

# Politics and International Relations provision in UK higher education

January 2025

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# Acknowledgements

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# Key findings

**Aggregate demand for taught programmes in Politics and International Relations is strong, and more people are studying at undergraduate and postgraduate levels than a decade ago. But growth has been highly uneven across institutions, and Politics and International Relations has decreased as a share of all students over the past 4-5 years.**

**1** Despite growth in absolute numbers, as a proportion of all first degree students Politics and International Relations has decreased slightly in the 2020s, dropping **below 2%** of all students.

**2** Postgraduate taught numbers for Politics and International Relations have seen significant growth since 2011/12. But in the 2020s, these have reduced slightly as a proportion of all entries, dropping down to **1.5%**.

**3** Student recruitment across institutions in the UK has been **highly uneven** for Politics and International Relations, with a noticeable difference between Russell Group and non-Russell Group institutions at the undergraduate level.

Average change in the number of undergraduate students since 2011/12:

- Russell Group universities **+320**
- Pre-92 universities (non-Russell Group) **-25**
- Post-92 universities **-17**

**There have been notable changes in the international domiciles of students taking the discipline, shaped by a significant rise in non-EU international students.**

**4** There were **1,885** more non-EU international first degree students and **2,800** more non-EU international postgraduate taught students studying Politics and International Relations in 2022/23 compared to 2011/12.

**5** EU student numbers have **dropped by 36%** since 2020/21, the year changes in eligibility for home fee status came into effect.

**6** First degree students from the **United States** overtook France as the most common international domicile in 2021/22. For postgraduate taught programmes, **China** overtook the USA to become the most common international domicile in 2019/20.

**The makeup of the domestic intake of Politics and International Relations is changing, with the characteristics of cohorts of first degree students diversifying.**

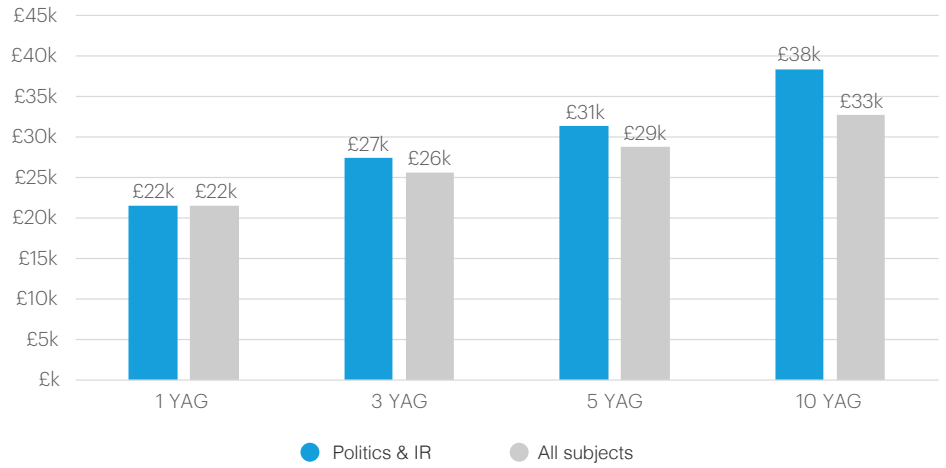
**7** Between 2011/12 and 2022/23, the proportion of undergraduate students from non-white ethnic backgrounds studying Politics and International Relations **increased by 8 percentage points**.

**8** In 2018/19, female students surpassed their male counterparts to become the majority among first degree students. This trend has persisted in recent years, with the **proportion of female students gradually increasing each year**.

**Politics and International Relations graduates have strong outcomes after completing their studies.**

**9** Median earnings for Politics and International Relations graduates are **higher than the average** salary for all graduates. A decade post-graduation, the average salary for Politics and International Relations first degree graduates is **£5,000** above the average graduate salary. For postgraduate taught students in the discipline, the average salary is **£9,000** higher than for all subjects

**Median earnings of first degree graduates 1, 3, 5 and 10 years after graduation, 2020/21**

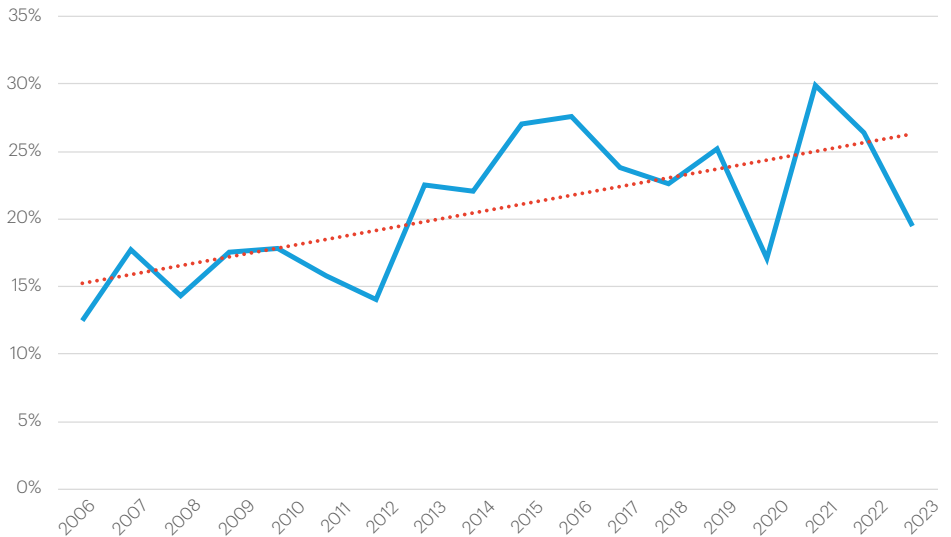


**Research funding has increased for Politics and International Relations over recent years.**

**10** Research income from all sources for Politics and International Relations **increased by £17.4 million** between 2016/17 and 2021/22.<sup>1</sup>

**11** The proportion of ESRC fellowships and grants awarded to Politics and International Relations has increased since 2006.

**Proportion of ESRC-funded fellowships and grants for Politics and International Relations, 2006-2024**



<sup>1</sup> Three-year averages (2015-2018 and 2020-2023) have been used here to calculate the difference over time to mitigate any year-on-year fluctuations caused by funding cycles.

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# 1.0 Introduction

Politics and International Relations is a broad and complex subject area that includes multiple overlapping disciplines and sub-disciplines. The most recent subject benchmark statement for Politics and International Relations provides a useful definition of what constitutes the discipline in UK higher education, summarising the scope as follows:

*As a subject discipline, politics and international relations explores issues of power, governance, participation, decision-making, conflict and cooperation across the globe. Broad in scope, politics and international relations encompasses the examination of relations between human beings and their sociopolitical and ecological environments at local, national and global levels. Studying this discipline is characterised by understanding and critiquing changing political practices, processes and challenges, and providing ongoing scrutiny, contestation and debate about what constitutes politics and international relations.*

*The study of politics and international relations involves the description of phenomena, which are analysed or explained using general theories, patterns or generalisations, reflected upon normatively. Politics is concerned with developing a knowledge and understanding of government and society, including the interaction of people, ideas and institutions, and providing an understanding of how values are allocated and resources distributed across many contested sites - from the local through to the sectoral, national, regional and global.<sup>2</sup>*

This report is the most recent publication in a series of disciplinary-focused reports published by the British Academy looking at the SHAPE disciplines (Social Sciences, Humanities and Arts for People and the Economy), which can be found on [the British Academy's SHAPE Observatory](#). These reports provide a picture of higher education provision in the UK in specific disciplines or disciplinary areas. The aim of these reports is to provide insights into the state of the discipline, its health and the direction of travel across several different measures.

This report is based on both qualitative and quantitative data, using higher education databases as well as a short series of semi-structured interviews conducted with those working in Politics and International Relations. It draws on a wide range of sources that measure different aspects of the discipline, including funding, students, staff and research assessment data. For the quantitative analysis, the default time period considered (where possible) is from the academic years 2011/12 to 2022/23<sup>3</sup>. Full details of the methodological approach used for this project can be found in Chapter 9 at the end of this report.

<sup>2</sup> QAA (2023), *Subject Benchmark Statement: Politics & International Relations*, [accessed September 2024].

<sup>3</sup> Shorter timeframes have been used due to limitations in availability of the data in some cases. For some analyses, longer timeframes have been used to capture longer term trends, most notably with respect to research funding. See Chapter 9 for a justification of the default time period that has been considered in this report.



It is not the aim of this report to provide a history of the development of the discipline in the UK, as others have done previously.<sup>4</sup> It is also beyond the scope of this report to provide a comprehensive analysis of the current disciplinary landscape with respect to subject matter, research focus or pedagogical approaches. We hope, however, that this report can help to provide the basis for deeper dives into more specific aspects of the discipline.

The objective of this report is to pull together information from a wide range of sources to situate Politics and International Relations within the broader context of higher education in the UK. We want this to be a useful resource for those working in the Politics and International Sector as well as those working in the wider higher education policy landscape.

Chapter 2 considers pathways to higher education and those studying the discipline at pre-university levels across the UK. This involves an assessment of A level and Scottish Highers numbers over recent years, as well as a look into the changing demographics and characteristics of people showing interest in Politics and International Relations at 16 years or older. The long term trend in Scotland (Highers) and the rest of the UK (A levels) is positive, with those subjects corresponding to the discipline increasing their share of all qualifications taken.

Chapter 3 provides quantitative analysis of student numbers in taught programmes for Politics and International Relations (first degree and postgraduate taught programmes respectively). This chapter analyses changes in aggregate numbers over recent years, as well as changes in relation to the domicile of students and recruitment by different institutions. This shows that while there is still strong demand for Politics and International Relations, recruitment has been highly uneven between institutions over the past few years.

Chapter 4 looks at the make-up of the student population for Politics and International Relations with respect to certain personal characteristics, namely ethnicity, sex, disability and age. As with the chapter on student numbers, these are examined at the level of both first degree and postgraduate taught students. The data shows that at the undergraduate level, the student body for Politics and International Relations is diversifying, with the proportion of both female and non-white students increasing over recent years. However, the gap in access between the groups of students in England, based on geographical area, has persisted.

Chapter 5 turns to the teaching environment, the experience of Politics and International Relations students and their outcomes after graduating. This chapter looks at the changing expectations and demands of students who are studying the discipline. It also draws on data from the Graduate Outcomes Survey and the Longitudinal Outcomes Survey to provide insights on the reflections, employment status and earnings of graduates of Politics and International Relations. Politics and International Relations students are shown to generate a broad set of skills that are applicable to life after university and have strong salary returns in the decade immediately after graduation.

Chapter 6 focuses on the pipeline into the academic profession for Politics and International Relations, looking at both postgraduate research students and the academic workforce. It starts by focusing on postgraduate research student numbers and the characteristics of students at this level of study. The absolute number of postgraduate research students has decreased over recent years, a trend that has also taken place in other social science disciplines.

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<sup>4</sup> Hayward, J. et al. (1999), *The British Study of Politics in the Twentieth Century*. Published for the British Academy by Oxford University Press.

Hayward, J. (1991), 'Political Science in Britain', *European Journal of Political Research*, 20(3-4): 301-322.

Kenny, M. (2004), 'The Case for Disciplinary History: Political Studies in the 1950s and 1960s', *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 6(4): 565-583.

Grant, W. (2010), *The Development of a Discipline*, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

Craig, J. (2020), 'The Emergence of Politics as a Taught Discipline at Universities in the United Kingdom', *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 22(2), 145-163.

The chapter then considers the transition to academic positions in the discipline, by considering data on the numbers of staff, their nationality and contract type (respectively). Throughout the chapter, insights are also captured from the interviews that were conducted to support this project, considering the internationalisation of the workforce, staff mobility and entering the profession. In addition, the chapter looks at diversity of academic staff in Politics and International Relations.

Chapter 7 of this report is focused on the research sector for Politics and International Relations, exploring what the most recent research excellence framework (REF2021) and research funding data tells us about the discipline. The chapter also draws on semi-structured interviews that were conducted as part of this project to provide insights on the rise of interdisciplinarity and the impact of new technologies on the development of the discipline. This chapter highlights increases in research funding for the discipline across a range of different revenue streams over recent years. It also highlights the breadth of impact as shown through REF2021, and the perception of a plural academic community amongst scholars. All this suggests a thriving and diverse Politics and International Relations research sector exists in the UK.

Chapter 8 concludes by synthesising the findings of the report and offering a set of opportunities and challenges for the discipline.

Chapter 9 details the methodology and approach of the report.

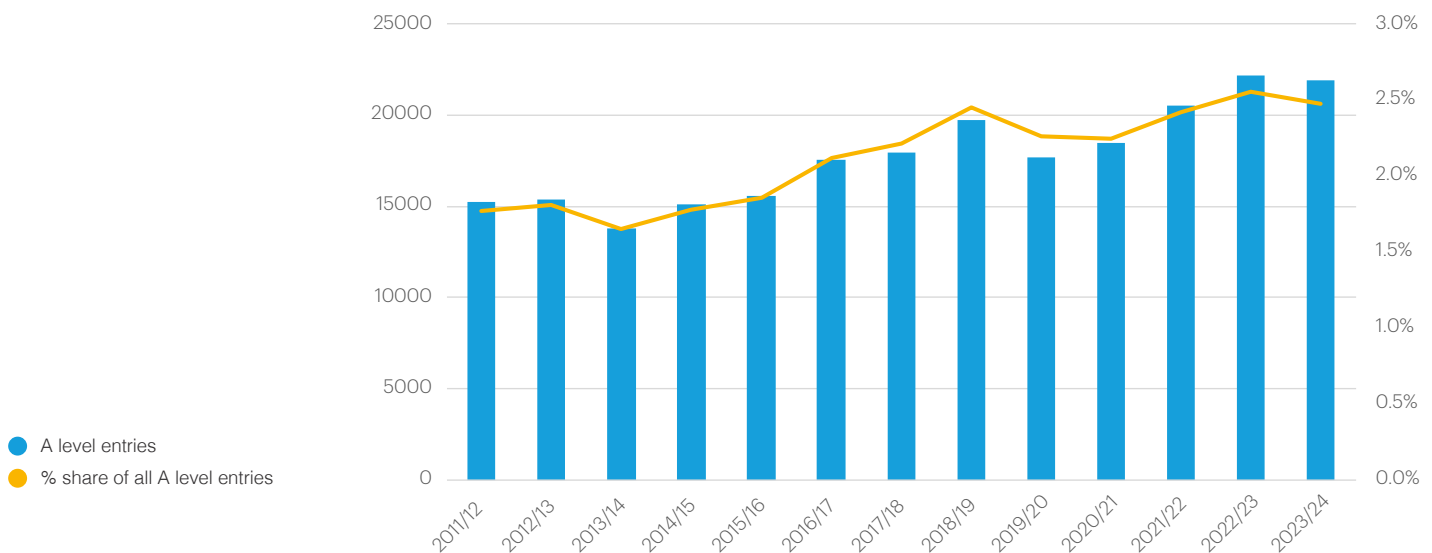
# 2.0 Pre-university qualifications

Data on A level entries for Politics in England, Northern Ireland and Wales (provided by JCQ) and Higher entries in Scotland (provided by the SQA) can help paint a picture of demand for the discipline at pre-university levels of education in the UK.<sup>5</sup> For many Politics and International Relations degree courses, a pre-university qualification in the subject is not an entry requirement. Nevertheless, it is useful to have an understanding of take up of these qualifications, as they form an important part of the pathways of those who go on to study Politics and International Relations at university as well as being an indicator of general interest and engagement in the discipline.

## 2.1 A level Politics (UK)

As shown in Chart 1, overall demand for Politics has increased over recent years, which is positive for the discipline. Politics A level has experienced growth in student numbers and in relative demand (measuring Politics A level as a percentage of the total entries to all subjects, as indicated by the yellow line).

**Chart 1 – Politics A level entries i) in absolute numbers and ii) as a porportion of all A level entries, 2011/12 to 2023/24**



Source: [British Academy SHAPE indicators dashboard](#)

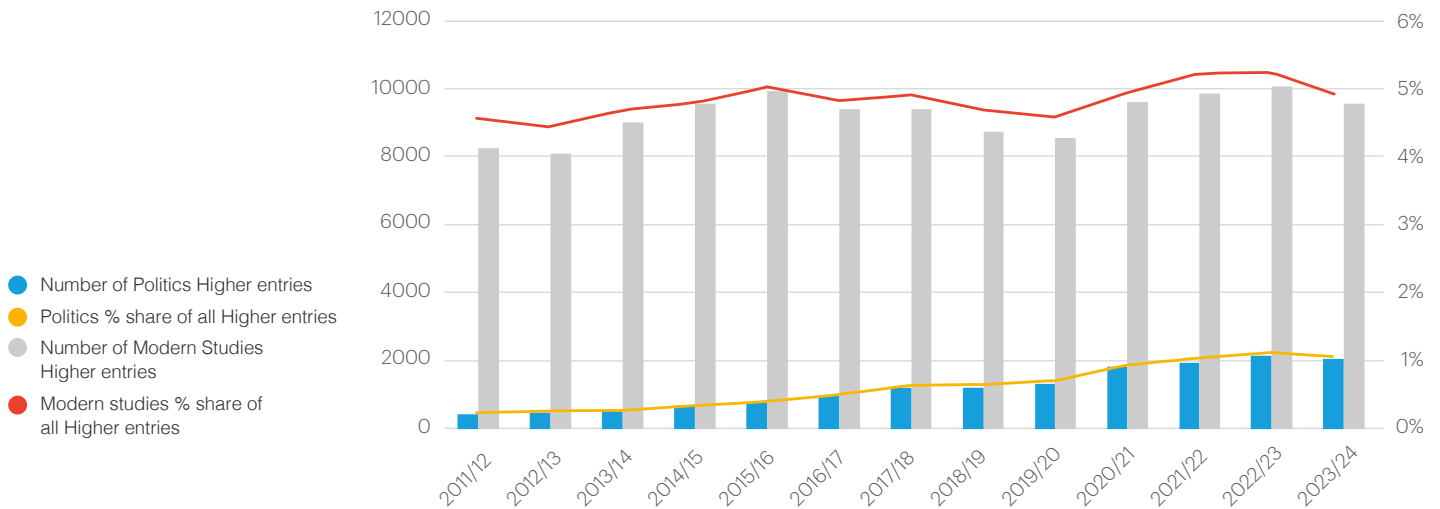
This chart refers to data from across the whole of the UK. A levels are commonly taken in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, but not in Scotland. In England, the popularity of Politics has increased, climbing from 1.76% of all entries in 2011/12 to 2.47% in 2023/24. However, there was a slight year on year decline in the most recent year. Wales also saw an increase, albeit more modest, over the period in question. In Northern Ireland, there has historically been a much higher proportion of people studying A level Politics, representing 3.76% of all A levels in 2023/24.

<sup>5</sup> There are no specific qualifications for International Relations at this level. Some A level History students will take modules that share much with International Relations, but this is not trackable in the data.

## 2.2 Higher level (Scotland)

Scotland has a different qualification framework to the rest of the UK, which involves qualifications called “Highers” and “Advanced Highers” post-16, which are similar to A levels.<sup>6</sup> There is an option to study the subject “Politics” at Higher level as well as “Modern Studies”, which includes a significant amount of content which maps on to Politics and International Relations. Chart 2 shows the take up of this subject at Higher level in Scotland.

**Chart 2 – Higher Entries for "Politics" and "Modern Studies" shown i) in absolute numbers ii) as a proportion of all Higher entries, 2011/12 to 2023/24**



Source: [British Academy SHAPE indicators dashboard](#)

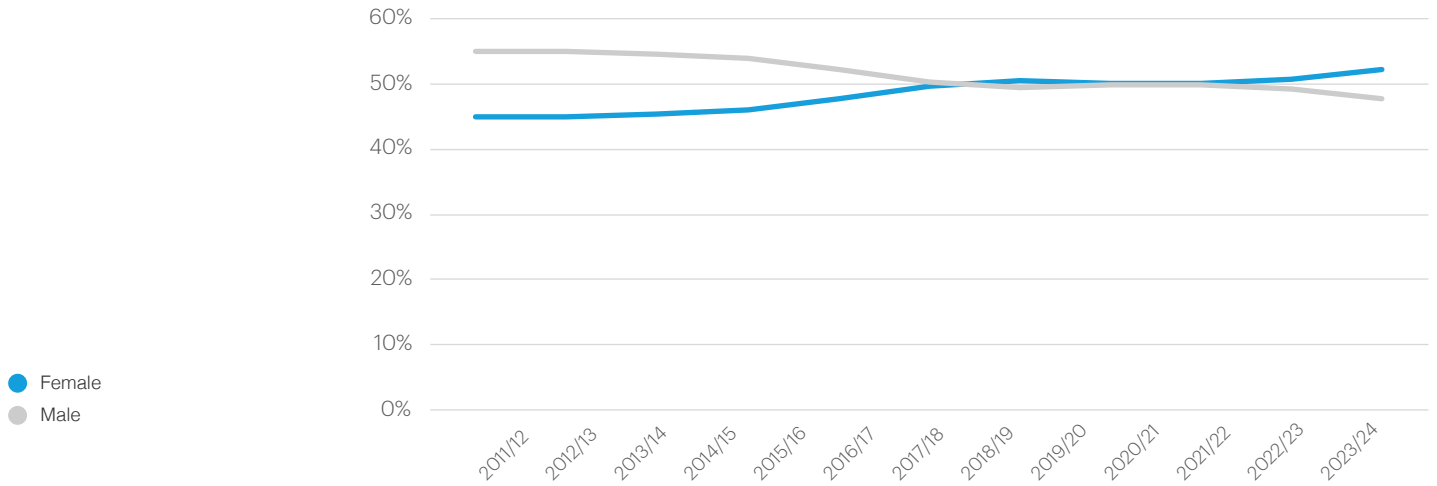
The overall picture in Scotland is very positive for the discipline, with a relatively steep increase in absolute numbers for Politics, as well as in the share of all Highers taken in Scotland. However, it should be noted that this will be partly attributable to it being a relatively new qualification. Modern Studies has fluctuated somewhat over recent years as a proportion of all entries but still commands an impressive share of pupils, with just under one in twenty of all entries taken in this subject. Interestingly, just like in England, we see a year-on-year decrease in the share of entries in the most recent year, 2023/24.

<sup>6</sup> Following the introduction of the Curriculum for Excellence, Modern Studies and Politics Highers were reformed on the Academic Year 2014/15, so the SQA presents two datasets for that year, "Highers" data and "New Highers" data. These datasets have been merged for the purposes of this section since it is deemed that there is consistency in the subject classifications of both.

### 2.3 Characteristics of A level Politics students (England)

Data from the National Pupil Database (NPD) and the Individualised Learner Record (ILR) helps to explore characteristics of students who have studied Politics in England before university. As shown in Chart 3, the gap between male and female pupils taking Politics at A level was closed in 2017/18. In 2011/12, 55% of entries were male and 45% were female, but by 2021/22 this had switched to males representing 48% and females representing 52% of the students.

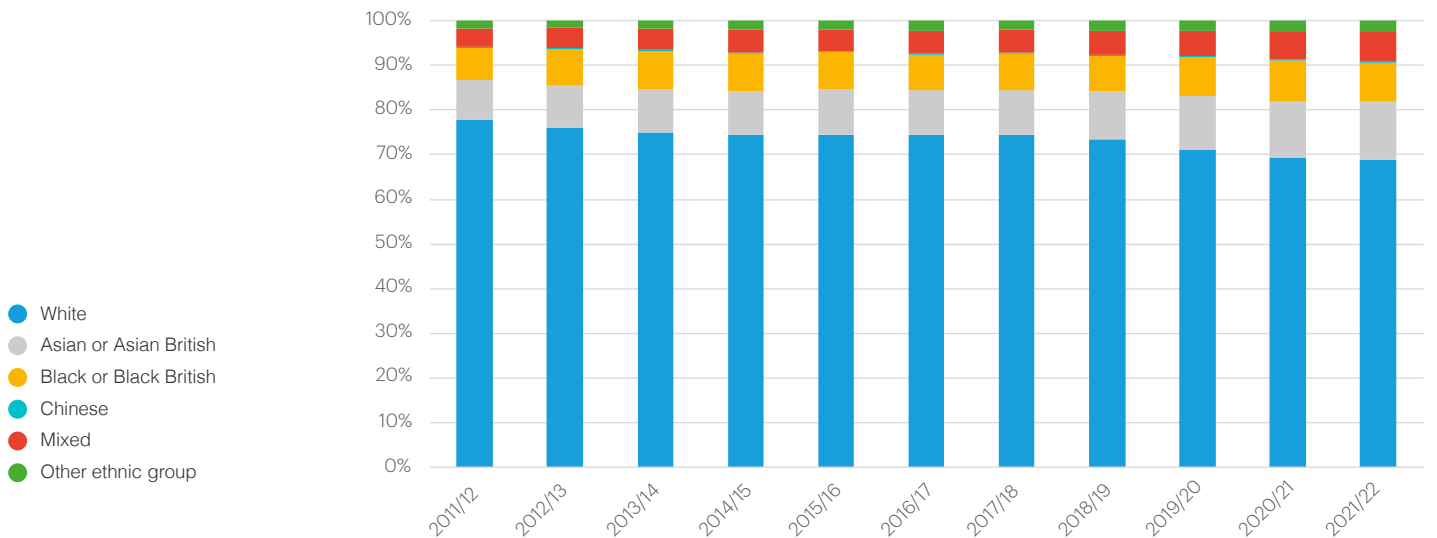
**Chart 3 – Proportion of Politics A level entries by sex, 2011/12 to 2021/22**



Source: British Academy post-16 subject choice dashboard

Regarding ethnicity, Chart 4 highlights an increase of non-white A Level students taking Politics over time. Students from minoritised ethnic groups made up 22% of the cohort of Politics A level students in 2011/12, and grew to 31% in 2021/22, an increase of 9 percentage points. The largest minoritised ethnic groups studying Politics A level are Asian or Asian British and Black or Black British (representing 13% and 9% respectively in 2021/22).

