



Subject Benchmark Statement

Economics

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About this Statement

This document is a QAA Subject Benchmark Statement for Economics that defines what can be expected of a graduate in the subject, in terms of **how they might think**, what they might know, do and understand at the end of their studies.

Subject Benchmark Statements are an established part of the quality assurance arrangements in UK higher education, but not a regulatory requirement. They are sector-owned reference points, developed and written by academics on behalf of their subject. Subject Benchmark Statements also describe the nature and characteristics of awards in a particular subject or area. Subject Benchmark Statements are published in QAA's capacity as an expert quality body on behalf of the higher education sector. A summary of the Statement is also available on the QAA website.

Key changes from the previous Subject Benchmark Statement include:

- a revised structure for the Statement, which includes the introduction of crosscutting themes of:
 - equality, diversity, and inclusion
 - accessibility and the needs of disabled students
 - education for sustainable development
 - employability, entrepreneurship and enterprise education
- a comprehensive review updating the context and purposes, including course design and content in order to inform and underpin the revised benchmark standards.

How can I use this document?

Subject Benchmark Statements are not intended to prescribe any particular approaches to teaching, learning or assessment. Rather, they provide a framework, agreed by the subject community, that forms the basis on which those responsible for curriculum design, approval and update can reflect upon a course, and its component modules. This allows for flexibility and innovation in course design while providing a broadly accepted external reference point for that discipline.

They may also be used as a reference point by external examiners in considering whether the design of a course and the threshold standards of achievement are comparable with those of other higher education providers. They also support professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs) with the academic standards expected of students.

You may want to read this document if you are:

- involved in the design, delivery and review of courses in Economics
- a prospective student thinking about undertaking a course in Economics
- an employer, to find out about the knowledge and skills generally expected of Economics graduates.

Relationship to legislation

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

The regulatory status of the Statement will differ depending on the educational jurisdictions of the UK. In England, Subject Benchmark Statements are not sector-recognised standards as set out under the Office for Students' [regulatory framework](#). However, they are specified as a key reference point, as appropriate, for academic standards in Wales under the [Quality Assessment Framework for Wales](#) and in Scotland as part of the [Quality Enhancement Framework](#). Subject Benchmark Statements are part of the current quality arrangements in Northern Ireland. Because the Statement describes outcomes and attributes expected at the threshold standard of achievement in a UK-wide context, many higher education providers will use them as an enhancement tool for course design and approval, and for subsequent monitoring and review, in addition to helping demonstrate the security of academic standards.

Additional sector reference points

Higher education providers are likely to consider other reference points in addition to this Statement in designing, delivering and reviewing courses. These may include requirements set out by PSRBs and industry or employer expectations. QAA has also published [Advice and Guidance](#) to support the [Quality Code](#), which will be helpful when using this Statement – for example, in [course design](#), [learning and teaching](#), [external expertise](#) and [monitoring and evaluation](#).

Explanations of unfamiliar terms used in this Subject Benchmark Statement can be found in [QAA's Glossary](#). Sources of information about other requirements and examples of guidance and good practice are signposted within the Statement where appropriate.

1 Context and purposes of an Economics degree

1.1 This document sets out benchmark standards for undergraduate degrees in Economics. It defines the distinctive nature of the subject, the aims of a typical degree course, the subject knowledge and skills of an economist, methods of learning and assessment and, finally, a description of benchmark standards at threshold, typical and excellent levels.

Purposes and characteristics of an Economics degree

1.2 Economics is the study of individuals and groups and how they interact and make decisions individually and collectively in the context of institutions, **the environment, power structures** and the external context. It seeks to inform the design and implementation of economic policy, based on theoretical and empirical analysis. A key aim of economics is to analyse and understand the allocation, distribution and utilisation of resources and the consequences for economic and social well-being **and for equitable, global sustainability**. Economics is concerned with such phenomena in the past and present, as well as how they may evolve in the future.

1.3 Studying economics requires an understanding of how resources are used and how economic and social entities, such as households, firms, **charities and aid organisations, the financial sector**, governments and other institutions, behave and interact. This understanding is required at both the individual (micro) and the aggregate (macro) level as well as with respect to the relationship between **diverse individuals, society and the environment**. The analysis is both static (dealing with, for example, levels of wages and prices, employment, output and trade in the context of institutional and other 'rules of the game') and dynamic (concerned with, for example, innovation, changes in market structure, economic growth and the distribution of income, business cycles, financial stability and instability, and **sustainable development**). **These factors include gender & racial pay gaps; internal variation in price and wage within a country; distribution between genders & races/ethnicities and geographical distribution both within and between countries**. Various interpretations – sometimes fundamentally different – of commonly observed economic phenomena exist, and hence explanations may be contested. It is therefore important that economic phenomena are studied from a range of theoretical perspectives, in the relevant historical, political, institutional, international, social, **anthropological** and

environmental contexts, and that theories are evidence-based, using quantitative and qualitative data analysis as well as a mix of the two.

1.4 Economics is a social science with a broad scope, which draws on and influences the other social sciences. It also has fundamental links with other subject areas such as Politics, Geography, History, Philosophy, Law, Data Science and Artificial Intelligence and Psychology. It uses mathematical and statistical methods, **alongside qualitative methods**, and interacts with sciences such as biology and medicine. **It should be rooted in environmental sciences and physics because it deals with issues of resource and energy consumption and depletion, whilst recognising that different schools of economic thought draw on the natural sciences in different ways.** As economics is integral to understanding business behaviour, strategy and corporate performance, it is also one of the core disciplines informing the study of [Finance](#), [Business and Management](#) and of [Accounting](#).

