

Education Studies

Subject benchmark statements

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

This subject benchmark statement, together with the others published concurrently, refers to the ***bachelors degree with honours***.

Subject benchmark statements are used for a variety of purposes. Primarily, they are an important external source of reference for higher education institutions 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. Benchmark statements provide for variety and flexibility in the design of programmes and encourage innovation within an agreed overall framework.

Subject benchmark statements also provide support to institutions 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.

Finally, subject benchmark statements are one of a number of external sources of information that are drawn upon for the purposes of academic review* and for making judgements about threshold standards being met. Reviewers do not use subject benchmark statements as a crude checklist for these purposes however. Rather, they are used in conjunction with the relevant programme specifications, the institution's own internal evaluation documentation, together with primary data in order to enable reviewers to come to a rounded judgement based on a broad range of evidence.

The benchmarking of academic standards for this subject area has been undertaken by a group of subject specialists drawn from and acting on behalf of the subject community. The group's work was facilitated by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, which publishes and distributes this statement and other benchmarking statements developed by similar subject-specific groups.

The statement represents the first attempt to make explicit the general academic characteristics and standards of an honours degree in this subject area, in the UK.

In due course, but not before July 2003, the statement will be revised to reflect developments in the subject and the experiences of institutions and academic reviewers who are working with it. The Agency will initiate revision and, in collaboration with the subject community, will establish a group to consider and make any necessary modifications to the statement.

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* academic review in this context refers to the Agency's new arrangements for external assurance of quality and standards. Further information regarding these may be found in the ***Handbook for Academic Review***, which can be found on the Agency's web site.

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Letter from the Chair of the benchmarking group

Dear Colleagues

The preparation of this report has been undertaken within the framework of the QAA procedures for reviewing subjects. The Working Group offers to those who have a direct or indirect interest in the area of Education Studies an opportunity to identify those key aspects of the subject which ought to inspire and influence programmes in the subject.

The definition of a subject is always problematic, and this is especially true of one which has a variety of contexts which are changing with considerable speed. This statement of the benchmark standards in Education Studies focuses on what might be expected of a student following an honours degree in Education Studies in an institution of higher education in the United Kingdom, but it is well understood that there may be a variety of settings and circumstances in which these might also be applied.

Attention has been paid to ensuring a comprehensive view of the subject, but one that does not constrain those who design courses in this area. In particular attention has been paid to the "organisers" of the subject, viz. Knowledge and Understanding; Application; Reflection; and Transferable Skills.

The Group established to prepare these statements recognises that they will require to be developed and refined with their application and with reflection. They will need to be further considered within the framework of other statements and programmes.

It is hoped that the communities who will use these statements will find them to be of value, and that they will offer support in the continuing development of Education Studies as a subject within higher education. These statements are designed to encourage and enhance this process of development and change, and not to inhibit it.

My grateful thanks to all who have contributed to the preparation of this statement. In particular to the members of the QAA Group, the Officers of QAA, and to those who responded to the consultation during the preparation of this report.

Bart McGettrick

Convener of QAA benchmarking group for Education Studies

January 2000

Academic standards - Education Studies

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1 Introduction

This set of statements has been prepared to assist Universities and other institutions of Higher Education in the design and development of courses in Education Studies. Particular attention has been paid to the identification of the distinctive features of the subject, setting these within the overall context of the programmes and awards of the institution.

It is recognised that Education Studies is often set in the context of programmes which have broader contexts, and this is taken into account in this set of statements.

1.1 Target audience

The information in this document is intended to contribute towards the quality assurance of, and consistency between, Education Studies programmes in Higher Education institutions in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The document provides guidelines on the achievements that should be demonstrated by students in order to be awarded an honours degree in Education Studies.

