



Durham
University

School of Government
and International Affairs

Inspiring the extraordinary

MSc in Public Policy First Intake 2025-26



Introduction

Thank you for showing interest in our new MSc in Public Policy programme. This course will provide you with an understanding of policy-making processes in all world regions and skills in data analysis for evidence-based policy making, combined with the opportunity to gain hands-on experience to enhance your employability.

From the economy and the environment to education, migration, healthcare and beyond, today's policy makers face a multitude of complex challenges. Our custom-designed MSc in Public Policy critically examines global policy concerns, exploring how policy decisions are made and how these decisions impact different areas of society, as well as what solutions exist and how to implement them.

Covering all aspects of the policy process from agenda setting to evaluation, the curriculum has been developed to equip you with the skills to examine diverse policy issues, make evidence-driven decisions, and evaluate their success or failure. Whether you are looking for a role with an NGO or government, or simply looking to advance your private sector role with a cutting-edge ability to evaluate how policy decisions will shape your industry, this course gives you the skills to advance your career.

The University has adopted a process of modularisation of its taught Masters degrees which has allocated credits to each module: a single module is worth 30 credits. A minimum of 180 credits are needed to complete each MA/MSc degree. This means that you will take the equivalent of four single modules and write a dissertation (the dissertation is worth 60 in this programme).

If you find any of this confusing please do not worry. When you start with us in Durham you will be able to discuss your choices with the Programme Convenors. For now you may like to look at some of the preliminary readings listed in this booklet. We suggest that you identify the core modules for your chosen degree listed at the front and consider what preliminary reading would be necessary. We would like to stress that you are not required to read all the items before you arrive. Depending on your previous educational background you should aim to make a start where you feel your need is the most obvious. A handbook and reading lists will be available during the course of the programme

Term Dates

Induction Week: 29 September 2025 – 5 October 2025

Michaelmas term: 6 October 2025 – 12 December 2025

Epiphany term: 12 January 2026 – 20 March 2026

Easter term: 27 April 2026 – 26 June 2026

****Please note that all programmes are subject to change and are provisional***



List of Modules 2025-26*

- Public Policy (Core)
- Capstone Project (Core)
- Dissertation in Public Policy (Core)
- Causal Inference (Core)
- Full Stack Research Design (Core Option)
- Quantitative Methods and Analysis (Core Option)
- Natural Language Processing for Public Policy (Option)
- Advanced Topics in Public Policy (Option)
- The Politics of Global Europe (Option)
- Public Policy Reform (Option)
- The Making of a Policy Maker (Option)

**Please note that this is a provisional list and it is subject to change.*

On the following pages is a brief outline of each module in the course and some recommendations for preliminary readings. The readings are by no means expected but will hopefully provide some further insight into the type of content that will be studied on the course.

Public Policy (Core)

This module will familiarize students with a diverse range of (country-based) contexts and issue areas for policymaking and give students the skills to compare across these various settings.

The module will also advance students' skills in applying knowledge from literature to a diverse range of policy issue areas and enable students to do independent research to identify and evaluate policy solutions as well as advance their communication and argumentation skills.

Teaching will comprise of a series of lectures and seminars culminating in a full day simulation which will allow students to work through a real-world policy making problem, to discuss different policy options, and to work towards a solution together.

Indicative Reading:

Odermatt, Reto and Alois Stutzer. (2017). Subjective Well-Being and Public Policy. IZA Institute of Labor Economics Discussion Paper Series. IZA DP No. 11102.

van der Dool, Annemieke and Caroline Schlauffer. (2024). Policy process theories in autocracies: Key observations, explanatory power, and research priorities. *Review of Policy Research*. 41(6): 865-891.

Besley, T., Burgess, R., Khan, A., & Xu, G. (2022). Bureaucracy and Development. *Annual Review of Economics*, 14: 397-424.

Rainey, H. G. (2014). What makes public organizations distinctive (Chapter 3). In *Understanding and managing public organizations* (5th ed., pp. 75-109). Jossey-Bass.