1.5 Recognition of these interrelationships and the increasing number of students who are choosing to study Economics jointly with other subjects has led to new and innovative degree courses being introduced. Their design has been influenced by the appreciation that training that includes a sound understanding of **the interdisciplinarity of economic concepts and how they interact with and apply to different groups of people provides a greater, more ethical practical understanding of economy and significant** employment opportunities across the wide array of sectors and career pathways, which Economics graduates typically enter, in addition to working as a professional economist in a multitude of sectors, both private and public **or civil society**. At the same time, understanding the limitations of the tools and techniques taught in an Economics degree is a key part of the education imparted. These **multidisciplinary** degrees, **if economics is to be taught in a pluralist way**, also enable students to be productive and responsible citizens who can critically evaluate and apply the tools and content of the course to identify key contemporary problems – the **climate crisis**, political uncertainty, economic instability, poverty and inequality, **global power disparity**, the challenges and opportunities provided by digital technology, and many others – and develop strategies to address them.

1.6 An Economics undergraduate course teaches students how to use the full variety of analytical tools and contextual knowledge to address key issues arising in the world around them. This points to several key intellectual features that characterise the approach of economists and are therefore important in the training of undergraduate students. Economists need the ability to:

- gather evidence and assimilate, structure, analyse and evaluate qualitative and quantitative data

- abstract and simplify in order to identify and model the essence of a problem, **without isolating it from its context**, analyse and reason – deductively, abductively and inductively – using the tools of economics **and other disciplines** and prior research both within economics and elsewhere
- communicate results concisely **and accessibly** to a variety of audiences, including those with no training in economics
- think critically about the limits of their analysis in a broader, **long term** socioeconomic **and environmental** context
- draw economic policy inferences, to recognise the potential constraints in their implementation and to evaluate policy outcomes in the light of stated policy objectives.

Equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI)

1.7 Using data theoretical models and other analytical tools, Economics explores key issues related to EDI, such as **systems of power, discrimination, economic development, income and other measures of inequality**. Economics educators should aim to foster an inclusive learning community and consider how to embed EDI in learning materials (such as readings, lecture slides, videos, and so on), **methods and processes**. This commitment goes beyond minimum legal requirements related to particular groups and **aims to develop an equitable community** that both recognises students’ differences in **background, experience and opportunity** and **helps remedy systemic inequalities** in the context of the subject. It is important to note that Economics degrees are more likely to be offered at academically selective universities (Johnston et al 2014) which may result in particular issues related to access and the diversity of the student body. **As a result, Economics departments should take extra care to remove barriers to participation and ensure equitable access to their courses for all prospective students**. Such efforts might include:

- **widening participation initiatives, including financial assistance and resource provision**, to ensure economic disadvantage does not hinder a student’s access, experience or outcome
- **countering the underrepresentation** of marginalised and minoritised groups inclusive of, and beyond, those with protected characteristics as defined by the Equality Act 2010. **This should be inclusive of both teaching staff and students**
- adopting a zero-tolerance approach to discrimination and harassment, such as everyday microaggressions
- **anticipating access** for neurodiverse community members when designing teaching materials and methods and assessment

- closing structural awarding gaps
- acting on feedback from students from minority or neurodiverse communities to adapt intake, study, and assessment processes.

1.8 As a subject, Economics is characterised by evidence-based and theory-informed debates expressing opposing views around potentially sensitive EDI issues. This enables better understanding of relevant topics and also promotes effective communication with those outside the subject area about these issues and their resolution. Recent examples of such discussions within economics include the debate around a minimum wage, the ways in which (for example racial) discrimination is modelled and analysed, and the most appropriate response to a rise in inflation. Conducting these debates in an inclusive, **ethical and respectful** manner is central to the study of Economics.

1.9 One of the key EDI-related challenges for Economics is that it remains a predominantly white, cisgender male and Western field, with relatively few members of the profession from a disadvantaged background ([Stansbury, 2022](#)) which influences both the **selections** of topics to study, as well as the lens through which these topics are approached. Difficult conversations are often a crucial part of learning in Economics - for example, studying **national and international** ethnic wage gaps with students who have personal experience of such gaps. This provides an opportunity as well as a need to learn how to have these conversations in a compassionate way. Indeed, an important way to diversify the profession is to model kindness, understanding and inclusion in interactions with students to make Economics more welcoming as a profession for people from different backgrounds and with different characteristics. **This needs to be done carefully where the students in question consent to discussing their personal experience and are not viewed as a case study to educate their peers.**

Accessibility

1.10 Pedagogic methods for teaching Economics will generally reflect the needs of the student body, with an inclusive curriculum that prioritises the accessibility, equity, appropriateness **and provision** of learning and teaching resources and materials being key. **Equitable access to the course for all students should be proactively and flexibly considered in an anticipatory way but also determined on a case-by-case basis with significant impact from the student or staff member in question.**

1.11 The diversity of the learning community is reflected in the issues, case studies and policy analyses covered in the Economics curriculum. **Enabling all members of the learning community to 'see themselves' in the curricula and find solidarity with other members is recognised as a strategy for supporting students**

of diverse backgrounds and as a key approach to the equity agenda for the discipline.

