MA International Relations

Programme Specification

Primary Purpose:
Course management, monitoring and quality assurance.

Secondary Purpose:
Detailed information for students, staff and employers. Current students should refer to the related Course Handbook for further detail.

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Contents

Programme Specification

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1. Named Awards

MA International Relations
Postgraduate Diploma in International Relations
Postgraduate Certificate in International Relations

2. Course Code (and UCAS Code if applicable)

C2662F/P

To view units and course structures please visit www.port.ac.uk/unitwebsearch and enter the 'C' code above to find the correct course.

3. Awarding Body

University of Portsmouth

4. Teaching Institution

University of Portsmouth

5. Accrediting Body

Not applicable

6. QAA Benchmark Groups

Not applicable

7. Document Control Information

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8. Effective Session

2016/17

9. Author

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10. Faculty

Humanities and Social Sciences

11. Department

School of Social, Historical and Literary Studies

12. Educational Aims

- To provide a challenging and stimulating study environment
- To provide a coherent and flexible programme of study which corresponds to the differing backgrounds, needs and interests of students
- To enable students to develop specialist interests, skills and knowledge to an advanced level in the fields of International Relations

- To provide students with the skills and knowledge base to undertake research within the areas of International Relations
- To ensure that the research and specialist expertise of staff informs the curriculum
- To expose students to a broad range of themes, issues and debates in International Relations.
- To promote the University of Portsmouth's aims of internationalisation in its strategic plan through a programme which enhances students' capacity to be effective through emphasis on global citizenship and an international curriculum.
- Offer an opportunity for students to gain experience and skills relevant to future employment or further study within the International Relations subject area by choosing relevant work based learning and study options

13. Reference Points

- University of Portsmouth Curriculum Framework Document
- The UK Quality Code for Higher Education
- The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies (Qualification Frameworks)
- QAA characteristics of qualifications types
- Higher Education Credit Framework for England
- Professional experience, the scholarship and the research expertise of academic members of staff
- The regular feedback from undergraduate students on our portfolio of International Relations, Politics and European Studies degrees who have sought the opportunity to continue with postgraduate study at Portsmouth
- Consultation with Subject and Award External Examiners
- Consultation with colleagues nationally through professional associations such as the British International Studies Association

14. Learning Outcomes

A. Knowledge and Understanding of:

A.1   the features of stability and transformation in international affairs across global, regional, national and subnational contexts.

A.2   the diverse state and non-state actors and institutions constitutive of international relations and their relevance in international affairs

A.3   the complex and interdependent nature of key problems and issues in international affairs

A.4   the contested nature of key concepts such as security, citizenship, identity, power, politics and participation in International Relations

A.5   the range of theoretical approaches applied to the study of International Relationsthe variety of research methods and resources available for the advanced study of International Relations

A.6   the process of undertaking detailed research at an advanced level into an aspect of international affairs

B. Cognitive (Intellectual or Thinking) Skills, able to:

B.1   demonstrate an appreciation of the twin characteristics of stability and transformation exhibited within the international order

B.2   distinguish between the central actors and institutions and appraise contending accounts about their role and importance within international affairs

B.3   recognise and reflect upon issues of complexity, interdependence and contingency exhibited in diverse areas of international politics and policy

B.4   compare and contrast the contested meanings ascribed to key concepts such as security, citizenship, identity, power, politics and participation within the field of International

Relationsapply relevant theoretical approaches to key themes and issues in International Relations

B.5   conceptualise, articulate and defend the application of adopted methods and resources for research in International Relations

B.6   propose, design and develop a project of defined independent research at an advanced level and communicate the findings through an extended written report according to defined specifications in a chosen field of International Relations

C. Practical (Professional or Subject) Skills, able to:

C.1   critically analyse a range of primary and secondary texts relevant to the discipline of International Relations

C.2   distinguish between key debates in International Relations appraise their strengths and weaknesses

C.3   apply relevant approaches to the analysis of complex problems within the field of International Relations

