

Same Candidate, Different System

How published elite-selection architecture differs across the UK, GCC, India, United States, Singapore and Hong Kong

Elite institutions do not ask the same candidate to prove the same thing in the same way. Across six markets, the published process changes what is visible, what is verified and where discretion enters.

50

SIGNALS ACROSS SIX
MARKETS

6

MARKETS COMPARED

21

OFFICIAL SOURCES

This report compares published process architecture. It does not rank markets, estimate selectivity or infer fairness, intent or candidate outcomes.

Hassan Akram

Founder and Principal Advisor, Elite Careers Strategy. Research lead: accountable for coding decisions, publication rulings, source grading and corrections.

REPORT 02 . 31 AUGUST 2026 . GLOBAL ELITE SELECTION MONITOR V1

Global Elite Selection Monitor: 107 coded signals citing 69 official sources, held in a 71-entry source register. Purposive six-market sample of 50 signals checked 31 August 2026.

SECTION 01

Executive answer: verification converges; architecture does not.

Every market in this purposive sample verifies the candidate beyond the written file. What differs is the instrument, the sequence and the point at which discretion enters.

FIVE FINDINGS

1. **Verification is universal in the cohort.** All six markets include a published mechanism that checks more than bespoke prose.

2. **The verification instrument is local.** Supervised retesting, on-the-spot writing, authenticated school work, case challenges and language tests perform different versions of the same function.

3. **Transparency varies materially.** Indian institutions in the sample publish staged formulas and weights; other markets publish sequences but not the final decision calculus.

4. **Access to the live gate is itself designed.** Shortlisting, programme preference, prior tests and invitation-only events determine who is allowed to demonstrate judgement.

5. **AI changes ownership controls, not the need for judgement.** The clearest new design choice is separating AI-mediated presentation from human scoring or independent performance.

SECTION 02

Method: a purposive six-market sample, not a market league table.

MARKET	SIGNALS	INSTITUTIONS	ARCHITECTURE	DISTINCTIVE FEATURE
UK	8	2	Assessment-rich	AI-mediated, human-scored
GCC	8	3	Immersive plus retesting	Supervised verification
India	8	3	Test, writing and panel	Published weighting
United States	8	3	Artifact-rich	Authenticated school work
Singapore	8	3	Programme-specific	Sequential gates
Hong Kong	8	2	Preference-linked	Language verification

Table 1. Signal count was equal at UK 8, GCC 8, India 8, United States 9, Singapore 8, Hong Kong 9 at first publication at first publication; institution count is not.

Source: Global Elite Selection Monitor V1, signals SIG-058 to SIG-105, with SIG-106 and SIG-107, sources SRC-051 to SRC-071. Checked 31 August 2026. Full register at Section 08.

Corrected from the first issue, which recorded four Singapore institutions. The evidence register contains three: NUS, SMU and DBS.

WHAT IS CONTROLLED

Signal count was equal at UK 8, GCC 8, India 8, United States 9, Singapore 8, Hong Kong 9 at first publication at first publication. Every entry comes from an official employer or university page and carries its own source ID, observation date, publication ruling and analyst note.

WHAT IS NOT CONTROLLED

Institution type is not matched. India and the United States are admissions-heavy; the UK, GCC, Singapore and Hong Kong include more employer pathways. Institution counts vary from two to three. The cohort is intentionally transparent but cannot support claims about prevalence across a country or sector.

READING RULE

Treat each comparison as an observation about the sampled published systems. The phrase 'not observed' means the feature was absent from the selected public pages - not that it does not exist.

SECTION 03

Different instruments serve the same verification problem.

Rows are evidence types. Columns are the six sampled markets. A cell reads Present only where the cited source explicitly describes the feature.

Exhibit 1. Every market verifies beyond the written file; only the instrument changes.

Source: Global Elite Selection Monitor V1, purposive sample of 50 signals. Two Hong Kong signals are coded jointly with the UK. Checked 31 August 2026.

	UK	GCC	INDIA	US	SINGAPORE	HONG KONG
Prior record or academic threshold	●	○	●	●	●	●
Test or structured assessment	●	●	●	●	●	●
Writing assessment	○	●	●	○	●	○
Case, task or simulation	○	●	○	○	●	○
Interview	●	●	●	●	●	●
Panel assessment or committee review	○	○	●	●	●	●

● Present ○ Not observed

CAVEAT

The matrix is intentionally binary and conservative. A feature is marked present only when the cited source explicitly describes it.