1.12 There has been an increase in the adoption of different combinations of face-to-face, online, synchronous and asynchronous teaching and learning accelerated in part by the COVID-19 pandemic from 2020. This provided both opportunities to develop diverse and inclusive teaching and learning, as well as challenges for ensuring that it was, and remains, equally accessible to all students.

1.13 As a discipline that utilises graphical and other visual tools, Economics pays attention to digital accessibility of materials which should include, for example, image descriptions. More generally, digital content needs to be suitable for use with screen readers, include transcript or closed captions with audio and video materials, **particularly for teaching and learning delivered online and/or asynchronously**, be downloadable in different formats. The use of data and specialist software and coding also needs consideration in terms of accessibility and alternative provisions. **Within a physical venue, consideration of space for mobility aids including wheelchairs and crutches, support workers, the visibility of boards and other display equipment and audibility of session leaders and presentation material is essential.**

1.14 Enhanced digital capabilities are an important way to improve accessibility. There is now greater awareness across higher education of how digital accessibility can be improved. For example, Jisc has published [Steps to improve your institution's digital accessibility](#) and individual providers can publish accessibility statements such as that produced by [The Open University](#) which, as a distance learning institution committed to promoting comprehensive higher education, has a long-established approach to digital accessibility. Economics departments can also promote better accessibility in learning and teaching design, for example with the use of an accessibility checklist.

1.15 As a discipline that has been historically exclusionary, the language used is essential to improving access to the subject. While key economic terminology is necessary, the general sentiment of writing should not be unnecessarily hidden behind heavy academic language. Only if students are taught using accessible language, will it be possible to further the goal of effectively communicating economics with non-economists after graduation.

Sustainability

1.16 The [UN Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs) together with other sustainability initiatives such as the [UN Global Compact](#) provide a broad concept of sustainability that goes beyond climate change. These internationally

recognised initiatives provide Economics with a relevant framework for the integration of sustainability into the curriculum. Sustainability is here defined as present and future states that are supported by strategies and operations with the aim of achieving societal goals with a definitive focus on resource preservation, maintaining human rights and ethical labour relations, and achieving equitable welfare situations. Integrating sustainability into the discipline of Economics involves fostering, sharing and advancing knowledge around sustainability and identifying its manifestation in economic concepts and models, including appreciating the limits of such models and concepts in this regard. The regulatory and standard-setting developments of the UN Global Compact in the areas of human rights, labour, the environment and anticorruption are reflected in the discipline through the integration and analysis of institutional and legal frameworks and policy approaches that are precautionary, promotional or corrective.

1.17 Reflecting the UN SDGs and their educational implications, a governing purpose of Economics degrees is that graduates have developed capacities that enable them to cope with and attempt to create solutions for the planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss, environmental injustice and potential, consequent social and political instabilities, conflicts and humanitarian issues. Such solutions should be created from an interconnected global viewpoint which does not attempt to isolate problems from the context in which they arose and have been maintained. Within the discipline, issues of sustainability cannot be isolated and treated as a sub-discipline that only 'ecological' or 'environmental' economists deal with, because although requiring dedicated professionals and modules, the issue of sustainability is overarching and must be embedded in the study of microeconomics, macroeconomics, financial economics etc. These problems are fundamentally transdisciplinary and highly dynamic and are characterised by pervasive uncertainty. As such, they require students to foster critical and creative capacities beyond the application of existing tools and models.

1.18 The core skills provided by all Economics courses, outlined above in paragraph 1.6, closely align with the learning outcomes suggested by the [Education for Sustainable Development Guidance](#) produced by Advance HE and QAA (March 2021). These learning outcomes go beyond being solely about environmental issues, focusing instead on interconnections and interdependencies between economic, social and environmental factors, supporting the knowledge, skills and competencies that students and staff develop to contribute to a more sustainable future. These core skills include systems thinking, anticipatory thinking, normative competency, strategic thinking, critical thinking and integrated problem-solving competency. There is direct alignment with the UN

SDGs, all of which are interconnected. For example, economic policy plays a role in helping achieve Goal 7: Affordable and Clean Energy, which in turn allows for Goal 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure.

1.19 Economics can contribute directly to the design, implementation and evaluation of economic policy to create a more sustainable approach to development. A key aspect is to decentre growth as analogous to development and incorporate other measures of wellbeing to focus on equitable development such as poverty alleviation. The focus within the field of the motivations and behaviours of consumers, producers, governments and other stakeholders makes it well placed to analyse complex systems with multiple agencies and understand why certain unsustainable behaviours are so common and how individuals and communities can reduce them. Core competencies developed in an Economics programme - for example, assimilation, structuring, analysis and evaluation of data - form a strong foundation for graduates to go on to design evidence-informed and sustainable policy. A key emphasis is being able to communicate these insights to society to better shape future outcomes.

1.20 Various areas of Economics contribute to the understanding of sustainability. Students are introduced to ways of thinking about the abundance of environmental resources and energy, and how to extract, process, and handle them without significant disruption or danger to local communities and those working with the materials, and how to operate within these resources' limits; the causes and consequences of economic activity and growth and its impact on sustainable futures on global and local levels; the social cost of depletion of resources that transcends the market logic; the balance of private-vs-state-led development and corrective policies; intergenerational and intragenerational equity: global asymmetries in contribution to and suffering effects of climate change and resource production, consumption and disposal; and the measurement of income and welfare. Students are also provided with a range of tools that can help them build awareness of and analyse these issues through both static and dynamic modelling approaches.

