



Well-being strategies for your overseas education



HSBC Life

Opening up a world of opportunity

Planning your overseas education with a focus on well-being

Embarking on an educational journey abroad is exhilarating and transformative – it offers students unparalleled opportunities for personal and academic growth. However, this requires careful, long-term planning and active involvement from both students and their families, as well as a strong focus on maintaining well-being throughout the pre-departure process. This article explores the essential aspects of preparing for an international education, focusing on the importance of timing, financial, academic, and soft skill readiness.



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1 The decision of two

Before delving into the logistics of planning for an international education, it's essential to pause and reflect: why are you interested in studying abroad, or why do you want this experience for your child? There are no right or wrong reasons here - each family will have their own unique motivations.

Understanding why you're embarking on this adventure is crucial.

Shared support: It's important for both parents and students to be on the same page. This shared understanding can help you both navigate the upcoming changes and challenges together.

Guiding your path: Knowing why you want to study abroad can help simplify many of your decisions along the way. Whether it's seeking new cultural experiences or specific career opportunities, understanding your motivations can help keep your planning focused and intentional.

Being open to change: As you progress through your international education journey, your motivations may evolve. Starting with a clear understanding could allow for easier adjustments along the way, ensuring that changes feel like part of the adventure, not distractions from your path.



2 Timing considerations

To achieve academic success and ensure optimal well-being when studying overseas, it's important to make sure the time is right for you. The situation can vary significantly depending on the educational stage.

Undergraduate: Studying abroad at this stage of your academic journey can offer a formative experience, allowing for greater cultural immersion and language acquisition.

Transfer: Choosing to transfer to an international university during undergraduate studies can present an opportunity to realign your academic and career aspirations with more specialised programmes not available in your home country.

Postgraduate: During this stage, students may feel more mature and focused, potentially leading to a richer academic and professional experience abroad.

3 Financial readiness

Robust financial planning is essential – not just for securing funds, but also for significantly influencing the mental well-being of both students and their families. Financial stability can alleviate worries over money-matters, enabling students to concentrate on their academic and personal development instead of financial pressures. Financial security is crucial for maintaining a stable and stress-free environment for the student.

Understanding costs: Studying abroad can involve a host of new expenses, which can differ greatly depending on the chosen country, city, and institution. Comprehensive financial planning should account for tuition fees, living expenses, travel costs, visa fees, and other incidental expenditures, such as health insurance and textbooks. A clear understanding of these costs can help families prepare and avoid unexpected financial strain. It's recommended to speak to a financial adviser to get help putting together a budgeting plan and gain an understanding of potentially changing needs.

Saving plans: Establishing a savings plan early is essential for accumulating the necessary funds to cover the expenses associated with studying abroad. This financial planning process offers students an excellent opportunity to actively engage in financial decisions, contributing to a sense of independence and adulthood.



4 Academic / Portfolio preparation

Academic and portfolio preparation is crucial for students planning to study abroad. It impacts not only their acceptance into programmes but also their confidence and emotional well-being. Here's how parents and students can approach these preparations effectively.

Course selection

Aligning courses with career goals:

Ideally, students should select their secondary education or undergraduate courses strategically, based on the requirements of the degree they plan to pursue. Active parental involvement and open communication on career goals and educational pathways can reduce stress for students by clarifying their academic direction.

Recognising educational qualifications:

Enrolling in advanced placement programmes like AP, IB, or A-levels can significantly enhance a student's academic profile by providing college-level curricula and globally recognised examinations. It is important to note that country-specific qualifications such as China's Gaokao, Korea's CSAT, and Japan's Upper Secondary School Leaving Certificate are increasingly recognised among international institutions, particularly if the student exhibits exceptional performance. Parents can help by accessing resources and guidance to navigate these complex systems, ensuring students meet the specific criteria set by prospective universities.



Standardised tests preparation

Undergraduate and Graduate exams:

Common tests like the SAT/ACT are essential for undergraduate admissions in the US and other countries, while graduate programmes may require GRE, GMAT, LSAT, or MCAT depending on the field of study. It's highly recommended to search for online resources and join study groups while preparing for these tests.

Language proficiency:

Proficiency in the instructional language is crucial. Non-native English speakers often need to pass TOEFL or IELTS, which are mandatory for universities in English-speaking countries.

Alternatively, other language tests such as DELE for Spanish, DELF/DALF for French, JLPT for Japanese, or HSK for Chinese might be required depending on the study destination. Encouraging early preparation and regular practice can help students feel more confident and less anxious about their language skills.



Building an academic portfolio

Gathering strong letters of recommendation:

Letters from teachers, mentors, or employers who can vouch for a student's academic and personal qualities are invaluable. For art students, recommendations from art instructors or professionals in the art world add significant weight, as they can provide insights into the student's creative abilities and dedication to their craft.

Developing personal statements and essays:

Crafting compelling personal statements or essays is crucial for highlighting a student's academic achievements, personal experiences, and motivations for studying abroad. For art students, these documents should also reflect their artistic philosophy and the evolution of their work. Parents can assist in this reflective process by discussing key life events that shaped their child's aspirations, thus enhancing the authenticity of the narrative.



