions in order to understand how human needs are experienced and met
- an ability to relate to wider international and global contexts: a critical awareness and appreciation of transnational and globalised social problems, and of addressing human social needs in a global context.

3.6 In addition to the above, Social Policy graduates have developed the following generic skills in the course of their studies:

- personal communication skills: the ability to convey ideas and arguments effectively, using a variety of media, to a range of audiences. This includes verbal and written presentations technology enhanced where appropriate, clearly communicating meaning to a third party, and using appropriate academic conventions
- self-management of learning and personal resilience: the ability to work independently, within deadlines, supported only by broad guidance as to sources and objectives. Graduates are able to organise their learning in terms of effective planning, time-management and presentation. Furthermore, they are able to reflect on their learning in ways that enhance their personal and professional development.
- team-working skills: Social Policy graduates have interpersonal skills that allow them to collaborate with others and to contribute effectively in group-based research and problem solving
- information and communications technology skills: Social Policy graduates are proficient in the use of a range of technologies and software, including the internet and social media platforms, to access, search, store, transit and manipulate relevant information; and to conduct various forms of computer-based data analysis and presentation.

## 4 Teaching, learning and assessment

4.1 The objectives of a degree in Social Policy are to produce independent learners who are competent in a range of knowledge, understanding and skills appropriate to their level of study. Social Policy shares with other social sciences a range of teaching methods and techniques. Social Policy requires that students directly engage with current debates and arguments surrounding Social Policy issues. To this end, forms of learning and teaching include an appropriate blend and balance of traditional teaching methods, such as:

- lectures, seminars, tutorials, workshops and laboratory sessions
- whole group, small group and individual teaching
- student-led and tutor-led sessions

and learning opportunities that draw on appropriate alternative sources, such as:

- work placements and internships
- visits to relevant organisations
- voluntary work for charities and other organisations  
relevant life experiences (for example domestic responsibilities, and previous work experiences).

4.2 In addition to face-to-face communication, teaching and learning may take place with the use of approaches such as virtual learning environments (VLEs) and bespoke data analysis packages. This may be via distance learning, blended learning and the use of massive open online courses.

4.3 A combination of these teaching methods and learning approaches allows students to develop a portfolio of experiences, competencies and skills that prepare them for employment in a range of organisational and occupational settings, many of which involve one or more of the following:

- synthesis and dissemination of complex ideas and arguments
- compilation, comparison and explanation of empirical evidence
- development of case studies
- policy research and evaluation
- teamwork
- working to specific deadlines
- self-motivation and self-direction
- effective communication to a range of audiences.

4.4 Student learning takes place in a variety of settings including scheduled meetings of tutors and students (for example, in lectures, seminars, and workshops or in a one-to-one dissertation student/supervisor relationship), peer assisted learning, VLE instruction and support, self-directed study time and preparation for and feedback from assessment. Student development may also include experiential learning.

4.5 Students of Social Policy are expected to use a range of learning methods, including:

- critical reading of a wide range of texts including documents, monographs, scholarly articles, statistics, newspapers, textbooks and sources on the internet
- independent research using both primary and/or secondary sources and appropriate methods of enquiry

- group discussion for communicating ideas and presenting their own work in a variety of formats, including, for example, debates, case studies, role plays and simulations
- contact with policy makers, professionals and interest groups in a variety of settings, and through visits, speakers, websites, public events, and experiential learning such as internships, placements or action research for organisations and community groups.

4.6 Constructive alignment of learning outcomes and methods of assessment encourages clarity in curriculum design and transparency in the links between assessment and learning. Methods of assessment reflect progression within undergraduate programmes, and assessment strategies include a range of methods which allow students from different backgrounds and with diverse life experience to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of the subject effectively.

4.7 A range of assessment strategies are used, including the following:

- essays
- seen and unseen exams
- reports and dissertations
- oral assignments and presentations
- group and individual work
- tutor-directed and student-directed tasks
- tutor, peer and self-assessment
- seminar performance
- policy briefings, book reviews, blogs
- project-based or work-experience reports.

4.8 Feedback is an essential part of assessment, which helps students evaluate their progress and identify how they may improve further. As such, Social Policy students receive constructive feedback throughout their studies, with particular attention paid to building skills of self-reflection and critical awareness. Given the contested nature of many core concepts in the subject field and problem definitions underlying policy issues, an appreciation of the multiple approaches that may be legitimately taken to any given question is expected and discussed. Feedback is provided through various mechanisms, including written and spoken comments, group discussion and technology-enhanced systems.



## 5 Benchmark standards

5.1 It is recognised that many students studying Social Policy will be taking programmes, or taking Social Policy modules in the context of a wider social science programme. However, the following benchmark standards set out the achievement expected of a graduate of a bachelor's degree with honours in Social Policy. Drawing upon *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland*<sup>11</sup>, graduates in Social Policy have 'an understanding of a complex body of knowledge' and have also developed 'analytical techniques and problem-solving skills that can be applied in many types of employment'.

5.2 The standard expected of two types of graduate is addressed in this document - a threshold and a typical graduate. The threshold level describes the minimally acceptable standard achieved by a graduate. The typical level of achievement describes student performance around the median, which is where the performance of the majority of students lies. It is important to note, however, that a significant proportion of graduates will perform above the 'typical' level.