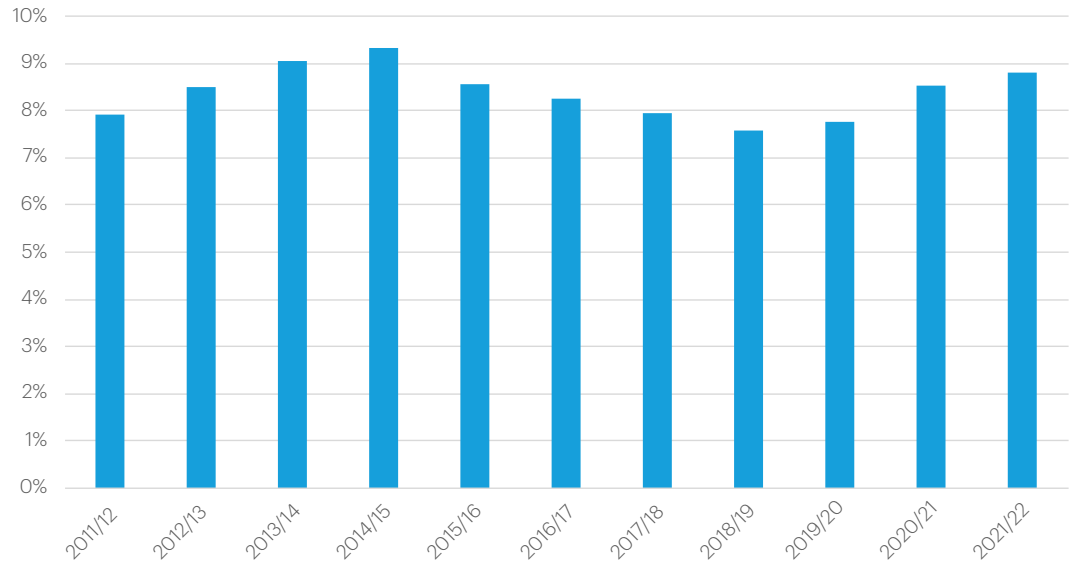
**Chart 4 – Porportion of A level entries by ethnicity (major categories), 2011/12 to 2021/22**



Source: British Academy post-16 subject choice dashboard

Finally, Chart 5 shows trends in the percentage of A Level students taking Politics that have been eligible for free school meals (FSM) over time. FSM eligible students represented 7.9% of the 2011/12 Politics cohort and 8.8% of the 2021/22 Politics cohort, reaching a peak of 9.3% in 2014/15. While there is a general increase over the period, there is clearly a lot of fluctuation year-to-year. The share of FSM eligible students is broadly in line with the same figure for all A level subjects and all A level Social Sciences (both 8% in 2021/22), but lower than the proportion for all level 3 qualifications

**Chart 5 – Proportion of Politics A level entries eligible for Free School Meals, 2011/12 to 2021/22**



Source: [British Academy post-16 subject choice dashboard](#)

# 3.0 Recruitment in taught programmes

This section explores data on student numbers in higher education over recent years for Politics and International Relations. It looks at first degree and postgraduate taught students, separately, to explore recent trends in numbers, how this breaks down by domicile, and trends across institutions.<sup>7</sup> This is complemented with further insights gathered from our qualitative interviews. This chapter shows that while there is still strong demand for Politics and International Relations, recruitment has been highly uneven between institutions over the past few years.

## 3.1 Changes in aggregate student numbers

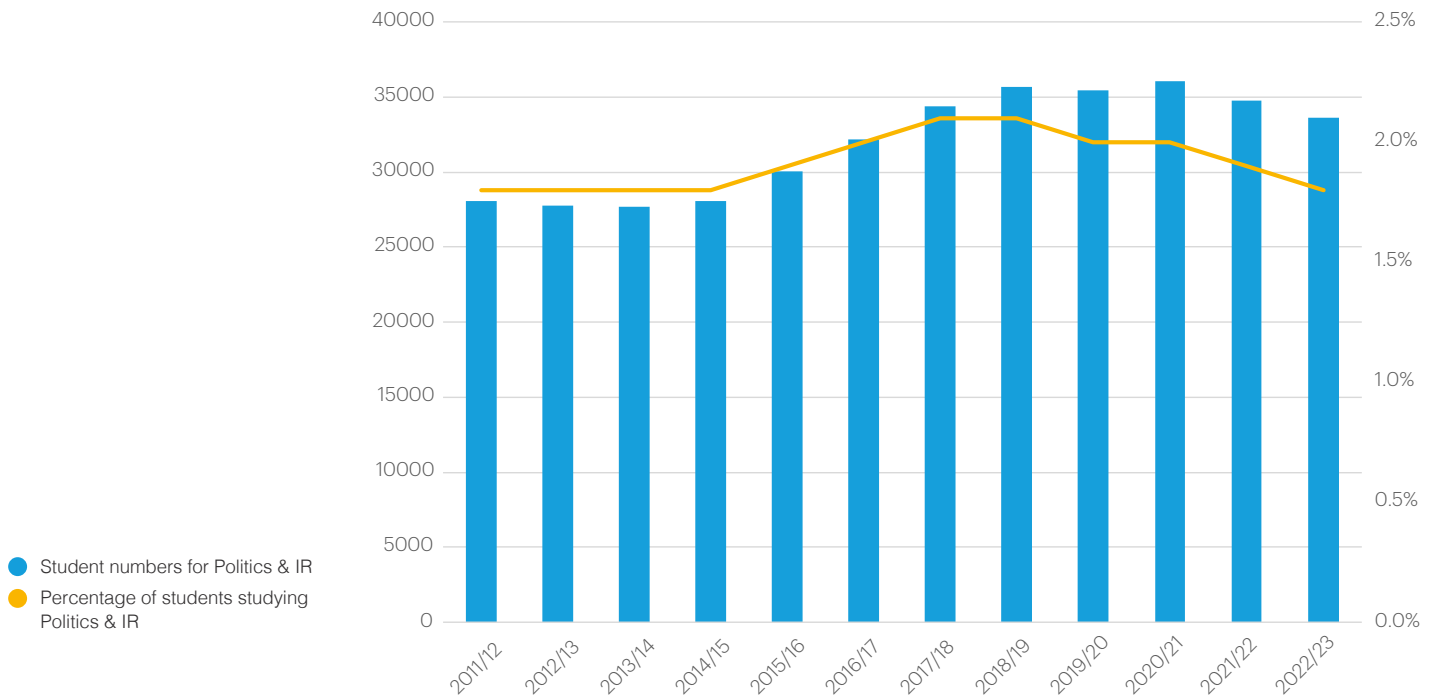
To calculate changes in aggregate student numbers we first of all isolated first degree students enrolling in Politics and International Relations for the purposes of the analysis. Between 2011/12 and 2022/23, the number of students enrolling in these programmes increased by 20%. At the postgraduate taught level (including but not limited to master's degrees), numbers have increased significantly, rising 41% since 2011/12. Percentage changes in the absolute numbers of students studying a subject only provide part of the picture, since the total student population (in the UK) can be affected by a range of different factors, not least demographic shifts in the wider population. Nevertheless, it is positive that numbers have increased for the discipline at both these levels.

To comprehend the situation fully, it is necessary to look at student numbers for Politics and International Relations as a proportion of the total student body. Chart 6 below shows patterns in enrolments for first degree students in Politics and International Relations, both in absolute numbers and as a proportion of all entries. The proportion of first degree students studying Politics and International Relations was relatively stable, at around 1.8% of the total student population until 2014/15. A subsequent increase, which rose to its peak in 2018/19, has since declined. Although the share of students taking Politics and International Relations has decreased in recent years, it has not dropped below the level shown in the early 2010s.

Nevertheless, the general trend over the past five years is a declining share for Politics and International Relations. This does pose some questions for those in the discipline. Some interview participants picked out the recent decrease in the proportion of all first degree students when talking about the general health of the discipline. While it was not highlighted as a major concern at present, it was seen as one that could develop into a more concerning trend for the discipline if continued.

<sup>7</sup> First degree students are those enrolling on an undergraduate degree course. These are level 6 qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland or level 9 in Scotland. Postgraduate taught programmes are those with a principal taught component above first degree, excluding research programmes.

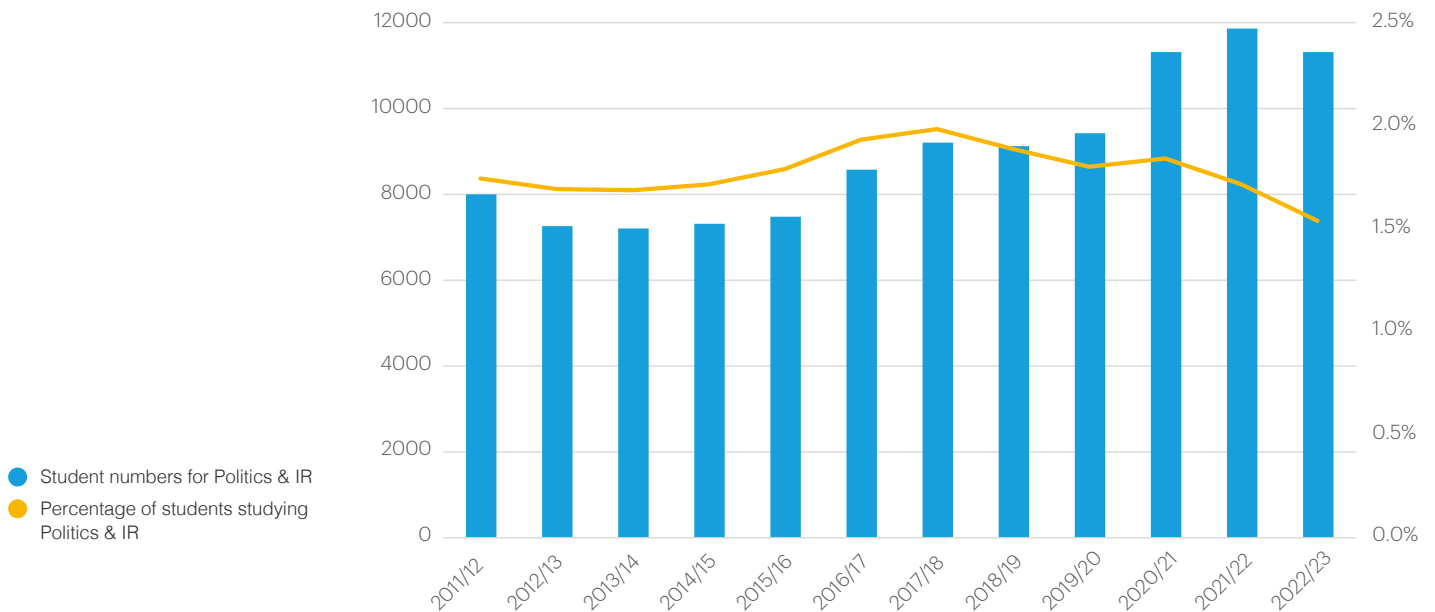
**Chart 6 – i) Number of first degree students for Politics and International Relations and ii) as a proportion of all first degree students, 2011/12 to 2022/23**



Source – HESA Student Record 2011/12 to 2022/23, Full Person Equivalent © Jisc 2025

At the postgraduate taught level, as shown in Chart 7, there have been large increases in the absolute number of enrolments since 2015/16, with overall numbers substantially higher than they were around a decade ago. The proportion of all postgraduate taught students that study Politics and International Relations was relatively stable until the mid-2010s, followed by a sharp uptick in the share of all students around 2015/16, before dropping back down to a similar level as in the early 2010s.

**Chart 7 – i) number of postgraduate taught students for Politics and International Relations and ii) as a proportion of all first degree students, 2011/12 to 2022/23**



Source – HESA Student Record 2011/12 to 2022/23, Full Person Equivalent © Jisc 2025



The declining share that is depicted in the most recent years in Chart 7, which started in 2017/18, is occurring despite significant increases in absolute numbers. The decrease in the share of students studying Politics and International Relations since 2017/18 is attributable to a higher rate of growth in other subjects. This could therefore reflect significant growth in demand for other disciplines, rather than declining interest for studying politics per se.

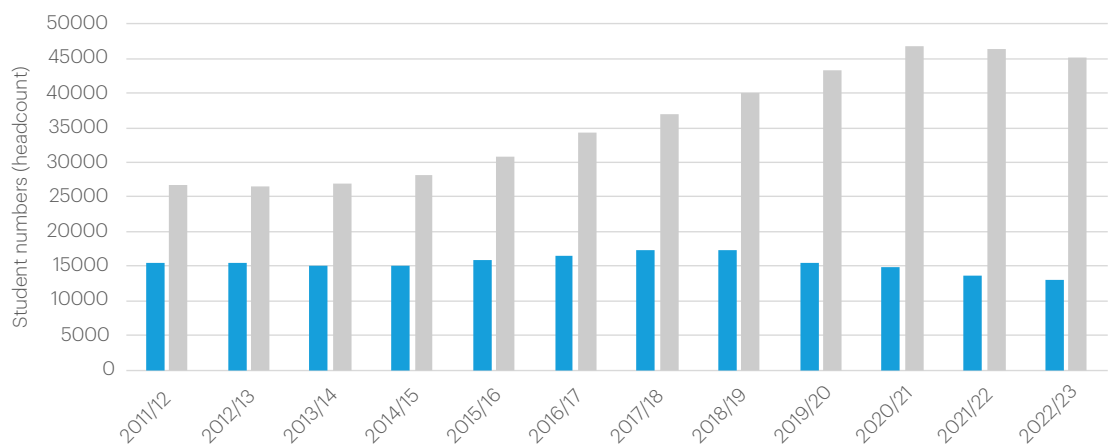
Interview participants picked out postgraduate taught programmes as areas of real growth for their departments over the past decade, particularly with regards to international students. One noted that this revenue stream is likely to become even more important as the real terms value of funding for undergraduate university education in the UK continues to be eroded by inflation.<sup>8</sup> However, some of those representing institutions that had seen significant growth at this level remarked on what they saw as the finite nature of expansion from a departmental perspective. While it was clear there was still growing demand for courses at this level, some felt their department, having already massively increased provision at this level, was faced with practical limits to further growth in this area.

### 3.2 Growth of joint honours or combined programmes

One development in the discipline that was identified by interview participants was the proliferation of joint honours or combined programmes of study that are offered by institutions in the UK that include Politics and/or International Relations. This was generally seen as institutions responding to demand from students for more varied study options. This trend was identified principally by interview participants in relation to undergraduate programmes, but was also seen to be reflected in a growing interdisciplinary focus in the design of certain courses at masters level delivered by Politics and International Relations departments.

One example that was given to illustrate this was the growth of “Politics, Philosophy and Economics” undergraduate degrees, once confined to elite institutions, which has now become more widespread across different regions and types of institutions. Another aspect of this is the changing provision of modern languages courses at university level. As research has shown, languages are now more commonly studied at degree level in combination with other subjects, particularly the social sciences.<sup>9</sup>

**Chart 8 – Number of first degree students taking either Politics or International Relations with other subjects, 2011/12 to 2022/23**



Source – HESA Student Record 2011/12 to 2022/23, Full Person Equivalent © Jisc 2025

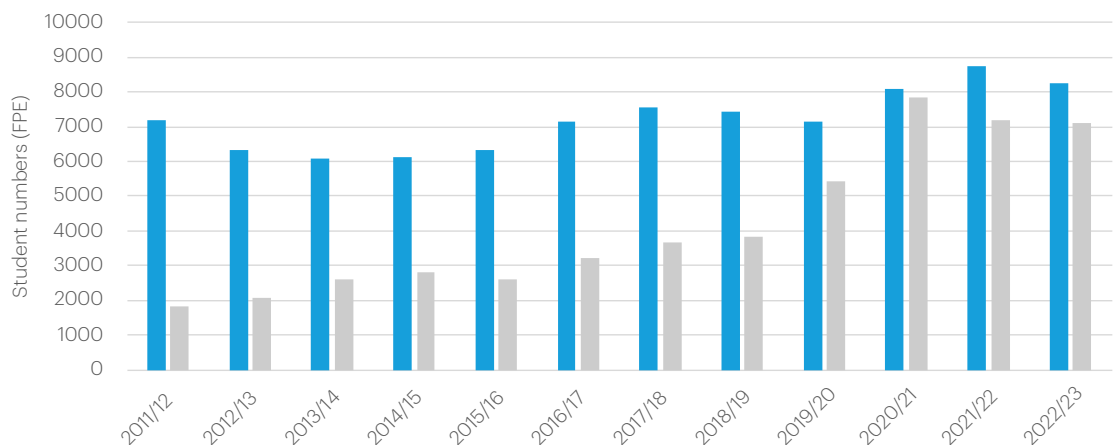
<sup>8</sup> Funding structures for tuition vary across the different HE systems of the UK. In none of the systems across the UK has the funding available for tuition been kept in line with inflation over recent years: The British Academy (2023), *Student Funding Across the UK: Tuition and Maintenance in the Four Nations and the Impact of Inflation*

<sup>9</sup> British Academy & the University Council of Modern Languages (2022), *Languages Learning in Higher Education: Granular Trends*

Chart 8 shows the absolute number of students taking Politics or International Relations either as full honours or as a joint honours first degree programme since 2011/12.<sup>10</sup> It shows that, even back in 2011/12, joint honours programmes made up a majority of those studying Politics and International Relations at this level, representing 63% of learners. However, the number of people studying joint honours or combined programmes began to increase quite rapidly after 2014/15, eventually making up 78% of first degree students taking Politics or International Relations in 2022/23.

Chart 9 below shows the same breakdown of uptake, this time for postgraduate taught programmes. This depicts quite a remarkable shift in the provision of postgraduate taught programmes for the discipline. In 2011/12, only one in five Politics or International Relations courses at this level were formally combined with other disciplines. As noted in previous chapters, the discipline has always been influenced by, and mixed with, other disciplines. But there is clearly a transformation that has occurred at this level of study, since there are now almost as many courses that are focused on Politics or International Relations at the postgraduate taught level that are recognised as having a mixed disciplinary focus, or are considered combined programmes of study.

**Chart 9 – Number of postgraduate taught students taking either Politics or International Relations with other subjects, 2011/12 to 2022/23**



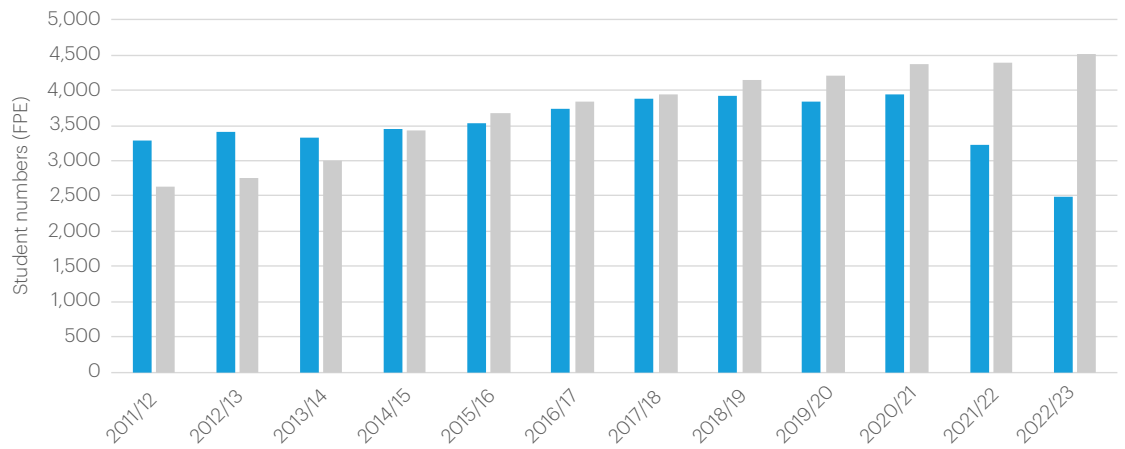
Source – HESA Student Record 2011/12 to 2022/23, Full Person Equivalent © Jisc 2025

### 3.3 Domicile of students

To explore how the domicile of Politics and International Relations students has changed over recent years, three main categories of domicile were used for analysis: UK, EU and non-EU International. The UK's departure from the European Union re-classified EU students from 'home' to 'international' students, removing their eligibility for tuition fee loans, increasing the cost of tuition, and requiring a student visa for study. These changes came into effect in August 2021.

<sup>10</sup> Joint honours are counted for anybody who has less than 1.0 Full Person Equivalent (FPE) for Politics & International Relations. These are people studying either Politics or International Relations as a substantial part of their degree. For a full description of FPE definition see <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/support/definitions/students>

**Chart 10 – Numbers of EU and Non-EU International first degree Politics & International Relations students, 2011/12 to 2022/23**

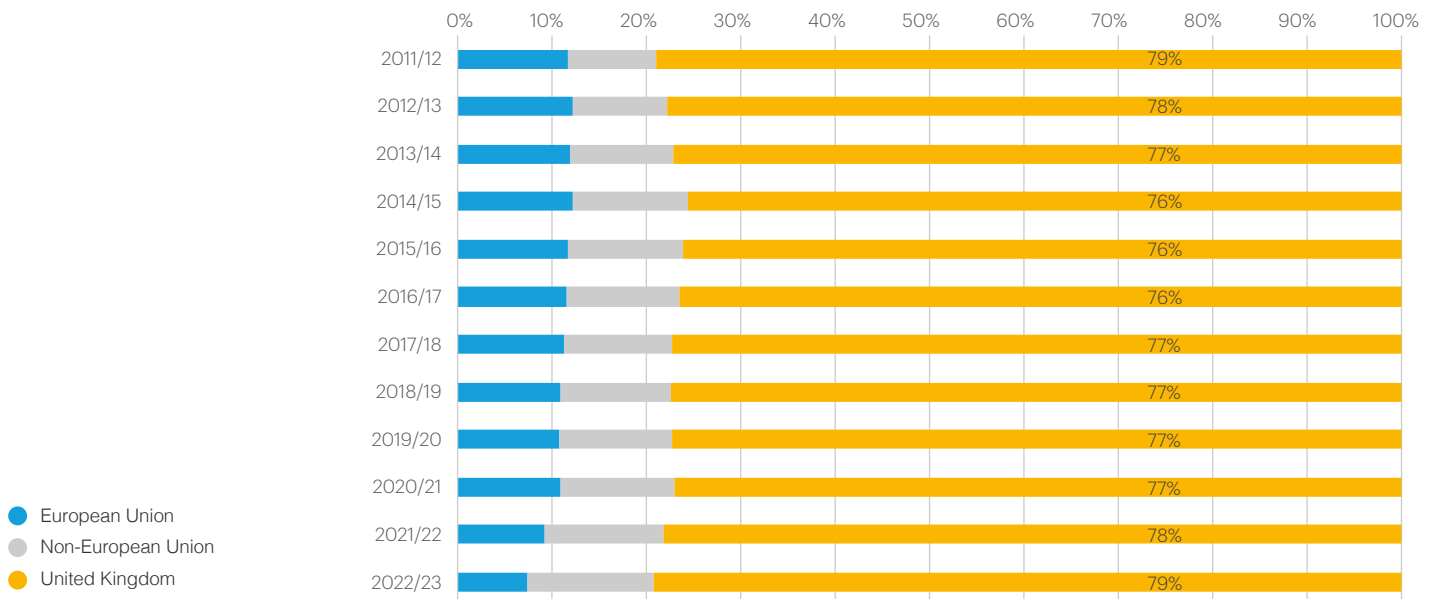


Source – HESA Student Record 2011/12 to 2022/23, Full Person Equivalent © Jisc 2025

Chart 10 shows that non-EU international, first degree students have seen numbers rise consistently since 2011/12. For non-EU international students in the discipline, the average year-on-year growth was 5.1% over the period shown in Chart 10. In contrast to this, there is a stark inflection point for EU student numbers in 2021/22, the first year that changes to their eligibility for student finance came into effect. Since 2021/22, EU student numbers have declined by 36%.

But how have these developments affected the makeup of different cohorts of Politics and International Relations students in the UK? Despite the significant increases in the number of non-EU international students, the proportion of first degree, UK students has remained relatively stable. As Chart 11 shows the proportion even ended up slightly higher in 2022/23 than it was a decade before.

**Chart 11 – Proportion of Politics and International Relations first degree students by domicile group, 2011/12 to 2022/23**



Source – HESA Student Record 2011/12 to 2022/23, Full Person Equivalent © Jisc 2025

It is worth making a very brief comparison between these figures and those for first degree students for all subjects, as shown in Table 1 below. First of all, it is worth pointing out that the proportion of students from the EU has historically been higher for Politics and International Relations than the wider undergraduate student population. However, the proportion of Politics and International Relations students that are from the EU fell by four percentage points over the period in question. The inverse of this decrease in EU students is the rise of non-EU international students, as we also know that the proportion of UK-domiciled students remained relatively stable. Table 1 shows that, in contrast to Politics and International Relations students, the share of UK students (for all subjects) has declined over the period.

**Table 1 – Proportions of first degree students by domicile group, 2011/12 and 2022/23**

| <b>Politics &amp; IR first degree students</b> |          |          |                   |
|--|----------|----------|-------------------|
|  | UK share | EU share | Non-EU Int. share |
| 2011/12  | 78.9%    | 11.7%    | 9.4%              |
| 2022/23  | 79.1%    | 7.4%     | 13.4%             |
| <b>All first degree students</b>               |          |          |                   |
|  | UK share | EU share | Non-EU Int. share |
| 2011/12  | 87.1%    | 4.8%     | 8.1%              |
| 2022/23  | 85.0%    | 3.4%     | 11.5%             |

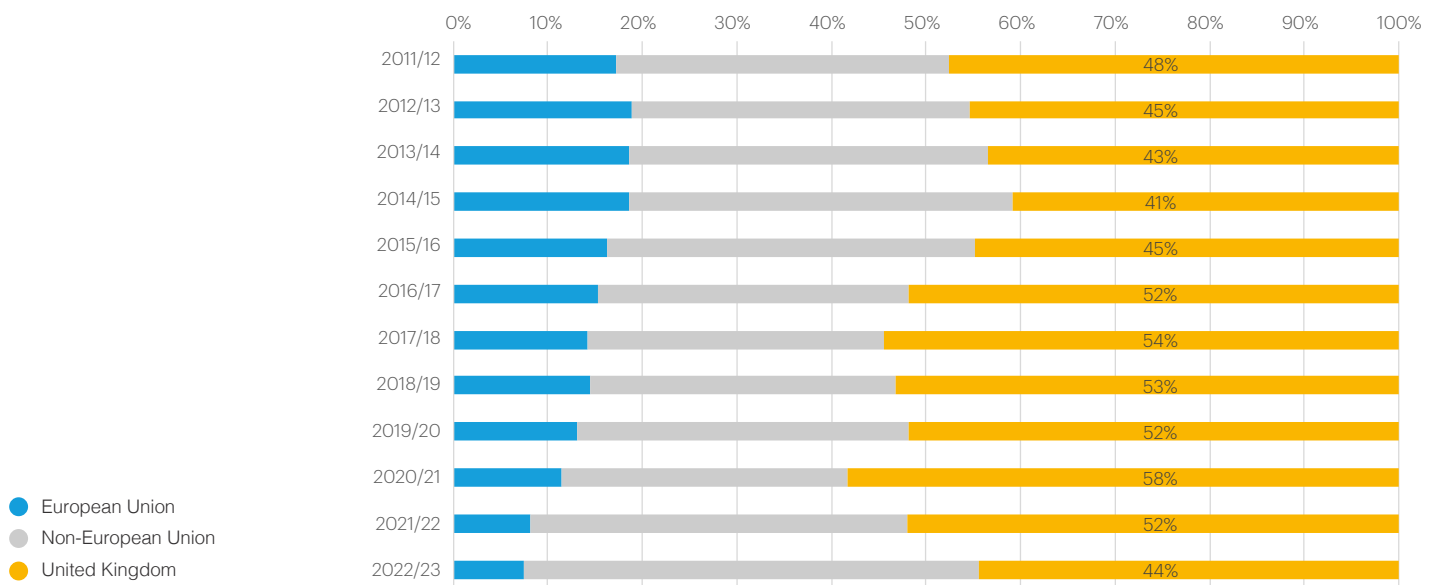
Source – HESA Student Record 2011/12 and 2022/23, Full Person Equivalent © Jisc 2025

The recruitment of international students in higher education is a topic that has received concerted media attention, with the practices of institutions coming under scrutiny in the mainstream media. Table 1 suggests, however, that the rise in non-EU international students is not coming at the expense of the recruitment of domestic undergraduates for Politics and International Relations.

