



Copyright © 2006
Arab Open University
Saudi Arabia Branch

*Supplementary material for
The academic staff in the Arab Open University
Customized for Saudi Arabia branch
For distribution to all tutors and staff tutors*

A briefer

QAA Benchmark Subject Statements

Contents

General Overview	2
English Language and Literature	2
Business Administration	4
IT and Computing	5

General Overview

The aim of this “Briefer” is to introduce, in a concise form, the essential elements of “Subject Benchmark Statements” adopted by the UK-based Quality Assurance Agency (QAA).

These statements serve a number of goals which, together, attempt to achieve quality academic standards. In turn, the statements attempt to:

1. Provide a means for the academic community to describe the nature and characteristics of the program, right at design stage.
2. Provide general guidance for articulating the learning outcomes associated with the program; thereby representing a framework for general expectations about the standards of the award associated with the program.
3. Encourage innovation within an agreed overall framework.
4. Provide support to the institution in pursuit of internal quality assurance.

The “statements” are not intended to dictate a specification of detailed curriculum in the subject. On the other hand, in their scrutiny of *validating* the AOU programs, the OUVS expects application of these benchmarks as a check for quality assurance of program presentation.

It is therefore highly important to recognize that, while these “Benchmark Statements and Standards” serve as good guidelines for erecting and upholding program quality measures of assurance, they are not indeed intended to lay down specific rules of operation. They simply serve as general guidelines.

It should, however, be emphasized that the full contents of these benchmarks appear in the appropriate location at the website of the QAA.

In the following, we, therefore, present a summary of the main items applicable to each program of study. The readings contained herein will invariably borrow statements as contained in the relevant original QAA Benchmark Statements.

English Language and Literature

1. Defining Principles:

- English is a versatile academic discipline characterized by the rigorous and critical study of literature and language.
- Methods of critical reading take account of form, structure and rhetoric of texts.
- Study of English embraces diverse methods of communication.
- All English graduates are expected to be aware of the productions and determination of meaning by historical, social, political, stylistic, ethnic, geographical and other contexts.

2. Nature and Scope of Subject:

- The intellectual character and academic practice of Higher Education English is a continually evolving discipline.
- It includes the study of the literature of Great Britain and Ireland as well as other literatures from the Anglophone world.
- Due to the breadth of English, it is expected that there are variations in content and coverage; and yet, there are common areas of knowledge and skills that must form the core of any curriculum of study.
- The study of English encourages inter- and multi-disciplinary perspectives.
- English has a vital role to play in promoting the ideal of lifelong learning.

3. Subject Knowledge and Skills:

Subject knowledge:

Graduates of English are expected to be able to demonstrate, in a primary fashion:

- Knowledge of literature and language
- Knowledge and understanding of texts written in principal literary genres
- Knowledge of the structure, levels and discourse functions of the English language
- Knowledge of linguistic, cultural and socio-historical contexts
- Recognition of the multi-faceted nature of the discipline

Key subject-specific skills:

- Graduates will have acquired a range of complementary literary, linguistic and critical skills.
- The program should provide a broad framework for articulating desired outcomes such as:
 - critical skills in close reading and analysis of texts
 - responsiveness to the central role of language in the creation of meaning
 - rhetorical skills of effective communication
 - command of a broad range of vocabulary
 - awareness of different social and cultural contexts affecting the language

Generic and graduate skills:

Some of the main key transferable and cognitive skills that graduates should possess are:

- advanced literacy and communication skills
- capacity to analyze and examine diverse forms of discourse
- competence in the planning and execution of essays and project-work.
- capacity for independent thought and judgment
- skills in critical reading

- ability to work with and in relation to others
- research skills
- time management and organizational skills

4. Teaching, Learning and Assessment:

Teaching and learning:

- There are many appropriate formats in which English may be taught.
- The interaction between the independent study of materials and the communication and discussion of ideas is fundamental to the teaching of English.
- English students should be required to write essays as a fundamental part of their learning experience.

Assessment:

- Assessment of students should be linked to the learning process and outcomes.
- It is desirable for students of English to experience a variety of assessment forms.
- The essay should be seen as an essential component in the assessment process.

5. Standards:

For the general classification of standards of achievement, it is possible to make the differentiation in two categories:

- Threshold level: This represents the minimum requirement that should be reached by the student qualifying for the degree.
- Modal level: This level of attainment reached by the typical student whose results fall into the main cluster.

