

# Subject Benchmark Statement

## Politics and International Relations

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## How can I use this document?

This document is a 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.

You may want to read this document if you are:

- involved in the design, delivery and review of programmes of study in politics and international relations, or related subjects
- a prospective student thinking about studying politics and international relations, or a current student of the subject, to find out what may be involved
- an employer, to find out about the knowledge and skills generally expected of a graduate in politics and international relations.

Explanations of unfamiliar terms used in this Subject Benchmark Statement can be found in the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education's (QAA's) glossary.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The QAA glossary is available at: [www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us/glossary](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us/glossary).

## About Subject Benchmark Statements

Subject Benchmark Statements form part of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code) which sets out the Expectations that all providers of UK higher education reviewed by QAA are required to meet.<sup>2</sup> They are a component of Part A: Setting and Maintaining Academic Standards, which includes the Expectation that higher education providers 'consider and take account of relevant Subject Benchmark Statements' in order to secure threshold academic standards.<sup>3</sup>

Subject Benchmark Statements describe the nature of study and the 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 programme of study.

Subject Benchmark Statements are used as reference points in the design, delivery and review of academic programmes. They provide general guidance for articulating the learning outcomes associated with the programme, but are not intended to represent a national curriculum in a subject or to prescribe set approaches to teaching, learning or assessment. Instead, they allow for flexibility and innovation in programme design within a framework agreed by the subject community. Further guidance about programme design, development and approval, learning and teaching, assessment of students, and programme monitoring and review is available in Part B: Assuring and Enhancing Academic Quality of the Quality Code in the following Chapters:<sup>4</sup>

- *Chapter B1: Programme Design, Development and Approval*
- *Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching*
- *Chapter B6: Assessment of Students and the Recognition of Prior Learning*
- *Chapter B8: Programme Monitoring and Review.*

For some subject areas, higher education providers may need to consider other reference points in addition to the Subject Benchmark Statement in designing, delivering and reviewing programmes. These may include requirements set out by professional, statutory and regulatory bodies, national occupational standards and industry or employer expectations. In such cases, the Subject Benchmark Statement may provide additional guidance around academic standards not covered by these requirements.<sup>5</sup> The relationship between academic and professional or regulatory requirements is made clear within individual Statements, but it is the responsibility of individual higher education providers to decide how they use this information. The responsibility for academic standards remains with the higher education provider who awards the degree.

Subject Benchmark Statements are written and maintained by subject specialists drawn from and acting on behalf of the subject community. The process is facilitated by QAA. In order to ensure the continuing currency of Subject Benchmark Statements, QAA initiates regular reviews of their content, five years after first publication, and every seven years subsequently.

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<sup>2</sup> The Quality Code, available at [www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code), aligns with the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*, available at: [www.engae.eu/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/ESG\\_3edition-2.pdf](http://www.engae.eu/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/ESG_3edition-2.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> Part A: Setting and Maintaining Academic Standards, available at: [www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code/quality-code-part-a](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code/quality-code-part-a).

<sup>4</sup> Individual Chapters are available at: [www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code/quality-code-part-b](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code/quality-code-part-b).

<sup>5</sup> See further Part A: Setting and Maintaining Academic Standards, available at: [www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code/quality-code-part-a](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code/quality-code-part-a).

## Relationship to legislation

Higher education providers are responsible for meeting the requirements of legislation and any other regulatory requirements placed upon them, for example, by funding bodies. The Quality Code does not interpret legislation nor does it incorporate statutory or regulatory requirements. Sources of information about other requirements and examples of guidance and good practice are signposted within the Subject Benchmark Statement where appropriate. Higher education providers are responsible for how they use these resources.<sup>6</sup>

## Equality and diversity

The Quality Code embeds consideration of equality and diversity matters throughout. Promoting equality involves treating everyone with equal dignity and worth, while also raising aspirations and supporting achievement for people with diverse requirements, entitlements and backgrounds. An inclusive environment for learning anticipates the varied requirements of learners, and aims to ensure that all students have equal access to educational opportunities. Higher education providers, staff and students all have a role in, and responsibility for, promoting equality.