The document is aimed at four main groups:

- Those involved in designing, approving and validating courses
- External Examiners, and those concerned with assessment, moderation and monitoring
- Students, who may wish to select and/or evaluate subjects or programmes
- Interested members of the public, including potential employers of students who have completed programmes of Education Studies

1.2 The benchmark statements

These statements are provided to assist the design of undergraduate programmes in Education Studies. The benchmarks express minimum or threshold performance for students successfully completing such programmes; performance at a "modal standard" which most students will achieve; and performance at "best standard". These are used only for general comparative purposes, and are not statements for awards or classifications for awards.

While these benchmark statements are focused on programmes which lead to honours degrees, studies in areas of education often provide academic foundations for professional groups in many formal and informal fields of education. It is therefore anticipated that these benchmark statements might offer useful points of reference for the design of other programmes in which Education Studies have a part to play. Likewise, these benchmark statements could be drawn on for the design of other undergraduate programmes such as Early Childhood Education or Youth and Community Education.

The information about benchmark statements for Education Studies does not set out any specific or detailed requirements for course content, methods of learning, teaching, or assessment. Institutions will be expected to make their own decisions on these matters, and demonstrate how these are designed to meet the statements.

2 The structure of the document

The document has been constructed under a number of strands that reflect the nature of Education Studies. These are:

- Knowledge and understanding
- Application
- Reflection
- Transferable skills

While it can be helpful to specify these as discrete strands for the purposes of discussion, planning and assessment, it is also important to recognise that they exist as a single unity. The connection between these strands is therefore of particular significance as it encourages an appropriate development of integrated theories and practices within Education Studies. The "Transferable Skills" are generally derived from the other three strands. These are used as the basis of the organisation of the benchmark statements in Section 8.

3 The nature of the subject

Education Studies is concerned with understanding how people develop and learn throughout their lives. It facilitates a study of the nature of knowledge, and a critical engagement with a variety of perspectives, and ways of knowing and understanding, drawn from a range of appropriate disciplines. There is diversity in Education Studies courses at undergraduate level but all involve the intellectually rigorous study of educational processes, systems and approaches, and the cultural, societal, political and historical contexts within which they are embedded.

Following the satisfactory completion of courses in Education Studies students will be able to participate effectively in a number of constantly changing discourses which are exemplified by reference to debate about values, personal and social engagement, and how these relate to communities and societies. Programmes of Education Studies will provide students with opportunities to develop their critical capabilities through the selection, analysis and synthesis of relevant perspectives, and be enabled to justify their freely chosen personal positioning about educational matters.

4 The subject in context

Like many subjects Education Studies is in a constant state of change and development, and this statement is set in time and place.

Education Studies provides an academic foundation for practitioners in formal and informal contexts and phases of education, and provides a framework for understanding aspects of human development. These contexts and phases encompass a diverse range of groups including: community workers; education administrators; health workers; human resource managers; those who care for and educate children of all ages; librarians and information management professionals; and other professional educators.

So, once the purpose of a programme in Education Studies is determined the specific knowledge, skills, understandings and attitudes may be identified. The particular content and focus of any given programme will vary according to the stated aims and rationale, but will be demonstrably appropriate to the needs of the target group.

Education Studies can provide exemplification for students of cognate disciplines and for students who simply wish to understand their own development as reflective lifelong learners.

5 Defining principles of Education Studies

All programmes in Education Studies will relate to a set of principles. Programmes should:

- draw on a wide range of intellectual resources, theoretical perspectives and academic disciplines to illuminate understanding of education and the contexts within which it takes place
- provide students with a broad and balanced knowledge and understanding of the principal features of education in a wide range of contexts
- encourage students to engage with fundamental questions concerning the aims and values of education and its relationship to society
- provide opportunities for students to appreciate the problematic nature of educational theory, policy and practice
- encourage the interrogation of educational processes in a wide variety of contexts
- develop in students the ability to construct and sustain a reasoned argument about educational issues in a clear, lucid and coherent manner
- promote a range of qualities in students including intellectual independence and critical engagement with evidence

6 Subject strands

6.1 Knowledge and understanding

A necessary feature of an Education Studies undergraduate honours degree is an intellectually rigorous study of educational processes, and the cultural, political and historical contexts within which they are embedded. While individual courses within degree programmes may have a focus upon particular age groups, or learning and teaching, or particular contexts and education systems, they will provide students with opportunities to engage in critical reflection and debate. Students should have the opportunity to engage with a number of different perspectives and to evaluate aims and values, means and ends, and the validity of the education issues in question.

