

Guide to International Education & Schools

For Parents, Employers &
Relocation Professionals



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GUIDE TO INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION & SCHOOLS

FOR PARENTS, EMPLOYERS & RELOCATION PROFESSIONAL

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BRIDGING CULTURES

The number of bilingual and multilingual schools is increasing, producing language-savvy students equipped for the global workforce.

Ruth Holmes reports.

A multilingual or bilingual education means much more than learning how to order cake with cream in German or parsing a verb. To write, speak and understand another language is to have a unique window on a country's culture.

"Language above all is a culture," says Françoise Zurbach, Head of French-English bilingual international school, EIFA, based in Marylebone, London, in a recent Relocate Global webinar on the subject. "It's the whole block: the language, the culture, the emotion. How we speak to people changes according to the language."

With global citizenship front of mind and internationally mobile families frequently blending more

than one cultural identity and heritage, the ability to speak and learn in multiple languages builds cultural awareness and sense of self – a critical aspect of healthy transitions for third-culture kids.

Bilingualism and multilingualism also nurture understanding of different perspectives and create valuable connections that would otherwise go missed.

"Often parents are multiple passport holders" says Johanna Mitchell, Director of Lumos Education, an education and relocation consultancy. "They want their children to have a sense of global mobility and global awareness. Being bilingual or multilingual gives their children opportunities they wouldn't otherwise have."



BENEFITS OF A BILINGUAL AND MULTILINGUAL EDUCATION

Bilingual and multilingual education is an increasingly relevant and accessible option for international families in our more mobile world where we code-switch between cultures many times a day at home, work and in education.

Data on international school trends published in August by international school researchers ISC credits the rise of bilingual and multilingual international schools – whether in English, French, German, Mandarin, Japanese or the multitude of other home languages – to the increasing number of local families choosing an international education in their home country.

This trend in international education honours the local, as well as the multicultural context, as educators and school communities nurture the next generation of globally aware leaders. Recent research by ISC Research into international mindedness highlights how bilingual and bicultural learning is increasing amongst international schools as a way of supporting a multicultural context that values the host country of the school.

“As international schools have become the domain for many more host children, language learning has shifted from English only to bilingual and multilingual offerings,” ISC comments. “International schools have a duty to promote internationalism, and for many schools that means starting with the promotion of languages.”

“One of the purposes of education is to prepare a child for the future. For an international child, who may be moving from one assignment to another, keeping all their language options open is crucial.”

SUSAN STEWART, HEAD OF MULTILINGUALISM AT ISL



The International School of Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia (ISKL) has long been known for its community where people of all backgrounds find a place to belong.

“Bilingualism and multilingualism are assets that are celebrated at ISKL,” says Head of School, Rami Madani. “ISKL welcomes linguistic diversity and promotes the development of English academic proficiency alongside the development of the home language.”

Language specialists and classroom teachers work together to ensure the best academic outcome possible within a happy, social framework. ISKL’s EAL team works in partnership with students and parents to support multilingual learners and help them fulfil their potential.

In Europe, Salem is one of two boarding schools in Germany that offer an English-speaking track and the IB programme. “So-called international schools can be found in the bigger cities all over Germany, but usually do not provide a boarding facility,” says Dr Stephanie Nau, Head of Admissions at the Schule Schloss Salem International Boarding School.

“Salem’s student community consists of 45 different nations. About 60% of our children speak German and about 40% of our children study German as a foreign

language at Salem but follow our lessons in English. Their mother language is fully accredited in the German curriculum, replacing our second foreign language.”

ACHIEVING POTENTIAL AND MAINTAINING ROOTEDNESS

The International School of London (ISL), which has schools in the UK and Qatar, is another well-established and highly respected international school group that has multilingualism at its heart. It teaches 22 home languages and 80% of students graduate with a bilingual qualification.

“One of the purposes of education is to prepare a child for the future,” says Susan Stewart, Head of Multilingualism at ISL. “For an international child, who may be moving from one assignment to another, keeping all their language options open is crucial.”

As well as supporting families as they make transitions in their host country, a truly bilingual and multilingual education at an international school has other highly sought-after bonuses. Academic Ellen Bialystok reviewed the effects and consequences of bilingual education on young children in a 2016 paper in the ‘International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism’.

Among the key conclusions drawn from research was that, bilingual instruction at school had long-term benefits for children’s literacy and language. Bilingual students showed higher levels of executive function, which is a predictor of academic success.

Being fluent in two languages develops all-round cognitive skills and higher executive function, builds confidence, fosters global mindedness and cultural awareness – highly transferable skills valued by prestigious universities and employers.

WHAT IS A BILINGUAL OR MULTILINGUAL EDUCATION IN PRACTICE?

In order to deliver these clear benefits, teaching and learning has to go way beyond simply having languages on the curriculum. How children are immersed in the language-learning experience as they acquire a second, third or fourth language is critical.

“Successful true bilingualism requires that both languages themselves be the medium of instruction,” says Francoise Zurbach, not just its subject. “This is why at EIFA its balanced English-French curriculum is delivered five days a week. Some bilingual schools teach a second language only part of the week. But if a child doesn’t speak the

language at home, then this means they can go four days or so without speaking their second language.”

There has also been much pedagogical and academic study into the concept of translanguaging. The original meaning is understood to mean “the planned and systematic use of two languages in the classroom by specifying and varying the language of input and output.” However, because of its significance and relevance to healthy transitions – the process enables children to relate their previous learning experiences to language acquisition in their new setting and interactions with other students – translanguaging has grown to encompass these and other aspects.

In most truly bilingual and multilingual international schools, language learning therefore takes place in the subject lesson itself – be it English, Spanish, French, Mandarin, German – as well as in other subjects, with the language the curriculum taught in dependent on the timetable.

EXAMS FOR BILINGUAL STUDENTS

Given the clear benefits – and often necessity – of a bilingual or multilingual school option for families on the move, curricula and

“International schools have a duty to promote internationalism, and for many schools that means starting with the promotion of languages.”

ISC RESEARCH

examination bodies around the world have adapted over decades to award qualifications that celebrate and support bilingualism. For example, the International Option of the French Baccalaureate (OIB) accredited by Cambridge Assessment International Education, is a Franco-British educational collaboration based on the French Bacc. Similarly, in the US, the French Ministry of Education has partnered with College Board to create American Section OIB exams.

The International Baccalaureate Diploma also supports bilingual identities through its Bilingual Diploma. Candidates awarded a grade 3 or higher in two languages selected from the DP language and literature courses will receive this certification. Students attaining a grade 3 or higher in an individual and societies or science subject, completed in a different language, will also be awarded the accolade.

With employers paying a premium for people proficient in more than one language, investment in a bilingual or multilingual education is a good and increasingly popular option. ●



LESSONS IN WELLBEING

Good international schools take the health and wellbeing of their students seriously, writes **Ruth Holmes**.

As well as ensuring a successful assignment for the whole family, international schools that prioritise the mental and physical health and wellbeing of their student body maximise overall student experience and educational attainment. Research shows that stress reduces intellectual capacity by as much as 10-15 IQ points.

Looking after students' wellbeing also encourages young people to be aware of their own and others' needs – skills that have lifelong importance and help to prepare young people for healthy adulthood and participation in thriving societies and workplaces. So, what wellbeing aspects should you look out for when researching and visiting international schools?

INCREASING AWARENESS OF MENTAL WELLBEING AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Fortunately, the focus on the all-round health and wellbeing of children and young people has increased in schools in the past few years.

Intermittent lockdowns and enforced isolation due to the pandemic have taken their toll on all of our mental wellbeing, including the developmentally critical opportunities for children and young people. This unprecedented global event has helped heighten understanding and appreciation of our community and support networks. It has also deepened conversations around mental and physical wellbeing.

