



Subject Benchmark Statement

**Languages, Cultures
and Societies**

December 2019

Contents

How can I use this document?	1
About this Subject Benchmark Statement	2
Relationship to legislation.....	2
Summary of changes from the previous Subject Benchmark Statement (2015)	2
1 Introduction.....	3
2 Defining principles.....	5
3 Nature and extent of language studies.....	8
4 Subject knowledge and understanding.....	9
5 Skills	11
6 Learning, teaching and assessment.....	14
7 Benchmark standards	18
Appendix 1: Typical degrees for which the Subject Benchmark Statement is a key reference	20
Appendix 2: Membership of the benchmarking and review groups for the Subject Benchmark Statement for Languages, Cultures and Societies	23

How can I use this document?

This document is a Subject Benchmark Statement for Languages, Cultures and Societies. It defines the academic standards that can be expected of a graduate, in terms of what they might know, do and understand at the end of their studies, and describe the nature of the subject.

The [UK Quality Code for Higher Education](#) (Quality Code) sets out the Expectations and Core Practices that all providers of UK higher education are required to meet. Providers in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland must also meet the Common Practices in the Quality Code.

The Quality Assurance Agency for UK Higher Education (QAA) has also published a set of [Advice and Guidance](#), divided into 12 themes, and a number of other resources that support the mandatory part of the Quality Code. Subject Benchmark Statements sit alongside these resources to help providers develop courses and refine curricula but are not part of the regulated requirements for higher education providers in the UK.

This Statement is intended to support you if you are:

- involved in the design, delivery and review of courses of study in languages, cultures and societies, or related subjects
- a prospective student thinking about studying this subject or a current student of the subject, to find out what may be involved
- an employer, to find out about the knowledge and skills generally expected of a graduate in this subject.

Subject Benchmark Statements provide general guidance for articulating the learning outcomes associated with the course but are not intended to represent a national curriculum in a subject or to prescribe set approaches to teaching, learning or assessment. Instead, they allow for flexibility and innovation in course design within a framework agreed by the subject community.

It may be helpful to refer to the relevant Advice and Guidance when using this Statement.

Explanations of unfamiliar terms used in this Subject Benchmark Statement can be found in QAA's [Glossary](#).

About the Statement

This Subject Benchmark Statement refers to bachelor's degrees with honours in languages, cultures and societies.¹

It has been produced by a group of subject specialists drawn from, and acting on behalf of, the subject community. The process is facilitated by QAA, as is the full consultation with the wider academic community and stakeholder groups each Statement goes through.

In order to ensure the continuing currency of Subject Benchmark Statements, QAA initiates regular reviews of their content, five years after first publication, and every seven years subsequently, or in response to significant changes in the discipline.

Relationship to legislation

Higher education providers are responsible for meeting the requirements of legislation and any other regulatory requirements placed upon them, for example by funding bodies. This Statement does not interpret legislation, nor does it incorporate statutory or regulatory requirements. The responsibility for academic standards remains with the higher education provider who awards the degree.

Higher education providers may need to consider other reference points in addition to this Statement in designing, delivering and reviewing courses. These may include requirements set out by Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs) and industry or employer expectations.

Sources of information about other requirements and examples of guidance and good practice are signposted within the Subject Benchmark Statement where appropriate. Individual higher education providers will decide how they use this information.

Summary of changes from the previous Subject Benchmark Statement (2015)

This version of the Statement forms its fourth edition, following initial publication of the Subject Benchmark Statement in 2002 and review and revision in 2007 and 2015.

This latest version of the Statement is the consequence of the revision to the [UK Quality Code for Higher Education](#) which was published in 2018. It has been revised to update references to the Quality Code and other minor changes within the sector. Changes have been made by QAA and confirmed by the Chair of the most recent review group.

There have been no revisions to the subject-specific content of the Statement.

¹ Bachelor's degrees are at level 6 in *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* and level 10 in *The Framework for Qualifications of Higher Education Institutions in Scotland*, as published in [The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies](#)

1 Introduction

1.1 In an increasingly interdependent world, it is essential to be able to work with other languages, cultures and societies. Courses and modules in this area equip students to thrive in a variety of environments, from the local to the global. They offer a fascinating variety of things to study, and give better career and employment prospects to the next generation of transnational graduates, internationally mobile graduates who can work across cultures. Students are able to study languages, cultures and societies in single or combined honours degrees, as minor subjects or pathways, as elective modules alongside their main subject, and as extracurricular studies. According to the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS), there were around 50 universities offering full degrees in modern languages in the UK for October 2015, with another dozen offering language minors (around a quarter of a course) and a further 50 providing language electives (individual modules). There is no standard pattern for such courses and modules, and the aim of this Statement is to set out the range of knowledge and skills that students are able to gain in these studies. The broad range of studies in languages, cultures and societies is generally focused on specialist departments, language centres, schools or subfaculties with a variety of titles, most often including Modern Languages, Languages and Cultures or Languages and Area Studies. In this document, the field of studies concerned is for convenience referred to as languages.

1.2 In the past 20 years, the area of languages has received increased attention on the part of educators and policymakers. Changes in public attitudes and in educational policies have led to a noticeable decline in the number of students choosing to study language degrees at university. At the same time, increasing numbers of students are taking elective courses, with or without accreditation, to develop their proficiency in languages. These patterns have been the subject of numerous studies and reports, and have given rise to several government initiatives, particularly in the area of education. For example, the Scottish government is pursuing a policy of pupils learning two languages in addition to their mother tongue, and the Westminster government has adjusted the incentives in performance measures for schools to maintain teaching in foreign and ancient languages. There are several public campaigns to raise the profile of languages. Most of these activities have been directed towards alerting people to the value of languages as an asset for employment and career development. However, less attention has been directed to highlighting this as a rewarding area of study, and as a source of personal development through acquiring cultural enrichment and valuable life skills.

