

Questions and Answers about GCE A-level, International A-level and HKDSE for Hong Kong students

What is A-level?

A-level is a secondary school leaving qualification offered by educational bodies such as Edexcel. Students can apply to universities worldwide with A-level qualifications. Students in the UK study GCE A-level. Students in Hong Kong can study International A-levels or GCE A-levels, which are equivalent.

Who can study A-level?

Anyone can gain A-level qualifications through self-study. Students do not have to be enrolled in a school and can take A-level examinations as a private candidate (with Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (HKEAA)) or with a full academic centre, such as ITS Tutorial School (Edexcel Centre Number 92885), in Hong Kong.

What is the difference between GCE A-level and International A-level?

Students in the UK mainly study GCE A-level.

International A-level is designed for international students, and is more flexible. For example, there are two exam sessions in a year and laboratory assessment can be conducted in a written format. Both qualifications are widely recognized by universities in Hong Kong including HKU, CUHK and HKUST and by universities in the UK, including, the University of Cambridge, Imperial College, London School of Economics, etc.

Can I study A-level on top of HKDSE?

Yes. The timetable of A-level and HKDSE exams do not overlap. Please refer to the comparison below between HKDSE and IAL about the similarities between two syllabuses.

Why would a HKDSE student study A-level?

Students can apply to universities in Hong Kong via NON-JUPAS and can apply to UK universities via UCAS with A-level qualifications. Universities in the US, Australia, Canada also accept UK A-level qualifications. Top universities in the US might require standardized test scores such as the SAT and ACT.

How many subjects would a typical student study for A-level?

Most universities require three A-level subjects. There are university courses that might require more than three A-level subjects and we suggest students to check with respective universities. A-level English is not a compulsory subject for university entrance. Students in Hong Kong would typically need to take an additional English proficiency test such as IELTS or hold an English IGCSE.

Why would a student study more than three A-level subjects?

For students using A-level qualifications to apply, Universities in the UK or in HK will give conditional offers to students based on the final grades achieved. For example, a university could give a conditional offer of AAA for any three A-level subjects. Students who do more than three A-levels have an insurance option if three A-levels out of four reach the grade of AAA.

Which A-level subjects should I choose?

Students should choose A-level subjects based on the subjects they hope to study in university. For students applying to an engineering programme, we recommend students take physics, maths and further maths. For students applying to a medicine programme, we recommend students take chemistry, biology and maths. For students applying to an economics programme, we recommend students take maths A-level. Check with the respective universities about their specific entrance requirements.

What is the timeline to apply to Hong Kong universities with A-level qualifications?

With A-level qualifications, students apply to universities in Hong Kong via NON-JUPAS. There are two rounds of admission into universities in Hong Kong, the early round and the main round. Different universities may have different deadlines. The deadlines of the early round are typically around November. The deadlines of the main round are late December and early January. After submitting the

application, universities may arrange interviews in December for early round applicants and in the first half of the year for main round candidates.

Universities will give offers to candidates or reject the application after the interview. Offers are typically conditional if students have not yet finished exams or unconditional if students have already received the exam results.

What is the timeline to apply to UK universities with A-level qualifications?

Students apply to UK universities via UCAS. UCAS is a joint university admission mechanism like JUPAS in Hong Kong, but they are quite different in many ways. The deadline is the 15th of October the year before if students would like to apply to the University of Oxford, the University of Cambridge, or to competitive programmes, such as medicine, etc. For candidates in the UK, the deadline is the 15th of January of the year of entrance. For international candidates, there is a later deadline, but we strongly recommend students to submit their application by the 15th of January as universities start giving offers to other applicants by then.

A UCAS application includes five course choices (either Oxford or Cambridge), a 4000 character personal statement (around 650 words), references and predicted grades. Students might need to take additional written tests such as TSA, PAT, UKCAT, BMAT, LNAT, MAT, STEP, etc., depending on the course.

Students applying to Oxford or Cambridge may be invited for interviews in December. Offers are typically conditional based on final A-level grades and are given in January.

When students have received all the replies from the five universities, they choose one offer as the first choice and another one as the insurance choice. The conditional offer of the first choice should be higher than the insurance choice, so if A-level results do not meet the first choice, there is still a chance to get into the insurance choice.

If grades do not meet the insurance offer, students can go through the clearing process. Every year there is a clearing fair hosted by the British Council in August in Hong Kong where Universities from the UK will interview students for the September intake.

Which schools provide A-levels in Hong Kong?

Students can enrol with international Schools, such as Harrow International School or Kellett School. Local schools such as St Paul's Convent and YMCA of Hong Kong Christian College also offer A-levels. Private students can study and take the examinations via ITS tutorial school, which is a full academic centre.

How can I study A-level if I am not in Hong Kong?

You can check with schools in your location. ITS Tutorial School in Hong Kong also provides online learning options for students not in Hong Kong.

What is IGCSE?

IGCSE stands for International General Certificate of Secondary Education. Similar to the previous HKCEE or GCE Ordinary level qualifications, IGCSE is a public examination that students take in the middle of their secondary education.

Why would HKDSE students study IGCSE?

Top boarding schools in the UK will require students to meet a specific requirement based on their IGCSE results. For students going on to study A-level, we suggest students take the IGCSE examinations as IGCSE is the foundation of A-level, as they are all written based on the UK national curriculum. IGCSE is not a prerequisite for students applying to universities. However, universities often require IGCSE English and maths.

When can I start studying IGCSE?

Students can study IGCSE as a private candidate. There is no age requirement for studying and taking IGCSE exams. Students can start as early as in their junior forms in their secondary education.

The information above was written by experienced teachers at ITS Tutorial School in Hong Kong. If you have further enquiries, please contact ITS at +852 2116 3916 or by email at info@itseducation.asia. ITS Tutorial School is a full Edexcel academic centre in Hong Kong (Centre Number 92885). Further consultation in regards to GCE A-level, International A-level and HKDSE is completely free of charge. You might also refer to the following FAQ page from ITS Education Asia <http://www.itseducation.asia/UK-faqs.htm>

Disclaimer: Neither Pearson nor ITS Education Asia, nor any of their affiliates or associates, accept any liability whatsoever for the contents of this supplementary material, or for the consequences of any actions taken on the basis of the information provided.