A UK survey conducted in 2021 found that 100% of NHS mental health service leaders reported demand for children's and young people's support had increased in the previous six months. For 80% of these professionals, this demand was a 'significant' increase.

How much of this is related to anxiety and other issues caused directly by the pandemic, and a backlog of referrals, and how much is related to heightened understanding of mental health issues, as well as new stressors like social media, is a complex issue. But whatever the cause, good schools are putting their student, parent and staff community first and doubling down on pastoral support.

CHILDREN'S WELLBEING KEY TO INTERNATIONAL MOVES

For children accompanying their parents on international assignments, wellbeing is an especially pertinent issue. Pandemic aside, moving home, work/school, peer group, daily routine and country is among the most stressful experiences for adults – even more so for children. This is also now increasingly being recognised.

Advice on how to make good transitions and why they are important is captured by Professor John Hattie in his definitive research on third-culture kids (TCKs). He concludes that well-managed transitions can add significant value to children's lives and their learning journey. Leading relocation management companies (RMCs) and international schools understand this. They treat relocating families as a group of unique individuals, as well as a collective.

Schools and RMCs following the guidance and training of organisations like SPAN – Safe Passage Across Networks – are helping families with invaluable support to manage transitions so they can get on with "learning, loving, growing, stretching, cross-cultural competence and joy."

These schools include Relocate Think Global People Award winners the International School of London and the International School of Kuala Lumpur. Both have shared how they support families year-round in Relocate Global's International Education and Schools Fair webinar series.

"Transition care and looking after the wellbeing of our families is so important at ISL," says Claudine Hakim, head of advancement, transitions and external relations International School of London. "The transient world we live in today and just coming out of the pandemic, families are in need of special care." Along with other high-quality international schools, ISL has a team dedicated to family and student welfare and that of the wider school community.

SOURCES OF SUPPORT

Alongside ongoing transitions support, student counsellors, named heads of pastoral care and specialist wellbeing, most schools

also offer age-appropriate advice in regular and one-off workshops, and awareness days. These are designed to inform children and parents on hot wellbeing topics, as well as signpost to more information and advice, these events are often led by guest speakers and subject experts on specific issues like internet and personal safety, alcohol and drug awareness, mental health, bullying, relationships and good study habits.

Faculty members are also important in role modelling positive wellbeing behaviours, mirroring the ongoing renegotiation between employers and employees around work-life balance and boundaries around remote work post-pandemic. For the British School of Manila, head of primary Kate Tomlinson described in TES magazine how setting aside a 'stop week' for staff offers an opportunity to lighten the load from meetings and other non-urgent administrative tasks.

"With a focus on staff wellbeing being prevalent across many schools, one solution to allow for that optimism and positivity to maintain is the introduction of 'stop weeks', writes Kate Tomlinson. "A stop week does not mean closing the school. The concept is to carefully consider the things that we could stop for just one week while also ensuring that nothing in terms of provision for children is lost or impacted. Stop weeks help provide us with time to reflect and pause."

Bringing together educators, parents and students, it's clear that healthy schools around the world build wellbeing into every aspect of what it does daily in a truly child-centred approach. ●



CHOOSING A SCHOOL IN AUSTRALIA

Most international families send their children to the county's state or private schools. The broad and well respected national curriculum allows for easy global transfers, writes **Sally Robinson**.



Blue skies, vibrant multicultural cities, good education and stunning natural beauty: Australia has always been a coveted destination for expat families.

Sydney and Melbourne are the most popular locations and, despite the rivalry between cities, their demographics are remarkably similar. According to the 2022 census both have populations of around 5 million, a median age of 37, thriving education systems and a range of growing industries from finance and professional services to IT and biotech. The 2022 Global Financial Centres Index ranks Sydney as the 13th and Melbourne as 31st centre out of 119 surveyed.

Sydney is largely seen as Australia's economic and financial centre (the Reserve Bank and Australian Stock Exchange are based here) and the strategic centre for banks, fund managers and insurance companies. Melbourne has more manufacturing and is home to 32 of Australia's top 100 companies, including the world's biggest mining company BHP.

THE COST OF LIVING FACTOR

Modelling for Australia's Centre for Population predicts Melbourne is likely to overtake Sydney to become Australian's most populated city by 2026.

According to the latest My Expatriate Market Pay Survey (which monitors expat pay levels globally) from mobility solutions company ECA International, Australia has risen significantly and now ranks in seventh position. This is due to the strengthening of its currencies, increased benefits costs and income tax changes in the past seven months.

That doesn't mean expats find Australia cheap: Sydney is one of 10 most expensive cities in the world in which to live, costlier than London or New York. According to digital property portal Domain, rental prices in Sydney have risen by 14% in the last year in Sydney and by 9% in Melbourne. Buying is expensive too: Demographia International's housing affordability survey for 2022 found Sydney is one of most expensive cities in the world to buy a home.

One of the reasons Australia is so popular with expats is its well respected education system. There are four types of schools: free state schools, private fee-paying schools, Catholic schools and a small number of international schools. Education is managed by the country's six separate states which oversee curriculum in all types of schools. Statistics from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) show Australian students have similar attainment levels to those in the UK and US.

The Australian school year runs from January to December meaning students from the northern hemisphere may have to repeat part of the academic year, but schools generally find this is the best way to transfer.

State primary schools generally have a good reputation but a high proportion of Australians send their children to private senior schools. These vary from

Catholic schools (which tend to charge lower fees) to top-tier Sydney and Melbourne private schools where fees can be up to A\$43,000. To attend state schools, expats on temporary resident visas are charged \$5000 per year, per student.

“Around half of expats look for private education but we have recently seen more enter the state system, especially at primary level,” says Traci Crampton of Australian relocation consultancy Elite Woodhams.

State school places are determined by catchment areas so new arrivals need to find the school before looking for housing. Incoming temporary residence visa holders have to show a 12-month lease to prove they are in the catchment before being able to enrol in a school.

CHOOSING BETWEEN PRIVATE OR PUBLIC

In Sydney, most expats chose to live on the North Shore or in the eastern suburbs and the state primary schools in these areas are generally good. It’s a similar story in Melbourne’s affluent eastern and bayside suburbs, such as Kew, Hawthorn and Brighton.

State secondary education in Australia is considered less reliable than primary and many parents (around 40%) educate their children privately at this stage.

Private secondary schools are a big deal in Sydney and Melbourne, and the subject of endless discussion. The most elite schools have long waiting lists and it’s no urban myth that children are regularly registered from the maternity ward. Fees vary between around A\$20,000 and A\$43,000 and some offer boarding. Most are single sex with a few going co-ed for the senior years.

“Private schools in Sydney have the same long waiting lists as schools in the UK and, as a generalisation, it is hard to get a place, although things have eased after Covid,” says Julieanne McCartney, director of Sydney based Exec-Relocations.

“The hardest age group to place is 5-7,” says Elite Woodhams’ Crampton. “It’s easier to get high school students in who are strong academically.”

The traditional, long-established private schools in the more affluent suburbs favoured by expats are the most difficult to get into. Many of these are run along English public school lines with a strong sense of tradition, solid

“Families arrive thinking they need an IB school to get into university overseas but, after discussion with the school, they realise the VCE is easily transferable if their children take the more academic subjects”

TRACI CRAMPTON, ELITE WOODHAMS



academic results and fantastic facilities. These include Melbourne Grammar, (boys) Scotch College (boys), Ruyton (girls), PLC (girls) and Melbourne Girls Grammar in Melbourne and SCEGGS (girls), Sydney Grammar (boys) and the Scots College (boys) in Sydney.

Although most students are locals, expats usually fit in well. “Most private schools have solid expat communities and are used to families coming and going. If the school has places they welcome ex-pats for two or three years,” says Exec-Relocations McCartney.

