



Settling in: Hong Kongers and their new lives in the UK

REPORT

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Welcoming
Committee for
Hong Kongers

British
Future...



Department for Levelling Up,
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The research engaged 35 stakeholders with an interest in Hong Kongers in the UK, through interviews and seminar discussions. These stakeholders were drawn from areas including national and local projects, strategic migration partnerships and institutions including colleges and churches. Their knowledge, experiences and insights were

invaluable in identifying key issues for settlement and integration.

Most of all we would like to thank the many Hong Kongers (62 in total) who took part in focus groups and one-to-one interviews. We are very grateful for the time and consideration they gave to our project, sometimes covering difficult subjects relating to big life changes and challenges, as well as optimism for the future.

The report is authored by Heather Rolfe and Phyllis Chan with input from the wider Welcoming Committee and British Future teams, in particular Kathleen Ng, Sunder Katwala, Steve Ballinger, Lord Nat Wei, Daniel Korski and Matthew Tang.



Hong Kongers celebrate the Jubilee at a community event organised by Volunteer Centre Sutton.

Picture by Andy Aitchison.

FOREWORD

The arrival and settlement of Hong Kongers will be a central British migration story of the 2020s. Over 125,000 Hong Kongers have secured a British National (Overseas) visa in the first 18 months of the programme. It appears likely that between a quarter or half a million Hong Kongers could come to live in Britain over the next few years. Whatever its precise scale, this new Hong Kong cohort will join the post-war Windrush generation, the Ugandan Asians of half a century ago and the Polish workers who came after 2004 among the iconic examples of Britain's long history of migration and integration.

Welcoming this new wave of migration via the BN(O) visa route was a conscious choice, one of the first big immigration policy decisions as to what post-Brexit Britain would do with its new immigration controls. There was (and still is) a broad, cross-party, civic and public consensus that this was the right thing to do – given Britain's historic responsibilities, China's new security laws and indeed the positive contribution that Hong Kongers could make to Britain.

The Government's official Hong Kong welcome programme is one of the most proactive integration programmes that Britain has had for any incoming group. It is a welcome sign of the increased understanding of the value of practical work to ensure migration works well both for those who come to Britain and the communities that they join.

How are Hong Kongers settling in? The initial evidence gathered in this report shows that the welcoming agenda can build on solid foundations. Hong Kongers feel welcomed in Britain. New arrivals are navigating the initial practical challenges, particularly those of understanding how the UK property and rental markets and school admissions work.

Hong Kongers are a varied group. Many are professionals and some are entrepreneurs, but not everybody coming to Britain is well-off. Most Hong Kongers coming on the BN(O) visa have school-age children. Some have brought elderly parents with them. Others are young adults, many of them effectively political refugees, forced to leave their homes with little notice. The extension of the visa scheme, allowing those born after 1997 to come independent of their parents, gives more young adults the chance to come to Britain.

The priority that families from Hong Kong give to education has been a strong theme of the research. How schools get welcoming right will be a crucial foundation for the next generation. There is anxiety about access to Higher Education. Currently Hong Kongers at school in Britain will have to wait 5 years to have 'home student' status when applying for universities, unless BN(O) visa holders are given a similar exemption to refugees. This means that higher 'international student' fees and a lack of access to student loans will

be a barrier to many. If this is not changed, universities will need to make bespoke access efforts to try to mitigate the exclusion.

Seeking and securing good work will be an increasing focus. The Hong Kongers who have come to Britain are well qualified: around 7 in 10 are graduates. But there will be practical challenges to unlocking the potential of and possible contribution of Hong Kongers. Unless professional qualifications are recognised or can be converted, some people will initially take jobs at a lower salary or skill level than they would have had at home. The risks of a downward economic pressure are real.

Confidence in speaking English, including in the workplace, is an issue for many people whose written English is strong. Much current ESOL provision does not meet this level and variety of need. There is a strong opportunity here to bring the welcomers and the welcomed together – for example in conversation clubs and opportunities for social contact that draw on the enormous and largely untapped public appetite to help new arrivals settle in the communities they join.

In this era of levelling up, policy-makers should also take an interest in the locations that Hong Kongers choose – seeking useful ways to spread the gains across all nations and regions in the UK. Cities and regions can be helped to provide incentives to attract Hong Kongers, for example by offering

Cantonese instruction especially to school-age children.

With three major welcoming schemes – for Hong Kongers, Afghans and Ukrainians – developed at pace as crisis response measures, there is also an important opportunity to work out how far national and local policy-makers can knit these together where appropriate, while also recognising the different needs between and within each group.

Hong Kongers have settled in well to Britain. The challenge for the welcomed and the welcomers is how we can ensure that they thrive. That will require a broader circle of engagement – across education, employers and civil society – in this next phase. By showing how a proactive approach can help make integration work, getting the Hong Kong welcoming agenda right can be one of the foundations of a new era of welcoming in Britain.

Daniel Korski

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CONTENTS

Introduction	7
1. What do we know about Hong Kongers in the UK?	9
2. Where are Hong Kongers settling and why?	15
3. Learning English to settle and integrate	25
4. Employment	33
5. Children, young people and education	49
6. The welcomed and the welcomers	63
7. Conclusions and policy recommendations	77
Appendix 1: Research methods	85
Appendix 2: Sources of data on Hong Kongers in the UK	87
Appendix 3: Topic guides for focus groups and one-to-one interviews with Hong Kongers	89



INTRODUCTION

The British National (Overseas) visa route for Hong Kongers to live and work in the UK has now been open for more than a year. Latest government data shows that between January 2021 and March 2022 123,400 applied and 113,742 visas were granted.¹ Surveys carried out in Hong Kong suggest that many more will apply and make the move in coming months and years.²

Every group of migrants has its own characteristics, motivations and needs, and Hong Kongers arriving either as BN(O)s or as asylum seekers are both similar and different, in a number of respects, to others who have made the UK their home before. Most are driven by a personal mixture of political, economic and social motivations. Almost all say they are here to stay and build a future for themselves and their families in the UK.³

The purpose of the research for this report was to understand Hong Kongers' needs for settlement and integration, and how Hong Kongers can be fully and effectively welcomed to the UK. Our focus is therefore on practical and policy steps that have worked, and others that need to be in place.

Our project, delivered by the Welcoming Committee for Hong Kongers, was designed

to understand the needs of Hong Kongers across areas of life in the UK. We have focused on what steps are needed, in terms of policy and practice, to help Hong Kongers settle and integrate. We have not covered all areas of life and, at this point, have been able to explore some issues in greater depth than others. Areas particularly explored relate to decisions about where to live and priorities for their new lives, namely:

- Learning English.
- Children, young people and education.
- Employment.
- Social and cultural integration.

To provide necessary context we also collated and reviewed existing, largely statistical, data on Hong Kongers' characteristics.

Our report was carried out at a relatively early point in the arrival of Hong Kongers under the BN(O) visa scheme. As such there was only limited published evidence on which we could draw during the project period of February to June 2022. Primary research was therefore our principal method, and we interviewed nearly 100 stakeholders and individuals.

¹ Home Office, 'Immigration Statistics', 2021-22

² Man-yeek Kan, Lindsay Richards and Peter William Walsh, 'The migration intentions of British National (Overseas) status holders in Hong Kong', Migration Observatory (2 December 2021) [<https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/the-migration-intentions-of-british-national-overseas-status-holders-in-hong-kong/>]

³ HM Government-commissioned IFF research, 'Survey of Hong Kong British National (Overseas) visa holders, 2021' (March 2022) [<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/survey-of-hong-kong-british-national-overseas-visa-holders-2021>]

We carried out interviews with 35 stakeholder organisations. These included strategic migration partnerships (SMPs), projects funded under the DLUHC programme providing support to Hong Kongers and civil society organisations founded by BN(O)s themselves. To include the direct experiences, views and perspectives of Hong Kongers themselves we carried out 8 focus groups with 44 Hong Kongers and individual interviews with 18 other Hong Kongers. We also collected evidence from our series of policy seminars and the forum of the Welcoming Committee, which had been set up for organisations working to support Hong Kong settlement to share experiences and discuss emerging issues. In addition, we held a large number of informal conversations at our own and others' events. A more detailed description of our methods is in the appendix to this report.

Our findings reflect the project's short duration and its stage in the process of Hong Kong BN(O) settlement in the UK. Future research will be able to build on the issues identified and help provide more detail, especially on the most effective approaches to integration and settlement of Hong Kongers in the UK.



1. What do we know about Hong Kongers in the UK?

Numbers and demographic data are important in ensuring that Hong Kongers are appropriately and effectively welcomed to the UK, that services are able to meet their needs and that all can benefit from presence of these new arrivals. Data is available from a range of sources including internal government statistics. We briefly describe what is known here and include more detailed information about the sources themselves in the appendix.

A number of bodies working to settle and integrate Hong Kongers have carried out surveys, some of these large-scale involving more than a thousand respondents. There are also a number of smaller surveys which have collected data on Hong Kongers' characteristics, plans and needs. We have looked at evidence from 16 surveys carried out so far. Most are online surveys using informal networks which have been able to get to people who would be hard to reach using traditional approaches. While they are not necessarily fully representative of Hong Kongers and often have small sample sizes, they show quite marked consistency in identifying issues for Hong Kongers that have implications for policy and practice.

How many are here, and how many will come?

The Home Office collects data on in-country and out-of-country applications for the BN(O) visa, publishing figures every quarter. The data includes a breakdown of 'main applicants' and dependants as well as visa grants and refusals.

The most recent quarterly migration statistics, announced on 28 May 2022, indicate that as of 31 March 2022, 123,400 BN(O) status holders and their family members had chosen to take the UK up on the offer and applied for the BN(O) route since it opened 31 January 2021. Of the applications made, almost 114,000 have been granted. Of these, around three-quarters were granted from overseas applicants not already based in the UK. The refusal rate is low, though waiting times can be long. Published data is limited to information about applications themselves, with no further information shared about the individuals applying for visas.⁴

123,400
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More significantly, there is as yet no available data on the number of successful BN(O) visa applicants who have already moved to the UK versus those who have yet to move. Nor is there available data on those who intend to apply but are yet to do so. A survey of 1,000 BN(O) status holders by the Migration Observatory at Oxford University estimated that in early 2021, some 186,000 were planning to come to the UK via the BN(O) visa scheme, and a further 932,000 were considering applying.⁵ This suggests that numbers of Hong Kongers in the UK could increase substantially, though this shift could also be over a long period of time: over half of respondents to the Observatory's survey were planning a future move within a timescale as long as 10 years, and 8% even longer.

We have looked into the potential of sources of official government data other than the quarterly figures of BN(O) applications. Each of these has its own drawbacks indicating the need for a more complete picture of applicants and for a distinction between applications and arrivals. These sources include the school census and National Insurance number (NINO) data. These are described in more detail in the appendix.

Who are Hong Kongers in the UK?

The Migration Observatory survey provides an insight into reasons for Hong Kongers leaving Hong Kong, with many expressing political grievances, including dissatisfaction with the police and distrust in government. However, social and economic factors are also important: cost of living, work culture and property prices in Hong Kong relative to the UK. These factors are reflected in the characteristics and preferences of new arrivals.