At postgraduate taught level, the picture is different, with much greater fluctuation in the proportion of students that are UK-domiciled. Chart 12 shows that the proportion of UK students at this level dropped in the early 2010s to 41% before picking up later in the decade to reach a high point of 58% in 2020/21. Since 2020/21, the proportion of UK-domiciled postgraduate students has decreased, in spite of the fact that the proportion of EU students has also been decreasing.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> 2021/22 is the first year that EU students were affected by changes to fee eligibility due to the UK's decision to leave the European Union.

**Chart 12 – Proportion of Politics and International Relations postgraduate taught students by domicile group, 2011/12 to 2022/23**



Source – HESA Student Record 2011/12 to 2022/23, Full Person Equivalent © Jisc 2025

What stands out at the postgraduate taught level, above all, is the increase in non-EU international student numbers, having more than doubled over the period in question. However, the proportion of postgraduate taught students that are non-EU international only really began to tick up from 2018-19 onwards. In 2022/23, there was a greater proportion of non-EU international postgraduate taught students (48%) than there were UK-domiciled (44%) for Politics and International Relations.

International students create a strong revenue stream for institutions, but the increasing reliance on international fees at this level also makes the discipline more vulnerable to fluctuations in international recruitment. Immigration policy changes, made by the UK government, were highlighted by some interview participants as a concern in relation to international students. The interviews we conducted took place in Spring and early Summer of 2024 and therefore comments were made in relation to the previous UK government (2019-2024).

Interview participants pointed to the importance of international student revenue in terms of cross-subsidy in the university, not only for research, but also now for domestic teaching. This is not an issue that is specific to Politics and International Relations, but it is of direct importance to the discipline. When talking about international students, other interview participants also made the link between international application numbers, mainstream political rhetoric and immigration policies in reference to the previous UK government. This was also placed alongside a mix of different external political and economic factors that can make international recruitment, particularly at the postgraduate level, quite volatile. One lecturer in Politics and International Relations said:

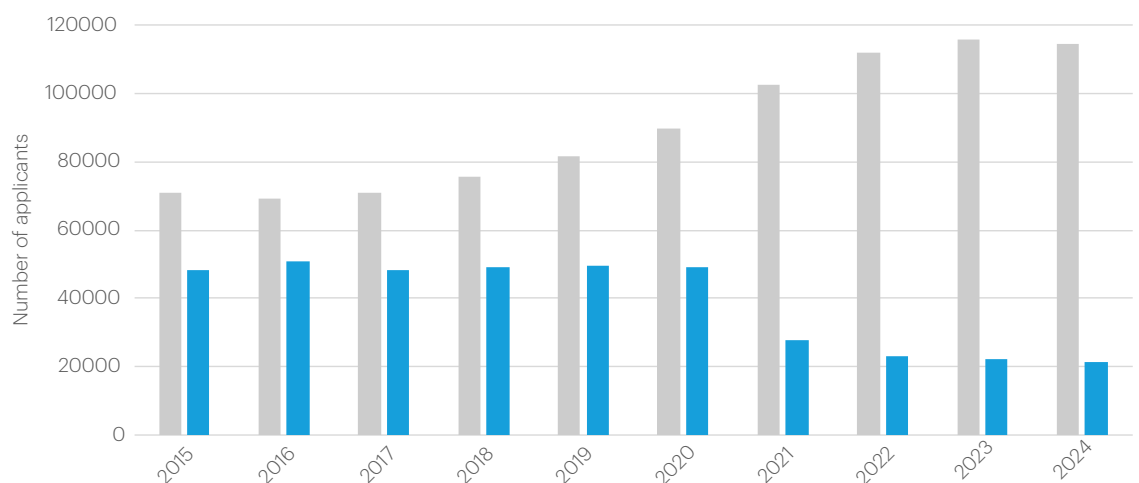
*I've spoken to the students, and they felt like: would I have wanted to come here if I'd known that there was going to be this level of government hostility? Would I advise other prospective students from my country to come and study? Maybe not. And the combination of that with things like currency fluctuations has been very disruptive for international students who suddenly find their fees are more than what they thought they would be.*

The last part of this quote alludes to problems for students from certain countries due to fluctuations in value of their home currency. This has become more prominent in the past year or two, and the quote underlines that this is an issue that is of direct importance to university departments across the UK, including Politics and International Relations departments. With growing political and economic instability in the international system, the risk of exposure to shocks like this arguably becomes greater.

It is important to note that there have been developments in the broader immigration policy landscape since the interviews for this project were conducted. A decision was made to keep the graduate visa route by the then UK Conservative Government, which has since been continued by the new UK Labour Government. Nevertheless, universities have encountered issues with application numbers from international students, not just for Politics and International Relations, but across the board. The most recent Home Office data on applications for student visas show that “main applicants” between January and July 2024 were 16% down on the same period the previous year. Due to the change in policy on eligibility of dependents, applications for dependents through student visas were 81% down January to July compared to the previous year.<sup>12</sup>

Chart 13 below shows the number of international, first degree students that have been placed at UK institutions via UCAS over the past five years (on A level results day). The results show a clear divergence between EU and non-EU international students over the past few years. The number of non-EU applicants for Politics and International Relations now dwarfs the total number of applicants from the EU for the discipline. Applicant numbers from international students outside of the EU rose each year between 2016 and 2023, before decreasing slightly in 2024. This break in the trend for non-EU international applicants aligns with the Home Office data cited above on visa applications. This inflection point in application numbers has undoubtedly created disruption and uncertainty for institutions, who are increasingly reliant on income from international students. But it is important to remember that, as Chart 13 shows, the number of non-EU international students applying for Politics and International Relations is still very high by historical standards.

**Chart 13 Number of EU & non-EU international applicants for Politics & International Relations undergraduate courses via UCAS**



Source: UCAS Statistical Releases – daily clearing analysis 2024<sup>13</sup>

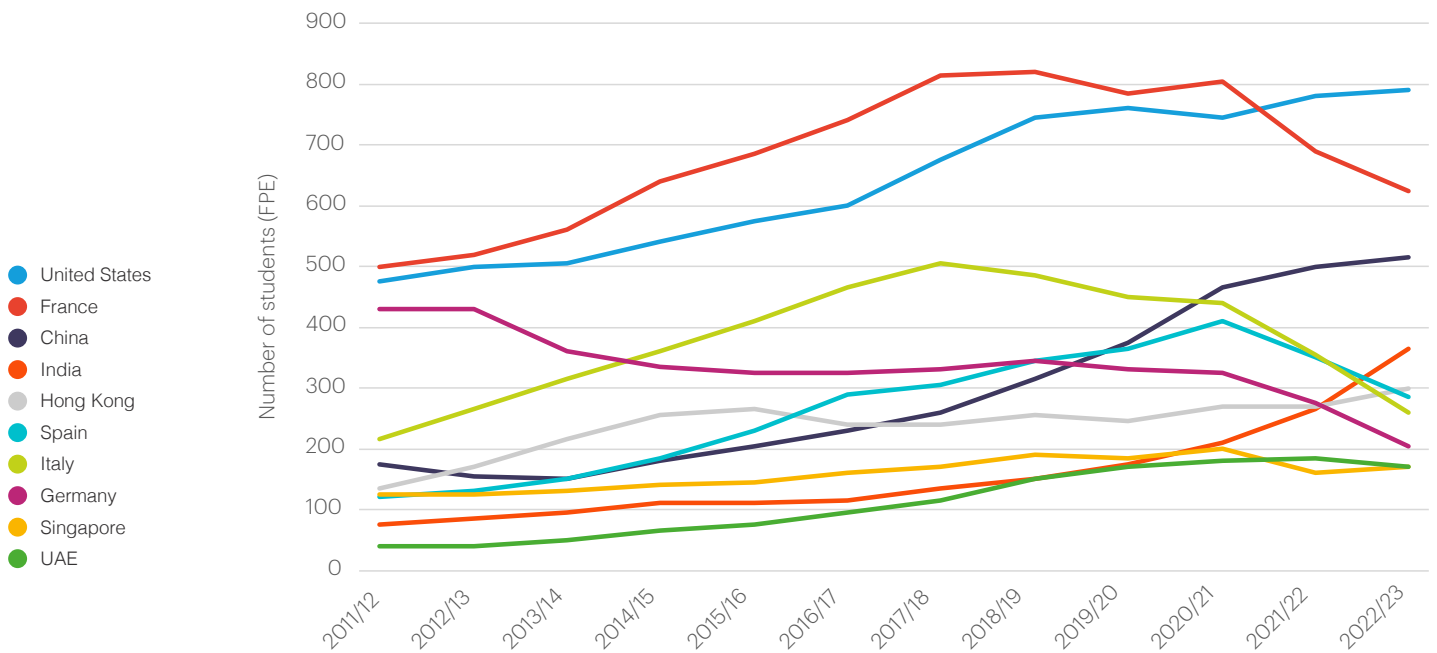
<sup>12</sup> Home Office, (2024), *Monthly Monitoring of Entry Clearance Visa Applications*, [Accessed August 2024].

<sup>13</sup> For UCAS data see <https://www.ucas.com/data-and-analysis/undergraduate-statistics-and-reports/statistical-releases-daily-clearing-analysis-2024> [Accessed August 2024].

It is also interesting to look more specifically at which nations (or domiciles) dominate international student recruitment for Politics and International Relations, and whether this has changed over recent years. To do this, we isolated the most numerous international domiciles for the most recent academic year where data is available. Chart 14 plots the numbers for the most common domiciles of international students for Politics and International Relations over time. The United States is the most common non-UK domicile for Politics and International Relations students at this level, having overtaken France in 2021/22. US students make up a much smaller proportion of students across all subjects (where they are only the seventh largest domicile).

Chart 14 also shows that there is a large proportion of first degree Politics and International Relations students from Western Europe. While numbers of students from some of these countries have declined over the past five years - namely France and Italy - numbers are still higher than they were a decade ago for most Western European nations. Spain has seen a steady rise throughout the period up until 2021. Despite the effects of the UK's departure from the European Union and the pandemic, many Western European nations remain significant recruiting countries for the discipline.

**Chart 14 – Top ten international domiciles for first degree students in Politics and International Relations, 2012/13 to 2022/23**

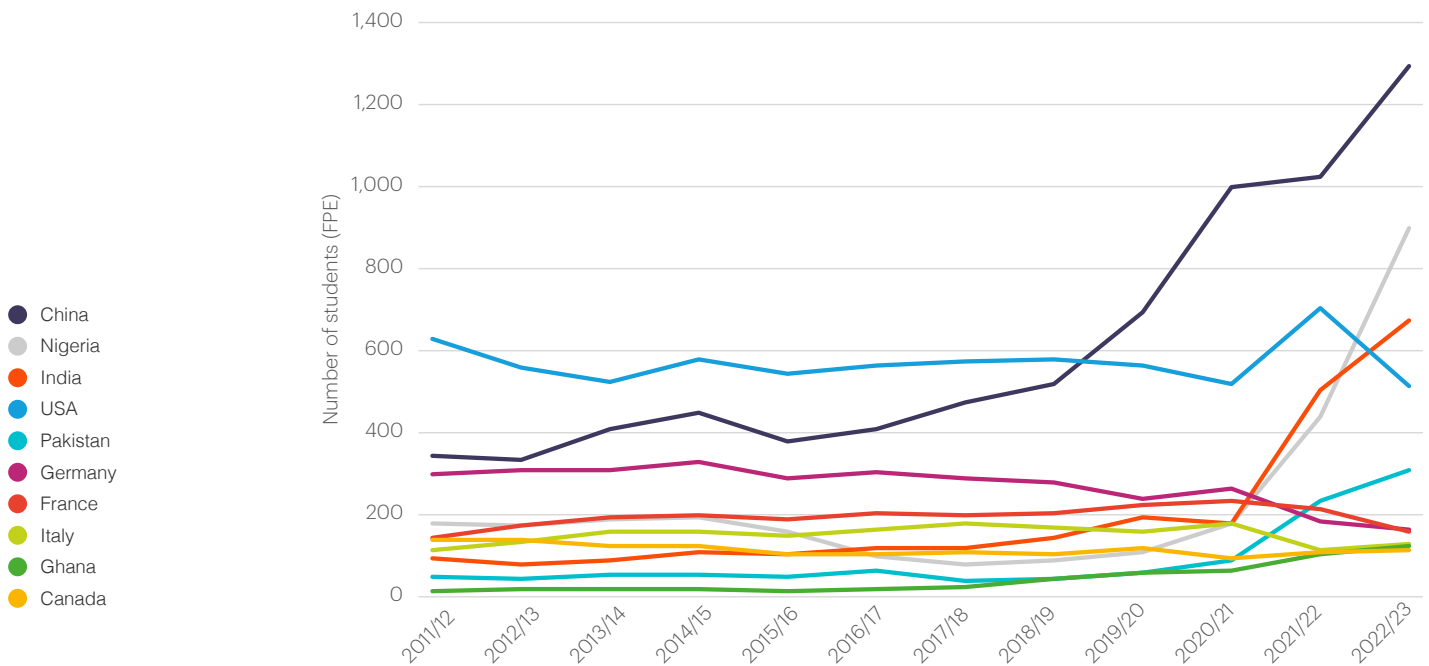


Source – HESA Student Record 2011/12 to 2022/23, Full Person Equivalent © Jisc 2025

The inverse of the high numbers of first degree students from the USA or European countries, is the relatively low proportion of students from China (compared to student numbers for all subjects). Across all disciplines, more Chinese students are recruited than the next five non-UK domiciles combined. The number of first degree Chinese students in Politics and International Relations at this level has almost tripled (+194%) since 2011/12. Despite a significant rise in student numbers over recent years, their share is modest compared to the recruitment of Chinese students across all subjects.

At the postgraduate taught level, in contrast, Chinese students became the most numerous international domicile for Politics and International Relations in 2019/20, overtaking the USA. Some interview participants commented on how their institution had pivoted towards China for recruitment at this level of study over recent years. While this had provided important institutional revenue, some expressed concern over a potential overreliance on international student income from a single domicile, especially in an increasingly volatile geopolitical environment. Moreover, there is a risk that growing educational infrastructure in countries like China could lower demand for study in the UK, leaving certain institutions exposed.

**Chart 15 – Top ten international domiciles for postgraduate taught students in Politics and International Relations, 2012/13 to 2022/23**



Source – HESA Student Record 2011/12 to 2022/23, Full Person Equivalent © Jisc 2025

Chart 15 above shows that over the past decade or so, some Asian and African countries have seen their numbers rise dramatically for postgraduate taught programmes in Politics and International Relations. This indicates that some institutions are diversifying their international student intake, but the information collected from our interviews suggests this might be a mixed picture across the sector. Chart 15 also offers some perspective on the change in postgraduate taught numbers since the pandemic. What is interesting here, is the divergence between some of the larger European nations, which have seen notable decreases, whilst many non-European countries have seen significant large year-on-year increases in the most recent years.

### 3.4 Variance across institutions

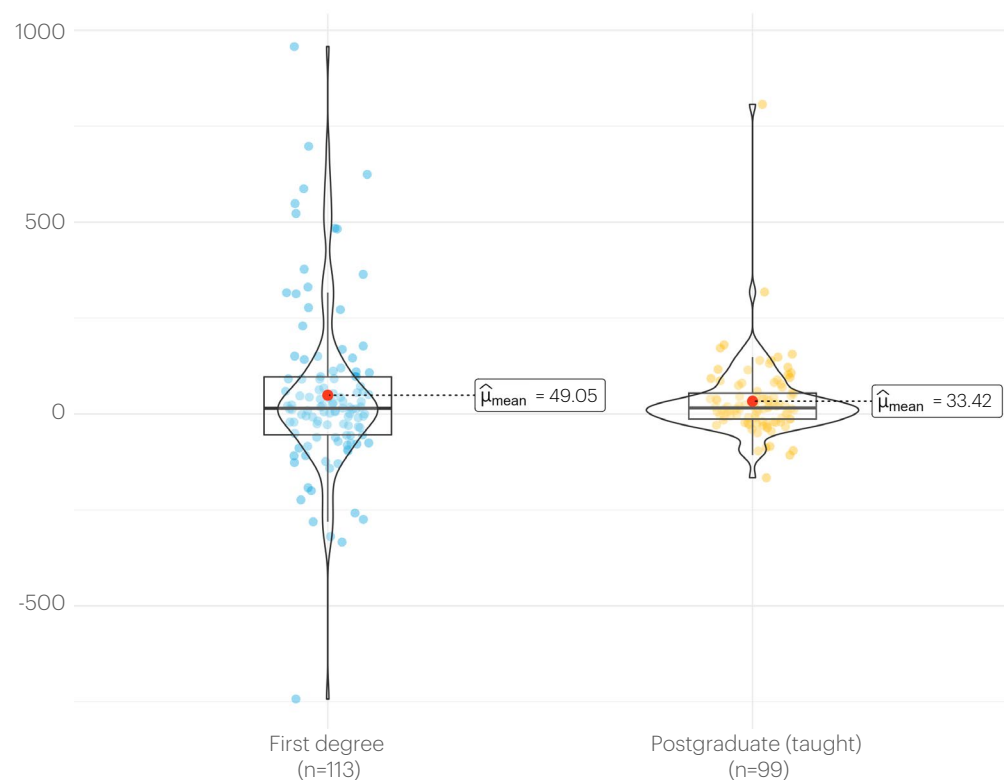
Aggregate student numbers are helpful in providing a macro perspective for Politics and International Relations, but this can mask variation at a more granular level in the sector, which is an important measure of discipline health. One expected area of variation is by institution. To measure this, we decided to look at the change in numbers for each institution with Politics and International Relations students over recent years. To be able to get a picture of the sector and analyse the data we first calculated the difference in enrolments at each institution between the academic years 2011/12 and 2022/23. This then gave us a variable (change in student numbers) to analyse, which enables us to look at trends in student numbers at the institutional level.



The violin plots shown below in Chart 16 lay out the results of this. Violin plots are visualisations that show the distribution of values for one variable, in this case change in student numbers for Politics and International Relations for individual institutions. The plot on the left shows changes in student numbers for first degree students, with each blue dot signifying an institution. The violin on the right shows absolute change in postgraduate taught numbers, with each yellow dot representing an institution. The red dots on each represent the mean for that violin, and the black line the median.

One can see that the blue dots are spread out quite widely along the y axis on the plot on the left. This demonstrates that changes in student numbers between different politics departments in the UK have been highly variable. Six institutions have seen numbers increase by more than 500 students, a huge increase for a single discipline within an institution over a decade or so. Conversely, there are numerous institutions that have shrunk in size with respect to first degree students. Six institutions saw first degree numbers decrease by more than 250 students over the period.

**Chart 16 – Changes in student numbers (FPE) for Politics and International Relations by institution for i) first degree and ii) postgraduate taught between 2011/12 and 2022/23**



Source – HESA Student Record 2011/12 to 2022/23, Full Person Equivalent © Jisc 2025

At the postgraduate taught level, in contrast, there is less variance in the absolute change in numbers. This is to be expected to some extent, since postgraduate cohorts tend to be smaller within institutions. However, if we look at percentage change, to better compare these differently sized cohorts, then the level of variance is similar at both levels. Therefore, both levels of study show similar patterns in relative terms: highly variable changes in student numbers by institution.

Chart 16 shows that Politics and International Relations departments have increased their intake of first degree students by 49 students on average over this period. The mean change at postgraduate taught level, in absolute terms, is smaller than the same figure for first degree students, but not dramatically so. However, as the violin plot on the right shows, there is a heavy concentration of institutions lying just below the median (the black horizontal line), of which a considerable number are showing small reductions in student numbers at the postgraduate taught level. To further investigate where different patterns might be occurring at the institutional level, we looked at the differences between different groups of institutions, using the categories of Russell Group, Pre-92 Other, and Post-92 to divide the sector up into three groups.<sup>14</sup>

**Table 2 – Summary statistics for changes in first degree student numbers by institution group, 2012/13 to 2021/22**

| Provider Group       | Number of institutions | Mean change | Standard deviation | Median change | Min. change | Max. change |
|----------------------|------------------------|-------------|--------------------|---------------|-------------|-------------|
| Russell Group Pre-92 | 23                     | 320.2       | 253.5              | 277.1         | -7.8        | 957.5       |
| Pre-92 Other         | 39                     | -24.7       | 191.6              | 8.0           | -742.6      | 363.9       |
| Post-92              | 51                     | -16.8       | 84.5               | -5.5          | -333.7      | 142.0       |

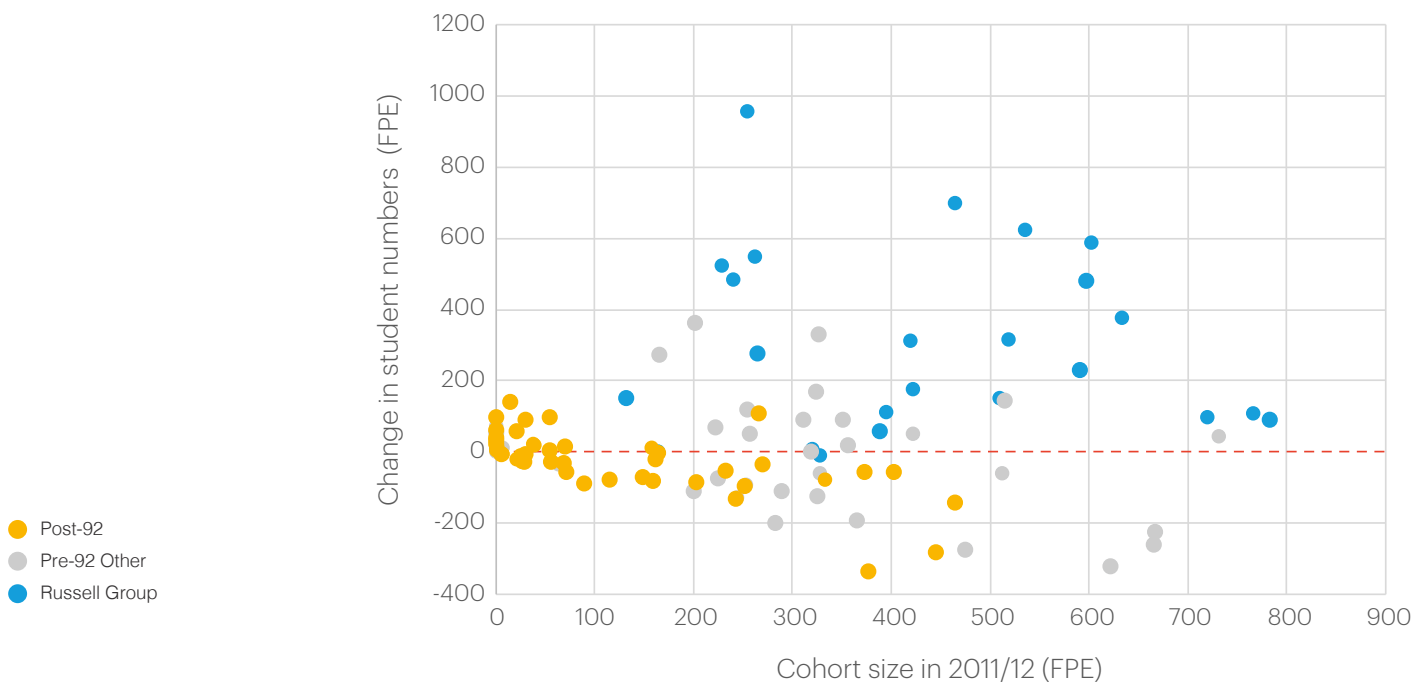
Source – HESA Student Record 2011/12 to 2022/23, Full Person Equivalent © Jisc 2025

Table 2 (above) and Chart 17 (below) reveal quite a stark contrast in the fortunes of recruitment for institutions. It shows that Russell Group institutions have seen numbers of first degree students increase by 320 on average, while for the other two groups the average change in recruitment was negative. However, the standard deviation is much greater across the Russell Group institutions, meaning greater variation within this group.<sup>15</sup> This suggests that while there is a clear divergence between the Russell Group institutions and the rest of the sector (in average change in student numbers), patterns of student recruitment have not been uniform across Russell Group institutions. Some have increased moderately while others have increased massively.

<sup>14</sup> The *Russell Group* is a membership organisation of research-intensive universities from across the UK. Pre or Post 92 is a category given according to when the university received royal charter. In 1992, many of the former polytechnic institutions in the UK received university title. Alongside other institutions that have since received university title, these newer universities are sometimes referred to as “post-92” or “modern”.

<sup>15</sup> The standard deviation expresses how much members of a group differ from the mean value of a group

**Chart 17 – Scatter plot of change in Politics and International Relations first degree students by institution, 2011/12 to 2022 /23**



Source – HESA Student Record 2011/12 to 2022/23, Full Person Equivalent © Jisc 2025<sup>16</sup>

The scatter plot in Chart 17 explores this further, with the number of Politics and International Relations students in the base year (2011/12) along the x axis, and the change in student numbers on the y axis. It is easy to see a clear pattern, with the darker blue dots (denoting Russell Group institutions) being found overwhelmingly on the top right-hand side of the chart. There is a small cluster in the top right, those institutions that have seen the greatest growth, all of whom already had quite large undergraduate departments. Conversely, those institutions that have seen the greatest reductions are generally non-Russell Group institutions that had larger student bodies at this level.

At the postgraduate taught level, we see a similar pattern in terms of a disparity between different groups of institutions and their average change in student numbers. Table 3 shows that the mean change in student numbers over the period is much higher for Russell Group institutions. However, in contrast to the first degree students, Chart 18 shows a much less clear pattern according to provider group. In fact, some of the institutions that have seen the greatest increase in postgraduate taught numbers for Politics and International Relations are in the Post-92 or Pre-92 Other categories.

It is clear also that there are multiple institutions outside of the Russell Group that have opened up provision at this level and made modest increases in numbers, signalled by those dots on the far left-hand side of the graph. So, the picture is more mixed at the postgraduate level. It is also worth noting that fewer institutions have seen numbers decline at this level, and for those that have, the reductions are much less severe than for undergraduate provision.