Enterprise and entrepreneurship education

1.21 [Enterprise and entrepreneurship education](#) (EED) supports behaviours, attributes and competencies that are likely to have a significant impact on the individual student in terms of successful careers, with success here reflecting the students' personal ambitions and satisfaction instead of broadly prescribing success as affluence. It prepares students for changing environments and provides enhanced impact through placements and activities that build links between academic institutions and external organisations.

1.22 Courses in Economics cultivate a wide range of transferable skills relevant to EED, including critical thinking, the framing of problems and creative **real-world** problem-solving, IT literacy, communication to diverse audiences and collaboration.

1.23 Economics graduates are familiar with a range of software for data analysis. Many degree courses not only teach students a range of analytical techniques and methodological approaches but also data collection, data retrieval, **pattern and thematic recognition**, data manipulation and interpretation, and quality assessment of quantitative and, **increasingly, qualitative data**. **Additionally, graduates must learn how to use a mix of both methods, to fill in the gaps and bring to life quantitative studies or provide evidence for qualitative studies.**

1.24 Economics graduates are trained in communicating economic issues and analysis to wide audiences using multimedia that may include written articles, blogs and policy briefs along with podcasts and vlogs. **The emphasis in Economics on the close relationship between theory and data analysis means that Economics graduates are well placed to not only work with data but also to supply a narrative of evolving issues in the real world.**

1.25 Placements and work experience in degrees have become more common in recent years. These range from full-year placements and summer internships to virtual internships. Such experiences further develop relevant attributes such as open-mindedness, curiosity, adaptability and determination.

1.26 Graduates who have gained experience in a broad range of contemporary real-world applications of **economic** analyses from a range of perspectives are well placed to work across disciplines through the application of analytical techniques as well as more systemic approaches that **recognise the interconnectedness of social, economic, political and environmental phenomena**. Moreover, courses in Economics illustrate how economic theory and analysis have changed to meet evolving policy, **social and environmental challenges** and help motivate and encourage students to explore real-world issues in creative **and ethical** ways.

1.27 Beyond employment, entrepreneurship education provides competencies to help students lead a rewarding, self-determined professional life, well placed to add social, cultural and economic value to society through their careers and **civic participation** by engaging and leading debates and offering ideas towards creative solutions.

2 Distinctive features of an Economics degree

Design

2.1 Economics degree courses are designed to provide a broad-based and intellectually rigorous understanding of the world so that students are equipped to address complex problems and arrive at creative solutions **which are both sustainable and ethical**. However, it is also recognised that Economics graduates go on to a wide range of career and further study options. Understanding the relationship between theories, methods and interpretation, **implications and impacts for a variety of stakeholders and systems including the natural environments** is central to Economics courses and, therefore, the structure of most includes a core of required modules in methods and basic tools which can then be applied to more field-specific modules. **To ensure courses are dynamic, programme leaders should also ensure that students have an opportunity to develop transferable skills such as digital literacy, media literacy, and green skills during their studies.**

2.2 Economics courses may or may not require a mathematics qualification for admission yet tend to involve a significant amount of analytical material, as well as the need to develop data and writing skills. Where the degree does not require Maths A Levels for entry, the expectation is that suitable teaching and support is provided within the degree to ensure that students are able to engage with the more quantitative elements of the course. Over time, these courses have moved toward more research-led teaching approaches both in terms of what students are exposed to, as well as what they have to do themselves, within the degree. The typical Economics course is designed to achieve the following learning outcomes.

- A **critical understanding of causality** and analytical methods, both theoretical and empirical.
- An appreciation and understanding of the history and development of economic ideas **across the globe and various cultures, understanding and appreciating the differing and similar values different cultures have,** and the differing methods of analysis **and value systems** that have been and are currently used by economists, **again exploring how and why different methods are favoured across different geographical regions and cultures.**
- An understanding of the historical context of contemporary problems addressed by economists, and, more generally, **a knowledge of economic**

history as relevant to the learning context. An ability to apply economic reasoning and tools to applied topics. An ability to critically evaluate differences in policy recommendations in the context of their underlying methodologies and the value system underpinning the approach.

- An ability to discuss, analyse and evaluate government policy and to assess the performance of the UK and other economies, as well as the global economy and how these policies contribute to, allow or mitigate environmentally damaging and unethical systems of power and societal norms.
- An understanding of verbal, graphical, mathematical and econometric representation of economic ideas and analysis, including the relationship between them. Appropriate techniques to enable manipulation, treatment and interpretation of the relevant quantitative and qualitative data are also relevant.
- An ability to articulate, communicate and present their arguments verbally and/or non-verbally and to both specialist and non-specialist audiences, who may have other kinds of expertise or a vested or personal interest in relation to the issue at hand.

