



Subject Benchmark Statement

Politics and
International Relations

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About this Statement

This document is a QAA Subject Benchmark Statement for Politics and International Relations that defines what can be expected of a graduate in the subject, in terms of 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 and 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 cross-cutting 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 of Politics and International Relations, 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 Politics and International Relations
- a prospective student thinking about undertaking a course in Politics and International Relations
- an employer, to find out about the knowledge and skills generally expected of Politics and International Relations 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 a Politics and International Relations degree

1.1 Politics and International Relations explore issues of power, governance, participation, decision-making, conflict, and cooperation across the globe. Students graduating in Politics and International Relations develop knowledge and high-level skills that equip them for success in their careers, as active citizens, and as people able to lead change that promotes political, social and economic well-being.

1.2 The study of Politics and International Relations has a long history in societies across the world, becoming part of the curriculum of universities in the United Kingdom from the late nineteenth century. Single honours undergraduate degrees in Politics and International Relations became widely established from the late 1950s and since then, courses have grown in number and matured. This process has been driven by changes in the international and political world and intellectual developments in conceptual, theoretical and methodological approaches. In addition, the evolution of courses reflects developments and innovations in approaches to course design, learning, teaching and assessment, as well as the evolving needs and aspirations of a diverse student body committed to understanding the changing nature of communities, states and people facing challenges such as migration, climate change and social inequalities.

1.3 Today the study of Politics and International Relations is broad in scope, encompassing the examination of relations between human beings and their sociopolitical and ecological environments at local, national and global levels. These studies are characterised by changing political practices, processes and challenges, the scope of which are subject to ongoing scrutiny, contestation and debate as successive generations of scholars reconsider what constitutes Politics and International Relations. This rigour and diversity are pillars of the discipline. The diversity of courses offered by a range of different providers promotes student choice and opportunity and is crucial to the intellectual health and vitality of Politics and International Relations.

1.4 This Subject Benchmark Statement provides both a description of the nature of Politics and International Relations and offers guidance on the standards expected of graduates in terms of their knowledge, understanding, skills and abilities upon completion of a degree. It primarily addresses single honours courses in Politics and International Relations and joint honours courses in which either comprises at least half of the curriculum leading to a degree. It is intended to be a broad framework within which providers can develop courses that respond to the needs of students and which acknowledges the diversity of approaches to Politics and International Relations. Postgraduate taught degrees (FHEQ Level 7 and FQHEIS Level 11) are based on the same core principles but require students to demonstrate higher levels of learning, typically with more substantive content specialism.

Purposes and characteristics of a Politics and International Relations degree

1.5 Courses, through the study of Politics and International Relations, aim to provide students with a broad and structured education via which they develop their knowledge, intellectual capacity and skills.

1.6 The scope of Politics and International Relations is broad, and the boundaries of the discipline are often contested and in movement. Thus, undergraduate degree courses in the field have a variety of names, and may be called Government, International Politics, International Relations, International Studies, Political Studies, Political Science, or some

combination of these. Degree courses with titles such as International Development, Legislative Studies, Peace Studies and War Studies may also include significant amounts of Politics and International Relations content. Names of awards may reflect different nuances adopted in degree courses or the extent to which aspects of the subject are taught in conjunction with one another.

1.7 The study of Politics and International Relations involves the description of phenomena which are analysed or explained using general theories, patterns or generalisations, reflected upon normatively. They are also analysed through methodological and conceptual interventions that do not rely on universalising theories, for example historical analysis and postmodern approaches. Normative theory and political philosophy concern the study of the political values of society and the international order, investigated both historically and analytically. Politics and International Relations involves understanding the cultures (including the political cultures) of other societies. Positive political theory, or explanatory political theory, concerns the study of the general mechanisms and forces which steer the behaviour of individuals and institutions as they interact at domestic, regional and global levels to allocate values and resources. Political science or political analysis use these theoretical perspectives to inform, assess and infer in the interpretation, explanation and forecasting of political events, political behaviour, the workings of political institutions and actors, the role of individuals, political processes and the policy outputs of governance and regulatory structures.

