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# The QAA Benchmarking Statement for History


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 **Subject benchmark statement: History**

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**Description**  
 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 qualifications should have demonstrated.



One of the first tasks undertaken by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) founded in 1997 to monitor standards in UK higher education was the creation of subject benchmarking documents. Authored by teams of academics working in the relevant disciplines, these describe the essential nature and characteristics of BA Honours programmes, and the attributes and capabilities that students achieving these qualifications should be expected to have acquired or demonstrated. The statements are of considerable assistance to those creating new degree programmes, not least in helping them articulate relevant 'learning outcomes', as well as enabling institutions to evaluate their delivery of a particular discipline against agreed general expectations about standards and the subject. First published in 2000, the History benchmarking document was produced by a panel of sixteen historians drawn from a wide range of institutions and chaired by Professor Anthony Fletcher. The diversity of approach and topics addressed in History degrees

mark the subject out from many others, and posed a particular challenge to the statement's authors. The panel very deliberately sought to accommodate the extensive but highly varied good practice then current in a subject which the National Student Survey, introduced in 2005, would reveal as delivering high rates of satisfaction across the full range of the HE sector. Inclusivity and pluralism did not, however, come at the price of any abandonment of disciplinary rigour, coherence and standards, and as a result the History benchmarking statement has been a notable success, attracting the support of the subject community and regularly being called on either to help shape new programmes or to defend key elements in advanced historical training where institutional pressures for conformity threaten their continuation (notably the importance of the essay, lecture and dissertation/extended essay to disciplinary culture). In 2007 the statement was reconsidered by a review panel who updated the statement to reflect the changing context of HE, acknowledging

not only the increased use of technology in teaching delivery and a growing emphasis on graduate employability, but also changes in historical practice, thus paying more attention to the importance of visual and material culture as historical evidence. The time has now come for a second review, and we have just finished co-chairing the panel (its membership is listed below) charged with creating the 'third edition' of the History benchmarking statement, which will shortly go out for consultation. So what has changed this time? We think most colleagues will welcome the fact that the statement remains largely unaltered in shape and approach, and that QAA were fully supportive of this in light of its track record of support from the subject community. Once more the document will acknowledge technological developments, notably in e-learning and the need for digital literacy in history students, and recognises the ongoing importance of the employability agenda in stressing the transferability of historical knowledge and core skills to a wide variety of sectors beyond the academy. It reflects the importance of recent legislation on equality and diversity, but also offers greater clarity and emphasis on the intrinsic value of independent study within history degree programmes and the centrality of the notion of historical enquiry to the discipline. We also felt it necessary to emphasise the importance of taking full account of the ethical di-

mensions of historical practice, reflecting the creation of institutional codes of conduct which can be of particular significance for students conducting independent research on the recent past. The revised statement will be put out for consultation in May, and we will alert the membership when this happens. We hope that colleagues in HE will continue to find it of considerable value in designing and reviewing degree programmes suited to preserving the high reputation currently enjoyed by the historical education delivered in British universities. The review panel consisted of Prof Arthur Burns (RHS/King's College London), Prof Jane Longmore (Southampton Solent/History Forum HEA), co-chairs Prof Alan Booth (Nottingham), Dr Arthur Chapman (Institute of Education), Dr Marcus Collins (Loughborough), Dr Paul Corthorn (Queen's University Belfast), Dr Pat Cullum (Huddersfield), Peter D'Sena (HEA), Prof Jackie Eales (Canterbury Christ Church/Historical Association), Dr Elaine Fulton (Birmingham), Dr Vicky Gunn (Glasgow), Dr Melinda Haughton (The National Archives), Dr Leif Jerram (Manchester), Dr Valerie Johnson (TNA), Dr Keith McLay (Chester/History UK), Dr Alison Twells (Sheffield Hallam), Dr Jamie Wood (Lincoln), and Dr Dave Wyatt (Cardiff).

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