

# The Road To Oxbridge And Ivy League



Photo: Stanley Morales/Pexels



**By Tatler Malaysia**

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HSBC Premier Special

In line with its commitment to education, HSBC partners with PrepWorks to help prepare students to successfully gain entrance into the top universities

**E**ducation is the foundation upon which we build a successful future and most Malaysian parents are committed to providing their children with the best there is to offer. For most parents, funding their children's education is one of the biggest financial commitments of their lives. Despite the financial challenges, not to mention outside influences—education prices are on the rise while residual income level (or income remaining after expenditure) has dipped since 2014, among others—parents are willing to sacrifice their own needs and future security if need be to send their children for the best education, which often means studying abroad. Besides saving for their children's education, which parents are inclined to start early, even before the children start school, they are also known to provide for extra tuition, music lessons and sports training to give their



children the added advantage they need for successful admission into the best schools and thus, securing them a bright future.

See also: [HSBC Premier: Financing Your Different Life Stages](#)

Realising all the struggles that parents go through to educate their children and based on its own strong belief in the importance of education and enabling the next generation to reach their full potential, HSBC has partnered with [PrepWorks](#)—an education company focused on guiding and preparing students to successfully apply to the top boarding schools and universities in the UK and US—to help alleviate parents’ concerns about their children’s entrance into the best schools. Besides that, HSBC also hosts education talks and webinars with PrepWorks, to provide valuable and little known insights into the inner workings of university admission and higher education as a whole.



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Other than the traditional route of medicine, law, engineering and accounting, more Malaysian parents and students are learning about unconventional degrees, which can lead to successful and fulfilling career pathways, such as philosophy, anthropology, politics, history and liberal arts and are deemed “less competitive” for international students to get into these universities. While medicine is still a popular choice with students here, according to PrepWorks, a lot of Malaysian students have



veered towards computer science and data science as their choice of degree in the past two years. With HSBC's partnership with PrepWorks, their Premier customers can access all these insights and more, and also get a discounted rate of 15 per cent from PrepWorks' courses and packages that prepare students for university admission.

To find out what it takes to get into these hallowed halls of learning, *Tatler Malaysia* speaks to Tamara Lim, the founder and one of nearly 100 Oxbridge and Ivy League educated tutors at PrepWorks.





Tamara Lim, founder of PrepWorks

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What do you need to get into a top university?

**Tamara Lim (TL):** There are three important aspects. The first is academics. Sometimes students are not aware how competitive it really is and don't realise how important grades are until it's too late. You must have good grades to get into a top university.

The second is skills, for example presentation skills and critical thinking like learning how to ask questions that are perceptive and will give you the answer you need; critical reading which is where you really think about what you're reading, who is writing it, what are they feeling, what are their perspectives on certain issues and where are they coming from; plus communication skills such as writing and speaking.

The last one is character, which are things to do with mentality—are you self-motivated, are you driven and are your targets clear or goals aligned with your personality and passions? The character



part is about traits that will help you deal with the challenges of student life like planning your study schedule, how to problem-solve, manage your stress and also understanding yourself.

**What are the most common gaps that you find students have?**

**TL:** There are gaps in all the three areas I've mentioned but for academics, English is always a downfall in terms of grades and that also impacts their writing and speaking skills.

Character-wise, I'd say it's more of a lack of clarity, not knowing what they want to do. Once they have figured it out, however, half the battle is won because from there, everything else aligns. Kids need three things—connection, purpose and belonging. If they find something they really like and what they want to do in their life, everything else follows—they find motivation to study hard to get their A's, they are driven to get their skills up to par so that they can reach their goal. This gap exists more or less for everybody, you just need someone to structure it all out for you, to get to that realisation. In fact, I find it the most satisfying, when the student realises what they want to do and they go for it.