1.8 Politics is concerned with developing a knowledge and understanding of government and society. The interaction of people, ideas and institutions provides the focus to understand how values are allocated and resources distributed and contested in many sites, from the local through to the sectoral, national, regional and global. Thus, analyses of who gets what, when, how, why and where are central, as are the collective decisions and their contestations. Questions of power, justice, order, conflict, legitimacy, accountability, obligation, sovereignty, mediation, security, governance and decision-making are central to politics. Politics encompasses philosophical, theoretical, institutional and issue-based concerns relating to governance.

1.9 International relations shares the concerns of politics, but its focus is reasons for, and implications of, how the world is divided into multiple polities. International relations explores anarchy (the absence of international or global government), security, economy, globalisation and the conflictual and cooperative engagement between states; international relations is increasingly concerned with engagement between states. It is also concerned with engagement below, above and beyond states in global public policy, foreign policy analysis, intergovernmental organisations and non-state actors such as transnational corporations, transnational civil society groups, terrorist organisations and resistance movements. As with the study of Politics, the study of International Relations encompasses philosophical, theoretical, institutional and issue-based concerns relating to governance without government, often at regional and global levels but also locally.

1.10 The study of Politics and International Relations uses a series of research strategies and methods, the range employed varying according to purpose. These may include a range of quantitative and qualitative methods such as textual analysis; historical research; use of contemporary media sources; languages; discourse analysis; structured, semi-structured or unstructured interviews; focus groups; mass surveys; statistical modelling; deductive modelling; observation; ethnography; experimental and quasi-experimental methods; and computer simulation techniques. Politics and international relations also draw upon the knowledge bases of cognate subjects.

Equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI)

1.11 The discipline of Politics and International Relations studies the experiences of people across the globe in both historical and contemporary settings. The discipline is concerned with the analysis of power relations, how power is used to create and reproduce patterns of privilege and in/exclusion, and how these structures and patterns are resisted and challenged. As such, the study of Politics and International Relations explores complex, controversial and contested materials. Even the very definition of the boundaries of the discipline are contested and reflect power relations, as expressed in the observation that 'the personal is political'.

1.12 Politics and International Relations educators engage and support students in their development as critical and self-reflective learners. Students learn to question and subject to rigorous analysis not only the diverse world in which they live, but also the concepts and theories constructed to understand this. Politics and International Relations developed in the contexts of imperialism, colonialism, patriarchy, heteronormativity, ableism and racism. The discipline actively shaped these forces and was shaped by them. Students are supported in rigorous engagement with this history to develop a critical and evidence-based understanding of how the discipline is shaped and how knowledge is produced. This requires engagement with the work of knowledge-producers in all parts of the world, including those whose ideas and experiences have historically been marginalised or excluded from the discipline.

1.13 The discipline is committed to the creation of inclusive learning experiences that value diversity and promote equality. Courses are designed to create learning communities that are accessible to all students (including those from less privileged and marginalised backgrounds) and in which they feel safe, welcome, able to participate and excel. Course teams work to ensure that the curriculum takes account of the breadth of human experience and that teaching, learning and assessment support all students to learn and to demonstrate that learning. Course teams evaluate student experiences and outcomes, and work to address gaps in access, attainment and awarding. This requires working in partnership with students and transforming the academic profession through the adoption of policies and practices that promote equality and diversity.

Accessibility

1.14 Politics and International Relations courses are designed to be accessible, inclusive and meet the diverse needs of all students. Politics and International Relations course teams work proactively to improve structures, processes and practices to ensure that attainment and experiences gaps relating to accessibility are progressively reduced. This includes consideration relating to the design and delivery of learning and teaching, assessment and feedback, access to learning resources and academic support. Course teams put in place additional reasonable adjustments to support the needs of all students.

Sustainability

1.15 The study of sustainability and sustainable development is integral to the way in which Politics and International Relations addresses and examines the interconnected nature of global affairs. QAA and Advance HE's [Education for Sustainable Development Guidance](#), 2021, defines sustainable development as 'an aspirational ongoing process of addressing social, environmental and economic concerns to create a better world' and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) as 'the process of creating curriculum structures and subject-relevant content to support and enact sustainable development'. ESD adopts a holistic approach to interrelated questions of climate change, social justice and global inequality across the curriculum. This may include critically analysing global

discourses of sustainable development, recognising the value of local and indigenous knowledge, and the importance and relevance of alternative models.

