



Guide for IB students considering higher education in Hong Kong SAR

This guide provides a brief introduction to the Hong Kong higher education system and its application process, as well as information specifically relevant to IB students.

Context

One of the world's most competitive cities, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) is home to some of Asia's, and indeed the world's, finest universities.¹ It is also ranked in the top 10 cities for international students.²

Education in Hong Kong is largely modelled on the UK system, but undergraduate programmes are typically a mix of British and American systems. Education is overseen by the Education Bureau (EDB), who report to the government of Hong Kong rather than the Chinese Ministry of Education.

Prior to the 1960s, higher education in Hong Kong was mainly for the elite, with very few students admitted to only a single university. Through the 1980s and into the new millennium, education underwent significant expansion and development.

In 2012, undergraduate programmes at public universities moved from a three-year specialized focus system, similar to that of the UK, to a four-year holistic, student-oriented approach more aligned with the US model.³

Recently, the government of Hong Kong also introduced additional benefits to international students: the quota for non-local students at publicly funded institutions increased to 20%; scholarships for international students were strengthened (up to HK\$80,000); and visa and employment restrictions were relaxed.

Academic culture

While the education system may be more Western in organization, academic attitudes are heavily influenced by traditional Chinese culture. There is a strong value placed on examinations, hard work and meritocracy.

¹<http://www.edb.gov.hk/en/edu-system/postsecondary/index.html>

²<http://www.topuniversities.com/best-student-cities>

³<http://www.ncee.org/programs-affiliates/center-on-international-education-benchmarking/top-performing-countries/hong-kong-overview/>

Students are encouraged to understand the larger process of learning; to manage and supplement their academic progress independently; and to develop practical skills by focusing on the “real-world” application of what is taught.

Along with the change to the four-year model, Hong Kong universities have enhanced interdisciplinary studies, service learning and exchange programmes to put a greater emphasis on whole-person development, global citizenship and international outlook.⁴

Institution types

There are about 20 degree-granting higher education institutions in Hong Kong, which offer a wide array of programmes. Eight of these institutions are publicly funded universities. In addition, about another 20 institutions offer a variety of locally accredited sub-degree programmes. Courses, programmes, entry requirements and fees vary considerably, and students are strongly advised to confirm details directly with the intended institution.

Higher education institutions in Hong Kong include the following.

- **Publicly funded universities:** The eight public universities funded by the University Grants Committee (UGC) each offer associates, bachelors, masters and doctoral degrees, and some provide sub-degree programmes. Most programmes are taught in English.
- **Vocational Training Council (VTC) institutions:** Member institutions offer vocational and undergraduate technical programmes focusing on applied skills in general fields such as arts and sciences.
- **Self-financing programmes:** Eleven self-financing institutions provide both sub-degree and degree-level programmes. The government has recently been developing this sector, including a HK\$3.5 billion education fund for scholarships and quality enhancement efforts.
- **Specialized institutions:** There are a number of public and independent institutions that offer specialized instruction areas, such as the publicly funded Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts.

- **Non-local courses:** There are some 1,100 courses offered by foreign providers in Hong Kong.

Degree types

There are multiple post-secondary study pathways available in the region, including sub-degree programmes, associates, bachelor’s and graduate degrees. Many of these tracks have multiple entry and exit points. Upon completion of secondary school, students can enroll directly on an undergraduate degree course or pursue another degree type that may allow them to move into an undergraduate programme later.

Undergraduate degrees

Bachelor’s degrees are now typically four years in length for full-time students. Each university offers a range of study programmes across general study areas divided into faculties, each with a unique set of major, minor, credit and entry requirements. This model allows students to complete general studies and nominate one or more “major”, or specialization, within their study area.

In addition to their major(s), students usually select a “minor”—a secondary specialization with less credit requirements than the major. Double-degree programmes are also possible at some institutions. Course load options can be somewhat flexible, allowing students to take more or less courses in a given semester (within limits) as long as they meet the overall requirements by the end of the programme.

