Subject Benchmark Statement

Public Policy and Public Administration

April 2025

Contents

About this Statement

This QAA Subject Benchmark Statement for Public Policy and Public Administration defines what can be expected of a graduate 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. Subject Benchmark Statements also describe the nature and characteristics of awards in a particular discipline 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.

This is a new Statement and includes the crosscutting themes of:

- equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI)

- accessibility and the needs of disabled students

- education for sustainable development (ESD)

- employability, entrepreneurship and enterprise education (EEE)

- generative artificial intelligence (Gen AI).

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 when considering whether the design of a course and the threshold standards of achievement are comparable with those of other higher education providers. Furthermore, statements can support professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs) with their definitions and interpretations of academic standards.

You may want to read this document if you are:

- involved in the design, delivery and review of courses in Public Policy and Public Administration

- a prospective student thinking about undertaking a course in Public Policy and Public Administration

- an employer, to find out about the knowledge and skills generally expected of Public Policy and Public Administration graduates

- a Public Policy or Public Administration scholar/expert with an interest in the content and delivery of degrees in these subjects.

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 requirement 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 status of the Statement will differ depending on 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, Subject Benchmark Statements are part of the current quality arrangements in Scotland, Wales and 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 when designing, delivering and reviewing courses. These may include requirements set out by PSRBs and industry or employer expectations. In 2024 QAA published an update to the Quality Code, which will be helpful when using this Statement.

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 Public Policy and Public Administration degree

1.1   This Subject Benchmark Statement sets out the context and purposes of degrees in Public Policy and in Public Administration, which are linked and at the same time distinct areas of study. The study of Public Policy is concerned with understanding the factors that shape the decisions that are taken by governments and other regulatory bodies. By contrast, the study of Public Administration is concerned with how public policy is formulated and implemented. This intersection and linkage is reflected at the most fundamental level in that Public Policy influences government decision-making, whereas Public Administration deals with its implementation. While a career in Public Policy requires an awareness and understanding of researching the issues that impact on government preferences and identifying recommendations that affect strategy, a career in Public Administration requires an awareness and understanding of how public policy goals are effectively implemented through a process that involves planning, implementing and monitoring.

1.2   Public Policy and Public Administration courses investigate the systems, processes, governance and management of public decision-making across all dimensions of society and tiers of government in both democratic and non-democratic countries. Students in Public Policy and Public Administration develop advanced levels of understanding of theories and concepts relating to governance, Public Policy, Public Administration, and public management as well as knowledge and skills in the formulation and implementation of public policies and the delivery of public services. This also includes the evaluation of impacts that governmental decisions, strategies, instruments and regulations have on citizens, and the drawing of lessons for practice and future public action.

1.3   The Subject Benchmark Statement for Public Policy and Public Administration recognises that the teaching of these subjects is not solely confined to academic departments whose core focus is Public Policy and/or Public Administration. Both subjects draw on and are taught across a range of other disciplines, including economics, finance, politics, public ethics, political geography, planning, urban studies, social policy, sociology, management, law and business.

1.4   The Statement is of relevance to the delivery of foundation and undergraduate degrees in Public Policy and/or Public Administration, as well as linking to postgraduate or public executive education in Public Policy and/or Public Administration. It is therefore theoretically broad and practical, and has wide utility. Types of degree include:

- generalist degrees designed for students without backgrounds in Public Policy and/or Public Administration

- generalist degrees covering the breadth of Public Policy and/or Public Administration, delivered exclusively for those with specific work experience

- specialist degrees designed for graduates to specialise in a particular function or sector, such as finance, human resources, and digital technologies

- specialist or 'executive' degrees, either MA or MSc, designed to enable career development for those working in specific sectors or professions, such as Police Leadership and Management, Healthcare Management, and Local Government Management.

1.5   Through a focus on governmental decision making, the study of Public Policy and/or Public Administration is concerned with policies and practices that impact citizens and society generally, as well as the economy, public institutions and public agencies. Through its interest in the delivery of government decisions, it is concerned with how public resources

are best organised and deployed to meet changing societal needs and preferences. This requires an appreciation of politics and policy, as well as an understanding of the craft of management and leadership that has a positive impact on broader society. Its field of study involves local, regional, national and international levels of enquiry.

1.6   The study of Public Policy and/or Public Administration requires analysis of a distinct set of issues, from the definition of policy problems and policy agendas, through to the design of policies, policy transfer and the selection of policy instruments, the effectiveness of policy implementation, and the evaluation of policy success and failure. These issues are explored through multiple theories, models and approaches, while focusing on different stages of the policy cycle, specific policies or sectors, or the comparison of policies across different sectors and local, national and international systems. Public Policy and its delivery are intertwined with concerns about fairness and social justice. Hence, the consideration of equality, equity, diversity, accessibility and inclusion is central to its study, from the immediate requirements (in the UK) of the public sector equality duty (PSED) to the broader concerns of global standards for sustainability, equity and social inclusion (see paragraph 1.18).