Both public and private secondary schools work towards Australia’s end-of-school qualification at 18 – the Higher National Certificate (HNC) in Sydney and Victorian Certificate Education (VCE) in Melbourne. A minority of private schools also offer the IB as well, although take up is much smaller.

THE INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS MARKET

There are 215 World IB schools in Australia including those offering the IB diploma or middle or primary years programmes. In Sydney schools offering the IB include SCEGGS (girls), Redland (co-ed), Queenwood (girls), Trinity Grammar (boys), Barker College (co-ed in last two years of school), Ravenswood School (girls), St. Andrews Cathedral School (co-ed), Newington College (boys) and MLC (girls).

In Melbourne, the co-ed Wesley College is one of the best respected IB schools where around 45 per cent of students follow the programme. Carey Baptist Grammar, Caulfield Grammar, Geelong Grammar, MLC and St Leonards are also well known for their IB programmes, offered alongside the traditional VCE.

“Families arrive thinking they need an IB school to get into university overseas but, after discussion with the school, they realise the VCE is easily transferable if their children take the more academic subjects,” says Elite Woodhams’ Traci Crampton.

When it comes to international schools, Australia is a relatively small market. “The demand for international schools is not high because Australia offers a national

curriculum and an approach to learning that many parents consider is reputable,” says ISC Research communications director Anne Keeling.

There are 147 schools in Australia that fall into criteria of an international school, according to ISC, mostly because they offer international curricula. This predominantly includes one or more of the International Baccalaureate programmes (Primary Years Programme, Middle Years Programme, DP or CP) or Cambridge Secondary and/or Cambridge Advanced. Most international schools deliver the IB programme and are based in Sydney.

Some international schools operate bilingual systems such as the German International School in Terrey Hills in Sydney, which opened in 1989 providing English or bi-lingual education and leading to the IB Diploma. Half students come from Australia with the rest from Germany, Austria and Switzerland..

The Lycee Condorcet de Sydney, the French international school, provides a bilingual education leading to the French Baccalaureate and, unlike other schools in Australia, operates on European term dates.

The International Grammar School in Ultimo is a secular co-ed through-train school with full language immersion programmes in French, German, Italian, Spanish and Chinese from aged 3 upwards.

Sydney’s Chinese International K-6 school has a dual language programme where 50 per cent of the curriculum is delivered in Mandarin and the Japanese School runs a dual curriculum – the international division follows the NSW curriculum with daily Japanese lessons up to year 6 and the Japanese curriculum is delivered up to year 9 with daily English lessons.

Expats looking for Muslim education are well catered for at the Australian International Academy of Education, set up in 1999, with four campuses in Melbourne, Sydney, and Abu Dhabi. All are World IB schools with Arabic or Turkish language programmes.

“These international schools tend to attract the nationality of the school as they have immersive language programs,” says Exec-Relocations McCartney. •

“The demand for international schools is not high because Australia offers a national curriculum and an approach to learning that many parents consider is reputable,”

ANNE KEELING, COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR, ISC RESEARCH



CHOOSING A SCHOOL IN HONG KONG

The city offers a huge choice of quality international schools and, post-Covid, places are easier to secure, writes **Sally Robinson**.



Ten years ago finding an international school place in Hong Kong was a challenge characterised by long waiting lists and demands for hefty debentures to secure admission.

Since then, the Covid pandemic, civil unrest and the new Beijing-decreed national security laws have left Hong Kong unrecognisable from the cosmopolitan metropolis which traded on the tag “Asia’s World City”.

Extreme quarantine requirements (three weeks in a hotel at one stage) and lengthy periods of school closures have only added to Hong Kong’s woes. It’s no surprise, then, that both expats and locals have been leaving in droves: the population fell by 1.6 per cent, or 121,500 in the year to June 2022 according to government data. This marks the third consecutive year of decline and the biggest drop in the last six decades.

Although quarantine restrictions

finally lifted in late September 2022 the hangover of the last five years has been enough to discourage expat movement to the territory. Families who have recently left say they are scarred by endless school closures (some primary schools can still only open half days) and the erosion of democracy and free speech in the territory.

Attracting expats back to Hong Kong is likely to be an uphill slog according to Lee Quane, regional director for Asia of relocation company ECA International. “Companies send staff to Hong Kong as the gateway to China, but as China continues its zero covid policy there is no point recruiting. Hong Kong needs a clear exit plan.”

The territory hopes its recent International Finance Summit (November 1-2) neatly scheduled to dovetail with the return of the city’s much loved Rugby Sevens, will turn things around.



“DEBENTURES ARE A THING OF THE PAST. THE SCHOOL MAY MENTION THEM ON A WEBSITE BUT THERE ARE A LOT OF WAIVERS AND NO FAMILY SHOULD BE BUYING ONE.”

RUTH BENNY, EDUCATION CONSULTANT AND FOUNDER OF TOP SCHOOLS

For now though, most of the territory’s 61 international schools have places. Historically they were required to have no more than 30 per cent local students but this was relaxed in the pandemic. Now it is unlikely to be reinstated and the extra spaces are being filled by locals. “Demand is now from Hong Kong families and mainlanders and not from international families,” says Ruth Benny, education consultant and founder of Top Schools.

“Hong Kong is a tough market for schools to operate in right now,” says Ashwin Assomull, partner at global strategy consultancy L.E.K Consulting. “The market has been in decline for the last two years. As the economy cranks up you would expect Hong Kong to recover, but it’s a slow growth market right now.”

For families who are relocating Hong Kong international schools offer a huge choice of curriculums including Australian, British, American, German and French. Relocating families also need to consider the school’s location. Traditionally, expats have preferred to live on Hong Kong island with easy access to the Central district where most business is done and the best restaurants and shopping are located.

“The most popular schools are still the longest established ones on the island including the Chinese International School (where all pupils spend year 10 in Hangzhou), the Hong Kong International Schools (HKIS), the German Swiss International (GSIS), the Canadian International (CIS) and Kellett, the British international school,” says Benny.

“It has been a tough couple of years,” says Laura Tyson, Kellett’s director of development and community relations, “but there is a real sense of renewed optimism this term.”

Kellett was founded in 1976 by a group of parents looking for a high quality British style education and now educates 1300 pupils at a primary school on the island in Pokfulam and at a purpose-built through-train school in Kowloon Bay which opened 10 years ago. It is one of only three schools in Hong Kong to offer A levels rather than IB. Traditionally the school has had long waiting lists and, even now, the sixth form is almost at capacity and there are only a few places at the

popular Pokfulam primary school. “We have been lucky to pick up students from other schools which has helped,” says Tyson.

In the last decade a handful of new international schools, many of them UK exports of existing schools, have opened in response to the pre-Covid shortage of places. Most have been built off the island in the New Territories where there is more space, with buses bringing pupils in from the island.

The first of the new internationals was Harrow which opened in 2012, bankrolled by oil executive Daniel Chiu. The vast Georgian-style through train school opened to 1500 pupils in Tuen Mun, in the far west of the New Territories, and is popular with mainlanders and Chinese locals. It follows the British curriculum, including GCSE and A level exams and offers weekly boarding. The bus takes one hour from Central, but many families have chosen to move out to Tuen Mun.

Malvern College, another British public school offshoot, opened in 2018 in a brand new campus in the New Territories, close to the Hong Kong Chinese University. It is part of a global network of Malvern schools (others are in Egypt, Qingdao, Chengdu and Switzerland with Barbados and Tokyo due to open in 2023) and is an IB World School.

Global educator Nord Anglia

has a network of 56 international schools in 26 countries including a new stand-alone secondary school in Kwun Tung, Kowloon, which opened in 2021. It joins Nord Anglia’s two primary schools in Hong Kong and follows the English curriculum to IGCSE followed by IB in years 12 and 13. The school encourages its pupils to see themselves as global citizens and has collaborations with world leading institutions such as the Juilliard School, MIT and UNICEF.