Equality of opportunity involves enabling access for people who have differing individual requirements as well as eliminating arbitrary and unnecessary barriers to learning. In addition, disabled students and non-disabled students are offered learning opportunities that are equally accessible to them, by means of inclusive design wherever possible and by means of reasonable individual adjustments wherever necessary.

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<sup>6</sup> See further the *UK Quality Code for Higher Education: General Introduction*, available at: [www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=181](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=181).

## About this Subject Benchmark Statement

This Subject Benchmark Statement refers to bachelor's degrees with honours in politics and international relations.<sup>7</sup>

This version of the Statement forms its third edition, following initial publication in 2000 and review and revision in 2007.<sup>8</sup>

### Note on alignment with higher education sector coding systems

Programmes of study which use this Subject Benchmark Statement as a reference point are generally classified under the following codes in the Joint Academic Coding System (JACS):<sup>9</sup>

L200 (Politics); L210 (Political theories); L211 (Liberalism); L212 (Conservatism); L213 (Socialism); L214 (Nationalism); L215 (Fascism); L216 (Feminism); L217 (Environmentalism); L218 (Anarchism); L220 (Political systems); L221 (Autocracy); L222 (Democracy); L223 (Plutocracy); L224 (Oligarchy); L230 (UK government/parliamentary studies); L231 (Public administration); L232 (UK constitutional studies); L240 (International politics); L241 (European Union politics); L242 (Commonwealth politics); L243 (Politics of a specific country/region); L244 (International constitutional studies); L250 (International relations); L251 (Strategic studies); L252 (War & peace studies); L253 (International criminology); L260 (Comparative politics).

### Summary of changes from the previous Subject Benchmark Statement (2007)

The key changes made by the review group in this third edition of the Statement include:

- the amendment of paragraph 3.6 about the range of subjects and approaches covered in politics and international relations degrees
- the expansion of paragraphs 5.1-5.5 on teaching, learning and assessment to include more examples
- the amendment of paragraph 5.10 covering different forms of assessment testing different skills and abilities
- the addition of section paragraph 5.11 on feedback.

Additional examples have been included throughout this Subject Benchmark Statement, where appropriate; these exemplars should be treated as such and not accorded any other status.

These changes have been made to improve the document and provide more detail, and to reflect the general developments within the subject since the last review of the Subject Benchmark Statement (which took place in 2007). The 2014 review group has sought to retain the essence of the Subject Benchmark Statement for politics and international

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<sup>7</sup> Bachelor's degrees are at level 6 in *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (2008) and level 10 in the *Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework* (2001), and master's degrees are at level 7 and level 11 respectively, available at: [www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code/qualifications](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code/qualifications).

<sup>8</sup> Further information is available in the *Recognition Scheme for Subject Benchmark Statements*, available at: [www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=190](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=190).

<sup>9</sup> Further information about JACS is available at: [www.hesa.ac.uk/content/view/1776/649](http://www.hesa.ac.uk/content/view/1776/649).

relations, as colleagues are generally of the opinion that it remains fit for purpose. Changes are therefore minimalistic, as opposed to constituting a major overhaul.

The subject is developing in a number of ways, not least by a focus upon differing pedagogical approaches and also by the more extensive use of technological advancements to teach politics and international relations. Both politics and international relations remain popular subjects at undergraduate level, and graduate employability levels remain high. In addition to highlighting the subject matter and programme content associated with a degree in politics and international relations, the Subject Benchmark Statement reflects the greater emphasis upon employability and also the focus upon the internationalisation of the curriculum. In addition the personal and transferable skills associated with the acquisition of a degree in politics and international relations are accentuated within the Subject Benchmark Statement.

# 1 Introduction

1.1 It is not the intention of this Subject Benchmark Statement to set out a national curriculum for honours degrees in politics and international relations. Rather, it provides a description of the nature of the subject area and offers guidance on the standards expected of honours graduates in the area in terms of their abilities and skills upon completion of the degree.

