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UNIVERSITY OF
ABERDEEN

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GO BEYOND BOUNDARIES



Politics and International Relations

UNDERGRADUATE GUIDE

“I could not recommend studying PIR here more. The wide range of topics on offer really gives you a chance to develop your knowledge in so many areas and broadens the options available to you in the future.”

CHARLOTTE HILL

Scottish Parliament Building, Edinburgh, UK

About Aberdeen

Going beyond boundaries, expectation, and tradition since 1495

For more than 525 years we have proudly offered our students life-changing opportunities by proving true to our Foundational Purpose: 'open to all and dedicated to the pursuit of truth in the service of others'.

Our rich heritage, world-leading research, and learning excellence has contributed to our association with five Nobel Prize winners and our ranking in the Top 20 UK Universities by the Guardian University Guide 2026.

Scotland's alternative city

Aberdeen is welcoming, adventurous, unafraid, and forever evolving – the perfect place to find your purpose and your people. Nestled in between the Cairngorms National Park and miles of golden coastline, Aberdeen has something exciting at every turn.

An ancient campus that has helped shape the modern world

Since 1495 our campus, and the world around it, have seen many changes. But the medieval core of King's College has remained constant. Over the centuries we've continued to add and innovate, growing our campus to the ideal blend of old and new you'll find today.

To keep breaking boundaries in education and research, we need to keep innovating. We are committed to investing in our campus to provide the very best learning resources for our students.

Our iconic Sir Duncan Rice Library is so much more than a study space. With social and collaborative spaces, a public lending library and museum, the Library embodies our foundational promise to be open to all in the service of others.

A community committed to inclusion and progress

At Aberdeen, you'll make friends and connections that will last a lifetime. Aberdeen has been voted one of the safest and most affordable cities in the UK (Complete University Guide 2025). When you come to Aberdeen, you'll be well looked after and will become part of a close-knit community known for its outstanding support.



Politics and International Relations

The study of Politics and International Relations (PIR) involves understanding the many challenges facing the world today.

From war and conflict to deepening inequality, the politics of climate change, widespread political discontent, and shifting relationships between states in the international system. In studying PIR, we look closely at both the dynamics of power and government at the state level and international cooperation between states in an increasingly interdependent world.

At its heart, the subject analyses power and conflict, and how to resolve global political problems. Traditionally, the study of Politics examines what happens within states, while International Relations looks at interactions between states.

At Aberdeen, you will be offered a diverse range of courses in Politics and International Relations, with the opportunity to study the subjects together or as part of a joint degree with another discipline. Aberdeen is one of the few universities in the UK where it is possible to study both Politics and International Relations in-depth.

Taught by internationally renowned academics who are engaged in cutting-edge research and media commentary, this programme offers the perfect foundation for a career in politics, international affairs, the civil service, non-government organisations (NGOs), media and journalism, and more.

→ **RANKED TOP 3 IN
SCOTLAND FOR BOTH
POLITICS AND
INTERNATIONAL
RELATIONS**

Guardian University Guide 2026



Meet your Lecturer

Hi, I am Sam and it is lovely to meet you. Students of Politics and International Relations will first meet me for the second year course “Global Politics: Equality and Inequality”.

Ever wondered why some people have more than others? Ever wondered what the solution to inequality could be? We ask these questions and more, while investigating how inequalities can be felt across a range of issues from gender and race, to economics, to issues of citizenship and migration.

There is so much to love about Politics and International Relations! There are a wide range of topics so there is always something to interest students and the study of Politics and IR is so much more than learning “facts”. It allows us to understand the world and each other, and most importantly contribute to changing societies for the better by developing original and creative critical thinkers.

Dr Samantha May
Department of Politics and
International Relations
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Why Aberdeen?

International reputation for excellence

Since its establishment more than half a century ago, in 1964, Aberdeen's Department of Politics and International Relations has developed an international reputation for excellence in teaching and research. We provide a supportive yet challenging environment within which students develop knowledge of Politics and International Relations, including historical and contemporary political issues and major theoretical debates. Students are supported by research-active staff who are internationally recognised experts in their fields, and our courses reflect staff specialisms.