1.3 There is a good deal of evidence that public opinion has accepted that capability in languages is an asset for employability. The variety of careers in which languages can play an important role is outlined in several places, including the Graduate Prospects website.² Departments providing language courses are increasingly taking steps to ensure that the value of their modules for employability is made clear to students. Departments also point out the rich and fascinating nature of language studies, which clearly resonates with students of language degrees. The transformative nature of language study and of residence abroad is often the aspect most valued by graduates. The ability to function in different settings, and to navigate different meanings and relationships, is accompanied by real growth in knowledge and understanding along with changes in self-awareness and social identity.

1.4 University departments, representative associations and national agencies have increasingly been motivated to reassess the curriculum content of language studies and the forms of educational provision. Such reassessments are required to respond to changes in contemporary society and the changing needs of learners, with the aim of making languages

² Graduate Prospects website, available at: www.prospects.ac.uk/options_modern_languages.htm

more attractive, more accessible and more relevant. This Statement seeks to reflect both the established curriculum and emerging new directions of study. It also takes account of the increasing diversity of provision.

1.5 Higher education providers draw on this Subject Benchmark Statement in different ways depending on the kinds of courses and modules they wish to offer. Their choice typically takes into account the focus and objectives of their degree courses and their particular research strengths. They may also wish to refer to other Subject Benchmark Statements which are of relevance, such as those for Area Studies, Linguistics, English, Welsh, Classics and Ancient History, Education Studies, Anthropology, Sociology, History, and Communication, Media, Film and Cultural Studies.

1.6 There is considerable variety of provision in languages. Single and joint honours degree courses often include the name of the languages studied in their title, but in many courses where the focus is on languages, the title may make no explicit reference to particular languages. Titles may refer to International Studies, perhaps with another named subject, such as Business or Communication. They may refer to translation and/or interpreting. They may refer to a specific region studied, such as European, Latin American or Middle Eastern Studies. An indication of typical degree courses that include languages is set out in Appendix 1. Elective modules in language learning typically specify the name of the language learned, with an indication of the level of attainment to be achieved. The variety and breadth of provision reflects the fact that study in languages is typically multidisciplinary, which means that teaching expertise is often drawn from several different subject domains, such as linguistics, literature, anthropology, cultural studies, history or politics. Languages also have the potential for interdisciplinarity, which means that a combination of different disciplinary approaches is used to illuminate a particular object of study.

1.7 While French, German and Spanish have historically predominated in the study of modern and medieval languages, a growing number of learners now wish to study a wider range of languages and cultures. They include other languages of Europe, for example, Italian, Portuguese and Russian; the languages of Asia, especially Chinese, Japanese and Korean; the languages of the Middle East, particularly Arabic; ancient languages, for example, Latin and Greek; and other less widely taught languages. Many higher education providers now offer opportunities to learn these and other languages as elective modules. Specialist degree courses in the languages of the wider world tend, however, to be taught in a small number of providers. In recent years, there has been increased academic interest in English as a second language, in Celtic languages, British Sign Language and in the languages of minority communities, such as Punjabi and Urdu.

1.8 The review group has taken account of several standards in language learning, including those associated with school qualifications in the UK, the National Language Standards, and the declared criteria for standards adopted by several UK universities. It recognises that the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR) has become the predominant international standard, gaining currency in North America and in South Asia. The group is aware of internationally recognised standardised language tests, such as IELTS, Cambridge Proficiency, the Hanban HSK test for the Chinese language and others, which are often mapped against the CEFR. The present Subject Benchmark Statement attempts to adapt the CEFR as appropriate to UK higher education.

2 Defining principles

2.1 Undergraduate study of languages is concerned with acquiring or improving competence in one or more languages, and understanding the cultures and societies where the language is spoken. Most often the language studied is a second language, understood as one in which the student does not have full mastery. The understanding of culture and society is deepened by use of the relevant target language, understood as the language that the student is learning, though this does not imply that all instruction is necessarily delivered in the target language. Learning through the target language is a matter for policy decision by providers, and such decisions are clearly specified in relation to the aims of the course or module.

2.2 The study of languages enables students to understand the similarities and differences between cultures, in the broadest sense of high culture, popular culture, material culture, traditional culture (national, regional, tribal and so on) and the customs and practices of everyday life. In this sense it is inherently intercultural. The study of languages enables students to understand ideas and events that cross national boundaries, the current and historical relationships between countries, and the ways in which other countries interact with the UK. In this sense, it is transnational. There is a wide range of practices in how far the intercultural and transnational dimensions are made explicit. At one end of the spectrum are courses that seek an exclusive immersion in the language or culture that is being studied. At the other end of the spectrum are courses that seek to focus on the relationships between cultures, developing, for example, comparative literary studies, intercultural communication or transnational cultural studies.

2.3 The subject range is extremely large, covering potentially all languages in the present and in the past, but two main components of language study are common to all courses. The first is a focus on the acquisition of competence in the target language, which requires a wide range of knowledge, understanding and skills of a subject-specific and generic nature. The second component is the study of aspects of the cultures and societies associated with the language. The nature and scope of studies varies according to the aims and objectives of the specific course, and may also draw upon a range of related subjects in order to inform understanding of that culture. In the process, students are expected to acquire understanding and skills that are transferable to other areas of study and to their future career development.

2.4 The acquisition of proficiency in languages has four complementary aims, which virtually all courses in languages endeavour to integrate:

- to acquire a medium of understanding, expression and communication; this is described as language acquisition (see paragraph 2.5)
- to gain access to other societies and cultures, being able to live and work in other countries and with people from elsewhere; this is described as intercultural awareness, understanding and competence (see paragraph 2.6)
- to understand how a particular language functions and changes, as an object of study in its own right; this is described as the explicit knowledge of language (see paragraph 2.7)
- to gain access to various bodies of knowledge that are available in the language concerned, and to methodological approaches that have been developed in other countries; this is described as knowledge of the cultures and societies where the language is used (see paragraph 2.8).

