

Hong Kong

Demographics for Hong Kong

Population:	6,898,686 (July 2005 est.)
GDP (by PPP method):	US\$234.5 billion
Currency (inc code):	Hong Kong dollar (HKD)
Language(s):	Chinese (Cantonese), English; both are official
Internet country code:	.hk

Elementary and secondary education

Students move on to six years of primary education around the age of six, after two years at kindergarten. The primary and junior secondary education, covering a total of nine years, is free and compulsory for children in Hong Kong. Students graduate from secondary school comprising five years of studies (Form One to Form Five), around the age of 17. To be considered having successfully completed secondary education, they have to obtain passes in at least five subjects including English and Chinese in the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination. Following that is two years of pre-university studies, at Form Six and Form Seven levels, designed to prepare them for the A-Level examination, the results of which form the basis for university admissions. The structure of basic education is set to be changed, however, under government reform plans to extend secondary education to six years, comprising three years of junior secondary and three years of senior secondary education, by 2009. The HKCEE and A-Level exams will be replaced by a new public examination to be taken at the end of the senior secondary years.

Curriculum wise, Chinese and English (25-30 percent of learning time), mathematics (10-15 percent) and liberal studies (10 percent) will make up the

four core subjects at the senior secondary level. They will be complemented by two or three subjects, to be chosen by students from different key learning areas, including career oriented studies, or to build depth of knowledge in a group of related subjects, such as sciences or business. Information about the reform is available at www.emb.gov.hk

Higher education

Currently school leavers may go for diploma or degree-level studies at either vocational training institutes or universities. The Vocational Training Council, the main provider of vocational courses, is also offering top-up programs in collaboration with overseas universities so that diploma graduates can get a degree by enrolling in courses offered by the partner institutions, either locally or overseas.

Form Seven graduates or graduates from international schools, which cater primarily for children of the expatriate community (an increasing number of local children, however, have enrolled in these schools taking advantage of their English environment and overseas curriculum), are eligible for admission into the eight government-funded universities. There is no private university in Hong Kong.

Since a few years ago, universities have taken on Form Six students with outstanding results in the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination one year earlier, under the Early Admissions Scheme. Depending on the university, these students may finish their studies in four years, as opposed to three years normally for a bachelor's degree.

But from 2012, university degrees will be extended to four years as part of the government's education reform plan. The change has received wide support in the community, as educators and officials generally agree on the need for a more rounded education for university students in today's fast-changing economy and social environment. Universities adopt a credit unit system in determining students' length of studies. The number of credits required for graduation varies by programs and institutions.

University studies are carried out on a semester basis, with two semesters in an academic year that runs from September to early May. Rather than studying, an increasing number of students have gone on internships in Hong Kong, China or other countries during the summer holidays, through arrangements made by their institutions.

Secondary graduates without any work experience can pursue first professional degrees like those awarded in law, dentistry, medicine or optometry. The two most sought after professional programs, medicine and law, take five and four years to complete respectively.

On graduate programs, all universities have graduate schools offering master's and doctor's degrees, except the only teacher-training institute, the Hong Kong Institute of Education, which has been offering degree programs

but was only granted self-accrediting status last year, a necessary condition before it can be upgraded to university status.

Master's degrees require one to two years of studies beyond the bachelor's degree, while a doctor's degree requires a minimum of four years beyond the bachelor's degree.

The sub-degree sector has developed rapidly since 2000, when the first batch of associate degree (AD) programs were launched in line with the government's goal to double the percentage of young school leavers with access to tertiary education to 60 percent within the decade. That rate has already been achieved. The AD programs are offered by community colleges set up by various universities and private institutions, modelled after the North American system. They are open to Form Five and Seven graduates, as well as mature students. Graduates are eligible for second year degree places at local or certain overseas universities, as long as their academic results match the prescribed admissions requirements.

Official accreditation is not required for all degree or sub-degree courses provided by universities. For other post-secondary institutions including overseas universities, accreditation is done by the Hong Kong Council for Academic Accreditation. Exemption is given to overseas universities offering courses through a local university.

Business and management education

Undergraduate, master's and doctoral business degrees are provided by business schools or faculties within universities; the continuing education arms of universities, and private colleges often in partnership with overseas universities predominantly from the UK and Australia; overseas business schools operating independently or through an agent in the city. Providers of non-degree management education include associations such as the Hong Kong Management Association, private colleges and the government-funded Vocational Training Council. Business courses are offered in large numbers at the associate degree level.

The most commonly offered degree titles are Bachelor of Business Administration and Bachelor of Science in Business. Students can choose an area of major emphasis out of wide-ranging possibilities from insurance, finance and actuarial analysis, professional accountancy, global business, hotel and business management, to international business and global management. Students are encouraged to take a minor or second major on top of their area of emphasis, or even do double major. The number of credits required for graduation varies by institutions and programs, ranging from 90 to slightly over 100. Each subject normally bears three or four credits, with the exception of final year projects which can carry more than ten credits.

Business undergraduates can also opt for two degree awards, one of which from a non-business related discipline, by enrolling in four-year, double degree

programs. Examples of the possible combinations include BBA in management and BSc in computing; BBA in marketing and BA in design. Some business schools also offer bachelor of science degrees, with a specialization in areas like economics and finance, or logistics engineering and management.

Company visits and internship are common elements of business education in Hong Kong. Students are given work placement opportunities during the summer or on a part-time basis during term time. Student exchange programs have been expanded to allow more students to spend a term or even one whole academic year at an overseas institution.