In order to achieve this, students will need to draw upon contemporary research and other relevant educational literature. Students will also require an awareness of relevant concepts and theories from across a range of appropriate disciplines.

Degree programmes should enable students to demonstrate that they have acquired the ability to understand theoretical knowledge and research evidence about:

- the processes of learning, including some of the key paradigms and their impact on educational practices
- relevant aspects of cultural and linguistic differences and societies; politics and education policies; economics; geographical and historical features of societies and contexts; moral, religious and philosophical underpinnings, including issues of social justice, and their effects on learning
- formal and informal contexts for learning. Educational contexts will include some understanding of their own education system and other education systems, and the value systems underpinning their organisation
- the complex interactions between education and its contexts, and relationships with other disciplines and professions

Courses should provide opportunities for students to:

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

6.2 Application

Courses should enable students to apply their subject knowledge and understanding through:

- the analysis of complex situations concerning human learning and development in particular contexts, including their own learning
- the use of examples of the implementation of policies in practice
- the accommodation of new ideas concerning globalisation on education systems and issues such as social justice, sustainable development, peace education, social inclusion and the knowledge economy
- provision of well argued conclusions relating to these main global issues

6.3 Reflection

Courses should provide opportunities for students to:

- reflect on their own value systems, development and practices
- question concepts and theories encountered in their studies
- interrogate the assumptions underpinning theory and research
- reflect on their own development and practices

6.4 Transferable skills

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

- communicate and present oral and written arguments
- use Information and Communication Technology, including word processing, data bases, internet communication, information retrieval and on-line searches
- interpret and present relevant numerical information
- work with others, as a result of the development of interpersonal skills, to demonstrate the capacity to plan, to share goals, and work as a member of a team
- improve their own learning and performance, including the development of study and research skills, information retrieval, and a capacity to plan and manage learning, and to reflect on their own learning
- analyse, synthesise, evaluate, and identify problems and solutions

Students following courses leading to a teaching qualification may also have to comply with other national requirements

7 *Learning, teaching and assessment in Education Studies*

The ways in which learning and teaching take place in Education Studies should reflect and inform the principles of the subject itself. Attention therefore has to be given to the ways in which students develop

- their knowledge and understanding
- their application of key principles to related contexts
- their ability to reflect on salient issues
- their transferable skills

It is of paramount importance that these are not treated as discrete or separate aspects of Education Studies, but cohere to form a unified discipline. There is therefore an understanding that learning, teaching and assessment will be closely inter-related, and be seen by students to be related.

Approaches to assessment will be expected to support student learning, and the teaching which promotes that learning. This should be made explicit, with aims, tasks and criteria for grading clearly defined.

Assessment should reflect the developing abilities of students. Students are entitled to demonstrate the full range of their knowledge and understanding as well as their capacity to apply and reflect these abilities. In particular, students are likely to have to undertake a range of appropriate methods of assessment which derive from the policies and approaches to teaching and learning in particular courses and modules.

Learning, teaching and assessment have to be inter-related with synoptic, "joined-up" thinking being at the heart of work in Education Studies. Assessment should help support and develop the abilities of students. The application of benchmark standards should, in turn, support all teaching and learning.