<sup>16</sup>

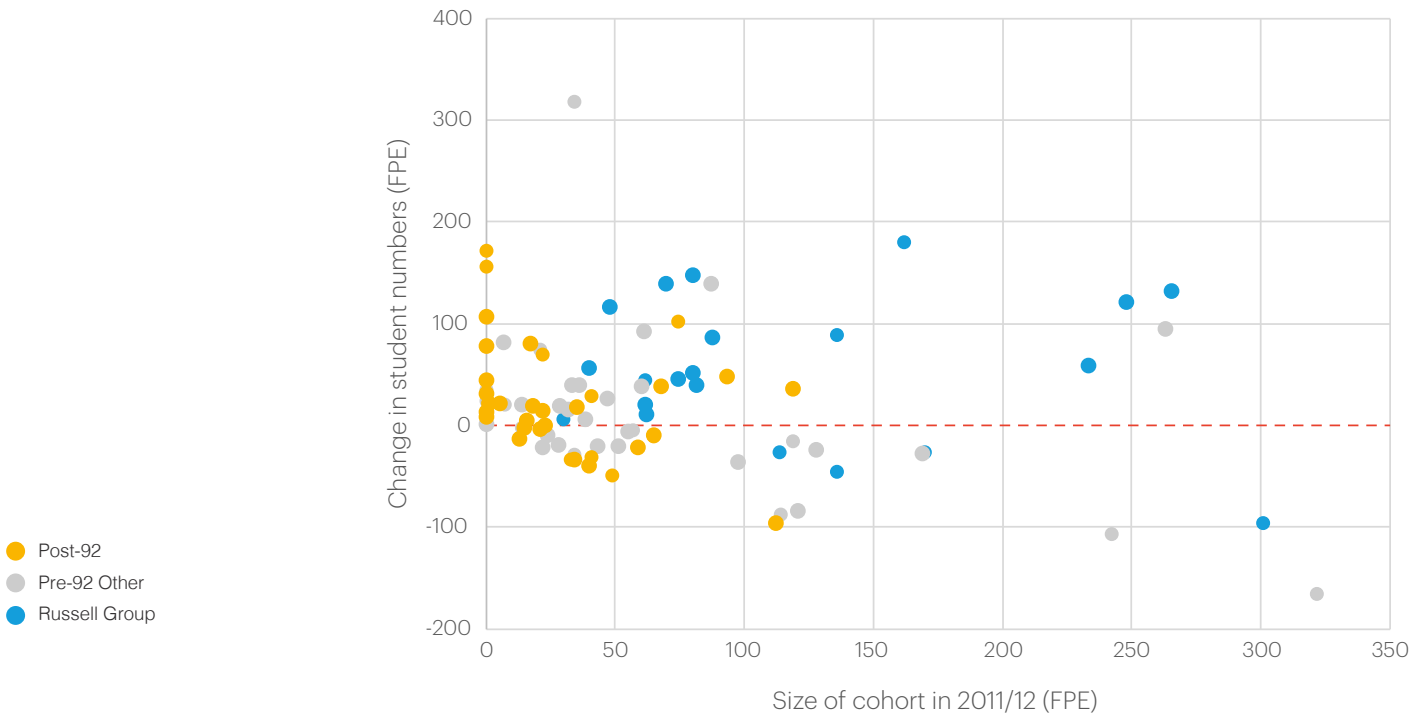
The Open University has been removed from this scatter plot as an outlier for readability purposes. This makes it possible to observe the pattern by institution group across scatter plot.

**Table 3 – Summary statistics for changes in postgraduate taught student numbers by institution group, 2011/12 to 2022/23**

| Provider Group         | Number of providers | Mean change | Standard deviation | Median change | Min. change | Max. change |
|------------------------|---------------------|-------------|--------------------|---------------|-------------|-------------|
| Russell Group (Pre-92) | 23                  | 90.3        | 170.6              | 56.7          | -96         | 807         |
| Pre-92 Other           | 37                  | 11.5        | 77.1               | 6             | -166        | 318         |
| Post-92                | 39                  | 20.6        | 52.7               | 13            | -95         | 172         |

Source – HESA Student Record 2011/12 to 2022/23, Full Person Equivalent © Jisc 2025

**Chart 18 – Scatter plot of change in postgraduate taught student numbers (Full Person Equivalent) by institution, 2011/12 to 2022/23**



Source – HESA Student Record 2011/12 to 2022/23, Full Person Equivalent © Jisc 2025<sup>17</sup>

These charts cohere with views expressed by several interview participants when talking about the health of the discipline. When talking about the student numbers, multiple interview participants characterised the last decade as one of mixed fortunes for different institutions. A couple of participants picked out the Russell Group members as one part of the sector that had witnessed more sustained expansion.

It is interesting to note that the general tone and framing of discussion on student numbers tended to vary according to the institution of the participant. Those working at institutions who had experienced little or no growth in recent years invariably linked this to the current context of wider financial challenges facing institutions. This trend was observed when discussing the health of the research sector. There was also a sense that, in the years ahead, departments would be faced with institution-wide cutbacks. None of the interview participants we spoke to

<sup>17</sup>

King’s College London and the LSE have been removed from this scatter plot (as outliers) in order to be able to observe the pattern by institution group clearly in this report.

described this as an existential threat to their department at present. However, one interview participant did work at an institution that had decided to close its politics department before they had joined the institution. In this case, uneven growth in student numbers at the regional level had caused senior management at that institution to deem that recruitment was no longer competitive.

In comparison, those working at large, research-intensive and higher-tariff institutions, generally reported a healthy picture. This was one of sustained growth in student numbers over the past few years with more solid finances. Expansion had brought clear benefits to these institutions. One individual commented on how they saw the significant growth in student numbers at their institution as supporting a healthy and pluralistic department which was large enough to accommodate different sub-disciplines and specialisms across its staff. Nevertheless, the uneven growth across institutions was also acknowledged by participants, with some expressing concern at the impact this was having on colleagues at other institutions, or the distribution of provision at the regional level.

# 4.0 Student characteristics (taught programmes)

This chapter focusses on the characteristics of students taking taught programmes for Politics and International Relations, drawing on both HESA data and insights from the semi-structured interviews carried out as part of this project. It explores the current diversity of first degree and postgraduate taught students respectively, as well as looking at how this has changed over recent years. The characteristics chosen here are ethnicity, sex, disability status, age and POLAR4 (university access indicator). The personal characteristics of postgraduate research students are dealt with separately in Section 6.3.

## 4.1 Ethnicity

To gain a better understanding of the ethnic diversity of Politics and International Relations students, HESA data on student ethnicity is presented below. International students have been excluded from the data to obtain an accurate picture of the representativeness of the student body from a UK perspective. This approach helps us assess how well minority groups in the UK are represented in the discipline.

HESA data remains one of the most comprehensive resources on ethnicity in UK higher education, nevertheless, it is important to consider its limitations. Categories of ethnicity, including the ones in the HESA dataset, often oversimplify complex identities and cultural backgrounds, and therefore might fail to capture the nuances and complexities of some ethnic identities.

**Table 4 – Proportions of the first degree student body by ethnic group for i) Politics and International Relations ii) other social science disciplines and iii) all subjects, 2022/23**

|                                      | Politics & IR | Social Sciences | All subjects |
|--------------------------------------|---------------|-----------------|--------------|
| Asian or Asian British - Bangladeshi | 1.7%          | 2.0%            | 2.2%         |
| Asian or Asian British - Indian      | 3.1%          | 4.2%            | 3.6%         |
| Asian or Asian British - Pakistani   | 2.5%          | 3.6%            | 4.4%         |
| Black or Black British - African     | 6.6%          | 6.5%            | 6.5%         |
| Black or Black British - Caribbean   | 0.9%          | 1.6%            | 1.4%         |
| Chinese                              | 0.5%          | 0.7%            | 0.8%         |
| Mixed                                | 6.8%          | 6.0%            | 5.0%         |
| Other                                | 2.8%          | 2.0%            | 2.3%         |
| Other Asian background               | 1.9%          | 2.1%            | 2.6%         |
| Other Black background               | 0.4%          | 0.4%            | 0.4%         |
| White                                | 72.9%         | 70.9%           | 70.8%        |

Source – HESA Student Record 2011/12 to 2022/23, Full Person Equivalent © Jisc 2025

Table 4 displays the proportion of first degree Politics and International Relations students by ethnicity, alongside corresponding numbers for other social science disciplines (collectively) and for all subjects. Although the numbers do not differ substantially, it is noticeable that Politics and International Relations has a slightly lower proportion of students from most minoritised ethnic groups, with the exception of students who identify as having a “Black or Black British – African”, “Mixed” or “Other” ethnic background. This indicates that, at the undergraduate level, most minoritised groups are better represented in other subjects than they are in Politics and International Relations.

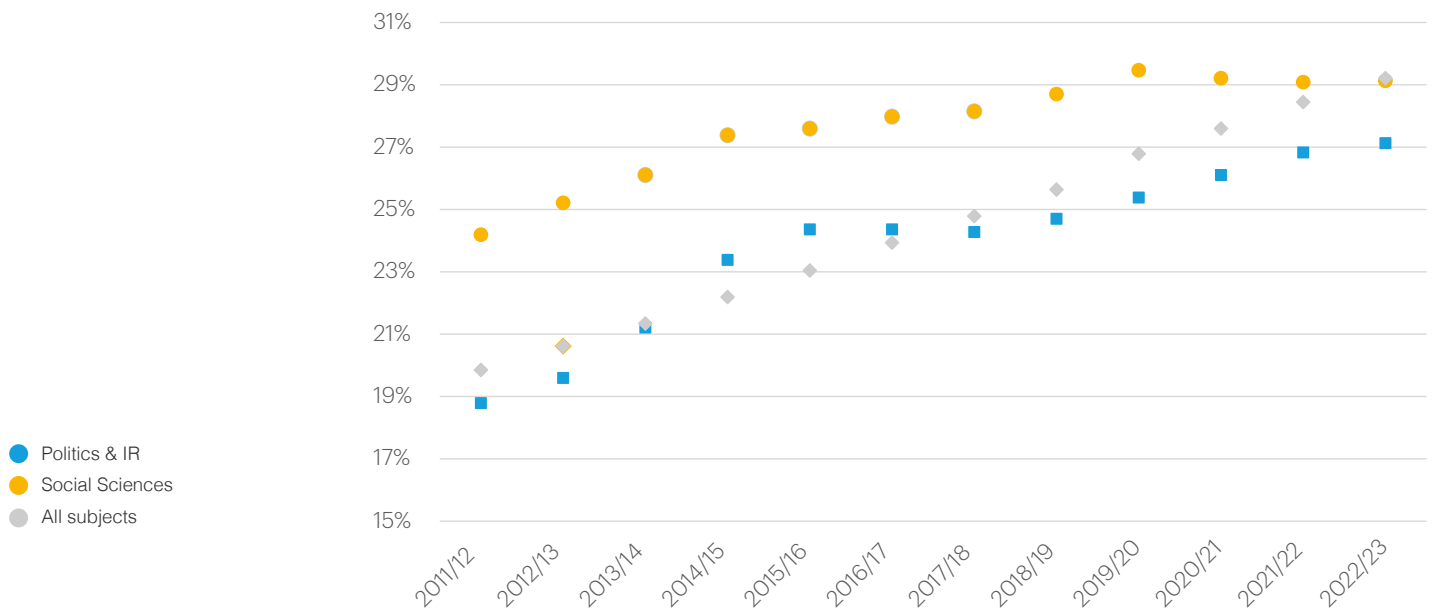
**Table 5 – Proportions of the postgraduate taught student body by ethnic group for i) Politics and International Relations ii) other social science disciplines and iii) all subjects, 2022/23**

|                                      | Politics & IR | Social Sciences | All subjects |
|--------------------------------------|---------------|-----------------|--------------|
| Asian or Asian British - Bangladeshi | 0.9%          | 0.9%            | 1.0%         |
| Asian or Asian British - Indian      | 2.4%          | 2.5%            | 4.3%         |
| Asian or Asian British - Pakistani   | 1.9%          | 2.1%            | 2.9%         |
| Black or Black British - African     | 4.8%          | 10.2%           | 6.7%         |
| Black or Black British - Caribbean   | 0.8%          | 2.0%            | 1.4%         |
| Chinese                              | 1.1%          | 0.9%            | 1.4%         |
| Mixed                                | 5.9%          | 5.2%            | 4.0%         |
| Other                                | 3.3%          | 2.1%            | 2.1%         |
| Other Asian background               | 2.5%          | 1.6%            | 2.4%         |
| Other Black background               | 0.3%          | 0.6%            | 0.4%         |
| White                                | 76.2%         | 71.9%           | 73.5%        |

Source – HESA Student Record 2011/12 to 2022/23, Full Person Equivalent © Jisc 2025

Looking at postgraduate taught students, Table 5 presents the breakdown of figures for students of Politics and International Relations, showing most minoritised groups are also marginally better represented in other subjects than in Politics and International Relations. Longitudinal data shows that the discipline has made clear progress in terms of diversifying its UK-domiciled undergraduate student population, as shown in Chart 19. Between 2011/12 and 2022/23, the proportion of undergraduate students from non-white ethnic backgrounds studying Politics and International Relations increased by 8 percentage points. But the chart shows that Politics and International Relations lags behind other subjects on this metric.

**Chart 19 – Proportion of first degree students from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds for i) Politics & International Relations ii) other social science subjects iii) all subjects**



Source – HESA Student Record 2011/12 to 2022/23, Full Person Equivalent © Jisc 2025

Interview participants observed that the undergraduate student body had become increasingly diverse with respect to ethnicity over recent years. It was noted that many universities had made conscious efforts to improve diversity on campus and in their department. Interviewees emphasised the value of a diverse classroom, stating that seminars and lectures are enriched by having people present who may have a non-traditional perspective on world issues that are being studied. Politics and International Relations has increased the ethnic diversity of its domestic undergraduate student population. At postgraduate level, however the direction of travel is less clear. The data shows that the percentage of non-white students increased by 3 percentage points between 2011/12 and 2022/23. However, the proportion of students at this level whose ethnicity is unknown has grown over the period.

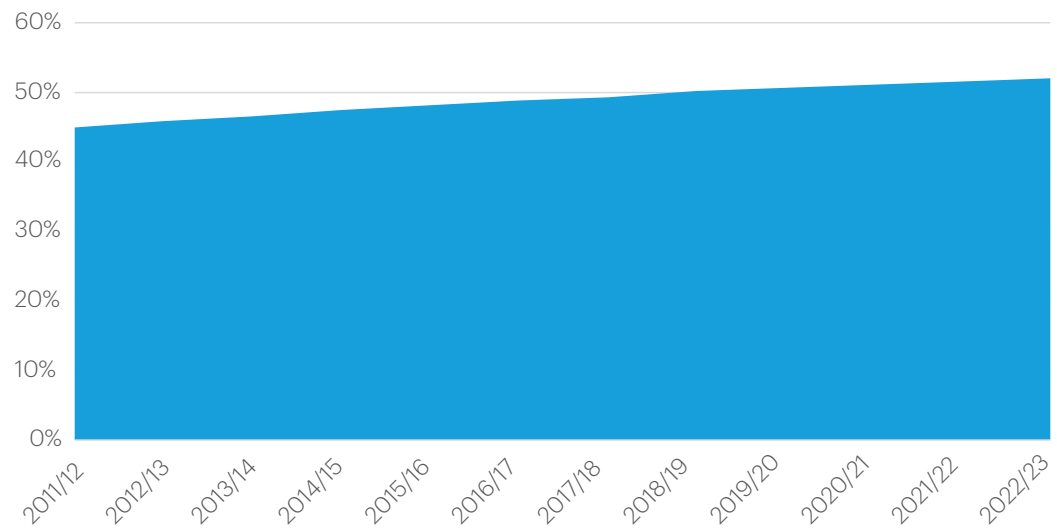
## 4.2 Sex

In 2022/23, female students made up 52% of first degree students, while male students were 48% of the student body.<sup>18</sup> Historically, the discipline has been one that was male-dominated, especially when compared to other social sciences. However, longitudinal data indicates a steady narrowing of the gap over the past decade, as shown in Chart 20 below. In 2018/19, female students overtook their male counterparts to become the majority among first degree students. This trend has persisted in recent years, with the proportion of female students gradually increasing each year, as shown in Chart 20. Politics and International Relations has seen a much clearer change in the composition of students over this period than in the other social sciences, and across all subjects, where the composition has not changed much since 2011/12.

<sup>18</sup> HESA includes the category 'Other' for students whose sex aligns with terms such as intersex, androgyne, intergender, ambigender, gender fluid, polygender and gender queer. In 2022/23, there were 160 students reported in this category <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/support/definitions/students>.



**Chart 20 – Proportion of female Politics & International Relations first degree students (FPE), 2011/12 to 2022/23**



Source – HESA Student Record 2011/12 to 2022/23, Full Person Equivalent © Jisc 2025

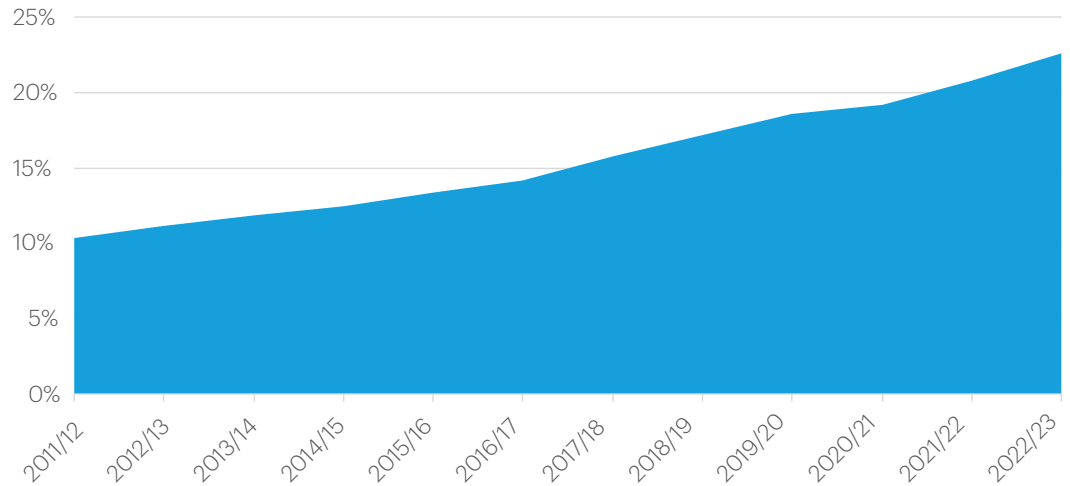
Several interviewees commented on this evolving composition of the Politics and International Relations student body, noting a significant increase of female students in the classroom. Nevertheless, Politics and International Relations stands out somewhat as an outlier relative to other social science disciplines. In 2022/23, the share of female students across other social sciences disciplines was 60%.

A similar long-term shift towards a greater percentage of female students has also occurred at the postgraduate taught level. In 2022/23, 51% of postgraduate students studying Politics and International Relations were female. However, the percentage of female students is much lower than for social science disciplines, where 64% of students are female. Politics and International Relations is broadly in line with all subjects when it comes to the representation of different sexes. However, it should be noted that most STEM and SHAPE disciplines tend to have a very different makeup, with many STEM subjects having predominantly male student bodies and SHAPE courses having a much higher proportion of female students. Therefore, while the figures for Politics and International Relations align more with that of the entire student body, it stands out from other comparable disciplines in the social sciences.

### 4.3 Disability

In 2022/23, 23% of first degree students in Politics and International Relations and 12% of postgraduate taught students in the same field were known to have a disability. These figures are slightly higher than the percentage for all subjects, at 18% for first degree students and 10% for taught postgraduates. Chart 21 shows how the proportion of students who are known to have a disability has changed over time. Since 2011/12, the proportion of students known to have a disability has increased by 10 percentage points. This is a marked increase, although it could reflect a rise in reporting of disabilities rather than a straightforward increase in the number of disabled students.

**Chart 21 – Proportion of Politics and International Relations students known to have a disability**

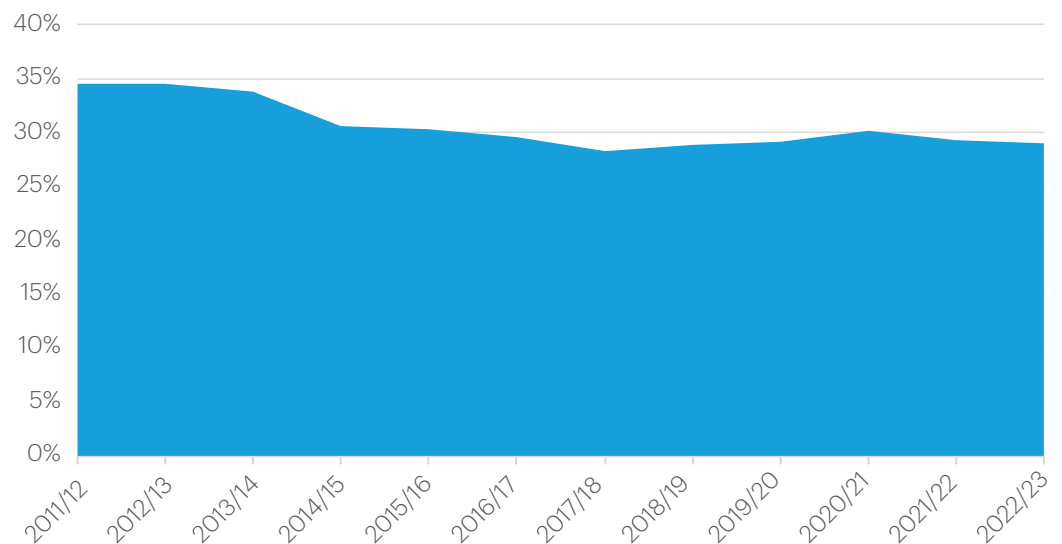


Source – HESA Student Record 2011/12 to 2022/23, Full Person Equivalent © Jisc 2025

#### 4.4 Age

In 2022/23, 71% of first degree students in Politics and International Relations were under the age of 21; 23% were aged between 21 and 24; and 6% of students were aged 25 or over. There has been a downward trend in the proportion of mature students studying the discipline over the past decade at this level, as shown by Chart 22.<sup>19</sup> Since 2011/12, the proportion of mature first degree students for Politics and International Relations has decreased by five percentage points.

**Chart 22 – Proportion of Politics and International Relations students that are mature (21 or over), 2011/12 to 2022/23**



Source - HESA Student Record 2011/12 to 2022/23, Full Person Equivalent © Jisc 2025

<sup>19</sup> HESA defines mature students as those over the age of 21 upon entry at undergraduate level <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/support/definitions/students>

This trend was also observed within institutions by some interview participants, who remarked upon a decrease in the number of mature students and an increasing share of younger school-leaver students in recent years. This was seen to have influenced the socioeconomic makeup of cohorts on campus in some cases. At some institutions, the decline in mature students meant fewer students being drawn from certain communities in the locality or region of the university that had historically had low levels of higher education participation. Interview participants emphasised the value of having a wide range of ages entering their courses, particularly for Politics and International Relations. It was emphasised that mature students brought a diversity of life experience that enriched the learning environment for all. This echoed some of the points made on the value of a diversity of perspectives in relation to the background of students (made in Section 4.1).

#### 4.5 POLAR4 Quintile

Data from the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) allows to also investigate the profile of incoming Politics and International Relations undergraduates with respect to socioeconomic status and access to higher education. POLAR4 is a spatial, socioeconomic indicator that categorises individuals based on their likelihood to participate in higher education, using their local postcode or area as a determinant. Individuals are classified into five groups or “quintiles” based on the proportion of young people in that local area that go on to university. Quintile 1 is the quintile with the lowest rate of participation, and Quintile 5 is the quintile with the highest rate of participation.

**Table 6 – Proportion of accepted applicants to Politics and International Relations undergraduate courses by POLAR 4 Quintile, 2019 to 2023**

|      | Quintile 1 | Quintile 2 | Quintile 3 | Quintile 4 | Quintile 5 |
|------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| 2019 | 8%         | 12%        | 17%        | 24%        | 40%        |
| 2020 | 8%         | 11%        | 17%        | 24%        | 40%        |
| 2021 | 8%         | 11%        | 17%        | 24%        | 40%        |
| 2022 | 8%         | 11%        | 17%        | 23%        | 41%        |
| 2023 | 8%         | 11%        | 16%        | 23%        | 42%        |

Source – UCAS end of cycle data

Table 6 shows that participation for Politics and International Relations for domestic applicants who are accepted is quite heavily skewed towards those in Quintile 5, meaning those who are from areas where high proportions of young people traditionally go to university. If all localities across the UK were well-represented in the cohort of applicants for the discipline, we would expect to see all quintiles have 20% each. All subjects skew towards Quintiles 4 and 5 to some extent. However, it does appear this is rather pronounced for Politics and International Relations. Furthermore, looking across the last five years of application cycles, it is interesting that there has been no increase in the proportion of Quintiles 1 or 2 during this time period. This indicates that access to the discipline has not broadened over the past few years in relative terms, and the situation is largely static. If anything, there has been a marginal increase in the proportion of those coming from the most well-represented areas in the past couple of years.

# 5.0 Student experience and outcomes

This chapter explores the journey of Politics and International Relations students in taught programmes, through their studies and into the graduate labour market. It considers the motivations students have for engaging with the discipline and the expectations students have of their learning experience. This chapter draws on conversations that took place in the semi-structured interviews with academic staff in the discipline, as well as data taken from the Longitudinal Education Outcomes database and the Graduate Outcomes Survey.<sup>20</sup>

## 5.1 Interest in the subject and its broader value

When asked about the value of studying Politics and International Relations, several of our interview participants pointed to both the instrumental and intrinsic value of the discipline. This dualism was used to explain the healthy levels of interest in the discipline. On the one hand, Politics and International Relations degrees are seen to install a “basket of skills” that is flexible and sought after in the current labour market. On the other hand, students are drawn to the discipline by a clear interest in its subject content, which is often dealing with some of the most pressing and important questions of contemporary society. It was noted that this also applies to other social science disciplines, but there was nevertheless a sense that Politics and International Relations has something distinct to offer in terms of the balance of these two elements. As one Professor of Politics & International relations noted:

*“I think the strength of a politics degree lies in not just understanding the application of critical skills, but an understanding of the broader and interrelated nature of contemporary society and how we are all impacted by decisions made at the global and local level.”*

Some participants also reflected on Politics and International Relations operating in a “sweet spot” between the more vocational programmes and those focused more squarely on the intrinsic value of study and the furthering knowledge in their field. This has helped departments to advocate for the discipline within the university itself. In a climate of heightened regulation and an increased focus on the metrication of employment outcomes and pecuniary returns, the general perception was that Politics and International Relations held up relatively well compared to other subjects. Equally, it was a subject that was able to appeal to students and respond to the shifting demands of new generations of learners.

Interview participants also pointed out that the discipline helps to foster active citizens who are politically engaged. It was argued that engaged graduates with a heightened sense of public purpose support a healthy democracy. Although civic engagement and propensity to vote are associated with graduates of all disciplines,<sup>21</sup> there is arguably a special relevance for Politics and International Relations, as the subject matter often connects students directly to the democratic institutions and processes that surround them. This is especially the case for domestic students, as the UK is somewhat of an outlier internationally in having limited or no

<sup>20</sup> The Graduate Outcomes survey represents a sample and not the whole population of graduates in the UK and this should be taken into consideration when viewing the results. Margins for error are provided for all of the analysis using this data in the methodology section at the end of the report.

