

A photograph of an archaeological site. In the foreground, a large, weathered, reddish-brown pottery jar with two handles sits on the ground. To its right, a small white card with the number '85' is pinned to the ground with a metal pin. The background shows a dirt excavation site with some wooden shoring.

Subject Benchmark Statement: Archaeology

The Basics

This document is a summary of the Subject Benchmark Statement for Archaeology. It is specifically designed to provide a short and accessible overview of the main Statement for students, employers and academics. It is not intended to replace or alter the Subject Benchmark Statement, which should be referred to in the design and approval of courses and when any further detail is required.

Subject Benchmark Statements describe the nature of study and the benchmark academic standards expected of graduates in specific subject areas, and in respect of particular qualifications. They provide a picture of what graduates in a particular subject might reasonably be expected to know, do and understand at the end of their course or programme.

Subject Benchmark Statements are presented in four sections. Section 1 outlines the contextual information - providing the operational landscape, and boundaries, of subject discipline. This includes consideration of the ways in which the discipline addresses wider social goals, specifically in relation to: equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI); the requirements of disabled students; education for sustainable development (ESD); and enterprise and entrepreneurship.

Section 2 covers distinctive features of the course, including curriculum design, partnership arrangements, flexibility of delivery, progression and ongoing monitoring processes. Section 3 explains any features relevant to teaching, learning and assessment activities for the subject. Section 4 describes the benchmark standards of achievement reached by all graduates with a bachelor's degree with honours in the subject, with some subjects also including achievement at master's level.



Why study a degree in Archaeology?

As a subject discipline, archaeology provides a unique perspective on the human past and on what it is to be human. As the only subject that addresses the entire human past in all its temporal and spatial dimensions, archaeology offers a vital perspective on how we shape our future collectively. Archaeology is fundamental to exploring how our own society and other societies across the world came into being, how they changed over time and how we create and perceive those narratives. While looking back at the human past, archaeology is also a process of the present. It helps us to understand who we are, the challenges we face and to reflect on varied perspectives of the past. Archaeology has its own methodological, scientific and theoretical frameworks which draw critically on a rich archive of past work. Its broad remit makes archaeology a natural vehicle for inclusivity and respect for other ways of life. It also provides the knowledge and critical skills to evaluate the evidence-base for claims about the past and historical processes, and this empowers students to engage positively in the debate around the history of global diversity.

Career prospects embrace a range of related employment sectors - from tourism and heritage to non-governmental organisations involved in sustainability, environmental and developmental work at regional, national and international levels, as well as more generic graduate employment pathways.



What are the main teaching and learning approaches in archaeology?

Teaching, learning and assessment styles in the discipline are broad and emphasise equally practical field and laboratory practices as well as more traditional communication skills, including written assignments in a variety of different formats, as well as oral and media presentations. Archaeology should always emphasise the fluidity of our understandings of the past and the opportunity it offers to challenge our modern Western conventions of practice. Four key contexts provide the foundation on which Archaeology degree courses are designed: social, ethical and professional, theoretical, and scientific.

Students reading for an Archaeology degree are taught within an environment conducive to learning, which is intellectually stimulating, and which embraces intellectual diversity. They have access to relevant published literature; digital technologies, including associated software and computing resources to use those effectively in a group learning environment; appropriate primary sources; archaeological materials (such as artefacts, archives and comparative collections); field equipment and instrumentation (such as topographic survey systems and geophysical survey facilities); and, for science-based work, properly equipped and staffed laboratories (including layout space, sample preparation facilities and access to analytical instruments). Given the importance for Archaeology graduates of the development of technical skills in a variety of areas of archaeological practice, higher education providers facilitate access to the equipment and technical resources for the pursuit of these within the Archaeology courses they manage.



How are students assessed?

The assessment of Archaeology courses includes a mix of methods that are accessible to disabled students and students from varying educational and cultural backgrounds within different learning situations. Where individual students may be disadvantaged by particular assessment methods, adjustments to those assessments are considered while ensuring fairness across the full cohort.

The procedures used for assessment cover the subject knowledge, abilities and skills developed through the degree course. The assessment of work undertaken in practical classes is most likely to be through exercises or project/portfolio submissions. Seminar contributions may be assessed either directly or indirectly. Coursework may be part of the overall assessment of a student's performance or regarded as a pedagogic device for developing research and presentation skills, with formative assessment and regular feedback being provided by the tutor. Feedback and assessment may also be provided by the peer group.



Benchmark Standards

The minimum threshold standards that a student will have demonstrated when they are awarded an honours degree in Archaeology are outlined on **pages 20-21** of the Subject Benchmark Statement. 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.

The Statement was developed by a group of subject experts drawn from across the sector. Details of the Advisory Group can be found on **page 23** of the Statement.

Read the full Subject Benchmark Statement

The [full Subject Benchmark Statement](#) is available on the QAA website.



Subject Benchmark Statements are published in QAA's capacity as a membership organisation on behalf of the higher education sector.

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