Surveys show some consistency in terms of age groups, with concentrations in their mid-30s to mid-50s. As Figure 1.1 shows, the largest represented age group is 35–44 followed by those in the 45–54 age bracket. These age groups represent those most likely to hold BN(O) citizenship themselves as they were born during the

4 Published BN(O) data is available via the Gov.uk link: 'How many people come to the UK each year (including visitors)?' [<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/immigration-statistics-year-ending-december-2021/how-many-people-come-to-the-uk-each-year-including-visitors#british-national-overseas-bno-route>]

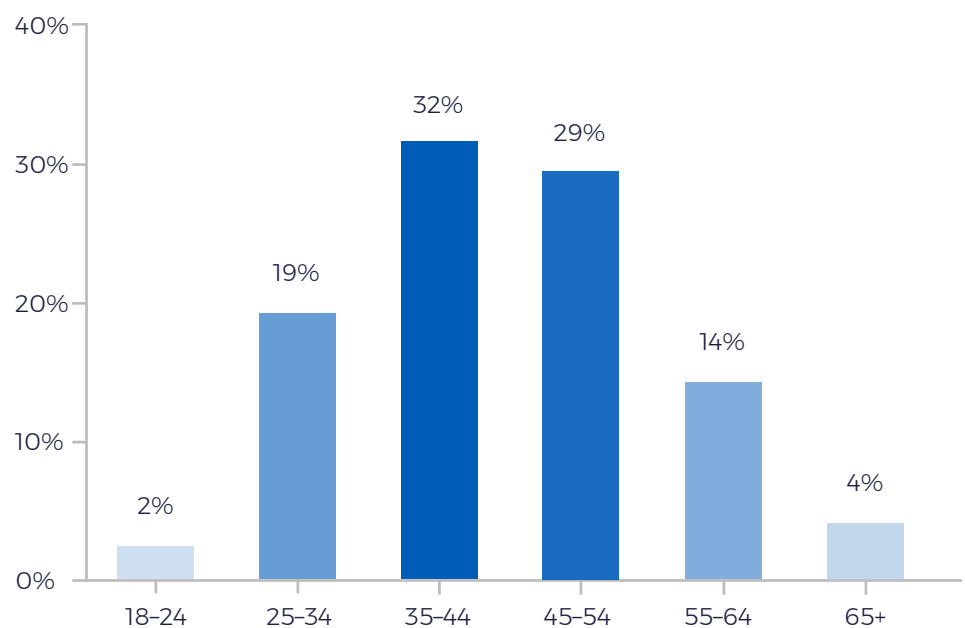
5 Figure 2 in Man-yeek Kan, Lindsay Richards and Peter William Walsh, 'The migration intentions of British National (Overseas) status holders in Hong Kong', Migration Observatory, Oxford (2 December 2021) [<https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/the-migration-intentions-of-british-national-overseas-status-holders-in-hong-kong/>]

Reasons for moving from Hong Kong to the UK include political safety, cost of living, work culture and property prices.

population boom of the 1960s–80s. Those aged 25–34 and 55–64 form smaller groups. Only 4% are aged over 65, suggesting the proportion of those bringing older dependants is small.⁶

The age profile of Hong Kongers is likely to shift downwards following the planned change in rules allowing those born after 1997 who have at least one BN(O) parent to apply independent of their parents.⁷ This will take effect in the coming months, with the date yet to be announced.

Figure 1.1: Age profile of Hong Kong BN(O) visa holders



Source: Home Office visa application databases, as at 30 September 2021

A large survey of 1,264 BN(O)s in Hong Kong and the UK by UKHK Welcome Churches found around 1 in 8 were choosing to move with at least one older parent, with an average age of such parents being 68.5.⁸ More than half of these respondents (55%) said they would bring just one older parent. These findings indicate that the number of older new arrivals is likely to be relatively small. However, at the same time, it is a sufficiently significant number to indicate that efforts to support the integration and wellbeing of older Hong Kongers are important.

⁶ Table 1 of Hong Kong BNO survey results from HM Government-commissioned IFF research, 'Survey of Hong Kong British National (Overseas) visa holders, 2021' (March 2022) [<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/survey-of-hong-kong-british-national-overseas-visa-holders-2021>]

⁷ 'UK expands eligibility for Hong Kong visa offer', Reuters (24 February 2022) [<https://www.reuters.com/world/uk-expands-eligibility-hong-kong-visa-offer-2022-02-24/>]

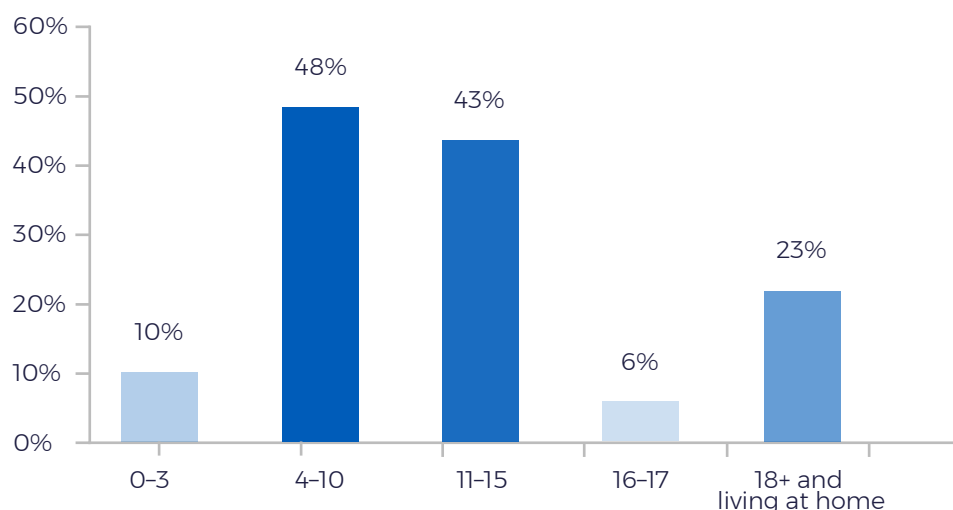
⁸ UKHK, '2021 UKHK HKers settlement survey report' (October 2021)

Family structure

A survey by IFF for the Home Office shows that almost three-quarters of Hong Kongers in the UK (72%) are married.⁹ Many have young families. It also found that 60% of visa holders have one or more children, with the majority of children aged under 15.¹⁰ Figure 1.2 presents the percentages across different children's age groups in more detail. A 'preferred destination' survey of 720 respondents by Hong Kongers in Britain found more than half (53%) have children of school age, with 1.6 children being the average family size.¹¹

Another survey of BN(O) visa holders in the UK and Hong Kong, by UKHK found that more than half (54%) of respondents' children (aged 0-21) were of primary school age and over a quarter (27%) were of secondary school age. 1 in 8 (13%) were in the early years age bracket.¹² However, as noted earlier, this may change once those born after 1997 can apply independently.

Figure 1.2: % of visa holders with children by age group



Source: Home Office / IFF Research survey of Hong Kong BN(O) visa holders, April/May and August/September 2021

⁹ HM Government-commissioned IFF research, 'Survey of Hong Kong British National (Overseas) visa holders, 2021' (March 2022) [<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/survey-of-hong-kong-british-national-overseas-visa-holders-2021>]

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Hongkongers in Britain, 'Where will Hongkongers stay in Britain? Survey report on Hong Kong BN(O) Arrivals' Preferred Destinations', June 2021 [<https://www.hongkongers.org.uk/bno-destinations>]

¹² UKHK, '2021 UKHK HKers settlement survey report' (October 2021)

With migration generally, it is not uncommon for some migrants to arrive before their family, though in the case of Hong Kongers, this does not seem to be usual so far. A survey conducted by the South East Strategic Migration Partnership found that, while 80% had arrived in the region with their family, 10% said family members would be joining later. (A further 10% said their family would not be joining them.)¹³ This is similar to findings from a survey by UKHK which found that 85% had arrived with partners and other family members.¹⁴

Another notable feature of Hong Kongers in the UK, identified in surveys, is that almost half are Christian, with the majority of these being of Protestant faiths. A small proportion are Buddhist. However, the relatively high proportion identifying as Christian may reflect the strength and reach of church networks associated with some of the surveys rather than prevalence. But these figures also suggest that churches can play a significant role in welcoming.

What are Hong Kongers' priorities for their new lives in the UK?

Hong Kongers are a diverse group, arriving at different stages of life and with varied motivations, expectations, aspirations and future plans. While some – young activists in particular – hope to return to Hong Kong should the political climate change, most Hong Kongers plan to stay here and for their children to grow up British. In our interviews with stakeholders and Hong Kongers we asked about priorities for new lives in the UK. Responses included finding somewhere to live, placing children in schools, getting a job and meeting people.

The priorities of many Hong Kongers therefore relate to settling their family in the right location and finding schools. Employment is the next priority for many and is higher up the list for those without a financial cushion to tide them over.

“I can say that our economic position is quite privileged for us to stay here not finding a job ... I think there is some Hong Kong coming. They need to find a job very in urgent way ... They are not very financially stable.” – mum, London

Most Hong Kongers moving to the UK plan to stay here and for their children to grow up British



¹³ South East Strategic Migration Partnership, 'SESPM - HK BN(O) survey in south east England' (28 March 2022)

¹⁴ UKHK, '2021 UKHK HKers settlement survey report' (October 2021)

Many Hong Kongers with young families said that their first priority was settling their children into their new life, with some explicitly saying they would wait until their children were fully settled in before looking for employment. For adults without children, finding a house and a permanent location was the first priority, alongside other practical tasks such as learning to drive and buying a car. Many cited that finding somewhere permanent to live was a priority because they knew the property market was very 'hot', especially in desirable areas.

Stakeholders similarly reported that finding a property in a good location with good schools was commonly the first priority for a large proportion of new arrivals. One strategic migration partnership coordinator noted that for many she had encountered, this was first on the list before sorting out employment.



Representatives of civic society organisations set up by Hong Kongers noted that this may also have to do with the stress of the process of leaving home and moving to a new country, with those of whom can afford it opting to take 6 months or a year to recuperate and decompress before embarking on a job search.



“At least [for] this 1 to 2 years, they may ... plan to take a rest or they will not plan ... to get work here [yet].” – stakeholder, voluntary organisation

The rest of our report will focus on these areas of life, identifying what needs to be done to help Hong Kongers settle and integrate in the UK.

2. Where are Hong Kongers settling and why?

Previous groups of migrants have often shown distinct patterns of settlement in different areas of the UK, for example East Asians in Leicester, Bangladeshis in parts of east London and Sri Lankans in Harrow and Tooting. Overall, research by the Migration Observatory has found that in 2019 almost half (48%) of the UK's migrants were either in London or in the Southeast.¹⁵ In contrast, Northern Ireland, Wales and the Northeast had much lower proportions at between 1% and 2%.¹⁶

There is little national data on precisely where Hong Kongers are settling in the UK: most has been collected at regional level and much evidence is qualitative and observational. However, a small number of national surveys provide a picture of Hong Kongers' preferences pre-departure. A survey specifically on regional preference conducted by Hong Kongers in Britain in June 2021 found that 94% gave England as their preferred UK nation of settlement.¹⁷ The top 5 localities, excluding Greater London, were other large cities, including Manchester, Birmingham and Bristol. The Migration Observatory survey also established London as the preferred destination of 42% of respondents, with Manchester second with 12%. However, these preferences are likely to be on the basis of a loose familiarity with them by name and reputation, since Hong Kongers have mostly settled in cities, and have chosen more suburban locations and towns.

An unpublished survey by the South West Strategic Migration Partnership also found that only 13% of Hong Kongers who were settling in the region were doing so on the basis of prior knowledge of the region.

