

RESPONSE TO STUDENT CONSULTATION ON Q11 INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

SUMMARY

This is a response to the consultation on International Studies (Q11) which took place between 17th and 27th May 2021 on the Boards of Studies Student Consultation Forums. The forum can be viewed here <https://learn1.open.ac.uk/mod/forumng/view.php?id=24437>.

Following recent market research by faculty marketing colleagues that recommended a re-badging of Q11 to International Relations (IR), a student consultative forum was carried out in May 2021. The aim of this consultation was to gain insight into student views of the current qualification, including motivation to study, satisfaction with the degree structure, module content, and the name of the degree itself.

A synopsis of the responses fed into a proposal by POLIS (Politics and International Studies) colleagues which outlined possible changes to the structure and content of Q11. This was considered at a meeting attended by the Head of School, Associate Dean for Teaching, and colleagues from POLIS and DPP (Development, Policy and Practice) as the two primary disciplines involved in the qualification, in July 2021. No decisions have been made about changing the structure as yet, and this will need to go through formal governance procedures before doing so.

The main headline messages included broad student support for a possible name change to International Relations. The number of participants taking part in the forum was relatively small.

FULL RESPONSE

Students offered a range of motivations and interests for their study pathway and reasons for choosing the degree initially. While useful in terms of wider understanding of student background, the insight provided here was less relevant for the aims of the proposal to change the degree title and were noted rather than presented in detail. The main questions that gave useful insight for the degree change proposal centred around: 1) whether there was sufficient IR content in the degree; 2) the current modules on offer; 3) the degree title; and 4) future study plans.

1) Content: Students were asked whether they thought there was sufficient emphasis on IR content in Q11. Of the 7 responses to this question, 5 expressed a preference for more IR-specific content earlier on in the degree, with 1 happy with the existing and another answer not applicable. Some found that although there was reasonable preparation in earlier modules in terms of study skills, the jump up to TD223 from level 1 was quite challenging, and that the degree would benefit from more IR earlier on to help prepare the ground for the content in DD313.

2) Current modules: Students were asked if the current modules were sufficient for their study needs. Of the 6 responses to this question, all were generally content with the current offering, but there was broad agreement that the level one modules were a bit too broad based. DD103 was cited as being quite challenging with some students failing to see the relevance of the content covered for their degree.

3) Degree title: Students were asked whether they would prefer International Studies or International Relations as a degree title, given the choice. Of the 8 responses to this question, all expressed a preference for International Relations. Responses included: perceptions of IR being in more common usage at other universities; IR being perceived as 'less generalist' and more attractive to employers; perceptions of the word 'Studies' in degree titles as indicating a 'dumbing down'; choosing Q11 because it was the nearest thing to IR; and using IR as an alternative title when explaining to others what they study, as it's easier to explain.

4) Future studies: Students were asked about whether they would be interested in postgraduate studies in IR. Of the 10 responses to this question, 7 expressed a keen interest, of the remaining 3, one thought it was a good idea but not possible for them, one did not have sufficient funds, and one was a straight 'no'. This broadly positive response is good to see in terms of the current postgraduate production, and shows that offering a pathway to progression beyond the degree is a potentially useful resource for attracting students in.

In terms of other additional comments, 3 students expressed a desire for greater representation of non-Western viewpoints and examples in the module materials, while another appeared to express concerns that the institution was obsessed with problematising whiteness and decolonising the curriculum.

You said	OU response	Next steps, if appropriate
The jump up to TD223 from level 1 was quite challenging	New curriculum developments at level 1 (i.e. the remaking of both DD102 and DD103) will increase IR/IS provision at level 1, helping preparation for more subject-specific content at level 2.	
Level 1 content was too broad based - want more subject-specific content	Covered in above – greater subject-specific content planned for new level 1 modules	
Preference for International Relations (IR) over International Studies in final degree title	We will look to initiate necessary curriculum and content changes to allow for this change	Curriculum changes to go through governance processes pending approval
Support for postgraduate offering in IR	MA in IR currently in production for 23J (October 2023)	
Greater representation of non-Western voices in degree content	Currently being brought into new curriculum at level 1, and also in remakes at level 3 and in the MA in IR.	

Date: 31 August 2021