

History

Subject benchmark statements

Subject benchmark statements provide a means for the academic community to describe the nature and characteristics of programmes in a specific subject. They also represent general expectations about the standards for the award of qualifications at a given level and articulate the attributes and capabilities that those possessing such qualifications should be able to demonstrate.

This subject benchmark statement, together with the others published concurrently, refers to the ***bachelors degree with honours***.

Subject benchmark statements are used for a variety of purposes. Primarily, they are an important external source of reference for higher education institutions 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. Benchmark statements provide for variety and flexibility in the design of programmes and encourage innovation within an agreed overall framework.

Subject benchmark statements also provide support to institutions 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.

Finally, subject benchmark statements are one of a number of external sources of information that are drawn upon for the purposes of academic review* and for making judgements about threshold standards being met. Reviewers do not use subject benchmark statements as a crude checklist for these purposes however. Rather, they are used in conjunction with the relevant programme specifications, the institution's own internal evaluation documentation, together with primary data in order to enable reviewers to come to a rounded judgement based on a broad range of evidence.

The benchmarking of academic standards for this subject area has been undertaken by a group of subject specialists drawn from and acting on behalf of the subject community. The group's work was facilitated by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, which publishes and distributes this statement and other benchmarking statements developed by similar subject-specific groups.

The statement represents the first attempt to make explicit the general academic characteristics and standards of an honours degree in this subject area, in the UK.

In due course, but not before July 2003, the statement will be revised to reflect developments in the subject and the experiences of institutions and academic reviewers who are working with it. The Agency will initiate revision and, in collaboration with the subject community, will establish a group to consider and make any necessary modifications to the statement.

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* academic review in this context refers to the Agency's new arrangements for external assurance of quality and standards. Further information regarding these may be found in the ***Handbook for Academic Review***, which can be found on the Agency's web site.

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Academic standards - History

Initial statement

Introduction

1. In the first instance, the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education defined the task of benchmarking groups as producing 'broad statements which represent general expectations about standards, particularly at the threshold level, for the award of honours degrees in the field.' Following discussions with the Agency, it was agreed that the History Group should focus upon providing a framework for judging programmes which set an acceptable level in principle attainable by the typical History student. We have not seen it as our task to provide a basis for judgements to be made about a particular student's learning achievement, though we do provide an Appendix which makes reference to judgements in this respect. Our assumption has been that academic reviewers will be making judgements about a department's capacity to deliver on standards.

2. We use the term programme to refer to courses of study leading to a degree award. We use the term course to refer to modules or units within a degree programme. Our present concern is with the criteria relating to the work of students completing honours degree programmes (level H4), not with those relating to earlier stages and exit points (H1, H2). However, the criteria relating to programmes are relevant to every stage of progression to the honours degree, from the first year onwards. We recognise that provision in the subject is very extensive through single, combined honours and interdisciplinary programmes. Our principal concern at this stage is with single honours programmes leading to an award in History but our recommendations often relate more broadly. We imagine it will be seen as sensible, in programme approval and review of joint degrees, to take notice of the general tenor of the Benchmarking Statements for the two subjects concerned. We note that the QAA has established an advisory group to consider the implications for benchmarking academic standards of modular and multidisciplinary programmes. Pending further work in this field we hope that our statement will be of value to all those concerned with History in universities and colleges. We accept that organisational patterns vary across the sector. Where we refer to departments, this is a shorthand for history subject groups however organised.

Guiding assumptions

3. History differs from many subjects in that we do not recognise a specific body of required knowledge nor a core with surrounding options. We take it as self-evident that knowledge and understanding of the human past is of incalculable value both to the individual and to society at large, and that the first object of education in History is to enable this to be acquired. We accept variation in how the vast body of knowledge which constitutes the subject is tackled at undergraduate degree level. This entails an approach which concentrates on using knowledge in order to develop certain skills and qualities of mind. The focus in this Statement is on how knowledge is used to acquire these skills and qualities. The form of our argument follows from this. Throughout our work we have been guided by the belief that we should refer to everything that is crucial and integral to the issue of standards. In other words, we take the view that it will not be possible for academic reviewers to make judgements about academic standards in History without some consideration of every aspect of a degree programme which we consider here. Moreover, we believe that departmental statements about the framework of programmes, if they are to be properly useful to both staff and students, will need to cover all the ground that we have covered here. Our final paragraph attempts to summarise the standards which should be sought and achieved by the typical student in key areas of the discipline.

4. We have seen our task as the following: to lay out criteria for judging the suitability and adequacy of single-honours degree courses in History; to do this in a way that is as specific as possible without undermining the principle that there are many different suitable and adequate ways of constructing and making available the great richness and diversity of History; to do it in a way that recognises also the need for adaptability to new academic developments in the field, and innovations in course structures and teaching methods. We insist that teaching and learning are evolving processes and that it not our intention to freeze the teaching of History in a particular model. Our benchmarking statement should be seen as a starting point: departments and subject groups will have the chance to demonstrate how benchmarking standards can be built on by the provision of additional or perhaps alternative opportunities.

