

# International relations

**What is the impact of global affairs on our everyday life? Is world peace achievable?**

International relations is the study of political relationships between countries and organisations.

## Why study international relations?

While it is not a subject offered at school, many students find that international relations provides the tools for understanding a complex world, and the inter-linking political, economic and cultural elements that form it. International relations examines the factors that lead to conflict and co-operation, global security and the use of the world's resources.

With the rise of global terrorism and other challenges to the world order in the twenty-first century, the subject has become increasingly relevant.

## What will I study at university?

There are over 400 different courses available to study international relations in the UK. Depending on the university, some degree programmes are based in the politics department, while others take an cross-discipline approach.

International relations course are often combined as a joint degree with subjects such as:

- Politics
- History
- Economics
- Philosophy
- Languages
- Geography

Students begin by studying different political theories and thinkers, along with broad themes such as war, ethnic conflict and security.

• Later on in the degree programme you will be able to choose from the specialist options which could include subjects such as humanitarian intervention in the Balkans, nuclear proliferation in the Middle East, or politics in contemporary China.

• As part of their course, many students have the chance to take part in parliamentary placements or exchange schemes with universities abroad.



**“Studying international relations has given me an appreciation of how complex the world is. Its multidisciplinary nature has equipped me the knowledge and skills for a wide range of careers.”**

International relations graduate

# International relations

### What skills will I gain?

Graduates acquire a breadth of transferable skills that are very attractive to employers.

These include:

- Analytical and critical thinking
- An understanding of complex political issues
- Research skills
- Strong writing and verbal skills
- The ability to work with sustained arguments

### After my degree... what next?

Many universities offer postgraduate study in international relations, further exploring the knowledge acquired at undergraduate.

International Relations makes a good starting point for a wide range of careers in areas such as:

- Business
- Journalism
- Politics
- Marketing
- Finance

Some graduates may aim to join the diplomatic service or Foreign Office, while others aspire to work for the United Nations or one of the European Union institutions as an analyst or policy adviser.

### Employment statistics

International relations graduates' highly-developed analytical and communication skills are valued by employers. In 2011, six months after graduation, 79 per cent were in employment or engaged in further study,

Higher Education Statistics Agency.

Think-tanks dealing with global affairs or international aid and development charities are another option, as are human rights and campaigning bodies. Such organisations employ staff with international expertise in a variety of roles and offer the chance to specialise in a particular region or issue. Experience gained through internships can help to secure a job in a non-governmental organisation.

In the commercial sector, there are many organisations that recruit students with a background in international affairs. Companies need staff with an understanding of political risk when considering whether to do business in a particular area, while investment banks and insurance firms have to assess the risks of prospective deals. The defence industry uses experts to assess political and security risks, sometimes on a consultancy basis.



# SOCIAL SCIENCE FOR SCHOOLS

## Further resources

- **British International Studies Association (BISA)** is the professional organisation for those working in international relations in academia and beyond. It promotes the study of international relations and related subjects through teaching and research and publishes *International Studies Today*, an online magazine aimed at a general readership.  
[www.bisa.ac.uk](http://www.bisa.ac.uk)
- **Chatham House** is the largest global affairs think-tank in the UK. Its wide-ranging research programme covers both specific countries and broader issues such as international security and the environment. As a membership-based body, it brings together academics, diplomats, policymakers, NGO workers and journalists with an interest in international affairs, holding meetings and debates at its centre, the Institute of International Affairs in London. Student memberships are available. It publishes the bi-monthly magazine *The World Today* and the academic journal *International Affairs*.  
[www.chathamhouse.org](http://www.chathamhouse.org)
- **Centre for International Studies and Diplomacy (CISD)** at the School of Oriental and African Studies, the University of London, prides itself on avoiding the Eurocentric approach that has historically dominated the discipline.  
[www.cisd.soas.ac.uk](http://www.cisd.soas.ac.uk)
- **Centre for International Studies (CIS)** at the University of Oxford is one of the largest centres in Europe for advanced research in the subject. It focuses on topics such as global governance and international peace and security.  
<http://cis.politics.ox.ac.uk/>
- **Centre for Advanced International Theory (CAIT)** at the University of Sussex takes a theoretical approach to the subject which does not seek to influence policy.  
[www.sussex.ac.uk/cait/](http://www.sussex.ac.uk/cait/)
- **The International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS)** is a London-based think-tank specialising in global security, political risk and military conflict. It produces publications and organises conferences, and holds private summit meetings for ministers, diplomats and government officials.  
[www.iiss.org](http://www.iiss.org)
- **Institute of Development Studies (IDS)** is a think-tank specialising in international development which is affiliated to the University of Sussex. It has around 100 researchers, and produces a wide range of publications of all aspects of development. It offers postgraduate degrees and professional courses for charity workers and government officials.  
[www.ids.ac.uk/study](http://www.ids.ac.uk/study)