Business Administration

1. General Scope

- The benchmark standards are intended primarily to establish threshold standards
- They promote institutional transparency
- They promote institutional accountability to students.
- They help the institution be more able to demonstrate how knowledge and skills components come together in a proper learning environment.

2. Program Purpose

- Study of organizations, their management , and the external environment of operation
- Preparation for a career opportunity in business-related areas
- Enhancement of lifelong learning skills

3. Relevant Knowledge and Understanding

- Program should provide broad, analytical and integrated study of business.
- Graduates must be able to demonstrate relevant knowledge and understanding of organizations.
- Graduates must also demonstrate knowledge and understanding of: markets; customers; finance; people; operations; information systems; communication and information technology; business policy and strategy; and, contemporary and pervasive issues.

4. Skills

- Cognitive skills of critical thinking, analysis and synthesis
- Effective problem solving and decision making
- Effective communication
- Numeracy proficiency
- Lifelong learning
- Abilities to conduct research into business issues

5. Learning, Teaching and Assessment

- Must have a learning and teaching strategy
- There should be integration between theory and practice
- Must have an assessment strategy
- Assessment methods should assess the formative and summative aspects of achievement.

6. Standards of Achievement

In general, three categories may be used to differentiate the achievement of graduates:

- “Threshold” describes the baseline expected of *all* graduates
- “Modal” is set as the standard to be achieved by the *majority* of graduates
- “Top” is characterized by achievement of *excellence*

IT and computing

1. The study of computing:

- Computing is concerned with the understanding, design and exploitation of computation and computer technology.
- Computing promotes innovation and creativity assisted by rapid technological change.
- It approaches design and development through selection from a variety of alternatives.

2. The curriculum:

Computing is a highly diverse subject with aspects that overlap with areas of interest in a number of adjacent subjects. In turn, it may be instructive to survey the main elements of a typical curriculum in the subject.

- a. The cognate area: In this realm, it is noted that:
 - Computing presents a spectrum of activity ranging from theory to practice.
 - In whole, the subject deals with a variety of topics in: Hardware; Software; Communication and interaction; Practice; and, Theory.
- b. Abilities and skills: Students are expected to develop abilities and skills in three broad categories:
 - Computer-related cognitive abilities and skills such as knowledge and understanding of modeling, critical evaluation and testing, application of proper methods and tools in system specifications and design, and skills of effective communication.
 - Computer-related practical skills such as the ability to specify, design and construct computer-based systems, the ability to evaluate such systems, and the abilities of working in teams and operating effectively in a computing environment.
 - Additional transferable skills such as effective information-retrieval, and effective utilization of IT resources, in addition to developing good appreciation for lifelong learning.

3. Program/Course design:

It is important to pay attention to a number of issues in program design, including the following:

- Producing a coherent design of the theory, practical skills and applications in an integrated manner
- Curriculum layout should show progression with later components; thereby building onto earlier parts appropriately.
- Program should create opportunities for students to work in groups and as individuals.
- Curriculum ought to exhibit a balance between theory and practice.
- Curriculum should reflect the diversity of the subject and the diversity in the interests of students.

4. Learning, teaching and assessment:

Learning and teaching

- Teaching staff must be appropriately qualified for the curriculum
- Mechanisms for faculty development should be in place
- Teaching ought to stimulate learning that is driven by explicit objectives
- Learning is enriched by current research and industrial activities

Student motivation

- Students should be motivated toward acceptable progression rates
- Students should receive appropriate and timely feedback on all aspects of student work.

Student induction

- Students should receive proper induction into the program
- Graduates should receive appropriate education that would enable them to act as the agents of technology transfer.

Assessment issues

- An appropriate assessment strategy should be adopted.
- All student assessments should be set at appropriate standards, and should be fair, valid and reliable.
- A broad range of external and internal measures should be used to safeguard standards.

Learning environments and resources

- The academic environment should be conducive to learning.
- Sufficient resources must be allocated to support the delivery of the curriculum
- High-quality staff/faculty with appropriate specialist interests should be provided.

5. Benchmarking standards:

For the general classification of standards of achievement, it is possible to make the differentiation in two categories:

- Threshold level: This represents the minimum requirement that should be reached by the student qualifying for the degree.
- Modal level: This level of attainment reached by the typical student whose results fall into the main cluster.

Online Reference and Support:

Website, at: www.qaa.ac.uk

Click on “Academic Infrastructure”; then on “Benchmarking statements”; then on “Honours degree benchmark statements”; then choose the subject/discipline.