

**Studying Politics**

**in the UK**

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**A Guide for Prospective Undergraduates**

**2018**

**LES Department of Politics**

**Introduction**

Politics students are frequently accused of being a politician in training. Ignore those people who level such charges - doing politics at university opens up so many doors to a rich variety of careers.

Politics is emphatically far more than the study of boring men in boring suits; politics is the study of power – the what, who, where, why and when of that universal phenomenon. Lurking under its umbrella are a diverse range of fields that this booklet is designed to illustrate.

Politics is a fascinating and dynamic subject to study at degree level. Indeed according to UCAS and the British Studies Association[[1]](#footnote-1) it is currently more popular than ever, with numbers of students choosing to study the subject increasing steadily over the last decade. By studying a degree in Politics you will gain analytical and practical skills that are invaluable in a contemporary competitive employment market. Occupations that view Politics students (or those who have studied the subject) as being a real asset include: researchers, broadcasters, journalists, local government officers, civil servants, pollsters, lobbyists, teachers, lawyers, financiers & bankers, public relations, the police and military, management training, advertising and a wide range of business opportunities[[2]](#footnote-2).

The objective of this booklet is to introduce you to the ways in which Politics is studied in the UK and the sorts of skills you will acquire by studying this subject. It provides up-to-date information of all Politics departments in the UK so that you can choose the department and degree that is right for you.

After reading this booklet I hope that you will apply to study Politics. I am often asked whether this degree route is only open to those who have done an AS or full A Level in the subject, well for the record you can apply to study Politics without having previously studied the subject at school.

**Why Study Politics?**

Part of the excitement and the challenge of studying Politics is the fact that it is always changing. Domestic and world events often take us by surprise and the speed with which major political developments occur increases with new technology.



One reason why students are attracted to the study of Politics is that it allows you to explore your own views and be challenged by the views and perceptions of others. The teaching and learning environment in Politics is therefore a particularly stimulating one.

With the cost of university study increasing dramatically you, as a prospective student, will want to know that your degree will not only be intellectually rewarding but will also lead to a successful career once you have completed your studies. Politics provides you with a diverse set of skills that this booklet has already noted is highly attractive to employers.

**Courses**

If you have determined that Politics is a subject you wish to specialise in or pursue at degree level, you will be able to choose from a wide range of programmes of study; different emphases exist within different departments, with some specialising more in political theory or international relations.

A large number of universities offer Joint Honours degree courses, which means you can choose to study Politics alongside a subject you have previously studied and enjoyed. In a considerable number of universities you will be able to study Politics in combination with subjects such as History, Philosophy, Economics and English and so on.

Ideally you should attend open days and visit days to make an informed choice

**The academic study of Politics traditionally includes three broad areas:**

1. **Political Theory**

This looks at the major ideas and concepts and philosophies that have been developed to show how societies should be organised. It includes discussion of the work of major political philosophers from the earliest civilisations to the present day and a range of ideologies.

1. **Political Institutions**

This involves the study of political systems in each country and comparatively. You will examine the structures of government and the ways in which legislatures and the judiciary are organised and decisions are made and laws upheld.

1. **International Relations** (IR)

IR concerns the way in which nation-states interact with one another and the reasons why countries go to war and how they resolve their differences. It also includes a discussion of international institutions such as the United Nations and the European Union.

**Teaching & Learning Strategies**

There will be considerable choice over the structure of your degree. First year modules are intended as a broad introduction to the subject. There are more advanced and focused modules in the second and third year (often leading to specialism is a specific area).

The balance between Core and Optional modules varies from programme to programme as does the number of modules you elect to do in other subjects. A dissertation (long independent research project) is available in either an optional or, more normally, compulsory basis in your final year.

Given the number of universities that offer the subject in one form or another, you can expect to experience a wide range of learning environments, including traditional lectures, seminars and increasingly newer approaches such as political blogs, wikis and role play.

A wide range of assessment strategies form your Politics degree, ranging from more traditional practices such as examinations and essays through to in-class presentations and on-line discussion forums.

**Degree study exists in essentially eleven topics:**

1. **British Politics**

Not surprisingly British politics is a feature of all politics degrees in the UK. There has arguably never been a more fascinating time in recent years to study British politics. Since 2010 we have the first coalition government since the end of the Second World War, which has proven to be very controversial with huge public expenditure cuts, an economy in stagnation and disaffected voters rallying to UKIP.

1. **European Politics**

British politics is linked closely with the European Union and other European nations. Many politics departments have a range of modules available in various aspects of European politics, which has been subject to major political focus in recent years.

