



# **Subject benchmark statement**

## **Languages and related studies**

**Draft for consultation June 2007**

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## Preface

Subject benchmark statements provide a means for the academic community to describe the nature and characteristics of programmes in a specific subject or subject area. They also represent general expectations about standards for the award of qualifications at a given level in terms of the attributes and capabilities that those possessing qualifications should have demonstrated.

This subject benchmark statement, together with others published concurrently, refers to the **bachelor's degree with honours**<sup>1</sup>. In addition, some subject benchmark statements provide guidance on integrated master's awards.

Subject benchmark statements are used for a variety of purposes. Primarily, they are an important external source of reference for higher education institutions (HEIs) when new programmes are being designed and developed in a subject area. They provide general guidance for articulating the learning outcomes associated with the programme but are not a specification of a detailed curriculum in the subject.

Subject benchmark statements also provide support to HEIs in pursuit of internal quality assurance. They enable the learning outcomes specified for a particular programme to be reviewed and evaluated against agreed general expectations about standards. Subject benchmark statements allow for flexibility and innovation in programme design and can stimulate academic discussion and debate upon the content of new and existing programmes within an agreed overall framework. Their use in supporting programme design, delivery and review within HEIs is supportive of moves towards an emphasis on institutional responsibility for standards and quality.

Subject benchmark statements may also be of interest to prospective students and employers, seeking information about the nature and standards of awards in a given subject or subject area.

The relationship between the standards set out in this document and those produced by professional, statutory or regulatory bodies for individual disciplines will be a matter for individual HEIs to consider in detail.

This subject benchmark statement represents a revised version of the original published in 2002. The review process was overseen by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) as part of a periodic review of all subject benchmark statements published in this year. The review and subsequent revision of the subject benchmark statement was undertaken by a group of subject specialists drawn from and acting on behalf of the subject community. The revised subject benchmark statement went through a full consultation with the wider academic community and stakeholder groups.

QAA publishes and distributes this subject benchmark statement and other subject benchmark statements developed by similar subject-specific groups.

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<sup>1</sup> This is equivalent to the honours degree in the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (level 10) and in the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (level 6).

The Disability Equality Duty (DED) came into force on 4 December 2006<sup>2</sup>. The DED requires public authorities, including HEIs, to act proactively on disability equality issues. The Duty complements the individual rights focus of the *Disability Discrimination Act* (DDA) and is aimed at improving public services and outcomes for disabled people as a whole. Responsibility for making sure that such duty is met lies with HEIs.

The Disability Rights Commission (DRC) has published guidance<sup>3</sup> to help HEIs prepare for the implementation of the Duty and provided illustrative examples on how to take the duty forward. HEIs are encouraged to read this guidance when considering their approach to engaging with components of the Academic Infrastructure<sup>4</sup>, of which subject benchmark statements are a part.

Additional information that may assist HEIs when engaging with subject benchmark statements can be found in the DRC revised *Code of Practice: Post-16 Education*<sup>5</sup>, and also through the Equality Challenge Unit<sup>6</sup> which is established to promote equality and diversity in higher education.

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<sup>2</sup> In England, Scotland and Wales

<sup>3</sup> Copies of the guidance *Further and higher education institutions and the Disability Equality Duty*, guidance for principals, vice-chancellors, governing boards and senior managers working in further education colleges and HEIs in England, Scotland and Wales, may be obtained from the DRC at [www.drc-gb.org/library/publications/disability\\_equality\\_duty/further\\_and\\_higher\\_education.aspx](http://www.drc-gb.org/library/publications/disability_equality_duty/further_and_higher_education.aspx)

<sup>4</sup> An explanation of the Academic Infrastructure, and the roles of subject benchmark statements within it, is available at [www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure)

<sup>5</sup> Copies of the DRC revised *Code of Practice: Post-16 Education* may be obtained from the DRC at [www.drc-gb.org/employers\\_and\\_service\\_provider/education/higher\\_education.aspx](http://www.drc-gb.org/employers_and_service_provider/education/higher_education.aspx)

<sup>6</sup> Equality Challenge Unit, [www.ecu.ac.uk](http://www.ecu.ac.uk)

## Foreword

The subject benchmark statement for languages and related studies is intended to make explicit to the subject community and other stakeholders the academic qualities and competences that could be expected of graduates in the subject area. The following is a revised version of the subject benchmark statement that was published in 2002 and which has served the community well. The benchmark statement has needed only to be refreshed to take account of the changes in context and practice over the past five years.

