



# Securing Your University Offer for Politics and International Relations

Essay Competition Award Ceremony: August 2nd, 2022

**New College of  
the Humanities**





## Agenda

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- Welcome
- Studying Politics and International Relations at University: an Overview
- Submitting a Competitive Application
- NCH Insights
- Q&A



# Studying Politics and International Relations at University: an Overview

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# What is the study of Politics & International Relations?



- The broad, universal, and essential study of how governments, policies, and internal relations work, incorporating political theory (how governments and policies *should* work), comparative politics (how governments and policies *do* work), and international relations (how governments and policies work with each other!)
- Answers questions and addresses global challenges such as human rights, poverty, equality and welfare
- Many individuals who study subject do so because they have a deeply personal motivation to make the world a better place, regardless of specific career goals
- Develops interpersonal, analytical, decision-making, negotiation and argumentation skills



## Where and how can you study Politics & International Relations?

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- Single Honours BSc Politics & International Relations
- Many joint and combined honours options, e.g.: Politics and Journalism, Politics and History, Politics with Spanish (\*note that the study balance is likely to be other than 50/50 if it's Politics *with* rather than Politics *and*)
- Could study PPE (Philosophy, Politics and Economics) or PPH (Philosophy, Politics and History)
- Different degree spans (standard English 3 years, standard Scottish 4 years, fast-track 2 years etc)
- Degree apprenticeships take a more practical approach (potentially useful to fast track toward particular careers)
- Full-time/part-time; online/in-person; study abroad

# How is Politics and International Relations taught?

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- **Reading:** You will read extensively, independently - reading is critical in understanding current and historical political spheres
- **Lectures:** Lectures will give an introduction to historical and current political events, as well as an understanding of how to go about analysing the different political spheres of activity and debate
- **Seminars:** Seminars are very important in politics, as it is all about discussion and debate; usually there is no right or wrong answer
- **Essays:** Formative and summative, to allow you develop your thinking, research and analytical skills, and to construct and articulate your own independent arguments
- **Presentations:** A great way to show independent research, and to give you more hands-on practice with the subject - these may be individual or group presentations



## What skills do you develop?

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- Thorough and accurate research
- Detailed analysis
- Precise language and writing
- Critical thinking
- Essay writing
- Time management
- Persuasion skills

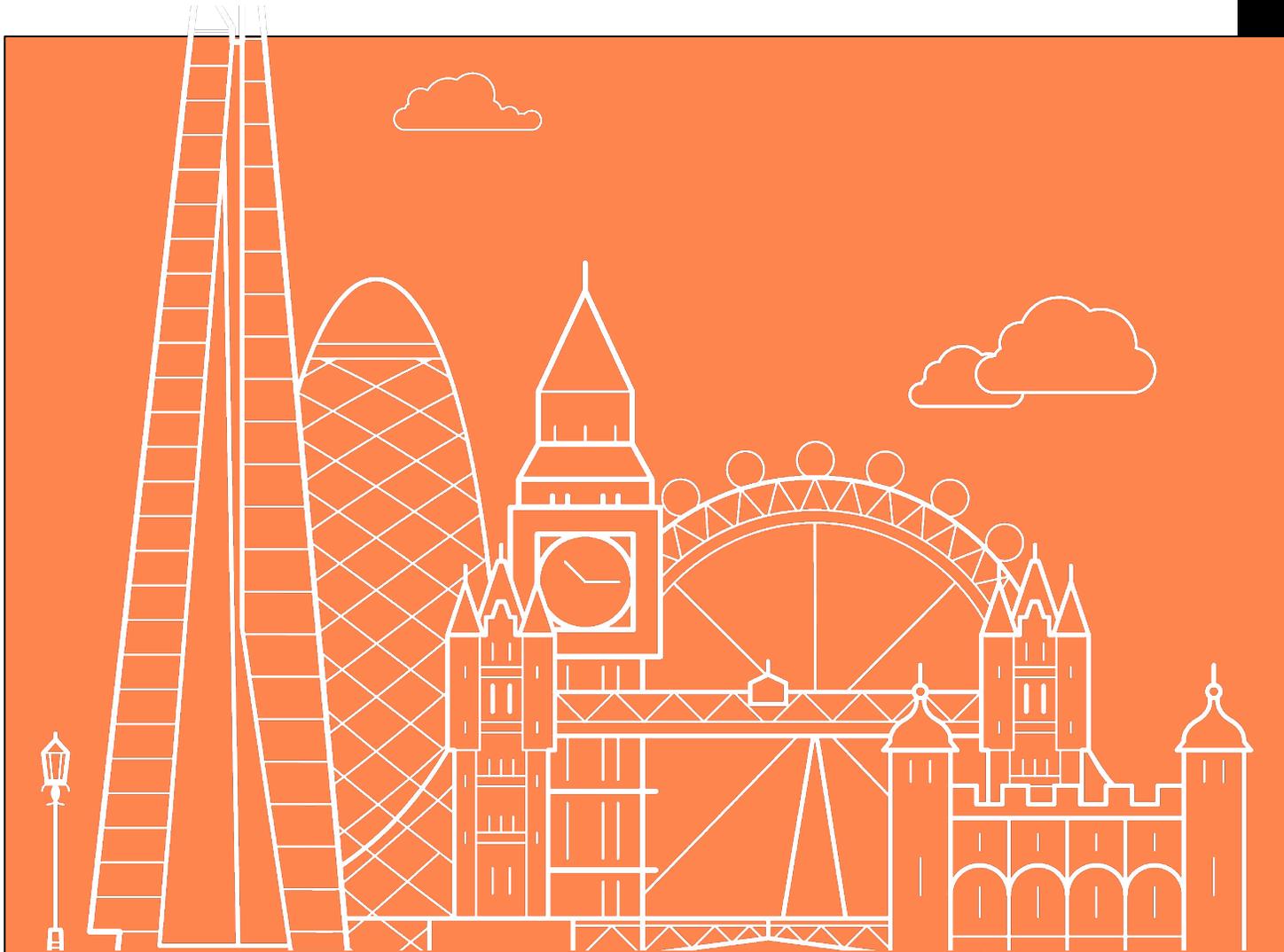
The skills you will acquire as a Politics & International Relations graduate will allow you to pivot flexibly into a variety of industries, when you enter the working world.