¹⁵ Man-yee Kan, Lindsay Richards, and Peter William Walsh, 'The migration intentions of British National (Overseas) status holders in Hong Kong', Migration Observatory, Oxford (2 December 2021) [<https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/the-migration-intentions-of-british-national-overseas-status-holders-in-hong-kong/>]

¹⁶ Denis Kierans, 'Briefing: Where do migrants live in the UK?', Migration Observatory, Oxford (24 March 2022) [<https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/MigObs-briefing-Where-do-migrants-live-in-the-UK.pdf>]; 'Local data on migrants in the UK', (01 June 2022) [<https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/projects/local-data-guide/>] (Accessed 6 June 2022)

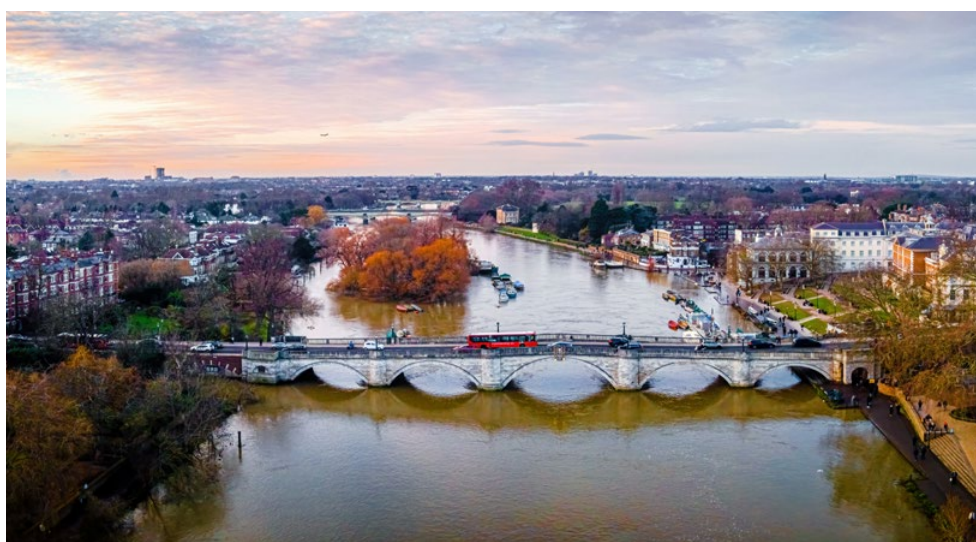
¹⁷ Hongkongers in Britain, 'Where will Hongkongers stay in Britain? Survey report on Hong Kong BN(O) arrivals' preferred destinations' (June 2021) [<https://www.hongkongers.org.uk/bno-destinations>]

BN(O)s who were still based in Hong Kong but considering a move showed more interest in the devolved nations, with 12% interested in Scotland, 7% in Wales and 6% in Northern Ireland. These increases may be due to greater exposure to information among potential migrants and suggest that efforts on the part of devolved nations to raise awareness of their offer are being effective.

Evidence from the UK's nations and regions

London has been a destination for previous arrivals from Hong Kong, but there are no very sizeable settled communities in any one area. In any case, Hong Kongers appear to be attracted to very different localities to those which have attracted migrants in the past.

The Greater London Authority has gained a partial picture of locations of settlement from council tax registration, among other methods. It has estimated numbers across the Greater London areas at 2,000-4,000.¹⁸ Settlers are more concentrated in southwest London including in the boroughs of Kingston, Sutton and Richmond. Sutton has been a particularly popular choice, with an estimated 700-800 having settled there. Elsewhere in the Greater London area, numbers are thought to be much smaller outside of the south and minimal in the east.



¹⁸ Unpublished data reported in research interview

Other locations in southeast England are proving to be popular among Hong Kongers. An unpublished survey by the South East Strategic Migration Partnership found concentrations of respondents in locations including Southampton, Tunbridge Wells, Guildford, Brighton and Reading. The survey also found that more than two-thirds (69%) were planning to stay where they had settled, though more than a quarter said they were uncertain. This suggests that the arrival of Hong Kongers is unlikely to result in frequent mobility and high population turnover in neighbourhoods and communities.

Other locations across the UK reported relatively small numbers of Hong Kongers compared to southeast England. Based on previous patterns of inward migration, the West Midlands had been expecting high numbers, particularly in Birmingham and Wolverhampton, but they report receiving only a few hundred Hong Kongers. However, locations outside of the main conurbation have proved more popular. In particular Solihull reports around 1,000 newcomers from Hong Kong, gleaned from school admissions data. Strategic migration partnerships in other areas of the UK similarly report favoured spots as being suburbs and towns situated close to larger cities. Some notable locations include Trafford and Warrington in the Northwest.

Hong Kongers' perspectives

The popularity of such locations as Trafford, Warrington, Solihull and Sutton as destinations for Hong Kongers has been viewed with some interest.¹⁹ This trend is explained with reference to four main factors: The presence of very good state schools, often Grammars; relatively affordable housing in comparison with more central city locations; proximity to cities for commuting to work; lower crime rates and a more affluent feel. These priorities have influenced Hong Kongers' decisions about where to live in the UK.

Across the board, stakeholders cited the presence of good schools, specifically those rated 'outstanding' by Ofsted, as the principal factor for the majority of Hong Kongers with young families.

¹⁹ [<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2022/06/04/world/europe/hong-kong-migrants-london.html>]



“We’re thinking of buying a house in Richmond. I have a friend there, but she says the catchment areas are very small. We need to find a house in those catchment area[s].” – couple, London



“I choose – because my husband are thinking [of] different areas, because of the schools. We know that here the school are very famous ... and the crime rate is lower than other areas.” – woman, London

Education is culturally a high priority and, for many, all other factors can be ‘cast aside’ for a good school

Some stakeholders expressed surprise that Hong Kongers were moving to locations not populated by existing Chinese communities, for example Solihull, and Warrington. One stakeholder from Hong Kong spoke for others in noting that education is culturally a high priority, and that for many all other factors could be ‘cast aside’ for a good school. Some local authorities and SMP coordinators interviewed noted that clusters of Hong Kongers are forming in the catchment areas of good schools. Examples by nation and region include Sutton, Reading, Tunbridge Wells, and Guildford in the southeast of England.

In Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, while overall numbers are lower, clusters are reported in Glasgow, Edinburgh, and the Lothians in Scotland, Lisburn and Bangor in Northern Ireland, and Cardiff in Wales.

For many interviewees, especially for those with children, crime rates were a significant factor in choosing a location. Again, participants did in-depth independent research, looking at local crime reports and maps in the course of their research, sometimes based on anecdotal evidence from friends and different media sources. One mother said that she was especially worried about crime as she had two daughters. Another participant mentioned that she was willing to pay more to live in a more secure area. At a local event in Scotland, some mentioned that they were moving from Glasgow to Edinburgh because the crime rate there is generally lower.

Hong Kongers are generally not keen to live near 'too many' other Hong Kongers, preferring to integrate into the local community.



Relatively few Hong Kongers said that they wanted to live near other members of the diaspora. In fact, a few expressed surprise that the location they had chosen was, on arrival, already populated by so many other Hong Kongers. There were several reasons given for their preference. A number said that they thought some areas already had 'too many' Hong Kongers, and that they wanted to integrate into the local community. Some also said that they thought that their children would integrate better in schools with fewer Hong Kongers.

“

“I think [school] should be one of the most efficient ways for my kids to adapt.” – man, South Wales

Others living in smaller towns or rural areas were looking for a quieter pace of life in comparison with how they lived in Hong Kong, seen as crowded and frantic.

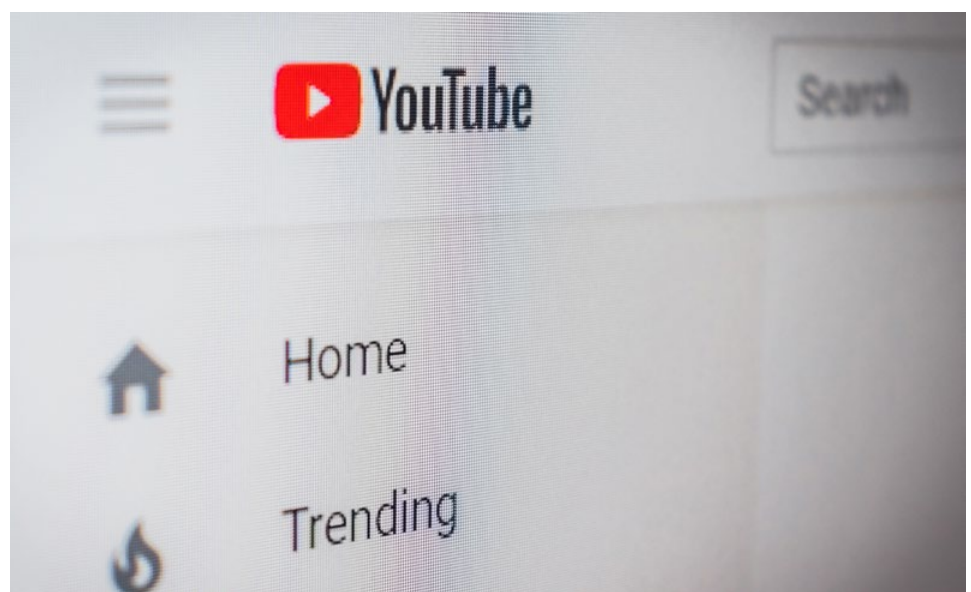
“

“[It’s] nice, simple, a little, you know, a town and then away from the city. And everything is more easier. And then you just, you could chill a bit ... We don’t like to live in a place with lots of people first, especially [in] Hong Kong, we try to get away from people.” – couple, South Wales

Other reasons taken into consideration included the local climate, with the south coast and South Wales in particular valued for their milder climates. One focus group participant said that he had exclusively compared Scotland and Wales in choosing somewhere to settle, and chose Wales on the basis of weather, seeing Scotland as too cold. One mother said she chose not to move to Scotland or the North because she did not want her son to speak with the local accent.

Where Hong Kongers were living in areas of the UK with very small numbers of other Hong Kongers, this was largely because they had family or friends who they wished to join. This was reported to be the case in Northern Ireland where numbers are believed to be in the hundreds.

YouTubers have been influential in the decisions of some Hong Kongers, by familiarising those intending to move with particular localities that might best meet their needs. The influence of social media, and YouTube in particular, on decisions about where to settle in a host country has not been noted before. A number of Hong Kongers interviewed for this research said that YouTube had been a major source of information about where to live in the UK. However, some of those interviewed said they were more hesitant about believing YouTubers fully, noting that they knew of others who had been disappointed after following YouTube





recommendations. Some stakeholders similarly noted that while people were eager to share information online in general, much of it is unverified and even misleading.

“If you ask me, another challenge is creating a channel through which Hong Kongers can receive correct information. The information [out there] is not quite accurate or comprehensive, resulting in more problems ... YouTubers keep emphasising danger in the UK – everywhere is unsafe except places they recommend.” – stakeholder, civil society organisation

Some Hong Kongers mentioned that they were discouraging their friends from moving to certain areas popular among the community, such as Sutton, due to the competitiveness of the rental market and for school places. One said that his family was considering moving away from the London borough to Nottingham, where they had purchased property. Another said that while she was able to buy her house when she arrived a year ago, property price increases meant she could not have afforded it now.

Accommodation as a key factor

Finding accommodation is reported to be a top priority for many Hong Kongers: research by a consortium of stakeholder organisations in London found almost three-quarters of respondents said it was the most difficult issue they experienced.²⁰ There is currently very little data on the housing status of Hong Kongers settling in the UK. A number of small-scale surveys have been conducted into the balance between renting and owner-occupation among Hong Kongers. Their findings have been varied, possibly because respondents were at different stages in the process of settling in the UK..