1.2 The primary uses of this Subject Benchmark Statement are as a reference point in the design, delivery and review of academic programmes, and where appropriate as a resource for professional bodies in their accreditation and review of programmes relating to professional competence.

1.3 The Subject Benchmark Statement may also be of value to students and employers seeking information about higher education provision and levels of attainment expected of graduates.

1.4 The Subject Benchmark Statement covers six key areas.

- Defining principles: acknowledges the breadth and diversity of politics and international relations.
- Nature and extent of politics and international relations: describes the nature of the subject area and undergraduate programmes falling within its boundaries.
- Subject knowledge and understanding: outlines the areas of core knowledge and understanding expected of a graduate in the subject area and the overall aims of degree programmes relevant to the Subject Benchmark Statement.
- Subject-specific and generic skills: provides an indication of the attributes and capabilities expected of graduates in the subject area.
- Teaching, learning and assessment: outlines different forms of teaching, learning and assessment appropriate to degrees in politics and international relations.
- Benchmark standards: lists the standard expected of an honours graduate in the subject area in terms of threshold and typical levels of attainment.

1.5 The Subject Benchmark Statement addresses single honours programmes in politics, international relations, or both, and joint honours programmes in which politics and/or international relations comprise at least half of the curriculum leading to a degree. The study of one discipline (that is politics or international relations) can help with the study of the other and vice versa. The Statement is intended to provide a broad framework within which providers can develop programmes that respond to the needs of students and which, at the same time, acknowledges the diversity of approaches to politics and international relations.

1.6 As emphasised in paragraphs 2.1 to 2.3 and 4.1, it is not the purpose of the Subject Benchmark Statement to impose a set of rigid conditions on higher education providers that stifle intellectual diversity or innovation in programme development and the design of learning experiences. It is recognised that there is a tension between the idea of a common programme of provision and the individual research focuses that departments attempt to highlight. It is intended that this Subject Benchmark Statement will make a contribution to defining 'graduateness' in politics and international relations.



## 2 Defining principles

2.1 The scope of politics and international relations is broad, the boundaries often being contested or in movement. Thus, departments teaching the subject in higher education have a variety of names. They may be called departments of government, politics, political science, international politics, international relations, international studies or some combination of these. Different names may reflect different nuances adopted in degree programmes or the extent to which both aspects of the subject are taught in conjunction with one another.

2.2 Politics and international relations reach out to other subjects such as anthropology, cultural studies, economics, sociology, geography, history, languages, law, literature, international development, philosophy, marketing and media. Thus, programmes in departments of politics and international relations or international studies often include other social sciences and humanities aspects. There are many examples of joint programmes. While many programmes are primarily social-scientific in approach, some are on the cusp of the social sciences and humanities. There is a discernible thrust towards what might be called the 'internationalisation' of programmes, and a related stress on interdisciplinarity. Departments play to their specialist strengths, which may be expressed in 'traditional', self-contained, programmes.

2.3 Politics and international relations may be taught in a variety of academic settings and utilise a variety of research methodologies. Examples, of which there may be many more, include international development, economics, geography, media and marketing, public administration taught in schools of management under the title of public sector management, political philosophy in philosophy departments, and the history of political thought in history departments. Degree programmes in peace or war studies, or in conflict studies, cut across conventional knowledge-based categories and their distinctive approaches to understanding; skills may need to draw on a wider range of materials and resources, including other Subject Benchmark Statements, to capture fully the specific character of their particular degree programmes. Area studies, which has its own Subject Benchmark Statement, is also a significant route through which students engage with politics and international relations.

2.4 The labelling of approaches within politics and international relations and the scope of associated areas of study are also contestable (see paragraphs 3.3 and 3.5). Consequently, this Subject Benchmark Statement itself might be regarded as transient. What follows is intended to be broad enough for a diversity of nuances, approaches and relationships with other subjects to be expressed. In other words, specific references to approaches and areas of study are indicative rather than comprehensive, exclusive or prescriptive. They are to be read in the context of the characteristic general approaches and the specialisms, including research methods, of each department.