1. **US Politics**

Courses in US politics remain incredibly popular with students. With events such as Bush’s ‘War on terror’ and the election of Obama having major implications in the USA and internationally.

1. **Comparative Politics**

Several Politics departments will offer a choice of modules in other parts of the world, including the Middle East, Asian and African politics, where issues of democratisation, terrorism and development will be considered.

1. **International Politics**

In addition to studying politics in terms of established and emerging nation-states, politics can also be considered in terms of the relationships between states and the increasingly significant role of international institutions and the impact of ‘globalisation’.

1. **Security studies**

An increasing important branch of political research is that of Security Studies, given the rise of global terrorism and environmental security issues.

1. **Public Policy**

How is policy made? How do decision-makers decide between different policy options? What are the causes of policy failure and how can they be avoided? These are the type of questions of concern to public policy analysts at a local, national and international level.

1. **Political Economy**

Considers the way in which the economy is organised, relations between states, markets and civil society and the range of proposals that have been put forward to change economic structures at a national and global level.

1. **Political Ideologies**

Political action is shaped by beliefs. Such beliefs can be classified as political ideologies ~ both established ideologies such as Liberalism, Conservatism and Socialism and newer ideologies such as feminism and environmentalism.

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1. **Political Philosophy**

Throughout time philosophers have wrestled with key issues that are inherently political. Such as what the relationship between freedom and order should be, the legitimacy of political rule, social justice and the most appropriate way to understand human nature.

1. **Methods**

Politics involves not only the study of content, but also the application of methods. Almost all Politics degrees will have an emphasis on not just what is studied, but also how to study it. Qualitative and quantitative methods will be studied and practical guidance offered as to how to study the inherent complexities of Politics effectively.

**Skills**

In choosing to do a degree in Politics you will develop a wide range of subject specific and wider transferable skills, making you attractive to potential employers. For example:

**Analysis & Critical Awareness**

Politics is about analysis of complex and often contradictory data and being able to construct and defend arguments derived from such data. You will be able to articulate and defend your arguments in the face of criticism.

**Communication**

You will be able to communicate effectively in writing and verbally as a result of studying Politics. You will be required to write essays and reports independently, in addition to giving presentations and contribute to academic discussions. You will become more confident in your ability to communicate by studying Politics.

**Information Technology**

You will be able to develop this vital skill in today’s world. You will use information technology to gather, interrogate and present data. Some Politics modules involve the analysis of statistical data using relevant software packages.

**Work Experience & Placements**

An increasing number of Politics departments offer placements, for example in Parliament, the devolved assemblies and the European Union/Parliament. Similarly opportunities exist in pressure groups, local government, industry and so forth. These allow you to gain direct experience of working in a political environment, testing your theoretical knowledge of the subject whilst enhancing your CV and employability after your studies.



**Further Study**

Obtaining a degree in Politics does not necessarily mean the end of your studies. Most universities offer postgraduate Politics provision, including taught and research-based qualifications such as MA/MSc and MPhil/PhDs. These qualifications allow you to specialise in areas you have found most interesting during your undergraduate study.

Whilst a postgraduate qualification in Politics remains essential to become a university lecturer in the subject[[3]](#footnote-3), these qualifications are an advantage in applying for professional jobs, think-tanks and the civil service.