The importance of languages and related studies, (hereafter referred to as languages), has been widely recognised at national and international levels. Languages have been the subject of numerous reviews and reports in the United Kingdom (UK) and European Union (EU). The result of this has been to raise the awareness of the economic value of languages, both to the individual and to society more broadly. The ability to use a foreign language is, by any definition, a useful acquisition and one which is held in high regard by employers. Graduates in languages have the highest employability rates of all humanities graduates. Indeed, in securing jobs, graduates in some modern languages have been second only to graduates in more narrowly defined vocational subjects such as dentistry or veterinary medicine.

Languages play a key role in expressing the cultures and identities of the places in which they are used. They provide a privileged form of access to the cultural resources and complex patterns of life in other countries, and have an important place in promoting relationships and mutual understanding between countries.

At the same time languages provide a rich and rewarding educational experience for students. The study of languages at university level is a multidisciplinary learning process, allowing access to a broad range of enquiries, including linguistic, literary, cultural, social, political and historical studies.

Undergraduates in languages experience a learning process which enables them to develop a range of transferable and interpersonal skills, such as teamwork, self-reliance and critical reflection. They are also enabled to develop valuable intercultural competence, often enhanced through a period of residence abroad undertaken during the programme of study either for study or for work purposes.

Languages are very frequently incorporated in programmes of study in other disciplines. They provide students with important competences which enrich and extend their study of other subjects. Many of the features of languages degrees are reflected in degrees where language is a minor or elective component, and this subject benchmark statement is also intended to be of value to those who learn and teach in these programmes.

Michael Kelly  
Chair  
May 2007

# 1 Introduction

1.1 Many programmes now recognise that the ability to navigate other languages and cultures is an important dimension of international communication and a key asset in an increasingly interdependent world. Languages provide a valuable and rewarding object of study, and significantly enhance the career and employment prospects of their graduates. Consequently, in addition to language degrees, languages units are widely available to students as a minor subject or on an elective basis. This subject benchmark statement focuses upon first degrees in languages. There is no standard or unique pattern for such degrees. While many are offered as single honours programmes, this is no longer the prevailing model. Increasingly in UK higher education, languages are studied on a joint or combined honours basis, in conjunction with other languages or with other disciplines, especially, but not exclusively, those in the humanities and the social sciences.

1.2 Schools and departments will draw upon this subject benchmark statement in different ways depending on whether they are concerned with a single honours degree, a joint or a combined honours degree, units for students of other disciplines, for example, through an institution-wide language programme, or with some other pattern of study. They will also wish to take into account the focus and objectives of their degree programme and their particular research strengths. Those schools or departments offering joint and combined honours degrees will also wish to refer to other subject benchmark statements which may be relevant, such as those for area studies and linguistics.

1.3 There is very great variety of provision in languages. Typically, single and joint honours degree programmes will include the name of the target language or languages in their title, but there are also other degree programmes, and units within programmes, where the focus is on languages but where the title of the programme makes no explicit reference to them. The variety and breadth of provision reflects both the multidisciplinary nature of study in languages, and its potential for interdisciplinarity. It is further reflected in the academic affiliations of those who have contributed to this benchmark statement, particularly in the membership of the initial benchmark group (2000) and the review group (2007).

1.4 In undertaking its work, the review group was conscious of the continued need to emphasise the breadth and diversity of the subject area. The subject covers classical, medieval and modern languages. It includes languages spoken in Europe and beyond, including languages indigenous to the UK, as well as languages of the wider world.