Available data suggests that many will have bought, or be in the process of buying, property rather than renting long term. The UKHK ‘Hongkonger Survey’ found that more than two-thirds of respondents said they were likely to buy a home within the next 2 years.²¹

²⁰ Hongkongers in Britain, Hackney Chinese Community Services (HCCS), and Hong Kong Assistance and Resettlement Community (HKARC), ‘Briefing on housing situation of Hong Kong BN(O)s arriving in the UK’ (April 2021) [<https://www.hongkongers.org.uk/bno-housing>]

²¹ UKHK, ‘2021 UKHK HKers settlement survey report’ (October 2021)

While the assets of Hong Kongers will vary considerably, some have a significant amount of wealth at their disposal, with over 82% having over £100,000 total household assets and 34% with over £500,000.²² This gives many Hong Kongers some degree of choice in where they live and the accommodation they buy. However, many other Hong Kongers have more limited budgets and are choosing affordable locations, including South Wales and Warrington.

We found a mixture of arrangements among the Hong Kongers we interviewed: some had purchased apartments or housing outright, sometimes before arriving in the UK; others were renting and some were staying with friends or family until they found somewhere suitable.



“Money-wise, it’s okay ... We planned to buy a house, but it’s quite expensive. We’re renting now.” – woman, Greater London



Renters face particular issues resulting from their lack of credit history and also from the practices of landlords. Many Hong Kongers who were renting said that their landlord had required them to pay a year’s rent upfront, and said that this was the norm across the UK. This does not apply in Scotland, however, where a maximum amount of 6 months’ rent can be requested in advance. One woman said that in her second year of renting her house, her landlord said he would consider monthly rent payments, but the

²² UKHK, ‘2021 UKHK HKers settlement survey report’ (October 2021)

property management did not agree to this and asked her to do another credit check. As nothing had changed in her personal situation, she declined to do so and agreed to pay 12 months upfront again.

The majority of interviewees expressed interest in buying new-builds and apartments, rather than older homes. They cited that it was easier to move into a new-build with everything installed and ready. However, one woman mentioned that she had wanted to purchase a second-hand home via an agent while she was still in Hong Kong, but there were difficulties with legal paperwork. In the end, she opted for a new-build instead, though these were 'more expensive and smaller'.

A few mentioned that they were upset and confused that it seemed like landlords and agents were allowing them to 'bid' and compete with other Hong Kongers for the same property. In Hong Kong, selling and letting is on a first-come-first-served basis. Some were confused as to whether they were deliberately being charged more due to perceptions that Hong Kongers are relatively affluent.



"I couldn't find anything that meet my requirements. I thought one is really nice. So I made an offer. But I'm not soon enough ... And they prefer to consider local family more so that they turned me down. And I felt really frustrated, because I've tried quite a long time for searching." – woman, Greater London

Such experiences indicate a need for more clarity over the rental and property market in the UK and how it works, such as in the government Welcome Pack or information from the Citizen's Advice Bureau. It is important that BN(O)s are informed on what is routine and what is irregular or, in a worst-case scenario, illegal and/or discriminatory.



3. Learning English to settle and integrate

Both stakeholders and Hong Kongers interviewed agreed that learning English was essential as a foundation for other aspects of integration, such as finding employment, navigating services, and making friends and social connections. Many Hong Kongers also asserted their desire to improve their spoken English in particular, some even wanting to learn dialects such as Geordie to further integrate and communicate with local people. Our research found barriers to learning English, but also that Hong Kongers were finding ways to improve their skills, often assisted by provision or signposting by stakeholders.

English language in Hong Kong

Cantonese is the main language for almost 90% of Hong Kong's citizens. However, English is one of the official languages in Hong Kong and is used in business, government and other areas. The 2016 census update found a majority of Hong Kong citizens saying they could speak, read or write English, at 51.1%, 63.5% and 65.6% respectively. Levels are even higher among younger Hong Kong citizens. Older people, especially the over-60s, are likely to have lower levels of fluency.²³



²³ Hong Kong population by-census (2016) [<https://www.bycensus2016.gov.hk/en/bc-mt.html>]
Bacon-Shone, J., Bolton, K. and Luke, KK. (2015) 'Language use, proficiency and attitudes in Hong Kong, Social Sciences Research Centre The University of Hong Kong' [http://www.ssrc.hku.hk/files/language_2/HK_Ig_survey_Final.pdf]

Given these age differences in proficiency, research by the Learning and Work Institute (L&W) in 2021 predicted relatively little demand for basic English.²⁴ However, in reality this may depend on the number of older people who move to the UK. We do agree with the L&W's views that for those in younger age groups, especially those aiming to continue their profession, demand is more likely to be at higher levels, from intermediate and upwards.

L&W identifies a number of learning routes for new migrants from Hong Kong: EAL (English as an Additional Language) support in schools; language support for students in Further Education and universities; and ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages), especially for beginners. In our research, we focused on the provision of ESOL in adult education colleges and in community settings. In the section that follows we look at English language learning for adults and later in the report we also look at the needs of children and young people in education settings.

What are Hong Kongers' ESOL needs?

In the course of the interviews and focus groups, stakeholders and Hong Kongers said that BN(O)s were looking to improve their English in order to lead full lives in the UK. This included:

- Finding work at their skill level or profession.
- Progressing in education and learning.
- Helping children with school work.
- Accessing services, including health and finance.
- Interactions for daily tasks such as shopping.

Hong Kongers and stakeholders also talked about needing better spoken English to socialise: given that many have settled in areas with small numbers of other Hong Kongers, meeting local people is of particular importance in reducing feelings of social isolation, which can lead to poor mental health.

²⁴ Rolfe, H. and Stevenson, A. 'Migration and English language learning after Brexit', Learning and Work Institute (2021)



Hong Kongers see English as key to settling, integrating and being in control of their future lives. Two participants at a focus group in Cardiff explained:

“

“There’s so many people coming, it’s so important, I think many people can’t speak that well. How do we contribute to society if we can’t speak? Even if you know how to work, it’s no use. Even if you have skills, it’s no use.” – man, Cardiff

“

“I think, because I don’t know English, I’m very dependent on others. If I know even a bit, I can be more independent.” – woman, Cardiff

Previous research suggests that some new arrivals will have ‘spiky’ profiles rather than consistent levels of ability across speaking, listening and writing, as a result of their knowledge and use of English in Hong Kong. Tutors and Hong Kongers themselves said their reading and writing skills were much stronger than their speaking and listening skills. Similarly a number of the Hong Kongers we interviewed understood written English well but lacked confidence with spoken English. Providers such as Sutton College consequently tailor much of their provision around speaking and listening, on topics related to integration and understanding life and culture in the UK.

Notably though, stakeholders reported a tendency for Hong Kongers to underrate their spoken English, due to lack of confidence. This indicates the importance of opportunities for conversation across a range of settings, as well as formal classes. The issue of understanding national and regional accents was also raised by Hong Kongers, which is difficult to address through classes. Some Hong Kongers noted that their confidence in spoken English was shaken when realising how different English spoken in the UK is in comparison with what they were taught at school. Some Hong Kongers felt that the isolation they experienced during the pandemic had set them back, since they were not able to make social contact during the first months of arriving in the UK. Those who arrived more recently were keen to attend classes and to improve their speaking skills quickly.

Tailored provision

Some Hong Kongers have particular needs for English language learning, which are not being fully met through mainstream ESOL classes. Older Hong Kongers have much lower levels of English proficiency than other age groups, sometimes speaking very little English. While colleges offer entry-level courses, older Hong Kongers are much less likely to attend colleges, deterred by lack of transport and low confidence. Two older people reported that they had attempted to go to classes, but dropped out as they found it too difficult to follow. One also felt that the exam-based focus of the course was irrelevant to her. Their needs around English are specific, around functioning in their daily lives. Tailored provision in the community is therefore much more suitable for this group than comprehensive college classes.



Previous research has noted that many Hong Kongers will be seeking to find employment and will therefore need guidance on job search, career planning and occupationally specific language and skills.²⁵ This issue arose in many of our own interviews with stakeholders and Hong Kongers, and is covered further in Section 4 ('Employment'). The need for work-related English language provision covered professions such as nursing and teaching, and also trades. An adult education service in the south of England told us it was setting up a course for nurses to convert their qualifications but was having to wait for funding to be approved. Such barriers need to be addressed since there is likely to be high demand for provision which links vocational training and ESOL, both for Hong Kongers but also for other migrant groups.



Eligibility

Arrivals via the Hong Kong BN(O) visa route will not be eligible for ESOL provision funded from the Adult Education Budget (AEB) until the ordinary residency criteria (3 years) are met. However, as part of the Government's welcome scheme, the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) has set up a targeted support fund open to local authorities, which can provide the authorities with up to £800 per head to support ESOL needs where necessary.²⁶ This fund operates in England only, with the governments for Scotland and Wales funding AEB provision directly. In Northern Ireland, ESOL funding for Hong Kongers has been devolved but is not ring-fenced so may be used for other purposes.

²⁵ Learning and Work Institute 'New arrivals from Hong Kong – language and other learning needs. Briefing to the South East Strategic Partnership for Migration' (2021)

²⁶ [<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/hong-kong-uk-welcome-programme-guidance-for-local-authorities>]

Local authorities in England were delivering ESOL provision largely through local colleges, but also through other community providers. Colleges were pleased to be able to offer provision to Hong Kongers, who would otherwise be ineligible. While some colleges allow Hong Kongers to pay privately, some do not since they can fill places with students eligible for free AEB courses. The BN(O) funding had a number of drawbacks from the point of view of providers, in particular the requirement to claim funding retrospectively.

Despite funding from DLUHC to local authorities in England, some Hong Kongers also said they had been turned away from colleges and told that they were not eligible. In addition, stakeholders said that not all local authorities had drawn down the funding. In Scotland ESOL provision is free to the learner, but stakeholders reported a shortage of provision at intermediate and higher levels, where there is most demand from Hong Kongers, and a shortage of ESOL teachers overall. Teacher shortage was also said to be a constraint on provision elsewhere, including in the northeast of England. And in Northern Ireland and Wales, we found many Hong Kongers were learning English through community providers and some had been told they were not eligible for college classes.

Community provision

Depending on where they live in the UK, Hong Kongers can also usually access other provision in their local community which does not have a 3-year residency requirement. Such provision is funded from a variety of sources, including the local authority. Stakeholders reported that Hong Kongers widely make use of such provisions when they have either been told they are not eligible for provision funded in colleges via the Adult Education Budget or where classes are full.

In some cases churches were holding conversation classes, and these were reported to be popular. Volunteers were also setting up basic English courses for older people, without funding. Since learning informally and through conversation is likely to meet the needs of some Hong Kongers better than formal classes, funding

should be made available for this provision. To be most useful to Hong Kongers, these sorts of classes should have a strong emphasis on life in the UK, and on social integration.



“We’ve also had an integration course, ‘British Integration Skills’ which was quite popular. Tutors discussed with [the] group [what] they wanted to cover, bespoke according to what was most appropriate ... Understanding the NHS, political system, voting. Really understanding how systems work differently.” – stakeholder, ESOL provider

For spoken English, online learning is less useful than face-to-face classes which offer more opportunities to practise speaking and listening

Another option is private sector provision which is widely available. Some Hong Kongers said they had used this option to learn English, usually online. However, while easily available, the online option was seen as less useful by Hong Kongers than face-to-face classes which offer more opportunities to practise speaking and listening. One interviewee noted that she felt she could practise reading and writing skills independently using online resources, but that speaking and listening skills could only be improved in a classroom environment.

Hong Kongers are just one group of migrants who are in need of ESOL support, along with Afghans, Ukrainians and other asylum seekers and refugees. ESOL needs vary between and within these groups, depending on existing levels of English and their priorities for settling and integrating. An ESOL strategy was promised in 2016 as part of the government’s Integrated Communities Strategy but has never been published. Any future strategy should take account of the need for a wide range of options to meet the varying needs of people wishing to learn or improve their English.