**Places to Study Politics in the UK**

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| **|Aberdeen**Dept. of Politics & IR[www.abdn.ac.uk/pir/](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/pir/) | **Dundee**School of Government & International Affairs.Dept Politics[www.dur.ac.uk/sgia](http://www.dur.ac.uk/sgia) | **Lancaster**Dept. of Politics, Philosophy & religion[www.lancs.ac.uk/fass/politics/](http://www.lancs.ac.uk/fass/politics/) |
| **Aberystwyth**Dept. of International Politics[www.aber.ac.uk/interpol/en](http://www.aber.ac.uk/interpol/en) | **Durham**School of Government & International Affairs, Dept. of Politics[www.dur.ac.uk/sgia](http://www.dur.ac.uk/sgia) | **Leeds**School of Politics & International Studies[www.polis.leeds.ac.uk/](http://www.polis.leeds.ac.uk/) |
| **Bangor**School of Social Sciences[www.bangor.ac.uk/so/](http://www.bangor.ac.uk/so/) | **East Anglia**School of Political Social & International Studies[www.uea.ac.uk/psi/](http://www.uea.ac.uk/psi/) | **Leeds ~ Metropolitan**School of Politics & International Studies[www.Imu.ac.uk/as/sss](http://www.Imu.ac.uk/as/sss) |
| **Bath**European Studies & Modern Languages[www.bath.ac.uk/esml/](http://www.bath.ac.uk/esml/) | **Edinburgh** Dept. Politics & IRwww.pol.ed.ac.uk/ | **Leicester ~ De Montfort**Dept. of Public Policy[www.dmu.ac.uk/faculties/publicpolicy](http://www.dmu.ac.uk/faculties/publicpolicy)Dept Politics & IR[www.dmu.ac.uk/facuties/politics/ir/](http://www.dmu.ac.uk/facuties/politics/ir/) |
| **Belfast ~ Queen’s University** School of Politics, IR & Philosophical Studies[www.qub.ac.uk/schools/Schoolof PoliticsinternationalStudiesand Philosophy/](http://www.qub.ac.uk/schools/Schoolof%20PoliticsinternationalStudiesand%20Philosophy/) | **Essex**Dept. of Government<http://www.essex.ac.uk/government> | **Leicester**Dept of Politics & IR[www.le.ac.uk/politics/](http://www.le.ac.uk/politics/) |
| **Belfast ~ Ulster**School of criminology Politics & Social Policy[www.socsci.ulster.ac.uk/policy/](http://www.socsci.ulster.ac.uk/policy/) | **Exeter**Dept. of Politics[www.exeter.ac.uk/politics/index.php](http://www.exeter.ac.uk/politics/index.php) | **Liverpool**Dept. of Politics[www.liv.ac.uk/polcomm/](http://www.liv.ac.uk/polcomm/) |
| **Birmingham ~ Aston**School of languages & Social Sciences[www.aston.ac.uk/lss/](http://www.aston.ac.uk/lss/) | **Glamorgan**Dept. of social Sciences<http://hass.glam.ac.uk/> | **Liverpool ~ John Moores**School of Humanities and Social Science[www.livjm.ac.uk/Unistructure/84426/](http://www.livjm.ac.uk/Unistructure/84426/) |
| **Birmingham** Centre for Russian & East European Studies[www.eri.bham.ac.uk/](http://www.eri.bham.ac.uk/)Dept. of Political Science & International Studies[www.polsis.bham.ac.uk/](http://www.polsis.bham.ac.uk/)Institute of Local Government[www.inlogov.bham.ac.uk/](http://www.inlogov.bham.ac.uk/) | **Glasgow**Dept. of Politics[www.gla.ac.uk/departments/politics](http://www.gla.ac.uk/departments/politics) | **Liverpool ~ Hope**Dept. of Politics, media & Communication[www.hope.ac.uk/politicsandhistory](http://www.hope.ac.uk/politicsandhistory) |
| **Birmingham ~ City**School of Social Science[www.bcu.ac.uk/elss/schoo-of-social-sciences](http://www.bcu.ac.uk/elss/schoo-of-social-sciences) | **Glasgow ~ Caledonian**Dept. of Social Sciences, Politics Subject Groups[www.gcal.ac.uk](http://www.gcal.ac.uk) | **London ~ City of London**Dept. of International Politics[www.city.ac.uk/intpol/](http://www.city.ac.uk/intpol/) |
| **Bradford**Dept. of Peace Studies[www.brad.ac.uk/peace/index.php](http://www.brad.ac.uk/peace/index.php) | **Huddersfield**School of Human & health Sciences[www.hud.ac.ukhhs/pis/index.php](http://www.hud.ac.ukhhs/pis/index.php) | **London ~ East London**School of Humanities & Social Science[www.uel.ac.uk/hss/](http://www.uel.ac.uk/hss/) |
| **Bristol**School of Sociology, Politics & International Studies[www.bristol.ac.uk/politics/](http://www.bristol.ac.uk/politics/) | **Hull**Dept. of Politics & International Studies[www.hull.ac.uk/pas/](http://www.hull.ac.uk/pas/) | **London ~ Metropolitan**Faculty of Law, Governance & International Relations[www.londonmet.ac.uk/depts/lgir/](http://www.londonmet.ac.uk/depts/lgir/) |
| **Cambridge**Dept. of Politics & International Studies[www.polis.cam.ac.uk/index.html](http://www.polis.cam.ac.uk/index.html) | **Keele**SPIRE: Politics, IR & Philosophy[www.keele.ac.uk/depts/spire/](http://www.keele.ac.uk/depts/spire/) | **London ~ South Bank**Dept. of Social & Policy Studies[www.Isbu.ac.uk/ahssps/](http://www.Isbu.ac.uk/ahssps/) |
| **Cardiff** Politics Dept., School of European Studies[www.cardiff.ac.uk/euros/](http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/euros/) | **Kent**Canterbury Christ Church Politics & IR Framework[www.canterbury.ac.uk/politics](http://www.canterbury.ac.uk/politics) | **London ~ Westminster**Dept. of Politics & International Relations[www.westminster.ac.uk/politics](http://www.westminster.ac.uk/politics) |
| **London ~ University**Birkbeck CollegeDept. of Politics[www.bbk.ac.uk/polsoc/](http://www.bbk.ac.uk/polsoc/) | **Manchester**School of Social Sciences[www.socialsciences.manchester.ac.uk/](http://www.socialsciences.manchester.ac.uk/) | **Reading**School of Politics & International Relations[www.reading.ac.uk/spirs/](http://www.reading.ac.uk/spirs/) |
| **London ~ University**Goldsmiths CollegeDept. of Politics[www.gold.ac.uk/politics/](http://www.gold.ac.uk/politics/) | **Manchester ~ Metropolitan**Dept. of Politics[www.hlss.mmu.ac.uk/polphil/](http://www.hlss.mmu.ac.uk/polphil/) | **Richmond**Politics & International Relations<http://richmond.ac.uk> |