1.16 ESD offers an opportunity to reflect on and challenge established approaches to Politics and International Relations. It should be integrated throughout degree courses and not simply confined to specialist modules. For example, reviewing the curriculum and teaching delivery using the QAA guidance can encourage reflection on how best to embed ESD so that it draws on a broad range of global literatures, topics and perspectives. The [United Nations Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs) can help to frame the Politics and International Relations curriculum in a way that reflects the rich and diverse context of ESD.

1.17 A rich range of teaching methods and pedagogical approaches, opening up opportunities beyond the classroom through problem-based learning, critical thinking, collaboration, self-reflection, simulations and crisis games, field trips and placements, can be used for the delivery of ESD. Embedding active and meaningful learning and assessment opportunities within the curriculum, such as portfolios, participatory budgeting, speeches, and vlogs, encourages students to understand different viewpoints and acquire the skills to be engaged members of the community. Establishing learning environments that encourage interdisciplinarity and focus on authentic approaches enables students to see their own experiences and challenges reflected throughout their studies. This includes developing in students a commitment to active community engagement, and the key skills and abilities which allow them to challenge sites of injustice, rethink established power structures and explore diverse ways of interpreting orthodox thinking.

1.18 ESD highlights the contemporary relevance of studying Politics and International Relations in a world of challenges. These consider the implications of climate breakdown and interconnected questions of economic and social well-being, gender, race and other forms of inequality, thereby developing critical insight into established narratives and hierarchies of power. Technology, social media, cyber warfare and misinformation shape the conduct of both national and international politics today. Students need the skillsets to decode, interpret and reject, when necessary, the multitude of narratives and propaganda filling social media. Understanding how knowledge is managed, contested and evolving is therefore a key part of ESD within Politics and International Relations degrees.

Enterprise and entrepreneurship education

1.19 [Enterprise and entrepreneurship education](#) (EED) develops behaviours, attributes and competencies supporting students to contribute to society as active and enterprising citizens and pursue successful graduate careers. EED is a key component of Politics and International Relations degree courses. All courses, through exploring and evaluating ever-changing political and international systems, practices, processes and theories, encourage students to develop an inquisitive, analytical and reflective mindset. Whether embedded at course or modular level, Politics and International Relation courses cultivate attributes that include open-mindedness, curiosity, adaptability, awareness of political and social institutions, domestic and global conflict and cooperation, ethical and sustainable thinking, resilience and self-efficacy.

1.20 Through their studies, Politics and International Relations students develop EED competencies such as digital literacy; research methods and data analysis skills; critical evaluation skills; critical thinking skills, leadership and decision-making skills; sensitivity to complexity and uncertainty; awareness of global citizenship and the ability to weigh up and summarise often disputed political positions. Students also develop competencies in influencing political and social agendas, negotiating, and communicating research findings, as well as the confidence to tackle contemporary sociopolitical issues with bold, innovative evidence-based solutions working within and across disciplines.

1.21 EED can be promoted in various ways within Politics and International Relations courses. Opportunities can include internships or placements (which may be short term, semester, or year long), work experience weeks with external organisations, or through work-like learning and research experiences embedded into university courses. Equally, it can be promoted at the modular level at any stage of the course via experiential learning, simulations, role-play, practical problem-solving activities or group project work which may or may not be set and/or assessed by a community partner or external stakeholders. In addition, EED attributes, competencies and behaviours can also be developed through modules that focus on research method skills as well as through modules that explore the application of subject knowledge and skills in the workplace. Assessment tasks, such as group or individual presentations, reflective essays on work placements or work-like experiences, policy briefs and campaign report writing, may also support and encourage EED attributes, behaviours and competencies.