Associate and other degrees

Students who do not wish to pursue an undergraduate degree, or do not gain entry to a bachelor’s degree programme, may pursue an associate degree or a higher diploma. These courses often articulate with a degree course later on. It is also sometimes possible to gain a course transfer from a successfully completed higher diploma or associate degree into an overseas degree programme with some credit transfer.⁵

³<http://www.hotcoursesabroad.com/study-in-hongkong/applying-to-university/the-hong-kong-higher-education-systemsimplified/>

⁵<http://www.itseducation.asia/education-system.htm>

Applying

Hong Kong's reputation as a competitive city certainly holds true for its university admissions. The number of places available for undergraduate degrees is substantially less than the number of students who meet the entry requirements for general admission. So, qualifying for a programme may not necessarily lead to admittance. At a minimum, applicants are generally expected to have completed a secondary education programme and gained satisfactory results.

Local students with the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE) results apply to all publicly funded universities through the Joint University Programmes Admission System (JUPAS). However, local IB students and international students apply through the Non-JUPAS/International Admissions Schemes directly to a university through its website.

Course selection

It is very important that you research each separate subject you might study in detail. Although most universities have general admissions requirements, there may be faculty-specific requirements as well.

Admissions

Specific entrance requirements vary across institutions, study level and subject area. However, broadly speaking, applicants are primarily considered based on the nature of their academic background and academic achievements. Many faculties will include an admissions interview as part of the process. Most universities will require proof of proficiency in English language, as most programmes are taught in English. Some may also have additional language requirements.

It is important for applicants to convey understanding of, and enthusiasm for, their field of study while outlining relevant academic achievements and skills. However, international applicants should be aware of the local cultural attitudes towards boasting or self-promotion.⁶

Timeline

The Hong Kong academic year begins in September and runs until April or May. Students are advised to begin researching prospective institutions a year prior to their

start date. Dates and deadlines vary between institutions, but applications are usually accepted from September to April for the following academic year. In most cases you should be prepared to apply by the end of December. Some universities also have mid-year intake rounds.

Fees

While tuition fees for local students are relatively modest, fees for international students can be higher. Fees vary between programmes, but international students can expect to pay between HK\$100,000–HK\$150,000 per year in undergraduate tuition. Some universities may charge additional fees.

The Hong Kong government does provide [scholarships](#) to outstanding local and international students, and [financial assistance](#) to qualified local students in need.

Information for IB students

Despite its competitive environment, Hong Kong is generally very favourable towards IB students. The IB diploma is recognized by all publicly funded universities and most self-financing institutions. They understand the qualification well, and most institutions have specific IB policies outlined on their websites.

Both local and non-local IB students should apply directly to the individual institution(s) they are interested in attending.

In general, Diploma Programme (DP) candidates will need to have been awarded the IB diploma as meeting the minimum entry requirement. Owing to the competition for university places in Hong Kong, a total score above 30 points will likely be required to gain entry into an undergraduate degree programme at one of these institutions. In some cases, the bar may be set much higher.

Many institutions grant advanced standing to higher-performing IB students. The exact number of transfer credits are determined by the individual university faculties after the candidate has been admitted.

⁶<http://www.hotcoursesabroad.com/study-in-hongkong/applying-to-university/applying-to-study-in-hong-kong/>



Who applies to Hong Kong?

Despite its relatively small size and the cap on the number of university places for international students, Hong Kong is among the most popular higher education destinations in the world for IB students.

In 2015, 22 Hong Kong institutions received 3,195 transcripts from 1,558 students (just over two transcripts per student). About 35% of those undertook the DP in 50 different countries outside of Hong Kong.⁷