2.5 The study of a language as a medium of understanding, expression and communication involves the acquisition of practical competence in the use of a specific language. Acquisition of practical competence in a language is carried out to various levels

and may focus on any or all of the main skills of reception (listening and reading) and production (speaking and writing). It may also include proficiency in mediating between two or more languages, especially in translation and interpreting. A number of features make the acquisition of a language uniquely challenging. It involves acquiring new knowledge of a very detailed kind. Many courses seek to develop the ability to use that knowledge to a high level of accuracy and fluency in the target language. To achieve an appropriate degree of fluency in a chosen language, the learner must devote a great deal of time seeking active exposure to the language and in practising it on a daily basis. Knowledge of relevant culture(s) is integrated with that process through teaching materials, appropriate specialist coursework, residence abroad and independent study and learning.

2.6 The study of a language enables students to participate in societies whose language they study and to operate within different linguistic and cultural contexts. This places them in a privileged position in that they can reflect on their own society from new perspectives, thus increasing their understanding of the concept of citizenship. They can compare and contrast diverse visions of the world, thereby promoting intercultural understanding and bringing distinctive benefits both to their own society, for example, in employment terms, and to the societies of target languages. Language courses typically incorporate a period of work or study abroad to enable students to develop linguistic and cultural skills and gain other associated benefits (for example, personal resilience, social networks, international perspectives or work experience).

2.7 The study of language as an object in its own right comprises knowledge and understanding both of the structure of the language itself and of the social, historical and cultural contexts in which it has been and/or is currently used. A study of language structure includes learning the use of systems of symbols and sounds for written and spoken communication, the production and comprehension of meanings, and the grammatical patterns in which words can be ordered and modified. A study of social contexts for language includes learning about how usage and meanings vary and change in both time and place; how language is acquired; its role in education, culture, politics and social relationships, and the relations between languages and the ways in which governments, institutions and organisations seek to manage the learning and use of languages. These fields and other aspects of language awareness are outlined in greater detail in the Subject Benchmark Statement for Linguistics.

2.8 The study of a language permits access to various bodies of knowledge and methodological approaches. These may involve the study of any aspects of the cultures and societies in which the language is used, and may introduce students to a spread of subjects that range across the humanities and social sciences. The knowledge and understanding may be embodied in the literature, media and other cultural products of the target language societies. Students working in these areas employ the methodological approaches and techniques that they share with other subjects, including the analysis of discourse, texts, images and events from a variety of critical perspectives. Other modes of knowledge and understanding are embodied in the history, geography, institutions, social practices and political and economic life of these societies. Students of languages can access knowledge of these through primary and secondary source materials in the target language, which is particularly important where the sources are not available in their first language. Students may develop a more detailed knowledge and understanding of particular subgroups of the society such as the business, legal, creative, rural, technological or the scientific communities. Students who study languages gain first-hand access to those communities.

2.9 The nature of language study requires substantial contact with competent users of the language studied, typically in small groups and with the involvement of people who use the language as their first or main language of communication. Many courses enhance this

contact through advanced educational technology, for example by using distance-learning based on online facilities.

2.10 The development of skills and knowledge to an advanced level is greatly enhanced by a period of residence in a context where the language concerned is used as the main language of communication. For English, Celtic languages and sign language, this may be achieved within the UK, and may include periods of immersion in particular environments where the language is used predominantly. For other languages, the period of residence is normally abroad. The extent of residence abroad varies between different courses. All courses encourage students to undertake some residence abroad and most courses include a compulsory period of work or study abroad. Some courses make extensive use of virtual learning environments and other online resources to achieve 'virtual mobility' during the course of studies.

2.11 Many courses include a compulsory one-year period of residence abroad, which makes a significant, and often essential, contribution to the development and enhancement of knowledge, understanding and skills in linguistic and sociocultural studies. Such residence may involve periods of study in target language communities, academic exchanges, work placements or assistantships, as circumstances permit. It contributes experiences and contacts that can be valuable in subsequent careers. It also encourages intercultural awareness and capability, qualities of self-reliance and other generic skills. These further enable graduates to become mobile and transnational citizens in the global environment.

2.12 The teaching of languages and related studies is remarkable in the variety of ways in which it has sought to integrate the achievement of its objectives within UK higher education. In many providers, students may take one or more of a range of languages from a variety of starting points, from beginners' level (often called *ab initio*) through to advanced attainment. Similarly, they may cease their study after various levels of progression. Teaching and learning is calibrated to address the different needs of learners, and to secure learning outcomes appropriate to the course of study at undergraduate and postgraduate level. This multiplicity of purpose, combined with the need to provide small group teaching in a way that recognises the nature of language learning at different stages of competence, requires extraordinary flexibility of organisation. Languages may be single honours degree subjects, subjects in joint degrees, or any proportion of an honours degree course.

2.13 The academic location of the subject may vary within the institutional structure. Traditionally, languages were taught as single-subject disciplines, located in departments named for the subject (for example, Department of French). In most institutions, languages are now grouped together in a school or department of Modern Languages, which provides an academic home for the languages component of all degree courses incorporating the study of languages. In such contexts, a language resource centre, offering students access to a wide range of language learning facilities, resources and reference materials, may be located within the school or department. In some providers, a language centre, operating as a free-standing central resource, performs this function. Some schools or faculties in other subjects have established separate languages units in order to meet the language learning requirements of their courses, as is sometimes the case in business schools or engineering faculties.

3 Nature and extent of language studies

3.1 The study of languages, both within higher education in the UK and internationally, encompasses a wide range of activity, including the study of language, linguistics, cultures and societies. They are also studied in association with a wide range of other subjects, including the natural and social sciences, whose requirements usually influence the ways in which languages are then studied. A small proportion of students study a single language for the entire duration of their undergraduate course. The majority of students follow courses either in more than one language or in a language in combination with another subject.

3.2 The subject range is extremely diverse and this Statement has relevance for all languages, including languages that developed in the UK, particularly English as a second or additional language, Celtic languages and sign languages. Modern languages are most commonly taught both as spoken and written languages. Some languages, such as Japanese or Chinese, have complex written scripts to be learned as well as their spoken forms. The subject also includes languages where a classical component of varying weight may be taught alongside the modern component, as is typically the case for classical Arabic and Chinese.