1.5 The review group was conscious of significant standards-related initiatives in languages, in particular, the Common European Framework of Reference, the National Language Standards, and the National Recognition Scheme for Languages in England (Languages Ladder). It was also aware of the developing Bologna process which is seeking to establish a framework of convergence towards a European Higher Education Area, now reflected in the Diploma Supplement. This is a fundamental building block in the EU's Lisbon Agenda to make Europe, by 2010, the most competitive and the most dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world. The present benchmark statement attempts to adapt these frameworks as appropriate to UK higher education.

## 2 Defining principles

2.1 Undergraduate study of languages is concerned with the acquisition and development of competence in one or more foreign languages and with the analysis and understanding of another culture, or cultures, in the broadest sense possible, through the medium of the target language(s) concerned. This does not imply that all instruction is necessarily delivered in the target language. The intercultural nature of the subject represents one of its key characteristics and is inherent in the discipline. The intercultural nature of the subject includes learning to reflect upon aspects of one's own culture.

2.2 While the subject range is extremely large, covering potentially all languages in the present and in the past, it is possible to identify two main components of language study that are common to all programmes. The first is a focus on the acquisition of competence in the target language. This 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 studied. The nature and scope of such studies will vary according to the aims and objectives of the programme; though they may be specific to the culture(s) of the foreign language studied, they may also draw upon other disciplines in order to inform understanding of that culture.

2.3 Fundamental to the discipline is the recognition that the study of languages encompasses four complementary dimensions. Languages are at one and the same time:

- a medium of understanding, expression and communication, described here as the use of the target language (2.4-2.5 below)
- a means of access to other societies and cultures, described here as intercultural awareness, understanding and competence (2.6 below)
- an object of study in their own right, described here as the explicit knowledge of language (2.7 below)
- a gateway to related thematic studies comprising various bodies of knowledge and methodological approaches, described here as knowledge of the cultures, communities and societies where the language is used (2.8 below).

2.4 Virtually all programmes in languages endeavour to integrate these aspects.

2.5 The study of a language as a medium of understanding, expression and communication will involve 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), production (speaking and writing) and mediation between two or more languages (translation and interpreting).

2.6 A number of features make the acquisition of a language uniquely challenging. It involves acquiring new knowledge of a very detailed kind. Many programmes 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 foreign language, the learner must devote a great deal of time to 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 and independent study and learning.

2.7 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: they can represent their own society within the foreign society and they can also learn to view 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, thus promoting intercultural understanding and bringing distinctive benefits both to their own society, for example, in employment terms, and to the societies of target languages.

2.8 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.

2.9 The multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary nature of the subject is reflected in the study of language as a gateway to thematic studies which permit access to various bodies of knowledge and methodological approaches. This may involve the study of all aspects of the cultures and societies in which the language is used.

2.10 Much of this knowledge and understanding is embodied in the literature and other cultural products of the target language societies. Students working in these areas employ the methodological approaches and techniques which they share with other disciplines, 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 economic life of these societies.

2.11 Students of languages can access knowledge of these through primary and secondary source materials in the target language. Yet further knowledge and understanding may pertain to subgroups of the society such as the business, legal, creative, technological or the scientific communities. Students who study languages gain first hand access to those communities.

2.12 The contribution and the interdisciplinary nature of these related thematic studies will vary in scope and emphasis according to the aims and objectives of the programme. However, common to all programmes is the belief that the acquisition of competence in the target language significantly enhances students' understanding of an extremely broad and varied range of subjects, disciplines and areas of study.

2.13 The development of language skills to an advanced level is greatly enhanced by a period of residence abroad in a country where the language concerned is spoken. Such residence may involve periods of study in target language communities, academic exchanges, work placements or assistantships, as circumstances permit. The extent of residence abroad varies between different programmes; and some programmes make extensive use of virtual learning environments and other online resources to achieve virtual mobility. The period of residence abroad makes a significant, and often essential, contribution to the development and enhancement of knowledge, understanding and skills in linguistic and socio-cultural studies. It also encourages intercultural awareness and capability, qualities of self-reliance and other generic skills.

2.14 The nature of language study requires substantial contact with competent users of the language studied, typically in small groups and with the involvement of native or near-native speakers. Language studies commonly require access to



advanced educational technology. Distance learning is based on a combination of learning through advanced technology and active practice in monitored small groups, and may also include a study period abroad.