Capstone Project (Core)

We are very excited to offer this new module in which students will write a group report in response to a brief set by an organisation. Students will formulate Terms of Reference for their group and will work to fulfil these, assessing different policy options and advising the partner organisation. Students will present their report during a group presentation.

We are currently finalising our list of global partners but so far these include: The National Audit Office, NHS Foundation Trust, Ministry of Justice, Georgetown Law (O'Neill Institute), International Crisis Group, Karbon Homes, The Institute for Human Rights and Business, the Building Societies Association, Ramsden International, and HIAS.

Indicative Reading:

Sin, C. H. (2008). The role of intermediaries in getting evidence into policy and practice: some useful lessons from examining consultancy-client relationships. *Evidence & Policy*, 4(1), 85-103.
<https://doi.org/10.1332/174426408783477828>

Causal Inference

This module aims to prepare students to use the causal inference toolbox to advance knowledge and inform decisions in business, policy, and academic settings. The module supplements core techniques with cutting-edge advances, to build a comprehensive and future-proofed toolkit.

The module covers topic such as:

- Randomized Experiments
- Difference-in-Differences
- Regression Discontinuity Design
- Instrumental Variables

The module focuses equally on theoretical understanding and hands-on application. This aids the development of efficient and efficacious problem solving skills and ability to navigate trade-offs stemming from data limitations, resource constraints, and audience backgrounds and interests.

Indicative Reading:

Grimmer, J. (2015). We are all social scientists now: How big data, machine learning, and causal inference work together. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 48(1): 80-83.

Brand, J. E., Zhou, X., & Xie, Y. (2023). Recent Developments in Causal Inference and Machine Learning. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 49.

Cinelli, C., Forney, A., & Pearl, J. (2022). A crash course in good and bad controls. *Sociological Methods & Research*.

Huntington-Klein, N. (2021). *The effect: An introduction to research design and causality*. CRC Press.

Cunningham, S. (2021). *Causal inference: The mixtape*. Yale University Press.



Full Stack Research Design

The primary aim of this module is to navigate research design in the social sciences, from formulating research questions, through data and method choices, to delivering the findings to a variety of audiences. Indicative content is listed below and will be taught with reference to problems/scenarios within the social sciences:

- Data types, sources and their relevance;
- Computational measurement designs;
- Surveys and sampling;
- Causal inference in experimental and observational studies;
- Simulation as a research design tool.

By the end of the module students will have a working knowledge and understanding of the following areas:

- Types of research objectives and designs;
- Data types and sources;
- Strengths and limitations of different methods in social science.

Indicative Reading:

Narayanan, Arvind, and Sayash Kapoor. (2024) *AI Snake Oil: What AI Can Do, What It Can't, and How to Tell the Difference*, Princeton University Press. pp. 1-34.

Athey, Susan. (2017) "Beyond prediction: Using big data for policy problems" *Science* 355.6324: 483-5.

Pearl, Judea, and Dana Mackenzie. (2018) *The book of why: The new science of cause and effect*. Basic Books, Chapter 1.

Bailey, Michael A. (2023). "A New Paradigm for Polling" *Harvard Data Science Review* 5.3.

Kohavi, Ron, Diane Tang, and Ya Xu. (2020) *Trustworthy online controlled experiments: A practical guide to A/B testing*. Cambridge University Press, pp. 3-45.

Bail, Christopher A. (2024) "Can Generative AI improve social science?." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 121.21.

Quantitative Methods and Analysis

The aim of this module is to enable students to use common statistical methods to analyse social processes and to appropriately interpret the results of such analyses.

The course will introduce some of the key foundational concepts and methods of statistics, and then illustrate their application to social science data. The approach adopted will not be an overly mathematical one, but rather an applied one aimed at enabling students to do basic quantitative analysis of social data, and in doing this analysis understand what it is they are doing.