C.4   select and implement appropriate research methodologies

C.5   prepare well-structured, clearly written, cogently argued and academically informed academic work at an advanced level

C.6   apply with confidence established disciplinary conventions, including accurate and consistent use of scholarly practices of bibliographic referencing and presentation

C.7   identify ethical issues and apply appropriate frameworks and practices

D. Transferable (Graduate and Employability) Skills, able to:

D.1   demonstrate advanced literacy and oral skills including the ability to present rhetorically effective, coherent, well researched and sustained arguments

D.2   employ effective self-management, initiative and personal responsibility across a range of tasks in order to meet set deadlines

D.3   utilise technical expertise using a range of information resources including online databases, digital archives, internet tools and ICT applications across a variety of contexts

D.4   manage and synthesise effectively a broad range of qualitative and quantitative evidence

D.5   work effectively within groups, engaging critically but respectfully in informed debate with others and are able to negotiate and handle conflict with confidence

D.6   communicate confidently within academic and professional settings

15. Learning and Teaching Strategies and Methods

A.1 – A.7 (knowledge and understanding) are delivered in in a variety of ways through the programme. Lectures are used to set out the key themes, theories, issues and debates. Seminars provide an opportunity for students to debate the issues and reinforce their learning. At a postgraduate level the content and structure of these and the relationship between the two are, however, fluid and will vary depending on students' backgrounds, prior knowledge and needs. Awareness of research methods and resources, the use of primary sources, use of data-bases and study skills at Master's level are emphasised in the taught units and also reinforced by workshops and library/ computer sessions which form part of the study skills/research methods classes running throughout the year. Students are assigned a supervisor with who they have regular one-to-one tutorials for the purposes of preparing for, and undertaking the research of, their dissertation/major project. Learning across the programme is also facilitated by student access to a dedicated virtual learning environment (VLE) site for each unit.

B.1 – B.7 (cognitive skills) are developed through preparation for seminar discussion and seminar presentations and within the seminars and lectures themselves. Both the key intellectual and thinking skills and the more practical research skills are also developed through the assessment strategy. Successful completion of their assessments requires that students demonstrate skills in comprehension, analysis, synthesis and evaluation and an ability to apply them within the empirical, conceptual and theoretical fields of International Relations (B.1 – 6). Students are supported in developing these skills through opportunities for personal tutorial and research supervision meetings. The practical skills related to undertaking advanced research and project management (B.6 – B.7)

are explicitly developed through induction sessions introducing students to the extensive resources available via the University Library and further developed via workshops which form part of the study skills/research methods support classes running throughout the year. The optional Independent Project module also offers students a further opportunity to develop their research and project management skills.

C.1 – C.7 (practical skills) are developed throughout the syllabus. Induction sessions provide an introduction to use of the library, IT facilities and an outline of what is expected of Master's-level work. Practical skills, including an explicit emphasis on ethical concerns (C.7), are further reinforced through study skills/research methods sessions which are embedded in the Dissertation/Major Project unit and extend throughout the year. Course and unit handbooks along with resources available via the VLE at course and unit levels provide guidance on core scholarly conventions such as bibliographic referencing which is discussed and practiced within skills sessions in order to ensure students have the necessary knowledge to uphold the expected standards associated with intellectual integrity (C.6). Tutorial support for the dissertation and personal tutorial consultations for unit assessments more widely as well as discussion in seminars are also vehicles for the development of practical skills. Students have the opportunity to take an option which develop negotiating and lobbying skills within the context of an international institution; the optional work-based unit provides an opportunity to reflect on the workplace and develop a project of practice relevant to their work situation.

D.1 – D.6 (transferrable skills) are developed through the assessments and learning activities. The process of preparing assessments such as essays, projects, reports and the Dissertation/Major Project requires that students take responsibility for their own learning and managing their time effectively in order to meet deadlines and pass the learning outcomes (D.2). This involves extensive reading, data collection, organising material, developing ideas and arguments, and applying advanced analytical skills both verbally and in written work (D.1, D3 – D.4, and D.6). These skills are further developed in seminars and lectures, the study skills/research methodology sessions throughout the year and workshops and online resources sessions in the library. Group work skills are developed in the seminar discussions across different units (D.5).

