

RAS response to QAA Subject Benchmarks Consultation

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education is reviewing the Subject Benchmark Statements for higher education programmes. The Agency recently consulted on the statement for physics and astronomy, developed by a panel including at least four astronomers, one of whom is the current chair of the RAS Education and Outreach Committee.

See <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/the-quality-code/subject-benchmark-statements/subject-benchmark-statement-reviews-2024-25>

Feedback from RAS Council members emphasised the need to include geophysics in the statement and asked the QAA to rename the statement accordingly.

Responses to specific consultation questions

6. Overall, does the revised Subject Benchmark Statement continue to define the nature of the subject area and the academic standards expected of graduates?

Yes, overall, this is the case. There is however a significant omission in that geophysics is not mentioned. This covers the physics and physical processes of the Earth and its surrounding space environment. Geophysicists appeared twice as in demand roles in the previous Shortage Occupation List.

Despite this demand, geophysics undergraduate degrees are at risk of closure, with the real prospect that there could be no courses in this area in the UK. In the past five years, some 25% of geophysics programmes have already been shut down.

7. Does the information in the introductory sections successfully describe the context, characteristics and purpose of the subject?

Yes, but with the same need to add in geophysics as an important component of physics as a whole.

11. Please use this space to add any further observations relating to the revised Subject Benchmark Statement not covered in the questions above.

This submission is from the Royal Astronomical Society, which represents around 4,000 astronomers, space scientists and geophysicists in the UK and in 70 countries globally.

We ask that the scope of the Benchmark is widened to include geophysics, and the document is renamed: "Physics, Astronomy, Astrophysics and Geophysics".

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