<sup>21</sup> McMahon, W. (2009), *Higher Learning, Greater Good: The Private and Social Benefits of Higher Education*, Johns Hopkins University Press

teaching of national political institutions and processes in compulsory education. Furthermore, the specific subject matter of Politics and International Relations was marked out for its capacity to empower individuals as politically-minded citizens. As one interviewee put it:

*“The study of Politics and International Relations is fundamentally about studying power, whether that’s institutions, presidents, parliaments or individual power relations between people. Being able to understand that and how it affects us in the everyday and how it impacts the distribution of resources; knowing about that is really important ... Giving students that knowledge is powerful in and of itself.”*

## 5.2 Changing demands and needs of students

One theme that came up often during the interviews was the perception of a qualitative change in the student body over the past decade towards a greater level of focus from students on developing themselves through their studies. Multiple participants reflected on this by comparing it to their own undergraduate experience, which they described as having taken place in a less pressurised and competitive environment. Contemporary students were characterised as generally being more focused on the outcomes of their degree and more orientated towards building experience and knowledge relevant for the world of work, with a growing number of undergraduates thinking about their post-graduation activity from early on in their studies. There was a perception that many contemporary students see assessment at university as a high stakes endeavour, with enormous consequences attached to marginal grade differences:

*“Another challenge is dealing with students’ expectations over assessments, dealing with a very competitive job market and pressure to get good degrees. There is lots of anxiety about that and the need for good feedback.”*

Separately, some interview participants also talked about the changing academic profile and support needs of students. This was contextualised as happening in a period that had seen significant fluctuation in student numbers between different institutions (see section 3.4 for analysis of uneven growth across the sector at the institutional level). In England and Wales, restrictions placed on institutions with respect to undergraduate student numbers were gradually lifted from 2012/13 onwards.<sup>22</sup> For Politics and International Relations this has resulted in some departments growing numbers considerably while others shrunk. Some institutions had been better prepared than others to support changes to their student body that had come as a result of this, while others were seen to still be adapting to these changes.

## 5.3 Changes in teaching and learning

As noted below in section 7.3, Politics and International Relations is a research field that can evolve rapidly in accordance with world events. This is also reflected in the appeal of the subject to students and the capacity for the learning environment to stay relevant. The curriculum itself is guided and shaped more directly through the evolution of the subject benchmark statement for Politics and International Relations, developed and written by the academic community.<sup>23</sup>

The subject benchmark statement provides a layer of quality assurance to the teaching environment at higher education institutions in the UK and is referred to in the design and approval of courses in this disciplinary area (see the introduction for this report for a definition of Politics and International Relations taken from the subject benchmark statement). A key

<sup>22</sup> Hillman, N. (2014), *A Guide to the Removal of Number Controls*, HEPI Report No. 69, Higher Education Policy Institute.

<sup>23</sup> QAA (2023), *Subject Benchmark Statement: Politics & International Relations*

change to the most recent iteration of the subject benchmark statement is the introduction of key cross-cutting themes. One of these cross-cutting themes that was also picked up by some interview participants was that of equality, diversity and inclusion in the discipline. This was identified as an area where the subject benchmark statement has played a role in the evolution of the curriculum, while also being part of a wider shift in rethinking the learning environment.

*“Politics and IR has historically been a pretty white, middle-class, male discipline and I think there are real efforts in institutions across the UK to really grapple with that [...] whether that’s making reading lists more diverse and thinking about decolonising the curriculum in that way, whether that’s about thinking about the specific topics we consider central versus peripheral in the discipline. I do think there’s been a lot of intellectual attention given to that, which is entirely warranted.”*

Interview participants focused in particular on the growing tendency to frame problems and questions in an international or global context within the curriculum for Politics and International Relations. As noted above, this has been influenced by the evolution of the subject benchmark statement. It is also related to two separate trends that are covered in this report, namely the growing profile of International Relations within the disciplinary landscape and the globalisation of higher education. Interview participants emphasised that within the discipline there were deliberate attempts to diversify the courses they offer. This was seen by the academic community as an intellectual exercise, as well as an effort to better reflect a changing student body and the interests of new generations of students.

The development and influence of technology were also identified as a key change that was impacting the learning environment for the discipline, a development that was not exclusive to the discipline. Interview participants talked about the challenges that were being faced as part of the teaching of Politics and International Relations with the rise of generative AI tools:

*“... we’re really going to have to adapt in the era of AI [...] I think it’s a challenge, particularly for social science and humanities [...] it’s transforming the teaching and learning landscape. And right now, in a way that I think is very unhealthy until we move [...] I think there are two paths, and maybe it’s going to be a combination of the two. One is going to be learning how to teach students to use these tools in a productive way, a way that has integrity. And the second might be bringing back of some relatively now unfashionable methods of assessment [...] But it feels like we haven’t moved radically yet.”*

It was reported that politics departments are detecting increases in the use of these tools by students, which posed serious questions with respect to traditional assessment methods. This is not likely to be a development that is unique to politics, but one that is important for the discipline nonetheless. It was also noted that the rapid development of this technology offers an opportunity for innovation in teaching. There was a warning that institutions should be mindful of the fact that the skills associated with these types of software are likely to be demanded by employers in the future. Educators should therefore bear this in mind when updating their policies on the use of such software and changes to pedagogy.

## 5.4 Generating a broad skillset

The subject benchmark statement for Politics and International Relations provides an outline for the minimum threshold standards that a student graduating in the discipline is expected to show.<sup>24</sup> This is organised across three principal areas:

1. Knowledge and understanding
2. Discipline-specific skills
3. Cognitive abilities and skills

When discussing graduate skills with interview participants for this report, critical and analytical skills were most commonly cited as key tenets of student development, underlining the importance of these transferable skills. This mirrors the emphasis placed in the subject benchmark statement in the knowledge and understanding section, which sets out expectations with respect to the content of the subject and the ability for the individual to engage critically with key concepts and evaluate different interpretations of events.

The subject benchmark statement also outlines a number of expectations with respect to research design, data collection and analysis, methodological awareness and engagement with the literature. Careful critical reading of sources and the development of transferrable research skills were also emphasised as important parts of the skillset of graduates of Politics and International Relations by interview participants.

Some interview participants linked this part of the skillset to the notion of a “mainstreaming of research methods” in Politics and International Relations courses in the UK over the past couple of decades, particularly at the postgraduate level. One interviewee working outside of the UK system commented that UK departments were seen as having been leaders (internationally) in this trend over recent years. This in turn had made them attractive places to work and study and bolstered the international reputation of the sector. One aspect of this development that was picked out in particular was the rise of quantitative methods and a sense that training in this area has become embedded as a core part of Politics and International Relations programmes across the sector.

The Q Step programme was singled out by multiple interview participants as an initiative that has had a significant positive impact on the discipline.<sup>25</sup> This has incentivised departments to expand their methodological capabilities and broadened out the research skills of students at all levels, as well as offering students opportunities to apply skills in a professional environment.

The subject benchmark statement also outlines the more general and transferrable skills that are expected as parts of the graduate skillset for the discipline. These include effectively organising and completing projects; working independently and as part of a team; the ability to take on feedback; and communicating via a variety of formats to multiple audiences. Communicative abilities in particular were highlighted as important areas within the interviews that were held for this project, including examples such as presentation skills, rhetorical skills, and presenting complex data or concepts:

*“It’s the sheer communicative ability of politics students whether it’s verbal, written, audio, etc. That’s a skill that’s never going to divert from the politics degree.”*

Politics and International Relations was described as a discipline that provides a solid base of employability skills at various levels of higher education. As well as some of the more transferrable, “soft” skills mentioned above, interview participants also talked about a more holistic understanding that is fostered due to engagement with the subject content of the discipline. Students of Politics and International Relations are engaging with some of the big societal questions and being challenged to problem-solve central issues affecting the social and political world. This exposure to cross-cutting issues and wider understanding was seen to be relevant for a wide range of industries and employment areas:

*“... students tend to go well into business-related jobs because they’ve learned about the broader world and society; employers want graduates who not only have technical skills but who also understand what the appropriate use or application of those tools is.”*

The subject benchmark statement for Politics and International Relations maps out a number of skills developed by those studying the discipline that are well-suited for enterprise and entrepreneurship, namely digital literacy, research methods and data analysis skills, critical

<sup>25</sup>

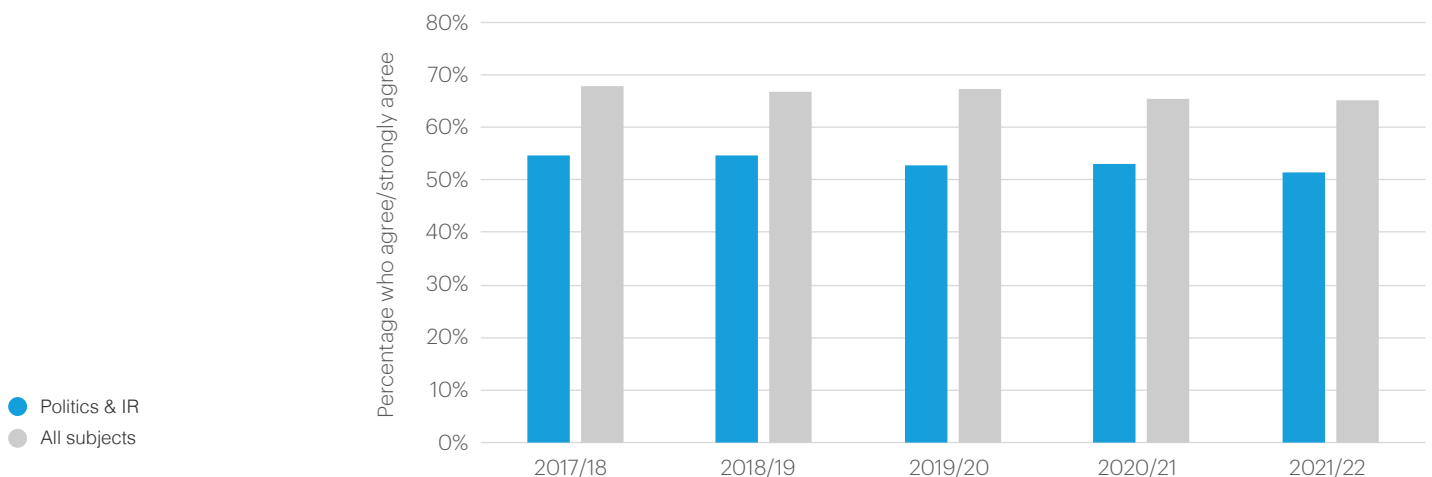
Q Step programme <https://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/students-teachers/q-step> [accessed July 2024].

evaluation skills, critical thinking skills, leadership and decision-making skills, sensitivity to complexity and uncertainty, awareness of global citizenship and the ability to weigh up and summarise often disputed political positions.

Interview participants also remarked on concerted efforts in their departments to embed employability skills within Politics and International Relations programmes over the past five years. Universities have introduced learning placements and created pathways through internships as well as more generally building employability into the core structure of a degree. Furthermore, innovation has also occurred within the teaching space by introducing new methods of assessment (formal or informal) such as briefing papers, speeches, policy reports, simulations and scenario-based tasks, all designed to make the skills acquired through a degree applicable in the labour market.

Chart 23 displays data from the Graduate Outcomes survey, which is conducted with students 15 months after completion of their course.<sup>26</sup> The chart shows that one in two Politics and International Relations graduates responded positively when asked if they agree with the statement “I am using what I learned during my studies in my current work”. But as is evident from the chart, the percentage of positive responses is lower than for all disciplines.

**Chart 23 – Response to skills question (I am using what I learned during my studies in my current work) from Politics and International Relations first degree students, 2017/18 to 2021/22**



Source – HESA Graduate Outcomes Survey 2017/18 to 2021/22 © Jisc 2025

The disparity here between Politics and International Relations graduates and all subjects could be attributed to a range of factors. It is likely, for example, that those courses that have a direct vocational route such as medicine, nursing or educational programmes to be scoring particularly highly on this response. But even factoring this in, the notable gap between Politics and International Relations and the rest of the sector on this question does raise some questions, particularly as appears to contrast with the general tone of interview participants on the applicability of skills developed in the discipline.

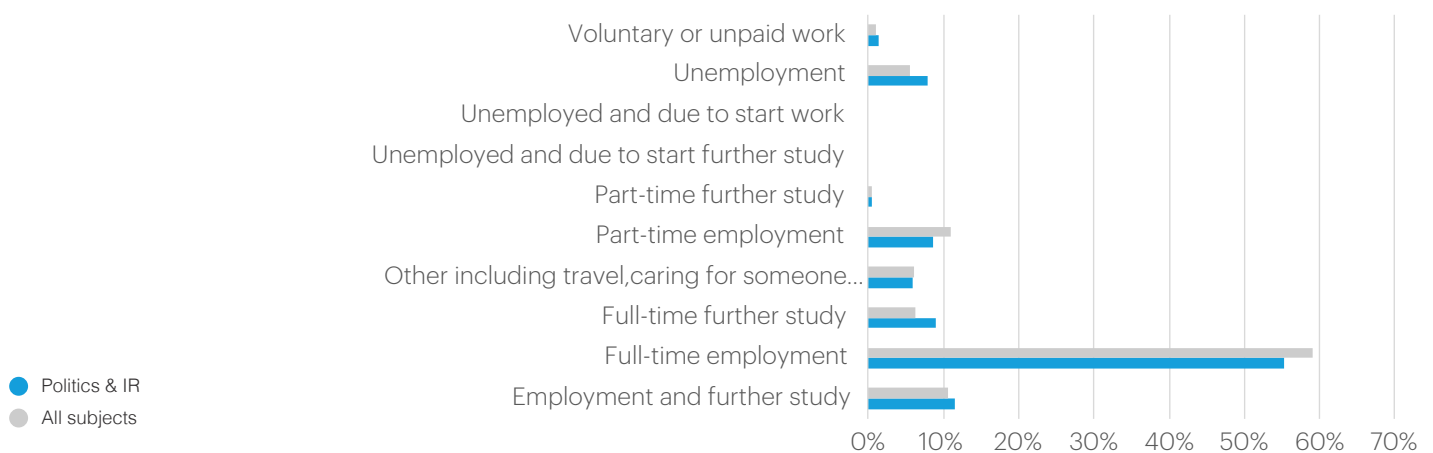
<sup>25</sup> Confidence intervals at the 95 percent level have been calculated for all data presented in this report taken from the Graduate Outcomes Survey. These can all be found in an Annex to the Methodology section at the end of this report. These confirm that the differences in response rates between Politics and International Relations and all first degree students shown in Chart 26 are statistically significant.



## 5.5 Graduate employment

Data from the Graduate Outcomes survey offers some insight into the early career activity of new graduates in the discipline. For those graduating in 2022, 85% of Politics and International Relations graduates were in employment or further study 15 months after graduation. This shows that a high proportion of people who studied the discipline at undergraduate level go on to have positive outcomes shortly after graduating. However, the same figure for all subjects is marginally higher at 87%. Chart 24 provides a breakdown of the different types of activity reported by first degree students in the survey, comparing Politics and International Relations with all first degree students. It is interesting to note that while the percentages are marginally higher for all employment activities, a greater percentage of Politics and International Relations graduates are in further study.<sup>27</sup>

**Chart 24 – Activity of first degree students in Politics and International Relations 15 months after graduation, 2021/22**



Source – HESA Graduate Outcomes Survey 2017/18 to 2021/22 © Jisc 2025

Graduate earnings are increasingly being put under the spotlight in discussions and debates about higher education as more data becomes available. It is important to emphasise here that that this is only one of several different metrics that should be used to assess the outcomes of graduates. The value of studying extends far beyond the pecuniary returns for the individual, a view that is shared by staff and students alike. Chart 25 below shows the average earnings of Politics and International Relations graduates for the 2021/22 tax year, showing average results for individuals one, three, five and ten years after graduation. This is compared alongside the same measure for all first degree graduates. The data shows that average earnings grow consistently throughout this period. Indeed, the rate of growth in earnings is greater than for all first degree graduates.

<sup>27</sup>

Confidence intervals at the 95 percent level have been calculated for all data presented in this report taken from the Graduate Outcomes Survey. These can all be found in an Annex to the Methodology section at the end of this report. These confirm that the differences in response rates between Politics and International Relations and all first degree students shown in Chart 24 are statistically significant.

**Chart 25 – Median earnings of first degree graduates for i) Politics and International Relations and ii) for all subjects 1, 3, 5 and 10 years after graduation, 2020/21**



Source: Department for Education [Longitudinal Educational Outcomes database](#)

Average earnings for Politics and International Relations graduates are roughly at the same level as the average for all students one year after graduation. However, average earnings for Politics and International Relations increase at a faster rate than for all graduates during the first ten years of their graduate career. A decade post-graduation, average salaries for Politics and International Relations students are £5,000 above the wider graduate average salary. This suggests that the typical career paths of Politics and International Relations students are ones that have steady wage growth and that these students make healthy monetary contributions back into society in the first decade of their graduate careers. This trend is even more pronounced for postgraduate students, as shown below in Chart 26. The gap between average earnings for students 10 years after graduation widens at this level. Politics and International graduates earn £9,000 more than the wider postgraduate population.

**Chart 26 – Median earnings of level 7 graduates (Masters or equivalent) for i) Politics and International Relations and ii) for all subjects 1, 3, 5 and 10 years after graduation, 2020/21**



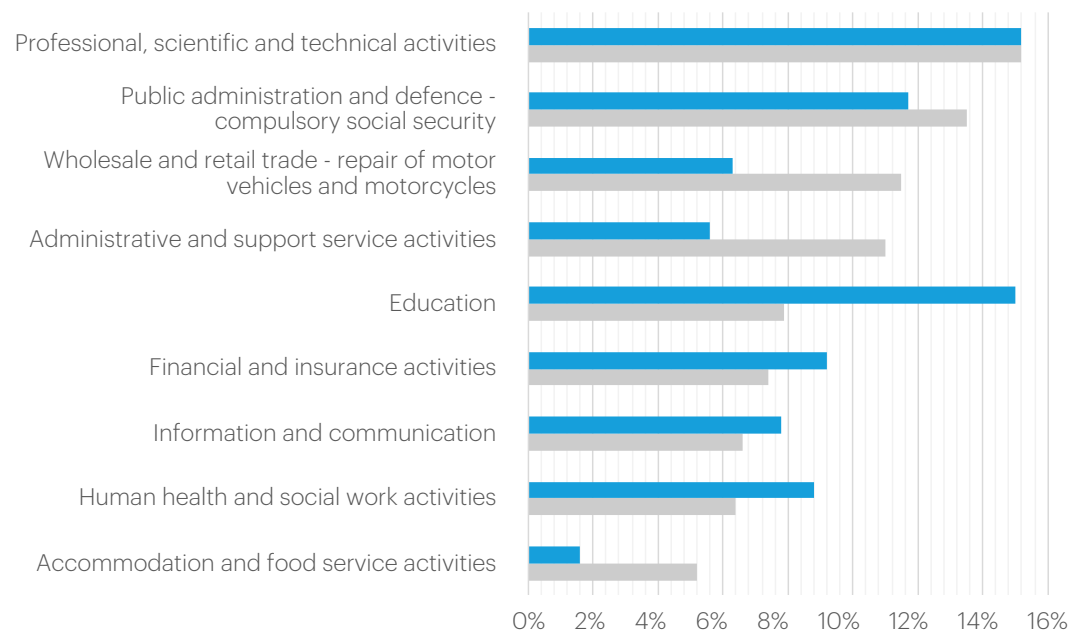
Source: Department for Education [Longitudinal Educational Outcomes database](#)

One factor that might be linked to this is the variety of destinations of Politics and International Relations graduates. This breadth of employment pathways for students of the discipline was noted in the interviews:

*“... career options are very broad from diplomacy to journalism, and all other careers you can imagine; you're educated for whatever career you might want to do.”*

This observation is also supported by data from the Longitudinal Educational Outcomes (LEO) database. Chart 27 shows the industries that first degree students of Politics and International Relations are working in one and ten years after graduation. Graduates in the discipline are spread broadly across the economy; the largest percentage are working in “Professional, scientific and technical activities”, constituting 15% of Politics and International Relations graduates both one year and ten years after graduation. The category of Public Administration and Defence is also well represented. The largest change for any one industry category over time is education, as many graduates appear to move into the education sector a decade into their graduate careers.

**Chart 27 – Industry of employment for first degree Politics & IR students by SIC code (LEO data) 1 & 10 years after graduation, 2020/21**



Source: Department for Education [Longitudinal Educational Outcomes database](#)

Interview participants talked specifically about the non-academic opportunities for postgraduate students of Politics and International Relations. PhD holders in the discipline were seen as well-placed to apply their distinct skillset in policy institutions, think tanks, consultancies, market research companies, the civil service, local government and arm's length governmental organisations. There was a perception amongst some interview participants, however, that across these types of organisations, particularly those located in London, graduates were still recruited from a narrow set of higher education institutions. This was seen as problem insofar as it could reinforce a narrow set of perspectives and backgrounds of practitioners and can make it particularly hard for individuals from certain backgrounds to break through into these areas.

# 6.0 The pipeline into academia

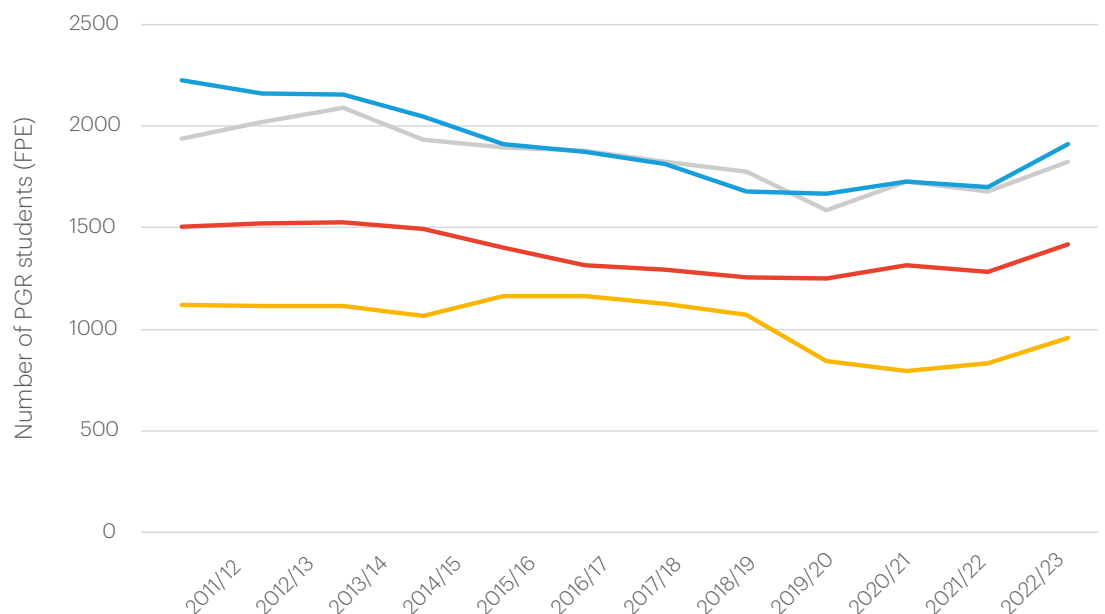
This section looks at the pipeline into academia for Politics and International Relations, focusing first on postgraduate research students. This category of student is predominately made up of those undertaking doctoral studies. This level of qualification is generally seen as a prerequisite to working in academic roles in the sector. The section explores aggregate numbers of these students within Politics and International Relations, as well as their domicile and student characteristics. This offers some perspective on of the flow of people coming through as the next generation of scholars for the discipline. The second part of the chapter below explores the academic workforce to give a sense of the size, shape and diversity of the current workforce.

## 6.1 Reduction in postgraduate research students

The data on student numbers for postgraduate research students in Politics and International Relations paints quite a different picture to that for taught programmes. The general picture is one of contraction for postgraduate research students. For example, the number of postgraduate research students in the discipline decreased by 14% between 2011/12 and 2022/23, compared to 41% increase in postgraduate taught study.

As shown in Chart 28, other comparable social science subjects have seen their numbers reduce over the same time period. The general trend across these subjects is a decrease in numbers for most of the 2010s. However, this trend is particularly pronounced for Politics and International Relations. Social Policy is the only other subject shown in the chart to have seen a similar percentage decrease in numbers over the period. Most subjects featured in the chart have seen numbers recover somewhat over the past couple of years, with a notable year-on-year increase in 2022/23. For Politics and International Relations there were 210 more postgraduate research students in 2022/23 compared to the previous year.

**Chart 28 – Postgraduate research student numbers for Politics and International relations and other comparable social science disciplines, 2011/12 to 2022/23**



Some interview participants identified the longer-term trend of declining numbers as a cause for concern, while a minority questioned whether declining numbers was necessarily negative for the health of the discipline. This latter position was made in the context of the challenges associated with finding an academic post after completing a PhD and the relatively small proportion of PhD holders who go into the profession. When discussing the potential causes of the reduction in student numbers, interview participants most commonly pointed to lack of funding, specifically cutbacks in scholarships and studentships available for social sciences:

*Doing a PhD comes at a huge cost, personally, professionally, and financially. [...] There are less scholarships available. There are less studentships available. I don't think it's a choice, the costs are high, and if you want to be an academic, the job options are limited.*

Multiple interview participants explained that, during the last decade, their institution had stopped accepting PhD students who had not secured funding. This was suggested as another factor that could be influencing a reduction in the supply of places for doctoral students. Table 7 shows the proportion of postgraduate research students in the discipline broken down by their main source of funding for tuition. This shows that around half of postgraduate research students for Politics and International Relations pay their own tuition fees. This is broadly in line with the percentage of students who pay their own fees across all subjects. Interestingly, the figures listed in Table 7 have not been subject to much change over the past decade, at most fluctuating by a couple of percentage points each way.