An outstanding student experience

As a popular PIR department attracting hundreds of students each year, we are committed to providing students with an outstanding student experience with a focus on excellence in teaching. This involves a wide variety of innovative course assessments, including a mix of exams, group work, policy briefings, podcasts and poster presentations.

From year 3 (the Honours level) you are offered considerable choice in course selection, allowing for specialisation in your study and culminating in a final-year dissertation on a topic of your choice.

With the option to follow a single Honours degree or study Politics and International Relations as part of a Joint Honours degree, you have the flexibility to shape your own degree to suit your particular interests and career plans.

A forward-looking teaching programme

Our teaching programme is wide-ranging and addresses the following themes:

- **Conflict & Security:** Analysing a range of international conflicts and 'types' of security (human, societal, environmental)
- **Democracy & Representation:** Comparing elections, political organisations and emerging challenges to modern liberal democracies
- **Political Institutions:** Understanding how and why political systems are different and the consequences of different institutional choices
- **Political Theory:** Exploring values, beliefs and ideologies - what thinkers from Aristotle to contemporary democratic theorists say about the distribution of power and the role of the state
- **Public Policy:** Considering how policies are made and the extent to which they are successful in achieving desired goals, including EU policy post-Brexit and the study of energy politics
- **International Political Economy:** Dealing with complex issues of our time including globalisation and inequality
- **Identity Politics:** Questioning how class, gender, religion, and race feed into power and inequality
- **International Organisations:** Examining relations between states and non-state actors in the international system, e.g. the United Nations and the European Union, multinational corporations and aid organisations

These themes allow us to keep pace with new global challenges and emerging issues, from the process of democratic transition (including a rising tide of disillusionment in liberal democracies) to the changing nature of global citizenship (for example, the challenges of migration and inequality). As a department, we are well-placed to explore these international challenges, and to ensure that our graduates develop the skills to contribute to these important debates.

Dynamic and Collaborative Student Societies

Our students are active in many University societies and debates, including the Politics and International Relations (PIR) Society.

The PIR Society seeks to create links between academic and social areas of university life. From meeting new people and having a laugh to furthering your career prospects, the PIR Society is a dynamic group to join.

With academic talks, exciting debates, social nights and a successful ball last year, and the imminent launch of a Society podcast, there's always a lot going on! Society members have been working hard to increase collaboration with other societies.

There is also the opportunity to go on international trips; in recent years, there have been visits to Amsterdam, New York City, Washington, D.C, and Brussels. The Society has won the coveted 'Society of the Year Award' on several occasions.

You can follow the PIR Society at:

 **@abdnpir**

 **www.facebook.com/ABDNPIR**

Or email us at **politics.ir@abdn.ac.uk**



Degree Structure & Content

We offer two types of Honours degrees. The first is an Honours Degree in Politics and International Relations. The second is a joint degree, where Politics or International Relations is combined with another discipline, e.g. Politics and Economics, or International Relations and Management (or many other combinations).

Year 1: Democracy and Governance; Power and Conflict

In these foundational courses, we introduce key conceptual tools in the discipline, exploring democracy, governance and conflict. We examine major themes including the role of governments, forms of democracy, political parties, representation and the policy process, the structure of the international system, and international organisations. And we analyse key events such as the world wars and nuclear proliferation.

Year 2: Ideas and Ideologies in Politics and International Relations; Global Politics: Equality and Inequality

The courses in year 2 introduce students to different theoretical perspectives and approaches. This includes the study of ideology and major ideas from liberalism to feminism and the extreme right. Students investigate major theoretical approaches to the international system and examine questions of international political economy and the distribution of wealth and power.

Year 3: Researching in the 21st Century; Choice of courses from a list of electives

All year 3 students (Junior Honours) undertake 'Research Methods in Politics and International Relations', a course which equips students with the necessary skills to undertake their own research in a chosen topic for their dissertation in Year 4. Alongside the Research Methods course, students choose a course from a list of options.