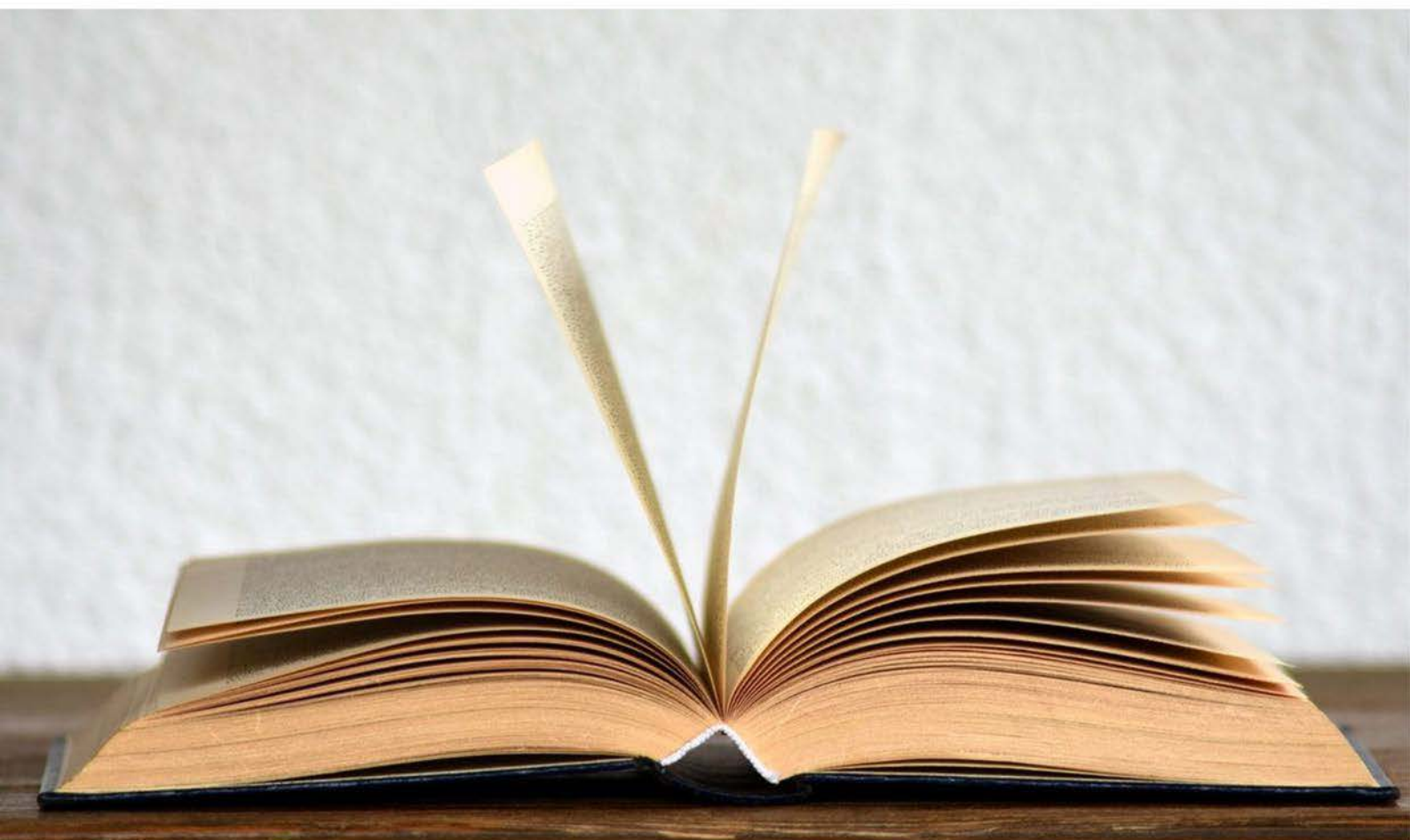


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**What can be done to prepare and how long does it take?**

**TL:** The minimum is 10 months, beginning two to three months after they've started A-Levels or IB (International Baccalaureate). We first identify where the student is right now, for example what they've got on their profile—such as extracurricular activities, IGCSE (International General



Certificate of Secondary Education) results and if the subjects they are taking in A-Levels are right for what they are applying for. Then for the next 10 to 12 months we plan out what they will be doing every month in order to close the gaps in time for them to submit their application.

The earliest they can begin preparing is just before starting their IGCSE or at 15 years old. Working with them, we can help to start building a profile, like what subjects and extracurricular activities to choose. We guide them on how to better direct their time and energy like avoiding multiple instrument lessons and three types of sports a week. It doesn't really help them get into a top university anyway; it's a better strategy to focus on one or two. So the best thing is to plan it all out well in terms of what they do in and outside of school.

University admissions are especially competitive right now, with lower acceptance rates due to oversubscription. With the cancellation of exams because of Covid-19, more students are securing their conditional offers as overall results are better than a normal year from teacher-graded assessments. Next year, in September 2022, entry into university will still be more competitive than normal due to the backlog of oversubscribed places from 2021. This means that students will need as much help as possible to get into their first choice university, and it's more important now than ever. So far, many Malaysian students for September 2021 are facing disappointment after disappointment.



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Has the pandemic impacted Malaysian parents' strong desire to send their children overseas for university, when most of the classes are now being conducted remotely?

TL: Malaysian parents are still willing to send their children overseas as everyone foresees that the vaccine will return everything back to normal. Additionally, it is more that Covid-19 will temporarily only affect their first year of learning (which is this year) and not the subsequent years, and this is worth the sacrifice versus reapplying and going through the whole process again, or doing a gap year and delaying graduation. Anyhow, universities such as Cambridge and Oxford have only cancelled big hall lectures of 250+ in a room. In fact, most of the key learning takes place through 1-on-1 or 2-to-1 tutorials with tutors and these are still carried out physically. Generally, we foresee everything returning back to normal in two years' time, particularly with admissions.



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You say that getting into top institutions like Oxford, Cambridge or an Ivy League school is not based on a student's background or education system. What do you mean by that?