Progression

2.3 Over the course of a degree with honours (FHEQ Level 6; FQHEIS Level 10) an Economics student will typically progress from one level of study to the next, in line with the regulations and processes for each institution. However, it is expected that each level would see the attainment of knowledge, expertise and experience that build towards the final achievement of meeting the threshold-level subject-specific and generic skills listed in this Statement. This will usually include successful completion and the award of credit for the full range of learning and assessment, including any practical components. Upon graduation from an undergraduate degree, it would be expected that a student who had achieved a second-class degree or higher would be capable of, and equipped for, undertaking postgraduate study in Economics or an associated discipline. Entry requirements to postgraduate courses are, however, determined by individual providers and may require specified levels of achievement at undergraduate level.

2.4 Undergraduates studying a combined, joint or major-minor route will achieve core elements of the specific and generic skills for the subject, and will add others according to the subjects covered in joint courses. Additionally, they may explore the overlap between their two subject areas and the unique social

and environmental impacts this intersection has or could contribute to a more sustainable future, creating further opportunities for interdisciplinary study.

2.5 In standard three-year (or four-year in Scotland) undergraduate honours degree courses, students may exit earlier and be eligible for a Certificate of Higher Education, a Diploma of Higher Education, or a Pass degree depending upon the levels of study completed to a satisfactory standard. Scottish undergraduate degrees with honours are typically designed to include four years of study, which relates to the structure of Scottish primary and secondary education. For students following part-time routes, their study time would be the equivalent of the study involved in a three or four-year degree, albeit spread over a longer period in total.

Flexibility

2.6 Economics degrees in most providers, and particularly since the onset of the pandemic in 2020, can comprise a mix of distance, online and in-person, and synchronous and asynchronous components as discussed in more detail in the Teaching and learning section of this Statement. Students are encouraged to learn in an environment focused on evidence-based analysis **from a culturally diverse variety of reliable sources with an eclectic range of perspectives**, making use of independent learning both with peers as well as on their own and in their own time, to complement content delivery by course leaders **with the support, and, where possible, assistance of economic practitioners from a range of backgrounds working locally, nationally, and globally**. Modern Economics is taught through a variety of materials, resources and techniques, including the traditional textbooks and journal articles, and applied sources such as policy briefs as well as multimedia, computer programming content and empirical analysis. **The discipline is expanding to recognise, respect, and actively engage with more Indigenous, gendered and collective forms of knowledge.**

Partnership

2.7 New degree types, such as Degree Apprenticeships and those including work placements, have become more common in the Economics field over the last decade. These are often in conjunction with formal organisations, including the government, public sector bodies, the Bank of England, **charities**, and economic consultancies. In addition to providing an employability angle to the degree programme, they may contribute toward diversifying the Economics student body by providing different paths to an education in Economics.

2.8 Other partnership work includes widening participation initiatives that many providers are involved with in conjunction with the [Royal Economic Society](#)

and other such organisations. In addition to the stated purpose, these initiatives are an opportunity for current Economics undergraduate students to work together with these institutions **and with the wider community. Student groups can directly engage with external organisations such as, for example, [Institute for New Economics Thinking](#) or [Rethinking Economics](#) to improve direct engagement with the latest research and network with other students and professionals.**

Monitoring and review

2.9 Degree-awarding bodies and their collaborative partnerships routinely collect and analyse information and undertake periodic course review according to their own needs, and **students, economic practitioners, economics organisations including charities, and direct users of economic services should form part of this monitoring and review process.** They draw on a range of external reference points, including this Statement, to ensure that their provision aligns with sector norms. Monitoring and evaluation are a periodic assessment of a course, conducted internally or by external independent evaluators. Evaluation uses information from both current and historic monitoring to develop an understanding of student achievement or inform future course planning. **The internal review for all degree-awarding bodies should systemically mandate input from current and previous students.**

2.10 The quality assurance system in the UK relies significantly on external input. Higher education providers will use external reviewers as part of periodic review to gain an external perspective on any proposed changes and ensure threshold standards are achieved, and content is appropriate for the subject **and will equip students with the tools and values to further economic research and knowledge to facilitate a more sustainable, equitable future for society.**

2.11 The external examination system currently in use across the UK higher education sector also helps to ensure consistency in the way academic standards are secured by degree-awarding bodies. Typically, external examiners will be asked to comment on the types, principles and purposes of assessments being offered to students and whether (1) learning outcomes are constructively aligned to **academic standards and the needs of the economic field**, and (2) teaching and assessment are aligned to learning outcomes. They will consider the types of modules on offer to students, the outcomes of a cohort and how these compare to similar provision offered within other UK higher education providers. External examiners are asked to produce a report each year and make recommendations for changes to modules and assessments (where appropriate). Subject Benchmark Statements, such as this one for Economics, can play an important role in supporting external examiners in advising on whether threshold standards are

being met in a specific subject area and whether teaching methods and content enable a student's ability to meet these standards, rather than just succeed in assessments.

2.12 Courses with professional and vocational outcomes may also require evaluation and accreditation from professional and regulatory bodies. These are usually done through a combination of site visits and desk-based reviews.

2.13 The Monitoring and review process should act as a loop where standards like this one inform good practice for courses and are part of their review, and in turn the standards are updated by learning from the degree-awarding bodies and their students when they push boundaries and excel.

3 Content, structure and delivery

Context

3.1 Graduates of a single honours degree in Economics can develop knowledge of the content listed below. It is recognised that, in both single honours degrees and in many degrees that involve a substantial amount of Economics, content is adapted to suit the nature and objectives of the degree course. In joint or combined honours degrees including Economics, these elements may be covered in differing degrees of detail and depth. It is also recognised that the forms of analysis chosen may differ and may be tailored to best serve the skills that students bring with them into their degree course, **although various forms should be introduced**. It is neither the function nor the objective of this Subject Benchmark Statement to prescribe what these forms of analysis might be; this is a matter for institutional choice and decision-making.