1.7   The principles of legality, fairness, participation, accountability, consistency, rationality, proportionality and impartiality are central to ensuring that public bodies act fairly, reasonably, and according to the law. They also provide a framework for challenging maladministration or the misuse or abuse of power by a public body. An appreciation of these principles enables students of Public Policy and/or Public Administration to critically assess the misuse and abuse of power by public bodies in respect of the process by which decisions are reached, rather than on the merits of the decisions themselves.

1.8   The study of Public Policy and/or Public Administration reflects the subject's interdisciplinarity and linkage between its theoretical and practical elements. This includes an emphasis on the effectiveness, efficiency and equity of both the design and the delivery of public services. This has led to wide consideration of the benefits of co-design and coproduction with service users and citizens, as well as the benefits of effective collaboration between public agencies in a supply network or in a locality.

Purposes and characteristics of a Public Policy and Public Administration degree

1.9   The purposes of a Public Policy and/or Public Administration degree are to develop:

- a comparative and critical appreciation of the purposes of the public sector and the place of politicians in making public-interest decisions on behalf of the public

- a critical understanding of the nature of policy making and Public Administration

- an awareness of the difference between the making, administration and implementation of policy at a local, regional and national level

- an appreciation of the interface between advice giving and decision making in governmental and public agencies

- an understanding of the critical difference between theories of Public Administration, public management and public governance

- an awareness of the comparative ethics involved in public decision making

- an appreciation of the comparative cost effectiveness of different models for investment in public infrastructure, and for organising public service delivery.

1.10   The study of Public Policy and/or Public Administration is concerned with providing students with skills, knowledge and capabilities that enable them to work in democratic or non-democratic environments characterised by uncertainty and challenge. Courses teach students to solve problems and identify solutions through strategic thinking, thereby equipping them with an awareness of how to hold governments and public service departments to account. While not every graduate will subsequently engage in a Public Policy and/or Public Administration focused career, the skills and attributes they acquire will prepare them for a wide range of occupations.

1.11   Governmental and public sector jobs make up approximately 20% of the contemporary economy in the regions and nations of the UK. Furthermore, public service delivery increasingly extends to providers in the non-profit and private sectors. Investment in the training and development of staff in the public sector is therefore crucial. Degrees in Public Policy and/or Public Administration will encourage students to critically evaluate policy and consider the overall effectiveness and productivity of the public sector.

Equity, diversity and inclusion

1.12   Degrees in Public Policy and/or Public Administration have a significant role to play in the organisation and governance of socially just societies and the delivery of fair policies, services and public support. They are also responsible for the development and maintenance of institutions and structures that create conditions for an equal, equitable and inclusive society. Accordingly, the creation and implementation of policies and public administrations which promote equal opportunities and fair outcomes, and which serve a population regardless of its members' backgrounds, is of paramount importance. All of these activities should recognise and be guided by Equity Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) principles. Therefore, degrees in Public Policy and/or Public Administration should observe, integrate and promote EDI in both delivery and curriculum. Equality, equity, diversity and inclusion should permeate knowledge production and pedagogies, curricular and assessment activities, and the creation of inclusive subject learning communities in which all staff and learners are welcome and feel a sense of belonging. Recognising the complexities involved in this task, QAA offers a useful resource on Creating Inclusive Subject Communities: New QAA Advice.

1.13   Curricula in Public Policy and/or Public Administration degrees, and their evaluation, champion, mainstream and epitomise the principles of EDI. This requires embracing an approach to curricular design, formats and delivery that goes beyond the limits set by western, heteronormative, able-bodied, privileged and other dominant worldviews. It may be accomplished through the selection of case studies, reading lists, guest speakers or panellists that represent a wide variety of perspectives belonging to a range of subjugated groups. Site or institutional visits and community engagement activities may complement on-campus and digital provision.

1.14   EDI principles should be at the forefront of academic, pedagogical and administrative practices, processes and behaviours in supporting teaching and learning practice in Public Policy and/or Public Administration degrees. This includes, but is not limited to, the use of inclusive language, pedagogies and assessment frameworks that recognise power asymmetries, facilitate the inclusion of diverse views and characteristics, promote ideas of social justice and foster inclusive learning environments.

Accessibility and the needs of disabled students

1.15   In the context of Public Policy and/or Public Administration, accessibility is key to creating and enabling an inclusive society. Accessibility is at the forefront of degree design and delivery, from the creation of accessible and inclusive learning environments and

opportunities, to designing a curriculum that equips graduates with the knowledge, skills and capabilities necessary to embedding accessibility in their professional practice.