SECTION 04

UK and GCC: multi-stage employer systems make performance visible.

UNITED KINGDOM

KPMG publishes a four-stage journey: application, online skills and cognitive assessments, a recorded video interview and an in-person Launch Pad. The video questions are presented by an AI avatar, but human recruiters score the responses [SRC-051]. Freshfields publishes shorter paths for trainee and apprenticeship routes, with a career conversation or online application preceding an assessment centre [SRC-052, SRC-053].

GCC

PwC Middle East uses online numerical and verbal tests, then repeats them under supervision at the assessment day. Its centre also includes written communication, group work and a partner or director interview [SRC-054]. NYU Abu Dhabi runs an invitation-only Candidate Weekend combining a sample class, group activity, brief interview and further assessments [SRC-055]. Strategy& Middle East publishes three to four case-led interviews [SRC-056].

These findings come from two UK institutions and three GCC institutions. They do not describe every employer in either market.

SECTION 05

India and the United States: explicit calculus versus richer artefacts.

INDIA

ISB combines test-centre scores and work experience with an on-the-spot essay and a faculty, alumni and staff panel [SRC-057]. IIM Ahmedabad moves from CAT-based screening to analytical writing and personal interview [SRC-058]. IIM Calcutta publishes a weighted path from CAT and academic indicators to writing, interview and final composite selection [SRC-059].

UNITED STATES

Princeton requires a graded school paper with teacher comments and any rubric, preferring thesis-driven analytical work [SRC-060]; its alumni interview is optional and absence is not penalised [SRC-061]. Harvard combines a personal essay with five short answers and renewed testing requirements [SRC-062]. MIT frames several short responses as a route to authenticity rather than a writing test [SRC-063].

The samples cover management-school admissions in India and undergraduate admissions in the US. They are not directly equivalent sectors.

SECTION 06

Singapore and Hong Kong: sequencing, preference and cross-border translation.

SINGAPORE

NUS Law uses a written test before interview, while NUS Dentistry uses a manual-dexterity test before interview [SRC-065]. SMU places a writing test before the Law interview [SRC-066]. DBS uses an AI recruiter and online assessment before an in-person case challenge and senior-management panel [SRC-067].

HONG KONG

HKU uses rolling review [SRC-068] and notes that high-volume JUPAS programmes may prefer Band A applicants for interview invitation [SRC-069]. Freshfields Hong Kong reviews the training-contract application as a whole before online assessments and a senior-lawyer and people-team interview [SRC-070]; its London-Asia route adds a language test before a London or online assessment centre [SRC-071].

Hong Kong is concentrated in HKU and Freshfields. Singapore is more institutionally diverse but still a small structured sample.

SECTION 07

The candidate is constant; the auditable claim changes.

The strategic question is therefore not 'Which market is harder?' The evidence cannot answer that. The useful question is 'What type of claim must the candidate reproduce, and at which gate?'

ACCESS WARNING

Live verification can protect integrity while also rewarding candidates with more time, coaching and familiarity. This report identifies that tension; it does not measure its size or resolve it.

SECTION 08

Source register.

Signals SIG-058 to SIG-105, with SIG-106 and SIG-107 in the sample are graded A, carry a confidence of 5 of 5, and were all checked on 31 August 2026. This register is new in this issue; the first issue did not publish one.

Table 2. Every signal in the cohort traces to an official page.

Source: Global Elite Selection Monitor V1, sources SRC-051 to SRC-071, all graded A and checked 31 August 2026.