3.3 The range of studies associated with languages is, likewise, extremely diverse. Study may be focused on the cultures and the literatures, both historical and contemporary, of the societies of the language concerned. It may draw upon subjects such as linguistics, translation or interpreting in order to deepen understanding of the language. It may address aspects of history, philosophy, politics, media, geography, sociology, anthropology and economics, in order to enhance understanding of the fabric and context of societies where the language is spoken. Languages are also increasingly taught in other multi and cross-disciplinary combinations, such as languages with business or accountancy, law, art and design, computer science, engineering, and with the natural sciences. In such combinations, the language studies undertaken are seen as adding value to the knowledge, understanding and skills acquired, and extending the range of generic skills. With such diversity and flexibility of courses, languages are necessarily multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary, as well as intercultural and applied in nature.

3.4 While this Statement addresses the knowledge and skills expected of the graduate of a language degree, it recognises that large numbers of undergraduate students undertake language study within or outside their course of study in another named subject, often in the framework of institution-wide language programmes. In these contexts, language may be studied for specific purposes, where the lexical structures and discourses studied are tailored to that purpose. The majority of these students are specialists in other subjects and do not aspire to the graduate-level standards of competence in the language studied, as set out in Section 7. For the majority of these students, the levels of proficiency described in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment and use of the European Language Portfolio may be both helpful and appropriate. However, the language learning experience of these specialists in other subjects has much in common with that of the specialist language student; in particular, the balance between receptive and productive skills, the exposure to authentic resources and the role of educational technology. Paragraph 5.4 is applicable to these students. Similarly, for students of other subjects who pursue language study at a level equivalent to final year, those parts of the Statement relating to language skills and standards and levels of achievement (see paragraph 7.11) may also be relevant and appropriate.

4 Subject knowledge and understanding

4.1 Related to the four complementary dimensions of languages identified in paragraph 2.4, four key elements typify the knowledge and understanding outcomes of courses in languages:

- use of the target language for purposes of understanding, expression and communication
- intercultural awareness, understanding and competence
- explicit knowledge of language
- knowledge of aspects of the cultures, communities and societies where the language is used.

4.2 The curriculum in a particular course generally depends upon the nature of the language, local conditions, specialist strengths and the current state of the evolution of the subject as this is driven by research and other factors. The language-learning environment has distinctive potential to be a place from which one takes off into other environments. Courses in languages achieve the balance between these four key elements as appropriate for the objectives set.

Use of the target language for purposes of understanding, expression and communication

4.3 The use of the target language(s) as a medium for understanding, expression and communication is the shared concern of all schools or departments dealing with languages. Some aspects of effective use of the target language require an extensive knowledge and understanding of the cultures and societies where the language is spoken. Other aspects of its use may be related to the development of language skills. Language courses seek to impart the appropriate balance of knowledge, understanding and skills.

Intercultural awareness, understanding and competence

4.4 A key form of knowledge and understanding developed among students of languages is the ability to compare the view of the world from their own languages and cultures with the view of the world from the languages and cultures they have studied. The analytical skills they have developed can be used equally well in the study of their own culture and, in particular, in comparing, contrasting and mediating between the two (or more) societies with which they are familiar.

Explicit knowledge of language

4.5 Explicit knowledge of language makes up a significant part of all language courses. As a minimum input, it involves the study of linguistic structures in the context of specific language uses. A standard input involves sufficient knowledge of language structure to enable students to observe the full range of appropriate norms of written language and some awareness of linguistic systems. At a more specialised level, language study may involve the detailed consideration of synchronic and diachronic dimensions of language linked to a variety of linguistic theories as illustrated by different languages.

4.6 Many language courses seek to enable students to mediate between languages and cultures by means of translation and interpreting across a wide range of media. These activities require knowledge of how linguistic systems and cultural contexts relate to one another and of the techniques which permit mediation between languages and cultures. Where linguistic and cultural mediation is a significant part of the curriculum, the

development of advanced skills and explicit knowledge of the practices of translation and interpreting are key features.

Knowledge of aspects of the cultures, communities and societies where the language is used

4.7 The linguistic competences mentioned above are used by schools or departments of languages to enable students to access primary and secondary source materials in the target language in order to gain first-hand knowledge of the cultures, communities and societies where the language is used, including aspects of their literatures, cultures, linguistic contexts, history, politics, geography and social or economic structures. In certain courses, these relate to discipline-specific contexts, such as the business, legal, creative, rural, technological or scientific communities within those countries or regions.

4.8 Students of languages typically explore a variety of approaches to these cultures, communities and societies by drawing on a wide range of methodologies shared with other subjects in the humanities and social sciences. Degree courses vary as to the relative weight they attach to these different approaches, but all normally ensure that students completing the course acquire familiarity with methods, knowledge and understanding appropriate to the academic disciplines involved.

5 Skills

5.1 Graduates in languages will have developed a wide range of subject-related skills that are of great value in a diversity of careers and are readily transferable. A period of residence in a language-intensive environment, often abroad, is crucial in developing and enhancing many of these. The range of subject skills vary according to the specific focus of the course but typically fall into four areas:

- language skills
- intercultural awareness, understanding and competence
- language-related skills
- subject-related skills.

5.2 Graduates will have developed valuable generic skills, the profile of which varies according to the specific focus of the course but typically fall into three areas:

- predominantly cognitive skills
- predominantly practical skills
- interpersonal skills and other personal attributes.

Language skills

5.3 The acquisition of skills (primarily reading, writing, listening and speaking) in a language is a central objective of language courses. Courses endeavour to enable students to develop and use such skills, as appropriate to the target language and to the learning outcomes of the course. They may also develop skills that are relevant to their first language, for example translating from the target language in a way that demonstrates awareness of the subtleties of both languages. Certain aspects of effective language use may be related primarily to the development of particular language skills, which themselves require specific knowledge. Thus, for example, advanced productive skills of writing and speaking in the target language both require a high level of knowledge of the grammatical, discursive and pragmatic conventions that govern language use, and of the societal factors which make language use effective.