8 *The benchmark statements for Education Studies*

The following benchmark statements are defined for students studying a single honours degree in Education Studies. It is understood that students may follow an Education Studies programme in a wide range of academic and professional contexts including, for example, a joint honours programme; programmes with "major" and "minor" studies; or a professionally focused honours programme. However, no assumption is made within the benchmark statements about the practical experience contained within or expected as a pre-requisite for any degree programme. Neither is any judgement made about how much subject knowledge and understanding might be required in a joint honours programme. Where students study Education Studies as part of a degree programme institutions will need to clarify the extent to which the benchmarks should be met.

Where students are undertaking Education Studies as part of a programme of professional training (such as initial teacher education), their stance on the benchmark statements on Application (page 8) will be contextualised within that programme. Similarly, teachers or other professionals undertaking a post-experience honours degree programme covered by these benchmark statements might well focus on a specialist theme such as Mathematics Education, Conductive Education, Special Education, or Lifelong Learning and will demonstrate a deeper awareness of this area. It would be appropriate that such students would demonstrate their learning only in a specific area or areas relevant to their academic or professional context. Individual institutions will wish to articulate their stance with regard to the benchmark statements in the light of their own student groups and perspectives, and programme specifications will amplify the connections between the benchmark statements and the programme's desired learning outcomes.

The following statement of benchmarks is prescribed as the minimum or threshold standard. This is the minimum performance specified for a student successfully completing a programme leading to an honours award.

It may be useful to define the performance expected from students who exceed the minimum standard in a programme leading to an honours award. These additional statements indicating a "modal standard" as the standard attained by most students, and a "best standard" build on and subsume the threshold standard. They are offered as guidelines and comparators, but do not formally constitute the benchmark standards for subject review. It should be emphasised that these three statements are not intended as statements of progression within programmes, but all represent standards on completion of courses. These are not intended to be statements for the classification of degrees in Education Studies.

Education Studies - benchmark statements

Table: Knowledge and understanding

<i>Knowledge and understanding</i>	<i>Threshold</i>	<i>Modal</i>	<i>Best</i>
	Students will demonstrate:	Students will demonstrate:	Students will demonstrate:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • awareness of the underlying values and principles relevant to Education Studies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • an awareness of the underlying values and principles relevant to Education Studies and a developing personal stance which draws on their knowledge and understanding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a good awareness of the underlying values and principles relevant to Education Studies and a developing personal stance which draws on their knowledge and understanding
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • knowledge of the diversity of learners and the complexities of the education process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a good working knowledge of the diversity of learners and the complexities of the education process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a comprehensive and critical understanding of the diversity of learners and the complexities of the education process.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • an awareness of the different contexts in which learning can take place and the range of different roles of participants in the learning process (including learner and teacher) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a good understanding of the complexity of the interaction between learning and contexts and the range of ways in which participants (including learners and teachers) can influence the learning process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a well-developed understanding of the complexity of the interaction between learning and contexts and the range of ways in which other participants (including learners and teachers) can influence the learning process
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • some understanding of the societal and organisational structures and purposes of educational systems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a good understanding of the societal and organisational structures and purposes of educational systems and the possible implications for learners and the learning process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • critical insight into the societal and organisational structures and purposes of educational systems and the possible implications for learners and the learning process
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the ability to identify relevant theoretical and research based primary and/or secondary sources and to use these appropriately in their study to extend their knowledge and understanding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the ability to select a range of relevant primary and secondary sources, including theoretical and research-based evidence, to extend their knowledge and understanding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the ability to select from a comprehensive range of relevant primary and secondary sources, including theoretical and research-based evidence to extend their knowledge and understanding

*Education Studies - benchmark statements**Table: Application**Table: Reflection*

