



# Subject Benchmark Statement

Linguistics

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# Contents

<b>About this Statement .....</b>	<b>1</b>
How can I use this document? .....	1
Relationship to legislation .....	1
Additional sector reference points .....	2
<b>1 Context and purposes of a Linguistics Degree .....</b>	<b>3</b>
Context .....	3
Purposes and characteristics of a Linguistics degree .....	3
Equality, diversity and inclusion .....	4
Accessibility .....	4
Sustainability.....	5
Enterprise and entrepreneurship education.....	6
<b>2 Distinctive features of Linguistics degrees .....</b>	<b>8</b>
Design .....	8
Progression.....	8
Flexibility .....	9
Partnership .....	9
Monitoring and review .....	10
<b>3 Content, structure and delivery .....</b>	<b>11</b>
Content .....	11
Teaching and learning.....	14
Assessment .....	15
<b>4 Benchmark standards.....</b>	<b>17</b>
Minimum threshold standards .....	17
Generic skills .....	18
<b>5 List of references and further resources.....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>6 Membership of the Advisory Group.....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Appendix 1: Indicative course titles .....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Appendix 2: Signposting to other Subject Benchmark Statements .....</b>	<b>23</b>

*Cover photo: (PI Jessica Bradley) Multilingual Streets Project, 2019 - QAA would like to thank Dr Louise Atkinson, freelance artist-researcher, together with pupils and teachers from Burnage Academy.*

## About this Statement

This document is a QAA Subject Benchmark Statement for Linguistics 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. Subject Benchmark Statements are an established part of the quality assurance arrangements in UK higher education, but not a regulatory requirement. They are sector-owned reference points, developed and written by academics on behalf of their subject. Subject Benchmark Statements also describe the nature and characteristics of awards in a particular subject or area. Subject Benchmark Statements are published in QAA's capacity as an expert quality body on behalf of the higher education sector. A summary of the Statement is also available on the QAA website.

Key changes from the previous Subject Benchmark Statement include:

- a revised structure for the Statement, which includes the introduction of cross-cutting themes of:
  - equality, diversity and inclusion
  - accessibility and the needs of disabled students
  - education for sustainable development
  - employability, entrepreneurship and enterprise education
- a comprehensive review updating the context and purposes, including course design and content in order to inform and underpin the revised benchmark standards.

## How can I use this document?

Subject Benchmark Statements are not intended to prescribe any particular approaches to teaching, learning or assessment. Rather, they provide a framework, agreed by the subject community, that forms the basis on which those responsible for curriculum design, approval and update can reflect upon a course, and its component modules. This allows for flexibility and innovation in course design while providing a broadly accepted external reference point for that discipline.

They may also be used as a reference point by external examiners in considering whether the design of a course and the threshold standards of achievement are comparable with those of other higher education providers. They also support professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs) with the academic standards expected of students.

You may want to read this document if you are:

- involved in the design, delivery and review of courses in Linguistics
- a prospective student thinking about undertaking a course in Linguistics
- an employer, to find out about the knowledge and skills generally expected of Linguistics graduates.

## Relationship to legislation

The responsibility for academic standards lies with the higher education provider which awards the degree. Higher education providers are responsible for meeting the requirements of legislation and any other regulatory requirements placed upon them by their relevant funding and regulatory bodies. This Statement does not interpret legislation, nor does it incorporate statutory or regulatory requirements.

The regulatory status of the Statement will differ with regard to the educational jurisdictions

of the UK. In England, Subject Benchmark Statements are not sector-recognised standards as set out under the Office for Students' [regulatory framework](#). However, they are specified as a key reference point for academic standards in Wales under the [Quality Enhancement Review](#) and in Scotland as part of the [Quality Enhancement Framework](#). Subject Benchmark Statements are part of the current quality requirements in Northern Ireland. Because the Statement describes outcomes and attributes expected at the threshold standard of achievement in a UK-wide context, many higher education providers will use them as an enhancement tool for course design and approval, and for subsequent monitoring and review, in addition to helping demonstrate the security of academic standards.

## **Additional sector reference points**

Higher education providers are likely to consider other reference points in addition to this Statement in designing, delivering and reviewing courses. These may include requirements set out by PSRBs and industry or employer expectations. QAA has also published [Advice and Guidance](#) to support the [Quality Code for Higher Education](#), which will be helpful when using this Statement - for example, in [course design](#), [learning and teaching](#), [external expertise](#), and [monitoring and evaluation](#).

Explanations of unfamiliar terms used in this Subject Benchmark Statement can be found in [QAA's Glossary](#). Sources of information about other requirements and examples of guidance and good practice are signposted within the Statement where appropriate.

# 1 Context and purposes of a Linguistics Degree

## Context

1.1 The purpose of this Statement is to make explicit the context, content, scope and benchmark standards of undergraduate degrees in the subject area of Linguistics, which encompasses the interrelated areas of General and Applied Linguistics. The Statement includes guidance on subject knowledge, course structure, delivery of teaching and assessment.

## Purposes and characteristics of a Linguistics degree

1.2 Linguistics is concerned with the knowledge, structure and use of language. The discipline involves the study of the human capacity for language in all its expressions (spoken, signed and written). This includes a structural dimension that asks what the universal building blocks of human language are and how these elements - sounds, signs, words - combine to generate meaning; the cognitive dimension of how the brain processes these; and the social, cultural and historical dimensions of how these systems form - how they are acquired, used and interpreted, as well as how they interact and evolve.

1.3 Whether the focus of study is language structure as a product of human cognition or language use as a structured social practice, the guiding principle of Linguistics is that the nature of linguistic behaviour can be elucidated by systematic study, using a range of theoretical and empirical methodologies, including the development of theoretical models that can be systematically tested against empirical data. The subject thus comprises a highly diverse set of established and emerging fields that span the traditional domains of sciences, social sciences and humanities, and explore the interfaces between them. The Statement uses the term 'Linguistics' to refer to this considerable conceptual breadth, methodological diversity and inherent interdisciplinarity, while acknowledging that the term attracts different approaches and interpretations in different higher education providers.

