



Subject benchmark statement

Town and country planning

Draft for consultation October 2007

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Preface

Subject benchmark statements provide a means for the academic community to describe the nature and characteristics of programmes in a specific subject or subject area. They also represent general expectations about standards for the award of qualifications at a given level in terms of the attributes and capabilities that those possessing such qualifications should have demonstrated.

This subject benchmark statement, together with others published concurrently, refers to the **bachelor's degree with honours**¹. In addition, some subject benchmark statements provide guidance on integrated master's awards.

Subject benchmark statements are used for a variety of purposes. Primarily, they are an important external source of reference for higher education institutions (HEIs) when new programmes are being designed and developed in a subject area. They provide general guidance for articulating the learning outcomes associated with the programme but are not a specification of a detailed curriculum in the subject.

Subject benchmark statements also provide support to HEIs in pursuit of internal quality assurance. They enable the learning outcomes specified for a particular programme to be reviewed and evaluated against agreed general expectations about standards. Subject benchmark statements allow for flexibility and innovation in programme design and can stimulate academic discussion and debate upon the content of new and existing programmes within an agreed overall framework. Their use in supporting programme design, delivery and review within HEIs is supportive of moves towards an emphasis on institutional responsibility for standards and quality.

Subject benchmark statements may also be of interest to prospective students and employers, seeking information about the nature and standards of awards in a given subject or subject area.

The relationship between the standards set out in this document and those produced by professional, statutory or regulatory bodies for individual disciplines will be a matter for individual HEIs to consider in detail.

This subject benchmark statement represents a revised version of the original published in 2002. The review process was overseen by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) as part of a periodic review of all subject benchmark statements published in this year. The review and subsequent revision of the subject benchmark statement was undertaken by a group of subject specialists drawn from, and acting on behalf of, the subject community. The revised subject benchmark statement went through a full consultation with the wider academic community and stakeholder groups.

QAA publishes and distributes this subject benchmark statement and other subject benchmark statements developed by similar subject-specific groups.

¹ This is equivalent to the honours degree in the *Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework* (level 10) and in the *Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales* (level 6).

The Disability Equality Duty (DED) came into force on 4 December 2006². The DED requires public authorities, including HEIs, to act proactively on disability equality issues. The Duty complements the individual rights focus of the *Disability Discrimination Act* and is aimed at improving public services and outcomes for disabled people as a whole. Responsibility for making sure that such duty is met lies with HEIs.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission³ has published guidance⁴ to help HEIs prepare for the implementation of the duty and provided illustrative examples on how to take the Duty forward. HEIs are encouraged to read this guidance when considering their approach to engaging with components of the Academic Infrastructure⁵, of which subject benchmark statements are a part.

Additional information that may assist HEIs when engaging with subject benchmark statements can be found in the revised *Code of Practice (revised) for providers of post-16 education and related services*⁶, and also through the Equality Challenge Unit⁷ which is established to promote equality and diversity in higher education.

² In England, Wales and Scotland.

³ On 1 October 2007, the Equal Opportunities Commission, the Commission for Racial Equality and the Disability Rights Commission merged into the new Equality and Human Rights Commission

⁴ Copies of the guidance *Further and higher education institutions and the Disability Equality Duty, Guidance for Principals, Vice-Chancellors, governing boards and senior managers working in further and higher education institutions in England, Scotland and Wales*, may be obtained from www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/forbusinessesandorganisation/publicauthorities/disabilityequalityd/pages/disabilitye.a.spx

⁵ An explanation of the Academic Infrastructure, and the roles of subject benchmark statements within it, is available at www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/

⁶ Copies of the *Code of Practice (revised) for providers of post-16 education and related services*, published by the Disability Rights Commission, may be obtained from www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/publicationsandresources/Disability/Pages/Education.aspx

⁷ Equality Challenge Unit: www.ecu.ac.uk

Foreword

Given that five years had passed since the development of the original subject benchmark statement for town and country planning, a review was carried out in order to consider any change of context or other factors that might prompt necessary revisions to the original statement. The review team included a representative from the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI), as well as from a wide range of the United Kingdom (UK) universities.