# What can you do after your degree?

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As a Politics & International Relations graduate your transferable skills can take you into ANY industry. Some of the top graduate destinations are:

- Politician
- Local Government Officer
- Public Relations
- Human Resources
- Finance
- Aid/Charity Work
- Diplomatic Service Officer



# Submitting a Competitive Application for Politics and International Relations

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## What are the entry requirements?

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**UCAS**

*Information provided by [ucas.com](https://ucas.com)*

### **A levels:**

- Usually need a minimum of two A levels, with three A levels and A-B grades required for the most popular courses
- Entry requirements range from BBC to AAB, with universities and colleges most commonly asking for ABB
- Other useful subjects to hold for Politics & International Relations degrees include any other humanities subject

### **International Baccalaureate Diploma:**

- From 30-39 points overall in the IB Diploma

### **Scottish Highers:**

- From BBBB to AAABB (most frequently AABBB)



## What are admissions tutors looking for?

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- Enthusiasm and motivation to study Politics & IR
- Credible evidence that supports your subject passion
- Proactive subject exploration and engagement - e.g.: wider reading beyond the set texts
- Relevant extra-curricular/super-curricular activities
- Interests outside of school, relating to Politics & IR
- Relevant and transferable work experience
- Aims and goals; career plans if known
- Understanding of the demands of studying at university, and how this is different from school



# What super-curricular activities would support my application?

Super-curricular activities take the subjects you study further, beyond what you have learnt at school or college. Some examples for Politics & IR may include:

- Wider reading beyond the set texts
- Reading specialist magazines and journals
- Attending university taster lectures or taster days
- Listening to podcasts, TED talks or online lectures
- Attending a Politics & IR Summer School
- Taking an online (MOOC) Politics & IR course
- Working within the local division of a political party
- Volunteering with think-tanks and local charities
- Shadowing MPs
- Taking part in university essay competitions!

# Why is the personal statement so important?

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- Often your only chance to 'sell yourself' to the university and impress the admissions tutor
- Helps to differentiate between equally excellent candidates with similar or identical grade profiles, especially for competitive courses
- Helps if you are a borderline candidate
- Demonstrates your reasons for applying for a course
- May form basis of an interview - tutors may ask questions arising from the statement
- May help if on results day you don't quite make your grades

# How can I write a compelling personal statement?

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- Invest plenty of time in the brainstorming/thinking stage, before starting to write your statement
- Structure your personal statement
- Use positive and enthusiastic language
- Make every sentence count - word count is tight!
- Ensure it reflects your 'voice', and your 'journey'
- Use evidence to support claims/statements
- Be prepared to draft and redraft
- Be honest - don't exaggerate and don't plagiarise
- Double check grammar and spelling for errors
- Ask for support, especially with proofreading and checking - it's easy for mistakes to slip through!





## What might an admissions interview look like?

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- Unique opportunity to discuss a subject you are passionate about with an academic tutor
- Opportunity for tutor to get to know you and your motivation for applying - you can also ask questions!
- May take the form of a 'taster' tutorial
- Unlikely to be a test of knowledge - tutor will be more interested in how you think, rather than what you know
- Discussion-based; questions will probe your subject interest, enthusiasm and aptitude
- Questions may build on your personal statement
- Questions will be challenging - don't panic if you don't immediately have an answer; take your time to think
- Some interviews may include a task, or pre-reading



## How can I prepare for my admissions interview?

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- Carefully reread your personal statement, and be prepared to expand upon any of the points you have included
- Re-read or re-familiarise yourself with any texts you referenced, so these are fresh in your mind
- Undertake any reading or pre-interview tasks in good time
- Practice talking about the points in your statement
- Research who will be interviewing you
- Make sure you are clear regarding interview logistics
- If you will be undertaking a virtual interview, make sure you have somewhere suitable for this task, with good wifi
- Prepare questions you would like to ask in the interview