16. Assessment Strategy

The assessment strategy seeks to encourage and prompt critical engagement with course materials, competing interpretations and, in some units, such as work-based learning, reflect on their own experiences. Assessment of learning outcomes within units is progressively achieved through a range of formal assessment artefacts including academic essays, reports, case studies, literature reviews, research proposal and final dissertation. The philosophy underpinning this approach is that as students' progress through the programme they are exposed to a broad range of relevant debates, theories and issues. The adopted assessment strategy widens students' knowledge and understanding of the topic. It also means that student for whom International Relations is a new subject have to acquaint themselves with the full range of the subject area.

The variety of assessments means that students are able to develop a broad range of skills. In some units students will be asked to answer a direct question and will be assessed on how well they can mobilise sources and develop an argument towards answering that question. In other cases they will undertake a project in which they define the issues and set the hypotheses. In the core units students undertake an assessed proposal. This enables them to receive written feedback on what they are proposing to write before the submission of the final piece of work. Additionally, other units offer a variety of methods by which students can discuss their ideas with their tutors during formative stages and receive feedback prior to final submission.

The strategy also offers students ample opportunity to undertake detailed studies focusing on particular topics and thereby apply their wider theoretical and subject knowledge within the specific area of interest. This opportunity to undertake focused in-depth study is essential to developing the advanced skills required at a Master's level.

The assessment for the Dissertation/Major Project involves the submission of a proposal which requires that students set out their ideas for their research under a series of structured headings such

as aims and objectives, research methodology and ethical issues. They also have to write a literature review. As well as helping the development of research skills in a structured way, this assessment ensures that students have worked out the viability of their proposed area of research in a systematic way and have received feedback from relevant staff.

The dissertation is the culmination of the MA programme in that it involves the development of a wide range of skills over an extended piece of work. Students have to apply the practical and technical skills of research management including using online resources, collection and organisation of data. They have to be able to manage their time and organise their work effectively over an extended period. They need to be able to identify a research question, develop a hypothesis and an argument. In doing this they have to apply relevant theoretical approaches, show awareness of the arguments of others and mobilise and analyse evidence effectively. Lastly they have to be able to write and present their material in a readable form according to academic conventions.

Skills A.1 – A.7 (knowledge and understanding). Knowledge and understanding of the subject area is assessed through a variety of assessment types, including essays, projects, reports and portfolios. The adopted assessment strategy ensures that students have both a coherent overarching knowledge and understanding of the discipline whilst also allowing them to develop in-depth expertise within particular areas of interest. Students have opportunities for receiving feedback on their ideas in class and in tutorials and the core units include formative proposals through which students receive written feedback before embarking on their main piece of work. The development of students' knowledge and understanding of academic research and methodology is assessed especially by the proposal for, and final submission of, the Dissertation/Major project.

Skills B.1 – B.7 (cognitive skills). All the forms of assessment used in some way assess students' proficiency in the specified cognitive skills. However, shorter reports and essays facilitate assessment of students' skills of knowledge acquisition, comprehension, and application in relevant fields of International Relations (B.1 – B.5). Extended essays, independent projects and the Dissertation/Major project provide an opportunity to assess these skills more comprehensively but also facilitate the assessment of students' ability in the higher skills of synthesis and evaluation (B.6 – B.7).

Skills C.1 – C.7 (practical skills). Students' application of practical skills is assessed across the diverse assessments underpinning the programme assessment strategy. In order to satisfy the learning outcomes all units require that students demonstrate skills in reading critically; engage in key debates; apply knowledge of relevant theoretical and/or methodological issues and informed academic writing conforming to scholarly expectations (C.1 – C. 6). Marking criteria refer to practical skills such as presentation, structure, clarity and coherence. The option of undertaking an independent project and the core dissertation/major project require that students demonstrate skills C.1 – C.6 over an extended piece of writing but additionally entails that they consider ethical debates related to academic research and the implications arising for their own research activities (C.7).