The review team was immediately impressed at how far sighted the original statement had been, and was satisfied that in large part it was still up to date and highly relevant for planning education in 2007 and beyond. The view was taken, however, that the statement lacked clarity in three key areas:

- on the interrelationships between the different standards contained in the statement for first cycle (undergraduate) education
- over how its content and standards related to second cycle planning education, either as part of an initial planning education, or as a stand alone postgraduate qualification
- in its advice on specialisms in planning.

The statement has therefore been revised in the light of the above as follows:

- minor editorial changes to the main text have been made, to give greater consistency and clarity to the statement
- the new diversity of planning programmes in the UK is reflected and the guidance on specialisms have been removed and replaced with advice on the need for in-depth specialist teaching to be available in planning programmes
- the 'standards' section has been rationalised and guidance on standards for second cycle qualifications in planning has been introduced.

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1 Introduction

1.1 The purpose of this subject benchmark statement is to make explicit for the subject community of town and country planning (hereafter referred to as 'planning'⁸) the standards of awards for first and second cycle degree programmes in the UK. It will also provide useful guidance where planning studies is a significant part of a programme's content. Programmes in planning include a variety of delivery models (eg three, 3+1, four or five years, including those with linked first cycle (undergraduate) and second cycle (postgraduate) qualifications). It is for institutions to explain and justify the particular programme that they have adopted in relation to this statement and in relation to other changes affecting higher education, notably the Measuring and recording student achievement (the Burgess Report, <http://bookshop.universitiesuk.ac.uk/downloads/measuringachievement.pdf>) and the Bologna process (www.bologna2009benelux.org).

1.2 In most developed societies the practice of planning is a statutory and professional process that has major impacts on the quality of life of everyone; it directly affects our economic, social and environmental well-being. This professional activity of planning takes place at a variety of scales (local, regional, national and supranational), and within communities in a wide range of forms. In the UK, most planners belong to a regulated profession with its own professional organisation, the RTPI.

1.3 While the professional requirements for planning programmes have influenced this statement, diversity is an important characteristic of planning as an academic subject. The guidance here is therefore deliberately wider than that required to inform professional accreditation. Providers may, however, wish to use this statement when meeting the specific accreditation requirements of the RTPI.

The challenge for planning

1.4 Planning is an activity that has an important role to play in delivering and safeguarding many of the aspirations that civilised societies hold dear - environmental sustainability, social equity, cultural diversity and economic prosperity. It needs committed, talented and creative individuals to help deliver its evolving agenda, working across the private, public and voluntary sectors.

1.5 Challenges faced by planning graduates include:

- the deterioration of global and local environments
- the regeneration of declining or underutilised urban and rural assets
- the opportunities and threats posed by globalisation, new technologies and the speed of change
- changing living patterns and redistributing populations
- the delivery of high quality public and private environments.

⁸ Because of its diversity, planning has been referred to by a variety of terms (including 'spatial planning', 'land-use planning', 'town and country planning', 'town planning', 'city and regional planning', 'urban planning' and so on). In this statement, 'planning' is used as a generic title, and 'planners' as a general term to include all those involved in planning as an activity, whether professional, statutory or otherwise.

1.6 Planning generates creative proposals for change, by means of negotiation and advocacy within a complex web of competing interests. Positive action is at the heart of planning, and it operates within a wide context of environmental, social, economic, legal and governance constraints.

1.7 As an academic discipline, planning is the study of the way societies plan, design, manage and regulate change in the built and natural environment. It therefore includes the study of why and how (and with what consequences) societies intervene, shape, organise and change natural and built environments, in order to secure an agreed range of social, economic and environmental objectives.