Through this module you will learn about foundational statistical methods, and how to apply these appropriately to social data. In doing so, you will develop and improve a number of key skills. By learning how to practically handle and organise large amounts of quantitative data using computer software you will improve your IT skills. By learning how to interrogate that data and articulate appropriate conclusions you will improve your analytical skills, numeracy skills and communication skills. You will also improve your critical thinking, becoming better equipped to evaluate and critique claims made by others based on quantitative data. All of these are skills that are highly valued by employers, especially in a world where quantitative data is becoming increasingly important.

Indicative Reading:

Agresti, Alan (2018) *Statistical Methods for the Social Sciences* (Fifth Edition). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson. Sections 1.1-2.1.

Agresti, Alan and Barbara Finlay (2009) *Statistical Methods for the Social Sciences* (Fourth Edition). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall. Sections 1.1-2.1.

Agresti, Alan and Christine Franklin (2014) *Statistics: The Art and Science of Learning from Data* (Third Edition). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson. Sections 1.1, 2.1.



Natural Language Processing

The aim of this module is to furnish students with the skills to apply natural language processing methods (methods of collecting, pre-processing and analysing text data) to answer empirical questions in public policy. Students will also develop their skills in communicating results from text analysis to a policy audience.

Indicative content for the module is as follows:

- Use of web scraping and API to collect text data
- Methods of pre-processing text data
- Unsupervised learning methods
- Supervised learning methods
- Language models

Students will also learn how to use natural language processing methods to:

- Relate policy documents to the performance of policy actors
- Study how policy documents are used
- Investigate public sentiment towards policy actors
- Analyse the changing meaning of key terms in public policy

Teaching will comprise of lectures and computer labs that will allow students to practice applying methods of collecting, pre-processing and analysing text data to the field of public policy.

Indicative Reading:

Grimmer, Justin, Margaret E. Roberts, and Brandon M. Steward. (2022). *Text as Data: A New Framework for Machine Learning and the Social Sciences*. Princeton University Press.

Eckhard, S., Jankauskas, V., Leuschner, E. et al. (2023). The performance of international organizations: a new measure and dataset based on computational text analysis of evaluation reports. *Rev Int Organ* 18, 753–776 (2023).

Osnabrügge M, Vannoni M. (2024). Quality of legislation and compliance: a natural language processing approach. *Political Science Research and Methods*.

Public Policy Reform

This module will equip students with an advanced understanding of the economic, institutional, and political factors that shape public policy challenges and reforms across diverse national contexts. Students will develop their ability to analyse policy failures and to derive practical solutions by applying lessons from successful reforms and global experiences.

The module will familiarise students with key policy areas, which could include areas such as: migration, climate, energy, security, health, taxation, state capacity, and corruption, among others.

They will also develop some subject specific skills, such as:

- The ability to critically analyse the underlying factors contributing to public policy failures and understand the reasons for why these failures persist over time;
- Identifying the complex economic, institutional, and political conditions that enable successful public policy reform;
- Conducting independent, in-depth analyses of complex public policy issues and formulate actionable plans to address them.

Indicative Reading:

Bueno de Mesquita, E. (2016) Political economy for public policy. 1st ed. Princeton, N.J: Princeton Univ. P. Available at: doi.org/10.1515/9781400883189

Bahar, D. et al. (2024) Forced Migration and Refugees: Policies for Successful Economic and Social Integration. Cambridge, Mass: National Bureau of Economic Research.

Bandiera, O. et al. (2020) 'Women's Empowerment in Action: Evidence from a Randomized Control Trial in Africa', American economic journal. Applied economics, 12(1), pp. 210-259. Available at: doi.org/10.1257/app.20170416



Advanced Topics in Public Policy

The aim of this module is to familiarize students with advanced literature in public policy, at the current limits of knowledge, and as novel public policy issue areas emerge. It will furnish students with the skills to apply insights from this literature to answer questions in public policy and to apply insights from this literature to inform their understanding of public policy making.