2.15 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 institutions, students may take one or more of a range of languages from a variety of starting points from ab initio to advanced attainment. Similarly, they may cease their study after various levels of progression. Teaching and learning is typically calibrated to address the different needs of learners, and to secure learning outcomes appropriate to the programme of study at undergraduate and postgraduate level. This multiplicity of purpose, combined with the need to provide small group teaching in a way which 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 programme, and yet manage to deliver, often for all students in an institution, programmes achieving the objectives which this benchmark statement seeks to outline.

2.16 The academic location of the subject may vary within the institutional structure. Traditionally, languages have been taught as single-subject disciplines, located in departments named for the subject. In many institutions, languages have been brought together in a school or department of modern languages, which provides an academic home for the languages component of all degree programmes 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 institutions, a language centre, operating as a free-standing central resource, performs this function. Some schools or faculties in other disciplines, business schools, for example, have established languages units within the school in order to meet the language learning requirements of their programmes.

### **3 Nature and extent of languages and related 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 disciplines, including the natural and social sciences, whose requirements usually inflect the ways in which languages are then studied. Only a small proportion of students will study a single language for the entire duration of their undergraduate programme. The majority of students follow programmes either in more than one language or in a language in combination with another discipline.

3.2 The subject range is extremely diverse and includes modern as well as classical languages. This benchmark statement has relevance for the study of languages spoken in the UK, but which are studied by non-native speakers, including English as a second or other language. Modern languages are most commonly taught both as spoken and written languages. Some languages, such as Sanskrit and Old Norse, are taught only as written languages. Some, such as Japanese, 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 disciplines such as linguistics, in order to deepen understanding of the language. It may address aspects of history, philosophy, politics, 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, with law, with art and design, with computer science, with 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 programmes, languages are necessarily multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary, as well as intercultural and applied in nature.

3.4 While this benchmark statement addresses the knowledge and skills expected of the graduate in language degrees, it recognises that large numbers of undergraduate students undertake language study within or outside their programme of study in another named discipline, often in the framework of institution-wide language programmes. The majority of these students are not languages specialists 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* and use of the *European Language Portfolio* may be both helpful and appropriate. However, the language learning experience of these non-specialist students has much in common with that of the specialist student, in particular, the balance between receptive and productive skills, the exposure to authentic resources and the role of educational technology. Section x is applicable to these students. Similarly, for non-specialists who pursue language study at a level equivalent to final year, those parts of the benchmark statement relating to language skills and standards and levels of achievement (section 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 2.3 above, four key elements typify the knowledge and understanding outcomes of programmes 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 programme will generally depend 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. Programmes in languages will achieve the balance between these four key elements as appropriate for the objectives set.

### **Use of the target language**

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. Certain 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 are related to skills development. Language programmes 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 amongst 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 languages programmes. As a minimum input it involves the study of linguistic structures in the context of specific language uses; a standard input will involve 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 programmes seek to enable students to mediate between languages by means of translation and interpreting across a wide range of media. These activities require knowledge of how language systems relate to one another and of the techniques which permit mediation between languages. Where language mediation is a significant part of the curriculum, explicit knowledge of the practice of translation will be a key feature.

### **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.

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 disciplines in the humanities and social sciences. Degree programmes will vary as to the relative weight they attach to these different approaches, but all will normally ensure that students completing the programme 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 skills which are of great value in a diversity of careers. A period of residence abroad is often crucial in developing and enhancing many of these. The range of subject skills will vary according to the specific focus of the programme but will typically fall into four areas:

- language skills
- intercultural competence
- language-related skills
- subject-related skills.

5.2 The emphasis given to generic skills (4.5) will vary according to the specific focus of the programme but will 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 foreign language is a central objective of language programmes. Programmes endeavour to enable students to develop and use such skills, as appropriate to the target language and to the learning outcomes of the programme. 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, discursal and pragmatic conventions which govern language use and of the societal factors which make language use effective.

5.4 Languages graduates will normally reach a high level of understanding of the target language(s). They will exhibit appropriate levels of achievement (see section 7) in productive (speaking, writing) and receptive language skills (reading, listening), and mediation (translating and interpreting). They will be 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 to be familiar with a wide range of source materials in the target language. Students studying outside specialist language programmes will exhibit achievement and progression appropriate to the level of their programme.

