Guide to selecting JACS codes

What are JACS codes?

JACS (Joint Academic Coding of Subjects) is the subject classification system used to describe the subject content of courses at UK Higher Education providers. A second review of JACS resulted in the introduction of the JACS3 coding framework for use from 2012/13 (UCAS year of entry 2012). This was developed jointly by HESA (Higher Education Statistics Agency) and UCAS. See the web link at the end of this document for a full listing of JACS3 codes.

Which agencies use JACS codes?

JACS codes are used by UCAS to code undergraduate courses. Higher Education providers in the UK use JACS codes to identify the subject of courses and modules in their statutory returns to HESA. HESA collects information on behalf of a number of government departments and agencies (for example: the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS); Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE); National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL); Department of Health; Research Councils).

HESA also releases statistics and datasets of students by subject of study - some important examples of how subjects identified by JACS codes are used:

- The Unistats website (http://www.unistats.com/), which provides information to help prospective students select higher education courses, uses JACS codes to group subjects.
- Newspaper league tables.
- HEFCE uses JACS codes (together with other criteria) to monitor and describe activity in the HE sector and to identify courses that are eligible for additional or premium funding.
- Academic Technology Approval Scheme (ATAS). Any students from outside the European Economic Area (EEA) and Switzerland, who are applying for Masters or PhD courses in certain science or technology subjects, are required to obtain ATAS clearance before they are able to obtain a visa. The scheme also applies to any visiting student coming to Cambridge for the fourth year of an undergraduate science or technology course or any visiting student attending a postgraduate level course in science or technology for more than six months. The JACS code of a student’s course determines whether or not they are covered by the ATAS scheme and require clearance. The UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) manages this scheme; further information, including a list of the relevant JACS codes can be found on their website at https://www.gov.uk/academic-technology-approval-scheme .

It’s important to note that JACS codes are a means of recording activity and are not designed to be a financial tool. The use of JACS codes does not have a direct impact on mainstream annual formula teaching funding provided by HEFCE. However, JACS codes are used by HEFCE when targeting specific subjects or identifying specific groups of students for funding changes: examples in recent years include ELQs (Equivalent or Lower Qualifications) and providing additional funding for very high cost laboratory subjects (which have been defined as Chemistry, Physics, Chemical Engineering and Mineral, Metallurgy and Materials Engineering).
When might University of Cambridge staff need to use or understand JACS codes?

- When applying for a new course (e.g., Tripos, MPhil).
- When interpreting data published by HESA and in newspaper league tables.
- To know whether a student will require clearance under the Academic Technology Approval Scheme (ATAS).
- When setting up a new module (paper/enrolment as opposed to a new course/academic plan).

How do the codes work?

JACS codes do not indicate the level of study - the same list is used for courses at any level: undergraduate courses, postgraduate courses (taught or research), as well as for continuing education programmes. A single JACS code or combination of codes can describe the subject content of an entire course – for example a Tripos – or be applied to each paper or module that makes up a course.

The coding system is hierarchical – codes consist of a letter followed by three digits. The letter indicates the generic subject area, and the numbers enable a progressively more detailed coding of the topics within the generic subject. For example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEVEL OF CODING</th>
<th>JACS2 CODE</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Generic code</td>
<td>C000</td>
<td>Biological Sciences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal subject</td>
<td>C500 Microbiology</td>
<td>The scientific study of micro-organisms encompassing major components of genetics and molecular biology. Includes bacteriology, virology, cell structure and function, and may include some immunology.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full listing</td>
<td>C520 Medical &amp; veterinary microbiology</td>
<td>The study of the interactions between micro-organisms and their hosts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full listing</td>
<td>C521 Medical microbiology</td>
<td>The study of the interactions between micro-organism and their human hosts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full listing</td>
<td>C522 Veterinary microbiology</td>
<td>The study of the interactions between micro-organisms and their animal hosts.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Which level of JACS codes should be used – generic code, principal subject or full listing – and how many JACS codes?