According to ISC Research these ultra-premium school brands (often offshoots of prestigious UK independent schools) make up just over one per cent of the internationals schools market, but it’s a growing segment. Parents seek out these brands because they are known to them, but they are also popular with wealthy locals as an alternative to sending their children away to boarding school.

A “flight to quality” is occurring in many countries, including Hong Kong, says Pia Maske, research manager for East Asia at ISC Research. “Some remaining families in Hong Kong are moving to international schools that were previously full,” says Maske.

ISC Research also identifies demand from local families for a quality education at a more affordable price and says there is a market here in the near future.

Pre-Covid, there was an

acute shortage of primary school places and the in 2017 the Hong Kong Bureau of Education gave the go ahead for several new schools including Shrewsbury International. The school opened a bright new campus for 3-11 year olds in Tseung Kwan in 2018 following the English curriculum. One year later, in 2019, Wycombe Abbey, an off shoot of the highly academic UK school, opened its doors in Aberdeen. It offers a bilingual curriculum with a strong emphasis on learning Mandarin and being part of Chinese culture. According to ISC Research, the number of bilingual schools is increasing globally and they now account for one third of the international schools market.

For many families relocating to Hong Kong, the English Schools Foundation (ESF) is the first choice with 22 preschool, primary and secondary schools. Founded in 1967 when demand for English language education was growing as a result of Hong Kong’s expanding economy, it offers an English medium curriculum with students taking IGCSE exams followed by the IB Diploma. Fees are more reasonable than at some other schools, but parents say class sizes are bigger (around 30) and there can be a huge range of abilities in each class.

Many international schools in Hong Kong have traditionally

operated a debenture system, which can be costly for new arrivals. Basically parents, or their employers, have to make a lump sum payment on admission which may be refundable, depreciating or non-refundable at the end of their child’s education, depending on the school. Increasingly, these are being replaced by capital levies – annual non-refundable one off fees. “Debentures are a thing of the past,” says Benny. “The school may mention them on a website but there are a lot of waivers and no family should be buying one.” •

“IT HAS BEEN A TOUGH COUPLE OF YEARS, BUT THERE IS A REAL SENSE OF RENEWED OPTIMISM THIS TERM.”

LAURA TYSON, KELLETT’S DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT AND COMMUNITY RELATIONS



CHOOSING A SCHOOL IN SINGAPORE

Safe streets, green spaces, and a rigorous education system: Singapore has always been a magnet for international families. Now it has overtaken Hong Kong to become Asia's top financial centre (and the third largest in the world below New York and London), according to new figures from the Global Financial Centers Index. **Sally Robinson** reports.

In the last three years Singapore has seen an influx of ex-Hong Kongers driven out by the city's extreme Covid measures and stifling new national security laws. Scores of businesses have relocated, bringing their staff with them.

"Singapore managed the pandemic well," says Lee Quane, a director at global relocation consultancy ECA International. "It was good at rolling out the vaccine, had a clear plan and opened ahead of other cities in Asia."

The downside has been a marked increase in the cost of living: rent and school fees have both risen over the past 12 months. There is also increased demand for school places. Although Western expats are still coming into Singapore, ISC Research, which provides data and intelligence on the international schools' market, identifies most growth as coming from Asia, specifically China, Hong Kong, South Korea, India and Japan. Singaporean children are not permitted to attend international schools.

"Singapore has definitely benefited from Hong Kong's demise," says Ashwin Assomull, a partner at L.E.K consulting. "But the growth in education is not as strong as everyone envisaged. Enrolments are growing, but only by one of two per cent."

NEW SCHOOL OPENINGS

The last few years have been tough, but Singapore is still one of the world's most dynamic and competitive markets for K-12 international education. With over 60 international schools, it offers a diversity of curriculums and fee points. At 16+, IB is the most popular qualification but there are many good options for A levels too.

Despite the pandemic there has been considerable growth in Singapore's international school market. An influx of new schools, including three offshoots of premium British independents, all opened their doors in 2020.

Brighton College, a branch of the British public school known for its strong academics, welcomed pupils to its second partner school (the first is in Abu Dhabi) in August 2020. It offers a premium primary education (fees are SGD34,000) from nursery through to year 6.

A second UK import, the Cambridge-based Perse School, also established a primary school in 2020, following the UK's Cambridge Primary Curriculum. Its facilities are less sophisticated than at some schools, reflected in the more affordable fees (SGC25,000).

The last of the 2020 openings was North London Collegiate (NLCS) which already has schools in Jeju,



Above: Students from Nexus International

Dubai and Bangkok. Located on a swish purpose-built campus, the through-train school teaches an IB curriculum and describes itself as being for “scholars and critical thinkers”. Fees are among the most expensive in Singapore (up to SGD47,000).

“North London Collegiate has been a real success story,” says L.E.K’s Assomull. “It focuses on academic rigour which resonates with both Western ex pats and the Chinese.”

It’s a territory Dulwich College knows well. It was the first UK independent to open in Singapore in 2014 and quickly developed a reputation for strong academics. Located on a purpose-built campus in Bukit Batok, the high-end facilities command some of the most expensive fees in Singapore. Part of a network of 10 international schools in Asia, it offers a premium through-train education for 2000 students who take IGCSE and IB exams. The school is also well respected for its dual language early years programme which delivers lessons in English and Mandarin.

“BRANDED SCHOOLS ARE STILL SOMETHING EVERYONE WANTS TO GET INVOLVED IN. DEMAND FOR INTERNATIONAL K-12 EDUCATION IS GROWING AND THE PARENT SCHOOLS NEED THE INCOME.”

ASHWIN ASSOMULL, L.E.K CONSULTING

THE IMPORTANCE OF BRAND

In the next few years yet another UK import, Wellington College, is set to join the fray, developed in partnership with Singaporean billionaire Peter Lim. It joins Wellington offshoots in Thailand and China, and will cater for 2000 students following the English curriculum and offering IB.

As the new openings in Singapore attest, branded school groups are a growth area. ISC Research shows a global increase in their market share from 23 to 38 per cent in the past five years. Many are expensive but there is still strong demand – the enrolment rate at premium-fee schools has grown by 18 per cent in the last five years.

“Branded schools are still something everyone wants to get involved in,” says L.E.K’s Ashwin Assomull. “Demand for international K-12 education is growing and the parent schools need the income. The brand name gives the investor a head start: parents might not have heard of the school, but investors can refer to its academic track record. It’s a symbiotic relationship.”

New arrivals to Singapore often target the best-known long-established schools. These include the Singapore American School (SAS), Tanglin Trust, United World College of South East Asia (UWCSEA) and Dulwich College. United World College is the most international of the group, with two campuses, educating over 5000 students.

British families often head straight for Tanglin (over 50 per cent of pupils are British passport holders), famous for its lengthy waiting lists. Founded in 1925, it is the only international school in Singapore to offer both IB and A levels in the sixth form. It educates 2800 pupils from aged 3 to 18 and is one of the top performing international schools in Singapore for IB. “Our exam results last year were the highest they have ever been,” says Tom Evans, director of marketing and communications.

THE FUTURE: EXPECT MORE BILINGUAL AND AFFORDABLE OPTIONS

School reputation is very important in Singapore, says Janelle Torres, ISC’s research manager for SE Asia. “It is the reason why legacy school such as Dulwich, Tanglin Trust and UWCSEA are so popular.”

Not all new openings are British spin-offs. Nexus International, owned by Malaysia-based Taylor’s Schools, opened in 2011 and moved to an impressive new purpose-built vertical campus in Aljunied in 2020 which can accommodate 2000 pupils. Nexus offers a hybrid curriculum from early years to IGCSE and then IB diploma. The emphasis is on a flexible learning environment with open plan classrooms. The school has a strong reputation for sport, particularly swimming, thanks to its upscale aquatics centre with Olympic-size pool.