5.5 Language skills are likely to include a sub-set of related skills. These will vary from the relatively simple to the more complex, and could include such activities as email correspondence, talking on the telephone, video-conferencing, and the use of target language documents for carrying out research or writing reports.

5.6 Many graduates will have developed language skills which are applicable in a professional context.

## **Intercultural awareness, understanding and competence**

5.7 Through their studies, their contact with the target language and associated cultures and their related studies, all students of languages will develop sensitivity to, and awareness of, the similarities and dissimilarities between other cultures and societies and their own. In particular, their competence in the target language means that they will have an appreciation of the internal diversity and transcultural connectedness of cultures, and an attitude of curiosity and openness towards other cultures. The skills and attributes they develop will include a critical understanding of a culture and practices other than one's own; an appreciation of the uniqueness of the other culture(s); an ability to articulate to others the contribution that the culture has made at a regional and global level; an ability and willingness to engage with other cultures; and an ability to appreciate and evaluate critically one's own culture.

## **Language-related skills**

5.8 Students of languages will have developed appropriate linguistic tools and metalanguage to describe and analyse the main features of the language(s) studied. Therefore, they will be able to make effective use of language reference materials, such as grammars, standard and specialised dictionaries, and corpora, to refine knowledge and understanding of register, nuances of meaning, and language use.

5.9 Students of languages will be 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**

5.10 Subject-related skills are developed through the study of both the language and related thematic areas. Depending on the programme, these may relate to the study of the countries or regions in which the target language is used, including aspects of their literatures, cultures, linguistic contexts, history, politics, geography, social or economic structures. In certain programmes, these will relate to discipline-specific contexts, such as the business, legal, creative, technological or scientific communities within those countries or regions.

5.11 Study of these will lead to the development of analytical, critical and specialist skills drawn from the relevant discipline areas. The opportunity to study discipline-specific content in the target language represents a unique contribution to the students' learning experience. Learners will be able to select and use primary and secondary source materials in the target language in respect of these areas.

5.12 The multidisciplinary nature of many programmes in languages will lead to a range of subject-related skills. Subject benchmark statements in relevant disciplines may be helpful in identifying these skills.

## **Generic skills**

5.13 The multidisciplinary and language-specific nature of language programmes encourages the development of a wide range of key transferable skills including, where applicable, those developed during residence in the target language countries or regions. These skills are also developed to an appropriate level in students for whom language study is a smaller proportion of their degree.

### **Predominantly cognitive skills**

5.14 These include the abilities to:

- use language creatively and precisely for a range of purposes and audiences
- engage with and interpret layers of meaning within texts and other cultural products
- contextualise from a variety of perspectives
- reflect critically and make judgements in the light of evidence and argument
- extract and synthesise key information from written and spoken sources
- organise and present ideas within the framework of a structured and reasoned argument
- engage in analytical and evaluative thinking
- develop problem-solving skills.

### **Predominantly practical skills**

5.15 These include the abilities to:

- use and present material in the target language and one's own language in written and oral forms in a clear and effective manner
- work autonomously, manifested in self-direction, self-discipline and time management
- take accurate and effective notes and summarise material
- research effectively in libraries and handle bibliographic information
- use target language source materials appropriately
- write and think under pressure and meet deadlines
- access electronic resources and use information and communication technologies appropriately.

### **Interpersonal skills and personal attributes**

5.16 These include:

- communication, presentation, interaction
- the ability to work creatively and flexibly with others as part of a team
- mediating skills, qualities of empathy
- self-reliance, initiative, adaptability and flexibility
- intercultural competence.

## **6 Teaching, learning 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 will vary depending on the overall aims and objectives of the degree programme, on the student's starting point, and on the nature of the language studied (whether modern or classical, 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 both of teaching contact hours and learning resources. The need for concentrated study extends all the way through the language learning process, from ab initio 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 programmes is the use of the target language as a gateway to the study of the societies and cultures in which it is used. Typically programmes will exploit target-language materials in a way consistent with students' competence at each level. At the same time, programmes may include any of a wide range of humanities and social science disciplines as they relate to particular language areas and cultures, and hence, some or all of the study methods associated with those disciplines will be used.