The level of JACS code used and the number of JACS codes that may be selected is mainly determined by whether the JACS code is to be applied at the academic plan level (Tripos, postgraduate course, continuing education award) or module level (individual paper/enrolment in the course catalogue).

At the level of Academic Plan up to three JACS codes may be selected as the subject(s) of the course. If more than one JACS code is selected then the percentage of time allocated for the subject represented by each code should also be given, for example, Q500 (50%), Q900 (50%). It is preferable to use a single JACS code wherever possible – if more than one JACS
code is used then HESA will present the data by splitting the student load between the subjects. In the example just given, if there are 100 full-time students on the course then HESA will report 50 fte for subject Q500 and 50 fte for subject Q900; not 100 fte studying a combination of the two subjects.

Choose the JACS code or combination of up to three JACS codes that best describe the academic content of the course. It is acceptable to code at the Principal subject level (subject letter plus first digit plus two zeros), but note that HEFCE has requested that from 2009/10 institutions make appropriate use of the full 4-digit JACS coding in all subject areas wherever possible.

The generic codes, which consist of a subject letter and three zeros (for example, B000 ‘Subjects allied to medicine’) can be used to describe a truly interdisciplinary programme. For example, the Natural Sciences Tripos is coded at this level, B000 (33.3%), C000 (33.3%), F000 (33.3%). However subjects covered by generic codes may be excluded by the compilers of league tables who only use data for subject specific codes.

Where courses are taken by students funded by Research Councils then the JACS codes must be coded to JACS3 Principal subject level, that is, using the first two characters of the code (the second digit cannot be 0, so generic codes cannot be used for such courses).

Certain other restrictions apply:

1. Codes A300 (Clinical Medicine) and C842 (Clinical Psychology)/C845 (Clinical Neuropsychology) can only be used for postgraduate taught students if:
   a. The course bears very high costs comparable to the clinical unit of resource, or
   b. A substantial proportion of the staff-teaching time contributed to the course is provided by medically qualified university-funded clinical academic staff who hold honorary contracts with the NHS. This includes general practitioners.
   c. The course is normally taught in a clinical environment.
2. Codes A300 and C842/C845 can only be used for research students if focus of their research is in a clinical environment and the lead supervisor should be a clinical academic.
3. Codes A2XX and A4XX must only be used for pre-clinical and clinical dentists and therefore will not apply for courses at Cambridge.
4. There are special rules for initial teacher training courses (PGCE) in England and Wales for which only a subset of JACS3 codes should be used – see the paragraph headed ‘For initial teacher training students in England and Wales’ within the notes section at: [https://www.hesa.ac.uk/index.php?option=com_studrec&task=show_file&mnl=14051&href=a^_^SBJCA.html](https://www.hesa.ac.uk/index.php?option=com_studrec&task=show_file&mnl=14051&href=a^_^SBJCA.html)

At the level of a Module (individual paper/enrolment in the course catalogue) it is preferable to use as detailed a level of coding as possible. For example, a student may be studying for the Advanced Diploma in Archaeology, which has a JACS code of V400 at the academic plan level. At the module level the student could be taking papers in Archaeological Techniques (V460), Egyptology (V410) and Ancient History (V160).

It is possible to select up to sixteen JACS codes for an individual module, but not advisable. If more than one JACS code is selected then the percentage of time allocated for the subject represented by each code should also be given, for example, V261 Australian history (50%) and V262 New Zealand history (50%).
Please note, the generic codes, which consist of a subject letter and three zeros (for example, B000 ‘Subjects allied to medicine’) cannot be used at the level of a Module.

**Where to find the full listing of JACS3 codes**

The JACS coding system has been revised over time. It is therefore important to use the most up-to-date version on the HESA website only. (Be careful – Internet searches are likely to produce links to older versions.) The current full listing of JACS3 codes can be found at: [http://www.hesa.ac.uk/content/view/1787/281/](http://www.hesa.ac.uk/content/view/1787/281/).

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