3.2 Key concepts that most Economics courses cover include the below.

- **Opportunity cost and scarcity** - the idea that making a choice involves trade-offs, monetary and otherwise, including budget, **waste reduction and management concerns relating to resource and environmental sustainability, the wellbeing of individuals and communities impacted,** and other types of constraints.
- **Incentives and psychological biases** - a general form of cost and benefit analysis, as well as an understanding of systematic **cognitive and unconscious** biases in how people get information about costs and benefits, interpret this information and perceive the decision-making process and its objectives. Students also learn about the **implications of these biases and informational constraints**, for example, in the unintended outcomes of policies, as studied in behavioural economics, **environmental economics, and feminist economics, as well as how to identify, unlearn, and avoid perpetrating or perpetuating these biases.**
- **Strategic thinking** - economists learn the importance of strategic thinking **which accounts for and will not compromise on the sustainability needs of a fair society as described by the principle "people and planet over profit"**, and the roles of opportunities, strategies, outcomes, information and motivation in the analysis of strategic actions, including conflict, bargaining and negotiation.

- **Expectations, uncertainty and shocks** - economists learn that behaviour partly depends on experience and partly on peoples' perceptions of what is expected to happen and uncertainty around these events.
- **Marginal considerations** - economists are trained to recognise that important decisions often relate to small variations in key variables and parameters. **Students should also be aware of the limitations of marginal analysis in cases where there are strong threshold effects or discontinuities such as in the analysis of planetary crises.**
- **Equilibrium, disequilibrium, stability and dynamics** - the concept of equilibrium, when a system is in a state of rest or changing at a constant rate, and the subsequent dynamic response to both internal and external shocks, are fundamental concepts in Economics. **The possibility of instability and tipping points in such systems, as well as states of disequilibrium can provide insights into environmental and climate degradation, as well as social inequities and systemic mistreatment of oppressed groups, and their policy mitigations.**
- **Mutual gains, conflicts of interest and power** - economists are aware that the outcome of an economic interaction reflects opportunities for mutual gains from exchange as well as **conflicts of interest and the power relations** between economic actors. Students learn to evaluate such outcomes in terms of efficiency (unexploited mutual gains), **fairness to all stakeholders impacted directly and indirectly and sustainability.** As such, a focus on welfare analysis remains a key part of most Economics degrees. **This is also key for the study of labour economics, feminist economics, and decoloniality.**
- **Markets and state-led development models** - economists understand that price-taking markets between buyers and sellers may deliver the maximum welfare to market participants in certain contexts, but such markets are rare **and market participants are typically of privileged groups (such as white people, men, and/or non-disabled people), and even when they exist, the maximum welfare applies to participants who are not positioned outside the market transaction.** In most cases, the actions of an economic actor or actors confer un-priced **benefits or costs on another or on the environment.** Students learn to recognise such external effects and to evaluate how policy and/or private bargaining can potentially achieve **crucial** improved allocations.

3.3 Appropriate data, programming, visualisation and other computing skills required in the modern economics profession will be introduced within the degree course, with particular attention to the study of **causality.** These include

appropriate mathematical and statistical methods, including econometrics. Students will have exposure to the use of such techniques on actual economic, financial or social data, using suitable statistical or econometric software. In addition, students will learn about the nature, sources and uses of both quantitative and qualitative data and an ability to select and apply appropriate methods that economists might use to analyse such data. **Students will also learn to identify and critique unreliable, biased, and exclusionary data sources. Even when drawing conclusions from secondary data, they will learn to use it ethically, especially when working with sensitive data such as religion or health.**

3.4 An essential learning outcome of the Economics degree is the judgement and skill required to select and apply the relevant economic tools, principles and reasoning to a variety of applied topics or fields, including an awareness of how economics can be applied to design, guide and interpret economic, **social and environmental policy**. As part of this, students should also learn how to discuss and analyse government policy and to evaluate the performance, **both on an economic level and a social justice level**, of the UK and other economies, **including the international economy**, past and present.

3.5 Common applied fields an Economics course may cover, in addition to the core micro, macro and econometric content, include:

- advanced topics in the core fields of micro and macroeconomics and econometrics
- behavioural economics
- **development economics**
- **economic history**
- **economics for universal equity**
- **environmental economics**
- experimental economics
- **feminist economics**
- growth
- health economics
- industrial organisation
- **institutional economics**
- international macroeconomics and finance
- international trade and migration
- **labour economics**
- **Marxist economics**
- monetary economics
- **political economy**
- **Post-Keynesian economics**
- public economics

3.6 The core and applied content, or standalone content, include economic history and history of economic thought, as these provide the context within which Economics is studied. They are in a sense fundamental to the understanding of the basis of Economics, establishing, respectively, the historical and policy contexts of the applied economic and social issues studied in the degree and the process through which the lenses currently used to study a phenomenon were developed. These areas may be embedded within the core fields, as well as within the applied fields above, or else offered as separate modules or units.