### **3 Nature and extent of politics and international relations**

3.1 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 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.

3.2 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 is preoccupied with 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.

3.3 The study of politics and international relations involves the description of political 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 political theory and political philosophy concerns 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 uses these theoretical perspectives to inform, assess and interfere 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.

3.4 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.

3.5 The study of politics and international relations can be often both implicitly comparative and characterised by explicitly comparative investigations across time and space. Explaining the causes of an event or the workings of an institution may involve asking questions about what might have happened under different conditions. Other modes of

enquiry include modelling interpretative and analytical approaches that apply a particular conceptual framework to illuminate a question or issue in new ways.

3.6 Politics and international relations address a broad range of topics and issues. These subjects and approaches include, primarily, but not exclusively:

- politics and government: public opinion, elections, voting behaviour, parties and party systems, electoral systems, interest groups and mobilisation, parliaments and legislatures, executives, public administration and public management, public policy, political biography, political communication, political development, local government and urban politics, representation, accountability, equality, ethnic conflict, multiculturalism, nationalism, political economy, institutional design, globalisation, behaviouralism, institutionalism, rational choice theory, game theory, cultural theory, and critical theory
- international relations: international organisations, regimes, globalisation, international political economy, conflict analysis, peace research, human rights, foreign policy analysis, area studies, security studies, international relations theory, international law, regional integration, nationalism, realism and neo-realism, liberalism, institutionalism, Marxism, and social constructivism.

3.7 Politics and international relations use a wide range of theoretical approaches and research methods to understand and explain these topics. These include, primarily, but not exclusively:

- politics and government: behaviouralism, institutionalism, rational choice theory, game theory, cultural theory, and critical theory
- politics and international relations: realism, liberalism, social constructivism, Marxism, post-structuralism, feminism, post-colonialism, international political theory and other theories of the international, global and transnational
- political theory or political philosophy: normative political theory, history of political thought, conceptual analysis, analytical political philosophy, social choice theory, liberalism, Marxism, feminism, environmentalism, human rights, realism, conservatism, relativism, post-colonialism, and postmodernism.

## **4 Subject knowledge, understanding and skills**

4.1 Politics and international relations is a mature subject with rich and diverse research achievements in the study of political theory, political analysis/political science and international relations. These achievements are reflected in a wide array of research-led teaching literature that provides a core to the learning and teaching of politics and international relations within higher education. At the same time it remains a highly dynamic subject, its subject matter open to change, as each generation reconsiders what is political, and approaches to study remain in contention. It is therefore not the intention of this section to lay out a national curriculum for politics and international relations. Rather, higher education providers continue to offer their students a curriculum which is founded on the subject as it has developed to date, but which also reflects their particular approach to the subject and which draws on their specialist strengths. Consequently, this Subject Benchmark Statement reflects a strong sense of the subject as a whole and in providing exemplary lists they should be treated as such, leaving appropriate choice and flexibility to higher education providers in how they develop and innovatively teach the subject.

### **Contents of politics and/or international relations degrees**

4.2 A single honours graduate in politics experiences a curriculum which takes elements from political theory (normative and positive) and from political analysis/political science (see paragraph 3.3). The student is introduced to the use of appropriate research methods and methodologies, including comparative and/or historical analysis in the study of the subject.

4.3 The distinction between political theory (normative and positive) and political analysis/political science (see paragraph 3.3) may well not be so maintained in teaching for reasons of clarity. It may be, for example, that theoretical considerations are appropriately raised in programmes dealing with essentially empirical material or, conversely, empirical cases are raised in essentially theoretical courses.

4.4 Thus, political theory could be taught as, for example, traditional political thought, modern democratic thought, ethics, urban theories and integration theory. It may also be taught in modules on feminism, race, comparative politics, or in free-standing single country studies. The intention of this formulation is that there is no specification of the theory that students are exposed to, or where it may appear in the curriculum, simply that they are exposed to theory.