1.16 Public Policy and Public Administration degrees are attentive to the requirements of a diverse range of students, ensuring that reasonable adjustments are explored and implemented to cater for the needs of students with disabilities or neurodivergent learners. This includes the use of accessible facilities to enable equal access to timetabled degree activities, as well as study and social spaces (both physical and virtual). It also includes the design and use of accessible learning resources, activities and assessment practices, in both synchronous and asynchronous contexts, on campus or online. Visits and other field trips are organised in such a manner that all students can participate safely and enrich their learning experience. Course teams ensure that students are offered equal access to career training and opportunities, through accessible training degrees, placements, or volunteering opportunities, as appropriate in the institutional and degree context.

1.17 Public Policy and/or Public Administration graduates will play a central role in shaping policies and services in critical areas such as health, technology, innovation, finance, and crisis management. This goes beyond the realm of legal compliance, into building fully accessible and inclusive provision that is transparent, effective and enables the participation of all members of society.

Education for sustainable development

1.18 The study of Public Policy and/or Public Administration plays its role in contributing to the achievement of global outcomes on sustainability and sustainable development. It can effectively equip the next generation of public managers, policymakers and public administrators with the knowledge, skills, values and agency for realising sustainable development goals. Drawing on the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), QAA and Advance HE's Education for Sustainable Development Guidance (2021) defines sustainable development as 'an aspirational ongoing process of addressing social, environmental and economic concerns to create a better world', and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) as 'the process of creating curriculum structures and subject-relevant content to support and enact sustainable development'. ESD adopts a holistic approach that encompasses learning content, educational outcomes, pedagogy and the learning environment itself. It enhances the cognitive, behavioural and socio-emotional dimensions of learning in Public Policy and/or Public Administration degrees. ESD offers an opportunity to reflect on and challenge established approaches to the study of Public Policy and/or Public Administration. For example, using the QAA guidance on ESD can assist with reviewing the curriculum, drawing on an increasingly global body of literature, advancing local and indigenous knowledge, and recognising the importance and relevance of alternative models and approaches.

1.19 ESD is underpinned by a rich range of pedagogical and assessment methods. These can transform the learning environment and generate a sustainable workforce with the behaviours, attitudes, values and knowledge required to safeguard environmental, social and economic well-being for present and future generations. The diverse approaches and tools proffered, for example, by active learning, experiential learning and constructivist pedagogies are well suited to orientate learning towards meeting UNESCO's ESD Learning Objectives. They create diverse learning and engagement opportunities that extend beyond the formal curriculum, and can be prioritised across, and woven throughout, the study of Public Policy and/or Public Administration. They encourage interdisciplinarity, critical enquiry, responsible entrepreneurship, high-value innovation, and data and technological literacy, in addition to driving community engagement, reflective mindsets, humanity, integrity, and global awareness. They can empower learners to become autonomous, self-directed, creative and

compassionate lifelong knowledge producers by contributing to the sustainability of the economy, ecology and communities.

Employability, entrepreneurship and enterprise education

1.20 Undergraduate and postgraduate Public Policy and/or Public Administration students are helped to recognise the responsibilities of working in Public Policy and Public Administration related roles, within and outside the public sector. Enterprise and Entrepreneurship Education supports intellectual/cognitive, behavioural and affective capacities and understandings that are likely to increase employability and have a significant impact on individual students, in terms of preparing them for successful careers. It equips students to negotiate and flourish in changing environments, and can enhance learning through placements and/or experiential activities that build links between academic institutions and external organisations.

1.21 Beyond employment, EEE provides skills to help students lead rewarding, self-determined professional lives, well placed to add social, cultural and economic value throughout their academic studies and in their future careers. EEE can:

- be inclusive and support wider participation

- have a positive influence on students' creativity

- promote flexibility and the innovation process

- have a positive impact on behaviour change and active citizenship

- have a positive impact on learning attainment and grades

- significantly improve stakeholder engagement

- demystify career opportunities and enhance employability

- have a positive impact on positions gained within employment

- significantly increase company start-up rates.

1.22 Public Policy and especially Public Administration degrees for pre- and post-experience students are strongly related to practice, and therefore must provide clear links between degree content and enterprise and entrepreneurship. While degrees will have the capacity to develop career-ready students, they must also equip sector-experienced students with the knowledge, behaviours and skills that will enable them to develop and progress within the workplace.

1.23 Public Policy and Public Administration graduates understand the value of the EEE skills that they have developed and/or advanced throughout their study. Courses can instil students with an understanding and appreciation of these skills, as well as their applicability and transferability; students are able to recognise, reflect on and develop them, as well as communicate them to potential and current employers and other relevant stakeholders.

1.24 Courses may provide and/or require opportunities for students to work individually or collaboratively with employers and/or relevant public sector stake holders. This may involve working on specific research projects or in a task and finish capacity.

