

## Effort of Hong Kong SRA to promote University Mobility

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The Hong Kong SAR has 8 major higher education institutions (HEIs), namely :

The University of Hong Kong (HKU),  
The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK),  
The Polytechnic University of Hong Kong (PolyU),  
City University of Hong Kong (CityU),  
Hong Kong Baptist University (HKBU),  
Lingnan College (LC),  
Institute of Education (I-Ed), and  
The Open University of Hong Kong.

With the exception of perhaps the Open University, most HEIs are engaged in student and staff exchanges in varying degrees, with the older HEIs much more active due to their long history and established academic links. However, similar to many other countries or territories in their attempt to promote university mobility, various key impediments are quite obvious and need to be resolved.

### 1. Language barrier

This is not a problem for English-speaking students/staff exchanges as most HEIs in Hong Kong SAR are normally using English as the teaching medium, except perhaps for Chinese and Japanese studies. HKU has officially stated that English is the official language for teaching and examination, and incoming students from non-English-speaking countries or territory are required to attain a certain standard in the English language so that their studies would not be hindered by the lack of proficiency in English. Exchange students/staff from overseas can also easily get around in the community using English.

## **2. Resource and Funding**

The degrees to which local HEIs deploy their internal resources for student/staff exchange programs varies substantially among various HEIs. Most universities practice the "mutual fee-waiver" agreement, while the costs for travel and subsistence would be partly borne by the students and partly by the institutions. In some instances, international and/or local corporations might sponsor "exchange scholarships" under a "Study Abroad" scheme. In some HEIs such as HKU, annual revenues generated from its HKU Foundation for Education also provide funds to support its "HKU Worldwide" scheme for student and staff exchanges.

## **3. Credit Recognition and Transfer**

Though not all HEIs in Hong Kong SAR are using credit unit systems, the majorities are credit-based or modularized, and with individual policies and practice to permit transferability of credit among the various credit unit systems of different HEIs, local and overseas.

Within the territory, there is the common practice among local universities of "exemption", "advanced standing" (normally means admission to the second year of a program on the basis of a previous qualification). Although credit transfer policies among HEIs are comparable, there is no common credit-transfer system similar to ECTS, nor any published guidelines or regulations, especially for overseas exchanges to follow. Credit recognition and transfer hence remains significantly dependent on negotiations between institutions when exchange agreements are discussed. The Hong Kong SAR's University Funding Council and HUCOM (Heads of Universities Committee) have attempted to explore the practicality of credit transfer among the various credit unit systems of local HEIs, with a view to arriving at an effective conversion among different systems; the results has yet to be seen.

## **4. Accommodation**

This is perhaps the major impediment for incoming overseas exchange students due to the insufficiency/lack of student accommodations among local HEIs and the high costs of off-campus accommodation. The University Grants Committee now encourages and supports HEIs' efforts to build more student residence, some even specifically include graduate houses and international houses to provide more housing for international student exchanges.

On-campus student residence facilities provide not only reasonably-priced and convenient accommodation for the incoming exchange students, but also promote the venue for the mixing of students from different cultures, countries, and educational and/or political backgrounds, thus enhancing

communication and interpersonal skills, as well as fostering mutual understandings of our young people and future generations.

#### **5. Cultural Diversity and Integration**

Hong Kong SAR is a multi-culture city, a melting-pot of the oriental and western culture and traditions. Visiting students and staff will find it very easy to adapt to the new environment and integrate into the academic and societal community,. Although Hong Kong appears to be culturally a highly integrated society, there are various locations in the territory where one can find some special spots of a particular cultural characteristics.

#### **6. Curriculum and Academic Calendar**

The academic year of all HEIs in Hong Kong SAR starts in September, either the first, the second or the third week, and comprises two semesters each with either 13, 14 or 15 weeks. The end-of-semester examination is not a common practice at present, but as more and more HEIs moved into the credit unit system, it is expected to become a general practice in higher education in the future. The curriculum designs and contents are exclusively within the academic autonomy of the Departments and Faculties, but professional curricula are under the scrutiny of the local, and also overseas in some instances, professional bodies and there are periodic accreditation visits by the local professionals as well as industrialists so as to assure an international benchmark and professional standards.

#### **7. Summary**

Because of its uniqueness in being a mixed-culture community, geographically a gateway into China, and academically a bridge of the West and the East, the Hong Kong SAR is an ideal site for student exchanges especially those who like to gain exposure and experience in Asian studies and in culture and civilization. Although, diversities exist among local HEIs in Hong Kong, in terms of history, credit unit and credit transfer systems, objectives and goals in international student exchanges, accommodation provision, curriculum, etc., most HEIs are interested in internationalization and student/staff exchanges. A common set of guidelines on recognition of credits and credit transfer is crucial in promoting university mobility and regional collaboration.