The European Parliament Building, Strasbourg, France



Year 4: Choice of courses from a list of electives; Dissertation through supervised study

At level 4 (Senior Honours) students choose from a wide range of courses and complete an original research dissertation on a subject of their choice, allowing students to demonstrate their academic skills and to prepare for future study or employment.

Our Honours courses presently include:

- International Security
- US Politics
- Political Parties in Britain
- Scottish Politics
- International Terrorism
- Memory and Politics of the Past
- Northern Ireland: Small, Dirty War
- War and Peace
- Extreme Right Parties in Europe
- Soviet and Post-Soviet Russian Foreign Policy
- African Security
- Gender and Politics
- International Migration and Europe
- Human Rights in Global Politics
- US Presidents
- Political Islam
- Chile and Dictatorship
- Maritime Security
- Corruption and Good Governance Relations
- Wealth and Poverty
- International Political Psychology
- The Global Politics of Secession

Meet your Lecturer

Hi! I'm Malcolm Harvey, a lecturer in Politics in the School of Social Science. My background as a researcher is in UK constitutional politics, and I've written extensively about Scottish politics, referendums, consultations, elections and governing, and I'm currently engaged in a project examining our local representatives in Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire.

A Fulbright Scholarship at Villanova University in 2021 helped to develop my Honours courses on US Politics and US Presidents, and has helped significantly with supervising dissertations in these areas.

I'm one of the rotating course coordinators for your very first politics course at Aberdeen, Introduction to Politics and IR: Democracy and Governance. In this course, we cover a wide range of themes in PIR, including parties, elections, referendums,

institutions, governments, parliaments, presidents, territory, sovereignty, state organisation, political history and people. It's a super interesting course, with input from six members of our department, lots of engaging material, and offers a brief but deep introduction to lots of political concepts and ideas.

We're looking forward to seeing you here in Aberdeen!

Dr Malcolm Harvey

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Careers and Skills

Study Abroad

Studying abroad as part of your undergraduate degree provides a unique experience and helps you to develop skills highly valued by employers, such as intercultural sensitivity, an expanded worldview, language skills, time management, and problem solving.

In recent years many of our students have spent time studying abroad, mostly in North America or Europe but also in Hong Kong and Japan. Opportunities to study abroad are provided through the Go Abroad schemes. Students who wish to study abroad should plan ahead; in PIR, students have the option of going abroad in the second year of study or the second semester of third year.

Careers

A degree in Politics and/or International Relations from the University of Aberdeen opens doors to a wide range of professions, including many politics-related roles. Our teaching programme develops an advanced understanding of international political issues, and these skills are relevant to a vast array of jobs. We work closely with employers in developing our programme and our graduates acquire essential skills to prepare them for challenging professional roles.

Recent PIR graduate destinations include:

- Civil service officer
- Consultant
- Content and social media specialist
- Government relations officer
- Media researcher
- NGO project manager
- Policy advisor
- Start-up founder
- Statistician
- Teacher
- Television producer
- UK and Scottish Parliaments (graduates includes MPs and MSPs)
- Women's support worker

This programme provided me the opportunity to learn more about the power structures and world order which impact and govern our daily lives, more than we can imagine. After graduation, I joined the Scottish Government and I have been part of the Diversity and Inclusion team.

SHAHID KHAN



Meet your Lecturer

Hello! I'm Dr Philippe Beauregard, a lecturer at the University of Aberdeen. Originally from Québec, Canada, I was a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Montreal and the Freie Universität in Berlin before moving to Aberdeen.

I am interested in political psychology, especially how emotions, beliefs, and personality shape political behaviour. I published my first book, *The Passion of International Politics*, in 2022.

I'm also very passionate about teaching students, coordinating the first year course "Introduction to International Relations: Power and Conflict." In this course, you will explore the multiple forms of power and its impacts on our lives and the world we live in. You'll also learn about key concepts and theories related to global politics, and develop important skills for your future, such as writing, communication, time management, and critical thinking.

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