1.4 The Statement, therefore, does not aim to present clear-cut boundaries of the subject area. Rather, it follows an approach that is expansive, evolving and responsive to recent developments in the subject and the subject community. This approach acknowledges the diversity and the dynamism of the subject and demonstrates how Linguistics responds to changing societal and entrepreneurial needs. It also foregrounds the heterogeneity of the subject and highlights its social utility (see Section 3 below).

1.5 The diversity of the subject and of the courses in which it features, is reflected in the wide range of courses offered by providers, and for this reason the Subject Benchmark Statement for Linguistics does not seek to provide definitive criteria for course design. This diversity allows students of Linguistics to choose a course with an emphasis suited to their academic and professional aspirations. For example, Linguistics is commonly offered in combination with subjects such as English, TESOL, other languages, Psychology, Philosophy, and Politics. For an indicative list of the Linguistics course offerings in the sector, refer to Appendix 1.

1.6 These subject combinations reflect the breadth of the subject. Linguistic research in the 21st century encompasses all aspects of the systematic study of the human capacity for language - whether the physical properties of the sound waves in utterances or the social contexts in which linguistic interactions are embedded. Linguists also study what languages have in common - the extent of and limits to the variation within and between languages and linguistic cultures, and the ways in which languages change over time and are acquired by language users. The study of the properties of languages in this sense, and the construction of theoretical models for these areas of inquiry, all come under the auspices of Linguistics

and intersect with language use and applications in conjunction with different degree combinations. For these reasons, the higher education contexts within which Linguistics courses may be located are very diverse.

## Equality, diversity and inclusion

1.7 Linguistics embeds equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) within its curriculum design, research traditions, disciplinary values, knowledge production, ethical protocols, pedagogies, assessments and learning environments. Members of the subject community are engaged in individual and collective learning which is central to embracing EDI and challenging conceptual and methodological biases.

1.8 Linguistics students and staff critically reflect on their own linguistic knowledge, identities and attitudes. As a result, many areas within Linguistics directly embed EDI in the subject knowledge. For example, the study of phonology, morphology, syntax and other formal fields depends on comparative analysis of unrelated languages, often non-European languages, in order to establish the universal building blocks of human language and show that variation and change are ubiquitous and central to human society. Dialectology and sociocultural linguistics similarly emphasise the viewpoint of vernacular varieties, minority languages, discursive representations of minority groups, mobility and social justice, gender, sexuality and race. Linguists work in partnership with diverse social groups, rather than on their behalf.

1.9 Central to the subject community is making explicit the implicit knowledge, resources and practices that language users draw on every day. Language plays a central role in a range of complex cognitive and social processes and challenges, including perception, social transformation and social change; it also opens and closes doors for civic participation and social emancipation. Linguistics articulates the link between social hierarchies and the language usage that manifests them and raises awareness about the symbolic power of language in transforming and manipulating social realities.

1.10 Creating learning environments and experiences which enable students to interact and collaborate within and across their courses increases their knowledge, skills and understanding of EDI topics and issues. Diverse student populations bring to the discipline, rich, conceptual and methodological perspectives crucial to knowledge production, while the analysis and validation of non-standard varieties of languages makes a significant contribution to inclusion and diversity in the student body and society more generally.

1.11 Students' learning is supported by a mix of traditional and innovative approaches to assessment. The use of assessments linked to real-life experiences encourages students to make sense of the current social world, while appreciating the complexity of their discipline and its role in engaging with equality, diversity and inclusion topics, debates and issues.

## Accessibility

1.12 Linguistics embraces an inclusive understanding of language in all its modes (for example, written, spoken, sign) and explores how modes of expression intersect with cultures, histories, identities and societies. The subject community welcomes students from a wide range of educational backgrounds and facilitates their engagement by providing different accessible formats and reasonable adjustments.

1.13 Linguistics students work across a wide range of environments and circumstances and are normally expected to become increasingly able to communicate professionally, with an appreciation of and respect for linguistic, social and cultural diversity. They are also encouraged and supported to be active learners and to develop self-confidence, critical

understanding of their academic environment, and independence in their approach to learning.

1.14 Linguistics courses are designed to support student growth and development. It is often the case that diversity in students' home environments (for instance, being a bilingual/multilingual speaker) enriches the Linguistics classroom, as linguistic diversity is a main focus for many areas, including applied linguistics, sociolinguistics, multilingualism, language acquisition, and language learning and teaching.

1.15 Linguistics courses can encourage students to bring linguistic knowledge and experience from their own lives - from diverse speech communities and from the networks in which they participate, allowing them to apply and challenge linguistic theories in ways that are important to them and informative for others.

1.16 Higher education providers are aware of students' accessibility needs and the different levels of support necessary for the promotion of active engagement and inclusive participation of disabled students, using a combination of digital/virtual, face-to-face, synchronous or asynchronous teaching and learning support to ensure accessibility. Where digital content is used, this content is made available in a range of accessible formats. This includes using alternative formats (for example, transcripts, captions, notes) where necessary and appropriate to make digital content accessible and inclusive.

## Sustainability

1.17 Linguistics offers important contributions to how sustainability can be embedded in teaching, learning, pedagogies, assessments and research traditions. Linguistic knowledge, skills and competencies can allow students to analyse the connection and intersection between economic, social, racial, political, cultural, linguistic and environmental factor; how they feed into the exploitation of nature; and how individuals and societies respond to environmental concerns, such as the current climate emergency.

1.18 Basic principles for the subject's engagement with sustainability include the following:

- Language is crucial to discussions about sustainability and hope due to its power in articulating a vision of what can be done.
- Education in Linguistics develops crucial skills related to linguistic analysis, self-awareness, strategic thinking and critical argumentation that are needed for transformative thinking in the face of the current climate emergency.