5.4 Language graduates normally reach a high level of understanding of the target language(s). They exhibit appropriate levels of achievement (see Section 7) in productive (speaking and writing) and receptive language skills (reading and listening), and mediation (translation and interpreting). They are fluent and accurate target language users in a wide range of personal, academic and other domains. They are likely to be at ease with a wide range of topics and registers in formal and informal situations, and be familiar with a wide range of source materials in the target language. Students studying outside specialist language courses exhibit achievement and progression appropriate to the nature of their course.

5.5 Language skills are likely to include a subset of related skills. These vary from the relatively simple to the more complex, and could include such activities as online interaction, talking on the telephone, videoconferencing, and the use of target language documents for carrying out research or writing reports. Many graduates will have developed language skills that are applicable in a particular professional context, such as education, law or business.

Intercultural awareness, understanding and competence

5.6 All students of languages develop awareness of the similarities and dissimilarities between other cultures and societies, and their own. This is gained through their studies and through their contact with the target language and associated cultures.

In particular, their competence in the target language means that they have an appreciation of internal diversity and transcultural connectedness, and an attitude of curiosity and openness towards other cultures. The skills and attributes they develop include:

- i critical understanding of other cultures and practices other than one's own
- ii ability to function in different cultures
- iii ability to articulate to others the contribution that the culture has made at a regional and global level
- iv ability and willingness to engage with other cultures, appreciating their distinctive features
- v ability to appreciate and evaluate critically one's own culture.

Language-related skills

5.7 Students of languages develop appropriate linguistic tools to describe and analyse the main features of the language(s) studied. This includes what is often referred to as a metalanguage, that is, a language with which to speak about language. Therefore, they are able to make effective use of language reference materials such as grammars, standard and specialised dictionaries, and corpora, to refine knowledge and understanding of language varieties, register, genre, nuances of meaning and language use.

5.8 Students of languages become effective and self-aware independent language learners. Their language learning skills might extend from strategies for learning vocabulary to awareness of learning style and the identification of appropriate learning opportunities. These skills equip them to learn other languages with greater ease. They enhance their command and awareness of English and have been shown to increase their employability.

Subject-related skills

5.9 The multidisciplinary nature of many courses in languages leads to a range of skills in linguistic, cultural and social study. Subject Benchmark Statements in relevant subjects may be helpful in identifying these skills. Important skills are developed through the critical study of cultures, communities and societies that use the languages studied. Depending on the course, these may relate to the study of the countries or regions in which the target language is used.

5.10 Study of these leads to the development of analytical, critical and specialist skills drawn from the relevant disciplinary areas. The opportunity to study discipline-specific content in the target language represents a unique contribution to the students' learning experience. Learners are able to select and use primary and secondary source materials in the target language in respect of these areas. Examples of the skills developed include techniques of textual analysis, critical study of cultural products, discourse analysis, linguistic analysis, historiography or social and critical theory.

Generic skills

5.11 The multidisciplinary and language-specific nature of language courses encourages the development of a wide range of key transferable skills, including, where applicable, those developed during residence in the target language societies or communities. These skills are also developed to an appropriate level in students for whom language study is a smaller proportion of their degree. They are summarised in the following paragraphs.

Predominantly cognitive skills

5.12 These include the abilities to:

- i use language creatively and precisely for a range of purposes and audiences
- ii engage with, summarise and interpret layers of meaning within texts and other cultural products
- iii contextualise these from a variety of perspectives
- iv reflect critically and make judgements in light of evidence and argument
- v extract and synthesise key information from written, spoken and other sources
- vi organise and present ideas within the framework of a structured and reasoned argument
- vii engage in analytical and evaluative thinking
- viii develop their research skills, including data-searching
- ix develop their digital literacy, including using electronic sources of information in English and in the target language
- x develop their problem-solving skills.

Predominantly practical skills

5.13 These include the abilities to:

- i use and present material in the target language and one's own language in written and oral forms in a clear and effective manner
- ii work autonomously, manifested in self-direction, self-discipline and time management
- iii take accurate and effective notes and summarise material
- iv research effectively in libraries and handle bibliographic information
- v use target language source materials appropriately
- vi write and think under pressure and meet deadlines
- vii ability to manage their own learning
- viii access and use digital resources and social media appropriately.

Interpersonal skills and personal attributes

5.14 These include:

- i effective communication, presentation and interaction
- ii resilience, resourcefulness, self-reliance, initiative, adaptability and flexibility
- iii the ability to work creatively and flexibly with others as part of a team
- iv mediating skills and qualities of empathy
- v ethical awareness
- vi inter-cultural competence.

6 Learning, teaching and assessment

6.1 The presentation of teaching, learning and assessment methods in this section does not imply an order of priority.

Characteristics of the study of languages

6.2 Methods in teaching and learning vary depending on the overall aims and objectives of the degree course, the student's starting point and on the nature of the language being studied (for example, with or without a standard written form, written in alphabetical or other types of script).

6.3 Language learning at all levels and in all languages is normally intensive, in terms of both teaching contact hours and learning resources. The need for concentrated study extends all the way through the language learning process, from initial study of a language to study at advanced levels and beyond.

6.4 Language learning involves regular and extended contact with competent users of the language, both for explicit teaching of language structures and for exposure to authentic examples of language use. The latter requires frequent and easy access to target language material, for example, in the print, broadcast and electronic media, and film.

6.5 A defining characteristic of language courses is the use of the target language as a gateway to the study of the societies and cultures in which it is used. Typically, courses exploit target language materials in a way that is consistent with students' competence at each level. At the same time, courses may include any of a wide range of humanities and social science subjects as they relate to particular language areas and cultures, hence some or all of the study methods associated with those subjects will be used.

6.6 Students' learning experiences normally involve exposure to various forms of learning technology. These permit access to authentic materials in the language learned, such as print and electronic media, television, radio, film and speech recordings, as well as reference sources in areas such as grammar, vocabulary and scripts.

6.7 An explicit expectation of language students is a measure of learner autonomy and responsibility for the development of their language competence through independent study. Such independent study is usually undertaken in close relationship with structured learning, whether based in a classroom or an online environment. It may be guided and developed alongside and beyond structured learning.