**Table 7 – Proportion of Politics and International Relations postgraduate research students per major source of tuition fees, 2022/23**

| Major source of tuition fees               | Proportion of PGR students |
|--|----------------------------|
| Charitable foundation                      | 1%                         |
| Fees paid by student                       | 50%                        |
| Non-UK source                              | 7%                         |
| Other UK gov., gov. dept. or public body   | 2%                         |
| Other/not known                            | 6%                         |
| Provider own funds                         | 21%                        |
| Research Council                           | 10%                        |
| SLC/SAAS                                   | 1%                         |
| UK industry/commerce or student's employer | 2%                         |

Source - HESA Student Record 2022/23, Full Person Equivalent © Jisc 2025

Issues affecting demand for PhD study in the discipline were also raised, although it should be noted that these were generally discussed to a lesser degree by participants. One interviewee situated this issue within the wider context of changes to student funding in the UK. It was argued that the increased debt burden felt by graduates in certain parts of the UK could be another financial factor deterring people from continuing to study at higher levels:

*The prospect of them doing postgraduate research is therefore more challenging financially, and it is very difficult to get funding to do so. [...] I think students coming out with debt just want to hit the ground running and get a job.*

Many interviewees noted that even with secure funding, pursuing a PhD can still be challenging in the current UK economic climate. Since the stipend levels have not increased with inflation, the resulting erosion of real income can further complicate the financial viability of doing a PhD:

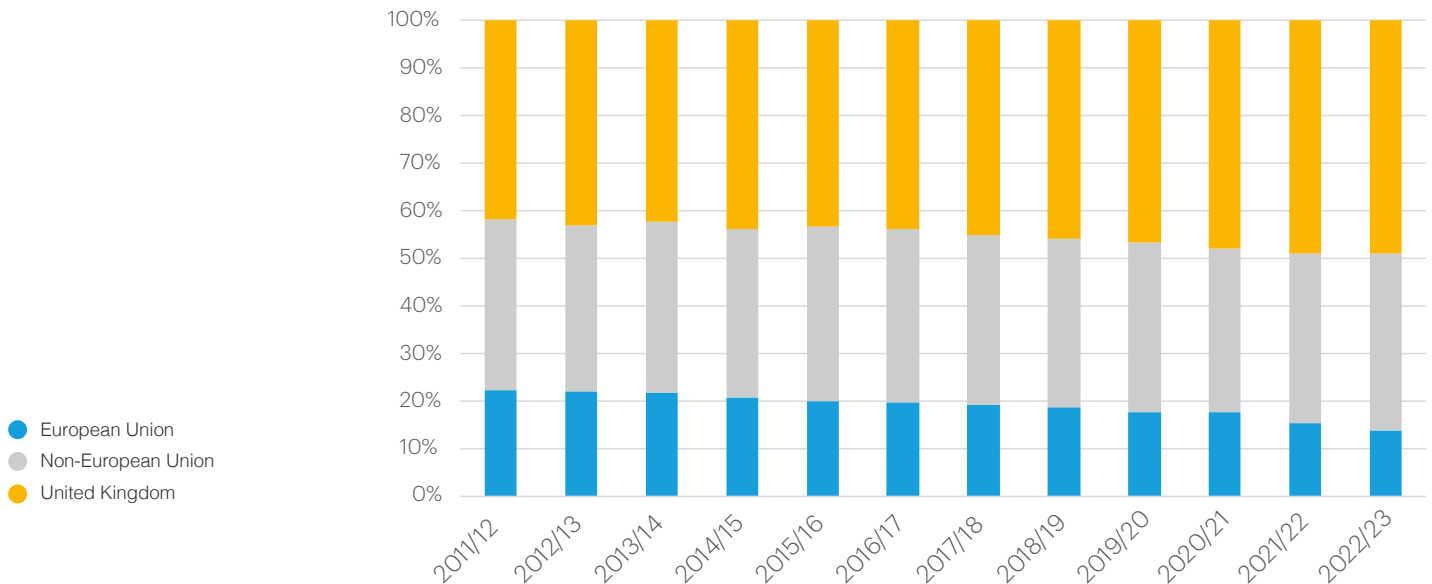
*The level of funding is quite a challenge these days with the cost of living. If you manage to get funding and get £19,000 per year, you can't live well with that. I think people are looking at other professions and at their peers, and not necessarily seeing another three or four years of very low income as a viable proposition.*

Despite these difficulties, interview participants placed great emphasis on the impressive level of talent within cohorts of doctoral students at their institutions. Although there may be a range of factors that are pushing up against demand, there was still an overwhelming sense that the current quality of cohorts of PhD candidates was very high. Interview participants remarked that this gave them great faith in the next generation of scholars.

## 6.2 Domicile of postgraduate research students

Chart 29 shows that the proportion of postgraduate research students who are UK-domiciled for Politics and International Relations has grown over the past decade, rising from 42% in 2011/12, to 49% in 2022/23.

**Chart 29 – Domicile group of postgraduate research students for Politics & IR, 2011/12 to 2022/23**



Source – HESA Student Record 2011/12 to 2022/23, Full Person Equivalent © Jisc 2025

The notable change with respect to domicile is the reduction in the proportion of postgraduate research students from the European Union. There was a perception amongst interview participants that changes to the immigration status of EU citizens caused by the UK's decision to leave the EU might be influencing this trend. However, it is important to note that this downward trend predates the referendum on membership of the EU, so there are likely to be other factors influencing this. In contrast to this, the proportion of non-EU international students has changed little over the past decade, staying between 35% and 37% over the period. If immigration policies in the UK are influencing demand from non-UK postgraduate research students, it does not appear to be happening in a uniform way.

In addition, interviewees discussed the competitiveness of other international higher education systems as a factor that might be contributing to the declining numbers at postgraduate research level. The depth and breadth of doctoral programmes in some competitor nations, and the support offered to students as part of this package, were seen to be superior to that offered by UK institutions. One interviewee felt their department had effectively been losing out on postgraduate research students to North American institutions over the past few years. Another participant cautioned against the UK isolating itself from the global education market and underestimating international competitors, as institutions in different parts of the world are producing increasingly high-quality research, which could lead more people to pursue their PhDs outside of the UK.

### 6.3 Characteristics of postgraduate research students

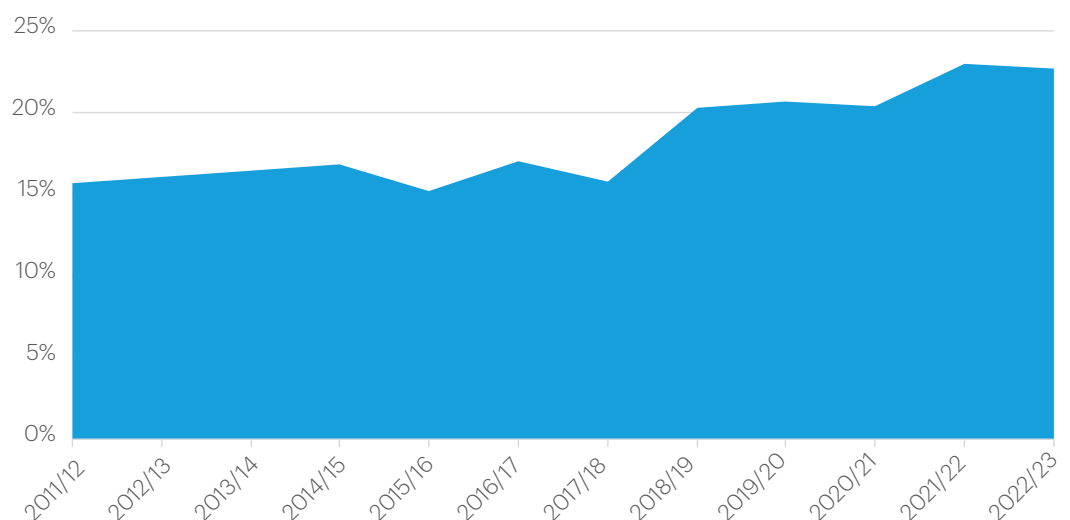
To gain a better understanding of the diversity of the postgraduate research students, three main variables were selected for analysis: Black and Minority Ethnic students; female students; and students with a reported disability. The analysis below gives some indication of the current level of representation based on these three measures, as well as offering perspective on how this has changed over time.

#### 6.3.1 Ethnicity

In the data gathered on ethnicity for postgraduate research students in Politics and International Relations, students that do not identify as White are grouped together under the category of Black and Minority Ethnic. This category inevitably masks some of the variation between different non-white ethnicities. This has been done in part because numbers at the postgraduate level are much smaller than for taught programmes. Because of the restrictions associated with publishing this data, it becomes much harder to publish data on ethnicity at a more granular level, and for it to be informative. For consistency with the analysis of ethnicity made elsewhere in this report, international students have been removed from the data for this exercise.

In 2022/23, 23% of UK-domiciled postgraduate research students in Politics and International Relations were from a minoritised group. As Chart 30 shows below, this figure has grown over recent years, increasing by seven percentage points since 2011/12. It is important to note that this trend has been occurring in a period when aggregate numbers of postgraduate research students in Politics and International Relations have been going down. This is positive from the perspective of widening participation, particularly as it is normally harder to make progress when the overall number of students is declining. Despite the drop in aggregate numbers, institutions are still managing to diversify their domestic intake of postgraduate research students.

**Chart 30 – Percentage of UK domiciled postgraduate research students for Politics and International Relations that identify as Black & Minority Ethnic, 2011/12 to 2022/23**



#### 6.3.2 Sex

In 2022/23, the postgraduate research student body for Politics and International Relations was 45% Female, 53% Male, and 1% Other.<sup>28</sup> As noted in Chapter 4, the student body at

<sup>28</sup> HESA includes the category 'Other' for students whose sex aligns with terms such as intersex, androgyne, intergender, ambigender, gender fluid, polygender and gender queer. In 2022/23, there were 160 students reported in this category <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/support/definitions/students>.

both undergraduate and postgraduate taught level are majority female, in contrast to the postgraduate research level. Nevertheless, the gap has been closing steadily over the past decade at the postgraduate research level: the proportion of female students has increased by six percentage points since 2011/12.

**6.3.3 Disability**

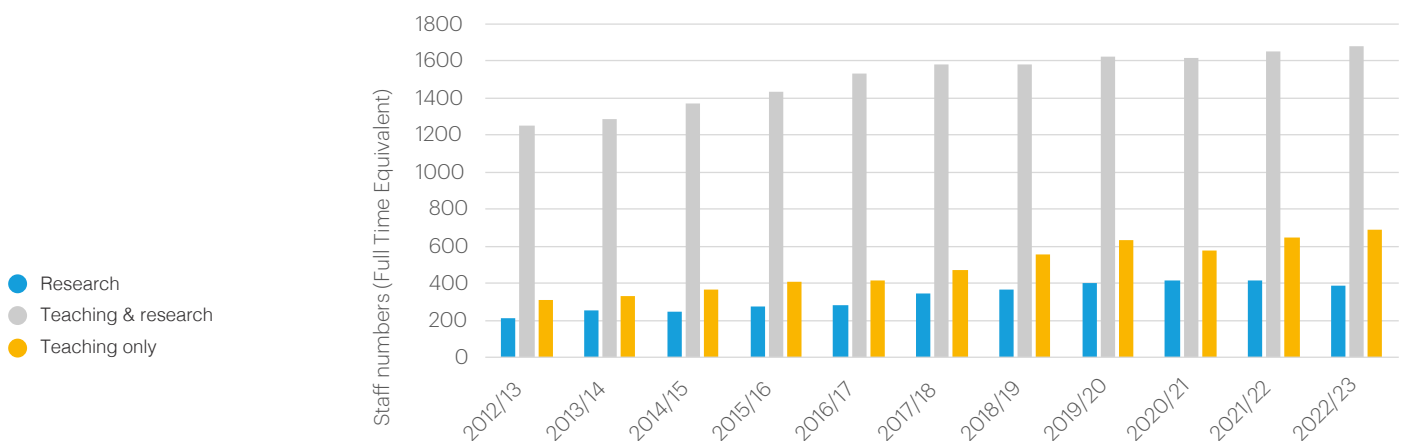
In 2022/23, 18% of postgraduate research students in Politics and International Relations were known to have a disability. Data shows that the proportion of disabled students in the discipline has increased by 12 percentage points over the past decade or so, with only 6% of postgraduate research students with a known disability in 2011/12. As noted in Chapter 4, this change may be affected by increased rates of reporting.

**6.4 Entering the profession**

As noted earlier in this chapter, one thing that came through strongly in the interviews was an appreciation of the quality of PhD candidates that were feeding through into the discipline. The next stage of the journey into academia for these individuals was also discussed. Interview participants commented on some of the challenges for early career academics with regards to obtaining their first role and sustaining regular employment thereafter.

Participants remarked upon a divided experience, with a “lucky few” able to secure prestigious post-doc positions that provide the time needed to research and network within the field, ultimately building their profile and status as a researcher. Others are often faced with looking for short- or fixed-term opportunities within a pressurised system. There was a sense that, although short-term contracts had always existed, the practice had intensified over recent years. Nevertheless, institutions had responded to this by establishing more effective support systems for early career academics and there was a general perception that institutions had become a lot more active in this space and generally improved practices over the past five years or so.

**Chart 31 – Type of contract for non-professorial academic staff in Politics and International Relations, 2012/13 to 2022/23**



Source – HESA Staff Record 2012/13 to 2022/23, Full Time Equivalent © Jisc 2025<sup>29</sup>

Chart 31 offers a breakdown of the different types of contract held by non-professorial academic staff within Politics and International Relations. Those in senior management positions have also been excluded from the data for this chart. It is worth highlighting that all of the three

<sup>29</sup> HESA Staff data (FTE) is only available from 2012/13 onwards.



main types of contract (research; teaching; and teaching and research) have seen numbers rise over the past decade respectively. Teaching-only contracts have more than doubled in number for the discipline over the period in question. This equates to an increase in seven percentage points over the period, with teaching-only contracts now representing 21% of all academic staff in the discipline.

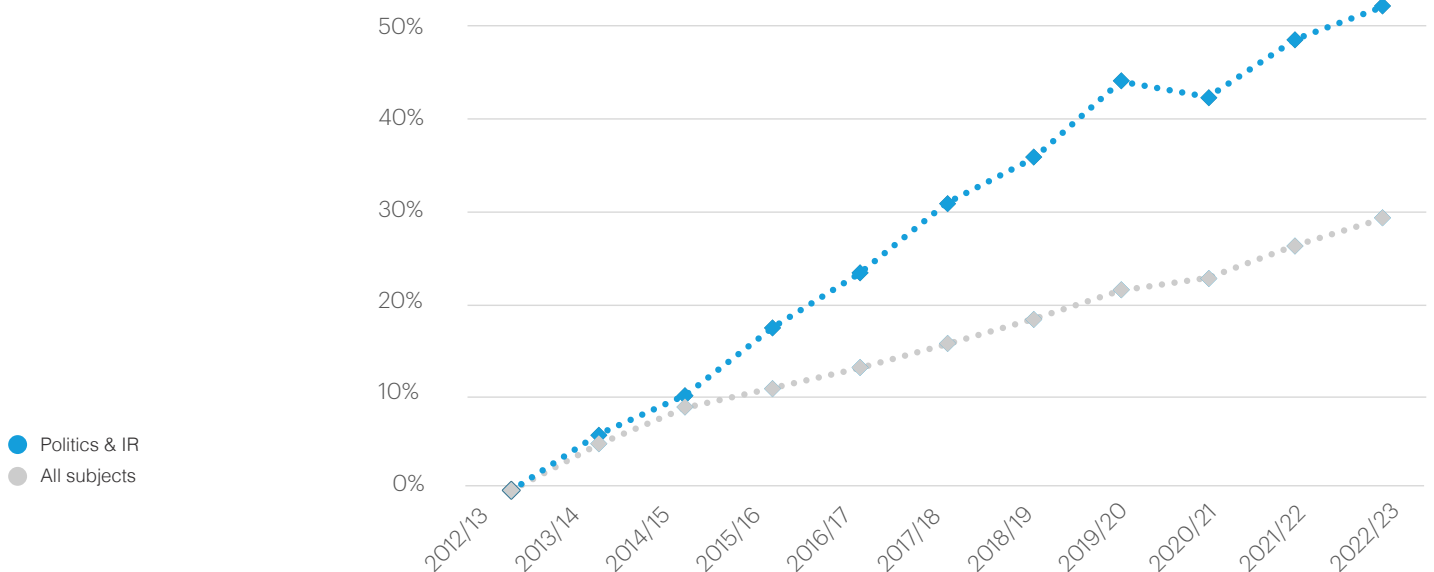
When we filtered the data for Politics and International Relations by institution group, the observed trend was shown to be more pronounced for Russell Group institutions, who had seen the number of teaching-only contracts almost triple over the period, which amounts to a 10 percentage point increase in overall academic staff for the discipline. In 2022/23, 27% of academic staff in the discipline at Russell Group institutions were on teaching-only contracts. It was noted by interview participants that although this type of employment was often associated with precarity, at many institutions it has become more viable to build a career via a teaching pathway over the past decade or so, with promotion criteria and opportunities built into the departmental structures.

The most common type of contract, still by some margin, is “teaching and research”, which has grown by 34% over the period. Interview participants commented on how they cherished the fact that the UK system was not as “adjunct” as some other HE systems around the world, namely the USA. This was reflected in the employment system and there was a perception of fewer barriers to staff mobility between institutions in the UK. Moreover, one participant argued that one of the things that makes the UK a particularly attractive international destination for political scholars is its reputation for recruitment based on merit and the consistent recognition of excellence of individual researchers.

### 6.5 A competitive labour market

The total number of academic staff for Politics and International Relations at UK universities has increased by 52% since 2012/13. This serves as another general indicator of good health for the discipline. Chart 32 shows that the total number of academic staff has increased strongly over the past decade. Indeed, when one compares this with total staff figures for all subjects, it is clear the relative increase has been greater for Politics and International Relations than across the wider sector.

**Chart 32 – Percentage change in total academic staff (FTE) for Politics and International Relations compared to all subjects, 2012/13 to 2022/23**

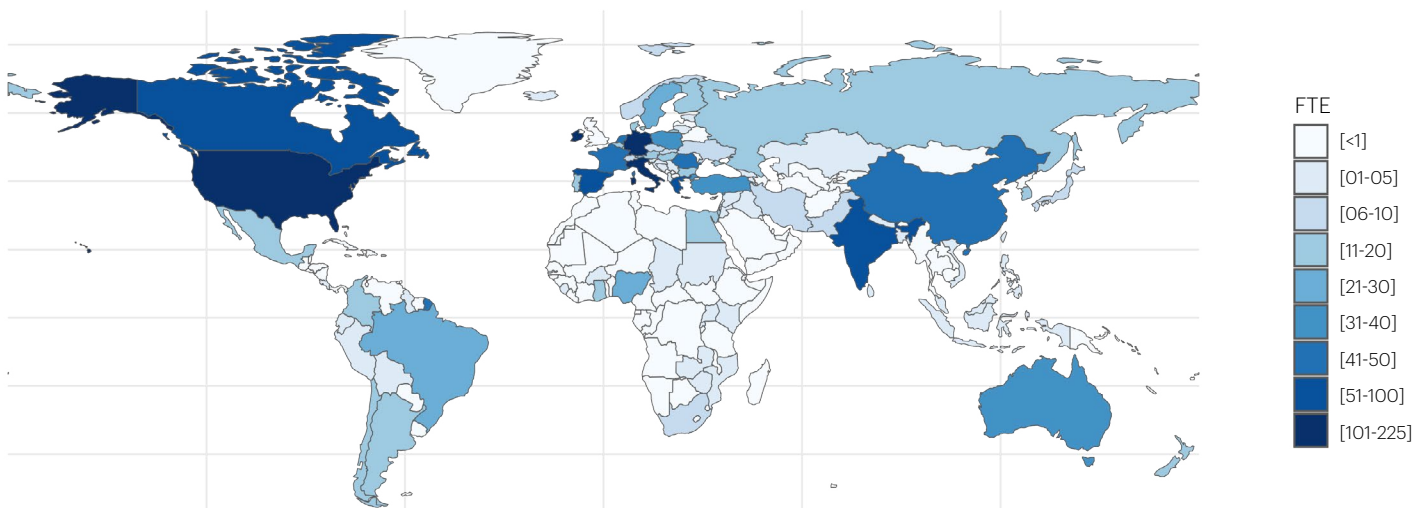


Source – HESA Staff Record 2012/13 to 2022/23, Full Time Equivalent © Jisc 2025

The academic labour market in the UK for Politics and International Relations was described by interview participants as fiercely competitive. This feature was seen to have become more intense over the past 10 or 20 years. One important factor contributing to this is the increasing professionalisation of the workforce. This relates to the general strength of PhD cohorts coming through as potential new generations of staff, as mentioned above. More broadly, the expectations placed on all academic staff in respect of their skillset, experience and published material were viewed to have increased over time.

Another factor that has contributed to this development is the globalisation of higher education, with the mobility of staff (as well as students) increasing in recent years. The percentage of non-UK academic staff working in Politics and International Relations has increased from 39% in 2012/13 to 48% in 2022/23. The international reputation of UK departments of Politics and International Relations has meant that institutions have been able to attract staff from across the globe. The result of this is a highly internationalised workforce, as depicted in Chart 33 below.

**Chart 33 – A map of the nationalities of non-UK academic staff for Politics and International Relations, 2022/23**



Source – HESA Staff Record 2012/13 to 2022/23, Full Time Equivalent © Jisc 2025

One can see from the chart above that there is an incredibly broad array of countries represented in the discipline, with the largest representation from the USA, Germany and Italy. After these there appears to be a second band of countries represented that includes a mix of anglophone and western European nations, as well as large nations from the Global South. The latter appears to have been an area of particular growth in the discipline over recent years. For example, the number of Politics and International Relations scholars from China who are working in the UK has more than doubled over the past decade, as has the number from India.

All of this increased competition has afforded benefits to institutions, who are typically able to recruit from a range of highly impressive candidates for academic post. Interview participants were also keen to highlight that the internationalisation of staff brought with it a diversity of perspectives and backgrounds, as well as international connections and networks, all of which was highly valued within departments. But the other side of the change was increased competition for posts for those who had undertaken their education and training in the UK.

## 6.6 Staff mobility

It was noted by interview participants that the attractiveness of the UK has been aided by the fact that English is such a dominant language of publication in the discipline. While this is the case generally in academia, it was seen to be even more pronounced for Politics and International Relations. One participant commented that this could be subject to change in the coming years, as countries in the Global South expand their own domestic higher education infrastructure (and staff). This was framed within the context of changing geopolitics and an increasingly multipolar world.

Furthermore, the implications of this went beyond the language of publication but also staff mobility, that is to say, the potential for an increasing number of UK scholars to seek opportunities abroad in growing higher education systems. One interview participant was open about the fact he had recently accepted an academic post in Singapore. He explained that he had been attracted to move due to the remarkable level of resources that would be available in the new role and the impressive employment conditions put forward as part of this package. It was argued that this was indicative of the growing level of infrastructure in certain East Asian countries and their increasing competitiveness in a globalised higher education labour market.

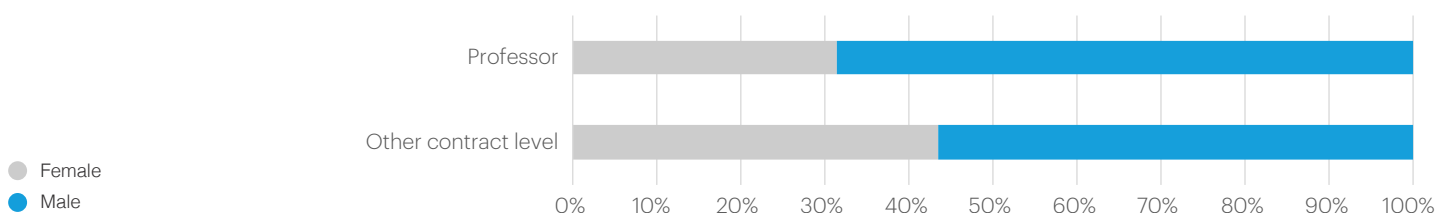
## 6.7 Diversity of academic staff

The diversity of academic staff in Politics and International Relations is a subject that warrants focus as part of an analysis of the health of the discipline. The topic was raised independently by interview participants on a number of different fronts, one of which was the gender of staff. As mentioned elsewhere in this report, Politics and International Relations is a disciplinary field that has historically been dominated by men. Interview participants commented on how there is a perception that inequalities have persisted in higher levels of employment within the university:

*“... one of the parts of this that I think has got the most attention is the leaky pipeline with regards to gender, not just in politics, but across academia ... in the early career stages it's pretty hard to reconcile with feeling like you're in a good place to start a family, and that's much, much more the case for women, I think, than for men, because of the kind of differential impact of what it means to have young children.”*

Chart 33 offers a breakdown of academic workforce by sex and contract level for Politics and International Relations. This confirms that the discipline is still majority-male with respect to academic staff. Moreover, in accordance with the notion of a “leaky pipeline”, women are not as well-represented in professorial roles. This indicates that if there is a leak in the pipeline, it is happening at the level of professor. However, progress has been made in female representation over recent years. The number of female professors in Politics and International Relations rose from 17% in 2012/13 to 32% in 2022/23.

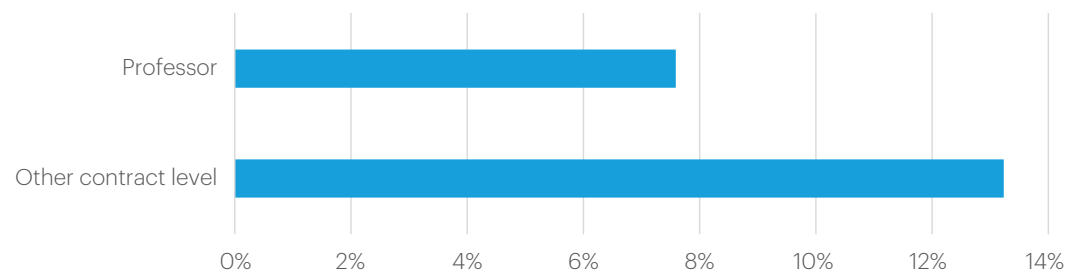
**Chart 34 – Sex of academic staff (FTE) for Politics and International Relations, 2022/23**



Source – HESA Staff Record 2012/13 to 2022/23, Full Time Equivalent © Jisc 2025

Data on ethnicity of staff also shows a disparity between the representation of minoritised groups at different contract levels. Chart 35 chart shows that 7% of professors in Politics and International Relations are from Black and Minority Ethnic groups.<sup>30</sup> This figure has not changed much since 2012/13, when it was 6%. The percentage of professors that are in this group is notably lower than the 13% of staff at other contract levels who are from Black and Minority Ethnic groups. This percentage has seen more change over the past decade, having increased by seven percentage points since 2012/13.

**Chart 35 – Percentage of staff from Black or minority ethnic background (with UK nationality) for Politics and International Relations, 2022/23**



Source – HESA Staff Record 2012/13 to 2022/23, Full Time Equivalent © Jisc 2025

It is also interesting to explore the effects of international staff on the diversity of the workforce. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the academic workforce for Politics and International Relations has internationalised over recent years. Expanding the analysis above to all staff in the discipline, one sees that the percentage of staff from a minoritised group who are in a non-professorial role rises to 21% of all academic staff for Politics and International Relations (eight percentage points higher than for UK staff alone). Perhaps unsurprisingly, internationalisation is increasing the diversity of staff at levels up to professor. But there is little difference when one looks at the figures for all staff at the level of professor. It appears that the increased diversification of staff that has been driven by the internationalisation of the workforce is not being reflected in the recruitment of professors in the discipline.