1.8 The academic core of the discipline is the study of the rationale for planning and how it is practised. This necessarily involves understanding not only the processes of spatial change in the built and natural environments, but also studying the arguments for intervening in these processes. It requires an understanding of the operation and outcomes of land, property and development markets from a variety of perspectives, including the economic, financial and legal aspects. It also requires an understanding of design, and the development of sustainable built and natural environments.

2 Defining principles

2.1 A number of principles can be defined that distinguish planning from other academic disciplines.

Planning is concerned with relationships between society and space

2.2 Planning is about determining the quality of the relationships between people and space. Planners are as much concerned with the impact of their decisions on people and communities and on their quality of life, as they are with the treatment and development of space. Thus the roles, aspirations and powers of politicians, professionals, landowners and developers, organisations and community groups, and other communities of interest, are of critical importance within planning; alongside the importance of an awareness of design, and the physical organisation and sustainability of space.

Planning is integrative

2.3 A key strength of planning education is its ability to develop and consider the overview. A key skill of the planner is to synthesise; to recognise the core issues within multi-faceted problems; and to be able to propose focused, effective courses of action, and responses to these problems. Planning is as much concerned with managing the whole environment as with the detail of any of its constituent parts. It is recognised that the built environment requires multidisciplinary actors, and that planning's role is one of coordinating the multiple interests to achieve the agreed objectives.

Planning attempts to manage processes of change through deliberate and positive actions

2.4 Planning is a discipline concerned with creating and coordinating action in the environment, and as such requires students to be familiar with a wide range of material, with a view to taking well-informed prescriptive actions in the real world of

the built and natural environments. Planners are therefore, first and foremost, creative problem-solvers. Planning prescriptions require an understanding of the balances of power within societies and organisations, and the limitations that these impose upon effective planning action.

Planning requires appropriate administrative and legal frameworks for implementing action

2.5 Planning invariably involves societies in developing appropriate administrative organisations and processes to regulate development within legal frameworks related to individual and collective property rights. Knowledge of such frameworks is essential for those wishing to understand planning.

Planning involves the allocation of limited resources

2.6 Planning actions result in changes in the distributions of social, economic and environmental costs and benefits on different individuals and groups within societies. Thus planning requires an evaluation of the likely impacts of decisions, and value judgements about their effects, and how they might be influenced. Planning can be used for oppressive as well as altruistic purposes, and students need an understanding of the contexts in which each might occur.

Planning requires the study, understanding and application of a diverse set of multidisciplinary knowledge

2.7 Planning requires an understanding of the relationships between underlying theory; conceptual thinking and analysis; and policy formulation, evaluation and implementation. It is an activity whose scope and legitimacy is contested, and in which a variety of justifications and views about its purposes and possible outcomes have to be understood, discussed and reviewed.

3 Knowledge and understanding

3.1 Key areas of knowledge and understanding that a planning graduate should be able to demonstrate might typically include the following.

Causes and processes of change in the environment

3.2 A planning graduate should be able to demonstrate:

- processes of socio-economic change and their spatial outcomes
- development processes and the nature of land and property markets
- processes of environmental, ecological and physical change
- processes of interaction in and between the built and natural environments
- interrelationships between land-uses, infrastructure and human activities in multi-dimensional space.

Practice of planning

3.3 A planning graduate should be able to demonstrate:

- impacts and consequences of planning upon individuals, communities and key interest groups

- political and institutional frameworks at all levels, and their procedures
- legal and administrative arrangements for planning
- plan and policy-making methods, techniques and processes at a variety of scales
- planning as a tool for delivering sustainable development
- awareness and understanding of design
- application of knowledge to action, and theory to practice
- the practice of planning in a variety of international institutional, professional, legal and cultural settings
- administrative and management arrangements for effective planning
- management, financing and implementation of planning projects.