1.19 Linguistics scholarship aligns with UNESCO's [education for sustainable development goals](#) in numerous ways:

- Language, gender and intersectionality studies develop critical understandings of the concepts of gender, gender equality, and gender discrimination, as well as the exploitation of and violence against women and girls. Such studies encourage self-reflection and comparison of gender norms in a range of cultural and social contexts (SDG5: Gender Equality).
- Multilingualism and understanding the relations between local and international languages are important for development, including economic and social development. Language skills are also important for economic growth and self-representation (SDG8: Decent Work and Economic Growth). Linguistics scholarship offers significant contributions to this goal in many areas, including language policy and planning, language education and multilingualism research.

- Language and intercultural dialogue/communication are at the heart of developing peace, and strong and inclusive societies (SDG16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions).
- Language use, analysis and understanding are key to empowerment, opportunities, inclusion and equitable access. Particular attention to language and linguistic diversity should be given if we are to develop inclusive education for all (SDG4: Quality Education).

1.20 Fields such as discourse analysis, recognise the role of language as a tool for manipulation, social transformation and persuasion, and are thereby able to analyse the role of language in constructing and responding to climate change, climate action and environmental concerns, while uncovering links between ecological, societal and racial vulnerability, and economic challenges and inequalities.

1.21 Linguists engaging in language documentation, endangered language research, and ethnography can help open up sustainability dialogues by giving voice to new kinds of knowledge (non-Western, non-white, indigenous), and new concepts from other languages that promote 'good living' for a better world and problematise the commonly celebrated concept of 'development' that might be interpreted as reinforcing infinite growth and unstoppable development.

## Enterprise and entrepreneurship education

1.22 Enterprise and entrepreneurship education supports behaviours, attributes and competencies that are likely to have a significant impact on the individual student in terms of successful careers. It prepares students for changing environments and provides enhanced impact through placements and activities that build links between academic institutions and external organisations.

1.23 Beyond employment, entrepreneurship education provides competencies to help students lead a rewarding, self-determined professional life, well placed to add social, cultural and economic value to society through their careers.

1.24 Linguistics encompasses varied subdisciplines that promote a unique combination of critical, creative and analytical skills that are valuable in a range of professional environments. This disciplinary diversity, coupled with the range of methodological approaches and theoretical stances used, fosters the development of a variety of transferable skills, knowledge and professional attributes. In the course of their studies, students develop capabilities that make them enquiring, critical, innovative, and able to find new and effective ways to create cultural, social or economic value.

1.25 These capabilities promote the generation and application of ideas combining creativity, originality, initiative, design, adaptability and reflexivity that can be used to support problem identification, problem solving, innovation, expression, communication and practical action ([QAA 2018](#)).

1.26 The Linguistics curriculum develops students' skills in a way that can have a significant impact on society - for example, by challenging established language ideologies and attitudes, scrutinising and rationalising institutional policies and practices, identifying assumptions, premises or prejudices underlying discourses, and critically evaluating theoretical positions and the data that drives them. Graduates are able to articulate and demonstrate these skills to potential employers, as well as other skills and personal attributes that are likely to be useful within the workplace.



1.27 The modules undertaken during Linguistics courses develop understanding of how language works in diverse contexts, and placement opportunities enable connections to be made with external organisations. The enhancement of skills, knowledge and professional attributes are of ever-increasing importance to graduates.

1.28 Students of Linguistics also gain extensive subject-specific and general skills in information technology, including the ability to present information using digital tools and resources for language analysis, together with the collection, evaluation, synthesis and interpretation of both qualitative and quantitative forms of data from a range of public and professional contexts.

1.29 Linguistics graduates are in demand in a range of sectors and industries, such as publishing, journalism, technology, artificial intelligence, public relations, teaching, research, translation, interpreting, marketing and branding, the civil service, business, industry, social media, language consultancy, language teaching, speech and language therapy, data science and forensic science. Such roles enable them to apply their knowledge of language, as well as their skills in linguistic and statistical analysis.

1.30 Due to the rise of internet-mediated communication and the wealth of written and spoken data linked to it, Linguistics graduates are increasingly employed in industries that make use of written and spoken data to inform their products and services. For example, in educational technology, editing, user experience research, customer service scripting, marketing, speech technology, artificial intelligence and the use of Large Language Models, Linguistics graduates may be employed for their ability to analyse linguistic data and deduce patterns, which can subsequently inform the work of all sectors in the effective and inclusive use of language.

1.31 Overall, the ability of Linguistics graduates to analyse complex linguistic data, deduce patterns from such analyses, evaluate communicative functionality and apply a range of analysis techniques makes them highly employable across a range of sectors.

## 2 Distinctive features of Linguistics degrees

### Design

2.1 The breadth of the Linguistics degree and its interdisciplinary nature are reflected in the design of Linguistics courses. Courses provide a coherent set of core modules, research skills training, and research-informed optional modules allowing students to build on increasingly more complex linguistic concepts and applications of the discipline as they progress through their studies. Courses allow opportunities to reflect critically on the nature of the subject, its theoretical underpinnings, practical applications and ethical dimensions.

2.2 Course design also supports the development of independence of thought and critical awareness as students progress between levels. At the end of their degree, students may complete an extended piece of work, often, but not always, referred to as a dissertation or a final-year project, where the student is enabled to formulate, execute and complete an independent piece of linguistic research under appropriate supervision.

2.3 Single honours degree courses in Linguistics cover a substantial part of the provision described in Section 3. Joint and combined honours courses, in general, select or modify various aspects of this provision, taking into account the provider's specific teaching and research strengths, and also the needs of its students. All relevant honours courses have at least a basic introductory module that introduces students to the wide range of issues in Linguistics.

### Progression

2.4 Linguistics courses differ in the types of core and optional modules offered by different institutions. This variety and flexibility is a distinguishing feature of Linguistics, and there is no single model of sequential study to follow for institutions offering Linguistics as a degree. Individual institutions determine how a given Linguistics course facilitates progression over the period of study.