SOURCE ID	INSTITUTION	OFFICIAL PAGE AND URL
SRC-051	KPMG	Our application process https://www.kpmgcareers.co.uk/graduate/applying-to-kpmg/application-process/
SRC-052	Freshfields	UK Solicitor Apprenticeship Program https://www.freshfields.com/en/your-career/united-kingdom/early-careers/solicitor-apprenticeship-program
SRC-053	Freshfields	UK Trainee Associate Programme https://www.freshfields.com/en/your-career/united-kingdom/early-careers/trainee-associate-program
SRC-054	PwC Middle East	Application and selection process https://www.pwc.com/m1/en/careers/student-application-process.html
SRC-055	NYU Abu Dhabi	Candidate Weekend https://nyuad.nyu.edu/en/apply/undergraduate/apply/selection-process/candidate-weekend.html
SRC-056	Strategy& Middle East	Business case preparation https://www.strategyand.pwc.com/m1/en/careers/business-case-prep.html
SRC-057	Indian School of Business	PGP eligibility and requirements https://www.isb.edu/programmes/post-graduate-programmes/pgp-in-management/eligibility-and-requirements
SRC-058	IIM Ahmedabad	IIMA Admission - MBA (India) https://www.iima.ac.in/academics/mba/admissions/indians
SRC-059	IIM Calcutta	Admission Procedure for Domestic Candidates https://www.iimcal.ac.in/programs/pgp/admission/admission-policy/admission-procedure-for-domestic-candidates
SRC-060	Princeton University	Graded Written Paper https://admission.princeton.edu/apply/graded-written-paper
SRC-061	Princeton University	Application Checklist https://admission.princeton.edu/apply/application-checklist
SRC-062	Harvard College	First-Year Applicants https://college.harvard.edu/admissions/apply/first-year-applicants
SRC-063	MIT Admissions	Essays, activities and academics https://mitadmissions.org/apply/firstyear/essays-activities-academics/
SRC-064	National University of Singapore	Aptitude-Based Admissions https://nus.edu.sg/oam/admissions/aptitude-based-admissions
SRC-065	National University of Singapore	Faculty Interview and Test Dates https://nus.edu.sg/oam/admissions/faculty-interview-and-test-dates
SRC-066	Singapore Management University	International and Other Qualifications https://admissions.smu.edu.sg/admissions-requirements/international-and-other-qualifications

SOURCE ID	INSTITUTION	OFFICIAL PAGE AND URL
SRC-067	DBS	Singapore Management Associate Programme https://www.dbs.com/careers/management-associate-programme/singapore
SRC-068	University of Hong Kong	International Qualifications https://admissions.hku.hk/apply/international-qualifications
SRC-069	University of Hong Kong	Interview Schedules https://admissions.hku.hk/apply/jupas/interview
SRC-070	Freshfields (Hong Kong)	Hong Kong Training Contract https://www.freshfields.com/en/your-career/hong-kong/early-careers/hong-kong-training-contract
SRC-071	Freshfields (Hong Kong)	London-Asia Trainee Associate Program https://www.freshfields.com/en/your-career/hong-kong/early-careers/london-asia-trainee-associate-program

PUBLICATION STANDARD

Future reports should match institutions by sector and market, archive the exact source wording, record change dates where available and separate observed process from interpretation. No proprietary index should be published until the sample and coding reliability support one.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Hassan Akram is Founder and Principal Advisor of Elite Careers Strategy, an independent advisory firm in London working with candidates and families on entry to the most selective employers and universities. He is the research lead for the Global Elite Selection Monitor and is accountable for its coding decisions, publication rulings, source grading and corrections.

ABOUT THE MONITOR

The Global Elite Selection Monitor is a standing register of published selection practice at elite employers and universities. Version 1 holds 107 coded signals citing 69 official sources, held in a 71-entry source register, across six markets. This report draws on a purposive sample of 50 signals, citing 21 sources.

Each signal records one verifiable selection signal from an official employer or university page, with its own source ID, observation date, grade, publication ruling and analyst note. Sources carry a scheduled review date; findings are corrected in place and the correction is stated in the report rather than made silently.

SUGGESTED CITATION

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CORRECTIONS AND VERSIONS

This is the first issue of Report 02, published 31 August 2026. It corrects the Singapore institution count carried in the first issue of Report 01. Corrections to published figures are listed in the section they affect. If you believe a signal is miscoded or a source has changed since the observation date, write to hassan@accessecs.com and the entry will be re-checked against the live source.

COMMENT, DATA AND REPRODUCTION

Journalists may quote any passage of this report with attribution to Who Gets In?, Elite Careers Strategy. The underlying signal-level data behind any figure is available on request. Interview within three working days; data checks and source verification same working day. Contact hassan@accessecs.com.

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Elite Careers Strategy - 45 Albemarle Street, Mayfair, London W1S 4JL
accessecs.com