4.5 A single honours graduate in international relations experiences a curriculum which incorporates elements of international political theory and of international political, economic and cultural analysis. A single honours programme in international relations generally aims to communicate the character of world politics from both the system and actor perspectives. It includes the historical evolution of international systems and of global power structures and the formation, transformation and transgression of boundaries between polities and international organisations. The main focuses in terms of agency are individuals, states, international organisations and transnational actors.

4.6 Joint or combined honours politics or international relations students are not expected to engage with the subject to the breadth and depth expected of the single honours student but, given this qualification, the curriculum similarly exposes students to elements of theory and elements of analysis.

4.7 International political theory may be taught as contending approaches, such as realism, neo-realism, neo-liberalism, postcolonial/decolonial theory and approaches, Foreign Policy Analysis, constructivism, postmodernism, theory, feminism, pluralism, Marxism or

critical theory; it may also be taught as normative theory. Theory may also form some part of the study of areas such as foreign policy, international organisation, international history, peace studies, human rights, gender or arms control.

4.8 International political analysis embraces the categories of global, sectoral and regional studies, the international system, international security, transnational and international mobility, and international political economy, often exploring the interface of domestic, international and world politics. For example, the curriculum may examine transnational corporations, environmental or financial politics, or the study of a particular region. As with politics, international relations have an important comparative and historical dimension which may be represented in the study of, for example, diplomacy, foreign policy, international order or area studies.

4.9 In the teaching of political analysis/science and international relations the term 'comparative and historical analysis' includes the categories of cross-national studies, area studies and single-country studies, and acknowledges the importance of these approaches to the subject.

4.10 Research methods and methodologies in politics and international relations include the use of information retrieval techniques, research design and strategies, qualitative and quantitative methods, the use of information technology and appropriate software. Their weight and character within a programme is determined in the light of requirements of the particular curriculum being taught.

## **Aims of degree programmes in politics and international relations**

4.11 Honours degree programmes in politics and international relations aim to:

- place questions of political and international order and disorder, decision-making and political contestation at the centre of analysis
- ensure that students of politics and international relations acquire knowledge and understanding in appropriate areas of theory and analysis
- enable students to understand and use the concepts, approaches and methods of their subject and develop an understanding of their contested nature and the problematic character of inquiry
- develop in students a capacity to think critically and independently about events, ideas and institutions
- relate the academic study of politics to questions of public concern and to relate the academic theory to policies and other political practices
- assist students to develop a range of cognitive, communication and social skills relevant to their intellectual, vocational and personal development
- provide a curriculum supported by scholarship, staff development and a research culture that promotes breadth and depth of intellectual enquiry and debate
- create a learning environment that is receptive to the needs and views of students and encourages them to achieve their full potential.

4.12 Graduates in politics and international relations are able to demonstrate a wide range of abilities and skills. These may be divided into two categories: knowledge and understanding of the subject, and generic intellectual and transferable skills.

## **Knowledge and understanding of the subject**

4.13 Graduates in politics are able to:

- understand the nature and significance of politics as a human activity
- apply concepts, theories and methods used in the study of politics to the analysis of political ideas, institutions and practices, relative to the historical and contemporary context
- demonstrate knowledge and understanding of different political systems; the nature and distribution of power in them; the social, economic, historical and cultural contexts within which they operate; and the relationships between them
- comprehend how politics is mediated to understand and evaluate different interpretations of political issues and events.

4.14 Graduates in international relations are able to:

- understand the political significance of multiple polities coexisting and of political boundary drawing and transforming practices
- apply concepts, theories and methods used in the study of international relations to the analysis of political ideas, practices and issues in the international system
- demonstrate a knowledge and understanding of the origins, evolution and contemporary dynamics of the international system and the challenges to it
- evaluate different interpretations of world political events and issues.