2.5 Over the course of a degree with honours (FHEQ Level 6; FQHEIS Level 10), Linguistics students will progress from one level of study to the next, in line with the regulations and processes for each institution. However, it is expected that each level would see the progressive attainment of knowledge, skills, expertise and experience that build towards the final achievement of meeting the threshold-level subject skills listed in this Statement.

2.6 Progression is typically reflected in increasing levels of sophistication in the understanding of knowledge and concepts; the development of a set of core research skills which are reinforced and developed at each level; the ability to critically evaluate multiple theoretical approaches and methodologies; an understanding of interfaces with other levels of linguistic analysis; and the ability to see the relevance of linguistics to wider applications beyond the intellectual pursuit of the course and an increased capacity for sustained written and/or oral argumentation. The course builds towards greater independence in learning that is typically marked by the completion of a dissertation or independent linguistics research project. Ultimately, upon graduation from an undergraduate degree, a student who achieves a second-class degree or higher is capable of, and equipped for, undertaking postgraduate study in Linguistics or an associated discipline. Entry requirements to postgraduate courses are, however, determined by individual providers and may require specified levels of achievement at undergraduate level.

2.7 Undergraduates studying a combined, joint or major-minor route will achieve core elements of the specific and generic skills for the subject, and will add others according to the requirements of the relevant joint courses. Additionally, they may explore the overlap between their two subject areas via interdisciplinary study.

2.8 While Linguistics courses are typically a three-year undergraduate honours degree (or a four-year course if a placement/'sandwich' year or year abroad is included), students may exit earlier and be eligible for a Certificate in Higher Education, a Diploma in Higher Education, or an honours degree depending upon the levels of study completed to a satisfactory standard. Scottish bachelor's degrees with honours are typically designed to include four years of study, which relates to the integrated structure of primary, secondary and tertiary education in Scotland. For students following part-time routes, their study time would be the equivalent of the three or four-year degree.

2.9 As funding models change and develop, it will increasingly be necessary for providers to consider the development of standalone 'micro-credentials' which may also contribute to more traditionally focused awards. These will need to be appealing to students in terms of professional and personal development, as well as contributing to the study of the subject, more generally.

## Flexibility

2.10 Linguistics courses are flexible in providing choice on entry to allow for diversity in students' educational backgrounds. Some courses do not list specific subject criteria for entry. Individual institutions provide such information clearly in their entry requirements.

2.11 Flexibility in content, modes of delivery and timing allows Linguistics modules to be taught and assessed in an increasingly flexible and accessible way that can accommodate the abilities and needs of individual students. Access to online provision and resources, supported by appropriate technology, facilitates the development and teaching of the subject.

2.12 The provision of accessible, inclusive and flexible content requires appropriate resources and training to ensure consistent high-quality content and delivery. Where the design includes digital technology, the diversity in students' access to technology needs to be recognised in ways that do not disadvantage them in any way.

## Partnership

2.13 Linguistics graduates develop a wide range of transferable skills and therefore enter a variety of occupations. As such, it is appropriate that they can engage in activities which will support them into diverse future careers. Institutions ensure that all students have equality of opportunity to engage in partnerships, where appropriate.

2.14 Courses can include a variety of partnership activities provided they meet some of the learning outcomes of a Linguistics degree. The guiding principle for these activities is that they enable students to either apply established linguistics skills developed during the course or to learn new skills which can be applied elsewhere in the curriculum.

2.15 Linguistics students often have a natural interest in language comparison and development. Mobility and exchanges across cultures and societies allow students to experience transnational teaching environments.

2.16 Even where mobility is not an integral element of a particular course, courses operating within a global context and with a focus on diversity of experience, whether face-to-face or virtual, enhance students' teaching and learning environment.

2.17 Partnership with external organisations which offer teaching qualifications, enhance the graduate outcomes of students on Linguistics courses with a teacher training focus, such as TESOL.

2.18 Feedback from employers indicates that Linguistics graduates bring a rich skill set of transferable skills which are highly valued. These include the ability for critical thinking and personal reflection, fluency in communication, and working both within teams and independently. Many of these skills can be enhanced through experiential learning offered by external partnerships or by elements within the curriculum.

## Monitoring and review

2.19 Degree-awarding bodies, and their collaborative partnerships, routinely collect and analyse information and periodic course review according to their needs. They draw on a range of external reference points, including this Statement, to ensure that their provision aligns with sector norms. Monitoring and evaluation take the form of a periodic assessment of a course, conducted internally or by external independent evaluators. Evaluation uses information from both current and historic monitoring to develop an understanding of student achievement or inform future course planning.

2.20 Externality is an essential component of the quality assurance system in the UK. Providers will use external reviewers as part of periodic review to gain an external perspective on any proposed changes and ensure threshold standards are achieved and content is appropriate for the subject.

2.21 The external examining system currently in use across the UK higher education sector also helps to ensure consistency in the way academic standards are secured by degree-awarding bodies. Typically, external examiners will be asked to comment on the types, principles and purposes of assessments being offered to students. They will consider the types of modules on offer to students, the outcomes of a cohort and how these compare to similar provision offered within other UK higher education providers. External examiners are asked to produce a report each year and make recommendations for changes to modules and assessments (where appropriate). Subject Benchmark Statements, such as this one, can play an important role in supporting external examiners in advising on whether threshold standards are being met in a specific subject area.

2.22 Courses with professional and vocational outcomes may also require evaluation and accreditation from professional and regulatory bodies. These are usually done through a combination of site visits and desk-based reviews.

## 3 Content, structure and delivery

### Content

3.1 The content of Linguistics courses varies from one provider to another and from one course to another within the same provider. Introductory modules in Linguistics tend to approach the study of language from several levels of linguistic analysis - specifically, phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics and pragmatics. These modules introduce core linguistic terms and concepts, often laying the foundation for modules that take diverse approaches to language study.