4. Employment

In this section we look at employment and enterprise aspirations and opportunities for Hong Kongers. These will vary, at least initially, according to experience and qualifications. We have noted that the priority given by Hong Kongers to employment varies widely. For those who do need to find work quickly, this can also mean migrants' skills are frequently under-utilised. In addition, there are often barriers to transferring professional qualifications. These issues are very real for some Hong Kongers.

The Hong Kongers we interviewed included trained nurses, social workers and teachers as well as engineers, electricians and plumbers. Most were not working in their occupational areas, through a mixture of choice and as a result of barriers. Some of our interviewees were working remotely for companies in Hong Kong, a number of them still in their former roles.

Preparing for employment

In terms of prioritising employment, many Hong Kongers said that this was stated as being secondary to settling their children in schools, finding a permanent place to live and improving their spoken English. Younger single Hong Kongers tend to prioritise employment more than those who are slightly older with children. However, most Hong Kongers across most age groups were interested in returning to the workforce in some form, whether in the same profession as they had in Hong Kong or in another sector.

A focus group of mothers who had moved to London from Hong Kong in the past year discussed perspectives on employment, with participants generally agreeing that their priority is to settle children into school or nursery. One was still house-hunting and planned to look for a part-time job once her family was settled. Another had found her son's classmates enjoyed her homemade desserts and snacks, and was looking into opportunities to turn this idea into a business. A third participant was starting to explore her options, including how her skills and qualifications could be transferred. Other interviewees had a more pressing interest in finding work,

Most Hong Kongers interviewed were not working in their occupational areas, through a mixture of choice and as a result of barriers.

but this rarely took precedence over decisions about housing (and schools, if applicable).

While often not prioritising employment, Hong Kongers had aspirations for their future working lives, but were taking a planned and measured approach: this included improving English and researching options, sometimes changing career paths or setting up a new enterprise:



“As I am taking care of three kids by myself at the moment, I didn’t plan anything yet. But I’m trying to find opportunities ... Because I am interested in elderly care ... I’m trying to find any opportunities to do volunteer jobs in the hospice first, and then maybe study further to gain qualification later, when my husband arrives.” – woman, Greater London

Employment prospects

In terms of prospects for finding work, surveys consistently find that Hong Kong BN(O) visa holders are more highly educated than the average person in both Hong Kong and the UK. This reflects both their motivations to leave Hong Kong and their ability to do so – having the financial and social resources available to them. A survey by the Migration Observatory of Hong Kongers’ migration intentions found only 5% of ‘movers’ (thinking of moving to the UK or elsewhere) had an education of junior secondary level or below, compared to more than a third (34%) of stayers.²⁷

The government-commissioned IFF survey²⁸ and the work and employment survey by Hong Kongers in Britain²⁹ found that over two-thirds (69%) of BN(O)s have degree-level qualifications or higher.³⁰ HKUC’s survey split tertiary education into three categories:

27 Man-yeek Kan, Lindsay Richards, and Peter William Walsh, ‘The migration intentions of British National (Overseas) status holders in Hong Kong’, Migration Observatory, Oxford (2 December 2021) [<https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/the-migration-intentions-of-british-national-overseas-status-holders-in-hong-kong/>]

28 HKUC, ‘Hong Kong BN(O) status holders’ characteristics – Hong Kong Umbrella Community’, unpublished.

29 Julian Chan, Jason Chao, Dr R. Yeung, ‘Survey report on work and employment for recently arrived Hongkongers in the UK’, Hongkongers in Britain (October 2021) [<https://www.hongkongers.org.uk/employment-survey/>]

30 HM Government-commissioned IFF research, ‘Survey of Hong Kong British National (Overseas) visa holders, 2021’ (March 2022) [<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/survey-of-hong-kong-british-national-overseas-visa-holders-2021>]

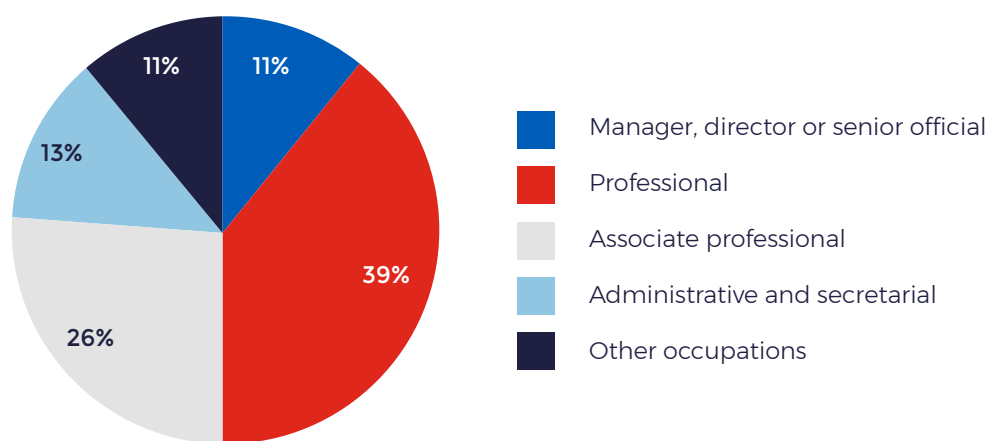
BN(O) visa holders are more educated and qualified than the domestic average in both Hong Kong and the UK.

diploma/associate's degree, tertiary, and Master's degree or above. 39% held degrees and another 22% had a higher degree. Only 5% had not reached a higher secondary level. This last figure is likely to be older people accompanying younger family members.

Levels of English are also important for employment prospects. Some data is available on English language educational level, although much of this is through self-assessment and may understate proficiency. HKUC's survey found 78% of respondents were educated at least partly in English during secondary education and almost half (47%) received tertiary education in English.

A survey of recent arrivals on work and employment by Hong Kongers in Britain found two-thirds had over 11 years' worth of work experience, and over half had an equivalent annual income of over £36,000 per annum in Hong Kong. The largest occupational group was that of professionals, or associate professionals. As shown in Figure 4.1, some 65% of respondents to the IFF/Home Office survey had held positions at this level in Hong Kong, and a further 13% had held managerial or senior posts.

Figure 4.1: Occupational status of Hong Kongers before arriving in the UK



Source: Home Office / IFF Research survey of Hong Kong BN(O) visa holders, April/May and August/September 2021

A recent survey commissioned by the South East Migration Partnership has found a similar picture, with the top occupations in professional and associate professional sectors of accountancy banking and finance, business consultancy, IT, media, and teaching and education. Only 12% had been self-employed. However, surveys may under-count the presence of people with non-professional

skills, for example those working in trades: it is likely that their participation in surveys is smaller and worth noting that their level of English may be lower.

This picture of the qualifications and experience of Hong Kongers indicates their potential to address skills gaps in a number of occupational areas and stimulate economic growth through new enterprises. This potential is applicable across the nations and regions of the UK, if Hong Kongers can be attracted to locations where their skills are especially needed. With some exceptions, for example the work of social enterprise ACH³¹, employers and employer bodies are not currently engaged in attracting Hong Kongers, and this represents a missed opportunity.

Employment intentions

The employment intentions of Hong Kongers have been included in a number of existing surveys. As we described earlier, there are indications that while employment prospects are likely to be a factor for some Hong Kongers in moving to the UK, this motivation is not necessarily for better financial reward, at least in the short term: the Migration Observatory's survey of prospective movers found that earning potential was not a pull factor, and most expect a pay cut³². This is a realistic expectation, at least initially, with the survey by HKUC finding 16% in elementary occupations, compared to 3% in Hong Kong.

Our interviewees included several with professional and managerial backgrounds who had taken blue-collar jobs in supermarkets and warehouses. Their reasons for taking these positions included wishing to improve their spoken English and meet local people. Another motivation was to gain experience of a UK workplace and to obtain a reference for financial services or for a future job. Their experiences were generally positive, with individuals and stakeholders commenting that wage rates and conditions are better for such work in the UK than in Hong Kong. However, the underutilisation of Hong Kongers' skills and experience is a missed opportunity. The challenge for policy is to ensure that it is short-lived.

The challenge for policy is to ensure that any underutilisation of Hong Kongers' qualifications and experience is short-lived.

31 [<https://ach.org.uk>]

32 Man-yeek Kan, Lindsay Richards, and Peter William Walsh, 'The migration intentions of British National (Overseas) status holders in Hong Kong', Migration Observatory, Oxford (2 December 2021) [<https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/the-migration-intentions-of-british-national-overseas-status-holders-in-hong-kong/>]



“Coming to UK is also a good reason to change my tracks ... I think working in a warehouse might not be long term. It’s a transition definitely. So I was still use my spare time to self-study, those kind of things.” – man, Cardiff

We noted that Hong Kongers are not necessarily looking to continue their previous occupations in the UK: over 80% of respondents to the survey by Hongkongers in Britain said they were open to moving to other sectors, and the survey by HKUC found that half were planning to change sectors or had already done so. HKUC and other organisations working with Hong Kongers, including those offering bespoke careers guidance, have found that in some cases this change was because of a lack of confidence which could be overcome with time and familiarity with the UK and its customs. In other cases moving to the UK was an opportunity to make a new start and to reconsider life goals. The employment and advice service Renaisi set up by Hackney Council finds its advisers often have to unpack whether switching sectors is about lack of confidence or a genuine desire for change.

Transferring qualifications from Hong Kong to the UK

Both stakeholders and interviewees highlighted the difficulty of transferring qualifications to the UK. These included occupations in sectors that are currently experiencing shortages, for example nursing, teaching and social work. Difficulties were also reported in obtaining certification for trades such as plumbing and electrical work.



Nurses

We interviewed a number of nurses who were fully qualified in Hong Kong, some of whom had practised for over a decade. They had found the process of registering as a nurse with the Nursing and Midwifery Council to be very challenging, as the documents and tests that are required have short expiry dates. This includes the 'certificate of good standing' required from the Hong Kong Nursing Board, which is valid for just 1 year, and the Occupational English Test (OET) and the practical 'OSCE' exams which are valid only for 2 years.

For many, the OET was seen as the biggest obstacle. Many Hong Kong-qualified nurses have a good standard of English reading and writing, as all their written training is in English, but many struggle with the oral and listening aspects of the test. However, because the OET requires a minimum score across each component, rather than a cumulative minimum score, many nurses have failed overall. This represents a substantial cost, with the OET costing £350 per try and the OSCE £800. A survey of members carried out by the Hong Kong Nursing Association found more than 60% said they were struggling to pass.

"I think it's difficult for many HK nurses, many of my colleagues have come here ... maybe ten, most of us are stuck at this stage ... one colleague tried more than nine times." – woman, London

To assist nurses in the process of registering to practise in the UK, some providers who are aware of this barrier locally are preparing bespoke courses for tests such as the OET. One such provider is Kent Adult Education.

Some nurses have managed to find employment while going through the registration process, as healthcare assistants or 'pre-registered' nurses. This was found to be somewhat positive, in allowing them to adapt to hospital life in the UK before fully qualifying. However, others said that taking these posts was frustrating, as they are lower paid and allow limited responsibilities compared to professional nursing.

Many Hong Kong-qualified nurses have a good standard of English reading and writing, as all their written training is in English, but many struggle with spoken and listening English.





Teachers

Surveys have identified teachers as a significant group among Hong Kongers in the UK, which presents obvious benefits for addressing persistent shortages.³³ Newly arrived teachers are keen to work in UK schools though note that pay levels are lower by as much as half in comparison with Hong Kong. Teaching responsibilities are somewhat different, particularly in primary schools which have subject teachers in Hong Kong rather than classroom teachers covering all subjects as in the UK. The culture of UK schools is also experienced as very different to that in Hong Kong, with less emphasis on obedience in the UK and more on pupil participation and creativity.