| **London ~ University**Institute for the Study of the Americas<http://americas.ac.uk/> | **Middlesex**Political & International Studies, School of Health & Social Sciences[www.mdx.ac.uk](http://www.mdx.ac.uk) | **Salford**Politics & Contemporary History[www.espach.salford.ac.uk/](http://www.espach.salford.ac.uk/) |
| **London ~ University**Institute of Commonwealth Studies[www.commonwealth.sas.ac.uk](http://www.commonwealth.sas.ac.uk) | **Newcastle**School of Geography, Politics & Sociology[www.ncl.ac.uk/gps/](http://www.ncl.ac.uk/gps/) | **Sheffield**Dept. of Politics[www.shef.ac.uk/politics/](http://www.shef.ac.uk/politics/) |
| **London ~ University**King’s College LondonDefence Studies Dept. JSCSC[www.kcl.ac.uk/schools/defence](http://www.kcl.ac.uk/schools/defence) | **Newcastle ~ Northumbria**Division of Politics & History[www.northumbria.ac.uk](http://www.northumbria.ac.uk) | **Sheffield ~ Hallam**Faculty of Development & Society[www.shu.ac.uk/faculties/om/](http://www.shu.ac.uk/faculties/om/) |
| **London ~ University**King’s College LondonDept. of War Studies[www.kcl.ac.uk/schools/ws](http://www.kcl.ac.uk/schools/ws) | **Northampton**Dept. of Sociology & Politics[www.northampton.ac.uk](http://www.northampton.ac.uk) | **Southampton**Division of Politics & International Relations[www.southampton.ac.uk/socsci/](http://www.southampton.ac.uk/socsci/) |
| **London ~ University**London School of Economics & Political ScienceDept. of International Relations[www.lse.ac.uk/Depts/intrel/](http://www.lse.ac.uk/Depts/intrel/) | **Nottingham**School of Politics & International Relations[www.nottingham.ac.uk/politics/](http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/politics/) | **St Andrews**School of International Relations[www.st-andrews.ac.uk/intrel/home/](http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/intrel/home/) |
| **London ~ University**London School of Economics & Political Science, Dept. of Govt.[www.lse.ac.uk/government](http://www.lse.ac.uk/government) | **Nottingham ~ Trent**Languages & International Studies[www.ntu.ac.uk](http://www.ntu.ac.uk) | **Staffordshire**Politics[www.staffs.ac.uk/faculties/](http://www.staffs.ac.uk/faculties/) |
| **London ~ University**Queens Mary’sSchool of Politics & Int. Studies[www.politics.qmul.ac.uk/](http://www.politics.qmul.ac.uk/) | **Nottingham ~ Trent**Division of Politics & Sociology[www.ntu.ac.uk](http://www.ntu.ac.uk) | **Stirling**Dept. of Politics[www.politics.stir.ac.uk/](http://www.politics.stir.ac.uk/) |
| **London ~ University**Royal HollowayDept. of Politics & International Relations[www.rhul.ac.uk/politics-and-IR/](http://www.rhul.ac.uk/politics-and-IR/) | **OPEN**Dept. of Politics & International Studies (POLIS)[www.open.ac.uk/socialsciences/about-the-faculty/departments/politics](http://www.open.ac.uk/socialsciences/about-the-faculty/departments/politics) | **Strathclyde**School of Government & Public Policy[www.strath.ac.uk/government/](http://www.strath.ac.uk/government/) |
| **London ~ University**School of Oriental & African StudiesDept. of Politics & International Relations[www.soas.ac.uk/politics/](http://www.soas.ac.uk/politics/) | **Oxford**Dept. Politics & International Relations[www.politics.oc.ac.uk](http://www.politics.oc.ac.uk) | **Surrey**Dept. of Politics[www.surrey.ac.uk/politics/](http://www.surrey.ac.uk/politics/) |
| **London ~ University**School of Slavonic & East European StudiesDept of Social Sciences[www.ssees.ucl.ac.uk/social/htm](http://www.ssees.ucl.ac.uk/social/htm) | **Oxford ~ Brookes**Dept. of Politics, International Relations & Sociology<http://ssl.brookes.ac.uk/international-relations/> | **Sussex**School of Law, Politics & Sociology[www.sussex.ac.uk/polces](http://www.sussex.ac.uk/polces) |
| **London ~ University**University CollegeDept of Political Science/School of Public Policy[www.ucl.ac.ukspp/](http://www.ucl.ac.ukspp/) | **Plymouth**School of Management[www.plymouth.ac.uk/pages/page 28885](http://www.plymouth.ac.uk/pages/page%2028885) | **Swansea**Dept. of Political & Cultural Studies[www.swansea.ac.uk/politics/](http://www.swansea.ac.uk/politics/) |
| **Loughborough**Dept. of Politics, History & International Relations[www.lbor*o.ac.*uk/departments/eu/](http://www.lboro.ac.uk/departments/eu/) | **Portsmouth**Politics Division, School of Social & Historical Studies[www.port.ac.uk/departments/sshls/](http://www.port.ac.uk/departments/sshls/) | **University of Highlands & Islands**History & Politics[www.uhi.ac.uk/home](http://www.uhi.ac.uk/home) |
| **Warwick**Dept. of Politics & Int. Studies[www.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/pais/](http://www.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/pais/) | **Winchester**Dept. of Politics[www.winchester.ac.uk/](http://www.winchester.ac.uk/) | **York**Dept. of Politics[www.york.ac.uk/depts/poli/](http://www.york.ac.uk/depts/poli/) |
| **West of England**Dept. of Politics & Philosophy[www.uwe.ac.uk/hiss/politics/index/](http://www.uwe.ac.uk/hiss/politics/index/) | **Wolverhampton**Politics & International Studies Subject Area[www.wlv.ac.uk](http://www.wlv.ac.uk) |
| **West of Scotland**Politics & Sociology Group, School of Social Sciences[www.uws.ac.uk/schoolsdepts/scoicalsciences/](http://www.uws.ac.uk/schoolsdepts/scoicalsciences/) | **Worcester**Dept. of History & Sociology[www.worcester.ac.uk/courses/1850](http://www.worcester.ac.uk/courses/1850) |