5. We have taken full account of the particular characteristics of History as a discipline. Its subject matter, distinguishing it from other humanities and social sciences, consists of the attempts of human beings in the

past to organise life materially and conceptually, individually and collectively, while the object of studying these things is to widen students' experience and develop qualities of perception and judgement. History provides a distinctive education by providing a sense of the past, an awareness of the development of differing values, systems and societies and the inculcation of critical yet tolerant personal attitudes. History's reciprocal relationship with other disciplines can have an important influence on the experience of the student of the subject.

6. We recognise that the concepts, theories and methodologies of the social sciences are themselves used by many historians, most obviously but by no means exclusively within courses in economic and social history. There has been a long and important tradition in the United Kingdom of teaching and writing history within a social science framework, which continues both within distinct degree programmes in economic and social history and as an important feature in many degree programmes in History. We recognise that where history is taught within the context of the social sciences, students will need to devote considerable time to acquiring a knowledge of one or more social science. In general, students of all types of history - cultural and political as well as economic and social - should have an awareness of relevant and appropriate concepts and theories.

7. We are convinced that particular types of skill, quality, and accomplishment are not connected solely to particular types of course provision or subject matter. Just as there is no one model for a programme, there will be no one model for the relationship between course provision and students' attainments. We reject any idea of mechanical progression in History. Skills and qualities are acquired cumulatively and iteratively.

8. Good undergraduate history teaching takes a variety of forms, and programmes quite legitimately combine different teaching methods in a number of ways. This variety arises from the different interests and abilities of individual scholars, from the requirements of different areas of the field of history, and from the fact that departments or subject groups in different institutions have access to different combinations of teaching resources. Each programme should define its own desired outcomes in ways that command general credibility, and departments, in designing their teaching to fulfil those outcomes, should recognise the need to assure their standards by means of the professional external scrutiny provided by institutional peer review, external examiners and the QAA's scheme of academic review.

9. Assessment is a critical element in the educational process and an essential element in effective learning. We therefore recommend that all departments should develop a clear assessment policy which is consistent with the learning outcomes of its degree schemes. They should specify clearly in their documentation what students are expected to learn, how their work will be assessed, and the relationship between the two. At the same time, we believe departments should think carefully about and explain the relationship between the functions of formative and summative assessment, ie between assessment designed as feedback on progress and assessment for degree award and classification purposes.

10. Important abilities and qualities of mind are acquired through the study of History. They are particularly valuable for the graduate as citizen and are readily transferable to many occupations and careers. Some of these qualities and abilities are generic, in that they are imparted by most degree programmes in the Humanities and Social Sciences. But degree- level study in History also instils ways of thinking which are intrinsic to the discipline while being no less transferable. These include a respect for historical context and evidence, a greater awareness of the historical processes unfolding in our own time, and a deeper understanding of the varied traditions current today. These qualities of mind and abilities are most effectively and economically developed by deep and prolonged immersion in, and engagement with, the practice, methods and material of the subject itself. The cumulative acquisition of, and ability to apply transferable skills, and the development of students as competent historians thus necessarily proceed hand-in-hand. The link between the two lies ultimately in the habits of mind or intellectual approach developed by students who have been trained as capable practising historians. These will continue to inform the application of their minds to other matters later in life.

11. We take it as axiomatic that students must progress and that well-designed programmes facilitate their progression. History programmes do not impart knowledge and skills to be passively absorbed: reading, discussion and writing, and engagement, exploration and discovery are essential. But we stress the importance of historical knowledge. The historian's skills and qualities of mind are developed through the processes of acquiring, evaluating and discussing historical knowledge in the courses and the independent study that History degree programmes demand. Although we prescribe no particular diet of historical knowledge, programmes need to impart such knowledge and also to encourage students to acquire more. The learning outcomes of a History degree programme have to be seen in terms of particular pieces of student work - either written or spoken - in which crucial tests are understanding texts and marshalling an argument. Accordingly, the ability to deploy ideas and information, to show conceptual grasp and to shape argument becomes difficult to separate in assessment practice from the ability to display appropriately relevant, wide and diverse historical knowledge.