1.22 Politics and International Relations courses help students recognise, reflect on and communicate the value of entrepreneurial behaviours, attributes and competencies as they progress through and beyond university. The courses produce graduates with a global awareness and reflective mindset that equips them to succeed in a wide variety of career pathways. These can include policy-oriented work - within domestic and international NGO, charity and other third sector organisations; enterprise work - within social sciences-driven start-ups or private sector organisations; and working within institutional settings such as the civil service or diplomatic service, educational institutions, media and political institutions at the national and local levels - including as political office holders. Politics and International Relations students are well equipped to progress into managerial/leadership or advisory roles in a range of careers not directly related to the discipline, for example, in human resources, health or marketing.

2 Distinctive features of a Politics and International Relations degree

Design

2.1 Politics and International Relations courses are designed to provide structured pathways of learning. These support students to develop the knowledge, understanding and skills required to achieve an honours degree and to use their learning to make a positive impact in their own lives and in that of the communities in which they live. The design of each course will outline the learning outcomes for the course, and the formats of learning, teaching and assessment, including content, that is identified as core to the attainment of course learning outcomes.

2.2 Politics and International Relations are dynamic areas of study, and changes in both the political world and the intellectual evolution of the discipline require that curriculum and learning resources are regularly reviewed and updated. In doing so, educators in Politics and International Relations engage with students as partners and co-producers to identify how learning can be developed and enhanced. This process is further strengthened through engagement with pedagogic research undertaken within Politics and International Relations and the wider field of research relating to higher education.

Progression

2.3 Over the course of a degree with honours (FHEQ Level 6; FQHEIS Level 10) a Politics and International Relations student will progress from one level of study to the next, in line with the regulations and processes for each provider. At each level, the attainment of knowledge, expertise and experience builds 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 Politics and International Relations or a related 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 learning outcomes relating to Politics and International Relations and will add more according to their other subjects. Additionally, students explore the interface between different disciplines, creating further opportunities for interdisciplinary study.

2.5 Students undertaking an honours degree may exit earlier and be eligible for a Certificate of Higher Education, a Diploma of Higher Education, or other awards depending upon the levels of study completed to a satisfactory standard. At providers in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, the standard duration of a full-time undergraduate course is three years. Scottish bachelor's degrees with honours are typically designed to include four years of study, which relates to the structure of Scottish primary and secondary education. Students following part-time routes accumulate academic credit in proportion to the intensity of their study, and their total study time and credit value would be the equivalent of the three or four-year degree.

Flexibility

2.6 Higher education providers structure the courses they offer to support students' learning and attainment. Depending on the educational mission of the provider, this may include opportunities to engage in learning on campus, online, and/or through hybrid learning, arranged in terms, by semester, year-long, block, or other formats. These may be offered in full and/or part-time modes of study and credit may be accumulated through the completion of micro-credentials or short accredited learning.

Partnership

2.7 Degrees in Politics and International Relations may provide students with the opportunity to undertake study with partner organisations. In some cases, these will be political, governmental, think-tanks or other organisations concerned with public affairs at local, regional, national or international levels. In other cases, they may be commercial, voluntary sector or other public bodies not directly involved in political or international affairs. The purpose of such learning activities will be defined by providers but may typically include supporting students in the development of their subject knowledge, intellectual abilities, and/or transferable skills through experiential learning. They may be structured in a variety of formats such as short placements, internships and sandwich years.

2.8 Courses may also be enriched through engagement by partner organisations in learning, teaching and assessment. This can involve a wide range of activities. For example, representatives from partner organisations might support the development of curriculum or learning resources in specialist areas. They may also take part in teaching as guest speakers or participants in simulations and seminars or contribute to the process of assessment in formats such as live briefs.

2.9 Higher education providers may also offer courses in Politics and International Relations in partnership with other higher education providers. These may include institutions within the UK and international higher education providers. Some relationships may include provision for students to study the whole of their course at the partner institutions, while other arrangements may be focused on the provision of part of a course or over a shorter time period.

Monitoring and review

2.10 Degree-awarding bodies, and their collaborative partnerships, routinely collect and analyse information and undertake periodic course review according to their own needs. Considering the student voice will form part of this. 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.

2.11 Externality is an essential component of the quality assurance system in the UK. 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.

2.12 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. 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, can play an important role in supporting external examiners in advising on whether threshold standards are being met in a specific subject area.

3 Content, structure and delivery

3.1 Courses are designed to support students to develop their knowledge and understanding of Politics and International Relations and develop their skills and abilities.