The Invictus International School, one of Singapore’s most affordable international schools (fees around SGD20,000), recently upgraded its facilities opening a new campus in 2021. The school started out as a small primary but the new location offers a K-12 education leading to IGCSE and A levels. Invictus also has an affordable bi-lingual primary school programme.

“We are seeing a greater inclination to learn Mandarin,” says L.E.K’s Assomull. “The schools with bilingual programmes are doing particularly well including the Canadian International School and Dulwich.”

One of the biggest growth areas in Singapore is in more affordable schools where fees hover around SGP\$20,000 (compared with SGP\$40,000 plus at the premium end of the market) and are popular with Chinese families.

“Mid-priced schools are a growth area in Singapore,” says L.E.K’s Assomull. “The government is encouraging this sector because it feels the market is dominated by the premium brands, which not everyone can afford. These less expensive schools get some amazing academic results.”

More affordable options include 5 Steps Academy, DPS International School, Invictus, the Grange, GIG International and Middleton International School. The latter delivers a bilingual education and is owned by education group Eton House, which has 130 schools spread across 11 countries. It has three campuses in Singapore including the West Coast campus which opened in 2022 offering nursery to grade five and the main Tampines campus up to year 12.

One World International in Jurong also offers more affordable fees and operates a 30 per cent nationality cap ensuring a truly diverse student body. It also has Chinese bilingual programme from grades 1 to 5 and a curriculum that blends the IB primary years with IGCSE and the IB diploma.

“It’s definitely possible to find a well-rounded international education at pocket friendly prices in Singapore,” says Anne Murphy, an education consultant at ITS Education Asia.

The move to more affordable schools reflects a global trend, according to ISC Research, which cites a 19 per cent increase in students enrolled in mid-market fee international schools between 2017 and 2022. Several factors have contributed to the growth including the reduction in expat benefits, which often included school fees, and more demand from host nation families. “The international schools’ market is broadening to meet the needs of a wider range of students,” says a recent ISC Research white paper. •

“MID-PRICED SCHOOLS ARE A GROWTH AREA IN SINGAPORE. THE GOVERNMENT IS ENCOURAGING THIS SECTOR BECAUSE IT FEELS THE MARKET IS DOMINATED BY THE PREMIUM BRANDS, WHICH NOT EVERYONE CAN AFFORD. THESE LESS EXPENSIVE SCHOOLS GET SOME AMAZING ACADEMIC RESULTS.”

ASHWIN ASSOMULL, L.E.K CONSULTING



Students from Tanglin Trust



Choosing a school in Malaysia

Malaysia's private education market is due to reach RM19 billion by 2026, with much of the growth coming from local families choosing an international education. **Sally Robinson** reports.

Back in 2012 the government changed the rule that only 40 per cent of international school students could be Malaysian, as part of its economic programme to make Malaysia a regional education hub. This altered the demographic of most international schools who now have at least 50 per cent local students.

Despite the estimated growth, enrolments in K-12 education has slowed in recent years, but there is still demand for quality, affordable education.

Post pandemic, Malaysia's economy is improving and international families are returning. According to the Malaysia Expatriate Talent Service Centre, which processes employment passes for expats, there was a 28 percent increase in applications in 2021 over the previous year, a trend that is likely to continue.

Malaysia is one of the most favoured destinations for international families in South East Asia, according to global mobility specialist ECA International. "This is partly due to its social and geographic diversity as well as its proximity to Singapore," says ECA's regional director, Lee Quane.

The company's MyExpatriate Market Pay Survey shows Malaysia is the cheapest place in Asia to hire expats. "Salaries are lower than in other locations such as China, Hong Kong and Singapore, partly due to Malaysia's low cost of living, but they are still attractive to employees," says Quane.

The housing rental market is still in recovery and there is plenty of stock in popular ex-pat areas such as Damansara Heights and Mount Kiara. Rents have decreased between 10 and 20 per cent over the last decade due to the reduction in expat benefits, fewer arrivals and oversupply.

CHOOSING A CURRICULUM

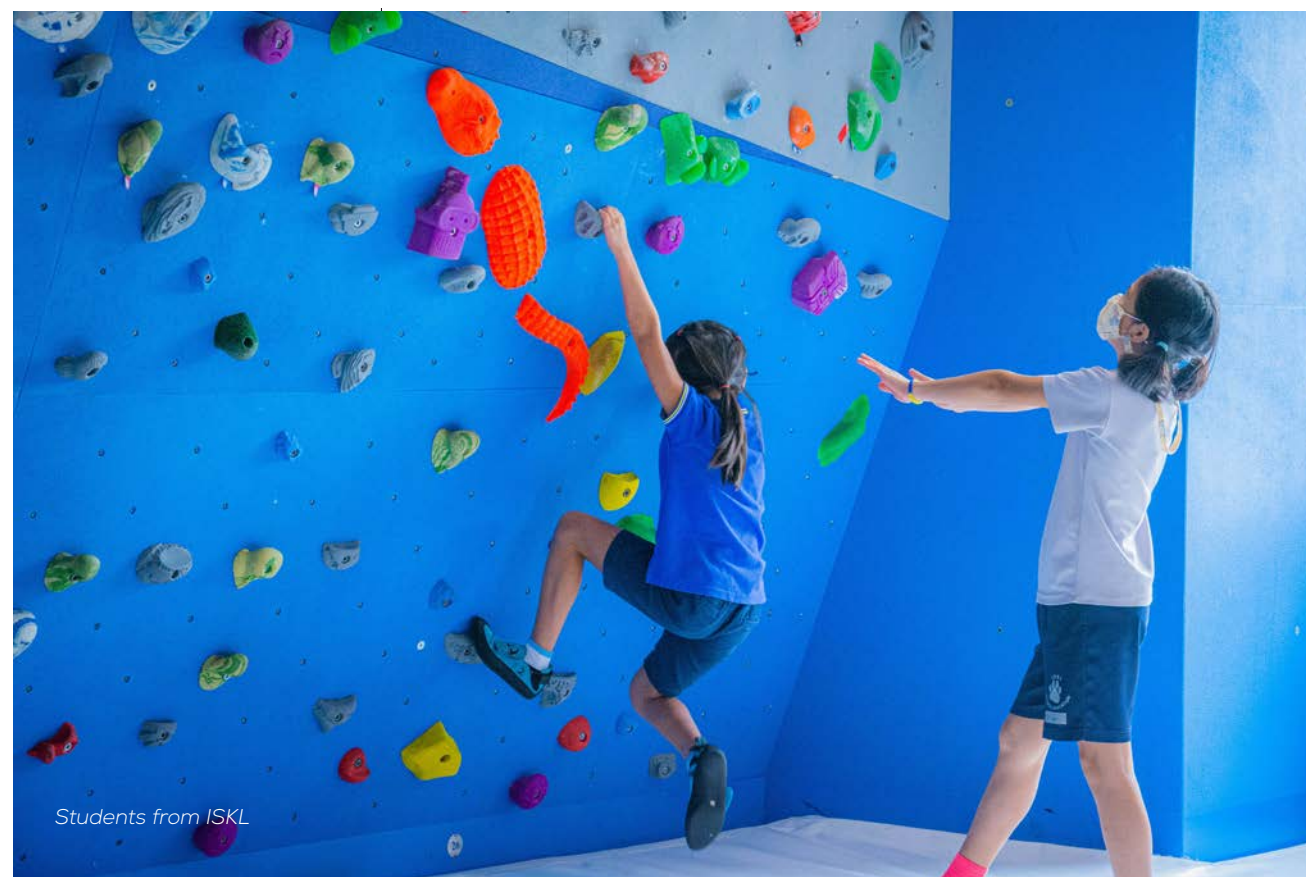
According to Malaysian education consultancy schooladvisor.my, there are 170 international schools in 16 cities in Malaysia with a wide range of fee points. Most are in Kuala Lumpur, Penang or Selangor and some of the newer premium schools offer boarding.