3.7 Learning about the environment should not be limited to understanding it as a resource or a constraint, instead acknowledging how all work and life take place within the environment, and the consequences of habitat loss, climate change, resource depletion must be studied as affecting all aspects of life. While environmental economics can be offered as specialised modules, it is simultaneously necessary to embed environmental education into other core and optional courses. The planetary crisis of climate change creates an imperative to learn how, for example, firms organise production around resource depletion, international trade is affected by disrupted global supply chains, how the consequences of climate catastrophe affect access to finance for poorer countries as well as the geographical and demographic communities most at risk of climate change and environmental disasters. Since the climate crisis requires solutions on all fronts, Economics students are uniquely positioned to strategise across many problem areas and contribute to a more socially, environmentally, economically, and politically sustainable future.

Teaching and learning

3.8 An undergraduate course in Economics is designed to encourage the acquisition of subject knowledge, understanding and skills with increasing critical facility and independence as the course progresses. To this end, learning is organised and supported to foster active learning and support employability in students with highly diverse backgrounds, learning styles, and support needs, for example by using a range of assessment methods. A variety of approaches to managing the learning process may be adopted to achieve this, including lectures, seminars, tutorials, workshops, peer teaching and learning, project-based learning, experiments, games, technology-enabled learning, experiential learning including short and extended placements, and the use of practitioners.

3.9 The use of more innovative approaches to teaching and learning within economics, accelerated by the pandemic from 2020, has seen a rise in the use of interactive and student-centred approaches, with an increased utilisation of blended learning incorporating a mixture of distance, online and in-person

elements and locally appropriate mixes of synchronous and asynchronous materials and activities. Such changes offer greater flexibility for both students and educators, but may also present challenges related to the engagement and motivation required on the part of students to fully benefit from these approaches. **Another challenge is with student experience suffering if there are different levels of engagement within the classroom because of some elements being asynchronous, where different levels of familiarity with previous content are a roadblock for teaching since some cohorts feel under stimulated and others feel rushed.**

3.10 Various resources are available to support teachers in the wider adoption of more innovative and inclusive teaching and learning methods. Organisations such as the [Economics Network](#) and the [Centre for Teaching and Learning Economics](#) provide relevant materials and practical ideas particularly designed for Economics, while organisations such as [Advance HE](#) and each university's teaching and learning centre provide more general guidance.

3.11 As the student body in many undergraduate Economics courses can be international and otherwise diverse, course leaders need to think about specific help for students to deal with language issues, mathematics support (as use of mathematics might be quite different from the focus in school), and study and exam skills support. These issues are present in any degree course, but Economics may pose a particular challenge since its study at undergraduate level is quite different from that at school-level, for those who have taken the subject before.

3.12 **Many higher education institutions have adopted more pluralist approaches to teaching and learning and introduced diverse economics approaches and perspectives. Development of more inclusive content and methods, for example by exploring decolonial perspectives and the economic systems at play in various Indigenous cultures and communities with fewer connections to the global and even their country's national economic system, also supports accessibility for groups that have been historically underrepresented in economics education (see paragraphs 1.7-1.9 on EDI).**

Assessment

3.13 The assessment design and format in a particular unit or module will depend on its content, the style of teaching and learning and the learning outcomes. In terms of ensuring that all graduates, irrespective of their choice of area within Economics (in courses where there is such a choice) develop similar skills for their future careers, a course-level analysis of assessment design and methods is particularly valuable.

3.14 Problem-solving skills and higher-order skills of reasoning and analysis are particularly important for Economics graduates and can be encouraged through careful design of teaching and assessment strategies. Economics graduates go on to a wide range of careers as well as further study in a variety of different fields, and **assessment design which seeks to equip students for these different paths** is particularly valued.

3.15 Economics is a discipline that may benefit from a range of different forms of assessment, including the traditional closed-book exam. Many of the skills that Economics courses seek to deliver (see paragraphs 2.1-2.2 on Design) may be more appropriately tested in other assessment formats, such as research projects, essays, open-book exams, multimedia assessments, group assessments, policy briefs and other non-traditional formats. The move towards more applied and data-based topics in Economics has naturally led to a shift to more data-oriented methods of assessment, such as research projects. These forms of authentic assessment **mirror activities and tasks from the wider world**, including workplaces, and are particularly useful in assessing a broad range of applied skills **and aptitude for economics, rather than an ability to succeed in course assessments.**

3.16 The use of formative assessment within an overall assessment plan is typically used to provide students with feedback and feed forward to enable them to build confidence for summative assessments and develop the reflective skills with which to assess their own progress. Assessment plans that scaffold learning and teaching for gradual and continuous skills development are increasingly utilised to support students in their progression. **Information provided about assessment and feedback should be explicit, accessible and transparent, and assessment and feedback should be planned ensuring that students and staff can manage their workloads effectively.**

4 Benchmark standards

Introductions

4.1 The benchmark levels specified below apply to both a single honours degree in Economics and joint degrees where Economics is a major component. Students following degrees where Economics is a minor component are not expected to attain all of these benchmarks. Students achieving the typical standard would also achieve the threshold.

4.2 The vast majority of students will perform significantly better than the minimum threshold standards. Each higher education provider has its own method of determining what appropriate evidence of this achievement will be and should refer to [Annex D: Outcome classification descriptions for FHEQ Level 6 and FQHEIS Level 10 degrees](#). This Annex sets out common descriptions of the four main degree outcome classifications for bachelor's degrees with honours: 1st, 2.1, 2.2 and 3rd.