Content and skills

3.2 Students taking Politics and International Relations courses will study both conceptual and empirical aspects of the discipline. The scope and breadth of each course will vary, but students will typically develop and demonstrate a knowledge and understanding of a number of the following subfields:

- area studies focusing on politics and government in geographic regions and countries (including the UK)
- colonial, postcolonial and decolonial politics
- comparative politics
- conflict, post-conflict, violence, international security and war studies
- feminism, gender studies, queer studies and intersectional approaches
- government, governance, public policy and political institutions
- international aid and development
- international relations theory and practice
- parties, elections and public opinion
- political concepts and ideologies
- political economy and international political economy
- political identities
- political theory and ethics
- public policy and administration
- research methods, methodologies and approaches to political analysis
- social movement, protest and resistance
- sustainability and environmental politics.

3.3 Politics and International Relations courses are designed to develop students' intellectual capacity and graduate skills. The skills developed in each course will be outlined by providers, but may include the ability to:

- collaborate with others to achieve common goals through, for example, group work, group projects and group presentations
- communicate through a variety of context appropriate formats for a variety of audiences
- construct reasoned argument, synthesising relevant information and exercising critical judgement
- critically reflect on their own learning
- identify, investigate and solve problems through lateral thinking to develop solutions, thinking creatively in both practical and theoretical contexts
- demonstrate appropriate behaviour and academic practice
- evaluate and apply approaches to collecting, analysing and presenting political data
- manage their own learning and projects effectively in a timely and critical fashion while working individually and collectively
- negotiate and influence
- organise and deploy evidence, data and information from a variety of secondary and primary sources
- understand and apply the principles of ethical research
- understand and use constructive feedback

- select and use appropriate communication, information and data analysis aids and software
- work and engage in multicultural, diverse environments domestically and globally.

Learning and teaching

3.4 Learning and teaching can take place in different formats, including, but not limited to, seminar groups, workshops, computer labs, with groups of varying sizes, and with different aims and objectives. With the integration of digital and online technologies into every aspect of life, all learning and teaching can take place through in-person or online formats, or a combination of these. The appropriate combination of these will develop over time, reflecting developments in pedagogy, course design and the needs of students.

3.5 Exposing students to a diverse range of learning environments, methods, activities, content, skills and understandings supports students in developing their own approach to critical evaluation in Politics and International Relations. It also enhances their ability to develop their own skills and knowledge base. This can be supported by emphasising diversity through modes of delivery and types of learning and providing avenues for students to express themselves and engage with the subject.

3.6 Lectures can range from the more traditional style of delivery with a focus on presenting content to more interactive styles, including quizzes, pauses for questions from the students, and small group discussion, as well as 'flipped' lectures where the students access the lecture content online first, and then use the contact time to develop their learning through class discussion, activities and reflection. The lecture format can be used to inspire students and give them direct entry into a range of information, ideas and interpretations which students may never, or only very rarely, be able to gather for themselves. Lectures can act as a launch pad into the heart of new subject matter. They enable students to develop their skills in comprehension, selective note taking and reflection, and can also have an important social function as a collective and shared experience.

3.7 Small group learning environments, such as workshops and seminars, can provide more scope for student-centred interaction. The structure of activities can provide space for students to explore subjects through presentations, debates, conversations, arguments and other activities. They can be designed to support students' critical engagement and understanding rather than the acquisition of knowledge per se and be structured in such a way as to maximise effective student participation. Small group work can support students in developing their ability to marshal evidence, use the language of the discipline, summarise and convey arguments, as well as to think quickly on their feet to communicate articulately and persuasively with others, and to recognise the value of close collaboration with peers. Activities may be preceded by a set of preparatory tasks, and can include active problem-solving exercises, roleplays, crisis-games and live-scenarios, semi/structured debates, pedagogical games, writing tasks and primary source analysis, peer-tutoring and student-led teaching, presentations and workshops.

3.8 Small group teaching provides students with the opportunity to receive critical and constructive comments on their understanding and progress as an integral part of learning and teaching. Interactions with academic staff through regular teaching arrangements, feedback on work and occasional meetings are essential in helping students clarify areas of understanding and gain a better reflective awareness of their own performance as well as of the content of the course.