Kuala Lumpur is home to most international schools with the best known located in the popular ex-pat areas of Mount Kiara and Bangsar. In recent years, international schools have opened campuses in Johor Bahru, a special economic zone close to the Singapore border. “It is an attractive residential location for commuters and remote workers who benefit from higher salaries in Singapore and Malaysia’s lower cost of living,” says ECAs Quane.

The British curriculum is the most widely followed in Malaysia’s international schools, but there are many others on offer from Indian and French to German and American. Post Covid, there are plenty of school places, even in traditionally over-subscribed schools. According to Ken Research, private schools are struggling to increase enrolments due to increasing competition and decreasing birth rates.”

The premium schools, charging the highest fees, include the through-train Alice Smith School in Kuala Lumpur, the British International School of Kuala Lumpur, part of the Nord Anglia group, and a clutch of British public school offshoots including Repton, Marlborough and Charterhouse.

Alice Smith School was the first British international school in Malaysia, founded in 1946, and known for its sense of community. It has a spacious primary campus and a new purpose-built secondary campus and follows the British curriculum to IGCSE and A level. “There is a good mix of ex-pat and local children at the school so it feels diverse but also familiar as many



Students from ISKL

teachers are from the UK,” says one recently arrived parent. “Since Covid the numbers are lower and we had no issues getting a place.”

The popular Garden International School is the largest private co-educational school in Malaysia (educating 2000 students) is a respected alternative for families living in the affluent Mount Kiara area looking for the British curriculum. Established in 1951, it one of the first schools in Malaysia to cater for ex-pats and still has high levels of British teaching staff. With over 65 nationalities, it is known for its inclusive community.

The British International school in Selangor, about 40 kilometres from the city centre, opened in 2009 and also follows the British curriculum. It educates around 1200 students from 2-18 years and is part of the Nord Anglia group which has 78 premium schools in 31 countries.

For families from the US, the International School of Kuala Lumpur, established in 1965 as a non-profit American school, is often the first choice. It delivers a blend of US and international curriculums and was Malaysia’s first accredited

World IB school. In 2018 it moved to a new 25-hectare campus in Ampang with capacity for 1700 students from early years up.

Many Australian families choose the Australian International School, established in 2000 in the MINES Resort City as the southern end of Kuala Lumpur, around 40 minutes from the centre. It follows the Australian curriculum leading to the New South Wales Higher School Certificate.

AFFORDABLE OPTIONS

More affordable school options include Cempaka International School in Damansara Heights, popular with locals; GEMS International School; Sunway International School, which combines the Canadian curriculum with the IB and Taylor’s International.

The least expensive schools include Wesley Methodist College which has schools in Kuala Lumpur and Penang, and St John’s International.

The more affordable schools tend to employ locally-trained teachers and have more local students, while the premium schools usually employ

international staff and a more international student population.

Most growth is coming from locals looking for mid-market schools. “An increasing number of parents want an international education at an affordable price,” says ISC Research’s Janelle Torres.

“During the pandemic parents who were financially impacted transferred their children to schools with lower fees. Others transferred from national schools to the more affordable international schools, which offered better online learning,” says Torres.

Demand is also coming from other Asian counties. Prior to the pandemic Malaysian international schools were getting more enquiries from Japan, South Korea, Hong Kong, China, India and Bangladesh. “With borders now open demand from these countries is likely to continue,” says ISC Research’s Torres.

As in other Asian cities there has been an influx of UK branded schools including Marlborough, Repton, Charterhouse, Epsom and, the latest, Stonyhurst. In exchange for premium fees, these schools offer superior facilities, sophisticated

extra curricula programmes and the opportunity to board.

Marlborough college Malaysia was one of the first to open in Johor Bahru, Southern Malaysia’s fast-growing economic zone 20km from the border with Singapore. The purpose built 90-acre site opened in 2012, complete with golf driving range, lake for water sports and organic farm. The K-12 school offers boarding for senior years where students take IGCSE exams followed by the IB.

THE GROWTH IN BRANDED EDUCATION

In 2020 Repton International opened, a rebranding of the Excelsior International school, on a 20-hectre forest site in Johor Bahru. Repton carried out a major refurbishment and delivers a curriculum leading to IGCSE followed by A levels and IB in the sixth form.

“International schools have established campuses in Johor Bahru in recent years due to its proximity to Singapore and the large expat community who work there,” says Quane.

Epsom College opened in 2014, the first international branch of Epsom College in Surrey. It is a boarding and day school located on 50-acre campus one hours’ drive south of Kuala Lumpur in Bandar Enstek, 15 minutes from the airport. Students take IGCSE and A level exams.

Last year Charterhouse International School opened a sixth form college close to the centre of the city and premium residential area Sri Hartamas. Pupils study the A level Cambridge curriculum in the purpose built “university inspired” campus in classes of no more than 12 pupils.

The latest of the UK branded schools to expand into Malaysia is the more affordable Stonyhurst International School in Penang which opened in September 2022. The K-12 school says it will build enrolments in phases and will eventually have 1200 pupils including over 300 boarders.

“Reputation tends to be the deciding factor of parents enrolling their children in international schools in Malaysia. Families who can afford it choose schools with long-standing reputations,” says ISC Research’s Torres. ●

“Reputation tends to be the deciding factor of parents enrolling their children in international schools in Malaysia. Families who can afford it choose schools with long-standing reputations.”

JANELLE TORRES, ISC RESEARCH

Below: Students from Marlborough College



INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITIES MAKE THE GRADE

International university league tables are still dominated by the UK and the US, but tertiary institutions from Asia to Australia are increasingly offering a quality alternative. **Marianne Curphey** reports.

The Times Higher Education's 'World University Rankings 2023' assessed 1,799 universities in 104 countries across 13 measures focusing on teaching, research, knowledge transfer and international outlook.

The global top ten comes as little surprise. Some of the longest established US and UK universities continue to dominate the best universities list in this, the largest, international university comparison. Yet developments further down the rankings show how school-leavers today in international and local schools have far more choice when considering their higher education options around the world.

This is good news all round given the value of international collaboration and experience to thriving individuals, businesses and economies.

THE SHIFTING AXIS OF EXCELLENCE

The best universities are responding to today's ongoing geopolitical shifts and turbulence. The big story for 2022's international university rankings is the pandemic's impact on both teaching and admission, notes THE.

African universities, for example, are growing in influence and impact, offering more options for students in the process. Five countries enter the top 200 for the first time: Zambia, Namibia, Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Mauritius. Seventeen African countries also now feature in the ranking compared with nine in 2018, with 25 universities make their ranking debut this year.

Africa's biggest score increase in THE's measures came in the number of citations. "A lot of local researchers were engaged at the start of the pandemic to finish

off projects that global experts couldn't travel for," Gordon Adomdza, Associate Professor of Entrepreneurship and Innovation at Ashesi University in Ghana, told the THE.

"I experienced this myself. So that could have increased involvement in research by local researchers, hence the uptick in citations. The real test is if it sustains post-pandemic."

