



Subject Benchmark Statement: Politics and International Relations



The Basics

This document is a summary of the Subject Benchmark Statement for Politics and International Relations. It is specifically designed to provide a short and accessible overview of the main statement for students, employers and academics. It is not intended to replace or alter the Subject Benchmark Statement, which should be referred to in the design and approval of courses and when any further detail is required.

Subject Benchmark Statements are an established part of the quality assurance arrangements in UK higher education as non-regulatory, sector-owned reference points, developed and written by academic communities on behalf of their subject. Subject Benchmark Statements describe the nature of study and the benchmark academic standards expected of graduates in specific subject areas, and in respect of particular qualifications. They provide a picture of what graduates in a particular subject might reasonably be expected to know, do and understand at the end of their course or programme.

Subject Benchmark Statements are presented in four sections. The first section outlines the contextual information - providing the operational landscape, and boundaries, of subject discipline. This includes consideration of the ways in which the discipline addresses wider social goals specifically in relation to: equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI); the requirements of disabled students; education for sustainable development (ESD); and, enterprise and entrepreneurship.

Section 2 covers distinctive features of the course, including curriculum design, partnership arrangements, flexibility of delivery, progression and ongoing monitoring processes. The third section explains any features relevant to teaching, learning and assessment activities for the subject. The final section describes the benchmark standards of achievement reached by all graduates with a bachelor's degree with honours in the subject, with some subjects also including achievement at master's level.



Why study a degree in Politics and International Relations?

As a subject discipline, politics and international relations explores issues of power, governance, participation, decision-making, conflict and cooperation across the globe. Broad in scope, politics and international relations encompasses the examination of relations between human beings and their sociopolitical and ecological environments at local, national and global levels. Studying this discipline is characterised by understanding and critiquing changing political practices, processes and challenges, and providing ongoing scrutiny, contestation and debate about what constitutes politics and international relations.

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. Politics is concerned with developing a knowledge and understanding of government and society, including the interaction of people, ideas and institutions, and providing an understanding of how values are allocated and resources distributed across many contested sites – from the local through to the sectoral, national, regional and global.

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.

International relations share the concerns of politics, but it focuses on 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. 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.

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.



What are the main teaching and learning approaches in politics and international relations?

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, and students will develop and demonstrate a knowledge and understanding across a wide number of sub-fields – from area studies to postcolonialism, conflict and security, gender and queer studies, governance, party politics and elections, political economy, development, international relations theory and practice, concepts and ideologies, normative theory and ethics, sustainability, and social movement and practices.

Students will develop their intellectual capacity and graduate skills through a range of activities and methods. Learning and teaching can take place in different formats, including but not limited to seminar groups, workshops and 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.

Students will work both independently and collaboratively to explore the discipline content and to develop their own skill set. This can include developing their skills in communication, argumentation, information and data synthesis and critical judgement, problem solving, and the appropriate use of communication, information and data analysis aids and software.



Teaching, learning and assessment styles in the discipline

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 with an opportunity to engage in and demonstrate a full range of abilities. 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. This can include assessments to demonstrate knowledge, understanding and the ability to critically analyse – such as essays, examinations (both seen and unseen), podcasts, poster presentations and book reviews. It can also include authentic assessments, promoting transferable skills to reflect possible careers related to politics and international relations – such as briefing papers, diplomatic telegrams, speeches, policy reports and simulations. The assessments can promote students exploring areas of personal interest, whether by geographical region, actor or theme – such as blog posts, case studies and reports – as well as encouraging students to build their capacity for independent research, thinking and problem solving. This can develop students' ability to select, manage, investigate, evaluate and present their findings in a variety of forms of information – such as statistical analyses, reports and independent research projects. Encouraging students to develop and improve their communication skills, by using presentations, posters and video film recordings or vlogs and other multimedia forms of presentation, can further develop their wider skill set.



How are students assessed?

The assessment of politics and international relations courses includes a mix of methods that are accessible to disabled students and students from varying educational and cultural backgrounds within different learning situations.

Where individual students may be disadvantaged by particular assessment methods, adjustments to those assessments are considered in conjunction with the provider's procedures, while ensuring fairness across the full cohort. The procedures used for assessment cover the subject knowledge (breadth and depth), abilities and skills developed through the degree course, and assessment design is aimed at alignment with teaching and learning approaches and desired learning outcomes.



Benchmark Standards

The minimum threshold standards that a student will have demonstrated when they are awarded an honours degree in Politics and International Relations are outlined on **pages 15-16** of the full Subject Benchmark Statement. 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.

The full statement was developed by subject experts drawn from across the sector. Details of the Advisory Group can be found on **page 18** of the full Statement.

Read the full Subject Benchmark Statement

The [full Subject Benchmark Statement](#) is available on the QAA website.



Subject Benchmark Statements are published in QAA's capacity as an expert quality body on behalf of the higher education sector.

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