

# Study international relations and development studies in the UK

## Where can I study international relations and development studies?

There are over a 1000 courses at 110 universities to study international relations in the UK.<sup>1</sup> This includes three of the top ten universities for politics in the world - University of Oxford (second), The London School of Economics and Political Science (fifth), and University of Cambridge (seventh).<sup>2</sup> There are also around 800 development studies courses available at 82 universities.<sup>3</sup>

The five best universities in the world to study development are all UK institutions – University of Sussex (first), University of Oxford (second), SOAS University of London and London School of Economics and Political Science (joint third), and University of Cambridge (fifth).<sup>4</sup>

## What is the application process?

International students typically require at least 6,6,5 at Higher level – and over 32 points – to study development or international relations at undergraduate level in the UK. An overall IELTS score of 6.5 is also normally required (with at least 5.5 to 6.0 in each component).

For postgraduate degrees, universities will typically require at least an upper second class (2:1) honours degree or equivalent. An academic background in social science or humanities is preferred for development studies, while undergraduate studies in related areas such as politics or the social sciences are useful when applying for a master's in international relations.

## How long does it take to graduate?

Development and international relations undergraduate degrees typically take around three years to complete in the UK. Many offer opportunities to extend your studies with a year's work experience placement or study abroad.

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<sup>1</sup> [UCAS, 2025](#)

<sup>2</sup> [QS Top Universities, 2025](#)

<sup>3</sup> [UCAS, 2025](#)

<sup>4</sup> [QS Top Universities, 2025](#)

Postgraduate degrees are usually between one and two years, with many universities offering part-time options.

## What do the courses cover?

International relations is a branch of political science that explores how countries, NGOs and multinational companies interact in a globalised world. At undergraduate or postgraduate level, you'll study political theory, global history and political analysis, develop key research skills, and have the chance to specialise in areas such as world religions or security studies.

Development studies focuses on international development and humanitarian action, covering issues like migration, conflict, political ecology and aid. You'll gain a strong foundation in development history, theory and policy, and can tailor your learning through modules such as population studies or applied development economics.

## What will I study?

UK degrees in international relations typically explore political theory, diplomacy, global governance, security studies, international law, and regional politics. Development studies programmes focus on humanitarian policy, sustainable development, global inequality, conflict and peacebuilding, and applied economics. Across both disciplines, students learn to assess real-world challenges using critical research and policy tools.

## Why is the UK a good choice to study international relations and development studies?

A UK degree is a strong foundation for a global career in international affairs. You'll learn from leading experts, attend thought-provoking events, and study in a diverse, multicultural environment that broadens your perspective from day one. Innovative, interdisciplinary teaching also builds the critical thinking skills needed for success in a wide range of careers.

## Are there any scholarships for studying international relations and development?

There are often funding options available for international students who want to study international relations and development in the UK. These range from part-funding, for example paying part of your fees, to full-funding which covers programme fees, living expenses, and return flights to the UK.

You can search our database of scholarships at [study-uk.britishcouncil.org/scholarships-funding](https://study-uk.britishcouncil.org/scholarships-funding) and check with individual university websites for institution-specific opportunities.

## What are my work options after I graduate?

Both development studies and international relations graduates are highly sought after. With such a broad skill-set, rigorous academic training, and a globally-respected UK degree, you'll finish your studies ready to work anywhere in the world.

A development studies degree is the ideal start for anyone wanting to work for an aid organisation, international charity or non-governmental organisation (NGO). And beyond this, the careers open to development students are extremely diverse. And there are many opportunities available to you, from research-based roles, to working in journalism or at large global bodies such as the UN, the World Bank and UNICEF.

Similarly, a degree in international relations will give you the in-depth knowledge and skills to succeed at all manner of careers from diplomat, analyst, human rights campaigner, or lobbyist to varied roles in politics, economics or the media.

The UK's Graduate route allows international students to apply to stay in the UK and work, or look for work, upon graduation. International students who have successfully completed an undergraduate, master's degree or PhD have the option to apply to stay in the UK for an agreed period, following their studies. The Graduate route does not require you to secure sponsorship.

To find out more about studying international relations and development in the UK, and to find a course, visit [study-uk.britishcouncil.org](https://study-uk.britishcouncil.org)