Nigeria has seen the biggest rise in its scores, rising from an average of 27.9 to 31.5. It has overtaken Egypt to claim second place. Twelve universities in Nigeria – twice as many as last year – are now ranked

In Oceania, universities here have outperformed those in North America to secure the highest average overall score based on universities ranked each year since 2018. Australia achieved the highest average performance score, with the University of Melbourne (33 in



WORLD'S TOP TEN UNIVERSITIES 2023

1. University of Oxford
2. Harvard University
3. University of Cambridge
3. Stanford University
5. Massachusetts Institute of Technology
6. California Institute of Technology
7. Princeton University
8. University of California, Berkeley
9. Yale University
10. Imperial College, London

Source: Times Higher Education's 'World University Rankings 2023' <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings/2023/world-ranking>

TOP TEN UNIVERSITIES IN ASIA (2023 world rank in brackets)

1. Tsinghua University (16)
2. Peking University (17)
3. National University of Singapore (19)
4. University of Hong Kong (31)
5. Nanyang Technological University, Singapore (36)
6. The University of Tokyo (39)
7. Chinese University of Hong Kong (45)
8. Seoul National University (56)
9. The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (58)
10. Fudan University (51)

Source: Times Higher Education's 'World University Rankings 2023' <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings/2023/world-ranking>

the global ranking) in the top spot, followed by Monash University (44 in the global ranking). The country is increasingly attractive to international students, to the cost of universities in the US and UK.

Universities in Asia also fared particularly well, especially on international outlook. Together the figures suggest the economic pivot to Asia is also well underway now for tertiary education options. While Japan is the most-represented nation again this year (118 institutions, up from 116 last year), rising standards and demographic trends means it now has only one university in the regional top 10 (University of Tokyo) compared with two in 2021. Eight are now in the top 100 universities in Asia, down from 14 in 2020.

The global and regional rankings suggest that increasing competition, boosted by geopolitical shifts and one-off events, are bidding up the quality of offering in international higher education.

The expansion of world-class universities to more countries is having "a slight crowd-out effect in relation to US universities", commented Simon Marginson, Director of the Centre for Global Higher Education at the University of Oxford, in the THE. "The growing number of excellent universities outside of the US is causing a small relative decline in reputation, but this is not because the quality of American universities

themselves is impacted.

"There's no evidence that US research is weakening in an absolute sense, or US universities are in any way in decline." As the global rankings indeed show, "This continues to be the most prestigious system in the world."

STUDENTS STAYING CLOSER TO HOME?

With the quality of universities boosted across the board, some of the traditional reasons for seeking undergraduate study abroad may no longer be as relevant as they once were, including for third-country nationals who may consider returning to their home country to study for a degree.

So, is the appeal of an international degree on the wane? Figures from Universities UK released after the summer A level results show how the number of international students is yet to fully recover after Covid. But what do these trends mean for all-important knowledge sharing, cross-border collaboration, global citizenship and cultural awareness – all critical for 21st century challenges like climate change, social justice and what it means to be human in a digital age?

International students – already well-educated, culturally aware, often at least bilingual and recognisably entrepreneurial by the goal of studying abroad – make valuable contributions to economies and businesses around the world.

For every 14 international students in the UK, there's a £1mn benefit to local economy. At its core, the UK Government's policy paper, 'International Education Strategy: global potential, global growth' has the goal of increasing the number of international higher education students hosted in the UK to 600,000 per year by 2030.

"In sharing knowledge, skills and innovation with international partners around the world, we can also generate opportunities to help raise education standards both at home and around the world," it says, recognising the role of collaboration and knowledge transfer across borders in responding to shared challenges like climate change, as well as the quantifiable financial benefits.

Alongside perhaps temporary changes to the global mobility of international students, a study by graduate employer branding expert Universum shows the appetite for international careers has also been dented by uncertainty in recent years. This again suggests international Gen Z talent is hunkering down – at least for now.

Given that most new graduates regard themselves as 'globetrotting', the consultancy is confident that global careers will be back on the agenda. For now, vice-chancellors and boards are upping their game in the face of geopolitical headwinds around student visas on hot topics like wellbeing, equity and inclusion, safeguarding and free speech, as well as the quality of their accommodation and all-round student experience.

Universities like Tokyo University are seeking to attract a dwindling number of younger people in these more travel-averse times. It is looking to offer more undergraduate courses in English alongside opportunities to transfer and finish degrees in Japan.

Students at university in their home countries can also benefit from international experience through exchange programmes like Erasmus in the EU and the Turing Scheme, the UK's global programme for studying, working and living abroad that offers once-in-a-lifetime opportunities for personal and professional development for students, as well as other scholarships.

WHAT DO GRADUATE EMPLOYERS LOOK FOR?

As well as the course, location, affordability and all-round experience, employability is also a key factor in choosing a university. The latest 'Global Employability University Ranking and Survey' (GEURS) run by higher education consultancy Emerging and published by THE defines employability as the combination of six drivers: internationality, academic excellence, specialisation, graduate skills, focus on work expertise and digital performance.

Employers' priorities have shifted since 2018 to the latest study in 2021 from academic excellence to graduate skills. Digital performance is also on the rise. For now, the top three universities for employability are in the US, despite the shifts outlined in THE and GEURS identifying "rapid global diversification of top universities and countries when measured by employability."

"When it comes to deciding where to study, employability is becoming an increasingly important factor," says the study. "Quite simply, students and parents want to know that the often-high costs of a degree-level education will lead to a beneficial outcome when it comes to stepping onto, and climbing, the career ladder.

"India's universities see a clear rise for the first time in a number of years thanks to the rise of soft skills and digital literacy and technical and research specialisation. Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Delhi holds on to 27th place and all other universities ranked last year (six total) climb an average of 20 places in the table. Bangalore University (249th) enters the ranking for the first time."

With so much on offer when choosing a university, students today really do have a world of opportunity. •

"In sharing knowledge, skills and innovation with international partners around the world, we can also generate opportunities to help raise education standards both at home and around the world"

UK GOVERNMENT'S POLICY PAPER, 'INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION STRATEGY: GLOBAL POTENTIAL, GLOBAL GROWTH'

EUROPE'S TOP TEN UNIVERSITIES 2023 (2023 world rank in brackets)

1. University of Oxford
2. University of Cambridge
3. Imperial College, London
4. ETH Zurich
5. UCL
6. University of Edinburgh
7. Technical University of Munich
8. LMU Munich
9. King's College London
10. London School of Economics and Political Science

Source: Times Higher Education's 'World University Rankings 2023' <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/student/best-universities/best-universities-europe>

TOP TEN COUNTRIES FOR UNIVERSITY EMPLOYABILITY

1. USA
2. France
3. UK
4. Germany
5. China
6. Canada
7. Japan
8. Australia
9. Switzerland
10. Netherlands

Source: GEURS 2021 <https://www.employability-ranking.com/ranking>

Eight things to bear in mind when choosing a university for your globally mobile teen

Expat families often face difficult choices when their children reach educational milestones – at 11 when joining secondary education, at 16 when considering A Levels, International Baccalaureate Diploma and other qualifications, and at 18 when looking for suitable universities and further education colleges for tertiary education, writes **Marianne Curphey**.

Here are the considerations that a parent and young adult need to think through particularly when choosing to study at a university in a country where your family is not currently living.

1. THE REPUTATION OF THE UNIVERSITY

Many parents are keen for their children to have the kudos of a university that is world-renown and has a reputation for academic excellence.

The Times Higher Education World University Rankings 2023 includes more than 1,600 universities across 99 countries and territories, making them the largest and most diverse university rankings to date.

Among the UK higher education institutions, eight UK universities are featured in the top 50 global rankings. Along with the University of Oxford, which has just been named the best university in the world by the World Academic Summit and the University of Cambridge, UK universities offer fantastic tertiary education opportunities. Parents need to be clear about the difference in the UK between The Russell Group, whose 24 members are world-class, research-intensive universities, and Metropolitan Universities, which tend to offer more vocational courses and accept lower grades.

In the US, the Forbes list of America's top colleges lists Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) as the best followed by Stanford University and University of California Berkeley.

The World University Rankings in 2022 placed the University of Oxford in the UK as its top global university, followed by the California Institute of Technology and Harvard University in third place. Two Chinese universities, Peking and Tsinghua, made the top 20 rankings in 2022.