The historian's skills and qualities of mind

12. We recommend that History degree students should undertake programmes which foster and inculcate the following skills and qualities:

- i. The ability to understand how people have existed, acted and thought in the always different context of the past. History involves the cultural shock of encountering and sensing the past's otherness and of learning to understand unfamiliar structures, cultures and belief systems. These forms of understanding also shed important light on the influence which the past has on the present.
- ii. The ability to read and use texts and other source materials, both critically and empathetically, while addressing questions of genre, content, perspective and purpose.
- iii. The appreciation of the complexity and diversity of situations, events and past mentalities. This emphasis is central to History's character as an anti-reductionist discipline fostering intellectual maturity.
- iv. The understanding of the problems inherent in the historical record itself: awareness of a range of viewpoints and the way to cope with this; appreciation of the range of problems involved in the interpretation of complex, ambiguous, conflicting and often incomplete material; a feeling for the limitations of knowledge and the dangers of simplistic explanations.
- v. Basic critical skills: a recognition that statements are not all of equal validity, that there are ways of testing them, and that historians operate by rules of evidence which, though themselves subject to critical evaluation, are also a component of intellectual integrity and maturity.
- vi. Intellectual independence: a History programme is not simply or even primarily a preparation for research in the subject, but it should incorporate the general skills of the researcher, namely the ability to set tasks and solve problems. This involves: bibliographic skills; the ability to gather, sift, select, organise and synthesise large quantities of evidence; the ability to formulate appropriate questions and to provide answers to them using valid and relevant evidence and argument. It should develop reflexivity, ie an understanding of the nature of the discipline including what questions are asked by historians, and why.
- vii. Marshalling of argument - in written and oral form drawing on and presenting all the above skills. Such argument should have structure; it should be relevant and concise. In the case of written argument it should be expressed in clear, lucid and coherent prose. Orally it should involve the capacity to sustain a reasoned line of argument in the face of others, to listen, to engage in sustained debate, and amend views as necessary in the light of evidence and argument.

13. Some programmes, e.g. in economic and social history, incorporate the methodologies of other Humanities and Social Science disciplines. A number of specific skills are thus essential to particular types of programme, and desirable though not obligatory in others. Departments or institutions are strongly recommended to make provision, where appropriate, for the development of at least one of these: languages; the use of C and IT in learning or analysis; numeracy and quantitative methods; archaeological fieldwork; archival study; or skills associated with the study of other disciplines with which History has close links. We also note the capacity of overseas exchanges or study-abroad programmes to enrich students' intellectual and personal development.

14. The generic skills acquired through the study of History are:

- i. Self-discipline;
- ii. Self-direction;
- iii. Independence of mind, and initiative;
- iv. Ability to work with others, and have respect for others' reasoned views;
- v. Ability to gather, organise and deploy evidence, data and information; and familiarity with appropriate means of identifying, finding, retrieving, sorting and exchanging information;
- vi. Analytical ability, and the capacity to consider and solve problems, including complex problems.
- vii. Structure, coherence, clarity and fluency of oral expression;
- viii. Structure, coherence, clarity and fluency of written expression;
- ix. Intellectual integrity and maturity;
- x. Empathy and imaginative insight;

Criteria for content

15. History provision across the sector is characterised by a diversity of periods, cultures, methodologies and conceptual assumptions. Nevertheless a number of central requirements can be specified. These six requirements do not point to a particular combination of courses or a particular programme structure:

16. **Time depth:** Awareness of continuity and change over an extended time-span is central to an historical awareness. It leads to an understanding of historical process, and it opens the way to the insights which stem from a juxtaposition of past and present. Programmes should introduce students to the issues of continuity and change and give them experience of the intellectual benefits accruing from the study of History over an extended period of past time. Programmes which cover a relatively short time-span should demonstrate how they provide students with a long-term perspective on their subject-matter.

17. **Geographical range:** For good reasons it has become an established convention that students study the history of more than one society or culture. Among other things this opens the way to comparative perspectives. Where a single country is the focus of the programme, that programme should incorporate serious and sustained comparison with others. The student whose prime interest lies in Britain is in no way exempt from this requirement: the possibilities of enhanced objectivity which flow from studying other countries are particularly important, not to mention the implications of Britain's imperial past and multicultural present. History's ability to promote understanding between cultures and between national traditions remains as important as ever.

18. **Contemporary sources:** Opportunity for close work on source material originating in the period studied is essential. This will often comprise written documents, but when appropriate will include artefacts, visual evidence etc. Students should carry out intensive critical work on such source material. This may take place in a "Special Subject" course, in other courses or in independent work. In many instances the work done by students approximates to historical research. We note that most students do not expect a career in research, but we nevertheless regard documentary work as a necessary part of learning some of the characteristics of the discipline.

19. **Reflexivity:** All History students should be expected to reflect critically on the nature of their discipline, its social rationale, its theoretical underpinnings and its intellectual standing. This may take place in a course labelled historiography or historical method, in other courses or in independent work.

20. **Diversity of specialisms:** History comprises many varieties, each with its distinctive focus and theoretical orientation (for instance, economic, social, political, cultural, environmental history, the history of women, and gender). Students should be introduced to some of these varieties of approach. The aim is not comprehensiveness, but a critical awareness that there are many principles of selection and modes of enquiry. Where a programme is strongly based on one variety, serious comparisons must be made with the contribution of others to historical understanding.