1.25 Professional and vocational content and outcomes can be reflected in curriculum, learning and teaching and assessment, and providers may wish to combine degrees with professional accreditation, such as the Chartered Management Institute (CMI) and/or additional academic accreditation, for example via the International Commission on the Accreditation of Public Administration and Training (ICAPA), the European Association for

[Public Administration Accreditation](#) (EAPAA) or the [Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs and Administration](#) (NASPAA). Providers can also include key academic and non-academic stakeholders in course development and evaluation.

1.22 Given the prevalence of cross-sectoral working and the portfolio nature of careers, graduates benefit from displaying skills and abilities appropriate for industries and sectors outside the public sector. Crucially, graduates recognise and demonstrate these skills and appreciate their transferability. They also recognise the pace of change in employer priorities, as set out in the [World Economic Forum Future Jobs Report (2023)](#), and how the life cycle of skills and capabilities is diminishing.

Generative artificial intelligence

1.26 Public Policy and/or Public Administration degrees promote employability in a labour market that is becoming increasingly shaped by artificial intelligence (AI). They also prepare and equip students for work environments that require professionals to work alongside smart machines (Aoun, 2017). To ensure students can complete their studies responsibly and with integrity, and be equipped to enter a world increasingly impacted by generative AI (GenAI), Public Policy and/or Public Administration degrees must recognise and respond to employer and workplace needs, and evolving teaching, assessment and feedback practices. When considering the relevance of GenAI in Public Policy and Public Administration degrees, course developers look beyond assessment security and consider how degrees can incorporate GenAI into wider learning and teaching practices and student activities, including authentic assessments.

1.27 The incorporation of effective and responsible GenAI education in Public Policy and/or Public Administration degrees has the potential to provide future graduates with reflexive skills that are valuable to society, the economy and/or the environment.

1.28 Public Policy and/or Public Administration degrees can teach students to use technologies in an ethical and responsible manner and with integrity, cognisant of the likelihood that they will use GenAI in the workplace.

2   Distinctive features of Public Policy and Public Administration degrees

Design

2.1   Public Policy and/or Public Administration degrees are characterised by the multidisciplinary study of the public policy process and the administration of public services. They can be studied as separate subjects or may be combined to reflect the interdisciplinarity of the policy process and practice. Students gain an applied knowledge of the linkages between academic content and the public, private and non-profit sectors. This ensures career preparedness and professional development. Degrees typically have global reach given the international relevance of public policy and public administration.

2.2   Degrees are designed to integrate knowledge of public policy with a practical understanding of the dynamic nature of public administration and multi-sectoral delivery. Courses on the policy process typically explore policy drivers, examine policy cycles and decision-making (including who are the decision-makers and what are the techniques associated with the policy process), policy implementation and evaluation. This leads to a multilevel understanding of the policy drivers that shape public administration.

2.3   Courses promote skills in effective policy making and implementation, professional administration/management (in terms of organisational performance, accountability, efficiency and effectiveness in public service delivery), research design and methods, and the principles of co-production and collaboration. Policy innovation and public sector transformation are also central themes within courses. An important feature is the global reach of public policy and public administration, and the comparative nature of cross-sectoral and cross-national study.

2.4   Courses also examine multilevel governance, and the interplay between structure, systems and agency in the public sector, for example, the role of the state in the policy process and the experience of frontline workers and workforce challenges. They will also emphasise public and social value as characteristic of public policy and public administration. Themes such as public service motivation and ethos are also common features associated with the disciplines.

2.5   Degrees are often delivered by educators with a range of academic and professional experience, for example, practice-based officials, reflecting the applied nature of the discipline(s). This is advantageous for developing an understanding of the links between theory and practice, and facilitates the use of contemporary real-world case studies.

Progression

2.6   There are a limited number of undergraduate Public Administration degrees across the UK. Public Policy is more prevalent, but often as part of a joint honours degree, for example, combined with social policy, economics or government. Public sector content is extensively taught on foundation degrees delivered by further education providers on a range of courses, including those that are public-sector specific, as well as sociology and social policy, business and management and politics. Many students then proceed to study top-up degrees.

2.7   Over the duration of a degree with honours (FHEQ Level 6; FQHEIS Level 10), a student engaging with Public Policy and/or Public Administration 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 attainment of knowledge, expertise and

experience that build towards the final achievement of meeting the threshold-level, subject-specific and generic skills listed in this Statement. This will usually include successful completion and the award of credit for the full range of learning and assessment, including any practical components. Upon graduation from an undergraduate degree, it would be expected that a student who had achieved a second-class degree or higher would be capable of, and equipped for, undertaking postgraduate study in Public Policy and/or Public Administration or a related discipline. Entry requirements to postgraduate degrees are, however, determined by individual providers and may require specified levels of achievement at undergraduate level.