Teaching and learning methods

Development of competence in the target language

6.8 Given the necessary variety of approaches referred to above, language learning usually includes some or all of the following methods, either separately or combined in a range of integrated tasks.

- Use of authentic material. As a general principle, students are exposed to authentic material in the target language as early as possible in their language study. This may include written texts in a variety of styles and registers. In the case of spoken modern languages, it also includes contact with competent users, including native speakers, both directly and through radio, television and digital media. These forms of target language material can be used in a variety of ways, including reading or listening comprehension, and translation and production of related material in the

target language through exercises, such as summarising, essay writing and oral presentations.

- Explicit teaching of grammar, assisted by the use of information technology resources and by guided study of a textbook, together with appropriate exercises.
- Use of a variety of language learning resources, typically for independent use, to reinforce knowledge and skills gained in learning. These may include the use of online and computer-based practices.
- Study of literary and other texts in the target language. Courses vary in the extent to which source material is read in translation, either in teaching or in students' independent study. Courses may incorporate a progression from study of texts in translation to direct study of target language texts in the original; delivery of specified modules or parts of modules in the target language.
- Feedback on work submitted, including comment, for example, on appropriateness of style, register, presentation as well as correction of grammatical and other errors.

6.9 Teaching and learning methods that courses in the subject area have in common with other humanities-based disciplines. These include:

- directed study of primary and secondary texts and other cultural products
- commentaries on extracts from texts or documents and other cultural products, for example, placing in context, interpreting in the light of knowledge of the historical period, and identifying strategies of narration
- data collection and evaluation, for example, from guided use of library resources to independent use of subject bibliographies and online databases
- collecting, selecting, evaluating and presenting information or interpretations of material on a given topic, for presentation orally (seminar or other presentations) or in writing (essays, reports and so on)
- pair and group work, for example, in the preparation of presentations
- discussion of prepared topics in seminar groups
- creative writing
- supervised independent research leading, at the later stages of a course, to the writing of a dissertation or other large-scale report.

Period of residence abroad

6.10 Many courses with a large language component make the requirement or offer the opportunity for students to carry out a period of residence abroad, usually in the form of a study or work placement. This is a particularly valuable component of language study which makes a significant contribution to the development and enhancement of knowledge, understanding and skills in languages and related studies. It also encourages intercultural awareness and capability, qualities of self-reliance and other transferable skills. Courses vary in the use they expect students to make of the period of residence abroad, the tasks that students are expected to carry out, the ways in which their activities may be supported, monitored and assessed, and the way in which this part of students' learning is integrated into the overall objectives of the course. Among the objectives for the period of residence abroad, most courses include the following:

- provide opportunities for, and stimulate contact with, competent speakers of the target language(s)
- optimise the opportunities for linguistic progress, for the development of cultural insight and for academic and personal development resulting from extended contact with the target language environment
- enable students to reflect on and develop their own language learning skills and techniques

- develop intercultural understanding and ethical awareness
- acquire vocationally-oriented experience, where appropriate to the course.

6.11 Where students are not required or are unable to spend an extended period of residence abroad, these objectives are achieved by a variety of methods, including directed intensive language study during vacations, and providing contact with the target language environment through digital resources and/or virtual mobility.

Assessment

6.12 Language courses aim to enhance a very wide range of knowledge, skills and understanding, not all of which will necessarily be explicitly assessed.

Assessment of language competence

6.13 Regular and detailed feedback is an essential element in language learning. The multiplicity of knowledge and skills involved in language learning and teaching is an important factor in enhancing the employability of graduates. It is therefore matched by a wide variety of types of assessment covering the range of coursework, examinations and peer and self-assessment.

6.14 Assessment of target language skills can be made up of a range of tests and/or assignments designed to demonstrate fluency, accuracy, comprehension, range, interaction and presentation, as appropriate in:

- receptive skills (listening and reading)
- productive skills (speaking and writing)
- mediation skills (translation and interpreting).

6.15 Each of these may be tested separately or in combination, while forms of assessment may provide broad evidence of levels of competence and understanding and/or may be used to assess skills in specifically targeted ways. Forms of assessment may include:

- oral presentations and conversations
- participation in structured oral discussions
- listening comprehension tests
- transcription and dictation
- interpreting between speakers of the source and target languages
- grammar tests
- summarising and reading for gist or inference
- paraphrasing
- translation from and into the target language(s)
- essays and/or extended projects written in the target language(s)
- report writing based on target language texts or recordings
- linguistic commentaries
- drafting target language texts for a defined audience and purpose
- computer-based and online testing
- portfolios of evidence, participation in individual and/or group projects
- blogs, vlogs, wikis, contributions to social media.

6.16 Translation and mediation skills may be assessed by unseen papers, but also by other means, such as prepared translation with commentary and post-editing/correction of a draft translation. Some courses may give particular prominence to translating and

interpreting skills and use of appropriate tools. Their assessment strategies reflect this.

6.17 Where modules or parts of modules have been delivered in the target language, it may also be appropriate for these elements to be assessed partly or wholly in the target language.

Assessment of subject-related studies

6.18 The assessment of modules in linguistic, cultural and social studies is based on a variety of strategies appropriate to the relevant subject.

These may include:

- unseen written examinations
- essays with access to information sources, written to a timescale which may vary from 24 hours to several weeks
- open-book examinations
- oral presentations
- reports, written or oral, sometimes using blogs, wikis and other appropriate technologies
- group projects, involving collaboration between students
- extended essays, dissertations and individual project reports
- placement reports/presentations, written or oral.

Progression and achievement

6.19 Documentation for individual courses states the extent to which expected levels of achievement and progression are determined by factors such as the student's starting point; the nature of the language, including its script; the nature or focus of the course; and the purpose for which the language is being studied. However, consistent features include:

- increasing autonomy in student learning, including the ability to identify and plan individual strategies for learning
- growing mastery in language skills
- deepening understanding of the chosen aspects of the life and multiple cultures of the target language countries, communities or societies.