3.2 Many Linguistics modules focus on levels of language - such as sounds, words, phrases, sentences and discourse, and may also seek to understand the ways these elements are acquired by children and processed in the brain; and how they show variation and undergo change. There are strong links between linguistic theory and psychology, philosophy and cognitive science; therefore, by studying these modules, students gain interdisciplinary insights. The following provides a brief description of levels of linguistic analysis:

- **Phonetics** is the study of the physical properties of speech sounds and of the articulatory and psychological mechanisms used in speech production and perception across the world's languages. Phonetic theory deals with the mapping between the language-specific cognitive representation of speech sounds and the organs used to produce and perceive these. A range of techniques for recording and observing speech form part of this area, including phonetic transcription and instrumental displays.
- **Phonology** is the study of the systematic organisation of speech sounds in language. This includes the study of the cross-linguistic properties of sound systems, and the study of the sound systems of particular languages. Phonology involves both the description and analysis of the sound patterns occurring in the world's languages, and investigation into the relationship between speech sounds themselves and the abstract representational system underlying them.
- **Morphology** is the study of the internal structure of words and of word-formation, and of the properties of the minimal units that bear independent meaning or grammatical function, known as morphemes. Morphologists investigate how these minimal units are constituted and how they interrelate, addressing such questions as what kind of lexical information these minimal units specify, and how these specifications relate to the morphological patterns and word-formation processes occurring across languages.
- **Syntax** is the study of how words are combined to form phrases and sentences, and of the relationships occurring between the subparts of phrases and sentences. Syntacticians investigate systematic patterns both in individual languages and across the languages of the world. Syntactic theory is engaged in understanding the theoretical basis for these descriptive findings through the development of formal models.
- **Semantics** is the study of meaning at all levels: the meaning of morphemes and words, phrases, grammatical constructions, sentences and larger units. While lexical semantics studies the meaning of words in terms of content, formal semantics studies aspects of meaning having direct relevance to syntax, including how meaning is computed from parts of a phrase or a sentence and the way these are combined. Relations between natural language and formal logical systems are studied as part of logical semantics, often using techniques from formal logic.

- **Pragmatics** is the study of the way people use linguistic resources, in particular situational or discourse contexts. Pragmatics is therefore concerned with how language is used to enable a speaker to relate to, understand and possibly influence other people.

3.3 The above tools for the analysis of language and the cross-cutting themes from Section 1 are commonly used to understand a range of domains of language use and development such as the following.

- **Language acquisition** is concerned with how language(s) develop in children and adults. Core issues in the study of first language acquisition include the question of what constitutes knowledge of language; how it is acquired by children; and language socialisation in childhood. Second language acquisition is the study of the acquisition of a language after the first language is established. The study of bilingualism / multilingualism centres on the mental organisation and social embedding of two or more language systems.
- **Historical linguistics** involves the study of language change over time, investigating recorded data or reconstructed forms from past periods. It includes the genealogical classification of languages into family groups, the reconstruction of hypothetical ancestors for those groups, motivations for and processes of language change, comparative philology, and the relationship of language change to language variation and linguistic theory.
- **Language evolution or evolutionary linguistics** focuses on the biological, social and cognitive origins and evolution of the language capacity itself. Evolutionary linguists rely on a range of direct and indirect evidence, including acquisition; language formation - for example, sign languages or creole languages; archaeological evidence for advanced cognition and physiology; population genetics; studies of communication and cognition in other species; and computational and experimental modelling.
- **Typological linguistics** encompasses several closely related areas of investigation. Typology involves the classification of languages in terms of common structural features and the implicational relations among those features. Typology involves comparisons between two or more languages or language families, which may or may not be historically related, to establish the extent and nature of the diversity of structures displayed by the world's languages.
- **Sociolinguistics** addresses the relationship between language and society. The study of language variation and change is concerned with social regularities in accent and dialect at the community and individual level. Interactional and ethnographic approaches deal with communicative contexts, drawing on anthropology. Macro sociolinguistics deals with language policy and planning, language maintenance and language shift, and language endangerment and/or death.
- **Psycholinguistics** studies the relationship between linguistic behaviour and psychological processes. These include production and comprehension of spoken, signed and written language, the acquisition of linguistic knowledge in child and adult learners, and language disorders. Psycholinguists use experimental and naturalistic data to study comprehension (for example, word recognition, the processing of syntactic structure, and semantic and pragmatic interpretation), and language production (the planning and execution of utterances, from intention to articulation).
- **Neurolinguistics** studies the neurological implementation of the mental mechanisms involved in language use - both perception and production. Work in neurolinguistics is informed by neuroscience and neurobiology, as well as disciplines concerned with cognition, such as psycholinguistics and theoretical linguistics. Using brain imaging

(such as PET and fMRI) and time-sensitive electrophysiological techniques (such as EEG and MEG), neurolinguists aim to understand neurological activation during the processing of linguistic information.

- **The history of linguistics** investigates developments in linguistics and their historical and cultural contexts. The history of linguistics plays an important role in understanding how research in linguistics has contributed to the general history of ideas in the wider intellectual context of their time.
- **Philosophy of language** broadly considers the philosophical questions raised by language, such as: What is meaning? What is knowledge of language? How is language usable? How does language connect to the world? How does language connect to society and culture?
- **Corpus linguistics** draws on a range of large sets of representative samples of language in terms of written and spoken registers, and uses quantitative and qualitative methods in the investigation of patterns of language, as evidenced by digital collections of real-life, 'authentic', examples of language-in-use.
- **Discourse analysis** offers various qualitative approaches to the study of language use beyond word and sentence level, frequently in relation to sociocultural practices, ideologies and identities. Critical Discourse Analysis is a specific form of discourse analysis with a specific emphasis on explorations of the impact of power and ideology on this creation of meaning.
- **Stylistics** examines the construction of textual meaning in all texts, literary and non-literary, spoken and written. It develops theories of meaning which complement those of semantics and discourse analysis, and aims to understand the processes which operate between the purely formal (syntactic) and the situated (pragmatics and discourse analysis).
- **Educational linguistics** covers the linguistic, pedagogical and developmental components of language education such as literacy development, knowledge about language and language awareness. It also includes the social aspects of language use within education contexts, such as identity, meaning, relationships, context and the roles that language plays in teaching and learning.