21. **An extended piece of written work:** This allows the student to formulate, execute and complete an independent extended piece of written work with appropriate supervision. In most cases this will be based on contemporary source materials. Alternatively it may take the form of an in-depth historiographical enquiry, as in the critical evaluation of a particular historical controversy, or a particular historian's oeuvre. It may be free-standing, or it may arise from - and be linked to - a taught course. Where this is not offered at all, departments should demonstrate and justify an alternative and commensurate experience of work in depth.

Progression

22. Students progress through History degree programmes largely by gaining experience and knowledge as they take successive courses over a period normally of three - four years. It is a cumulative process of "learning by doing". Subject matter varies, and courses may make heavier and/or more sophisticated demands on students over time, but the general process is one of developing and reinforcing similar skills and qualities throughout the programme. Qualitative advances may be achieved in a number of ways, for instance through increasing conceptual sophistication, increasing interpretative skill, increasing capacity for sustained written and/or oral analysis, greater independence of learning, and so on. Departments are not therefore expected to conform to any one model, but they should show how their particular programmes are designed to provide students with the means to gain in insight, competence and performance over 3/4 years. Some programmes may in effect give students nine terms (or six semesters) of doing the same kind of thing with a variety of subject matter but with a growing competence. Others may attach particular skills and attributes to particular courses and prescribe how students shall move through them. Whatever the structure of the programme, students are expected to achieve higher standards at the end of their degree studies than at the beginning; departments will need to show how their particular programme facilitates this

process. Because History is a non-sequential discipline, there is no fixed order of progression from one type of course to another. There is no reason in principle why survey courses should be more strongly represented in year 1, or close documentary study in year 3, if departments are able to demonstrate how their particular provision fosters progression.

Teaching and learning

23. Students should be provided with documentation for each individual course which explains what the course is designed to achieve, and the means to its attainment. Documents should also include an outline of the course structure, information about the nature and amount of assessment, and a bibliography. These course guides should be designed to be read by students in relation to departmental documentation which includes details of the degree scheme, criteria for all levels of classification and all forms of assessment in use, the range of available courses, course structures, assessment methods and weightings, and advice about plagiarism. Both individual course and departmental documentation should make the teaching and learning available to students in as clear and straightforward a form as possible.

24. Programmes should offer students regular formal contact with tutors and other students in a variety of structured settings. The purpose of these engagements is to deepen their research, oral and communication skills. They should also inculcate the qualities of self-discipline, which are necessary for the successful pursuit of the discipline. The precise form and nature of these engagements within departments will, to some extent, be shaped by circumstances. But they will need to be the result of an internal planning process which determines and reviews the match between standard learning outcomes for the degree and the content and teaching/assessment methods employed in the department's individual courses and degree programmes. It is vital to note that teaching methods/learning opportunities should not be thought of as fixed categories. They must be kept under review by departments, with due consideration being given for instance to tutors' self-assessments, student course review questionnaires, and the dissemination of good practice from other departments and institutions.

25. There should be opportunities in the degree scheme for all students to experience lecture or lecture-type arrangements which capture their interest and excite their curiosity. Presentations by lecturers stamp the course or subject with the imprint of personality and enable students to reflect on and to respond to an individual's particular interpretative approach. Lectures provide a broad framework which helps define the course, while also introducing students to its main themes, debates and interpretations. At their best they offer direct entry into a range of information and ideas which students may never, or only very rarely, be able to gather for themselves; they thus serve as a launching-pad into the heart of new subject matter. They should enable the students to develop their skills in listening, selective note-taking, and reflection. Lectures will be more appropriate to certain kinds of courses than to others and it is for course teams to decide on their optimum deployment. We do not suggest that they should be employed in all courses. We also recognise that they may take many different forms including the use of AV, CAL etc.

26. There should be a requirement during the degree scheme for all students to engage in seminars and forms of group work. In these sessions students should be expected to participate in group discussion, give presentations and jointly explore themes and arguments. These group discussions should be aimed at improving students' understanding rather than at the acquisition of knowledge per se and should be structured in such a way as to maximise effective student participation. They will normally be preceded by a prescribed programme of reading. Such work should be seen as both deepening students' understanding of a theme or subject and developing oral communication skills. It encourages a critical, as well as self-critical but tolerant, approach to historical discussion and builds students' self-confidence. It improves their abilities to marshal historical evidence and to summarise historical arguments, as well as to think quickly on their feet, to communicate articulately and persuasively with others and to recognise the value of working closely with others.

27. Most of a history student's time is spent working independently, reading, thinking and writing. Course bibliographies and other reading advice will provide students with the necessary starting points, but they should be encouraged by tutors to make imaginative use of the library, the web etc. to expand their knowledge base and their range of historical approaches. History is largely a text-based discipline which requires students to learn to read widely, rapidly and critically, to take good notes, to digest arguments and to synthesise information quickly and intelligently. It also requires them to construct arguments in writing.