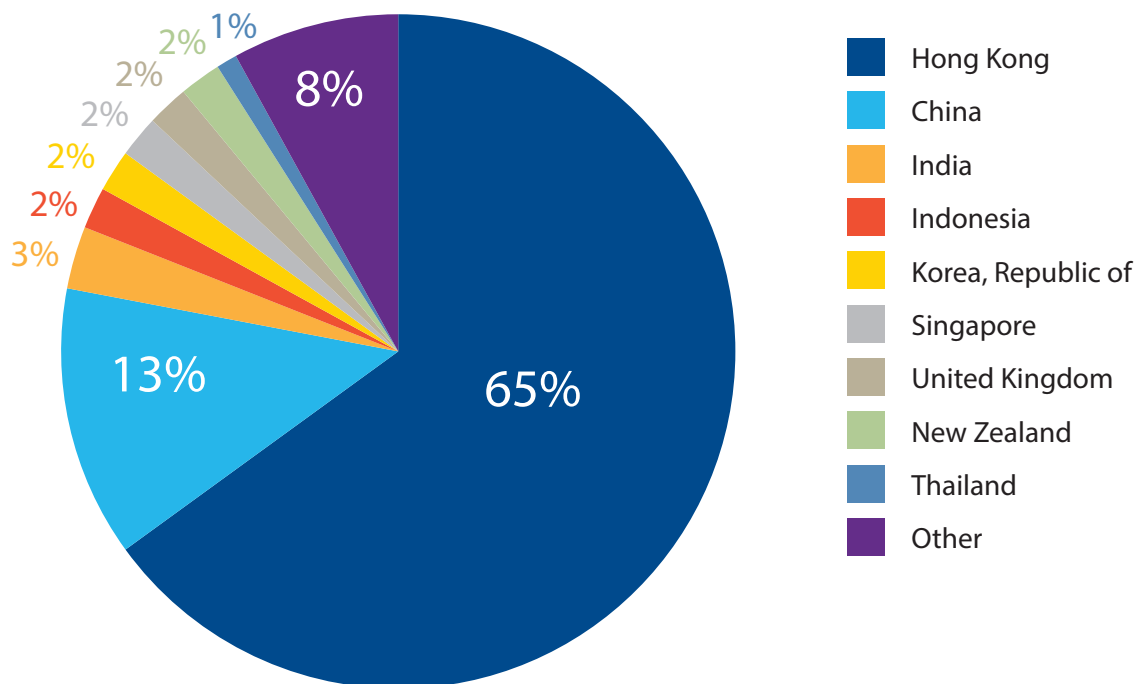
Interestingly, the UK is the only country outside of Asia sending significant numbers of students to Hong Kong, but 90% of those UK students held Chinese or Hong Kong passports. This suggests that while it is a major international destination, Hong Kong may offer a decidedly “pan-Asian” experience.

Where are transcripts sent?

In 2015, 22 Hong Kong institutions received transcripts from IB students. The bulk of these went to the region’s publicly funded universities. Six universities received more than 50 transcripts last year. Of these, four were ranked in the top 100 research universities in the world by QS, and in 2015 all of them were ranked in the top 300.⁸

IB-specific information on each of the six universities is outlined on the next few pages.

Origins of IB students applying to Hong Kong Institutions



⁷For the purpose of this analysis, China, Macau and Taiwan are considered separate from Hong Kong.

⁸<http://www.topuniversities.com/university-rankings/world-university-rankings>

Information on the 6 institutions that received the most transcripts from IB students⁹

THE CHINESE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG		
General admissions information		
General admissions requirements include receiving the IB diploma, a grade 4 or above in English language and Chinese language. There may be exemptions for the Chinese language requirement at the discretion of the Faculty Dean concerned. Additional faculty-specific requirements may apply.	Total undergraduate enrollment	15k
	Global ranking	44
	Average DP score	36.8
Example course requirements		
BSc Science: Two of the following subjects taken at HL: chemistry, biology, economics, geography, mathematics, further mathematics, physics.		
Additional considerations		
Applicants who meet specific requirements may apply for "Admission with Advanced Standing". The minimum number of units for graduation for students admitted with Advanced Standing may be reduced by up to 24 (normative period of study may be reduced by up to one year). Additionally, candidates who have completed only the first year of IB Diploma studies with outstanding results may be considered for admission under special circumstances on individual merit case-by-case.		

CITY UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG		
General admissions information		
Award of an International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma is necessary for admission to first-year studies. For Advanced Standing I, a minimum diploma score of 30 (out of 45) is required.	Total undergraduate enrollment	13k
	Global ranking	55
	Average DP score	33.1
Example course requirements		
No faculty-specific prerequisites could be identified.		
Additional considerations		
IB applicants may apply for admission to first-year studies in a degree programme or admission to a major with Advanced Standing I (non-senior-year). Students admitted with Advanced Standing I (non-senior-year) must achieve a minimum requirement of 90 credit units for graduation, subject to the requirements of individual colleges/schools/academic units.		

⁹These institutions are listed in alphabetical order, and inclusion here does not necessarily indicate that these institutions have the most generous or appropriate offerings for IB students. Whenever possible, text is quoted directly from the university's website. QS is used for the global rankings. Average DP score is that of transcripts sent, and may differ from the average score of students who actually gain admission.