There are vast options for earning an MBA in Hong Kong. They range from one-year full-time intensive programs including internship, two-year part-time programs that take students to field trips in China, online or distance programs for students who want to study at their own pace, to part-time MBA and Doctor of Business Administration delivered by predominantly Australian or British institutions, either through a local partner or independently. Like in many other countries, the part-time courses are designed for professionals who work during the day. Some of the overseas programs are taught entirely by home faculty who fly into the territory from time to time. For that reason, classes are held on an intensive basis while faculty are in Hong Kong, often during a block period of, say, two or three weekends.

Both local and overseas providers are offering Executive MBA programs designed for professionals with significant working experience. Joint programs offering degrees awarded by two universities are another option. The duration of EMBA programs ranges from 15 months to two years, sometimes including live-in sessions in China or other parts of the world, depending on the nature of the program.

All universities offer business doctoral programs for students on both a part-time and full-time basis, leading to the Doctor of Business Administration or Doctor of Philosophy award. Like in most countries, doctoral students undertake some course work and carry out scholarly research on a chosen topic related to a particular discipline, for example, accounting or marketing. Those without a research master's degree are given an additional year for completion of their thesis.

Students

There were 11,062 business and management majors out of 48,800 undergraduates in the 2004-2005 academic year, based on University Grants Committee statistics. This means about a quarter of the students were enrolled in business and management programs.

At the sub-degree level, 2,171 of the total 16,737 students were enrolled in it, meaning a proportion of one in five students opting for the discipline. There were 579 graduate students specializing in the area out of a total graduate population of 9,746. But the figures only cover the government-funded sector.

Most sub-degree courses and part-time MBA and EMBA courses are in fact self-financed and not included in the UGC statistics. According to the UGC, 61 percent of the enrollees in the government-funded degree and sub-degree programs were female. In 2003, based on press reports, women comprised just under half of the students in Hong Kong's leading MBA courses.

Faculty

The vast majority of business faculty in Hong Kong are PhDs, many with doctoral degrees obtained from the USA. A rising number of academics formerly from the mainland and who did their postgraduate studies in the USA have been employed. The hiring of business professionals or academics from mainland China and overseas institutions as adjunct faculties is also common. Those in full-time positions have to undertake both research and teaching duties. The US system of academic titles is commonly adopted, with new doctorates usually hired at the rank of assistant professor, above which is associate professor and finally professor, chair professor. Consideration for promotion to associate professor from assistant professor takes about six years.

Accreditation

Some business schools and programs have received accreditation from various international bodies, including AACSB, EQUIS and the Institute of Chartered Secretaries and Administrators. Some courses lead to exemptions in certain parts of professional examinations offered by bodies such as the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants, the Society of Registered Financial Planners (RFP-HK), and Institute of Financial Planners of Hong Kong (IFPHK). All business schools are reliant on the universities they are affiliated to for funding, while all universities receive the bulk of their funding from the government though a buffer body, the University Grants Committee. The committee has played an increased monitoring role to ensure value for money and to avoid overlapping use of resources. Universities enjoy autonomy in curricular design and staff and student recruitment but the government sets a ceiling on each university's annual student intake:

- Estimated number of institutions with undergraduate business degree programs: 28*.
- Estimated number of institutions with business master's degree programs: 44*.
- Estimated number of institutions with business doctoral degree programs: 18*.

*The figure represents both local and overseas institutions.

Issues facing business schools

As a result of dwindling government funding for universities, business schools need to find additional revenue to attract and maintain world-class faculty, while stepping up innovative research. All these are crucial for bolstering Hong Kong's position as a provider of world-class business education in the region. Hong Kong's status as an international financial hub and well-established business community is an attractive factor for top students and faculty. Faculty with cross-cultural perspectives, rich experience and knowledge in Western management, and a thorough understanding of the economic situation in the region is crucial for nurturing future business leaders. Increased research funding, either from the government or the private sector, is needed. The limited pool of research money can be a disincentive for potential candidates from top institutions abroad.

Competition for academic talent has been intensified with the rapid development of higher education in China, where much state resources have been pumped into the few leading institutions to raise their academic standing.

Similar to the USA, universities are under increased pressure for accountability. Schools and faculties are asked to comply with an audit culture initiated by the government funding body, the University Grants Committee, producing research output periodically and doing massive paper work throughout the audit process. This has exacerbated pressure on academics. Institutions could be more innovative and responsive to market demands if they were under less control by the government.

The government has begun withdrawing funding for taught postgraduate programs in phases since 2002. Among the first batch of programs to be stripped of the funding, MBA courses have since been running on a self-financed basis. To augment income, institutions have raised tuition fees for their postgraduate programs. But the increased number of providers has heightened competition for students as well. This raises the issue not just of cost but also how to ensure the quality of the programs. Institutions need to set clear benchmarks on admissions and graduation requirements to ensure they are producing high caliber business professionals. This is an area in which international accreditation can play a bigger role in the future.

Local students are in need of a well-rounded education. Under the current system, they are divided into an arts or science stream within their school at Form Four, forced to be overly specialized at too early a stage. As it will take years before the senior education reform bears any fruit, business schools are faced with the pressing task of broadening students' learning, not least of which is enhancing their communication skills, and helping them to adopt a global mind-set. Another priority is to come up with a four-year undergraduate curriculum, a model that can help students to develop adequate knowledge and skills for conducting businesses in a global economy.

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