Debates in planning

3.4 A planning graduate should be able to demonstrate:

- the development of planning thought and practice
- the philosophical and theoretical explanations underpinning the evolution and practice of planning
- the arguments for and against planning as a part of intervention or non-intervention in processes of societal and environmental change
- substantive theory concerning the processes of societal and environmental change (drawn, for example, from the disciplines of geography, sociology, political science, economics and environmental science)
- the conceptual basis of value-systems and ethics, and the justification of the choices made in planning in terms of goals, actions and outcomes
- political structures and processes and the nature and use of power.

4 Skills

Subject skills

4.1 Key planning skills that a planning graduate should be able to demonstrate might typically include:

- academic research and professional investigation in the planning field
- collecting, analysing, evaluating and synthesising planning data and trends
- identification and formulation of planning problems
- translation of theory and knowledge into practical planning policies and actions, including the writing of clear aims and objectives, the formulation, articulation, and evaluation/appraisal of strategies, plans and designs
- creative problem-solving skills and propositions for action
- practical design skills
- monitoring and evaluation of planning interventions and outcomes.

Generic skills

4.2 Key planning skills that a planning graduate should be able to demonstrate might typically include:

- preparing and presenting arguments and illustrative materials in a variety of presentational formats - written, graphic and oral
- numeracy and use of statistical data
- information sourcing and literacy
- using information technology (IT) in work preparation and presentation, and for problem-solving
- critical reflection with an understanding of the need for lifelong learning
- managing and producing work to time on an individual basis
- working effectively in and with groups
- being aware of, listening to and evaluating the opinions and values of others
- demonstrating an ability to exercise initiative, original thought and independence, within a system of personal values
- negotiating, facilitating, leadership and networking skills
- ability to work in a multiprofessional working environment.

Specialist skills and knowledge

4.3 In addition to a defined set of core knowledge, understanding and skills, planning programmes should generally expect students to obtain specialist in-depth knowledge and skills in one or more areas of planning activity. This may be a feature of first cycle programmes, but should always have been obtained on completion of second cycle studies.

5 Teaching, learning and assessment

Teaching strategies

5.1 Learning, teaching and assessment strategies for planning programmes should meet the normal precepts for good academic practice, set out in the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education*, published by QAA and internally within institutions. They should foster in planning students an enthusiasm for taking responsibility for their learning and developing a lifelong appetite for critically reflective appraisal and career development.

5.2 Strategies should be based around developing a clear, progressive accumulation of the required knowledge, understanding and skills, which enables students to test their own personal development as potential planning graduates as they progress from level to level.

5.3 Where appropriate, strategies should be developed with advice, collaboration and inputs from suitable professional colleagues in planning practice. Where outside professional assessors are used (ie for such elements as project work, field studies or work placement experience), planning programmes should integrate such learning, teaching and assessment procedures within their general programmes of quality assurance, training and assessment, and ensure that they meet the programme's overall standards.

5.4 All forms of planning teaching and learning should actively involve the student, and should seek to build upon its traditions of planning project-based work. Individual student coursework, undertaken both on its own and in group working situations, is particularly to be encouraged within planning programmes.

5.5 At both first and second cycle, graduates should typically have completed at least one major piece of work that demonstrates their individual capacity for reflective, self-directed learning.

Resources

5.6 Planning programmes require a comprehensive teaching and learning resource base, equipped to deliver effectively the wide range of planning education. A well-founded planning programme should have:

- a variety of teaching and learning spaces, including spaces for project work. A diverse range of situations and locations should be used, including, where appropriate, the use of the professional workplace for case studies and study placement opportunities
- a wide variety of learning resources, such as: specialist information sources; IT and computer-aided teaching and learning; graphics, audio-visual and recording facilities to support student learning.

6 Benchmark standards

6.1 The intention of this part of the statement is to establish standards against which planning students can be examined for first cycle (undergraduate) and second cycle (postgraduate) degree programmes in planning. The standards apply to all the areas of knowledge, understanding and skills discussed previously. The intention is that the standards should be used as a means to assess particular student learning outcomes for which planning programmes have responsibility. In this regard, as the standards are generic rather than specific to particular areas of planning, they can be applied across a diverse range of programme requirements.