Maintaining GPA or developing an art portfolio:

A strong GPA is a universal measure of a student's academic abilities and is critical for admission to most international universities. It reflects consistent performance in a variety of subjects and is often a key indicator of a student's capacity to handle challenging coursework. For students in the visual and performing arts, a portfolio showcases their development and depth in their art form and is often a deciding factor in admissions to specialised programs. Both maintaining a high GPA and developing a strong art portfolio are long-term commitments that require sustained effort and strategic planning.

Extracurricular activities:

Getting involved in extracurricular activities isn't just about enhancing a college or university application—it's a crucial part of creating a fulfilling student life. Whether it's sports, arts, clubs, or volunteer work, these activities extend learning beyond the classroom walls and help students become more rounded and attractive candidates for top programs. Beyond that, extracurriculars can serve as a gateway to making lasting friendships and finding a community abroad. They provide a supportive network that can make navigating a new environment and culture much easier, reducing feelings of loneliness. For parents, encouraging your children to dive into these activities offers peace of mind, knowing they're engaged, happy, and supported while exploring their passions far from home.

5 Developing soft skills

Soft skills are crucial for both personal development and professional success, especially in the context of studying abroad. These skills enhance students' capabilities and support their mental and emotional well-being, helping them thrive in new and challenging environments. Here's how parents and students can work on these essential competencies:

Encouraging independence and responsibility:

Helping adolescents become more independent is a key part of preparing them for life abroad. Parents can encourage this growth by involving them in daily decisions like managing the family budget, planning meals, or organising schedules. More responsibilities, like managing a part-time job or personal savings, also teach crucial life skills such as financial and time management, which are indispensable when they're away from home.

For parents, learning to take a step back can be tough but necessary. Trusting your children to make their own decisions and allowing them to face the outcomes builds their confidence and assures you that they can stand on their own. This reduces anxiety linked to worries about their safety and success while abroad.



Building resilience, adaptability, and openness:

Resilience is crucial for dealing with challenges and setbacks that may arise during the study abroad experience. For students, this could involve navigating academic pressures, cultural differences, or personal issues such as homesickness. They can build resilience by setting realistic goals, seeking support when needed, and learning from difficult experiences. Parents can foster their own resilience by developing coping strategies that help manage their concerns for their child's well-being. Some of these include engaging in their own hobbies and social activities, which can provide emotional outlets and reduce stress.

“Resilience, adaptability, and openness are essential for both parents and students to effectively navigate the emotional highs and lows of studying abroad”.

Adaptability is particularly important as both students and parents adjust to new dynamics in their relationship and communication. Students must adapt to new learning environments, social norms, and perhaps a new language, viewing these changes as opportunities for growth rather than obstacles. Similarly, parents need to adapt to communicating across different time zones and possibly less frequent interactions, finding new ways to stay connected and support their children from afar. This might involve using digital communication tools more effectively or setting regular schedules for calls that suit both parents and students. Participating in parent support groups or workshops can be an excellent way for parents to develop these skills, providing them with the tools they need to support their children's overseas education while managing their own well-being.



For parents, openness means being receptive to their children's evolving perspectives and independence. It involves listening to their experiences without judgment, supporting their decisions, and encouraging their exploration and self-discovery. This openness not only strengthens the parent-child relationship but also enhances mutual understanding and support.

Conclusion

Preparing for international education is a journey that extends far beyond academic readiness; it encompasses financial planning, emotional preparedness, and developing crucial soft skills. From the outset, identifying and supporting the personal motivations behind studying abroad sets a strong foundation for the challenges ahead. As students step into this exciting phase of their lives, supported by their parents' encouragement and understanding, they are not just preparing for an educational experience but also for a global, culturally enriched life. This journey, while challenging, offers opportunities for students to not only achieve their professional goals but also to become well-rounded individuals equipped to thrive in diverse environments.



About the HSBC Research Fellowship



HSBC and the Wellbeing Research Centre at the University of Oxford have partnered on a two-year programme that seeks to advance the understanding of the relationship between financial health and general well-being. The fellowship will conduct interdisciplinary research on the role and impact that different themes such as financial fitness and mental well-being play for our overall Quality of Life.

Disclaimer

The insights in this article are based on HSBC Research Fellowship with the Wellbeing Research Centre at the University of Oxford (A two-year partnership between 2023 and 2025) and HSBC Life +Factor Study 2021 & 2022. The HSBC Research Fellowship with the Wellbeing Research Centre at the University of Oxford shares the deep-dive findings from Hong Kong, mainland China, Singapore and the UK. This report is for general circulation and information purposes only. No part of this document may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, on any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of HSBC Holdings plc. This article does not constitute and should not be construed as legal, tax or investment advice, solicitation and/or a recommendation of any kind from the bank to you nor is it intended to sell any investments, financial products or services or solicit purchases or subscriptions for them. You should not use or rely on this document in making any investment decision. HSBC is not responsible for such use or reliance by you.

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