28. Students should be expected to undertake a wide range of assignments (such as seminar and group presentations, reports, reviews, gobbits or document papers, essays of varying lengths, C & IT projects, dissertations). It should be explained to students how such assignments enable them to improve their

writing and oral-communication skills, as well as those of evidence-handling, the critical treatment of themes/historical arguments and the thoughtful, persuasive presentation of their work. Assignments should be appropriate to the aims and intended outcomes of the course, though equity in the treatment of students and a balanced range of assessment across the whole programme must remain important considerations. We do not support the view that all courses should necessarily be of one term/semester duration. Certain types of historical course have been most effectively taught on a year-long basis. Where academic judgement indicates this to be desirable, this model should continue to be followed.

29. All students should receive critical and constructive comment on their progress as an integral part of teaching and learning. There should be adequate discussion of, and response to, a student's individual work. As a basic minimum, all tutors should specify in writing a period or periods each week while a given course is being taught when they will be available for academic consultation. Individual encounters with tutors, whether as part of a regular teaching arrangement, feedback on written work or more occasional meetings, are essential to helping students clarify areas of confusion and gain a better understanding of their own performance as well as of historical themes and issues.

Assessment

30. Diversity in assessment is vital for two main reasons. First, the full range of a student's abilities is most unlikely to be revealed through any single mode. Second, the increasingly diverse educational background and formal qualifications presented on entry suggest that the degree programme should afford all students the opportunity to show what they know, understand and can do.

31. Assessment of undergraduate performance is diverse. However, the essay remains a central component. The essay is a piece of written work in response to a particular question or issue, done either under examination conditions or as coursework. Essays require students to demonstrate a number of skills in combination. Because of the integrative high-order skills which they develop, they are an essential element of all History assessment at this level. We recommend that all single-honours students should be assessed in significant part on their essay-writing skills. We recommend that all departments should give serious consideration to the provision of opportunity for single-honours students to be assessed by essays of various types (as, for example, 'long' essays reflecting depth of scholarship, 'short' essays requiring precision of focus; essays focusing on different historical concepts - change, cause, similarity and difference etc.; essays written to a target length and essays written to time). We also recommend that departments give serious consideration to requiring students to write at least some essays under exam conditions which afford safeguards against plagiarism and the use of inappropriate outside assistance. This also gives students the opportunity to develop relevant life-skills such as the ability to produce coherent, reasoned and supported arguments under pressure.

32. We recommend that all single honours students should be assessed in some way or another on their understanding of and their ability to handle **primary source material**.

33. We recommend that all single honours history students should be assessed on their ability to address historical problems in depth. Students should have the chance to pursue a historical enquiry, sustaining and developing it through several stages. Such an exercise involves both task-setting and problem-solving. This is normally done through **an extended piece of written work**, usually of at least twice the length required for standard coursework essays.

34. Departments should also consider whether single-honours students should be given the opportunity to have their critical and communication skills assessed in other forms. The development of oral communication skills is important in the process of educating a historian and students should, where practicable, have opportunity to be assessed on this skill. Oral presentations can be of different types including, for example, formal paper delivered to a group; general contribution to seminar discussion; chairing or otherwise leading seminar discussion, and response to contributions made by others.

35. We recommend that all departments give serious consideration to ensuring that single honours students also have the opportunity to have their critical and communication skills assessed in some of the following ways:

- i. team working and collaborative activity: group projects, fact-finding, evidence- processing work, etc;
- ii. shorter written tasks, including historical literature reviews and reports;
- iii. use of information technology to answer questions about historical data, including statistical and/or graphical analysis of historical data sets and to present findings in a variety of appropriate forms (bar graphs, pie charts, etc);

- iv. use of information technology for bibliographic and archive searches;
- v. practical experience in the use of archival material.

36. It is not the intention of the History Benchmarking Group to prescribe any one assessment strategy. Establishing criteria for classification is the business of departments and institutions. Different modes of assessment will be appropriate to different schemes of study, and will reflect the particular emphases and concentrations in those programmes. In order properly to evaluate the range of undergraduate study, an honours degree in history should be awarded on the basis of more than one form of assessment.

Assessment criteria

37. Departments should operate, and publish to their students, descriptors which characterise levels of performance characteristic of first, upper second, lower second, and third classes. This might take the form of a template setting out assessment criteria, and an example of such a template is annexed to this document. Where different modes of assessment privilege different qualities (for example essay writing in examination conditions, extended essays, dissertations, oral competence) different templates may need to be produced. Such templates or their equivalent should be published in student handbooks.

38. Given that the qualities of the graduate historian will differ from those who have pursued honours degrees in different disciplines, procedures for assessing performance may be different in history from those appropriate to other disciplines. History departments, sections, or subject groups should have the autonomy to establish criteria for classification appropriate to the discipline and to this benchmark statement. Benchmark standards should inform, but not unduly circumscribe, the approach to determining modes of assessment, and the precise weightings given to assessing different historical skills, methodologies, and learning outcomes.