2.8   Undergraduates studying Public Policy and/or Public Administration as part of a combined or joint degree with other subjects will achieve core elements of the specific and generic skills outlined in this Statement, and will add others according to the topics covered in the other subject(s) of their degree. Additionally, they may explore the overlap between different disciplines, creating further opportunities for interdisciplinary study.

2.9   In a standard undergraduate honours degree in Public Policy and/or Public Administration, students may exit earlier and be eligible for a Certificate of Higher Education (FHEQ Level 4; FQHEIS Level 8), a Diploma of Higher Education (FHEQ Level 5; FQHEIS Level 9), or other awards depending upon the level of study completed to a satisfactory standard, and the expectation of specific providers.

2.10 At providers in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, the standard duration of a full-time undergraduate degree is three years. Scottish bachelor's degrees with honours are typically designed to include four years of study, which relates to the structure of Scottish secondary education. Students following part-time routes accumulate academic credit in proportion to the intensity of their study, and their total study time and credit value would be the equivalent of those achieved on full-time routes.

2.11 The majority of Public Policy and/or Public Administration degrees are at postgraduate level. MScs and Master of Public Administration (MPA) awards are prevalent, attracting a range of pre- and post-experience UK and international students. Though variation exists, MPAs and Master of Public Policy (MPP) awards tend to be studied by post-experience students, while MScs tend to be studied by pre-experience students. Of note is that full-time degrees are generally developed for pre-experience cohorts while part-time degrees almost exclusively cater to those that are post-experience.

2.12 Integrated master's degrees (FHEQ Level 7; FQHEIS Level 11) are available in the UK and comprise a four-year full-time degree or a part-time degree of not less than five and not more than eight academic years.

2.13 Entry requirements to postgraduate degrees are determined by individual providers and may require specific levels of achievement at undergraduate level, in a discipline that is determined to be relevant, and/or professional experience in Public Policy and/or Public Administration.

2.14 It is anticipated that graduates will have the requisite skills to become effective policymakers, managers, leaders and change agents in the public, private and non-profit sectors. An important outcome for the discipline is to acknowledge public service and Public Administration as distinct professions, where professionals will have acquired the general skills to move between Public Administration and Public Policy domains. Students will be helped to understand that public services are delivered through multiagency models, including public, private and non-profit organisations and that collaborative working across sectors is commonplace.

Flexibility

2.15 Public Policy and/or Public Administration degrees often attract working students. Flexible approaches enable learners to adopt a flexible approach to their studies in a way that complements their personal circumstances. Flexible learning is the central tenet of inclusive education that promotes social mobility and the widening participation agenda.

2.16 Examples of flexible learning may include hybrid or online options, modular delivery and recognition of placement-based and lifelong learning. Degrees and modules may also be accredited where they are designed for continuing professional development (CPD).

Partnership

2.17 Student experience is enhanced by partnerships that may include working with relevant organisations in the creation and delivery of degrees. This approach creates:

- teaching that is delivered by academics and practitioners

- authentic learning materials and assessment

- opportunities for advanced practice through placements or work experience

- opportunities for site visits to bring a case-based approach to learning.

2.18 Partnerships may include practitioners from government departments, public sector bodies, non-governmental organisations, social enterprises, and policymaking units. They are a distinctive feature of degrees in Public Policy and Public Administration and seek to bridge the space between theory and practice. Partnerships also manifest themselves through collaborations between different services and across sectors, including public, private and non-profit. Collaborations may also exist between policymakers, change agents and managers, and frontline practitioners.

Monitoring and review

2.19 Degree-awarding bodies and their collaborative partnerships routinely collect and analyse information and undertake periodic degree review, according to their own needs. Considering the student voice will form part of this. Degree-awarding bodies draw on a range of external reference points, including this Statement, to ensure that provision aligns with sector norms. Monitoring and evaluation constitute periodic assessment of a degree, conducted internally and/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. It can also include regular monitoring and review of EDI within the learning community.

2.20 Externality is an essential component of the quality assurance system in the UK. Higher education 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 examination 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 for Public Policy and Public Administration, 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 Providers may wish to create advisory boards comprising, for example, alumni and key non-academic stake holders who will be able to advise on degree design, content and applied or experiential degree components. Advisory board remits could include advice on assessment, placements, curriculum content, EEE, EDI and sustainability. Advice might also encompass sectoral needs and suggestions on strategic direction of courses. Members may be drawn from alumni, local, regional, national and international employers of the institution's graduates, and other stakeholders.

2.23 Courses with professional and or vocational outcomes requiring evaluation from professional and accrediting bodies will need to integrate these requirements into degree management.

3   Content, structure and delivery

3.1   This section explores how the content of the curriculum for Public Policy and Public Administration shapes the likely teaching and learning strategy and the modes of assessment that allow students to demonstrate they have met the benchmark standards at different levels of attainment.