Skills D.1 – D.6 (transferrable skills). Skills D.1 – D.4, and D.6 are assessed as part of the marking criteria for all units and the research skills are particularly extensively assessed through the dissertation and the dissertation proposal (D.3 – D.4). Time management skills are ultimately assessed through successfully passing the programme's learning outcomes. Deadlines are set such that students have to manage their own programme of work and pace themselves through the programme (D.2). Groups work skills (D.4) are not explicitly assessed. However, non-assessed group work in seminars and discussion develop these skills.

17. Course Structure, Progression and Award Requirements

See [Unit Web Search](#)[1] for full details on the course structure and units

The MA International Relations is offered either as a one year full-time or, two year part-time, programme of study. The degree is based on the University of Portsmouth's credit rating for taught

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[1] www.port.ac.uk/unitwebsearch

Masters Degrees of 180 credits. The taught units comprising the course are rated at 30 credits and the Dissertation is rated at 60 credits, as outlined below:

Award of the Postgraduate Certificate
To qualify for the award of a Postgraduate Certificate, students must have been assigned a least 60 credits at Level 7.

Award of the Postgraduate Diploma
To qualify for the award of a Postgraduate Diploma students must have been assigned a least 120 credits at Level 7.

Award of the MA degree
To qualify for the award of a Postgraduate Taught Master's Degree students must have been assigned a least 180 credits at Level 7.

18. Employability Statement

Graduate academic and employability skills – both subject specific and transferable skills – are delivered (and assessed where applicable) throughout the curriculum. This includes skills in: study and self-management; critical thinking and reflection; problem-solving and creative thinking; advanced reading, writing and oral communication skills; literacy in ICT and on-line information resources; and, research management. Through learning activities, assessments, and personal tutorials we support structured Personal Development Planning (PDP) to enable students to develop their skills throughout the course. Career management, as a subset of graduate and employability skills, is embedded in the year-long study skills/research management sessions which also develop advanced academic and research management skills for future employment. It includes explicit advice on careers for postgraduates (including further study) in conjunction with support from relevant partners across the university such as Purple Door and the Faculty's Placement and Internship Centre.

Assessment and activities in certain units are designed with work-related learning in mind, including: simulations of meetings of committees in international organisations such as the EU; preparation of briefing papers with respect to issues of international public policy; the development of lobbying strategies for network groups and presentations. In addition, especially for those part-time students who are in employment, a work-based unit is available in which students currently in work can reflect on their work for the benefit of their Master's degree.

Finally, within the structure of the assessment for the Dissertation/Major project there is an opportunity for students to develop a more work-related extended piece of research in place of the normal academic dissertation, for example, a commissioned assessment and analysis of a specific problem/issue in a work environment. Such projects need to be approved by the programme leader and relate to the overall subject area of International Relations.

All these activities will be supported by the Personal Tutor system.

19. Support for Student Learning

- The Course is managed by a Course Leader.
- Collaborative programmes are managed on a day-to-day basis by the University Contact who may or may not be the Course Leader.
- Extensive induction programme introduces the student to the University and their course.
- Each student has a personal tutor, responsible for pastoral support and guidance.
- University support services include careers, financial advice, housing, counselling etc.
- The Academic Skills Unit (ASK).
- The Additional Support and Disability Advice Centre (ASDAC).
- Excellent library facilities.

- The University of Portsmouth has consistently been awarded an excellent rating for student support and guidance in a number of Quality Assurance Agency inspections.
- Student course and unit handbooks provide information about the course structure and University regulations etc.
- Feedback is provided for all assessments.
- Personal Development Planning (PDP) for all awards.

20. Admissions Criteria

A. Academic Admissions Criteria

- an honours degree at a good standard in a social science, humanities or related discipline
- exceptionally other applicants may be admitted to the programme providing they can demonstrate an ability to study successfully at masters level
- students for whom English is a second language must demonstrate that they have a high level of competence in English equivalent to an ITLS score of 6.5 or above (with no individual component below 6.0)

B. Disability

The University makes no distinction in its admissions policy with regard to disability and will endeavour to make all reasonable adjustments in order to make it possible for students to study at Portsmouth on a course of their choice.