3.4 It is not uncommon for Linguistics modules to focus on the relationship between theory and practice. This involves examining language-related problems and addressing social and technological challenges that are inherently linguistic. Some of these modules take knowledge and insights from the way that language works (for example - phonology, morphology, syntax, lexis) and examine how this is relevant to the world around us. Other modules seek to inform practice by researching a wide range of social phenomena in numerous social and professional domains. The examples below illustrate how linguistic approaches are used extensively in applications across a range of contexts and professional practices within and beyond the discipline of Linguistics:

**Applied linguistics** uses insights from linguistics, sociology, education and psychology, and other disciplines to study real-world questions and problems involving language and, in partnership with those involved, to seek practical solutions for them. Areas involved include language learning and teaching, the role of language in education, and communication in professional and public service contexts. Applied linguistics, including critical applied linguistics, problematises traditional approaches to language research, pushes for methodological and conceptual innovations, and covers a wide range of topics such as World Englishes, social justice, language and symbolic power, multimodal analysis, language coloniality and decolonisation, as well as how language intersects with topics such as gender, sexuality, social class, race and the environment, among many others.

**Clinical linguistics** applies linguistic theories and analytical techniques to address speech, language and communication needs, often from a perspective of language and communication science. An understanding of clinically relevant linguistic phenomena is crucial for the description, remediation or management of a wide range of congenital, acquired, traumatic or degenerative impairments in children and adults, both cognitive and physiological. Clinical linguistics is therefore an essential core component of degree programmes leading to a range of professional qualifications, particularly Speech and Language Therapy. A clinical perspective also provides novel insights into the development and use of unimpaired language, whether in theoretical or typological research or through its relevance to practical issues such as voice health, rhetoric, literacy, accent modification or gender identity.

**Computational linguistics** is concerned with computer processing of human language, often for practical purposes such as human/machine interaction but also as a methodology for testing implementations of linguistic analysis (for example, computer simulations of language and speech). The field includes areas such as natural language understanding and generation; information extraction and retrieval; dialogue modelling; speech recognition and synthesis; and the computational manipulation of corpus data.

**Forensic linguistics** is the application of linguistic knowledge in the legal domain and, more generally, addresses the relationship between language and its legal context. This can involve the detection and measurement of deception or distinguishing features in sample texts or audio recordings, as part of criminal cases.

**Translation and interpreting** draw on insights from various branches of linguistics, such as lexical semantics, text linguistics, pragmatics and discourse analysis, as well as PET and fMRI) contrastive analyses of language systems and cultural practices in different speech communities.

**Language teaching** includes second and community language teaching, and Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL); it is informed by a body of theoretical, practical and critical perspectives on language teaching and learning, and covers areas such as Learner Motivation, Identity, Second Language Acquisition, Educational Linguistics, Multilingual Education, Multilingual approaches to language teaching and learning, and Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL).

**Language planning and policy** refers to the explicit and implicit policies influencing decisions about what languages are spoken, when, how, and by whom, together with the values and rights associated with those languages.

**Lexicography** is the application of the linguistic analysis of words to the design, compilation, and use of dictionaries and lexical databases.

## Teaching and learning

3.5 In all courses incorporating Linguistics, the teaching, learning and assessment methods are designed to achieve progression, coherence and balance, and to reflect the specific aims, emphases and learning outcomes of the course. There are explicit links between teaching and learning methods, and the specific aims, emphases and learning outcomes of the degree. Teaching, learning and assessment methods are designed to be appropriate for students' stage of progression.

3.6 Students are provided at the outset of their course with full documentation informing them of its aims and emphases. Linguistics is inherently multidisciplinary and



interdisciplinary, spanning the traditional humanities and social sciences, so different Linguistics courses vary in their structure and subject focus, particularly where Linguistics is studied in combination with another discipline. Owing to the breadth and diversity of its subdisciplines, Linguistics courses give students the opportunity to develop their skills and knowledge through a varied set of teaching styles and learning activities. This may include:

- lectures
- seminars
- practical classes and laboratory work demonstrating practical, subject-specific skills
- critical reading of core texts
- workshops on research methods
- verbal and/or non-verbal presentations, including visual presentation software
- group and individual tutorials
- peer-led or tutor-led collaborative group study
- the planning, design and execution of a group or individual research project or other type of rigorous inquiry
- problem sets and short exercises involving data analysis
- the use of specialist computer software and other relevant digital tools/resources
- supervised independent learning
- external placements
- the use of virtual learning environments.

3.7 Core principles of inclusivity within the learning environment underpin the design of teaching activities, ensuring that all students are equally enabled to achieve their potential through their teaching experiences and learning opportunities. An inclusive learning environment is supported by teaching methods that embody a sense of belonging and community among students and instructors by promoting engagement, interactivity, reflection and self-awareness.

## Assessment

3.8 Degree courses contain explicit links between assessment strategies and the specific aims and learning outcomes of the course. Formative and summative assessments are appropriate for students' learning needs and stage of progression.

3.9 Assessment formats are appropriate for the topic and, given that Linguistics encompasses a wide range of subdisciplines and interfaces with other disciplines, a broad and varied set of assessment styles is encouraged. Different assessment methods may be required in order to evaluate, for example:

- students' ability to describe and analyse specific properties of linguistic systems (including syntax and phonology)
- students' understanding of abstract theoretical concepts that underpin language structure, language change, language acquisition or language use
- students' appreciation of the impacts of cultural, social, historical or political contexts on language
- students' awareness and application of appropriate research methodologies in gathering, analysing and interpreting data
- students' application of principles of language learning in the design and delivery of language education courses.