## **Generic intellectual and transferable skills**

4.15 Graduates in politics and international relations are able to:

- gather, organise and deploy evidence, data and information from a variety of secondary and primary sources
- identify, investigate, analyse, formulate and advocate solutions to problems
- construct reasoned argument, synthesise relevant information and exercise critical judgement
- reflect on their own learning and seek and make use of constructive feedback
- manage their own learning self-critically
- recognise the importance of explicit referencing and the ethical requirements of study which requires critical and reflective use of information and communications technology in the learning process
- communicate effectively and fluently in speech and writing. Employers require politics and international relations graduates to be able to communicate ideas effectively to a varied audience: this ability to translate complex ideas to a wide audience is a particularly valued skill
- use communication and information technology, including audiovisual technology, for the retrieval and presentation of information and where appropriate, statistical or numerical information
- progress through the degree programme to become mature, independent learners who can demonstrate initiative, self-organisation and time management attributes. The ability to identify opportunities for continuous learning and development, leading to future continuous professional development, is particularly valued by employers
- critically analyse and disseminate information
- apply employability skills
- utilise inter-cultural skills/global awareness, particularly in relation to employability

- collaborate with others to achieve common goals through, for example, group work, group projects, and group presentations. Employers regard collaboration and the identification of common goals highly. This is especially so as public sector organisations and other agencies increasingly work together, and multi-agency teams are developed.

## 5 Teaching, learning and assessment

5.1 Teaching and learning methods are designed and deployed to:

- meet the aims and objectives of the programme
- foster knowledge of and enthusiasm for the subject
- stimulate engagement and ownership of the learning process
- encourage deep learning by students
- reinforce critical thinking skills and the versatility of politics and international relations graduates'
- encourage students to reflect on and take responsibility for their own learning
- take proactive account of the different circumstances and needs of students, facilitating wider participation.

5.2 Forms of learning and teaching include an appropriate balance drawn from the following:

- lectures, seminars, tutorials, workshops and laboratory sessions
- whole group, small group and individual teaching
- student-led and tutor-led sessions
- skills-based, discussion-based and knowledge-based classes
- placements, field trips and simulation exercises.

5.3 In addition to face-to-face communication, teaching and learning may take place with the utilisation of virtual learning environments (VLEs) and bespoke data analysis packages. This may be via distance learning, blended learning and the use of massive open online courses.

5.4 A combination of these teaching methods and learning approaches allows students to develop a portfolio of experience, competencies and skills. Students are prepared for employability in a range of occupations, many of which involve one or more of the following:

- synthesis and dissemination of complex ideas and arguments
- development of case studies
- comparison and explanation of empirical evidence
- teamwork
- working to specific deadlines
- self-motivation and self-direction
- effective communication to a range of audiences.

5.5 The triangulation of learning methods such as presenting, note taking, employing case studies, independent learning, group cooperation, imagination and original thinking enables students to demonstrate these skills.

5.6 Student learning takes place in a variety of settings including scheduled meetings of tutors and students (for example, in lectures/seminars or in a one-to-one dissertation tutor/supervisory role), peer assisted learning, VLE instruction and support, distance learning, self-directed study time and preparation for and feedback from assessment. Student development may also include experiential learning (see paragraph 5.8).



5.7 In honours degree programmes in politics and international relations, students learn through:

- speaking, listening, reading and writing
- engaging with printed, oral, broadcast and electronic sources, data sets and analytic software
- group and individual work
- observation, participation and reflection
- debating and articulation.

5.8 Students of politics and international relations are expected to use a range of learning methods, which include:

- critical reading of a wide range of texts including documents, monographs, scholarly articles, statistics, newspapers, textbooks and sources on the internet
- independent research using both primary and/or secondary sources and appropriate methods of enquiry
- group discussion for communicating ideas and presenting their own work in a variety of formats, including, for example, debates, case studies, role plays and simulations (and problem-based learning)
- contact with political actors through visits, speakers, websites, capstone projects and experiential learning such as internships, placements or action research for organisations and community groups.

