Politics and International Relations

The study of Politics and International Relations (PIR) involves understanding major challenges and conflicts facing the world today - Brexit, global inequality, climate change, pandemics, and terrorism, to name only a few.

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.

“I enjoyed my undergraduate degree here so much that I now will continue with a PhD at the university in political sociology.”

Viktoria Eriksson, Graduated 2017
Aberdeen’s department of Politics and International Relations was established more than half a century ago, in 1964, and 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 course assessments, including a mix of traditional exams, group work, policy briefings and poster presentations. From year 3 (the Honours level), students are offered considerable choice in course selection, the courses reflecting staff research expertise. The programme allows for specialisation on the part of students, culminating in a final-year dissertation on a topic chosen by the student. Popular topics have included gender politics, conflict in the Middle East, Scottish politics, the rise of extreme right parties, and explaining the phenomenon of Donald Trump!

Our students are active in University societies and debates. The PIR society (which describes itself as ‘neutral, but very political’) is one of the biggest on campus and hosts exciting debates throughout the academic year as well as 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.

“I really appreciated how supportive our lecturers were.”

Daniel Kaminek, Graduated 2017
A forward-looking teaching programme

Our teaching programme involves 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 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, theoretically and empirically, and to ensure that PIR graduates develop the skills to contribute to these cutting-edge debates.
School of Social Science

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 like the role of governments, forms of democracy, political organisations, political cultures, 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.

Our Honours courses include:
- International Security
- Middle East Politics
- US Politics
- Political Parties in Britain
- International Terrorism
- Memory and Politics of the Past
- The Politics of Democratic Spain
- War and Peace
- Extreme Right Parties in Europe
- Energy Politics
- Arab-Israeli Relations
- Nationalism in Modern Europe
- International Migration and Europe
- Human Rights in Global Politics
- Devolution and Constitutional Change

Year 3: Researching in the 21st Century; Choice of courses from a list of electives
All year 3 students (Junior Honours) undertake ‘Researching in the 21st Century’, a course which examines the philosophy of research and how research is conducted, with training in both qualitative and quantitative methods. This is combined with a choice of other courses.

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, which is intended to demonstrate intellectual and work-related skills (as requested by employers).
**Study Abroad**
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 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.

**PIR graduate destinations include:**
- Civil service
- Research and polling companies
- Lobbying and interest groups
- International organisations
- UK and Scottish Parliaments (some of our graduates are MPs and MSPs)
- Local government
- Political parties
- Health sector and social services
- Media, journalism and publishing
- Public relations
- Banking and commerce

**How Do I Apply?**
Applications to this degree programme are made through the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS). You apply online at www.ucas.com and may apply to up to five institutions on the full-price UCAS application. Prospective students (and their parents/guardians/teachers) are welcome to visit the University at any time, or attend our University-wide Open Days in August and October.

Please contact the Student Recruitment and Admissions Service, who will be happy to make arrangements for a visit. www.abdn.ac.uk/study/
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For further details relating to Politics & International Relations at Aberdeen, please also visit www.abdn.ac.uk/pir

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