7 Benchmark standards

7.1 Within the UK, a range of languages may be studied at different levels within a variety of degree courses. The Common European Framework of Reference: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR) provides a widely adopted framework for assessing achievement in language learning, but there is at present no detailed implementation of it that will serve as a benchmark for standards of achievement at different levels in university language learning courses. In the case of elective language learning modules and minor language components in degrees, the course or module specifications should indicate the expected level of achievement with reference to the CEFR criteria, and other relevant reference points.

7.2 The benchmark described below is designed to apply to language degrees, understood as degree courses in which the study of one or more languages:

- comprises at least one-third of the total study load
- is undertaken consecutively in all years of the course
- and is recognised in the title of the award where a language is named specifically.

7.3 Where the study of one or more languages comprises a smaller proportion of the course, students may not be required to achieve all elements of the benchmark standard.

7.4 The following standards are not designed to prescribe a curriculum for degree courses in languages, cultures and societies. In determining learning outcomes, individual courses give greater or lesser importance to the different areas of skills, knowledge and understanding described below. In some cases, the development of certain skills or aspects of knowledge and understanding may not figure in the course at all. It is therefore essential that in all cases these standards should be read in conjunction with the information given in individual course documentation which make clear the learning outcomes required.

7.5 Course objectives, methods of assessment and learning outcomes are determined according to:

- the nature or focus of the bachelor's degree with honours course
- the student's starting point
- the nature of the language(s) studied
- the purpose for which the language(s) is being studied.

7.6 The standard of achievement described below comprises 'threshold standards', understood as the achievement expected for the award of a bachelor's degree with honours in one or more named languages. The standards achieved by the majority of students completing such a degree course are typically higher, though students may achieve a mix of different levels of attainment in the various learning outcomes required.

Use of the target language

7.7 Students should have achieved at least level C1 (Effective Operational Proficiency) in the CEFR and should be able to:

- i understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognise implicit meaning
- ii express themselves fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions
- iii use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes

- iv produce clear, well structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.

7.8 It is recognised that some of these learning outcomes may not be fully achievable in all courses, for example European students studying some Asian languages, students studying languages with a predominantly oral culture or students of sign languages. Some courses may also offer students the option to attain a different level of language competence in different languages. In these cases, the CEFR standards expected should be made explicit.

Intercultural awareness, understanding and competence

7.9 Students should be able to demonstrate a knowledge, awareness and understanding of:

- i one or more cultures and societies, other than their own, that will normally have been significantly enhanced by a period of residence in the country, or countries, of the target language(s), or by an equivalent experience
- ii the similarities and dissimilarities of those cultures or societies in comparison with their own.

Explicit knowledge of language

7.10 Students should be able to demonstrate a knowledge and understanding of:

- i the structures, registers and, as appropriate, varieties of the target language(s)
- ii the linguistic principles required to analyse the target language(s).

Knowledge of subject-related studies

7.11 Students should be able to demonstrate a knowledge and understanding of:

- i one or more aspects of the literatures, cultures, linguistic contexts, history, politics, geography, and social and economic structures of the societies of the country or countries of the target language(s)
- ii the cultures and societies of the country of the target language(s) gained through the study of written texts and other cultural products in the target language(s).

Generic skills

7.12 Students should be able to:

- i identify and describe problems and to work towards their resolution
- ii communicate information, ideas and arguments both orally and in writing
- iii gather and process information from a variety of paper, audiovisual and electronic sources
- iv use digital media effectively as a source of information, a means of communication and as an aid to learning
- v work with others as part of a team
- vi demonstrate an ability to learn independently.

Appendix 1: Typical degrees for which the Subject Benchmark Statement is a key reference

The degrees for which this Statement will be a primary reference have a wide variety of titles, conveying a predominant focus on the study of languages, cultures and societies. There are five main categories.

The title specifies one named language, for example Chinese, or a language-related area of study, for example Arabic Studies. The following languages and areas are named in this way:

- African Language and Culture
- Arabic Language, Arabic Studies, Arabic and Islamic Studies
- Chinese, Chinese Studies
- European Languages
- French, French Studies, Francophone Studies, French Linguistic Studies
- German, German Studies
- Italian, Italian Studies
- Japanese, Japanese Studies
- Korean, Korean Studies
- Russian, Russian Studies
- Scandinavian Studies
- Slavonic Studies
- Spanish, Spanish and Latin American Studies, Hispanic Studies, Spanish Linguistic Studies Turkish.

The title combines two named languages or areas, for example Spanish and Portuguese, French with Arabic Studies. In addition to the languages named above, other languages may be shown, most commonly belonging to the same language family, for example Spanish and/or Portuguese or Catalan, German and/or Dutch or Swedish, Russian and/or Bulgarian, Czech, Serbian and Croatian, Slovak. The proportion of emphasis on the languages named varies from course to course.

A generic title that does not specify particular languages, but indicates a focus on languages. In many cases, students study two or three languages, one or more of which may be studied from scratch (ab initio). The following generic titles are used:

Applied Languages, Applied Language Studies, Applied Languages and Translation
Combined Languages, Languages, Language Studies
Modern Languages, Modern Language Studies, and/or with Translation, Modern Languages and European Studies, Multilingual Studies.

The title combines a named language equally with another subject, typically by using the word 'and', for example French and Politics, Economics and German or History and Russian. The languages combined in this way include Arabic, Chinese, Czech, French, German, Japanese, Korean, Portuguese and Spanish among others. The subjects with which combinations are available include:

- Accountancy
- Anthropology
- Archaeology
- Biology
- Business, Business Studies, Business Management
- Classical Studies

- Communication Studies
- Computing
- Criminology
- English, English Language, Creative Writing
- Economics
- Education, Education Studies
- European Studies, Eastern European Studies
- Film, Film and Media
- Finance
- Geography
- History
- History of Art
- International Management
- International Relations Law
- Linguistics
- Mathematics
- Music
- Politics
- Sociology
- Theatre Studies.