39. Published criteria should be available for all forms of assessment, including the assessment of long essays, dissertations, oral presentations, and vivas where any or all of these modes of assessment are used. Criteria at all levels of classification should give predominance to positive achievement, although below the first class they should also indicate the kinds of limitations which disqualify a candidate from achieving a mark in a higher class.

40. Individual institutions might wish to develop new methods for describing undergraduate achievement. The basic threshold for achievement of Honours (H4) must remain the standard required to achieve a Third Class in traditional systems of classification. Describing performance above this level might be done through issuing transcripts rather than by classification. Institutions might issue transcripts containing assessment marks for all courses or modules and an overall percentage mark (which might be weighted). Such a procedure would discriminate more precisely between different candidates' performance and would enable Institutions to show how a student performed across a range of assessments. Outstanding performance might be rewarded by graduating *with distinction*. Such a candidate would have achieved the same overall standard as a student graduating first class in a traditional system of classification.

41. An honours degree in History should normally reflect at least two years (or four semesters) of work beyond a previously qualifying standard. The qualifying standard would normally be one year's study at or equivalent to H1.

42. All graduates in history should demonstrate competence in the discipline and the purpose of schemes of assessment is to evaluate the level of competence achieved. In establishing and maintaining history degree programmes, departments should take into account the following summary of learning outcomes. They will not necessarily wish to include assessment of all these learning outcomes in degree classification:

- i. command of a substantial body of historical knowledge;
- ii. the ability to develop and sustain historical arguments in a variety of literary forms, formulating appropriate questions and utilizing evidence [12 (vi), 12 (vii)];
- iii. an ability to read, analyse, and reflect critically and contextually upon historical texts [12 (ii), 18];
- iv. an appreciation of the complexity of reconstructing the past, the problematic and varied nature of historical evidence [12 (iv)];
- v. an understanding of the varieties of approaches to understanding, constructing, and interpreting the past; and, where relevant, a knowledge of concepts and theories derived from the humanities and social sciences [7, 20];
- vi. the ability to read, analyse, and reflect critically and contextually upon historical texts and other source materials [12 (ii), 17, 32];

- vii. the ability to gather and deploy evidence and data to find, retrieve, sort and exchange new information [14 (v), 14 (vi), 35 (iii), 35 (iv), 35 (v)];
- viii. a command of comparative perspectives, which may include the ability to compare the histories of different countries, societies, or cultures [17];
- ix. awareness of continuity and change over extended time spans [16];
- x. an understanding of the development of history as a discipline and the awareness of different historical methodologies [19];
- xi. an ability to design, research, and present a sustained and independently-conceived piece of historical writing [21, 31, 33];
- xii. the ability to address historical problems in depth, involving the use of contemporary sources and advanced secondary literature [33];
- xiii. clarity, fluency, and coherence in written expression [12 (vi), 14 (vii), 27, 28, 31, 35 (ii)];
- xiv. clarity, fluency, and coherence in oral expression [12 (vii), 14 (vii), 26, 28, 34, 35];
- xv. the ability to work collaboratively and to participate in group discussion [26, 34, 35 (i)];
- xvi. competence in specialist skills which are necessary for some areas of historical analysis and understanding, as appropriate [13, 35 (iii), 35 (iv)].

Recommendations

1. The Groups recommends that all students studying History as part of their degree:
 - i. Undertake a programme which fosters the skills and qualities of mind listed in paragraphs 12 and 13 of this statement.
 - ii. Be provided with comprehensive course and department documentation
 - iii. Be provided with opportunities to participate regularly in a variety of structured settings with tutors and other students.
 - iv. Receive good diagnostic feedback on their progress as an integral part of teaching.
2. The Group recommends that all single history honours students:
 - i. Follow a programme which gives them practical experience of the intellectual benefits occurring from studying the subject over an extended period of historical time.
 - ii. Study the history of more than one society or culture.
 - iii. Carry out intensive critical work on source materials generated by the period under study.
 - iv. Be expected to reflect critically on the nature of their discipline.
 - v. Be introduced to some of the many varieties of History.
 - vi. Be involved in lecture or lecture-type arrangements which capture their interest and excite their curiosity.
 - vii. Engage in seminars and forms of group work.
 - viii. Undertake a wide range of assignments.
 - ix. Be assessed in significant part on their essay-writing skills.
 - x. Be assessed on their understanding of and ability to handle contemporary source material.
 - xi. Be assessed on their ability to address historical problems in depth.
3. The Group recommends that all departments should give serious consideration to requiring that all single history honours students will:
 - i. Formulate, execute and complete an independent extended piece of written work, with appropriate supervision on which they are assessed.
 - ii. Write at least some of their essays under exam conditions.
4. Departments will also wish to consider the desirability of providing the opportunity for all single honours students to be assessed on:
 - i. Varying types of and extended writing.
 - ii. Oral communication.
 - iii. Other forms of presentation.

