

FAQ

1. What is the difference between the MA and MPhil degree (or taught and research programs)?

MPhil and PhD are research postgraduate programs (RPG) and MA is a taught postgraduate program (TPG).

The RPG have a much stronger research element than the taught program. Apart from taking courses, MPhil/PhD students are also required to complete a thesis under the supervision of a faculty in the Division. The MPhil program is two years long, and students often apply directly to the PhD program at HKUST in their 2nd year. The PhD program is three years long. The taught program (MA) focuses mainly on coursework and no thesis is required. It is one year long.

2. When can I apply for the MPhil/PhD programs, and what documents are required?

The online application is usually available starting in September each year.

A complete application for a research postgraduate program should include:

1. [Online application](#)
2. [Research proposal](#) (for MPhil applicants, in lieu of a research proposal, applicants MAY submit BOTH a personal statement AND a writing sample)
3. Supporting documents (transcripts, certificates, publication, etc.)
4. English Language Proficiency Tests (For those applicants whose first language is not English and whose qualification(s) are not awarded by a university or comparable institution where the language of instruction and/or examination is not English, they have to submit the TOEFL/IELTS test result.)
5. Reference forms (2 sets)

Applicants are also welcome to provide additional information beyond the minimum requirement.

3. Can I apply for the program if I have not taken TOEFL/IELTS?

It is compulsory for applicants whose first language is not English and whose degree or equivalent qualification was awarded by an institution where the medium of instruction was not English to meet the university TOEFL/IELTS (Academic Module) requirements. The minimum score for TOEFL will be 550 (pbt) and 80 (ibt) while the minimum score for IELTS will be 6.5 (with all sub-scores not less than 5.5). Applicants may submit copies of their results for their application, but once they accept our offer, official reports of the scores are required.

Even though official reports from TOEFL/IELTS are only required once an offer is accepted, it is important to arrange for them to be sent to HKUST well before the test score expires, even if an offer of admission has not been made. Applicants should note that TOEFL and IELTS scores are valid for two years from the test date.

Please [see this page](#) for more details about university policy regarding TOEFL/IELTS.

4. Do I need to submit the TOEFL/IELTS test result if I graduated from an institution in Hong Kong?

Should you have a degree from one of the following eight institutions in Hong Kong, you are not required to provide English test score:

- City University of Hong Kong
- Hong Kong Baptist University
- Lingnan University
- The Chinese University of Hong Kong
- The Hong Kong Institute of Education
- The Hong Kong Polytechnic University
- The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology
- The University of Hong Kong

5. Do I need to take GMAT/GRE?

Our programs do not require applicants to take GMAT/GRE tests.

6. Is there a minimum Grade Point Average (GPA) for admission to the program?

Due to the range of systems being used by various universities, there is not a specific requirement of the Grade Point Average (GPA). However, we do pay attention to the applicants' course work and their academic capability.

7. What are the major selection criteria?

We are selecting students who have demonstrated great academic talent, both in terms of the grades achieved and in terms of the selected and command of research topic. Therefore, we place great emphasis on the background of the student, the recommendations which we receive from his/her professors, and especially the quality and feasibility of the research proposal. We also consider fit between the applicant's interests and our own areas of strength in research and teaching. A final decision on admission also depends on the applicant's performance in the interview. Since our program is taught in English, we demand a high level of demonstrated competence in that language.

8. Will I be invited to an interview?

The best applicants will be shortlisted for interviews. Overseas applicants will be interviewed by Skype or the equivalent. Most interviews will take place between January and March.

9. When will I receive notification of the application result?

Review of applications will begin in December/January. While some students may be notified soon after the review begins, most offers will be made in the period from January to April. Email notifications will be sent to successful applicants. Applicants are also encouraged to check their application account regularly for any admission updates.

10. Can I apply for postgraduate studentship?

No separate application is required for a postgraduate studentship (PGS). Our Division will normally award PGS to selected qualified full-time research postgraduate students (MPhil/PhD) who will be required to engage in ancillary teaching and/or research duties.

Normally, a full-time MPhil student will receive up to 2 years of PGS, while a full-time PhD student is eligible for a maximum of 3 years of PGS.

11. Can I apply for Spring Admission?

We only have Fall intake. We do not encourage Spring admission because we offer a course sequence that starts in Fall.

12. What is the admission quota?

We do not have a fixed admission quota. We typically receive about 100 each year for the MPhil program every year, and admit around 10. Although the admission quota for each year is different, we do encourage those interested candidates from all over the world to apply for studies at our Social Science Division.

13. Can I apply even if my undergraduate major was not in the social sciences?

We will consider applications regardless of the student's undergraduate major. Of course, for applicants who majored in something other than a social science discipline, the application should make clear the reasons for their interest in social science.

14. What language are courses taught in? Do I need to be able to speak or read Chinese?

Our courses are taught in English. Chinese is not a formal requirement for the program, though of course students planning to carry out research related to China may find lack of Chinese language ability a practical impediment.

15. Can I apply for credit transfer if I have already taken some PG courses in HKUST or elsewhere?

Credit transfer may be granted to students in recognition of previous studies completed in HKUST or elsewhere at an appropriate level as recognized by the University. Students applying for credit transfer must provide evidence, such as a transcript and course syllabus, to illustrate that a course taken elsewhere for which a satisfactory grade has been obtained is equivalent in content and level to a required course in the program here.