The title designates an area of study, but does not specify particular languages. It may include a focus on languages, but may not do so. In some cases, it is the area or region that forms the focus and the proportion of language study may be limited. Examples include:

- African Studies
- Asia Pacific Studies
- Celtic Studies
- European Studies
- Language and Linguistics
- Latin American Studies
- Middle Eastern Studies.

Other degrees for which the Subject Benchmark Statement is a useful reference

The Subject Benchmark Statement will be of value for courses that include a proportion of language-related studies, where the language component is a 'minor' subject or a pathway, accounting for less than one third of the student's final degree. In some cases the degree title indicates this minor focus, typically by using the preposition 'with' or the adjective 'international' or 'European'.

The number of possible combinations is potentially very large, and the following titles are offered as examples:

- Accounting with French (or German or Spanish and so on)
- Advertising and Marketing Communications with Language
- Biochemistry with Study in Continental Europe
- Business and Management (International Route)
- Business with Urdu
- Chemistry with Spanish (or French or German and so on)
- Economics with a European Language
- Electrical and Electronic Engineering with a Year Abroad
- English and European Studies

- English Language and Communication with French
- European-Latin American Management (Mexico)
- European Law with French (or German or Spanish and so on)
- European Politics with French
- European Social and Political Studies
- Festival and Event Management with Language
- Geography with Extended Studies in Europe
- Hospitality Management with Language
- International Business Management
- International Business with Entrepreneurship and one language
- International Tourism Management (Mandarin)
- International Business
- International Business with Mandarin (or French or German and so on)
- International Management Studies with European Languages and Society.

The Statement will also be of use for language provision for students of many subject, frequently offered as free-standing elective modules in language learning or in the study of cultures and societies. The majority of these modules do not aim to take students to the threshold level of achievement for language degrees.

Associations with an interest in the area of languages

- Association for French Language Studies - AFLS
- Association for German Studies in GB and Ireland - AGS
- Association for Language Learning - ALL
- Association for Low Countries Studies - ALCS
- Association for the Study of Modern and Contemporary France - ASMCF
- Association of British and Irish Lusitanists - ABIL
- Association of Contemporary Iberian Studies - ACIS
- Association of Hispanists of GB and Ireland - AHGBI
- Association of University Professors and Heads of French - AUPHF
- Association of University Language Centres - AULC
- British Academy
- British Association for Applied Linguistics - BAAL
- British Association for Chinese Studies - BACS
- British Association for Islamic Studies - BRAIS
- British Association for Slavonic and East European Studies - BASEES
- British Society for Middle Eastern Studies - BRISMES
- Linguistics Association of Great Britain - LAGB
- Modern Humanities Research Association - MHRA Philological Society - PhilSoc
- Society for Italian Studies - SIS
- Society for Latin American Studies - SLAS
- Society of French Studies - SFS
- UK Council for Area Studies Associations - UKCASA
- University Council of General and Applied Linguistics - UCGAL
- University Council of Modern Languages - UCML.

Appendix 2: Membership of the benchmarking and review groups for the Subject Benchmark Statement for Languages, Cultures and Societies

Membership of the review group for the Subject Benchmark Statement for Languages, Cultures and Societies (2019)

The fourth edition, published in 2019, was revised by QAA to align the content with the revised UK Quality Code for Higher Education, published in 2018. Proposed revisions were checked and verified by the Chair of the review group of the Subject Benchmark Statement for Languages, Cultures and Societies from 2015.

Professor Michael Kelly	University of Southampton
Dr Andy Smith	QAA

Membership of the review group for the Subject Benchmark Statement for Languages, Cultures and Societies (2015)

Details provided below are as published in the third edition of the Subject Benchmark Statement.

Dr Elizabeth Anderson	Newcastle University
Dr Uwe Baumann	The Open University
Dr Ulrike Bavendiek	University of Liverpool
Dr Rhian Davies	University of Sheffield
Dr Barbara Fennell	University of Aberdeen
Professor John Gillespie	University of Ulster
Professor Claire Gorrara	Cardiff University
Professor Chris Harris	University of Liverpool
Professor Debra Kelly	The University of Westminster
Professor Michael Kelly (Chair)	University of Southampton
Dr John Morley	University of Manchester
Dr Filippo Nereo	Coventry University
Vicky Wright	University of Southampton
QAA officers	
Dr Tim Burton	Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education
Dr Cathy Kerfoot	Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education
Employer representative	
Janet Zmroczek	The British Library
Student reader	
Dr Iain Mossman	Cardiff University

Membership of the review group for the Subject Benchmark Statement for Languages and Related Studies (2007)

Details provided below are as published in the second edition of the Subject Benchmark Statement for Languages and Related Studies.

Dr Robin Aizlewood	University College London
Dr Elizabeth Anderson	Newcastle University
Mr Uwe Baumann	The Open University
Dr Ulrike Bavendiek	University of Liverpool
Mr William Brierley	University of Portsmouth
Dr Nicola Cooper	University of Bristol
Dr Rhian Davies	University of Sheffield
Dr Barbara Fennell	University of Aberdeen
Elizabeth Hudswell	Subject Centre for Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies
Professor Debra Kelly	University of Westminster
Professor Michael Kelly (Chair)	University of Southampton
Professor Elisabeth Lillie	University of Ulster
Vicky Wright	University of Southampton

Membership of the original benchmarking group for Languages and Related Studies (2002)

Details provided below are as published in the original Subject Benchmark Statement for Languages and Related Studies.

Dr Robin Aizlewood	University College London
Dr Mark Davie	University of Exeter
Mr Clive Griffiths	University of Manchester
Professor Marianne Howarth (Chair)	The Nottingham Trent University
Ms Elspeth Jones	Leeds Metropolitan University
Dr Vanessa Knights	University of Newcastle upon Tyne
Professor Bonnie McDougall	University of Edinburgh
Dr Rob Rix	Trinity and All Saints College, Leeds
Professor Richard Towell	University of Salford
Professor David Walker	University of Sheffield
Professor Rhys Williams	University of Wales, Swansea
Ms Vicky Wright	University of Southampton

Fourth edition – December 2019
QAA2497

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