5.9 Forms of assessment include an appropriate balance of the following:

- essays, seen and unseen exams, book reviews, reports and dissertations, problem set, research problems
- oral assignments and presentations
- group and individual work
- tutor-directed and student-directed tasks
- tutor, peer and self assessment
- briefing papers, blogs
- seminar performance.

5.10 Different forms of assessment test different skills and abilities. Commonly, these include the ability to:

- utilise knowledge creatively to construct a reasoned argument, identify conclusions and communicate these persuasively orally and/or in writing
- engage with a wide range of sources in a variety of media to effectively extract and present key information, analyses and conclusions
- select and assess sources in terms of their relevance and quality in support of fulfilling specific analytical tasks
- demonstrate appropriately wide-ranging theoretical, conceptual and empirical knowledge in relation to specific issue areas
- use case-study knowledge to construct relevant theory in specific issue areas
- select and use theory to assess competing explanations of outcomes in case studies.

5.11 Feedback is an essential part of assessment, to help students evaluate their progress and identify how they can improve further. As such, students 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 in

the subject, an appreciation of the multiple approaches that may be legitimately taken to any given question is acknowledged and discussed: peer and self-assessment are therefore potentially valuable mechanisms for supporting this. Feedback is provided through various mechanisms, including written and spoken comments, group discussion and technology-enhanced systems.

## **6 Benchmark standards and levels of achievement**

6.1 The achievement of honours graduates in politics and international relations is described in terms of the two areas of performance identified in paragraph 4.12: knowledge and understanding, and generic skills.

6.2 The Subject Benchmark Statement is sufficiently broad to encourage higher education providers to develop honours degree programmes that reflect the diverse and changing nature of politics and international relations.

6.3 Although students are required to demonstrate the appropriate level of attainment in each of the stated areas of performance, they need not necessarily cover all the areas listed in this section as these vary according to the nature and purpose of individual programmes. However, the curriculum design is appropriate to each stage of the programme and gives students the opportunity to attain the required standards in each area of performance.

6.4 'Typical' describes the level of achievement attained by the majority of graduates. 'Threshold' describes in positive terms the minimal acceptable level of attainment of an honours graduate.

### **Typical and threshold levels of achievement in politics and international relations**

#### **Knowledge and understanding**

##### **Threshold standard**

6.5 On graduating with an honours degree in politics and/or international relations, students should be able to:

- describe and illustrate the nature of politics and/or international relations, including definitions of the boundaries of the political; the contested nature of knowledge and understanding; approaches to the study of politics and/or international relations; and key concepts, theories and methods employed in the study of politics or international relations
- describe and illustrate (international) politics and political phenomena, including the normative and positive foundations of political ideas; the vocabulary of political debate; the structure and operation of different (international) political systems; the social, economic, cultural and historical contexts of political behaviour; and the factors accounting for political change
- recognise the ways in which key concepts, theories and methods are used to analyse political ideas, actors institutions and behaviour
- describe and illustrate different interpretations of political issues and events.

##### **Typical standard**

6.6 On graduating with an honours degree in politics and international relations, students should be able to:

- demonstrate a familiarity and engage critically with the nature and significance of politics or international relations, including definitions of the boundaries of the political; 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; and the strengths and weaknesses of these approaches
- engage critically with politics (including international politics) and political phenomena, including the normative and positive foundations of political ideas; the vocabulary of political debate; the structure and operation of different (international) political systems; the social, economic, historical and cultural contexts of political behaviour; and 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.

## **Generic intellectual and transferable skills**

### **Threshold standard**

6.7 On graduating with an honours degree in politics and international relations, students should be able to:

- describe and illustrate different approaches involved in collecting political information, including how to: identify issues for political enquiry; recognise their ethical implications; and gather, organise and deploy evidence from a limited range of sources
- identify and investigate problems
- develop a reasoned argument and synthesise information
- make use of feedback
- manage their own learning with guidance and support
- communicate ideas, both orally and in writing
- use communication and information technologies for the retrieval and presentation of information
- undertake academic work with guidance and support
- collaborate with others to achieve common goals.