3.2   Students will typically learn about the evolution of policy making, public administration and decision making by exposure to practice-based learning. Here they will work on real-world problems and develop critical skills, drawn from pedagogies such as action learning and reflection, and through focused placements in public agencies and non-governmental bodies.

Content

3.3   Public Policy and/or Public Administration degrees introduce students to key ideas about the design and operation of governments, as well as public and voluntary sectors. No specific policy sectors or institutions are considered essential. Rather, it is expected that the study of Public Policy and Public Administration will include detailed engagement with substantive questions of governance and policy to develop knowledge and apply governance-related theories, concepts, values and principles in a range of contexts. This includes (but is not limited to), individual, local, regional, national and global contexts, as well as institutional, normative, social, political, economic, cultural, historical, ethical, philosophical, technological and ecological contexts. Both areas have their basis in legal, economic and political studies. More recently, their study has been shaped by broader social sciences, notably sociology and organisation and management studies. Despite the variation this generates, students taking Public Policy and/or Public Administration degrees all study the public sector conceptually and empirically, and across all levels of government in democratic and non-democratic countries. The scope and breadth of each degree varies, but students typically demonstrate a knowledge and understanding of a number of the following subfields which reflect both the foundational concepts and themes that address contemporary issues:

- administrative law and governance

- communities and civic life

- comparative public policy and administration

- crisis management and resilience

- decision making and evidence-based policy

- development studies in public administration

- economic and social policy

- emergency management and emergency services

- faith-based public administrations

- intersectionality across gender, sex, race, caste, ethnicity, class, sexuality, religion, disability

- governance institutions and processes, including their coordination

- health administration

- history of public administration

- innovation and bureaucracy

- public leadership, advocacy and influence

- local government

- monitoring and intervention

- multilevel governance

- organisation theory

- partnership working and collaborative governance

- performance management, financial and non-financial

- personnel/human resources

- philosophy of public administration

- policy design, delivery, implementation and evaluation

- policy theory and policy analysis

- public administration and minorities, including ethnicity, gender, language, race, religion, sexuality

- public administration within multi-ethnic/contested societies

- public finance, budgets and accounting

- public governance

- public management

- public policy and security

- public procurement and contracting

- public sector ethics

- public value

- regulation and delegation

- representative bureaucracy

- risk assessment and management

- sustainable development goals

- theories of the policy process

- voluntary sector/non-profit administration.

3.4   Public Policy degrees will often have a deeper focus on the policy cycle, policy analysis and policy evaluation. Public Administration degrees are typically more general and have a greater emphasis on leadership and management skills, including communication, project management and finance.

3.5   Public Policy and/or Public Administration degrees are designed to develop students' intellectual/cognitive, behavioural and affective capacities and understandings that are transferable to a range of contexts, including employability, entrepreneurship, enterprise and partnership. Degrees will range from the more vocational to the more theoretically orientated, while most will include a combination of both. Those for post-experience students are likely to contain more practical and experiential content.

Teaching and learning

3.6   The learning and teaching environments developed by different providers will reflect their respective approaches to Public Policy and/or Public Administration, and that may emphasise different types of ethos, context, skill sets and analytical approaches. Qualifications may be conventionally academic, or combine theory with practice-based elements. Learning and teaching methods are designed to best fit the subject matter at hand and the learning outcomes set, considering the needs of different learners. Learning and teaching methods embrace principles of sustainability, inclusion and diversity, accessibility, and enterprise and entrepreneurship (see section 1). They take account of the diverse learning and teaching cultures that students may have experienced and provide opportunities for students to understand and appreciate the global context in which they will be operating. Learning approaches may include a range of modes, including, but not limited to, in-person, digital, blended, block release, hybrid, experiential, full-time, part-time, synchronous and asynchronous. As far as possible, providers will ensure digital inclusivity for students.

3.7   Public Policy and/or Public Administration students will experience a range of learning environments, methods and activities that combine to develop ability to advance their cognitive and life skills, their knowledge base and to identify enterprising and entrepreneurial solutions to social challenges. Independent of mode of delivery, learning in Public Policy and/or Public Administration degrees typically includes some combination of:

- lectures - ranging from traditional 'chalk and talk' style to interactive and 'flipped' formats

- seminars and workshops

- case studies

- inquiry problem-based exercises, roleplays, simulations/games, experiments

- work-based learning, internships, placements

- independent learning and guided activities

- talks and workshops from practitioner speakers

- field work and study trips.