3.10 Linguistics courses are typically innovative in the design of assessment, though different assessment methods will suit different modules and courses of study. Assessment

methods include:

- essays and other written reports
- independent research projects and/or dissertations
- individual and group project reports
- seen and unseen examinations, which may involve written, aural, verbal and non-verbal assessment
- individual and group presentations
- short exercises and cumulative problem sets involving data analysis
- qualitative or quantitative data collection and analysis
- designing materials for specific professional or educational purposes
- laboratory-based practical work
- portfolios of work
- critical reviews of research articles
- creating online resources, including web pages, websites, podcasts and wikis
- critical self and peer-evaluation
- tasks aimed at the assessment of specific skills (for example, transcription and information technology (IT) skills).

3.11 The design of assessment methods balances opportunities to demonstrate knowledge in diverse subject areas with opportunities to demonstrate subject-specific, practical and transferable graduate skills as well as the principles described in Section 1 (above). Themes within Linguistics afford varied opportunities for providers to elucidate the role of language within inclusivity and global sustainability, relating to the [United Nations Sustainable Development Goals](#) such as quality education, work and economic growth, reduced inequalities, sustainable cities and communities, and gender equality.

3.12 The rationale for assessment is clearly presented to students and explicit assessment criteria support all forms of assessment; for some assessments, generic assessment criteria for assessed work at a particular level may be applicable but where generic criteria are not sufficient, task-specific assessment criteria are provided.

3.13 Assessment is not only evaluative but also formative and diagnostic; students receive constructive, detailed feedback on formative and summative tasks throughout their degree.

## 4 Benchmark standards

4.1 This Subject Benchmark Statement sets out the minimum threshold standards that a student will have demonstrated when they are awarded an honours degree in Linguistics. Joint and combined honours degrees draw on an appropriate subset of these skills. Demonstrating these standards over time shows that a student has achieved the range of knowledge, understanding and skills expected of graduates in Linguistics.

4.2 The vast majority of students will perform significantly better than the minimum threshold standards. Each higher education provider has its own method of determining what appropriate evidence of this achievement will be and should refer to [Annex D: Outcome classification descriptions for FHEQ Level 6 and FQHEIS Level 10 degrees](#). This Annex sets out common descriptions of the four main degree outcome classifications for bachelor's degrees with honours: 1st, 2.1, 2.2 and 3rd.

4.3 Graduates with a bachelor's degree in Linguistics will be expected to have an understanding of the basic concepts and modes of analysis in core areas such as phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, pragmatics, and discourse. These tools lay the foundation for Linguistics graduates to also gain significant knowledge and comprehension of the domains within which these systems arise and exist - for example, language acquisition; language variation and change; the role of language in society; and the nature of language as a cognitive object.

4.4 A Linguistics graduate is expected to have knowledge of a range of empirical linguistic phenomena and of the relevant technical terminology and methodology used in the description and analysis of such phenomena. Knowledge gained may be largely descriptive but is usually informed by an appropriate theoretical framework.

### Minimum threshold standards

4.5 The threshold standard is the minimally acceptable level of attainment achieved by an honours graduate. On graduating with an honours degree in Linguistics, students should be able to acquire a range of subject-specific and generic skills including:

- demonstrate knowledge of the fundamental analytical concepts and methods of inquiry appropriate to a Linguistics degree
- take a systematic approach to the identification, description and analysis of language phenomena
- ask motivated questions about language structure and use
- apply the basic techniques for collecting/eliciting and transcribing data specific to the various sub-disciplines of Linguistics, including the use of language corpora, media, politics or advertising, elicitation tasks, introspection, laboratory experiments, questionnaires, interviews and/or other types of linguistic fieldwork
- apply analytical concepts specific to different levels of linguistic analysis to appropriate data sets
- formulate linguistic generalisations, and construct and test hypotheses within the scope of linguistics, using appropriate evidence
- evaluate alternative analyses of a given set of data, based on an understanding of how linguistic theories help to organise linguistic analysis and to determine what constitutes evidence
- evaluate alternative theories, drawing on an understanding of the nature of linguistic theory and of what constitutes an explanation within the scope of linguistics
- present linguistic data and analysis using the appropriate methods and conventions specific to each sub-discipline of Linguistics, including bracketing, tree diagrams,

- formal logic, graphs, tables, matrices and specific transcription systems
- utilise linguistic terminology, theory and research to address real-world challenges
- understand and communicate observations about the linguistic representations of ideology, power, social identities and realities
- analyse linguistic representations of minority groups in different regional, sociocultural and situational settings
- identify and examine examples of and reasons for language variation across situational, social, cultural, regional and historical contexts as well as multilingual and cross-cultural contexts
- evaluate the role language plays in shaping sociocultural norms, identities and realities in a range of public and private domains
- show some understanding of language use and ideologies in relation to globalisation, mobility, sustainability and social justice.

## Generic skills

4.6 Degrees in Linguistics offer students the opportunity to develop many generic skills of value to employers. The following skills are of particular significance:

- hypothesis formulation and testing
- assessing the merits of contrasting theories and explanations
- verbal, non-verbal and graphical communication, employing format appropriate to the audience
- experimental design; the design and execution of research projects, individually and in groups
- understanding the appropriate and ethical use of evidence and data
- evaluating the merits of contrasting theories, explanations and evidence
- distinguishing descriptive systems from the data they describe
- abstracting and synthesising information; collecting, analysing and manipulating data of diverse kinds
- interpreting information presented in the form of diagrams, tables and graphs
- searching out and synthesising information occurring in a variety of formats, giving appropriate acknowledgements and lists of sources
- undertaking competent self-directed study and learning
- understanding the importance of health and safety, and of equality, diversity and inclusiveness in the work environment
- appreciating and engaging in contemporary debates relating to sustainability, employability and global perspectives, including decolonisation and anti-racism
- appreciating the need to act in a sustainable manner and display ethical behaviour and conduct
- communicating subject knowledge (of language) in an authoritative and sensitive way to stakeholders responsible for policies in which language is a critical element.