**Some final thoughts…**

By far the best way of choosing the most appropriate course is to utilise the resources and expertise of our library here at LGS, including reference books and university prospectuses and the Internet. The UCAS Website is open to everyone ([www.ucas.ac.uk](http://www.ucas.ac.uk)), and provides excellent search facilities listing every UK university degree. You can retrieve details of all the Politics Single Honours and Joint Honours degrees. There are also maps and general information about each university, such as its location, whether it is a campus or city site.

Similarly various sites exist that can offer you insights into the differing requirements needed for universities, as well as additional information about the provision of Politics they offer. An example of which is:

<http://www.thecompleteuniversityguide.co.uk/league-tables/rankings?s=Politics>

Once you have looked through the lists of degree courses available, you will need more detailed information. Most Departments maintain web pages (see above) with details of their staff and courses, quite often even showing the syllabuses of each module they offer. You may wish to look at the range of modules available, and at the research fields of the staff in a Department, particularly if you have areas of special interest, such as the Politics of some geographical region, research methodologies, or women's studies.

Unfortunately, there is no easy way of ranking your choices by the quality of the teaching you will receive. There is an official ranking of the quality of the research output of Politics Departments and this is also available on the Internet. Bear in mind, however, that excellent researchers are not necessarily also the best teachers. A parallel, official ranking of teaching quality is on its way, but is not yet available for Politics Departments, except in Scotland.

If you still are uncertain whether a particular course is suitable for you, perhaps the best advice I can give is for you to put your questions to the Department directly - it is safe to assume that all good Departments will welcome your inquiries and do their best to help you.

Feel free to speak with me about this issue. Good luck!

Mr Dawkins, 2018

1. The academic organisation for the study of Politics in the UK at under- and post-graduate level, representing 91 universities in the UK. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. PPE remains the hardest degree to get on at Oxbridge and 84% of Politics graduates in 2016 went directly into graduate employment, making them amongst the most employable of all humanities subjects in the UK (*Office of National Statistics: Graduate in the Workplace*). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Although qualifications here are not half as prized by universities as a peer assessed strong research record. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)