

# UCAS Tariff for HKDSE

## Introduction

The Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE) Examination has been introduced since 2012 to replace the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (HKCEE) and the Hong Kong Advanced Level Examination (HKALE). It aims at assessing the attainment of Secondary 6 students who have completed a full-time three-year senior secondary curriculum.

## Grading scale of HKDSE

The HKDSE comprises three categories of subjects: Category A New Senior Secondary (NSS) subjects, Category B Applied Learning subjects and Category C Other Language subjects. The results of the NSS subject examinations are reported in five levels (1 to 5), with level 5 being the highest. Achievement below level 1 is designated as “unclassified”. To ensure recognition and differentiation of outstanding candidates, level 5\*\* and level 5\* are awarded to the highest-achieving level 5 candidates and the next top level 5 candidates respectively.

In its endeavor to promote recognition of the HKDSE for further studies overseas, the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (HKEAA) has been working closely with renowned international agencies to conduct benchmarking studies of the standard of the HKDSE.

## Benchmarking study of HKDSE

In 2009, a study was conducted in collaboration with the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) to benchmark the standard of HKDSE with the GCE A level. Upon the completion of the study, UCAS announced in January 2010 the inclusion of level 3 to level 5\* of the HKDSE Category A NSS subjects in the UCAS Tariff system, which allows comparison of standards between the HKDSE and other international qualifications, such as the Advanced Placement Programme (AP) and the International Baccalaureate (IB). This has enhanced understanding of the standard of the HKDSE for admission to different higher education institutions.

After the completion of the inaugural HKDSE Examination, the HKEAA continued to work with UCAS to study the performance of the first cohort and review UCAS Tariff point for level 5\*\*. In December 2012, the UCAS Board approved the Tariff recommendation for level 5\*\* of the 24 HKDSE Category A NSS subjects.

## Results of the study

Expert groups of UCAS were formed to study the standards of attainment at different HKDSE levels. The study on HKDSE standard was based on the curriculum and assessment guides, the sample assessment materials, pilot scripts and live scripts of candidates. UCAS Tariff points were then allocated to each level, indicating that the standard of level 3 to level 5\* of the HKDSE is comparable to grades E to A\* of the GCE A level while the Tariff point awarded for level 5\*\* is slightly higher than those awarded for grade A\* in GCE A level.

The UCAS Board approved Tariff recommendations for 24 Category A NSS subjects of the HKDSE. An overall subject grade is awarded to 23 of the HKDSE subjects, except for Mathematics, which carries a unique structure comprising the compulsory part and the extended part.

Mathematics is one of the compulsory subjects for university admission in Hong Kong and students who intend to pursue further studies in Mathematics or related disciplines are expected to take a module in the more advanced extended part in addition to the compulsory part which covers fundamental concepts and knowledge of the subject. Their overall performance is indicated by combining the Tariff points awarded to both parts.

## The UCAS Tariff

It is a points system developed and used by UCAS of the United Kingdom (UK) to indicate the standards of various qualifications recognised for applications to higher education institutions. With reference to the UCAS Tariff points awarded, universities and higher education institutions in the UK are able to compare the different types of accredited qualifications available. Hence the UCAS Tariff is used as a common scale for universities in the UK to develop admission policies for different courses and programmes.

Following a set of procedures, a team of experts from UCAS, universities and colleges work together and make collaborative professional judgment on how well specific qualifications help prepare students for higher education. The expert group recommends Tariff points to each level of attainment for the approval of the UCAS Board. For details about UCAS Tariff, please refer to [wwwucas.co.uk](http://wwwucas.co.uk)

## The UCAS Tariff value for HKDSE (2012)

UCAS Tariff points for 23 Category A New Senior Secondary subjects, except Mathematics:

Level	Tariff	Remarks
5**	145	Slightly higher than grade A* in GCEA level examination
5*	130	Between grades A and A* in GCEA level examination
5	120	Comparable to grade A in GCEA level examination
4	80	Comparable to grade C in GCEA level examination
3	40	Comparable to grade E in GCEA level examination

UCAS Tariff points allocated to Mathematics:

\*The overall performance is indicated by the combined Tariff points to both parts.

Level	Compulsory Part	Extended Part	Remarks
5**	65	80	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>145 points (65+80) for 5** in both compulsory and extended parts – slightly higher than grade A* in GCEA level examination</li> <li>120 points (60+60) for 5* in the compulsory part and 5 in the extended part – comparable to grade A in GCEA level examination</li> </ul>
5*	60	70	
5	45	60	
4	35	50	
3	25	40	

## Comparing HKDSE with other international qualifications

For higher education institutions in the UK, the UCAS Tariff is a useful reference for understanding the standards of qualifications from different education systems. With reference to the Tariff points assigned, applications for admission to UK universities can be assessed on a common scale.

For other international higher education sectors, the UCAS Tariff is also an important reference for selection of suitable students with required qualifications.

Tariff points awarded to major qualifications offered by different countries are shown in Table I.

## Specific entry requirements

The inclusion of HKDSE in the UCAS Tariff system has greatly enhanced understanding of the standard and value of the HKDSE for progression to undergraduate studies. HKDSE is also acceptable in lieu of GCEA level for applications to UK universities through UCAS.

However, it is important to note that universities in different reputable higher education systems will set specific entry requirements for international students. Apart from the UK, the HKEAA remains in close contact with the higher education communities at popular destinations for overseas study such as Australia, Canada and the United States.

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Table I

## UCAS Tariff points for other international qualifications

Advanced Placement Programme – Canada & US			
Grade		UCAS Tariff Points	
5		120	
4		90	
3		60	
CIE Cambridge Pre-U Diploma			
Grade		UCAS Tariff Points	
D1		N/A	
D2		145	
D3		130	
M1		115	
M2		101	
M3		87	
P1		73	
P2		59	
P3		46	
GCE Advanced & AS Levels			
AL Grade	UCAS Tariff Points	AS Grade	UCAS Tariff Points
A*	140	N/A	N/A
A	120	A	60
B	100	B	50
C	80	C	40
D	60	D	30
E	40	E	20
International Baccalaureate Certificate (Higher Level)			
Grade		UCAS Tariff Points	
7		130	
6		110	
5		80	
4		50	
3		20	
Scottish Advanced Highers & Scottish Highers			
Scottish Advanced Highers Grade	UCAS Tariff Points	Scottish Highers Grade	UCAS Tariff Points
A	130	A	80
B	110	B	65
C	90	C	50
D	72	D	36

Source: [www.ucas.com/students/ucas\\_tariff/](http://www.ucas.com/students/ucas_tariff/)