

12 supercurriculars that strengthen your child's International Relations application.

What top universities actually want to see beyond A-level grades.

the activities:

Your child doesn't need to do all 12. Pick 2-3 that genuinely interest them and go deep. For IR, the goal is to show they follow the world with a critical eye, not just an opinion. Admissions tutors at LSE, Oxford and KCL can spot a checklist approach immediately.

1. Read a Serious News Source Weekly

The single most expected habit for IR. Tutors want to see they engage with global events critically, not passively scroll headlines.

Start here: The Economist or Foreign Affairs (foreignaffairs.com). Pick one story a week and write three lines on what they think and why.

2. Model United Nations (MUN)

The flagship IR activity. Diplomacy, negotiation, public speaking and resolution-writing all in one. A genuine personal statement anchor.

Start here: Join or start a club at school, then enter a conference. Look up regional school MUNs and LIMUN, Europe's largest student conference.

3. Enter an Essay Competition

Forces a real argument, properly referenced. Strong evidence of independent thinking and the writing IR degrees demand.

Start here: The John Locke Institute essay prize (johnlockeinstitute.com) has Politics and History questions perfect for IR applicants.

4. Read Beyond the Syllabus

Signals genuine curiosity. One book read closely beats ten skimmed, and gives them something real to discuss at interview.

Start here: "Prisoners of Geography" by Tim Marshall, then "Why Nations Fail" by Acemoglu and Robinson. Use Oxford's Staircase12 hub (staircase12.org.uk) for vetted Politics and IR reading.

the activities (continued):

5. Follow a Think Tank

Shows they understand where real analysis comes from. Naming a Chatham House report at interview is a level above quoting a newspaper.

Start here: Chatham House (chathamhouse.org), RUSI (rusi.org) and the IISS publish free briefings. Pick one region and follow it for a term.

6. Listen to IR & Geopolitics Podcasts

An easy, sustainable way to build context and vocabulary. Great for the commute or the gym, and it makes wider reading click.

Start here: "The Rest Is Politics", Chatham House's "Independent Thinking", and The Economist's "The Intelligence".

7. Attend Public Lectures

Exposure to university-level thinking, and a concrete answer to the "what have you done to explore this subject?" interview question.

Start here: Gresham College (gresham.ac.uk) runs free lectures, in person in London and live online, with a full free archive. LSE also podcasts its public events.

8. Take a Free Online Course

Shows self-directed learning beyond school. Best when they finish it and can talk about what they learned.

Start here: "Global Diplomacy" by SOAS University of London on Coursera, or browse FutureLearn's politics and international studies courses (free to audit).

the activities (continued):

9. A Deep-Dive Research Project (or EPQ)

The strongest evidence of all: an original question, researched and argued over months. The EPQ formalises it and some universities reward it with lower offers.

Start here: Pick one conflict, treaty or region they care about. Frame a focused question, gather sources, write 3,000 to 5,000 words.

10. Learn or Build a Foreign Language

IR is global by definition. A language signals seriousness about engaging with the world, and it is genuinely useful for the career beyond.

Start here: Start free on Duolingo, then add a structured course. Arabic, Mandarin, Russian, French and Spanish all carry real weight.

11. Debating & Public Speaking

Builds the ability to argue a position they don't hold, the core IR skill. Also superb interview preparation.

Start here: Join the school debating society, or enter the English-Speaking Union's Schools' Mace. Leading the society shows initiative too.

12. University Taster Days & Summer Schools

Shows genuine interest and gives material for the "Why this course?" question. Several are free and aimed at state-school students.

Start here: Look at Oxford UNIQ and Sutton Trust summer schools (free, eligibility applies) and LSE's open days and taster programmes from Year 12.

Pick 2-3. Go deep, not wide. Quality over quantity.

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