Annex 1

Assessment criteria for examination by essays written under timed conditions

First class

Structure and focus

- Work which engages closely with the question set, and shows a mature appreciation of its wider implications.
- The structure of the answer will facilitate a clear, coherent, and compelling development of the writer's argument.
- Descriptive material and factual evidence will be deployed in order to support and develop the writer's argument, and will be deployed with a vigorous sense of relevance and an appropriate economy of expression.

Quality of argument and expression

- The writing will be clear, fluent, and accurate. The range of vocabulary and linguistic idioms will be appropriate to the case being developed.
- The answer will go well beyond the effective paraphrasing of other historians' ideas, and demonstrate conceptual command of the historical (and, where appropriate, historiographical) issues at stake.
- The answer may develop ideas which are original, and may be structured in a way which enables the writer to develop independent lines of thought in compelling and coherent ways. Intellectual independence, when grounded in a mature consideration of available evidence, should take the candidate into the highest markbands.

Range of knowledge

- Relevant knowledge is both broad and deep. This will include knowledge of contemporary sources, historiography, secondary literature. The range of reading implied by the answer will be extensive.
- The answer will demonstrate a clear sense of the nature and complexity of historical development.
- The writer will show an ability to move between generalization and detailed discussion, and will be able to synthesize as well as particularize.
- Writers will show an ability to evaluate the nature and status of information at their disposal, and where necessary identify contradiction and attempt a resolution.
- The answer will demonstrate an informed and secure understanding of the historical period or periods under discussion.

Upper Second class

Structure and focus

- Work which displays an understanding of the question, shows an appreciation of some of its wider implications, and makes a serious attempt to engage with the question set.
- The structure of the answer will facilitate a clear development of the writer's argument, towards the lower end of this markband candidates will not sustain an analytical approach throughout.
- Descriptive material and factual evidence will be deployed relevantly. Towards the lower end of this markband candidates may not always bring out the full implications of evidence cited.

Quality of argument and expression

- The writing will be clear and generally accurate, and will demonstrate an appreciation of the technical and advanced vocabulary used by historians.
- The answer will deploy other historians' ideas and seek to move beyond them. The answer will also show an appreciation of the extent to which historical explanations are contested.
- Although the answer might not demonstrate real originality, the writer will present ideas with a degree of intellectual independence, and will demonstrate the ability to reflect on the past and its interpretation.

Range of knowledge

- Knowledge is extensive, but might be uneven. Demonstrated knowledge will include reference to relevant contemporary and historiographical sources. The range of reading implied by the answer will be considerable.
 - The answer will demonstrate a sense of the nature of historical development.
 - The writer will show an ability to move between generalization and detailed discussion, although there may be a tendency towards either an over-generalized or an over-particularized response.
 - Writers will reflect on nature and status of information at their disposal, and will seek to use it critically.
 - The answer will demonstrate a secure understanding of the historical period or periods under discussion.
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Lower Second class

Structure and focus

- Work which displays some understanding of the question set, but may lack a sustained focus and may show only a modest understanding of the question's wider implications.
- The structure of the answer may be heavily influenced by the material at the writer's disposal rather than the requirements of the question set. Ideas may be stated rather than developed.
- Descriptive material and factual evidence will be deployed, but not necessarily with the kind of critical reflections characteristic of answers in higher markbands.

Quality of argument and expression

- The writing will be sufficiently accurate to convey the writer's meaning clearly, but it may lack fluency and command of the kinds of scholarly idioms used by professional historians. In places expression might be clumsy.
- The answer will show some understanding of historians' ideas, but may not reflect critically upon them. The problematic nature of historical explanations may be imperfectly understood.
- The answer is unlikely to show any originality in approach or argument, and may tend towards assertion of essentially derivative ideas.

Range of knowledge

- Knowledge will be significant, but may be limited and patchy. There may be some inaccuracy, but basic knowledge will be sound. The range of reading implied by the answer will be limited.
 - The answer will show some limited awareness of historical development.
 - The writer might be prone to being drawn into excessive narrative or mere description, and may want to display knowledge without reference to the precise requirements of the question.
 - Information may be used rather uncritically, without serious attempts to evaluate its status and significance.
 - The answer will demonstrate some appreciation of the nature of the historical period or periods under discussion.
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Third Class

Structure and focus

- Work which displays little understanding of the question, and may tend to write indiscriminately around the question.
- The answer will have structure but this may be underdeveloped, and the argument may be incomplete and unfold in a haphazard or undisciplined manner.
- Some descriptive material and factual evidence will be deployed, but without any critical reflection on its significance and relevance.