3.8   Students studying Public Policy and/or Public Administration are taught within environments conducive to learning that embrace intellectual and/or neurological diversity. Students have access to, and are appropriately trained in, the identification, retrieval and use of a wide range of relevant published literature, digital technologies, databases and associated software and computing resources. The scope of material available can include, but is not limited to, traditional monographs, articles and edited collections, blogs, videos/vlogs, debates, opinion/think pieces, reports, speeches, artefacts, visual media, performances, art, official documentation (both historical and contemporary), oral histories, diaries and ethnographic sources, and raw and processed statistical data. To ensure development of digital literacy skills and challenges raised by GenAI, students are supported to critically evaluate these resources to ensure their effective and ethical use. Students engage with a wide range of sources and are supported to develop the skills to critically evaluate their value and significance in different contexts.

3.9   Innovation in pedagogy shapes curriculum design and development. In Public Policy and Public Administration there is a long tradition of research driving teaching practices. The interactions between teaching, research and professional practice are key elements of the environment in which Public Policy and Public Administration courses are taught. Inputs to

student learning come from public and voluntary sector managers and other stakeholders through curriculum co-creation and development, guest lectures and in supporting assessment. Course teams may engage with practitioner networks and relevant learned societies and/or professional bodies.

Assessment and feedback

3.10 Assessment and feedback help students to deeply engage with Public Policy and/or Public Administration and showcase their understanding, analytical ability, insights and skills. A course's assessment strategy will reflect the knowledge, skills and understanding developed within its curriculum and align with its preferred methods of learning and teaching. Assessment as, and for, learning (as opposed to only assessment of learning) is promoted and developed. Assessment is linked to the specific learning outcomes of degrees and enables students to demonstrate progressive levels of attainment. It also enables the development of specific skills related to employability, professional practice and personal development.

3.11 Plurality in assessment allows students to display and develop a wide range of skills and is appropriate for the diverse range of educational backgrounds of students taking Public Policy and/or Public Administration degrees. Providers design assessments to ensure that the overall assessment burden is considered, including the impact on well-being and accessibility. Where individual students are disadvantaged by particular assessment methods, reasonable adjustments to those assessments are considered in discussion with the student concerned, while ensuring fairness across the full cohort.

3.12 Public Policy and/or Public Administration courses include, but are not limited to, assessments which:

- enable students to demonstrate their understanding of the subject and ability to develop critical analyses and solutions, such as traditional set assessments including essays, examinations (both seen and unseen), review papers, and posters

- enable students to demonstrate their ability to develop and improve their communication skills, such as blogs, podcasts/vlogs, in-class presentations (individual and group), and viva voces

- enable students to explore an area of personal interest and build their capacity for independent research, thinking and problem solving from the design of an independent research project, selection of an appropriate methodology, and writing up of results, such as dissertations, case studies, capstone projects, and extended essays

- model transferable skills used in Public Policy and/or Public Administration-related careers such as authentic assessments including position/policy/briefing papers, evidence submissions, speeches or technique-centred assessments such as data analysis exercises, in-tray exercises, and use of GenAI

- encourage students to critically reflect on their knowledge, skills and personal development, and which are aimed at enhancing their employability, such as reflective logs/diaries and placement reports.

3.13 Feedback is an essential part of the learning process and is designed to enable students to understand their progress and to further improve. Feedback will be constructive, consistent and specific. It will be given to students throughout their studies on both formative and summative work, in ways that allow them to feed forward to their learning practices on future assessments. To ensure equality and inclusion with respect to diverse student cohorts, a variety of feedback methods can be used, including written and spoken comments, technology-aided systems, and peer and self-assessment.

4   Benchmark standards

Introduction

4.1   This Subject Benchmark Statement sets out the standards that a student will have demonstrated when they are awarded an undergraduate or postgraduate degree in Public Policy and/or Public Administration. Demonstrating these standards over time will show that a student has achieved the range of knowledge, understanding, behaviours, attributes and skills expected of graduates in Public Policy and Public Administration. This will include graduate attributes articulated by UK universities and the various international standards referred to elsewhere in this Statement.

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 of The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies which sets out the outcome classification descriptions for *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications of Degree-Awarding Bodies in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) Level 6 and *The Framework for Qualifications of Higher Education Institutions in Scotland* (FQHEIS) Level 10 degrees. These frameworks contain the common descriptions of the four main degree outcome classifications for bachelor's degrees with honours: 1st, 2:1, 2:2 and 3rd, and postgraduate degrees.

4.3   Please note that the minimum threshold standards are not intended to specify universal competence standards for a discipline. If a provider chooses to develop competence standards (as defined by the Equality Act 2010) as part of a programme specification, these can be informed by the relevant Subject Benchmark Statement along with any PSRB requirements. In these circumstances providers should follow the most recent guidance from the Equality and Human Rights Commission.

4.4   The benchmark standards defined in paragraphs 4.5 to 4.7 below are for the main content and characteristics in undergraduate and master's degrees. The benchmark standards do not constitute a checklist, nor do they imply any particular weighting to each outcome. Degrees include the full range of content and skills, but their point of introduction and the level of engagement is decided by curriculum designers.