3.9 Learning may take place in practice environments, through placements, internships and other formats. Learning opportunities may be provided in collaboration with external organisations and involve students in activities in workplace, community and other external

settings, which may be accessed in-person or virtually. These can both provide students with opportunities to extend their knowledge and understanding of subject content and develop their skills. Such learning experiences will be most beneficial where there is a clear alignment and integration with other aspects of the course.

3.10 Independent learning opportunities, including directed, guided and extracurricular activities, form an important part of a student's learning experience. Through their development as independent learners, students can demonstrate their ability to take initiative and to manage themselves and their work while deepening their understanding in areas of particular interest. Guidance and opportunities can be provided to support the student's independent learning through structured and semi-structured learning activities.

3.11 Students should be provided with access to a wide learning environment through engagement with relevant published literature, digital technologies including associated software and computing resources, appropriate primary sources, intellectual artefacts, archives and materials. The scope of material available can include, but is not limited to, traditional monographs, articles and edited collections, blogs, videos/vlogs, debates, think pieces, reports, speeches, artefacts, visual media, performances, art, official documentation (both historical and contemporary), oral histories, diaries and ethnographic sources, and raw and processed statistical data. Students should be exposed to and engage with a wide range of sources and be supported to develop the skills to critically evaluate the value and significance of these in different contexts.

Assessment

3.12 Assessment and feedback are central to successful course design and delivery. Assessments should aim to empower students to critically reflect on their own learning and abilities. They are one of the central means through which students most deeply engage in their studies and learn about the subject of Politics and International Relations, as well as allowing them to demonstrate their understanding, analyses, synthesis and insights and to show they have met the learning outcomes of their courses. In addition, assessments can focus on the development of certain skills and competences related to personal development, employability and citizenship, while the feedback students receive on assessments is central to their learning, development and improved performance in subsequent tasks.

3.13 In the discipline of Politics and International Relations, a variety of assessments are employed. Diversity and plurality in assessment is vital as it provides the student an opportunity to engage in and demonstrate a full range of abilities. Diverse educational backgrounds and formal qualifications of students embarking on degree-level study mean that courses should provide all students with opportunities to show what they have learnt and what they can do.

3.14 While all forms of assessment encourage students to engage with the subject, some assessments focus on the development of key competencies, whereas others allow students to explore themes or regions which concern them personally and to bring their knowledge, understanding and experiences to the fore. For example:

- assessments which enable students to demonstrate their understanding of the subject and ability to develop critical analyses, such as essays, examinations (both seen and unseen), podcasts, poster presentations and book reviews
- authentic assessments which model transferable skills that reflect possible careers related to Politics and International Relations, thus developing their sense of self-efficacy, such as briefing papers, diplomatic telegrams, speeches, policy reports and simulations

- assessments which enable students to explore areas of personal interest, whether by geographical region, actor or theme, such as blog posts, case studies and reports
- assessments which encourage students to build their capacity for independent research, thinking and problem solving, from the design of an independent research project, selection of an appropriate methodology, and writing up of results, such as dissertations, research reports and extended essays
- assessments which develop students' ability to select, manage, investigate, evaluate and present their findings of a variety of forms of information, such as statistical analyses and reports
- assessments which encourage students to develop and improve their communication skills, such as presentations, posters and video film recordings or vlogs and other multimedia forms of presentation
- assessments which encourage students to critically reflect on their knowledge, skills and personal development, which are aimed at enhancing their employability, such as reflective reports or diaries relating to forms of experiential learning such as placements or simulations.

3.15 Feedback is an essential part of assessment, to help students evaluate their progress and identify how they can improve further. Students should receive constructive feedback throughout their studies, with particular attention paid to building skills of self-reflection and self-criticality. Given the contested nature of many core concepts of Politics and International Relations, an appreciation of the multiple approaches that may be legitimately taken to any given question should be acknowledged and discussed. Feedback is provided through various mechanisms, including written and spoken comments, group discussion and technology-aided systems, peer and self-assessment.