Quality of argument and expression

- The writing will generally be grammatical, but may lack the sophistication of vocabulary or construction to sustain a historical argument of any complexity. In places the writing may lack clarity and felicity of expression.
- There will be little appreciation of the problematic or contested nature of historical explanations.
- The answer will show no intentional originality of approach.

Range of knowledge

- There will be sufficient knowledge to frame a basic answer to the question, but it will be limited and patchy. There will be some inaccuracy, but sufficient basic knowledge will be present to frame a basic answer to the question. The answer will imply relevant reading but this will be slight in range.
- There will be understanding of historical development but it will be underdeveloped, and the ideas of historians and other writers may be muddled or misrepresented.
- There will be an argument, but writer may be prone to excessive narrative, and the argument might be signposted by bald assertion rather than informed generalizations.
- There will be sufficient information to launch an answer, but perhaps not to sustain a complete response. Information will be used uncritically as if always self-explanatory.
- The answer will demonstrate appreciation of the nature of the historical period or periods under discussion, but at a rudimentary level.

Annex 2

A statement of the threshold standard

The Benchmarking statement for History has sought to provide, for all stakeholders, the general expectations about standards in the Single Honours History degree. This statement offers, in particular, information and advice about the content and progression of an Honours History degree programme, the specific historical and general transferable skills that such a degree programme will impart, and the means by which such qualities of mind can be assessed. It also, of course, indicates the abilities that an Honours graduate in History can be expected to possess.

The Benchmarking statement has recognised that the historical content in the many Single Honours Degree programmes on offer in the United Kingdom will vary in detail, although they are likely to share certain general characteristics. While the specific content of History degree programmes will undoubtedly vary, all will teach a substantial body of historical knowledge and all will develop the particular historical skills and the general transferable skills expected of an Honours graduate in History. These historical skills will include: an appreciation of the complexity and diversity of situations, events and mentalities in the past and of the surviving evidence about them; the ability to read, analyse, and reflect critically and contextually upon, a wide range of source materials; an awareness of the varieties of approaches to understanding, constructing and interpreting the past; an understanding of history as a discipline and of different historical methodologies; an awareness of continuity and change over time; an ability to gather evidence to develop and sustain historical arguments; and the ability to marshal an argument and to express it with clarity, fluency and coherence. An Honours History programme may expect students to employ other cognate skills in, for example, languages, computing and quantitative methods, and will certainly seek to develop such generic or transferable skills as self-discipline, self direction, independence of mind, empathy and imaginative insight, and the ability to work with others and to have respect for the reasoned view of others.

A student who has graduated with an excellent performance in Single Honours History can confidently be expected to have mastered a very extensive range and depth of historical knowledge in particular areas of the past and to have demonstrated a very superior command of nearly all the historical and transferable skills outlined above. The typical or modal History graduate will have acquired a considerable range and depth of historical knowledge in particular areas of the past and will be able to show a very sound competence in nearly all of the historical and transferable skills outlined above. A student who has shown a weak command of historical knowledge and a limited command of the historical and transferable skills expected of an Honours History graduate will not have succeeded in graduating with an Honours degree, but will have failed at an earlier stage in the Single Honours degree programme. Those students graduating in Single Honours History at the threshold level may well have demonstrated an unevenness of performance in the various courses or modules, and in the assessed work, in their degree programme. The unevenness can be detected by an examination of the range and diversity of marks awarded for their various courses or modules. Some students may perform consistently at the threshold level, but most students who graduate at the threshold level, will, none the less, have shown in parts of their degree programme the level of competence shown by the typical or modal student. At their best, they will have displayed sound historical knowledge and competence in many of the historical and transferable skills expected of an Honours History graduate, but they have graduated at the threshold level because they have not been able to sustain that level of performance across all of their courses and assessed work. Only a part of their performance is likely to have been assessed at the lowest threshold level. Even those students who have performed consistently at this level, however, will have demonstrated a basic understanding of the evidence, will have presented a structured, if underdeveloped and incomplete argument or have presented a thorough narrative with insufficient analysis, and will have expressed themselves in a manner that is generally grammatical and intelligible, if somewhat lacking in clarity and fluency.

History subject benchmarking group membership

Dr M Arnot	
Professor D Bates	University of Glasgow
Professor C Clark	University of Warwick
Professor M Daunton	Churchill College, University of Cambridge
Professor H Dickinson	University of Edinburgh
Dr Susan Doran	St Mary's College, Twickenham
Professor W Doyle	University of Bristol
Professor D Eastwood	University of Wales, Swansea
Professor E Evans	University of Lancaster
Professor A Fletcher (Chair)	
Professor A Jones	University of Wales, Aberystwyth
Mr R Lloyd-Jones	Sheffield Hallam University
Dr E McFarland	Glasgow Caledonian University
Professor A Porter	King's College London
Professor P Stafford	University of Huddersfield
Professor J Tosh	University of North London