6.6 Students' learning experience will normally involve exposure to various forms of learning technology. These permit access to authentic foreign language materials, 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 classroom-based learning. It may be guided and developed alongside and beyond such learning.

### **Teaching and learning methods**

#### **Development of competence in the target language**

6.8 Given the necessary variety of approach referred to above, language learning will usually include 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,

both directly and through radio, television and the electronic media. These forms of target-language material can be used in a variety of ways, including reading or listening comprehension, 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 classroom teaching. These may include the use of online and computer-based practices
- study of literary and other texts in the target language. Programmes will vary in the extent to which source material is read in translation, either in teaching or in students' independent study. Programmes may incorporate a progression from study of texts in translation to direct study of target-language texts in the original
- delivery of specified units or parts of units in the target language
- formative assessment of work submitted, including comment, for example, on appropriateness of style, register, presentation as well as correction of grammatical and other errors.

### **Teaching and learning methods which programmes in the subject area have in common with other humanities-based disciplines**

6.9 These include:

- directed study of primary and secondary texts and other cultural products
- commentaries on extracts from texts or documents, for example, placing in context, interpreting in the light of knowledge of the historical period, point of view
- data collection and evaluation, for example, from guided use of library resources to independent use of subject bibliographies, 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)
- pair and group work, for example, in the preparation of presentations
- discussion of prepared topics in seminar groups
- creative writing
- supervised independent study leading, at the later stages of a programme, to the writing of a dissertation or other large-scale report.

### **Period of residence abroad**

6.10 Programmes with a large language component typically offer the opportunity for 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. Programmes vary in the use they expect students to make of the period of residence abroad, the tasks which students are expected to carry out, the ways in which these may be



supported, monitored and assessed and the way in which this part of students' learning is integrated into the overall objectives of the programme. Most programmes include among their objectives for the period of residence abroad:

- to provide opportunities for and to stimulate contact with competent speakers of the target language(s)
- to 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
- to enable students to reflect on and develop their own language-learning skills and techniques
- to develop intercultural awareness and understanding
- where appropriate to the programme, to acquire vocationally oriented experience.

6.11 Where students are not required or unable to spend an extended period of residence abroad, these objectives should be achieved by a variety of methods, including directed intensive language study during vacations, and providing contact with the target-language environment through information and communications technology (ICT).

### **Assessment**

6.12 Language programmes 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, as appropriate:

- receptive skills (listening and reading)
- productive skills (speaking and writing)
- mediation skills (translating 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
- participation in structured oral discussions
- listening comprehension tests
- transcription and dictation
- interpreting between speakers of the target and 'home' 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, including cloze, multiple choice, discrete point testing and testing on non-alphabetic scripts
- portfolios of evidence, participation in individual and/or group projects.

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 programmes may give particular prominence to translating and interpreting skills and their assessment strategies will reflect this.

6.17 Where programme units or parts of units 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 related thematic studies**

6.18 The assessment of programme units in related thematic studies is based on a variety of strategies appropriate to the relevant discipline. 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, individual project reports
- placement reports/presentations, written or oral.

### **Progression and achievement**

6.19 Programme specifications state the extent to which expected levels of achievement and progression are determined by factors such as the student's starting point (from ab initio upwards); the nature of the language, including its script; the nature or focus of the programme; and the purpose for which the language is being studied. However, consistent features will 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 programmes. The standards of achievement described below are intended to apply principally to those degree programmes 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 programme
- is recognised in the name of the award (although the language(s) may not be named specifically).

7.2 Students following programmes in which language study is less salient should also be able to achieve some of the standards, as appropriate to their programme.

7.3 The following standards are not designed to prescribe a curriculum for degree programmes in language and related studies. In determining learning outcomes, individual programmes will 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 programme at all. It is therefore essential that in all cases these standards should be read in conjunction with the information given in individual programme specifications, which will make clear those learning outcomes which are required.

