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# Undergraduate Research in the UK: Politics and International Relations Degrees

## Characteristics of Politics Degrees in the UK

	Range	Mean	Std Dev
% of Degree in Subject	50% to 100%	87%	15%
% of Degree Compulsory	0% to 100%	51%	23%
% Degrees Requiring Methods		56%	
% of Degrees Requiring Project		69%	

The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland August 2008

Bachelor's degrees with honours are awarded to students who have demonstrated:

- a systematic understanding of key aspects of their field of study, including acquisition of coherent and detailed knowledge, at least some of which is at, or informed by, the forefront of defined aspects of a discipline
- an ability to deploy accurately established techniques of analysis and enquiry within a discipline
- conceptual understanding that enables the student:
  - to devise and sustain arguments, and/or to solve problems, using ideas and techniques, some of which are at the forefront of a discipline
  - to describe and comment upon particular aspects of current research, or equivalent advanced scholarship, in the discipline
- an appreciation of the uncertainty, ambiguity and limits of knowledge
- the ability to manage their own learning, and to make use of scholarly reviews and primary sources (for example, refereed research articles and/or original materials appropriate to the discipline).

- The UK has national benchmarks for honours degrees
- But Politics and International Relations reject any notions of a national standard or curriculum
- Despite rejecting a 'national curriculum', there is a remarkable degree of agreement across programmes in the way that they:

- Constrain student choice to create a very prescribed curriculum
- Mostly require research methods as part of the degree
- Overwhelmingly require a dissertation/project as part of the degree

• Research methods requirements do not differ between research intensive and other universities

• However, dissertation requirements significantly differ between research intensive universities and others

• The universities most committed to carrying out research are the least committed to pursuing this mission among undergraduates

• These differences, while very important in the UK context, appear trivial when compared to provisions in most other countries.

## Variation in Research Methods Provision

	Russell Group	Non-Russell Group
Methods Required	6	27
Methods NOT Required	8	21

Pearson Chi Square Prob Value Not Significant

## Variation in Dissertation/Project Requirements

	Russell Group	Non-Russell Group
Dissertation Required	7	38
Dissertation NOT Required	8	13

\*Pearson Chi Square Prob. value .042

Subject Benchmark Statement for Politics and International Relations

"Subject benchmark statements are used for a variety of purposes. Primarily, they are an important external source of reference for higher education institutions when new programmes are being designed and developed in a subject area. They provide general guidance for articulating the learning outcomes associated with the programme but are not a specification of a detailed curriculum in the subject."

## How to Categorize Curricula

- Depth vs Breadth
- Choice vs Coherence
- Diverse vs Common Academic Standards

Data Obtained from 64 of 77 single honours politics or international relations degrees offered in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland from 2008-2009

Sample rate of 86%

\*Scottish degrees normally take four years to completion, and are not directly comparable with other UK degrees for the purposes of this study.