TL: It means that whichever system you're from, you will always have a chance at getting into a good university. A lot of people rule that out because they think they're not somebody or have no resources or are not as fortunate enough. We are not selective; 95 per cent of our students get into their first and second choice university, and two out of three who applied with our help got into



Oxford, Cambridge and Ivy League in 2019 (a normal year without Covid impact). Also, more than 50 per cent of our tutors are from the government school system; in a way it spurs them to tell others not to give up on that dream. You just need someone to help you craft a plan and once that's in place, you can increase your chances of getting in. One of our students who recently got into Harvard was actually from the public school system. After SPM, you just have to segue into a more globally recognised qualification, which is either A-Levels or IB. A-Levels is more for UK and IB is more for UK and US. Also, it's not just about the curriculum but your extracurricular activities and what you do outside of school. Like this student, he represented Malaysia in the SEA Games for dance sport and he is also a chess player. So he had a lot of things going on outside of school, even though he was in a public school system.



Photo: iStock

**What is your advice to students hoping to get into Oxbridge or an Ivy League university?**

**TL:** First, you have to do well in school and more or less be at the top of your class. If you're not there yet, don't worry, it's very achievable, you just have to put your mind to it and get the right teachers and if necessary, an academic coach.

Next, you have to work on finding out what you want to do because it's your life. Find where your passions and strengths overlap, not just one or the other. Because if it's only strength, you can end up in a career where you do well but you're not excited by it. If you're



just following your passion, that's also super risky because it may not be an area that you're good at or where you can't perform to your highest potential. The key is to have those two overlap because that's where you will find your ideal career path and that's important for a successful application. So, read widely and explore, there are all these new courses like anthropology, sociology, politics, liberal arts and natural science that you may not know about but one of them could be your niche. There's also a lot of flexibility with courses now, they have joint honours degrees where you can couple two together like history and politics or biology and English. You may be a very good writer and also like plants, so this allows you to cultivate your interest in each area.

Also, don't be afraid to start training your skills. Put yourself out there when it comes to leadership and responsibility or put your hand up when it's time to present in class. Take any opportunity you get to fine-tune your skills.

Thirdly, never give up and have a growth mindset. If a teacher tells you that you're not good at a subject, don't perceive it as a failure. Barbara Oakley, the author of *Learning How to Learn*, didn't do so well with high school maths but eventually graduated with a PhD in engineering through a growth mindset. What she did was to master the subject and believe in her potential. So never give up, things are possible if you have a growth mindset. These three will keep you on track with your academics, skills and character.

*PrepWorks offers a comprehensive student and university-specific admissions guidance as well as the PrepWorks Academy to help students to align with this method. To book a free consultation, visit [www.prep.works](http://www.prep.works)*

**HSBC Takes Care Of Your Children Abroad**

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Once your children have gained admission to their choice university, it is time to prepare for their relocation to study abroad. Besides sorting out their student visa and accommodation as well as considering things like how they are going to move about or the kind of protection they will need, it is important to ensure that all their financial requirements are taken care of as well. HSBC Premier not only takes care of all of this and more with a convenient banking solution but also makes the journey abroad smoother for you and your children. The benefits start even before your children leave for university overseas:

### Open an International Account from Malaysia

HSBC can set up a bank account and all the necessary banking facilities including ATM card and internet banking at the destination country, right here in Malaysia. So the account will be ready to use even before your children's arrival, subject to host country's approval.

### No Global Transfer Fees

You can transfer money instantly to your children in 23 receiving countries whenever required, 24/7 and also from anywhere, at no cost. There is no transfer fee between HSBC accounts globally (applicable to HSBC Premier and HSBC Advance customers only).

### Preferential Exchange Rates

HSBC Premier customers will enjoy better rates with real-time exchange rates whenever you are making foreign currency conversions 24/7 whether it's via online or mobile banking transfers. Using your HSBC Everyday Global Account\* (Multi-Currency Account), you can also get the best rates by converting up to 11 different currencies in real-time or make a transfer at your preferred rate.





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### Convenient Access to Funds Overseas

With an HSBC Premier account\*, your children will have easy access to their bank account in different countries, can withdraw cash easily at convenient 24/7 ATMs available everywhere and transfer money to pay for their accommodation and bills.



## Multi-currency Debit Card

With the HSBC Everyday Global Visa Debit Card which allows you to buy, save and transfer in 11 currencies at competitive real-time rates, your children can make online or in-store purchases using local currencies anywhere in the world without conversion fees and also make withdrawal at ATMs, without conversion fees. They can save more with discounts when they use their debit card.

## Access to Emergency Assistance & Rescue

If your children lose their wallet or handbag, they can get swift help by calling the exclusive 24/7 HSBC Premier Contact Centre to block ATM and credit cards. To ease such situations, they can apply for emergency encashment services on the spot at any HSBC branches worldwide. They can also apply for an emergency card replacement at selected branches worldwide.

Speak to an HSBC Relationship Manager on the right banking solutions for you and your child.

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