Threshold level

4.5   Students graduating with an honours degree in Public Policy and/or Public Administration at threshold level of attainment are expected to be able to demonstrate:

- knowledge of key concepts and theories, as well as awareness of current evidence

- knowledge, understanding and awareness of current problems and/or new insights, much of which is at, or informed by, the forefront of the academic discipline, field of study or area of professional practice

- an ability to construct an argument, synthesising relevant information and exercising judgement

- an ability to deal with complex issues both systematically and creatively, making sound judgements in the absence of complete data

- an ability to identify, investigate and solve problems in relation to both practical and theoretical contexts

- an ability to evaluate and apply approaches to collecting, analysing and presenting relevant data

- collaboration with others to achieve common goals through, for example, group work, group projects and group presentations

- communication through a variety of context-appropriate formats for a variety of audiences

- reflection on their own learning

- management of their own learning and projects effectively while working individually and collectively

- an ability to understand and apply the principles of ethical research

- organisation and deployment of evidence, data and information from a variety of secondary and primary sources

- an ability to understand the importance of personal integrity and an awareness of the potential ethical impacts of decision-making

- understanding and use of constructive feedback

- an ability to select and use appropriate communication, information and data analysis aids and software.

Excellent level

4.6   Students graduating with an honours degree in Public Policy and/or Public Administration at an excellent level of attainment are expected to be able to demonstrate:

- a consistent and detailed knowledge of key concepts and theories, as well as awareness of current evidence and issues

- a systematic knowledge, understanding and critical awareness of current problems and/or new insights, much of which is at, or informed by, the forefront of the academic discipline, field of study or area of professional practice

- a sophisticated ability to collaborate with others to achieve common goals through, for example, group work, group projects and group presentations

- a developed ability to communicate through a variety of context appropriate formats for a variety of audiences

- a strong capability to construct reasoned argument, synthesising relevant information and exercising critical judgement

- a developed ability to critically reflect on their own learning

- effective handling of complex issues, both systematically and creatively, making sound judgements in the absence of complete data

- confidence in identifying, investigating and solving problems through thinking creatively in both practical and theoretical contexts

- an excellent ability to evaluate and apply approaches to collecting, analysing and presenting relevant data

- effective management of their own learning and projects in a timely and critical fashion while working individually and collectively

- clarity in understanding and applying the principles of ethical research

- effective organisation and deployment of evidence, data and information from a variety of secondary and primary sources

- evident understanding of the importance of personal integrity and an awareness of the potential ethical impacts of decision making

- analytical evaluation of the relationship between academic practice and professional behaviour (where relevant)

- developed understanding and use of constructive feedback

- a strong ability to select and use appropriate communication, information and data analysis aids and software.

Master's

4.7   Students graduating with a master's degree in Public Policy and/or Public Administration are expected to demonstrate graduate outcomes, command of one or more specialist areas of the subject, and independence in project-based work. They will also have extended their knowledge, skills and understanding into outcomes that demonstrate:

- a systematic and deep understanding of relevant knowledge about public sector organisations, their external context, and how they are managed

- a comprehensive and detailed understanding of techniques for detailed investigation, research and evaluation of, or advanced scholarship in, the subject area

- an ability to demonstrate proactive and independent approaches to learning

- an ability to demonstrate agile, reflexive and innovative approaches to learning

- a critical and nuanced awareness of current issues, which is informed by research and practice

- conceptual competencies that enable critical evaluation of current research and advanced scholarship

- application of relevant knowledge to a range of complex situations, taking account of the subject area's hybrid environment

- originality, creativity and entrepreneurship in the application of knowledge, together with a practical understanding of how established techniques of research and enquiry are used to create and interpret knowledge

- an ability to evaluate and integrate theory, practice and experience in a wide range of situations

- a comprehensive understanding of how the boundaries of knowledge are advanced through research and practice

- a developed understanding of, and commitment to, public sector values and ethics, and the importance of acting with and promoting integrity

- professional reflective capabilities to enhance professional practice

- nuanced understanding of how Public Policy and/or Public Administration impact societies and the environment

- an ability to take an international and global perspective

- an ability to work, engage and lead in collaborative, multicultural, diverse environments domestically and globally

- a capacity to negotiate and influence in professional contexts

- independent learning ability required for continuing professional development.

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6   Membership of the Advisory Group

Membership of the Advisory Group for the Subject Benchmark Statement for Public Policy & Public Administration 2025

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Professor Alasdair Blair (Deputy Chair)	De Montfort University
Dr Amanda Crompton (Deputy Chair)	University of Nottingham
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Dr Ian Elliott	University of Glasgow
Professor Steven Griggs	Staffordshire University
Mr Roscoe Hastings	University of Exeter
Ms Helen Jenkins	Local Government Association
Dr Martin Jones	Nottingham Trent University
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