Taking all this diversity data into consideration, it appears that there has been progress made in making the academic workforce more representative with respect to sex and ethnicity. Despite this, both females and Black and Minority Ethnic groups continue to be underrepresented in professorial roles compared to other levels in the profession. As has been noted in the report, there are limitations in using more generalised indicators of ethnicity, as these will mask variation between different minoritised groups. Further analysis is required to comprehend the intersectionality of these characteristics and to better understand how the workforce in Politics and International Relations has been diversifying.

<sup>30</sup> The data for Chart 35 corresponds only to academics who are reported as having UK nationality. This helps to provide a picture of the extent to which certain communities or ethnicities within the UK are represented in the academic workforce.

# 7.0 A high-performing and diverse research sector

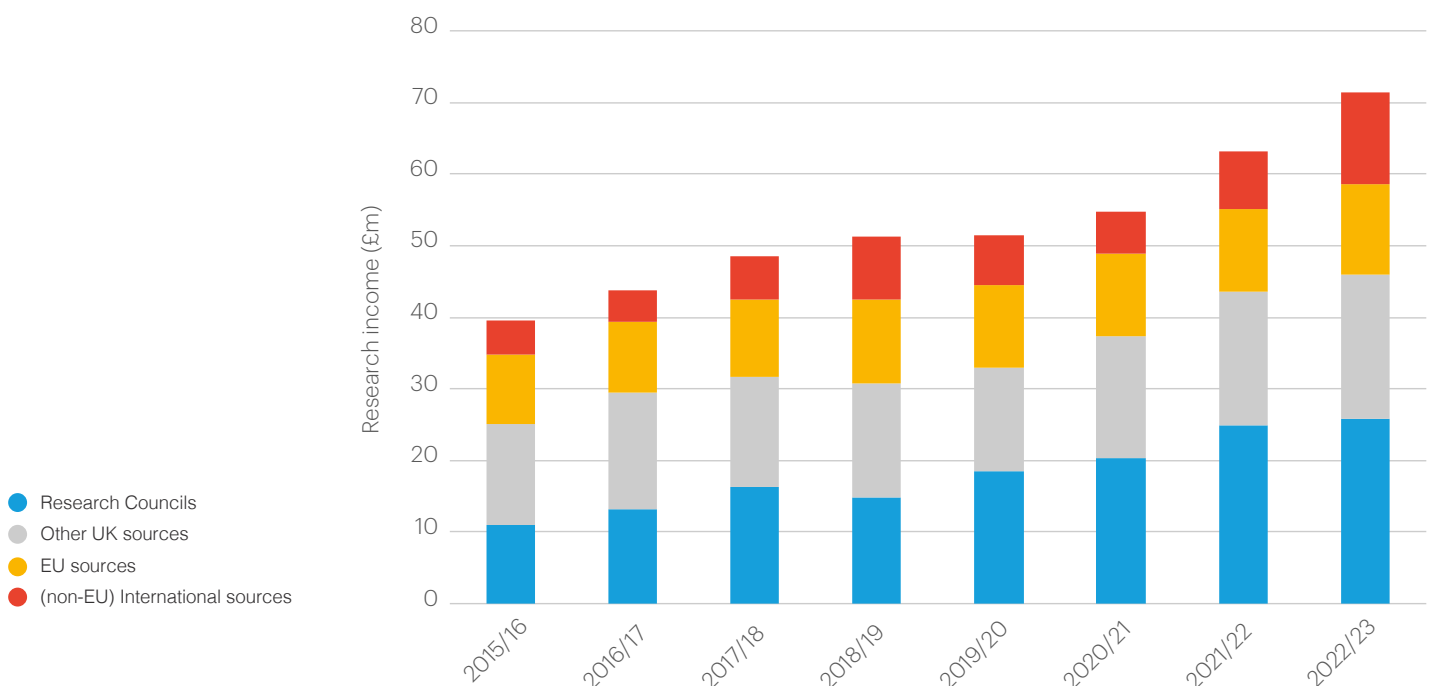
This chapter provides insights on the research sector for Politics and International Relations in the UK, drawing on a range of evidence sources. It uses data from the most recent research assessment exercise in the UK, REF2021, as well as data on research funding. This is all combined with insights gained from semi-structured interviews on the general health of the discipline from the perspective of academics working in the sector.

## 7.1 Research funding

One general indicator of health to look at for the research sector is research funding. Chart 36 shows how research income into politics departments at UK universities has changed over time, depicting a steady increase over recent years in aggregate research income. In total, politics departments have generated £423 million in research income between 2015/16 and 2022/23. The chart breaks down each year (or column) into the main sources of funding. This shows that research income is drawn from a range of different sources. All four of the funding sources shown in this chart have increased over the period. The fact that the discipline is able to readily draw on a range of income sources, and that all of these are growing, is positive.

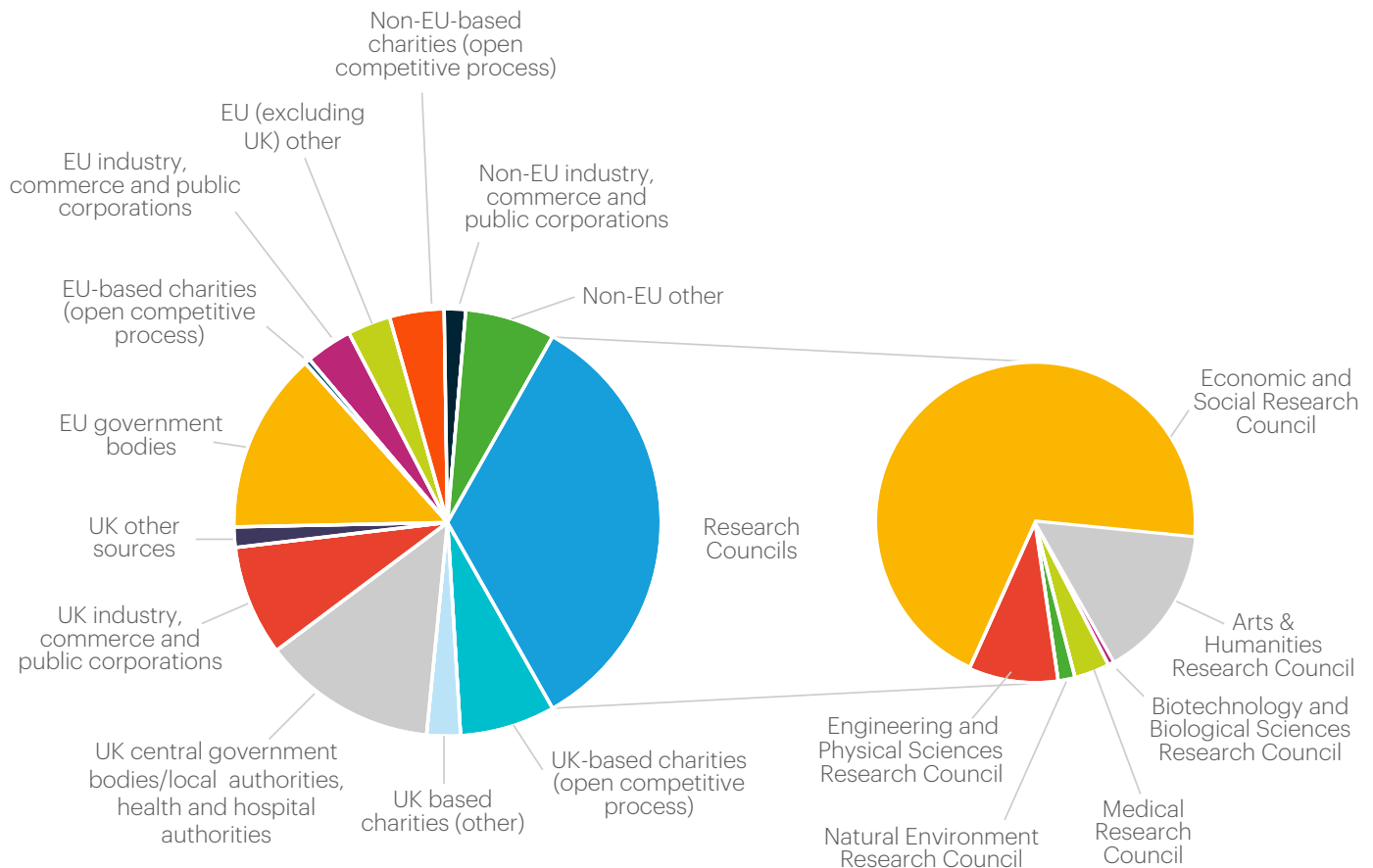
Income from research councils has increased by the largest percentage of these four main categories, having more than doubled in absolute terms since 2015/16. Funding from EU sources increased by only 17% in comparison, the smallest of all the categories shown in Chart 36. However, this is arguably impressive given the uncertainty faced by research teams over access to European funding programmes, namely Horizon.

**Chart 36 – Research income to cost centre "Politics" at UK universities, 2015/16 to 2022/23**



As noted above, the range of active revenue streams for Politics and International Relations should be regarded as a strength. This means that the discipline is not reliant on a single programme or body and therefore less vulnerable to fluctuations in funding from individual sources. Chart 37 below offers a more granular picture of the breakdown of income from research income for Politics and International Relations at UK universities.

**Chart 37 - Research income to cost centre "Politics" at UK universities, 2020/21 to 2022/23 (three year average)**



Source - HESA Provider Income Record 2015/16 to 2022/23, £000s © Jisc 2025

Research council income makes up 36% of total research income for Politics and International Relations, as indicated by the largest slice of the pie chart on the left-hand side of Chart 37.<sup>31</sup> The pie chart on the right-hand side of Chart 37 breaks down this type of funding by different research councils. As shown, research council funding is dominated by the Economic & Social Research Council (ESRC), but the Arts & Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and the Engineering and Physical Sciences Council (EPSRC) also provide significant revenue streams. The rise in income for Politics and International Relations from research councils other than the ESRC appears to be a relatively recent phenomenon. The amount of research money politics departments receive from the AHRC has increased by £1.4 million, more than doubling over a five-year period. For the EPSRC, there has similarly been a £1.4 million uplift in funding (+483%), and politics departments now receive £648,000 more from the Medical Research Council.<sup>32</sup> This data aligns with analysis elsewhere on research funding, which

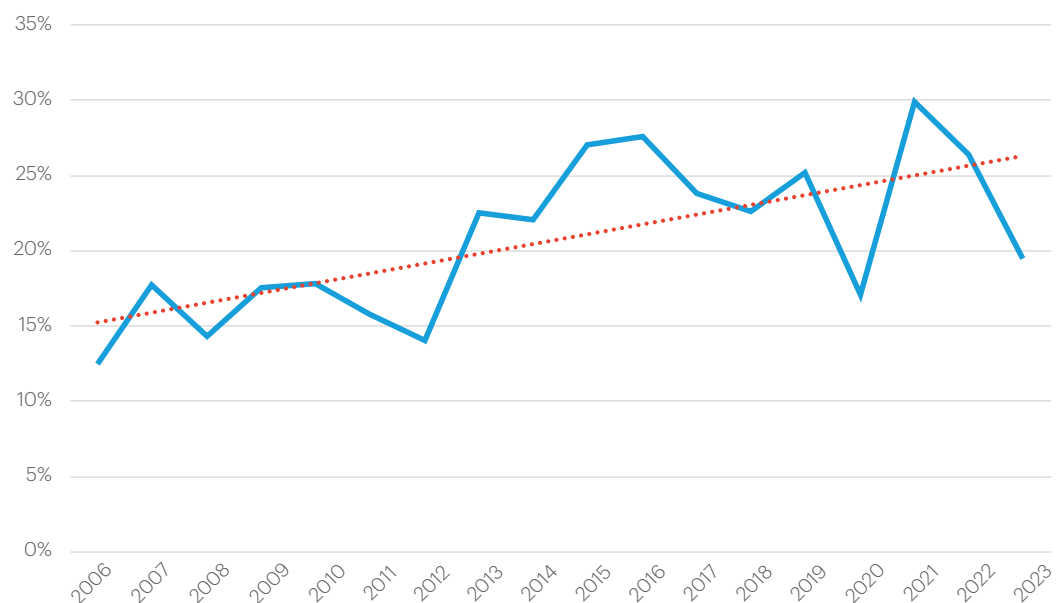
<sup>31</sup> As Chart 36 shows, this was not always the case. Politics and International Relations used to receive a greater proportion of its research funding from "Other UK sources" than from the research councils.

<sup>32</sup> A three-year average has been taken here for each point (2015/16 to 2017/18 and 2020/21 to 2022/23) to minimise the effect of larger year-on-year fluctuations in funding grants. This data is self-reported by institutions to HESA and cost centres themselves are defined by institutions. Therefore, there may be differences in the reporting of the allocation research contract and awards between this data and that held by funders.

shows that Politics and International Relations has done well in terms of increase in research income between 2013/14 and 2021/22 relative to other social sciences<sup>33</sup>. The increase in funding from research councils that lie beyond the traditional disciplinary boundaries of Politics and International Relations reflects well on the health of the discipline and its capacity to work at an interdisciplinary level.

While Politics and International Relations appears to be broadening its reach across the research councils, the ESRC is still the dominant funder. Of all research grants and contracts income for the discipline, the ESRC alone accounts for 23% of total income. And of all research council funding it accounts for 72% of income for the discipline. It is worth noting that politics scholars are competing for this funding against a wide range of other disciplines. Chart 38 below shows the relative share of ESRC funding that is attributed to research projects that fall within Politics and International Relations.<sup>34</sup> There are quite considerable fluctuations from year to year, which is to be expected from a funder of large, multi-year research grants. The beginning and end of some of these larger individual awards will be having notable effects on the aggregate amount of funding that is dispersed each year. Applying a simple trend line to the graph (the dotted red line) suggests that there has been a net increase in the proportion of ESRC funding going to Politics and International Relations scholars over the period. The discipline appears to have been competitive within the social sciences over recent years.<sup>35</sup>

**Chart 38 – Number of funded projects for Politics and International Relations as a proportion of all ESRC grants and fellowships, 2006-2024**



Source: ESRC funded research, [UKRI Gateway to Research Database](#)

When talking with interviewees about the health of the research sector, the framing of responses differed depending on the type of institution they were employed by. Those representing less research-intensive and younger institutions tended to consider disciplinary health in the wider context of financial pressures and challenges facing the higher education sector. There were concerns that the need for institutions to “weather the storm” of wider

<sup>33</sup> Academy of Social Sciences, (2024), *Research Funding in the UK Social Sciences: Summary Data Report for 2013/14 to 2021/22*, pp.22-23 Figure 6a and 6b.

<sup>34</sup> In many cases these funded research projects cover multiple disciplinary areas, but all include at least one classification that is considered within our definition of Politics and International Relations. See methodology section for full details of definition of Politics and International Relations.

<sup>35</sup> For a full definition of Politics and International Relations see methodology section.

financial pressures could result in a squeeze on research time for scholars at these institutions. For those representing more research-intensive or high-tariff institutions, this sort of framing was either absent from their response on the health of the discipline or, where included, set more optimistically.

## 7.2 Research excellence

The research excellence framework (REF) is a multi-year assessment of the UK research system. The most recent iteration, commonly referred to as REF2021, covers a period of seven years. The exercise is split up into units of assessment (UoA), one of which is UoA 19, Politics and International Studies.<sup>36</sup> While REF2021 does not cover all research in this field, it is the most comprehensive peer-review process in the sector in terms of its coverage of research outputs for Politics and International Relations.

For UoA 19, REF2021 assessed 4,710 research outputs from 1,961 staff as part of the exercise. It judged that 78% of research outputs in this UoA were either world-leading or internationally excellent. Moreover, a third of all research outputs in the UoA were judged to be world-leading in their quality. This overall rating is roughly equal with the average for Main Panel C, which comprises all social science subjects.<sup>37</sup> The REF2021 results show that Politics and International Relations in the UK is delivering excellence on a large scale.

Many of the interview participants reinforced the picture that is painted by these headline REF results, remarking on the strength of the sector and how well positioned it is internationally. The Politics and International Relations research sector was described positively by participants, with praise for its dynamism and international standing. The diversity of institutions and sub-disciplines was picked out as a particular strength by some interview participants. This aligns with the conclusion that was made in REF2021 that, within the unit of assessment for the discipline, research of “world-leading quality in terms of its originality, significance and rigour” was found at institutions of all sizes and across the full range of sub-disciplines within Politics and International Relations.<sup>38</sup> World-leading research was identified in 54 of the 56 institutions that submitted in this disciplinary area. The sub-panel found no correlation between the size of the submitting unit and research quality.

However, there was a sense from a minority of interview participants, that although excellence was well-spread across the sector, this did not always translate to the awarding of research funding. There was a perception amongst a minority of interviewees that there is a bias against smaller and newer institutions in competitive funding calls and that there is still progress to be made on this front. However, the majority of interviewees saw the direction of travel as positive in this area. The Carnegie Fund’s new approach to partial randomisation (awarding randomly amongst those submissions above a defined quality threshold) was held up by one interviewee as an example of an innovative practice that could minimise institutional bias. Such practices are being trialled across by other funders. Although not noted by interviewees, the British Academy has itself conducted an innovative new trial in the award of its Small Research Grants funding stream.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>36</sup> See methodology for definitions of Politics and International Studies used in this report. This will differ slightly from Politics and International Relations as a disciplinary group, but REF data is not available at a more granular level than unit of assessment when it comes to discipline. It is important to note that some Politics and International Relations work will also have been found in other panels for REF2021, namely UoA 16, 17, 18, 20 & 21.

<sup>37</sup> REF2021. (2022), *Results and Submissions*, [accessed May 2024].

<sup>38</sup> Ref2021. (2022), *Overview Report by Main Panel C and Sub-panels 13 to 24, pp.116-125*, [accessed April 2024].

<sup>39</sup> British Academy (2023) *Promising results from first year of innovative grant awarding trial show greater diversity of awardees and institutions given funding*

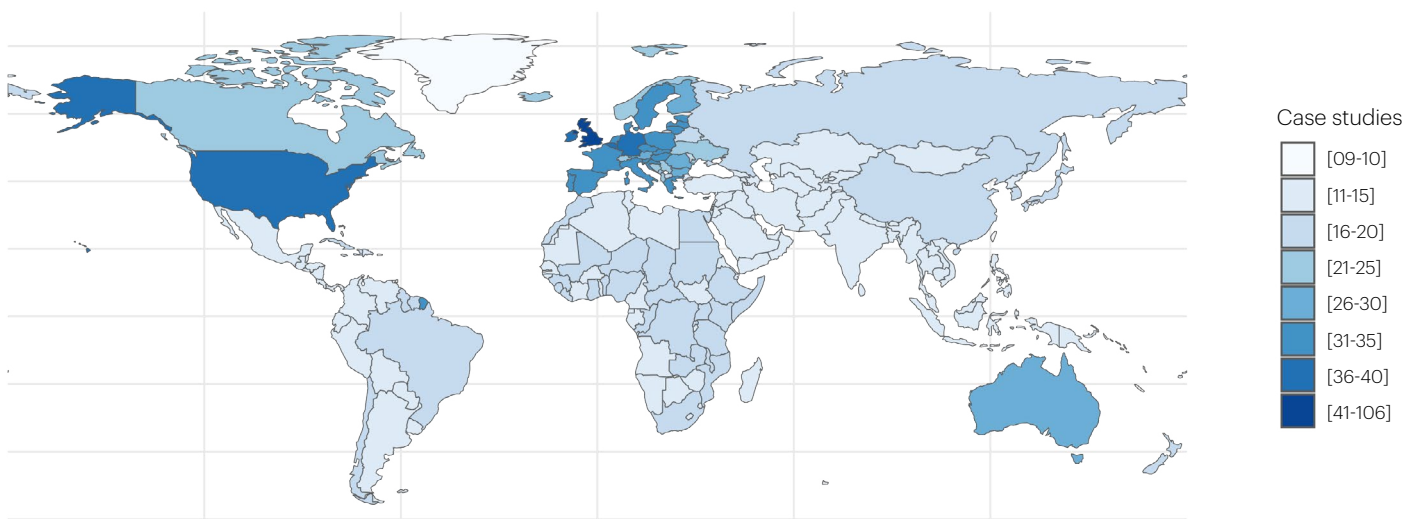


### 7.3 Impact of research

The REF2021 results paint a very positive picture of the discipline with respect to the impact that scholars have on the wider world. The exercise rated 92% of the impact case studies submitted by UK universities in Politics and International Relations to be world-leading or internationally excellent. As was the case for research outputs, this was marginally higher than the average for Panel C, which includes all the social sciences.

In 2024, the British Academy published a commissioned piece of research that analysed the 4,000 impact case studies submitted across the SHAPE disciplines (Social Sciences, Humanities and Arts for People and the Economy) in REF2021. This project produced an enhanced REF dataset, which can be accessed through an interactive dashboard available online.<sup>40</sup> Chart 39 below uses the names of countries tagged from impact cases studies to map the international impact of research taking place at UK universities for Politics and International Relations.

**Chart 39 – International impact of Politics and International Relations research (REF2021 case studies)**



Source – [British Academy enhanced SHAPE impact database](#)

Chart 39 shows a remarkably broad geographic spread of impact for the discipline. While there are strong concentrations of research impact shown in Europe and North America, it is notable that impact is located across all continents and regions of the world. This shows that the UK's Politics and International Relations research sector has strong and far-reaching international impact.

The research project that produced this new enhanced database developed a new typology for SHAPE impact case studies. The exercise looked across all the SHAPE impact case studies from REF2021 and categorised them into granular impact topics, with each of these topics grouped together into broader impact themes.

We can filter this new enhanced database to get some perspective on how these impact topics break down for Politics and International Relations within the wider context of the SHAPE disciplines. As shown in Table 8 below, impact in Politics and International Relations is spread across a wide range of topics and themes. Perhaps unsurprisingly, a majority of these are found within the impact theme of “Governance”, with the most common topics being “Government & Representation”, “Politics, Trade & EU” and “Political Violence”. However, the table shows that a significant level of impact is also found in the theme of “Family”.

<sup>40</sup>

British Academy Enhanced REF Dataset and Interactive Dashboard, <https://shape-impact.co.uk/>

**Table 8 – Types of impact for Politics and International Relations**

| <b>Impact Theme (% of Politics and International Relations impact case studies)</b> | <b>Impact topic</b>            | <b>Number of case studies per topic</b> |
|---|--------------------------------|---|
| Governance<br>(63.3%)   | Government & Representation    | 23                                      |
|   | Politics, Trade & EU           | 18                                      |
|   | Political Violence             | 16                                      |
|   | International Relations        | 13                                      |
|   | Fair Elections                 | 10                                      |
|   | Information Media              | 5                                       |
|   | Marginalised Communities       | 5                                       |
|   | Finance & Cybersecurity        | 4                                       |
|   | Migrant Support                | 4                                       |
|   | International Rights & Justice | 4                                       |
|   | Islam & Cultural Understanding | 2                                       |
| Northern Ireland  | 1                              |   |
| Family<br>(9%)  | Gender & Feminism              | 5                                       |
|   | Children & Women               | 4                                       |
|   | Gender & Equality              | 3                                       |
|   | Family & Social Support        | 1                                       |
|   | Gender in Work                 | 1                                       |
|   | Reproductive Rights            | 1                                       |
| Environment<br>(5.4%)   | Conservation                   | 5                                       |
|   | Disaster Management            | 1                                       |
|   | Renewable Energy               | 1                                       |
|   | Sustainability                 | 1                                       |
|   | Urban Planning                 | 1                                       |
| Health<br>(3.6%)  | Global Health                  | 2                                       |
|   | Healthcare Policy              | 2                                       |
|   | Diet & Nutrition               | 1                                       |
|   | Media & Body Image             | 1                                       |
| Crime<br>(3.6%)   | International Crime & Rights   | 3                                       |
|   | Crime & Justice                | 2                                       |
|   | Substance Abuse                | 1                                       |
|   | Language & Linguistics         | 2                                       |
|   | Education & Inequality         | 1                                       |
|   | Teaching                       | 1                                       |
|   | Employment<br>(4.2%)           | Taxation & Public Policy                |
| Labour  | 2                              |   |
| Disabilities  | 1                              |   |
| Heritage<br>(3.6%)  | Military History               | 4                                       |
|   | Public Engagement History      | 1                                       |
|   | Religion & Ethics              | 1                                       |
| Economy<br>(3.6%)   | Development                    | 5                                       |
|   | Macro & Finance                | 1                                       |
| Arts<br>(1.2%)  | Cultural Capital               | 2                                       |

Multiple interview participants explained that impact is an important element of the value of the discipline and a key factor that motivates them to be part of it. As Table 8 shows, there are a notable number of impact cases studies that fall under the themes of “Environment” and “Health”, which show that politics can (and does) play a role in shaping our response to national and global challenges in these areas. The more granular topics featured within each of these impact areas also underlines the fact that the impact of Politics and International Relations research is much broader than the classic track of policy or governmental influence.

Several interviewees raised the topic of impact when asked about wider shifts in the research landscape and the value of studying Politics and International Relations. The impact agenda was cited as one of the more profound changes for the discipline over the past twenty or thirty years, one that had been actively shaped by research funders. There was consensus that this had been a positive development overall. Where impact had historically been something that was “bolted on” or latterly considered, it was now widely embedded in the discipline and more uniformly incorporated into thinking around research design.

Interview participants remarked on how they felt this reflected a healthy discipline on multiple fronts. Impact has not only increased in quantity but also quality. The agility of academics in responding to this agenda was thought by some to provide proof of their dynamism as a community of scholars. One participant even commented that the impact agenda had positively affected teaching at their institution, by influencing thinking within their department on what is taught and how to engage with students. This was all set within a wider context of what was seen as a growing professionalisation of research staff over recent decades.

There was agreement across interviewees, who represented a range of institutions and sub-disciplines, that striking a good balance was key within Politics and International Relations. On the one hand, it was important to carve out a space for, as one interviewee put it, “... *the pursuit of knowledge for the sake of the pursuit of knowledge*”, and make sure this is protected. Participants emphasised the importance for the sector in maintaining enough space for more exploratory work, or research that is not defined by its impact outside of academia. On the other hand, the impact agenda had produced some clear gains within Politics and International Relations and its growth should be seen as a success.

Multiple participants pointed out that the focus on impact had helped to drive innovation in their research, prompting researchers to think differently about their work and collaborate with new colleagues. This was acknowledged by scholars in different disciplinary areas in Politics and International Relations, including those in areas that are perceived as being not so well pre-disposed to generate broader impact. As one political philosopher noted:

*“... a small bit of the picture is that maybe political theorists are more likely to get funded now if either there's some really strong impact angle to it or if it's kind of pushing us beyond the boundaries of essentially sort of theoretical and philosophical work and engaging with social scientists in some sort of way ... I think that's a broadly positive thing.”*

## 7.4 Pluralism & interdisciplinarity

When asked about changes in the research landscape over recent years, a few things were commonly picked out by interviewees. The first was the relative rise of International Relations within the wider disciplinary group. People commented on how it had forged its own identity within departments and the wider disciplinary landscape. This reflected the growth of research in this area, as well as growth in student demand for International Relations courses, particularly in the context of the internationalisation of higher education.