### **Typical standard**

6.8 On graduating with an honours degree in politics and international relations, students should be able to:

- describe, evaluate and apply different approaches involved in collecting, analysing and presenting political information
- identify issues for political enquiry; assess their ethical implications; and gather, organise and deploy evidence, data and information from a variety of sources
- identify, investigate, analyse and advocate solutions to problems
- develop a reasoned argument, synthesise relevant information and exercise critical judgement
- reflect on their own learning and make constructive use of feedback
- manage their own learning self-critically
- communicate ideas effectively and fluently, both orally and in writing
- use communication and information technologies for the retrieval, analysis and presentation of information. Presentational skills may include a focus upon delivery (in addition to content), time management, usage of audiovisual resources and an ability to stimulate debate
- work independently, demonstrating initiative, self-organisation and time management

- collaborate with others and contribute effectively to the achievement of common goals
- critique and synthesise information.

# Appendix: Membership of the benchmarking and review groups for the Subject Benchmark Statement for politics and international relations

## Membership of the review group for the Subject Benchmark Statement for politics and international relations (2015)

|                             |   |
|-----------------------------|---|
| Dr Jacqui Briggs (Chair)    | University of Lincoln                         |
| Dr Fidelma Ashe             | University of Ulster                          |
| Professor Jonathan Bradbury | Swansea University                            |
| Steven Curtis               | Higher Education Academy                      |
| Dr Lisa Harrison            | University of the West of England             |
| Professor Simon Hix         | London School of Economics                    |
| Dr Simon Lightfoot          | University of Leeds                           |
| Professor Lee Marsden       | University of East Anglia                     |
| Dr Mark Shephard            | University of Strathclyde                     |
| Dr Simon Usherwood          | University of Surrey                          |
| Professor John Williams     | Durham University                             |
| Brigitte Stockton           | Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education |

### Employer representative

|                |                              |
|----------------|------------------------------|
| Helen Johnston | Local Government Association |
|----------------|------------------------------|

### Student reader

|                    |                                 |
|--------------------|---------------------------------|
| Koen Sloodmaeckers | Queen Mary University of London |
|--------------------|---------------------------------|

## Membership of the review group for the Subject Benchmark Statement for politics and international relations (2007)

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

|                             |                                   |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Dr Jacqui Briggs (Chair)    | University of Lincoln             |
| Professor Vincent Geoghegan | The Queen's University of Belfast |
| Dr Jerry Johnson            | The University of Manchester      |

## Membership of the original benchmarking group for politics and international relations (2000)

Details provided below are as published in the original Subject Benchmark Statement.

|                      |  |
|----------------------|--|
| Professor J Annette  | Middlesex University   |
| Dr E Bomberg         | University of Stirling   |
| Dr P Byrne           | Loughborough University  |
| Dr P Carmichael      | University of Ulster   |
| Dr N Craske          | University of Liverpool  |
| R Dogan              | University of Plymouth   |
| Dr K Dowding         | London School of Economics and Political Science, University of London |
| Professor P Garrahan | University of Northumbria at Newcastle                                 |
| Dr A Geddes          | University of Liverpool  |
| Dr I Gordon          | Kingston University  |
| Professor D Judge    | University of Strathclyde  |

Professor E Meehan (Chair)  
Dr J McMillan  
Dr L F A Taylor  
Professor C Thomas  
Dr U Vogel  
P Welch  
Dr P Wingrove

Queen's University of Belfast  
University of Northumbria at Newcastle  
University of Wales, Aberystwyth  
Southampton University  
University of Manchester  
University of Wolverhampton  
University of Greenwich

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Southgate House, Southgate Street, Gloucester GL1 1UB

Tel: 01452 557 000  
Email: [enquiries@qaa.ac.uk](mailto:enquiries@qaa.ac.uk)  
Website: [www.qaa.ac.uk](http://www.qaa.ac.uk)

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