## NCH Insights

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# Faculty insights

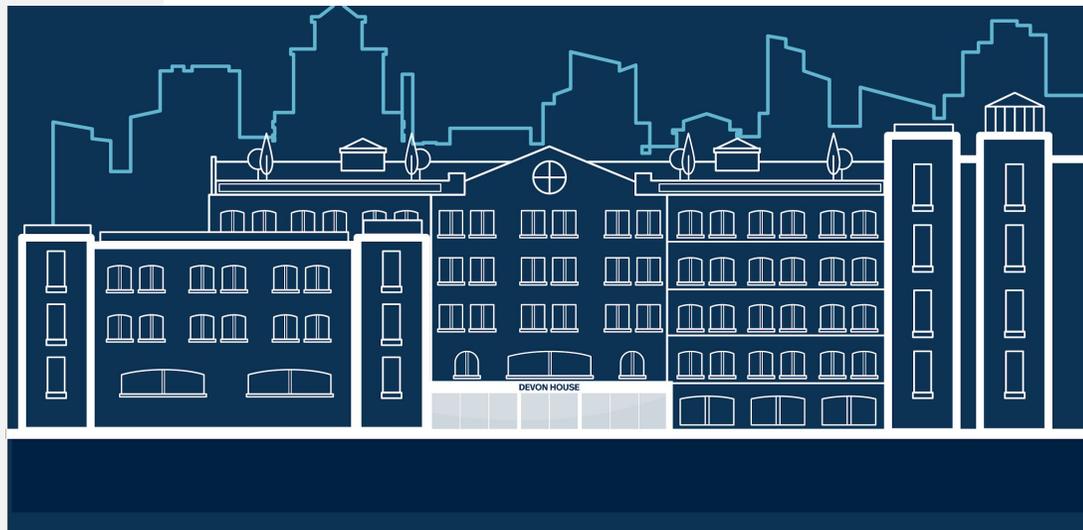
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- Gone are the days when a degree in Politics meant aiming for a career in government and civil service roles only. Politics & IR opens up a diverse range of options in political communication and journalism; consultancy; risk assessment and management; investment; research roles (in public or private institutes or think tanks); NGOs and charities; international institutions; legal work; banking; finance; teaching; tech start-ups; and business
- What we look for in a candidate is academic achievement, a capacity for critical thinking, flexibility in interrogating the world around them and the ability to apply theoretical models to study political processes and phenomena
- Our advice to applicants is to read broadly and widely on the topics you're most interested in. Tell us what is distinctive about yourself, and how the subject will help you pursue your goals
- In your interview, try to go beyond your personal statement: tell us about podcasts you've listened to, or conferences you might have attended. If given a task, analyse the text you're given in depth, with independent and critical thought. Prepare questions for the interviewer: this is a sign that you're invested in the University and want to study with us

## Student tips and hints

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- Find what you're interested in and you can apply it to anything. If you're interested in feminism, for example, you can link this to any politics course
- Read as much as possible, with an open mind. Keep up-to-date with current affairs; be critical of bias
- Consider getting involved in Model UN, debating, and student representation
- JSTOR has free content; also check out Yale Online, where you can take courses in a variety of subjects
- Podcasts and Youtube videos we recommend: Talking Politics; Newscast; BBC Global News Podcast; The Daily Podcast (New York Times); Ways to Change the World (Channel 4 News); Intercepted; The Rest is Politics; and In Our Time



## Suggestions for wider reading

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- Baylis, J; Smith, S; and Owens, R (2019), ***The Globalisation of World Politics***. Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Boix, C and Stokes, S (2009), ***Oxford Handbook of Comparative Politics***. Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Cahn, S (2014), ***Political Philosophy: The Essential Texts***. Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Dryzek, J; Honig, B and Phillips, A (2008), ***The Oxford Handbook of Political Theory***. Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Mingst, KA; Snyder, JL and McKibben, HE (2019), ***Essential Readings in World Politics***. New York: Norton
- Waltz, K (1959), ***Man, the State, and War***. New York: Columbia University Press

# Useful websites

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- List of top-ranking journals in Political Science and International Relations: <https://www.scimagojr.com/journalrank.php?category=3320>
- The CIA World Fact Book: <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/>
- Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem): <https://www.v-dem.net/>
- Freedom House: <https://freedomhouse.org/>
- International IDEA Constitutions Building Project: <https://www.idea.int/our-work/what-we-do/constitution-building>
- Political Science Resources: <https://www.politicsresources.net/>
- World Public Opinion: <https://worldpublicopinion.org/>

# Useful blogs

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Follow professional politics blogs in order to keep an eye on the latest discussions and debates on politics across the globe:

- The Conversation: <https://theconversation.com/uk>
- The Spectator - Coffee House: <https://www.spectator.co.uk/coffee-house>
- The Monkey Cage (Blog): <https://themonkeycage.org/>
- Politico: <https://www.politico.com/>
- Brusselsblog: <https://www.ft.com/brussels-briefing>
- The Middle East Institute Review Blog: <https://mideasti.blogspot.com/>
- World Politics Review Blog: <https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/blog>



# Q&A



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