2. THE STRUCTURE OF THE COURSE

Courses vary widely and your teen may have a clear idea of the subject they wish to cover, but they will also need to research the details and modular structure of the course. Some courses are more practical than others, but if you are looking for a high-ranking university degree, then those institutions that have research facilities are likely to score highest in the rankings and require more intense academic work.

Many modern degree level courses are structured in terms of modules, which may be examined by traditional exams or by assessed dissertations or other pieces of work over the three years. It is possible in some humanities courses to be examined almost completely by coursework rather than timed exams. Universities have also embedded coursework such as presenting or hosting seminars into the curriculum in order to help students develop transferable skills which will be useful in the workplace.

Medical and veterinary courses often require students to pass a high threshold for first year exams in order to continue into the second and third years. Generally speaking, a Bachelor degree runs for three years, while a Masters lasts one year.



“Universities are aware that accommodation is a particularly important issue for international students. This has led to a lot of purpose-built student flats close to many of the campuses.”

3. POST-DEGREE EMPLOYABILITY

Having a degree from a prestigious university can certainly boost your career prospects. These days, however, universities are aware that it is very expensive to study at degree level and know that students want more information and support in order to access top-level graduate roles when they leave.

For this reason, top universities place a great deal of emphasis on post-degree employability. They offer add-ons such as language courses and careers help in order to help students stand out. Good universities will also have careers advisers and will incorporate transferable skills practice into the degree in order to prepare students for corporate life. Many offer work placements, either in the holidays or for one semester. It is also often possible to spend a year working at a partner university, or in industry as work experience. Sometimes this equates to an extra year of the degree, and sometimes it is incorporated into the three year undergraduate degree.

4. THE ACCOMMODATION & FACILITIES

Universities are aware that accommodation is a particularly important issue for international students. This has led to a lot of purpose-built student flats close to many of the campuses. In the UK, for example, many Russell Group universities guarantee that overseas students will be able to live in university-owned accommodation for the full length of their course. This promise is not always made to home students although many offer accommodation for first year students. Universities also recognise that students coming from

abroad may not go home at every holiday between the semesters. For this reason, accommodation that is offered to foreign students tends to provide a longer lease (eg 42 weeks of the year) to allow for this.

In order to ensure that you qualify for the university-owned accommodation it is important to apply by the deadlines. In the UK this is September before term starts.

When considering accommodation think about what sort of accommodation you want – historic or modern? One will be atmospheric and architecturally interesting, but a more modern, purpose built accommodation block may be better designed for student use with more communal areas. Broadband and wi-fi are usually included in the cost of the room, and you will have the choice of catered halls or self-catered accommodation. If your teen chooses shared self-catered accommodation they may be required to clean their own bathroom and to help keep the communal areas clean and tidy as many university flats do not provide a cleaning or housekeeping service. They may also need to share laundry facilities.

In the UK, accommodation is usually of mixed gender – if this is an issue you can contact the university and ask what options they have available for single-sex accommodation.

Some rooms are ensuite, or even self-contained flats, but depending on your budget you may wish to opt for shared facilities and kitchens, as this will be cheaper. It is also a good way to meet people and to socialise. Catering facilities may be reduced over holiday periods, particularly Christmas, and this is something to bear in mind if you won't be going home at those times.

Another important point to bear in mind is whether the university is campus-based or part of a city. Many universities are based on their own purpose-built campuses, with teaching, accommodation and leisure facilities onsite. Others are spread across different parts of the city and you may need to travel between departments and accommodation but you have the benefit of being in the heart of the city.

5. THE FEES & OVERALL COSTS

Tuition fees vary from one university to another and whether your family counts as domiciled in that jurisdiction. For example, home students studying in the UK have their tuition fees capped at £9,250 but foreign students pay much more.

For example, Oxford University explains that course fees cover the provision of tuition, supervision, academic services and facilities by the University (including your department or faculty) and the colleges, but do not include residential or other living costs. If you are an EU national and do not live in the UK then you are likely to be charged fees as an overseas student.

This means your annual tuition fee will be much higher than a home student and could vary from £25,000 to £45,000 depending on the course and university you have chosen. You will not be eligible for a tuition fee loan from the UK government and will have to fund the fees upfront or in termly instalments. It can be cheaper to pay upfront as you may be able to negotiate a discount.

Your fee status is based upon where you usually live and your nationality, so it is very important to think about this before you apply. Some families choose to relocate back to their home country in the years leading up to their children's tertiary education.

In the US it is very important to plan how you will

fund your course and living expenses if you are attending as an international rather than a home student. In order to satisfy U.S. Immigration requirements you will need to show that you have budgeted and can afford your tuition fees and living costs for the course.

6. THE APPLICATION PROCESS

The university year starts at different times around the world and this is a particular consideration if you or your teen is planning to start an undergraduate degree in a different country.

In the UK the first academic semester starts in September, but in Australia the academic undergraduate year starts in March, and in the US the academic year typically starts in August. Bear in mind that you will need to allow time to move into your accommodation and complete any entry visa requirements if you are moving jurisdictions for study.

It is also important to check academic entry requirements, as many universities are flexible around secondary qualifications such as A Level exams in the UK and the European Baccalaureate diploma.

If you want to study at a UK university you will need to apply via the UCAS (Universities and Colleges Admission Service) website and all of the process can be done online. When you are researching your course you need to check whether the university requires additional tests and interview. For example, medical schools, veterinary courses and Oxford and Cambridge Universities require students to sit assessments in September and to attend interviews before being offered a place to study which is conditional on their exam results the following August. For US universities you may need to take a Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) or American College Testing (ACT) and to write an essay as part of your pre-application process.

7. YOUR PREDICTED GRADES

If you have already received your grades you can apply via UCAS in the UK. If, however, you are yet to take your exams you can apply via UCAS and may be offered a place based on you meeting the course requirement grades. The UCAS form officially has to be submitted by January 25, 2023 for entry into the academic year of September 2023. In practice most schools encourage their UK students to submit their application well before Christmas.

Grade offers differ between universities and courses, with Oxford and Cambridge requiring three A* grades for many courses, and Russell Group universities asking for three A grades. For this reason, UK schools often advise students to have a first choice university with an aspirational grade goal, and an “insurance” university which requires lower grade attainments. If you fail to make the grades for both your first choice and your insurance university you may be able to find a place on a UK university course via Clearing. This takes place immediately after A Level results (which for the next cohort will be August 17, 2023). Postgraduate students can apply directly to the chosen university if they meet the set requirements.

It used to be the case that some UK universities would give prospective students unconditional offers if they made them their first choice. This was seen as demotivating by the UK government and is now strongly discouraged.

While your predicted or achieved grades are very

important, they are only one part of the picture that universities build up. In the UK and US, admissions are also based on community involvement, leadership and distinction in extracurricular activities, and personal qualities and character. References from teachers and schools form part of the assessment process, as do a student's own personal statement and non-academic interests and achievements.

8. YOUR TRAVEL COSTS

For international families, an important consideration is travel to and from home, or wherever the rest of the family is going to be based while the student is at university.

Studying abroad may mean extra costs such as flights, trains and taxis, and these are important to build into your overall budget. If the wider family is planning to come and help the student settle in, they may need to book accommodation near to the university for a week or two. This tends to book up quickly so it is a good idea to organise it as early as you can.

Other additional costs will include registering for student visas, allowing for the cost of phone calls home (although Skype and FaceTime are free with a broadband connection) and buying railcards or transport passes.

Health insurance is an important consideration wherever you are studying, as is insurance for your possessions, particularly laptops and phones. Fluctuating currency rates can make it more difficult for students to budget effectively, and they will need to set up a new bank account in the country where they are planning to study. You can save on travel costs by signing up to airline points and rewards cards and checking term dates in order to book flights home as early as possible in order to take advantage of discounted rates. ●

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