The inverse of this trend was the decline of Area Studies programmes that traditionally would overlap with Politics and International Relations, particularly European Studies programmes. Although we cannot attribute the demise of these programmes to the rise of International Relations programmes, it was reported by some that one set of provision had effectively

replaced the other within their department. Institutions had reacted to what they saw as the demands of an increasingly international study body in an increasingly globalised world. The decline in demand for the study of European languages in the UK was also part of the picture here, and it was hard to separate this out from other shifts in student demand within Politics and International Relations that may be affecting these trends.

Despite shifts in different sub-disciplines within the wider family of Politics and International Relations, interviewees were keen to emphasise a healthy pluralism existing in the UK. This is something that has historically been identified as a particular and distinctive strength of the UK sector,<sup>41</sup> and there was a strong sense that this still held true today:

*“... we work well and sit well as a community of scholars with a range of different views ... within politics and IR in the UK, we seem to be happy with this community of difference. I think to some extent that is a British phenomenon. When I go to the United States and talk to people in the United States, there is more of a divide between those who would see themselves as political thought and those who would see themselves as what they might call hard political science. But in the UK, within the remit of political studies, we seem to have been able to build a community where those diverse and plural voices are heard. And I think that's the strength of political studies in the UK.”*

The other commonly cited shift in the landscape was the increase in interdisciplinarity, both within Politics and International Relations, and between it and other disciplinary fields. It was noted that Politics and International Relations has always historically borrowed heavily from other disciplines, and this has been an important aspect of the development of the discipline:

*“I think politics possibly is the maximally eclectic social science discipline. And you see this in studies that look at citation patterns. ... we cite people from sociology, from economics, from anthropology, from history in a very, very, broad way, and I think, engage in intellectual conversations across a lot of these different areas. And that's one of the things that I like best about the discipline.”*

There was an impression amongst interview participants that, over recent years, there has been an increase in more formalised collaboration across traditional disciplinary boundaries involving scholars in Politics and International Relations. This was reflected in a broadening out of what has been funded, with interdisciplinary research having grown significantly in recent years as a result. This observation is borne out by the data on research council income to Politics Departments (see Section 7.1), which shows growing levels of income being drawn from councils outside the ESRC. Over a five-year period, income from the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC) increased by £1.4 million, which means the total income from this source is more than four times higher than it was five years ago. Research income from the Natural Environment Research Council has more than doubled, increasing by £172,000. And research income from the Medical Research Council, which was practically non-existent five years ago, increased by £648,000.

It was noted in Section 7.1 that this trend had been influenced by incentives built into the system, with the impact agenda having played a role amongst other factors. Impact-focused funding calls and the increase in calls for mission-driven research, often lead to more interdisciplinary bids from teams of researchers. This is often due to the multi-layered nature of the problems that they pertain to. Aside from the rise in certain types of funding opportunities, it was argued that the rise in interdisciplinarity is also more simply reflective of the general direction of travel in the wider research sector.

<sup>41</sup> Hayward, J. et al. (1999), *The British Study of Politics in the Twentieth Century*, Published for the British Academy by Oxford University Press.

Interview participants noted that the study of Politics is one that adapts in response to national and global events, which gives the discipline an inherent dynamism that enables research to pivot towards global challenges. This is reflected by the rise in publications on democracy, populism and environmentalism in recent years, the latter topic being particularly well placed for collaboration with other disciplines. Moreover, the discipline has also witnessed the “mainstreaming” of what were previously more marginal research topics, such as gender, LGBTQ politics and approaches to decolonisation, all of which borrow from, and contribute to, the development of fields outside of Politics and International Relations.

There was also a sense that publishers in this discipline have become much more sensitive to diversity and inclusion in the past five years, which was noted by one publisher as a healthy development:

*“I think that with the advent of a much stronger cross-cultural concern with diversity and inclusion that we’ve seen in the last 5 years, I would say that funding has started to track that as well ... I think we, as publishers, are also much more sensitized to that kind of issue, and to not simply be publishing old white men, which is, you know, a tendency that any kind of leading publisher would have had 20 or 30 years ago.”*

It was also argued that one feature of the move to the digital world in academic publishing was that it opened up the possibility for a more diverse author base. This was in part a result of the fact that publications were no longer judged as rigidly by sales of physical copies. This development enables academic publishers to take more risks and engage with a broader set of authors to some extent. One area that was seen to be a particular area of success in terms of diversity and inclusion, with respect to publishing, was gender:

*“The one overwhelming change in the time that I’ve been working in political science publishing globally, but also in the UK is we’re heading towards a much better gender balance and I absolutely see that in terms of the acquisitions that I make now.”*

While there has been some clear progress on diversity of authors to date, it was acknowledged by most interview participants that this was just the beginning in what was hoped to be a longer-term shift in representation of authors with protected characteristics.

## **7.5 Technology & Artificial Intelligence (AI)**

Multiple interview participants raised the subject of generative artificial intelligence (AI) as one of the most fundamental changes facing the discipline, and one that was likely to become increasingly important in the next decade. This challenge had multiple layers, being pertinent to key themes in Politics and International Relations (democracy, justice, inequality etc.) but also how subject matter is studied, interpreted and researched. One participant characterised Politics and International Relations as having a strong track record of being effective riders, rather than drivers, of technological change:

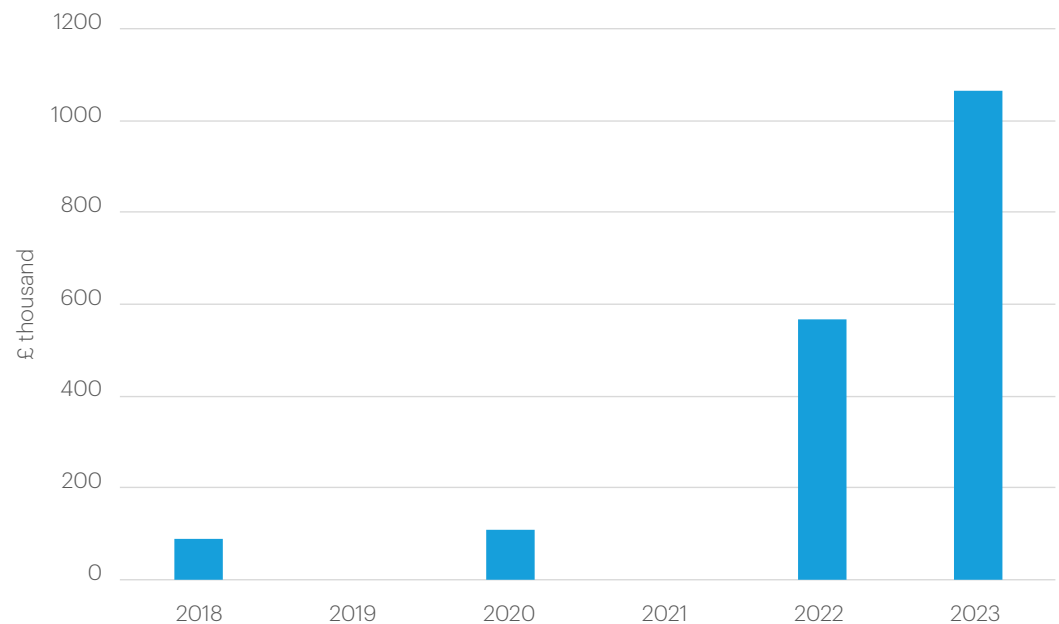
*“I think politics and international relations has always been quite good at riding the tails of technological improvements that facilitate new types of research. So, in the past 10 years, that’s looked like text analysis of social media data to gain insights into political phenomena.”*

There was a perception of a general “teching up” of research methods and greater sophistication of the application of quantitative methods within research designs, with a rise in mixed methods approaches, particularly in younger generations of scholars. AI was specifically identified as an area which had risen exponentially over the last couple of years, both as a burgeoning research topic and in its application as a methodological tool. One publisher who was interviewed commented that they had witnessed a rapid expansion of the former over an incredibly short timeframe:

*“... within the space of about 18 months ... I’ve probably acquired six or seven books that are focused on that [AI].”*

Scholars involved in reviewing funding applications also noted parallel trends occurring within funding submissions. This was matched by the perception of an increase in the number of funding calls on subjects related to AI or data innovation. This perception is reinforced, to some extent, by the data shown in the chart below. Chart 40 suggests there has been an uptake in ESRC funding for projects that are engaging with the subject of AI from a political science perspective.

**Chart 40 – ESRC awards (£000s) relating to both artificial intelligence and political science, 2018 to 2023**



Source: ESRC funded research, UKRI Gateway to Research Database

One data scientist working within a politics department noted that the public profile and political expediency of this topic appears to have filtered down into funding calls. This has resulted in more data science being brought into the research landscape for Politics and International Relations, at a much quicker rate than before:

*“That’s the gamechanger really, and I’ve seen more things come up about AI, AI safety, responsible AI - you know more technical fields, it’s touched EPSRC, that sort of research funding that might be on the periphery of what we do, but not impossible for us to apply to – AI and health policy, AI and climate change. That has taken off much more quickly than anything data science ever did.”*

Participants talked about AI not only in the context of it being a tool with infinite possibilities, but also as a potential challenge to the identity of researchers in Politics and International Relations. Practically speaking, there is the question of which tasks researchers will perform with AI at their disposal:

*“AI is something that is going to change the way we do research. It already has – I’m doing research using AI tools. There are AI tools to help us write, to help us do literature review, to help us find sources. Who’s to say that they’re not acting like search engines where they are guiding people to a certain type of question.”*

From a methodological and epistemological point of view, concern was expressed over the potential for AI to marginalise certain approaches in the future. Interestingly, this was raised most explicitly by a data scientist within the context of quantitative methods:

*“We don’t want to embrace data science, with its incredible predictive ability, and forget that it’s not all about prediction. It’s about explanation. Explanation includes causal explanation. So, let’s not throw the baby out with the bathwater in going forward with our ability to study politics through data science. Let’s not forget that we have a social scientific view of the world and that we are not just machine learning people who want to predict until we get the optimal reduction in error. That’s not our objective. Our objective is to try and explain things.”*

Whilst those working in different methodological traditions or sub-disciplines may dispute the emphasis on explanation, the central principle here can be applied more broadly across Politics and International Relations. The tools available to researchers are going to become increasingly more sophisticated over the coming years, but this should not alter the central objectives of research in the discipline. This underlines the distinct offer that the discipline has in an increasingly complex and interconnected research landscape.

# 8.0 Conclusion: opportunities and challenges

## 8.1 Opportunities

### **Research funding and academic staff numbers for Politics and International Relations have been increasing over recent years.**

Research income for the discipline has grown steadily over recent years. Since 2015/16, Politics and International Relations in the UK has generated £423 million in research grants and contracts. Research Council income has more than doubled over this period and Politics and International Relations is progressively drawing more research council funding from outside of the Economic & Social Research Council. Income from international sources has also increased over this period. This diversification of revenue streams increases the resilience of the discipline and provides opportunities for scholars. Furthermore, between 2012/13 and 2022/23, the total number of academic staff for Politics and International Relations increased by 52% in the UK, though these increases are unevenly experienced across universities.

### **Politics and International Relations has widespread impact and is well-placed to respond to pressing global challenges.**

Politics and International Relations in the UK has demonstrable impact beyond academia. REF 2021 rated 92% of the discipline's impact case studies as world-leading or internationally excellent, evidencing the high quality of research impact in the discipline. Research shows that impact in Politics and International Relations is spread across a wide range of themes, including governance and policy, family and social policy, environmental issues and the health and wellbeing of citizens. This demonstrates the ability of the discipline to help respond to some of the most pressing national and global challenges. Research also shows that impact case studies submitted across SHAPE disciplines for REF 2021 demonstrate remarkably broad geographic spread of impact for the discipline, with impact being located across all regions and continents of the world.

### **The REF 2021 and research funding data indicate strong and growing interdisciplinary links for Politics and International Relations.**

While Politics and International Relations has historically always had strong connections to other disciplinary fields, both the REF 2021 and research funding data demonstrate increasing interdisciplinary links for the discipline. This is evidenced by the growing levels of funding from research councils outside the ESRC. Over the past five years, income from the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council increased by £1.4 million, funding from the Natural Environment Research Council went up by £172,000, and research income from the Medical Research Council grew by over £648,000. The discipline appears to be expanding its capacity to collaborate across traditional disciplinary boundaries and is increasingly able to draw on a range of funding sources. This interdisciplinary approach strengthens Politics and International Relations' ability to contribute to solving complex societal issues.



### **Politics and International Relations graduates have strong outcomes after completing their studies.**

As demonstrated by data from the Graduate Outcomes survey and Longitudinal Educational Outcomes database, Politics and International Relations graduates are shown to have strong outcomes after study, with high percentages of first-degree graduates in work shortly after completing their studies. Average earnings throughout the first decade after graduation are particularly good. A decade post-graduation, the average salary for Politics and International Relations first degree graduates is £5,000 above the average graduate salary. For postgraduate taught students in the discipline, the average salary is £9,000 higher than for all subjects. This creates positive opportunities for the graduates themselves through strong careers and financial stability but also reflects strongly on the impact of the discipline in a broader sense.

### **Politics and International Relations students numbers have expanded at postgraduate taught level.**

Between 2011/12 and 2022/23, student numbers at postgraduate taught level for Politics and International Relations have increased by 41%. The proportion of all postgraduate taught students who are studying Politics and International Relations has been relatively stable since 2011/12, remaining between 1.5% and 2% of all students. Particularly noteworthy is the rise of non-EU international student numbers, which have more than doubled over the past decade. The popularity of the UK as a destination for advanced study in the discipline is a positive indication of the Politics and International Relations sector's global standing. The overall expansion of student numbers in taught programmes also provides a strong foundation for the discipline to continue to thrive from a teaching perspective.

## **8.2 Challenges**

### **There is still strong demand to study taught programmes in Politics and International Relations, but most recently, these programmes have decreased slightly as a proportion of all subjects.**

There are many more people studying taught programmes in Politics and International Relations than a decade ago. But over the past 4-5 years, we have seen Politics and International Relations decrease as the proportion of all students, for first degree and postgraduate taught students respectively. In both cases, this recent dip follows increases in relative demand for the discipline during the late 2010s, so overall numbers are higher than they were a decade ago. Nevertheless, if the trend continues, it could become an issue for the discipline.

### **Uneven growth in recruitment at undergraduate and postgraduate taught level has created instability for some Politics departments.**

The growth in student numbers for Politics and International Relations at the undergraduate and postgraduate taught levels has been highly uneven across institutions. In some cases, this has led to cutbacks and even the closure of departments. There is a stark difference between Russell Group members and the rest of the sector for undergraduate programmes. Since 2011/12, Russell Group institutions have increased first degree Politics and International Relations numbers by 320 on average. Whereas, for the rest of the sector, the average change per institution was negative.

### **Increased international competition in the discipline could make UK International Relations departments less competitive in terms of attracting international students and receiving international funding in the long run.**

While the Politics and International Relations sector in the UK continues to command a prestigious reputation around the globe, this is not inevitable. As countries around the world, particularly those in the Global South, increase their research base and higher education

infrastructure, the international standing of UK departments might be subject to greater competition. This could impact the UK's ability to attract international students, retain staff and secure international funding.

**Increasing geopolitical instability could pose a threat to international collaboration for UK researchers and international student recruitment from certain countries/regions.**

The subject matter of Politics and International Relations is itself closely linked to some of the risks for the discipline. Increasing geopolitical instability has the potential to stymie international collaboration for UK researchers in the discipline. Moreover, Politics and International Relations departments that are heavily reliant on international students from a particular country or region of the world could be left exposed. The report highlights the ten international domiciles with the largest population of Politics and International Relations students in the UK. Changes in the value of domestic currencies are highlighted in the report as one factor that can sharply disturb the purchasing power of cohorts of current and future international students, with knock on effects for Politics departments.

**Technological developments and the rise of AI tools present challenges for the identity of researchers and the learning environment.**

Artificial intelligence (AI) is a burgeoning area of research focus across the social sciences, which presents a real opportunity for scholars in Politics and International Relations. However, as AI becomes more ubiquitous in everyday life and the academic sphere, this could marginalise some more traditional approaches and the core value that is added through a social science perspective. In the learning environment too, the availability of AI tools poses challenges in relation to traditional methods of assessment in higher education. These are challenges that are not exclusive to Politics and International Relations, but do arguably have a distinctive importance for the discipline.

# 9.0 Data sources and methodology

This report utilises a mixed methods approach, drawing on qualitative and quantitative data to help understand the provision of Politics and International Relations in UK higher education and the wider health of the discipline. This project consisted of four main phases. Prior to the project starting in earnest, we undertook scoping calls with 12 members of the Politics and International Relations community, including Fellows of the British Academy, and conducted a scoping report. In Phase 1, we formed an Advisory Group, aiming to represent the disciplines encompassed within Politics and International Relations. We considered the geography and type of institution that would be represented, as well as different sub-disciplines of individuals to ensure we had some balance across the membership of this group. In consultation with the Advisory Group, we agreed on the initial scope, methodology and outline of the report.

Phase 2 consisted of the quantitative and qualitative research, including the semi-structured interviews that have informed this report. Interviews were carried out prior to the July 2024 election, so any mention of the UK Government by interviewees refers to the Conservative Government of 2019-2024. We conducted the writing of the report in Phase 3, which overlapped with Phase 2, incorporating feedback from the Advisory Group at key stages. Phase 4 included final drafting and sign-off. This chapter outlines the data sources and overall methodology in further detail.

## Quantitative data

For the purposes of this report the default time period under consideration is from the academic year 2011/12 to 2022/23. This timeframe was chosen for a number of reasons. It is long enough to view short-to-medium term trends for the discipline. The 2011/12 academic year was selected as a starting point as falls directly before major reforms that took place in England and Wales.<sup>42</sup> These reforms had implications for all four higher education systems of the UK. Throughout this time period, there have been successive changes to policy which have loosened restrictions on the recruitment of domestic students in England and Wales, resulting in a removal of all number caps in these higher education systems in 2015.<sup>43</sup>

There are exceptions to this approach in the report where a different time period has been used in the analysis. In some cases, this is due to limitations in the data that is publicly available (historically), and in some cases where it is instructive to show a longer-term analysis e.g. in research funding. In all cases, the most recent data has been that was available at the time of publication.

<sup>42</sup> Bolton, P. (2012), 'Changes to Higher Education to Funding and Student Support 2012/13', Research Briefing, House of Commons Library <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/sn05753/> [accessed August 2024].

<sup>43</sup> Hillman, N (2014) 'A Guide to the Removal of Number Controls', *HEPI Report No. 69*, Higher Education Policy Institute.

To analyse trends for Politics and International Relations we have interpreted the discipline as outlined in the table below:

| <b>Data Source</b>   | <b>Disciplinary scope</b>  | <b>Measurements</b>  |
|--|--|--|
| Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) data                         | <a href="#">JACS subject coding:</a><br>L2 Politics<br><a href="#">CAH subject coding:</a><br>15-03-01 Politics  | Student numbers;<br>Student characteristics;<br>Graduate outcomes;                               |
|  | <a href="#">HESA cost centre:</a><br>128 Politics & International Studies  | Academic staff numbers;<br>Academic staff characteristics;<br>Research grants & contracts income |
| <a href="#">UKRI Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2021 database</a> | Unit of Assessment (UoA):<br>UoA 19 Politics and International Studies   | Quality of research outputs<br>Impact of research  |
| <a href="#">British Academy Enhanced REF database</a>                  | Unit of Assessment (UoA): UoA 19<br>Politics and International Studies   | International impact of research<br>Type of research impact                                      |
| <a href="#">UKRI Gateway to Research Database</a>                      | Economic & Social Research Council grants and fellowships classified as at least one of the following:<br>Political Science; Politics; Political Philosophy; Political Sociology;<br>Politics, International Relations & Development; International Studies & Relations; International Political Economy;<br>Conflict/War Studies; Diplomacy & International Relations; Economics, Politics & Environmental Anthropology;<br>Foreign Policy Studies; Governance;<br>International Relations Theory;<br>International Organisations;<br>Law, Democracy and Development;<br>Peace Studies; Organisational Studies;<br>Political Geography; Public Administration;<br>Security Studies; European Studies;<br>European/EU Studies; War Studies | Research funding income for grants & fellowships   |
| <a href="#">Longitudinal Educational Outcomes Database</a>             | <a href="#">CAH subject coding:</a><br>15-03-01 Politics   | SIC classification of industry of employment<br>Graduate earnings                                |

## HESA datasets

The Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) is part of Jisc and collects, assures and disseminates data about higher education in the UK. The following datasets have been used from HESA:

- HESA student data, Full Person Equivalent (FPE)
- HESA student data, HE All Providers Student (FPE)
- HESA staff data, Full Time Equivalent (FTE)
- HESA finance data, Income (£000s)
- HESA Graduate Outcomes Survey data

HESA is the primary data source used in the quantitative analysis undertaken for this report. Any data used is from HESA unless otherwise stated.

All definitions for categories of data used by HESA can be found via <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/support/definitions>.

We have applied the HESA rounding and suppression methodology to datasets used in this report to anonymise statistics for staff and students.<sup>44</sup> This means that numbers are rounded to the nearest multiple of 5 and numbers less than 2.5 are rounded to 0. Percentages based on a population of less than 22.5 are not published. Due to the application of the rounding methodology, the sub-totals and percentages in a category may not correspond precisely to the sum of the total.

In recent years, HESA introduced a new subject coding system — the Higher Education Classification of Subjects (HECoS) — to replace the Joint Accounting Coding System (JACS). The Common Aggregation Hierarchy (CAH) groupings were also introduced with the aim of providing standard categories across HECoS and JACS.

The HESA finance data in this report provides a breakdown of research grants and contracts by source of income and HESA cost centre. The HESA staff record provides a breakdown of academic staff in higher education institutions by the cost centres to which their academic contracts are assigned. Cost centres are used by HESA to allow for meaningful and granular comparisons between different records. It should be noted that HESA cost centre coding does not align precisely with university departmental structures; it is at the discretion of the submitting HEI as to what cost centre staff are submitted to.

The Graduate Outcomes survey commenced in 2017/18, replacing the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey. The survey includes graduates who achieved their higher education qualifications from higher education providers in the UK, and from Further Education Colleges (FECs) in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. This report draws on the Graduate Outcomes survey to analyse data on outcomes from 2020/21. As the DLHE survey has a different methodology and constitutes a different measurement that is not directly comparable with Graduate Outcomes datasets, we have not utilised this earlier dataset for the purpose of comparison in this report.

<sup>44</sup> HESA rounding methodology <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/about/regulation/data-protection/rounding-and-suppression-anonymise-statistics>

## Margins of Error for Graduate Outcomes Survey

**Chart 23 – Response to skills question (I am using what I learned during my studies in my current work) in Graduate Outcomes survey, first degree students, 2017/18 to 2021/22**

**Percentage that agree/strongly agree and margins of error**

| Year    | Subject Group |              |
|---------|---------------|--------------|
|         | Politics & IR | All subjects |
| 2017/18 | 54.7%         | 68.0%        |
|         | ± 1.5         | ± 0.2        |
| 2018/19 | 54.6%         | 66.9%        |
|         | ± 1.4         | ± 0.2        |
| 2019/20 | 52.7%         | 67.3%        |
|         | ± 1.4         | ± 0.2        |
| 2020/21 | 53.0%         | 65.5%        |
|         | ± 1.5         | ± 0.2        |
| 2021/22 | 51.3%         | 65.2%        |
|         | ± 1.5         | ± 0.2        |

**Chart 24 – Activity of first degree students in Politics and International Relations 15 months after graduation, 2021/22**

**Percentage in specified activity and margins of error**

| Activity  | Subject Group |              |
|---|---------------|--------------|
|   | Politics & IR | All subjects |
| Employment and further study                          | 11.6%         | 10.5%        |
|   | ± 0.9         | ± 0.1        |
| Full-time employment                                  | 55.3%         | 59.1%        |
|   | ± 1.4         | ± 0.2        |
| Full-time further study                               | 9.0%          | 6.3%         |
|   | ± 0.8         | ± 0.1        |
| Other including travel, caring for someone or retired | 5.8%          | 6.0%         |
|   | ± 0.7         | ± 0.1        |
| Part-time employment                                  | 8.6%          | 11.0%        |
|   | ± 0.8         | ± 0.1        |
| Part-time further study                               | 0.4%          | 0.4%         |
|   | ± 0.2         | ± 0          |
| Unemployed and due to start further study             |               |              |
| Unemployed and due to start work                      |               |              |
| Unemployment  | 7.9%          | 5.6%         |
|   | ± 0.8         | ± 0.1        |
| Voluntary or unpaid work                              | 1.4%          | 1.1%         |
|   | ± 0.3         | ± 0          |

## Longitudinal Education Outcomes

This report draws on Longitudinal Education Outcomes (LEO) data for our analysis of graduate outcomes for Politics and International Relations. LEO data uses administrative data, including tax, benefits and student loans data, to provide information on employment and earnings of higher education graduates at different points after graduation, including 1 year, 3 years, 5 years and 10 years. While this data source can be a valuable tool for measuring graduate outcomes, there are some caveats to the methodology which impact accuracy. The data does not, for example, account for whether a graduate is in full- or part-time work, or has taken time out for childcare. LEO data may also exclude graduates who are self-employed in the relevant tax year or are working overseas.

## Qualitative data

The findings of this report were partly generated by semi-structured interviews with people working in Politics and International Relations. This included a range of academic staff including early, mid and late career researchers as well as one person working in academic publishing. The selection process for interviews was informed by discussions with the Advisory Group. A set of criteria was established with the Advisory Group to mitigate against the sample of people representing the discipline in a skewed manner. Geography of institution, institutional diversity and disciplinary specialism were all considered to try and reach some balance across interview participants. Based on the early quantitative research undertaken on student numbers, we also ensured that the interview candidates represented institutions that had both seen increases and decreases in student numbers over the past decade. In addition, it was agreed with the Advisory Group that one participant should be selected from a relevant part of the publishing industry and one academic who was working outside of the UK to give an international perspective on the UK system.

Interview participants were sent an interview sheet outlining the process, including a consent form, a copy of the interview questions and some contextual data on the higher education landscape for Politics and International Relations in advance of the interview. All interview participants were instructed to complete their consent form in advance of the interview and were free to withdraw their consent at any point during or after the interview. Eleven interviews were conducted in all, each lasting an hour. All quotes in the report are from interview participants unless otherwise stated.

The student voice is missing from the interview data, beyond that shown through analysis of the Graduate Outcomes survey. As is evidenced through our data, students of Politics and International Relations are a large, diverse cohort of undergraduates and postgraduates in the UK, and their experiences of learning and researching are critical in assessing the future of the discipline. Such research would be a useful addition to the work of this report.

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