Students will develop their skills to communicate results from an analysis to a policy audience.

Indicative content will vary from year to year, as literature in Public Policy and novel public policy issue areas develop, and may include:

- Public Policy of global public health
- Public Policy of the environment
- Comparative Public Policy
- Political Economy of public policy making
- Advanced theoretical models of public policy making

Indicative reading:

Wenham, Clare, Joshua W. Busby, Jeremy Youde, and Asha Hertzen-Crabb. (2023). From Imperialism to the "Golden Age" to the Great Lockdown: The Politics of Global Health Governance. Annual Review of Political Science. Online at annualreviews.org/content/journals/10.1146/annurev-polisci-052521-094633.

Kavanagh, Matthew M. and Renu Singh. (2023) Vaccine politics: Law and inequality in the pandemic response to COVID-19. Global Policy Journal. 14(2): 229-246.

Lidskog, Rolf and Goran Sundqvist. (2015) When Does Science Matter? International Relations Meets Science and Technology Studies. Global Environmental Politics. 15(1): 1-20.

The Politics of Global Europe

Whatever you think about the European Union (EU), it is one of the most important experiments in supranational governance and its policies significantly affect the lives of Europeans and non-Europeans. Yet, the EU – its core nature, functions and operations – is perplexing to many.

This module examines the EU in an approachable way by focusing on major contemporary debates relating to the EU's global role, ideas, principles, functions, and evaluating how it has dealt with challenges and crises, both internal and external. It focuses on controversial issues that have divided European political elites and public opinion, causing tensions in the relationship between member states and EU institutions, as well as affecting its links with external actors.

The main aim of the module is to provide students with advanced knowledge and better understanding of the tensions between the EU's internal priorities and values and its global ambitions and role, in the context of diverse priorities and interests amongst the member states. The module will also help students develop their understanding of how the EU reacts to domestic and international crises and its relations with partners and strategic competitors.

The module will address issues such as:

- The EU as a global actor and its normative power
- The EU's response to international crises – the cases of Russia and Ukraine, Syria, and Libya
- The experience and implications of EU enlargement and neighbourhood policy
- EU-transatlantic relations, European security and NATO
- EU-UK relations after Brexit
- EU-China relations
- The impact of recent crises, such as the Eurozone, migration, Brexit, Covid, and energy
- The EU's global image and the shadow of Euroscepticism
- Political representation in the EU and the preferences of political elites and citizens in elections and referendums
- The relationship between the EU and the member states
- The implications of differentiated integration

Indicative reading:

Dinan, D., Nugent, N. and Patterson, W. E. (2017), *The European Union in Crisis*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Hill, C., Smith, M. and Vanhoonacker, S. (2017), *International Relations and the European Union*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Keukeleire, S. and Delreux, T. (2022), *The Foreign Policy of the European Union*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Lelieveldt, H. and Princen, S. (2015), *The Politics of the European Union*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.



The Making of a Policy Maker

This module will equip students with policymaking specific knowledge and skills essential for all policy makers regardless of sectors. These include writing and delivering speeches, negotiation and mediation skills, and interview skills, among others.

Students will learn advanced techniques in making policy presentations, including the ability to clearly communicate evidence – collected by oneself and others – and provide policy advice to peers and supervisors in a manner appropriate to a specific context.

Students will gain insight into the basics of running an effective political campaign, which might include political strategies, messaging, and social media usage.

Indicative Reading:

McNamara, M. (2012) *The Political Campaign Desk Reference: A Guide for Campaign Managers, Professionals and Candidates Running for Office*. Outskirts Press: Denver, Colorado.

Westen, D. (2007) *The Political Brain: The Role of Emotion in Deciding the Fate of the Nation*. Public Affairs: New York.

Lepore, J. (2020) "How The Simulmatics Corporation Invented The Future". *The New Yorker Magazine*.



Please note that modules offered and their content is subject to change.

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