	<i>Threshold</i>	<i>Modal</i>	<i>Best</i>
<i>Application</i>	<p>Students will be able to demonstrate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a basic ability to analyse educational concepts, theories and issues of policy in a systematic way • a basic ability to identify potential connections between each of the aspects of subject knowledge and their application in educational policies and contexts • some ability to accommodate to new principles and understandings 	<p>Students will be able to demonstrate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • an ability to analyse critically educational concepts, theories and issues of policy in a systematic way • a developing ability to identify and reflect on potential connections and discontinuities between each of the aspects of subject knowledge and their application in educational policies and contexts • an ability to accommodate to new principles and understandings <p>This would include a developing ability to suggest ways forward and potential changes in practice.</p>	<p>Students will be able to demonstrate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a well-developed ability to analyse educational concepts, theories and issues of policy in a systematic way • a well-developed ability to identify and critically reflect on potential connections and discontinuities between each of the aspects of subject knowledge and their application in educational policies and contexts • a well-developed ability to accommodate to new principles and understandings <p>This would include the ability to formulate appropriate and justified ways forward and potential changes in practice using a range of evidence.</p>
<i>Reflection</i>	<p>Students will be able to demonstrate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a basic ability to reflect on their own value system • a developing ability to question concepts and theories encountered in their study • a basic understanding of the significance and limitations of theory and research 	<p>Students will be able to demonstrate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the ability to reflect on their own value system • the ability to use their knowledge and understanding critically to locate and justify a personal position in relation to the subject • a sound understanding of the significance and limitations of theory and research 	<p>Students will be able to demonstrate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a high level of ability to reflect on their own value system • the ability to integrate their knowledge and understanding critically into a personal position which shows depth and originality in relation to the subject • a critical understanding of the significance and limitations of theory and research

Education Studies - benchmark statements

Table: Transferable skills (1)

	<i>Threshold</i>	<i>Modal</i>	<i>Best</i>
<i>Transferable skills</i>	Students will:	Students will:	Students will:
Communication and presentation	be able to communicate adequately in speech and writing using some specialist vocabulary	have the ability to organise and articulate opinions and arguments in speech and writing using relevant specialist vocabulary	have a practised ability to organise and articulate opinions and arguments in speech and writing in a diverse range of relevant contexts showing confident use of specialist vocabulary
Information and Communications Technology	have an ability to use ICT in their study and other appropriate situations	be competent users of ICT in their study and other appropriate situations	be competent users of ICT in their study and other appropriate situations and be able to judge where the use of ICT is not appropriate
Application of numbers	have an ability to interpret simple graphical and tabular presentation of data and to collect and present numerical data	have a well developed ability to interpret graphical and tabular presentation of data, and collect, use and interpret numerical data as appropriate	have a well developed ability to interpret graphical and tabular presentation of data in a critical and constructive way, to collect and present numerical data and to use graphical and tabular information appropriately
Working with others	have a basic ability to collaborate and plan as part of a team, to carry out roles allocated by the team and to keep to agreed responsibilities	have the ability to collaborate and plan as part of a team, to carry out roles allocated by the team and take the lead where appropriate, and to fulfil agreed responsibilities	have a well developed ability to work effectively as part of a team, including working through difficulties and conflicts

*Education Studies - benchmark statements**Table: Transferable skills (2)*

	<i>Threshold</i>	<i>Modal</i>	<i>Best</i>
<i>Transferable skills</i> Improving own learning and performance	Students will: have a basic understanding of their own preferred learning styles and strategies and work with these to organise an effective work pattern including working to deadlines	Students will: have the ability to articulate their own preferred learning styles and strategies and actively manage their development to organise an effective work pattern including working to deadlines	Students will: have a well developed ability to articulate their own preferred learning styles and strategies and actively manage their development, to reflect on their learning styles and strategies in the light of learning theories and to work with these to organise an effective work pattern including working to deadlines
Analytical and problem solving skills	have a basic ability to use relevant empirical and theoretical data in addressing tasks and formulating possible actions	have the ability to process and synthesise empirical and theoretical data, to create new syntheses and to present and justify a chosen position having drawn on relevant theoretical perspectives	have a well developed ability to process and synthesise empirical and theoretical data, to create new syntheses and to present and justify a chosen position having drawn on relevant theoretical perspectives

Education Studies benchmarking group membership

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