## 5 List of references and further resources

QAA (2019) The UK Quality Code for Higher Education

[www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code)

QAA and Advance HE (2021) *Education for Sustainable Development Guidance*

[www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code/education-for-sustainable-development](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code/education-for-sustainable-development)

QAA (2018) *Enterprise and Entrepreneurship Education: Guidance for UK Higher Education Providers*

[www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/about-us/enterprise-and-entrepreneurship-education-2018.pdf](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/about-us/enterprise-and-entrepreneurship-education-2018.pdf)

UNESCO Sustainable Development Goals,

<https://en.unesco.org/sustainabledevelopmentgoals>

## 6 Membership of the Advisory Group

### Membership of the Advisory Group for the Subject Benchmark Statement for Linguistics 2023

Dr Khawla Badwan (Chair)	Manchester Metropolitan University
Dr Sebastian Rasinger (Deputy Chair)	Anglia Ruskin University
Professor Natalie Braber	Nottingham Trent University
Professor Phil Cardew	Leeds Beckett University
Jennifer Cowell	University of St Andrews
Roy Cross	British Council
Professor Derrick Ferney	QAA Officer
Dr Glyn Hicks	University of Southampton
Dr Maria Grazia Imperiale	University of Glasgow
Professor Suganthi John	University of Birmingham
Dr Dawn Knight	Cardiff University
Dr Mario Moya	University of East London
Lisa-Maria Muller	Chartered College of Teaching
Dr Diane Nelson	University of Leeds
Dr Pia Pichler	Goldsmiths, University of London
Dr Sara Pons-Sanz	Cardiff University
Professor James M Scobbie	Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh
Professor Devyani Sharma	Queen Mary University of London
Amy Spencer	QAA Coordinator
Dr Sultan Turkan	Queen's University Belfast

### Membership of the review group for the Subject Benchmark Statement for Linguistics 2019

The fourth edition, published in 2019, was revised by QAA to align the content with the revised UK Quality Code for Higher Education, published in 2018. Proposed revisions were checked and verified by the Chair of the Subject Benchmark Statement for Linguistics review group from 2015.

Professor Maggie Tallerman	Newcastle University
Dr Alison Felce	QAA

### Membership of the review group for the Subject Benchmark Statement for Linguistics 2015

Details below appear as published in the third edition of the Subject Benchmark Statement for Linguistics 2015.

Dr Peter Ackema	University of Edinburgh
Professor David Adger	Queen Mary University London
Dr Laura Bailey	University of Kent
Dr Andrew Caink	University of Westminster
Professor Christopher Hall	York St John University
Professor Ad Neeleman	Linguistics Association of Great Britain
Dr Diane Nelson	University of Leeds
Professor Francis Nolan	University of Cambridge
Dr Catrin Rhys	University of Ulster
Professor Maggie Tallerman (Chair)	Newcastle University
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**Employer representative**

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Palgrave UK

**Student reader**

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University of Oxford

**QAA officer**

Dr Neil Casey

QAA

**Membership of the review group for the Subject Benchmark Statement for Linguistics 2007**

This revision was conducted under the auspices of the Subject Centre for Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies Advisory Group for Linguistics chaired by Dr Paul Rowlett, University of Salford. The Chairs of the British Association for Applied Linguistics, Linguistics Association of Great Britain, University Council for Modern Languages, and the Vice-President of the International Clinical Phonetics and Linguistics Association were also contacted and invited to contribute comments and suggestions.

**Membership of the original benchmarking group for Linguistics 2002**

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

Dr David Adger

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Dr Keith Brown (Chair)

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Dr Sara Howard

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Professor April McMahon

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Professor Jim Miller

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Professor Rosamond Mitchell

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Dr Florence Myles

University of Southampton

Dr Linda Shockey

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Dr Mary Talbot

University of Sunderland

Professor Mark Tatham

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## Appendix 1: Indicative course titles

In April 2022, UCAS lists 768 undergraduate courses available that have Linguistics in the title. Linguistics is offered on its own as a single subject courses (BA (Hons) Linguistics) but also in combination with a wide variety of other disciplines.

**In combination with directly related subjects** such as Applied Linguistics, English Language, Phonetics, Forensic Linguistics, TESOL, Deaf Studies, Human Communication Science, Speech and Language Therapy; for example:

- BA (Hons) English Language, Linguistics and/or TESOL
- BA (Hons) English Literature and Linguistics
- BA (Hons) English Language and Applied Linguistics
- BA (Hons) English Linguistics with Forensic Linguistics
- BSc (Hons) Experimental Linguistics
- BA (Hons) Linguistics and Deaf Studies
- BA (Hons) British Sign Language, Deaf Studies and Linguistics

**Linguistics in combination with modern and classical languages** such as Arabic, Chinese, French, Gaelic, German, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Latin, Greek, Portuguese, Spanish and Welsh; for example:

- BA (Hons) Chinese and Linguistics
- BA (Hons) Linguistics and Arabic
- BA (Hons) Linguistics and Portuguese
- BA (Hons) Latin and Linguistics

**In combination with humanities, cultural studies, social sciences**, among other disciplines such as Philosophy, Criminology, Politics, Psychology, Archaeology, Literature, Economics, Film Studies, Global Development, History, Literary Studies, Communication, Media Studies, Journalism, Cognitive Science, Scandinavian Studies, Area Studies, Sociology, Social Anthropology, Informatics, Computer Science, Artificial Intelligence, Human-Computer Interface, Signal Processing; for example:

- BA (Hons) Psychology and Linguistics
- BA (Hons) Philosophy and Linguistics
- BA (Hons) Economics and Linguistics
- BA (Hons) Journalism and English Language & Linguistics
- BSc (Hons) Computing Science and English Language & Linguistics
- BA (Hons) Linguistics with Data Science



## Appendix 2: Signposting to other Subject Benchmark Statements

Linguistics relates to a variety of other disciplines. Relevant related Subject Benchmark Statements include:

- Anthropology
- Area Studies
- Criminology
- Communication, Media, Film and Cultural Studies
- Computing
- Creative Writing
- Early Childhood Studies
- Education Studies
- English
- Geography
- History
- Languages, Cultures and Societies
- Philosophy
- Psychology
- Sociology
- Welsh