HONG KONG BAPTIST UNIVERSITY

General admissions information

The university adopts a policy of broad-based admissions for most of its programmes, where students can enhance their overall understanding of their desired discipline in the first year, and can then make the best choice of major. **IB diploma** holders are eligible to apply for admission to undergraduate degree programmes. IB applicants should request the IB to send scores to the university electronically.

Total undergraduate enrollment	7k
Global ranking	278
Average DP score	32.4

Example course requirements

No faculty-specific prerequisites could be identified.

Additional considerations

Scholarship opportunities are available to outstanding local and overseas **IB diploma** holders. No separate application is required. The university will identify outstanding candidates for the award of scholarships upon successful admission.

Advanced standing: IB applicants once admitted may apply for transfer of units up to 15 units if they have taken equivalent courses in other institutions previously.

A grade of 4 or above in any group 1 course or English B HL, or 5 or above in English B SL meets the university's English language requirements.



THE HONG KONG POLYTECHNIC UNIVERSITY

General admissions information

The general admissions requirements are a minimum score of 24 with at least grade 4 in two HL subjects and at least a grade 4 in English.

Total undergraduate enrollment	16k
Global ranking	111
Average DP score	32.3

Example course requirements

No faculty-specific prerequisites could be identified.

Additional considerations

IB students may be given credit transfer upon admission to the four-year full-time undergraduate degree programmes. Normally, they will be given credit transfer from 9 credits to a maximum of 25% of the award requirements, depending on their previous study and grade attainments. Normally, there is no need for new students to apply for entry credit transfer, and the number of credits required will be shown on the offer notice. Students who have not been given credit transfer at the admission stage may submit an application after enrollment, together with relevant supporting documents.

THE HONG KONG UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

General admissions information

As a university with a global outlook and international ambience, HKUST welcomes applicants from any corner of the globe. IB students should submit their applications directly to the university via the online application system. HKUST is committed in supporting outstanding students who choose to pursue their higher education with the university. Receiving the **IB diploma** is a minimum qualification for entry, but the mid-50% score range for the 2015 intake was 36–40 (including bonus points).

Total undergraduate enrollment	9k
Global ranking	36
Average DP score	37.1

Example course requirements

BSc Science: One HL subject from physics, chemistry, biology, mathematics.

Additional considerations

The “**University Admission Scholarship Scheme for IB Diploma Holders**” will be awarded to top students based on academic merit without separate application. Students with IB Total Points (including Bonus Points) 36 or above will be awarded with scholarships ranging from HK\$10,000 (36-37) to full tuition plus living allowance (45). IB Diploma candidates/holders are automatically considered for the awards based on their verified IB Total Points.

IB students admitted in 2014 on average received 21 advanced credits on entry. These students have more flexibility in pursuing their interests and, should they decide to do so, can graduate in less than four years. A grade of 4 or higher in any group 1 course or English B HL, or a grade of 5 or higher in English B SL fulfill the university’s English language requirements.

THE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG

General admissions information

HKU particularly values the IB Diploma as the learning pedagogy in programme mirrors that of HKU. An IB diploma with 30 points out of 45 is the minimum entry requirement, but competitive scores will depend on the degree programme. For example, for Medicine, Dentistry or Law, scores would have to be in excess of 40 out of 45. On the other hand, scores of 32 to 35 would be the usual minimum for programmes with large quotas. Actual scores for successful applicants will also be dependent on the number and quality of applications received that year.

Total undergraduate enrollment	13k
Global ranking	27
Average DP score	37.1

Example course requirements

BSc Science: Students must take at least one of the following subjects: biology, chemistry, mathematics, physics.

Additional considerations

A grade of 4 or higher in any group 1 course or English B HL, or a grade of 5 or higher in English B SL fulfill the university's English language requirements. Students must also earn a grade 4 or above in a language other than English. IB applicants with at least seven years of secondary education at the time of admittance will be granted 30 credits of Advanced Standing. An extra 6 credits will be granted to applicants who fulfill the exemption criteria for Core University English. Advanced Standing will be granted automatically and separate application is not required. Note: Award of Advanced Standing may differ by faculty.



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