Threshold level

4.3 A graduate in Economics who has attained the threshold level should have demonstrated:

- understanding of key economic concepts, principles and tools
- understanding of key economic theories, interpretations and modelling approaches
- understanding of quantitative and qualitative methods and computing techniques appropriate to their course of study, and an appreciation of the contexts in which these techniques and methods are relevant
- knowledge of the sources and content of economic data and evidence and an appreciation of what methods might be appropriately applied to the analysis of such data
- an ability to apply economic reasoning to policy issues
- knowledge and understanding of the historical, political, institutional, social, cultural, and colonial contexts in which large- and small-scale economic systems arose and were manipulated or impacted by each other

- knowledge and awareness of historical, political, institutional, international, social, cultural and environmental contexts in which specific economic analysis is applied
- understanding of how different economic systems and practices inherently value particular demographic communities and individuals more and provide differing treatment to these groups. Students will understand that modern economic policy decisions should aim to eliminate these inequalities and instead promote equity between all social groups and the natural environment
- knowledge in an appropriate number of specialised areas in Economics, some of which is informed by research in Economics
- awareness of the possibility that many economic problems may admit of more than one approach
- some ability to communicate economic challenges, theoretical debates, and policy proposals with non-economists.

Typical level

4.4 A graduate in Economics who has attained the typical level should have demonstrated:

- systematic understanding of economic concepts, principles and tools
- systematic understanding of distinctive economic theories, interpretations and modelling approaches, and their competent use
- proficiency in quantitative **and qualitative** methods and computing techniques and knowledge of how to use these techniques and methods effectively across a range of problems
- systematic understanding of the sources and content of economic data and evidence and of those methods that might be applied appropriately to the analysis of such data
- knowledge of how to apply economic reasoning to policy issues **in a critical manner**
- **knowledge and a critical understanding of the historical, political, institutional, social, cultural, and colonial contexts in which large- and small-scale economic systems arose and were manipulated or impacted by each other**

- systematic understanding of the historical, political, institutional, international, social, cultural and environmental contexts in which specific economic analysis is applied
- a critical understanding of how different economic systems and practises inherently value particular demographic communities and individuals more and provide differing treatment to these groups. Students will understand that modern economic policy decisions should aim to eliminate these inequalities and instead promote equity between all social groups and the natural environment and be able to apply this ethos to their practice
- knowledge in an appropriate number of specialised areas in Economics and an appreciation of the research literature in these areas
- familiarity with some of the different approaches to addressing economic problems and evidence of a critical awareness of the applicability and limits of these approaches in particular contexts
- ability to effectively communicate economic challenges, theoretical debates, and policy proposals with non-economists.

Excellent level

4.5 A graduate in Economics who has attained the excellent level should have consistently demonstrated:

- excellent understanding of economic concepts, principles and tools
- excellent understanding of distinctive economic theories, interpretations and modelling approaches, and their competent use in a research context
- excellence in quantitative and quantitative methods and computing techniques and knowledge of how to use these techniques and methods effectively across a range of problems
- excellent grasp of the sources and content of economic data and evidence and of those methods that might be applied appropriately to the analysis of such data
- advanced knowledge of how to apply economic reasoning to policy issues in a critical manner
- advanced knowledge and an applied understanding of the historical, political, institutional, social, cultural, and colonial contexts in which large-

and small-scale economic systems arose and were manipulated or impacted by each other

- excellent understanding of the historical, political, institutional, international, social, cultural and environmental contexts in which specific economic analysis is applied
- excellent understanding of how different economic systems and practises inherently value particular demographic communities and individuals more and provide differing treatment to these groups. Students will understand that modern economic policy decisions should aim to eliminate these inequalities and instead promote equity between all social groups and the natural environment, be able to apply this ethos to their practice, and critique other economic policies and practises in regard to this ethos
- advanced knowledge in an appropriate number of specialised areas in Economics, and which is embedded in current research literature
- advanced knowledge of some of the different approaches to addressing economic problems with excellent **critical awareness of the applicability and limits** of these approaches, thus demonstrating creativity and sound judgement in the use of various approaches in diverse contexts
- advanced ability to effectively communicate economic challenges, theoretical debates, and policy proposals with non-economists.

5 List of references and further resources

Useful online resources

[Centre for Teaching and Learning Economics](#) - regular seminar series and free annual conference on good practice in teaching and learning in Economics

[Economics Network](#) - case studies on all aspects of teaching and learning in Economics and workshops for graduate teaching assistances and new lecturers

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United Nations, 2022
[UN Sustainable Development Goals](#)

United Nations, 2022
[UN Global Compact](#)

6 Membership of the Advisory Groups for the Subject Benchmark Statement for Economics

Membership of the Advisory Group for the Subject Benchmark Statement for Economics (2023)

Professor Parama Chaudhury (Chair)	University College London
Professor Alvin Birdi (Deputy Chair)	University of Bristol
Professor Susan Newman (Deputy Chair)	The Open University
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Amy Spencer	QAA Coordinator

Membership of the review group for the Subject Benchmark Statement for Economics (2019)

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

Professor Wendy Carlin	University College London
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Membership of the review group for the Subject Benchmark Statement for Economics (2015)

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

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Professor Wyn Worgan	University of Nottingham
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