6.2 It is not expected, however, that students should perform at the suggested level of attainment in all aspects of every given standard. The standards set out below are meant as guidelines only and will vary between programmes.

6.3 Threshold, typical and excellent standards for first cycle students and threshold and typical master's level standards for second cycle students are specified.

First cycle

6.4 All students (ie **threshold** and above) should be able to:

- demonstrate understanding in the treatment and exposition of the subject matter, making connections between the different areas of the curriculum
- evaluate arguments for planning as a form of action within processes of change
- evaluate political, legal, institutional and administrative frameworks and procedures in planning
- exhibit an understanding of the complexities of planning issues and problems
- demonstrate an understanding of theory and make appropriate connections between theory and practice
- demonstrate an understanding of the place of values and ethics in planning
- define and analyse planning problems effectively and appropriately
- make effective use of evidence and information sources

- use and evaluate a variety of plan and policy-making methods and processes
- formulate and propose policies, strategies, design proposals and other courses of action as responses to planning problems
- effectively communicate planning information, ideas, principles, arguments and proposals through written, graphic, oral and electronic means and demonstrate effectively, written, numeracy, oral, IT and information literacy skills
- work effectively individually and in groups.

6.5 In addition to these standards, **typical** students should be able to demonstrate:

- understanding and application of the majority of the knowledge components listed above to a good level and with appropriate critical discernment
- effective and appropriate application and execution of the majority of the skills listed above showing insight, some initiative, creativity and autonomy.

6.6 **Excellent** students should also be able to demonstrate:

- understanding and application of the majority of the knowledge components listed above with a high level of originality, insight and critical discernment
- effective, fluent and appropriate application and execution of the majority of the skills listed above, showing high levels of insight, initiative, creativity, autonomy and leadership.

Second cycle

6.7 **Threshold and typical** students at this level should have a similar attainment of knowledge, understanding and skills as **typical** students at the first cycle level.

6.8 In addition to having comprehensive knowledge of planning as a discipline and as an activity, they should also be able to demonstrate:

- a good in-depth (specialist) knowledge in one or more areas of planning activity
- a good awareness and understanding of professional working, roles, responsibilities and values
- professionalism in undertaking assignments.

6.9 **Threshold** students at this level should be able to demonstrate:

- a questioning and critical approach
- a capacity for critical reflection
- some capacity for independent thinking and action.

6.10 In addition, **typical** students should be able to demonstrate:

- a well-developed capacity for independent thinking, critical reflection and verbal, written and visual communication
- a well-developed capacity for producing creative solutions to problems, team working and leadership
- an ability to synthesis and integrate concepts and ideas and to relate them to practical contexts.

6.11 **Excellent** students should **consistently** demonstrate a high level of originality, insight and critical reflection in all of the above characteristics.

Appendix A - Membership of review group for the subject benchmark statement for town and country planning

Professor M Carmona (Chair)	University College London
Professor J Alden	Cardiff University
J Askew	University of the West of England, Bristol
Professor N Bailey	University of Westminster
Professor Angela Hull	Heriot-Watt University
S Percy	Royal Town Planning Institute
Professor D Shaw	University of Liverpool
Dr S Tiesdell	University of Glasgow
Professor C Webster	Cardiff University

Appendix B - Membership of the original benchmarking group for town and country planning

Details below appear as published in the original subject benchmark statement for town and country planning (2002).

Professor J Alden (Chair)	Cardiff University
C Booth	Sheffield Hallam University
R Bristow	University of Manchester
Dr M Carmona	University College London
Professor C Couch	Liverpool John Moores University
Professor A Crook	University of Sheffield
J Derounian	University of Gloucestershire
Professor B Field	De Montfort University
Professor A Hull	University of the West of England, Bristol
B Illsley	University of Dundee
S Percy	South Bank University
Dr S Tiesdell	University of Aberdeen