### Threshold standard

#### 5.3 Knowledge and understanding

- i Threshold Social Policy graduates are able to demonstrate general knowledge, understanding and awareness of key aspects of Social Policy including for example, how welfare state institutions function across the UK, and a general awareness of different welfare systems operating in other parts of the world.
- ii They are also able to demonstrate an ability to distinguish, describe and illustrate core Social Policy issues as well as recognising different theories, concepts, perspectives and methods presented in teaching and relevant literature.

### Subject-specific skills

5.4 Threshold graduates demonstrate an ability to:

- i describe and illustrate social questions, issues and problems
- ii recognise and distinguish between some of the core theories, concepts and perspectives in Social Policy and their relevance for practitioners
- iii appreciate the different normative values and principles which can underpin and shape policy making
- iv demonstrate sensitivity to the values and interests of others and appreciate the diversity of human needs and how they can be addressed
- v draw on their knowledge of research methods to provide informed commentary about the reliability of research evidence.

### Generic intellectual skills

5.5 Threshold graduates demonstrate achievement of the following generic intellectual skills:

- i problem-solving skills: evidence of an ability to propose alternative solutions to social problems
- ii data collection and research skills: an ability to retrieve, record, synthesise and

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<sup>11</sup> *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland*, available at: [www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication/?PubID=2843](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication/?PubID=2843)

- describe data gathered from various sources
- iii evaluative and analytical skills: an ability to provide accurate descriptive summaries of arguments, reports, documents and other written and verbal data
- iv creative and independent reasoning: ability to develop a reasoned argument and synthesise appropriate evidence.

### **Generic transferable skills**

5.6 Threshold graduates demonstrate achievement of the following transferable skills:

- i communication skills: an ability to communicate ideas both verbally and in writing, and where appropriate, use technical aids to develop and deliver simple presentations to an audience
- ii self-management of learning: an ability to undertake the planning, time management and organisation of work with guidance and support
- iii team work skills: an ability to engage in group work and collective projects
- iv information and communications technology skills: use a limited range of technologies to retrieve and present information
- v academic conventions: understand and use a standard referencing system for the purpose of constructing a bibliography.

### **Typical standard**

5.7 **Knowledge and understanding**

- i Typical Social Policy graduates are able to demonstrate in-depth knowledge, systematic understanding and critical awareness of key aspects of Social Policy, including for example, how welfare state institutions function across the UK, and an ability to distinguish different welfare systems operating in other parts of the world.
- ii They are also able to demonstrate an ability to review, consolidate, analyse, apply and extend their knowledge and understanding across a wide range of Social Policy issues as well as engaging critically with different theories, concepts, perspectives and methods presented in teaching and relevant literature.

### **Subject-specific skills**

5.8 Typical graduates demonstrate an ability to:

- i describe and demonstrate complex understandings of social questions, issues and problems
- ii understand and distinguish the core theories, concepts and perspectives in Social Policy and their relevance for other subjects and for practitioners
- iii develop critical reflection and evaluation of the normative values and principles which can underpin and shape policy making
- iv demonstrate sensitivity to the values and interests of others in order to appreciate the diversity of human needs, and understand how they can be addressed through Social Policy analysis and the process of policy making and implementation
- v apply their knowledge and experience of research methods to provide informed and critical commentary about the reliability of research evidence, and distinguish clearly between normative and empirically grounded arguments.

## **Generic intellectual skills**

5.9 Typical graduates demonstrate achievement of the following generic intellectual skills:

- i problem-solving skills: the ability to propose and critically evaluate alternative solutions to social problems
- ii data collection and research skills: an ability to work independently to retrieve, record, synthesise and analyse information gathered from various sources
- iii evaluative and analytical skills: an ability to critically and thoroughly assess and summarise arguments, reports, documents and other written and verbal data
- iv creative and independent reasoning: ability to develop a reasoned and substantiated argument using appropriate evidence and critical judgement.

## **Generic transferable skills**

5.10 Typical graduates demonstrate achievement of the following transferable skills:

- i communication skills: an ability to communicate ideas effectively both verbally and in writing, and where appropriate, use technical aids to develop and deliver complex presentations to an audience
- ii self-management of learning: an ability to undertake the planning, time management and organisation of work independently and through self-directed learning
- iii teamwork skills: an ability to initiate and contribute effectively to group work and collective projects
- iv information and communications technology skills: competently use a wide range of technologies to retrieve, analyse and present information
- v academic conventions: understand and use a standard referencing system correctly for the purpose of constructing an accurate bibliography.

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

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

Professor Hugh Bochel	University of Lincoln
Professor Sarah Hillcoat-Nalletamby	Swansea University
Dr Ingela Naumann (Chair)	University of Edinburgh
Dr Simon Pemberton	University of Birmingham
Dr Wendy Saunderson	Ulster University
Professor Nicola Yeates	Open University

#### **Employer representative**

Anna Buttenshaw	National Graduate Development Programme, Local Government Association
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#### **Student reader**

Frances McCourt	Ulster University
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This subject benchmark statement is produced by the Executive Committee of the Social Policy Association in association with the Joint University Council Social Policy Committee.

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QAA1353 - October 2015

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