We were told by several interviewees that some Hong Kongers with teaching qualifications are currently working in lower-skilled jobs in sectors such as warehousing. While their reasons are not known, transfer of qualifications would appear to be a factor, with some Hong Kongers wishing to teach in the UK finding it a difficult process. The Hong Kong postgraduate certificate in teaching, the PGDE, is recognised in the UK but teachers looking to work in the UK found that schools required a process of registration. One route is to find a job in a school as an unqualified teacher and then gain Qualified Teacher status (QTS).

³³ Jack Worth and Henry Faulkner, Teacher labour market in England annual report 2022 [<https://www.nfer.ac.uk/teacher-labour-market-in-england-annual-report-2022/>]

One interviewee who had taught Geography in Hong Kong had instead decided to go through the process of postgraduate training again, via Teach First, rather than seeking employment in her subject, feeling that it was not in high demand and that local applicants would be preferred. A disadvantage of this approach was starting at the bottom of the pay scale, but she also found that it had its advantages, since the school placement component would include mentoring and familiarisation with school life and culture. She felt that this would give her greater understanding of students and their lives, enabling greater rapport.

Some teaching qualifications are less transferable to the UK, in particular those relating to early years. One kindergarten teacher with a Master's degree in Hong Kong was working as an assistant in a non-teaching role at a nursery. She had found it difficult to find guidance on registering as a qualified early-years teacher, so that she could achieve her aim of working in a school reception class. She had received conflicting advice from different government departments and felt that her only option now was to retrain. She had also experienced difficulty in obtaining a criminal record check, a CNCC with the Hong Kong Police refusing her application since it was through the agency that employed her and not a school. Other interviewees also expressed concern about any contact with the Hong Kong Police and several had heard of delays even in applications made directly by schools.

The experiences of these Hong Kongers indicates a need for bridging training which includes transfer of qualifications alongside reorientation to the UK teaching system. This could also be offered to teachers of all other nationalities coming to work in the UK. The work of organisations including HKUC has been already been valuable to teachers looking to teach here and they can also provide ongoing support for teachers in post.

The experiences of nurses and teachers are also likely to apply to other professions and occupations. They indicate the need for improved communication between the relevant bodies in the UK and Hong Kong. Where barriers appear to be significant and unjustified, they should be reviewed so that Hong Kongers and other new arrivals are able to apply their professional skills.

Hong Kong teachers need bridging training including transfer of qualifications and reorientation to the UK teaching system

There is a need for improved communication between professional bodies in the UK and Hong Kong to identify barriers and solutions to transferring professional skills and qualifications.

Employers and employer bodies should be actively engaged in identifying barriers and identifying solutions. This is especially in view of the benefits of having teachers from a similar background to the growing number of Hong Kong students in schools across the UK.



Tradespeople face higher barriers, as such jobs in Hong Kong require very little or no English.

Trades

Several interviewees reported that they had hired or were themselves tradespeople, such as electricians, plumbers and decorators, on an informal basis via Cantonese-language networks. Tradespeople as a group face higher barriers to transferring qualifications than others, as such jobs in Hong Kong require very little or no English. The difference in qualifications is also greater, as most tradespeople leave school to train under a 'master' as an apprentice and gain their skills informally. As a result, coming to the UK they have to start again, despite many being highly skilled. One interviewee said that he had left school at 13 to become an electrician and was now 65. For someone in this position, one stakeholder noted that:



“He might know that [in] plumbing, electricity, you can make a living here, but it’s like he’s looking at a mountain he can’t climb over.” – stakeholder, Reading

She suggested that there be specific routes for such tradespeople to qualify with the help of an interpreter. However, there is still the issue of being unable to communicate with clients. A better solution may be to provide occupationally-focused ESOL provision while allowing tradespeople to demonstrate their aptitude in translated exams or assessments with interpreters.

If no such options become available, Hong Kong BN(O)s may continue to be hired only informally by fellow Cantonese speakers. This would mean missing wider opportunities for employment among other potential clients and possibly working without proper UK insurance and safety standard.

Familiarisation with the UK recruitment market

Hong Kongers spoke of differences in the job market and application process between Hong Kong and the UK. Many felt they lacked understanding of what employers were looking for in an application and how to present themselves. Stakeholders were aware of this issue and a number of voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) organisations are providing assistance to Hong Kongers in finding work, offering information, advice and guidance.³⁴

In Hong Kong, LinkedIn and other websites are less commonly used for advertising jobs and for networking. CVs and covering letters are also used differently. One stakeholder noted that many Hong Kongers were used to writing CVs with multiple pages of detail on past experience, along with their photograph, which UK employers do not want. An interviewee who was an HR manager in Hong Kong and is now working at a bank in the UK talked of the different expectations for skillsets: her experience was that Hong Kong recruiters tend to focus more on experience and language skills, while in the UK soft skills and competencies are valued more.

Many VCSE organisations have put on webinars and workshops on employability topics, including writing CVs and covering letters as well as interview skills. These events have proved very popular with some reporting sign-ups into the hundreds, signifying there

³⁴ The 'VCSE sector' is the term that includes any organisation working with 'social purposes'. This ranges from small community-based groups or schemes, for example the Scouts or 'good neighbour' schemes, to larger registered charities operating nationally, regionally and locally.

Hong Kong recruiters tend to focus more on experience and language skills, while in the UK soft skills and competencies are valued more.

is a great demand for such information. Hong Kongers who had received this kind of guidance said it had been very helpful:



“When the local people look at my rephrased CV immediately I got a lot of responses” – woman, Warrington

A further barrier to finding work is the role of informal networks in some sectors which are hard to break into. This was raised as a particular issue in the creative industries, but is also likely to exist elsewhere. More generally, stakeholders raised the importance of the role that informal approaches and conversations often play in the UK jobs market, of which Hong Kongers might not be aware. To assist Hong Kongers, and other minorities, sector networks need to be inclusive with organisations working with key stakeholders to promote opportunities.

Securing the right to work

A specific barrier for Hong Kongers wishing to work in some sectors is the need for a criminal record check through the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS). For many, the requirement to provide a CNCC (Certificate of No Criminal Conviction) from the Hong Kong Police is significantly difficult. While previously the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office was able to issue letters of verification to those applying for a CNCC, the Hong Kong authorities have now declared that this is invalid as it can ‘only be obtained for reasons



A further barrier to finding work is the role of informal networks in some sectors which are hard to break into

relating to applications for: a visa to visit or reside in another country; [or] the adoption of children.³⁵ Consideration for CNCC application is otherwise given only in ‘exceptional circumstances’ to meet legal or administrative requirements of foreign countries. The Hong Kong SAR government does not recognise the BN(O) visa as legitimate, which has also impacted other areas including barring BN(O)s from accessing their pension funds.

At the moment, letters of verification for a CNCC application can therefore only be sought from ‘a relevant UK government authority’ or an official organisation recognised by the Hong Kong Police, such as UCAS or the Nursing and Midwifery Council. However, the issue reported by a lot of interviewees is that many prospective employers require a completed DBS at the application stage. The Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office needs to find a way to streamline this process for individual applicants. This might involve, for example, obtaining a list of recognised authorities from the Hong Kong Police, or requesting that the Disclosure and Barring Service issue letters of verification itself.

Other barriers to obtaining a CNCC include the requirement of a full set of fingerprints from a police or law enforcement agency or a consulate where the applicant resides (legal representatives or private/commercial agencies are not recognised). Applications must also be paid for in Hong Kong dollars by a relative or friend in Hong Kong, or in US dollars for which the processing time may be longer than the stated 4 weeks. The Hong Kong Police website also notes that:



“If the applicant is under investigation by the Hong Kong Police Force / law enforcement agencies in Hong Kong, or is currently a defendant in criminal proceedings in Hong Kong, or is subject of non-payment of fine including traffic offences, his/her application will not be further processed until the matter concerned has been concluded.”³⁶

³⁵ ‘Countries G to P: applying for a criminal records check for someone from overseas’, Home Office, GOV. UK (7 June 2022) [<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/criminal-records-checks-for-overseas-applicants/countries-g-to-p-applying-for-a-criminal-records-check-for-someone-from-overseas#hong-kong>] (Accessed 13 June 2022)

³⁶ ‘About Certificate of No Criminal Conviction (CNCC)’, Hong Kong Police Force (June 2022) [https://www.police.gov.hk/ppp_en/11_useful_info/cert_no_crime_faq.html] (Accessed 13 June 2022)

This may be a further barrier for those who were involved in the 2019 protests, such as those with asylum seeker/refugee status. Alternatives to the DBS need to be in place for Hong Kongers who are in this position. Some Hong Kongers also said that they faced difficulties in providing referees for job applications, for example because they had to leave quickly for political reasons and so are not on good terms with their former employers. Such cases require flexibility and understanding on the part of employers.

We found evidence of other, more basic barriers to finding work including delays in getting a National Insurance number (NINO). This should not be a barrier in practice, since there is no legal requirement to hold one to work, and visa holders have access to a government document stating they can work in the UK. Nevertheless, we found evidence that some Hong Kongers misunderstand it as a compulsory step towards entering work, expressing their worry that employers might see the lack of a NINO as a disadvantage. The employment survey by Hong Kongers in Britain also found that a significant number have struggled to obtain NINOs, either at the application stage or waiting beyond the stated period.³⁷

We also found evidence of lack of understanding on the part of employers about the BN(O) visa. This issue as covered in an article in the Guardian newspaper in August 2021 featured Hong Kongers' experiences in seeking employment, which included lack of awareness among employers about their right to work.³⁸

As well as the right to work, it is also important that Hong Kongers are aware of their rights at work. Stakeholders expressed concern that Hong Kongers would be unaware of these and vulnerable to exploitation. Hong Kongers told us they expected to be at a disadvantage in the recruitment process, with employers preferring to recruit local applicants. For a few, this was a factor in seeking lower-skilled work. These low expectations might be addressed through employment support services who can help Hong Kongers to be more confident that they have skills and experience to offer employers and should not accept discrimination. However, some

³⁷ Julian Chan, Jason Chao, Dr R. Yeung, 'Survey report on work and employment for recently arrived Hongkongers in the UK', Hongkongers in Britain (October 2021) [<https://www.hongkongers.org.uk/employment-survey>]

³⁸ Kevin Rawlinson and Jedidajah Otte, "Employers seem baffled by this visa": Hongkongers who have fled to UK', The Guardian, (8 August 2021) [<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/aug/08/employers-seem-baffled-visa-hongkongers-fled-to-uk>] (Accessed 13 June 2022)

existing services have not reached Hong Kongers at scale, indicating a need to be proactive in reaching out to Hong Kongers, in both English and in Cantonese.

Enterprise

Stakeholders providing support to Hong Kongers consistently report interest from new arrivals in starting a new business in the UK. A survey by the South East Migration Partnership found 12% intend to start their own business, with particular interest in retail and sales.³⁹ An even higher level of interest has been found in other surveys – probably reflecting differences in wording. UKHK has found that more than 4 in 10 are considering starting a business.⁴⁰ While some respondents to these surveys already have experience of setting up a business, most do not: UKHK found only 8% were confident of their ability to do so successfully.

A number of our interviewees also said they were interested in starting a new business in the UK, and some were in the process of doing so. Motivations included the desire for a new start and to achieve goals which were more difficult in Hong Kong, where costs can be considerably higher. Some Hong Kongers also have savings as a result of having sold property in Hong Kong that they are interested in putting into a new business. Food and drink is a sector of particular interest to Hong Kongers. Others include accountancy, property management and pet grooming.

