

Hong Kong lifts cap on non-local students to 50 per cent

Policymakers allow universities to accept more international students as island seeks to capitalise on US crackdown

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Hong Kong's chief executive John Lee has lifted the cap on the number of non-local students universities can recruit as demand continues to grow.

Lee used his 2025 policy address to unveil reforms aimed at attracting students and researchers.

The annual address on 17 September set out plans to make the city a magnet for global talent by loosening student quotas and accelerating the development of a new "university town".



Source: iStock/fazon1

"We must press ahead with developing Hong Kong into an international innovation and technology centre, and into a post-secondary education hub for nurturing talent," Lee said.

Among the key announcements was a plan to expand Hong Kong's international student intake.

From the 2026-27 academic year, the cap on self-financing non-local students at UGC-funded institutions will rise from 40 per cent to 50 per cent on taught programmes, while research postgraduate programmes will be able to over-enrol by up to 120 per cent.

Lee described the change as a way to "bring in more young people from around the world to study and stay in Hong Kong, enriching our talent pool and enhancing our global network".

Universities in Hong Kong have reported growing demand from international students (<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/hong-kong-university-applications-surge-amid-us-uncertainty>) in recent months, in part due to increased anxieties about studying in the US.

The government also pledged to fast-track development of the Northern Metropolis University Town (<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/university-town-will-give-hong-kong-campus-room-grow>), a long-anticipated cluster of campuses by the city's mainland border.

"These initiatives are not only pivotal in reinvigorating Hong Kong's long-term development but also serve as crucial strategies to drive economic upgrading and transformation, and to expand the top-tier talent pool," said Nancy Ip, president of Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings/university-science-and-technology>).

"Innovation and technology must be talent-centric. Hong Kong needs to bring together international experts and local talents to continuously expand a diverse talent pool.

"Through policy innovation, we can foster a conducive environment for R&D and commercialisation."

Other institutions also welcomed the new policies.

Hong Kong Baptist University (<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings/hong-kong-baptist-university>) praised the expansion of international student quotas and the emphasis on the "Study in Hong Kong" brand, while City University of Hong Kong (<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings/city-university-hong-kong>) said it would "gradually increase the number of non-local undergraduate students over the next few years".

Lee framed these policies as part of a larger vision: "By integrating education, research and industry, we will strengthen Hong Kong's role in driving the nation's high-quality development while also securing our own long-term prosperity."

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