7.4 Programme objectives, methods of assessment and learning outcomes will be determined according to:

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

7.5 These objectives will be set out in the individual programme specification. (See also 6.19 above.)

7.6 The standards of achievement expected for the award of a degree with honours are described under the heading of 'Threshold standards'; the standards normally achieved by the majority of students completing such a degree programme are described under the heading of 'Typical standards'.

7.7 While it is expected that a number of students will attain higher levels of achievement than those described as typical, it is also recognised that a common pattern of achievement qualifying a student for the award of a degree with honours may include a mix of different levels of achievement in the various learning outcomes required.

7.8 It is for those responsible for institutional quality procedures at different levels to determine whether the standards are being satisfactorily interpreted and applied in assessment and monitoring procedures within individual programmes.

7.9 For degree programmes in which the study of one or more languages comprises less than one-third of the total study load or continues for a shorter period of time than that of the duration of the programme as a whole, the standards may be applied as and where they may be considered appropriate.

## **Levels of achievement**

7.10 As determined in the individual programme specification, graduates in languages at honours level will be expected to achieve the following at threshold and typical levels.

### **Threshold standard**

#### **Use of the target language**

7.11 Students should have achieved at least level C1 (Effective Operational Proficiency) in the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment* and should be able to:

- achieve effective communication in the target language(s) with competent speakers of the target language(s)
- exploit for a variety of purposes a range of materials written or spoken in the target language(s)
- make use of their language skills in a broadly professional context.

#### **Intercultural awareness, understanding and competence**

7.12 Students should be able to demonstrate an awareness and understanding of:

- 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
- the similarities and dissimilarities of those cultures or societies in comparison with their own.

#### **Explicit knowledge of language**

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

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

#### **Knowledge of thematic studies**

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

- 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)
- 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**

7.15 Students should be able to:

- identify and describe problems and to work towards their resolution
- communicate information, ideas and arguments both orally and in writing
- gather and process information from a variety of paper, audio-visual and electronic sources
- use ICT effectively both as a means of communication and as an aid to learning
- work with others as part of a team
- demonstrate some ability as an independent learner.

## **Typical standard**

### **Use of the target language**

7.16 Students should have achieved level C2 (Mastery) in the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment* and should be able to:

- communicate fluently and appropriately, maintaining a high degree of grammatical accuracy, in the target language(s) with competent speakers of the target language(s)
- be able to exploit for a variety of purposes and, as appropriate, to contextualise a broad range of materials written or spoken in the target language(s)
- be able to apply effectively and appropriately their language skills in a professional context.

### **Intercultural awareness, understanding and competence**

7.17 Students should be able to demonstrate:

- a reasoned awareness and critical understanding of 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
- an ability to describe, analyse and evaluate the similarities and dissimilarities of those cultures or societies in comparison with their own.

### **Explicit knowledge of language**

7.18 Students should be able to demonstrate a detailed knowledge and effective understanding of:

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

### **Knowledge of thematic studies**

7.19 Students should be able to demonstrate:

- an ability to evaluate critically through appropriate methodologies 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)
- a broad knowledge and, using appropriate methodologies, a critical understanding of the cultures and societies of the country or countries of the target language(s) gained through the study of written texts and other cultural products in the target language(s).

### **Generic skills**

7.20 Students should be able to:

- identify, describe and analyse problems and to devise appropriate strategies for their resolution
- communicate information, ideas and arguments cogently and coherently both orally and in writing with due regard to the target audience
- gather, process and evaluate critically information from a variety of paper, audiovisual and electronic sources

- use ICT effectively both as a means of communication and as an aid to learning
- be responsive to the disciplines of working with others and be able to work effectively as part of a team
- be an effective and self-aware independent learner.

## **Appendix A: Membership of the review group for the subject benchmark statement for languages and related studies**

Dr Robin Aizlewood	University College London
Dr Elizabeth Anderson	Newcastle University
Uwe Baumann	Open University
Dr Ulrike Bavendiek	University of Liverpool
William Brierley	University of Portsmouth
Dr Nicola Cooper	Bristol University
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

## **Appendix B: Membership of the original benchmarking group 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