Some Hong Kongers had found it difficult to set up a business. A couple wishing to set up a restaurant in central London had found property agents unhelpful:



“They asked for lots of information, almost like an interrogation. We costed everything and saw vacant lots, but they didn’t really want to help us, gave us no recommendations or anything.” – couple, London

Consequently they decided to explore less central locations where they felt the process might be less difficult.

³⁹ South East Strategic Migration Partnership, ‘SESPM – HK BN(O) survey in south east England’ (28 March 2022)

⁴⁰ UKHK, ‘2021 UKHK HKers settlement survey report’ (October 2021)

More local council services could be set up to offer guidance and help in areas such as tax and, renting premises.

In recognition of levels of interest in enterprise among Hong Kongers, a number of organisations have established tailored support as part of their employment advice services. They include Renaisi, funded by DLUHC to provide employment transition services, and the migrant support service ACH.⁴¹ They deliver workshops around employability and enterprise support in different locations, with Renaisi also providing tailored advice to Hong Kongers.

In response to levels of interest from Hong Kongers settling in Sutton, the local council has provided bespoke advice and guidance on enterprise, including in high street locations. The service has found Hong Kongers in need of help in areas such as tax, renting premises and other administrative and legal requirements. This type of service could be replicated by local authorities across the UK who will benefit from regeneration through new local businesses and services.



41 [<https://renaisi.com/services/hongkongers-employment-support/>]
[<https://ach.org.uk/>]

5. Children, young people and education

As noted earlier, the age profile of Hong Kongers arriving in the UK is skewed towards younger age groups. Many arrivals are families with children at school, and many of these are transitioning into Higher Education. At this stage in our research we have not interviewed children and young people, but have gained insights into some areas of their experiences from their parents, through our hub meetings and seminar series.



It was very clear from our interviews that Hong Kongers feel strongly that the UK is a good place to bring up their children. Many had been reluctant to leave Hong Kong for their own sakes, but moved partly due their belief that their children will have freer lives and better opportunities in this country. They wish them to succeed educationally and to make the most of what life in the UK can offer them.



“When we had to leave, 70% of my reason to leave was for my children, for my children to be free. 30% for myself. I want them to have a good education and live in freedom.” – woman, Reading



“He’s very happy. I think it’s worth it for me to give up everything to come here.” – woman, London

In addition to how Hong Kongers have gone about choosing schools, we asked about how their children have settled in and their own contact with schools. Here we found high levels of interest in engaging with schools to help ensure that children are happy, as well as successful, in their new lives.

Choosing a school

As described earlier, finding a good school is a priority for many Hong Kongers. This in turn means that Hong Kongers give priority to finding a permanent address that is accepted by schools, rather than applying while in temporary accommodation.

Many parents use Ofsted criteria, at least as an initial screening, and are likely to reject schools with a rating lower than ‘outstanding’. This is not to say that Hong Kongers are only interested in academic results. Interviewees had a wider interest in what schools could offer, including clubs and afterschool activities. These are common in Hong Kong, and parents were disappointed to find fewer such opportunities in the UK.

Some parents’ concerns were related to the wider social environment of the school. For example, one mother reported that when looking at local secondary schools for her son, currently at primary school, she noted the behaviour of students in uniform outside of school, such as on the high street in local shops. She compared the UK with Hong Kong, where students in uniform off school grounds are still subject to discipline if seen by parents or teachers. She noted that she would prefer to choose a school whose environment seemed ‘better’, and that this wasn’t something necessarily reflected in Ofsted reports.

Parents’ concern to find the best school for their children means that they may move children if a place at a preferred school is offered. Several focus group participants reported that perhaps half of the parents they knew had moved their children to a different school, or were on different school waiting lists. Reasons for this included the focus on getting an ‘outstanding’ school, but also the ease of having multiple children at the same school.

Children's happiness was also a key factor, and experiences of bullying had resulted in decisions to change schools. One mother related that her daughter (14) was not given any orientation or a buddy on her first day, and cried after being laughed at for going to the wrong classroom. When another school contacted her about a new place opening up, she opted to send her daughter there.

Children's experiences in school

Overall, parents said that their children had settled down well in school. They enjoyed having less pressure from tests and homework compared with Hong Kong. Some remarked that their children actively look forward to the school day. However, they also remarked that UK schools offer much less in the way of after-school opportunities for extracurricular activities, such as for sports, music, drama and other activities.

Many said that their children were not in schools with other Hong Kongers. However, some said that their classmates were from diverse backgrounds and that this helped them to feel more at home.



“Everyone here, in London especially, are quite international. So they easily accept other races and nationalities.” – woman, London



Children learn English in Hong Kong schools from a very young age. Most will therefore arrive in the UK with a good understanding of English. They are assessed by schools, and additional help planned accordingly. This can include supplementary classes, and sometimes separate teaching where a number of pupils have ESOL needs.

Parents generally said that their children did not need additional support because they had learned English in Hong Kong and could speak, read and write to a reasonable standard. However, in some cases where children did need support, that which they received was variable. But in all cases we heard about, children were immersed in classrooms, rather than taught separately and, where necessary, were then supported through classroom help and supplementary teaching. This approach is likely to help students to settle more quickly, as well as enabling them to make progress in all curriculum areas. However, some schools seem to offer more structured supplementary teaching, such as ESOL activities at lunch breaks. And one father in Sutton noted that his son's school organised three days' worth of special lessons to catch up to his year group before term started.

Schools' resources seem to be a factor in the level of supplementary support given. We heard of one case where there had been a supplementary ESOL class at a school, but this ended on the retirement of the teacher. Students were then left to improve their English through self-studying. We also heard from parents who had arranged private English lessons for their children.

Language support can be more difficult to provide where numbers are small and pupils are dispersed. Starting from summer 2022, the Wales Strategic Migration Partnership is working with the Welsh government to develop a free online learning resource for children with ESOL needs, which will complement local provision. Coordinated by a language professional, the initial trial will support 50 children dispersed across Wales. This initiative could be adopted in different locations, especially those where numbers of Hong Kongers are small.

Some schools with Hong Kong children struggle to disentangle learning difficulties, English language needs and difficulties with social mixing.

Some parents of children with special needs had understandable concerns that their children had not been fully assessed and provided with the support they need. In some cases, diagnoses such as autism had not been transferred from records in Hong Kong. The process of assessment for special needs in the UK was found to be slow, with schools sometimes finding it difficult to disentangle learning difficulties, English language needs and difficulties with social mixing.

Supplementary provision for children with special needs could be particularly helpful for migrant children who are falling behind with the curriculum. One SMP was using additional resources to support an organisation to work with children with special education needs, combining language with curriculum subject learning.

Welcoming new pupils

Some parents said that their children's school had welcoming systems in place. Some schools have buddy schemes which usually pair pupils of the same age for classroom and whole-school familiarisation and support. Parents very much welcomed this kind of support, saying it made a difference to how quickly and well their children settled down at school.

However, this did not seem to be universal. One student attending a sixth-form college noted that she was given no guidance beyond the orientation day and relied on Google Maps to get to the right building for her classes on time.

Some Hong Kongers noted that some schools asked their children to share about their culture in class or at an assembly. They said that this helped other pupils understand why they had come to the UK, and made them feel welcome and included. For example, one man's two sons were the only Hong Kongers at their local primary school, and the staff made sure to ask them to talk about their culture and traditions to the class. Other parents said that they would have liked their children's school to have had an assembly to help pupils and staff to understand the reasons why Hong Kongers are moving to the UK.

While most parents described their children's experiences as positive, there were a few reports of bullying, including of a racist nature. While most reported that schools dealt with issues effectively, there were cases of students moving schools due to their unhappy experiences.

Schools' contact with parents

Hong Kong parents are keen to have contact with their children's school and to support their learning. However, very few parents have had any real social contact with schools beyond dropping their children off and picking them up at the school gates. One parent did mention that she had been invited by a teacher to visit and look at what her son was learning, but this seems not to be common. The limited contact with schools experienced by many parents left some with a fairly minimal understanding of what went on at school, and what and how children are taught in the UK. This lack of understanding was further increased because, unlike Hong Kong, learning in UK schools is not structured around textbooks and workbooks. An additional factor is that some common UK school subjects, such as Drama, are not taught in Hong Kong schools. As one Hong Konger explained, the many differences between schools in Hong Kong and the UK leave parents uncertain of how they can support their children:



'It's hard to improve if I don't know what the issues are. And it's also a new environment ... we're worried about our children. We'd like to have more information about the curriculum, the teaching methods, outcomes and syllabuses. He has all these books to study I've never even read. I don't know how to support him.' – woman, London



Schools should welcome the commitment of many Hong Kong parents to their children's education and assist them in becoming more familiar with school life, the curriculum and expectations.

Schools should welcome the commitment of many Hong Kong parents to their children's education and assist them in becoming more familiar with school life, the curriculum and expectations. Some stakeholder organisations are assisting in this process. For example Solihull Council has held 5-10-week courses on family learning, including parenting classes and supporting children with Maths and English. Another project, delivered by the organisation 'coffee and craft' involved a programme of meetings in two schools in Reading to help parents understand the curriculum, as well as improve their conversational English.

Some parents had found it difficult to discuss their children's issues at school and said that schools were slow to respond to any questions or concerns. One parent said her son did not receive his password to the school website and online learning environment until the November of the autumn term, while her daughter only found out from another student that she had been assigned to an ESOL lesson in place of another class. These failures in communication were found to be frustrating to parents wishing to ensure that their children perform well and settle in at their new school.

A recent Hongkongers in Britain report also recommends communication from schools that better meets the needs of Hong Kong children and families, which is in turn shown to reduce and stress and mental health issues which are reported by a high proportion of Hong Kongers.⁴²

⁴² Hongkongers in Britain (2022) 'Mental health is a part of myself' [<https://www.hongkongers.org.uk/mental-survey>]

Schools as welcoming hubs

Schools offer natural opportunities for settlement and integration, and the arrival of Hong Kongers in schools across the UK is a chance for schools to get welcoming right.⁴³ Existing research has found that schools can do this in a number of ways. These include:

- Holding coffee mornings and social events, such as international evenings.
- Opening their doors to community organisations for activities such as celebrations of Saturday schools to bring schools and local communities together.
- Assisting migrant families and helping to signpost to appropriate support where needed.
- Helping parents to become involved in school life and children's learning through activities such as attendance at assemblies, 'stay and play' sessions, and sitting in on lessons.
- Offering language classes tailored to deliver information, for example on health screening or on school policy, for example on homework.

We found some examples of these approaches, for instance a successful series of 5-10-week courses funded by the West Midlands SMP in Solihull – around 55 parents have attended these courses, which include topics on family learning and parenting while over 100 are on the waiting list.

The Voluntary Refugee and Migrant Network in Sutton have been putting on coffee mornings, directed particularly at mothers with childcare responsibilities, who would otherwise be vulnerable to being isolated at home. These mornings include a creche where their children can play and be looked after while their parents can socialise or practise their English. Future research should look in greater depth at the extent of welcoming in UK schools and how these might be more widely implemented to include both children and their parents.

⁴³ Manzoni, C. and Rolfe, H. 'How schools are integrating new migrant pupils and their families, NIESR' (2019)

Some research has suggested that increasing the proportion of teachers from diverse ethnic or migrant backgrounds could assist integration by enriching pupils' learning experiences and sense of belonging as well as providing language support.⁴⁴ As previously discussed, addressing some of the challenges experienced by Hong Kongers seeking to convert their teaching qualifications would help achieve this aim.

Young people and progression from compulsory education

We have described how the process of settling into school has been a good one for many Hong Kong parents and their children. However, difficulties were more often experienced by students starting in secondary school. The school day, the curriculum and teaching and learning styles were experienced as very different to those in Hong Kong and some students found it hard to adapt. Particular difficulties were encountered by students joining in the GCSE years 10 and 11. Parents of secondary school pupils also felt considerably less connected with schools than those with children of primary school age. One couple, living in South Wales felt that their daughter's school showed no interest in their background or situation, which they found both disappointing and unhelpful.