21. Evaluation and Enhancement of Standards and Quality in Learning and Teaching

A. Mechanisms for Review and Evaluation

- Course Leader's Annual Standards and Quality Evaluative Review.
- Head of Department's Annual Standards and Quality Evaluative Review.
- Unit and Course Level student feedback considered at Board of Studies.
- Unit Assessment Board consideration of student performance for each programme.
- Annual Standards and Quality Reports to Board of Studies, including consideration of Subject and Award External Examiner Reports.
- Periodic Programme Review.
- Student Representatives and Student/Staff Consultative Committees.
- National Student Survey.
- Staff Performance and Development Review.
- Peer Review and Development Framework.
- Faculty Learning and Teaching Committee.

B. Responsibilities for Monitoring and Evaluation

- Unit Co-ordinators for unit content and delivery.
- Course Leader for day-to-day running of course.
- University Contact for day-today running of course.
- Board of Studies with overall responsibilities for operation and content of course.
- Head of Department.
- Associate Dean (Academic).
- Associate Dean (Students).
- Quality Assurance Committee.
- Unit, Award and Progression Board of Examiners.

C. Mechanisms for Gaining Student Feedback

- Student Representation on Board of Studies.
- Student Staff Consultative Committees.
- Unit and Course level student feedback questionnaires.
- University participates in external student surveys, e.g. National Student Survey (NSS), Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) and International Student Barometer (ISB).

D. Staff Development Priorities

- Academic staff undertake activities related to research, scholarship, teaching and learning and student support and guidance.
- Annual staff performance and development reviews match development to needs.
- Managers undertake a variety of management development programmes.
- New academic staff required to undertake appropriate University of Portsmouth learning and teaching programmes
- All academic staff encouraged to seek Higher Education Academy membership.
- Academic staff undertake initial and continuing professional development within the Academic Professional Excellence Framework (APEX) programme which is aligned with the Higher Education Academy (HEA)'s UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF)
- Support Staff are encouraged to attend short courses in areas such as minute taking, and specific IT packages.

22. Assessment Regulations

Standard university rules apply (see Assessment and Regulations).

23. Role of Externals

Subject External Examiners who will:

- oversee unit assessment and usually attend Unit Assessment Boards
- approve unit assessment strategy
- sample assessment artefacts
- present report to Unit Assessment Boards.

Award External Examiners (usually also a Subject External Examiner) who will:

- oversee and attend Award/Progression Boards;
- scrutinise and endorse the outcomes of assessment;
- ensure that the standard of the award is maintained at a level comparable with that of similar awards elsewhere in the United Kingdom.

24. Indicators of Standards and Quality

A. Professional Accreditation/Recognition

N/A

B. Periodic Programme Review (or equivalent)

The programme is subject to the University's comprehensive Programme Monitoring and Review Process including the Annual Standards and Quality Evaluative Review (ASQER) and Periodic Programme Review. The Masters provision underwent an External Periodic Review in May 2013. The review confirmed the 'fitness of purpose' of the International Relations curriculum and the effectiveness of its annual monitoring and review processes

C. Quality Assurance Agency

QAA Higher Education Review, March 2015, judgements about standards and quality meet UK expectations (*for full report see Higher Education Review of the University of Portsmouth, March 2015*[1]).

[1] www.qaa.ac.uk/en/ReviewsAndReports/Documents/University%20of%20Portsmouth/University-of-Portsmouth-HER-15.pdf

D. Others

None.

25. Other Sources of Information

Other sources of information may be found in

- Course Approval Document.
- Student Handbook.
- University of Portsmouth Curricula Framework.
- University of Portsmouth Undergraduate Prospectus.
- Assessment Regulations
- University of Portsmouth (http://www.port.ac.uk/) and (http://www.port.ac.uk/courses/history-politics-and-social-studies/ma-international-relations/) website.