

The Institution of Environmental Sciences

**QAA SUBJECT BENCHMARKING STATEMENT: EARTH SCIENCES,
ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES AND ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES
(ES³ DRAFT)**

THE IES RESPONSE

The following text is the IES response to the QAA as part of the consultation process on its Benchmarking Statement

The Benchmarking Statement is seen by the IES as an important document in the articulation and definition of the interdisciplinary area of Environmental Sciences which became noted in the 1990s for its breadth, proliferation and relevance. The IES' field of professional interest and concern is substantially in the academic area described as ES³ but also goes beyond into other academic subject areas such as Geography, Biology, and Built Environment. The following comments, however, relate to only ES³.

ES³ is characterised in the introduction of the document by:

“a focus on Earth systems in order to learn from the past, understand the present and influence the future;
an emphasis on field based investigation;
the multi-disciplinarity and inter-disciplinarity of their approaches;
the range of spatial and temporal scales that they cover, and
the development of graduates capable of using their powers of observation, analysis and imagination to make decisions in the light of uncertainty.”

ES³ admits to a wide remit, ranging from the scientific study of physical characteristics and environmental systems of the earth to the social and political issues of human relationships with the environment, explicitly in the context of sustainability.

The IES considers that these are fundamental to modern professional practice in the environmental sector.

The panel has wisely not attempted to explicitly define the core curriculum of ES³ but has expressly identified the knowledge and graduate skills, learning and teaching methods, assessment process and performance levels common to each of three constituent parts: earth sciences, environmental sciences and environmental studies.

The outline subject knowledge statements of these components of ES³ recognise that each undergraduate award will have its own characteristics with a detailed rationale for the content, and organisation outlined in its respective specification.

The IES welcomes the flexibility and diversity this encourages in the market place and believes it accords with professional practice needs.

The mapping out of the component territory of ES³ helps to address the diversity and what some have perceived as confusion in the environmental sciences' field. The Venn diagram creatively and effectively helps to portray the academic boundaries and internal

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relationships in the ES³ field and Geology which were also represented. The Appendices reveal the traditional strengths of Earth Science in its disciplinary and wider environmental context. The difficulty in distinguishing the Environmental Sciences-Studies divide has been dealt with reasonably. The IES in its accreditation process interrogates and places high value on the science content of environmental courses within a culture of interdisciplinarity and context of sustainability. These elements are transparent in the Appendix descriptions.

Finally, the IES is pleased that the Statement stresses the relevance and vital importance of specific skills such as fieldwork, laboratory work, IT, and of key graduate skills which are vital for careers in the environmental sectors.

In summary the IES welcomes the Benchmarking Statement for ES³. It is currently reviewing and relating the benchmarking principles to its own course accreditation activities. The IES, in its role as a professional body addressing the multi- and inter-disciplinary area of environmental science/studies, will be pleased to continue to contribute further to QAA issues.

D J Blair
Chair of IES Education Committee.
March 13th 2000