3.16 Feedback should be both formative as well as summative. It should focus on supporting students to understand how to improve their work (feedforward), both in terms of the assignment's specifics as well as their wider skill set. The summative feedback evaluates how the student is doing, providing the student with a judgement on their abilities in line with the stated learning outcomes. Formative assessment enables students to see how well they are progressing and gives them feedback to develop further. Effective formative assessment and feedback occurs early, during and after the assessment process to help the student develop.

4 Benchmark standards

Introduction

4.1 This Subject Benchmark Statement sets out the minimum threshold standards that a student will have demonstrated when they are awarded an honours degree in Politics or International Relations. Demonstrating these standards over time will show that a student has achieved the range of knowledge, understanding and skills expected of graduates in these subjects.

4.2 Most 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 attainment 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.

Knowledge and understanding

4.3 On graduating with an honours degree in Politics and International Relations, students at the threshold level should be able to:

- demonstrate a familiarity and engage critically with the concept of power, including:
 - the contested nature of knowledge and understanding
 - approaches to the study of politics or international relations
 - a range of key concepts, theories and methods employed in the study of Politics or International Relations
 - the strengths and weaknesses of these approaches
- engage critically with Politics and International Relations, including:
 - the normative and positive foundations of political ideas
 - the vocabulary of political debate
 - the structure and operation of different political and international systems
 - the social, economic, historical and cultural contexts of political behaviour
 - the factors accounting for political change
- apply different concepts, theories and methods to the analysis of political ideas, actors, institutions and behaviour
- examine and evaluate different interpretations of political issues and events.

Discipline-specific skills

4.4 On graduating with an honours degree in Politics and International Relations, students at the threshold level should be able to:

- identify a suitable a topic for research
- develop and evaluate research questions and hypotheses
- assess and analyse the ethical implications of research and enquiry
- identify, interpret and apply appropriate methods of data collection and analysis (qualitative and/or quantitative)
- systematically search for and identify the most relevant literature (books, reviews, research papers and articles) for a research topic

- review and critically assess the literature on a topic in order to engage with contending debates, concepts and empirical findings in the field
- plan, execute and present an independent piece of work, in which qualities such as time management, problem solving and independence are evident, as well as interpretation and evaluation of the quality of evidence
- demonstrate an awareness of relevant theoretical and empirical perspectives and the ability to identify and apply them.

Cognitive abilities and skills

4.5 On graduating with an honours degree in Politics and International Relations, students at the threshold level should be able to:

- effectively communicate through a variety of formats, and to different audiences
- complete tasks efficiently
- work independently and as part of a team
- evaluate the accuracy and reliability of sources, and use that knowledge to appropriately discuss and apply evidence
- create and produce information and media in an innovative manner
- recognise and reflect on feedback to critically analyse and improve their work
- interpret, analyse, apply and present numerical, textual and other forms of data.

5 List of references and further resources

QAA and Advance HE (2021) Education for Sustainable Development
www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code/education-for-sustainable-development

QAA (2018) Enterprise and Entrepreneurship Education
www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code/enterprise-and-entrepreneurship-education

United Nations, Sustainable Development Goals
www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment

6 Membership of the Advisory Groups for the Subject Benchmark Statement for Politics and International Relations

Membership of the Advisory Group for the Subject Benchmark Statement for Politics and International Relations (2023)

Professor John Craig (Chair)	Kingston University
Dr Ross Bellaby (Deputy Chair)	University of Sheffield
Lucy Adams	Leeds Beckett University
Professor Alasdair Blair	De Montfort University
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Steven Curtis	London Metropolitan University
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Professor Caroline Kennedy-Pipe	Loughborough University
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Dr Jonathan Parker	University of Keele
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Membership of the review group for the Subject Benchmark Statement for Politics and International Relations (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 Politics and International Relations from 2015.

Dr Lisa Harrison	University of the West of England, Bristol
Dr Andy Smith	QAA

Membership of the review group for the Subject Benchmark Statement for Politics and International Relations (2015)

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

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Membership of the original benchmarking group for Politics and International Relations (2000)

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Professor D Judge	University of Strathclyde
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Professor C Thomas	Southampton University
Dr U Vogel	University of Manchester
P Welch	University of Wolverhampton
Dr P Wingrove	University of Greenwich

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