Given that mental health issues are common among teenagers, and in view of the upheaval which moving to the UK has involved for young Hong Kongers, it is especially important that schools pay attention to their wellbeing and refer to help without delay where needed.



44 [<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/ioe/research-projects/2022/jan/improving-retention-minority-ethnic-teachers-england>]

With the visa extension to people born after 1997, many young people may now arrive alone in the UK.

Students and parents from Hong Kong may also be in more need than others of information about education and career pathways to assist decisions over GCSE and A-level options, and transitions to Further and Higher Education. Parents may be less familiar with the UK education system and labour market, and therefore less able than others to advise their children. This may be particularly true of non-academic and vocational opportunities. The UK also offers different opportunities which include paths to careers in the creative arts, which will be less familiar to Hong Kongers. At the same time, barriers currently exist to post-16 as well as post-18 options, as discussed below.

We have described the characteristics of Hong Kong BN(O)s and the presence of families where parents are able to provide ongoing support. The profile of arrivals may change in coming months once visa rights are extended to young people born after 1997.⁴⁵ This is likely to increase numbers of young people in their late teens and 20s making their own way to the UK. Given that many may arrive alone, it is especially important that they are supported in settling and integrating into life in the UK.

Media articles have reported levels of depression, isolation and homesickness among young Hong Kongers, in particular for those involved in political protests and who have continuing concerns for their own safety in the UK.⁴⁶ Many are adopting a low profile in the UK for fear of repercussions for family members in Hong Kong. The need for mental health support is addressed in more detail in the next section of the report, as an essential feature of welcoming.

Access to Further and Higher Education

Across the board, whether they have children or not, Hong Kongers were very concerned about the non-eligibility of BN(O)s and their dependents to pay 'home' fees. As the current situation stands, BN(O)s and their dependants cannot access student loans and must pay international fees until they have gained indefinite leave to remain (ILR) and 'settled' after 5 years as set out in the BN(O) visa,

⁴⁵ The date of implementation is to be announced.

⁴⁶ Laura Westbrook, 'Bumpy landing: Hong Kong migrants face culture shock in Britain, seek help for isolation, depression, marriage breakdown', South China Morning Post, (9 October 2021) [<https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/society/article/3151654/bumpy-landing-hong-kong-migrants-face-culture-shock-britain>] (Accessed 6 June 2022); Stuart Lau, 'From Lantau to Ealing: Hong Kong's homesick exiles in Britain greet the Year of the Tiger', Politico, 1 February 2022 [<https://www.politico.eu/article/hong-kong-united-kingdom-exile-visa-year-of-the-tiger-celebration/>] (Accessed 6 June 2022)

BN(O)s and their dependants cannot access student loans and must pay international fees for university courses until they have been in the UK for 5 years.



or if they are under 18, have lived in the UK for 7 years. While the Department of Education caps the maximum tuition fee for 'home' students at £9,250pa (per annum), for international students fees can vary between £10,000pa at the lower end of the scale up to over £40,000pa for some courses.⁴⁷

Similar restrictions apply to Further Education courses which are funded via the Adult Education Budget. This provision, which includes apprenticeships, requires a 3-year period of residence in the UK.

Exclusion from provisions for 'home' students further narrows the career choices of young people. It means that Hong Kongers have few choices other than to go into employment and put their education and future lives on hold. One family whose daughter is applying for university in the autumn explained that it was a real barrier to forming long-term plans for settlement.

"For our situation, we don't have a lump sum of money that you could just bring for house for education and everything ... Now, we are a bit stuck, because we're not sure if there's anything options I [have], so we have to have that lump sum of money ready ... So that is one of the concerns that is in our head, that stops a lot of planning in terms of finding a house and everything."

– couple, South Wales

Other Hong Kongers also said that the prospect of having to pay internal fees was a source of anxiety and stress for their children, as well as for themselves.

Heritage language provision

It is key that children from Hong Kong are encouraged to retain their Cantonese language skills as part of their education. As the Ethnic Minority and Traveller Achievement Service (EMTAS) has noted:

47 Lorna Kimmins, "Impossibly high" fees discourage international students from applying to Cambridge', Varsity (22 April 2022) [<https://www.varsity.co.uk/news/23569>] (Accessed 14 June 2022)



“Passing a GCSE in a heritage language is cognitively beneficial, enhances self-esteem, nurtures an individual’s sense of identity and boosts career prospects. Taking a heritage language GCSE is beneficial because it accredits a young person at a time when they may be unable to fully access many other GCSE options due to their current proficiency in English.”⁴⁸

The association of School and College Leaders and the British Council has also stated that:



“The value of community language examinations is recognised as strategically important to the country in terms of economic growth and exports; security, defence, and international relations; social mobility, and educational achievement of EAL pupils.”⁴⁹

While parents found it important that their children be able to access some kind of Cantonese language learning provision, there were those that expressed that it was not a priority compared to their settling down and learning English. Furthermore, many British Chinese children attend supplementary weekend Chinese schools, while most Hong Kongers interviewed found these unsuitable for their children as many are Mandarin-oriented and offer fewer Cantonese classes or culturally-relevant resources.

One stakeholder noted that the current GCSE spoken Cantonese qualification seems to have the requirement that for the oral examination students are able to speak in Cantonese, but in the ‘standard Chinese’ or ‘written’ register. The examiner’s report for 2019 noted that:

⁴⁸ ‘The role of heritage languages within the educational landscape: Hampshire EMTAS position statement’, EMTAS Hampshire Services [https://emtas.hias.hants.gov.uk/pluginfile.php/18546/mod_resource/content/3/L1%20Position%20Statement.pdf] (Accessed 13 June 2022)

⁴⁹ ‘Supporting students with home, heritage and community languages: information on supporting students entering for home, heritage and community language qualifications’, ASCL (January 2022) [<https://www.ascl.org.uk/ASCL/media/ASCL/Help%20and%20advice/Curriculum%20and%20assessment/Supporting-students-with-home-heritage-and-community-languages.pdf>] (Accessed 13 June 2022)



“During the marking of scripts, we became aware that sticking to the script could cause issues for Cantonese; it could result in unnatural phrasing that could hinder students’ understanding of the questions. Many Cantonese teachers automatically chose to use daily spoken form rather than written form ... As this was the first series of the exam, we allowed these kinds of variations in Cantonese, as long as they were a direct transfer of meaning of the question ... However, this is an issue which requires greater scrutiny and clear rules will be put in place for the next summer series.”⁵⁰

The examiner’s reports after 2020 are not publicly available, but the implications of the above findings are that there may be a barrier created against heritage learners from a Hong Kong background gaining an accredited qualification in their mother tongue. The ‘written form’ does not reflect how Cantonese is spoken in Hong Kong, whether formally or colloquially. The vocabulary used in assessments also reflects common usage in China, excluding vocabulary used in Hong Kong, even though such vocabulary is formal and used in all public contexts.⁵¹

Exam boards should offer Cantonese qualifications at both GCSE and A-level in consultation with formal language experts and Chinese teachers from Hong Kong: it is important for children and their parents to be encouraged to keep their mother tongue, as it is for children of other non-English speaking backgrounds. If necessary, this could be earmarked as a separate ‘Hong Kong Cantonese’ examination so as not to be confused with Cantonese as spoken in Mainland China.

⁵⁰ ‘Examiners’ report, principalexaminer feedback: Pearson Edexcel GCSE In Chinese (1CN0) Paper 2F: Speaking’, Pearson Edexcel (summer 2019) [https://qualifications.pearson.com/content/dam/pdf/GCSE/Chinese/2017/Exam-materials/1CN0_2F_pef_20190822.pdf] (Accessed 13 June 2022)

⁵¹ An example of this is found in the listening paper of that year, where ‘公共汽車’ is used for ‘bus’ in place of ‘巴士’ as one of the answers to the question ‘What method of transport is used?’ The latter is in official use in Hong Kong. [https://qualifications.pearson.com/content/dam/pdf/GCSE/Chinese/2017/Exam-materials/1CN0_3F_que_20190523.pdf] (Accessed 13 June 2022)



6. The welcomed and the welcomers

An emphasis on ‘welcoming’ in the Hong Kong welcome programme is crucial for Hong Kongers to arrive feeling accepted and supported from day one. The approach of welcoming should be holistic, involving local authorities, voluntary organisations and civic societies. Furthermore, welcoming should involve people of all backgrounds, and Hong Kongers should be encouraged to meet and connect with the wider community as much as possible. In this section we look at current involvement in welcoming and how this might be expanded to reach more Hong Kongers, and play an effective role in their integration and settlement.

The view from the welcomed

Across the board, Hong Kongers said that they felt warmly welcomed into their communities, and that local people had been very kind and helpful to them. However, they noted that there were few routes they knew of through which they could get further involved in the community, or have deeper, more meaningful interactions with their neighbours beyond general greetings. Local council communities officers and departments need to work with SMPs to engage with local Hong Kong BN(O) groups, so that they can be given guidance on this.

Some Hong Kongers said that they had been able to make local friends via sports or common interests. One man said his hobby was buying and selling trainers, and that he was invited to somebody’s house for dinner as a result. Others mentioned that the popularity of football in both Britain and Hong Kong also helped them and their children forge connections. Sports clubs and associations should consider integrating welcoming agendas into their remit, alongside diversity and inclusion initiatives.

Sport, at either amateur or professional levels, often brings people from different backgrounds together. However, the terms of the BN(O) visa prevent Hong Kongers from working as professional sports people or coaches at any level. To ensure that Hong Kongers are not barred from participating in competitive sports, particularly

Hong Kongers feel warmly welcomed into their communities but often find that there are few routes they know of through which to get more involved in the community.

Hong Kongers are keen to integrate while retaining links to their origins and culture.



young people, the Home Office should clarify this rule. Preventing parents from coaching their children's football teams or personal trainers from pursuing work in the UK unfairly bars Hong Kongers from participating in sports fully. As a first step, Hong Kongers volunteering in sport could be exempted from this restriction.

One stakeholder noted that for many the complete dislocation from their old lives has been particularly difficult, especially for the older generation. She suggested that organisations could facilitate activities that bring part of the 'mundanity' of everyday life in Hong Kong to the UK. Examples of this can include community cafes or coffee mornings where Hong Kong-style milk tea or mahjong and Chinese chess sets are available. Such activities can be low-cost, but give a sense of familiarity to those struggling to adapt.

"We feel very welcomed, but the problem is more that we are disconnected from our mundane ... lives in Hong Kong." – stakeholder (and Hong Konger), civil society organisation

In areas where there are many Hong Kongers, like Sutton and Reading, some churches have already collaborated with VCSE-funded organisations to hold coffee mornings and gatherings for older people, which have received a positive response. The provision and development of more community spaces where people can meet old and new friends outside of their homes would be beneficial for those most vulnerable to isolation, as well as allowing them to recreate some of the comforts of their old home life. They could also provide the opportunity for older people with less English ability to play board games and interact with local volunteers.



While many were keen to express that they did not want to build a 'little Hong Kong' or a new Chinatown, there was also a strong desire strike a balance and retain a link to their origins and culture. One way of doing this is giving consideration and funding to artists and creatives from Hong Kong, and encouraging schools and libraries to purchase Hong Kong books.

Almost all of those we interviewed expressed enthusiasm for integrating into their local community as well as into British culture. One stakeholder related that some Hong Kongers in the Northeast were looking for a tutor to teach them the Geordie dialect, while in Wales there have been enquiries via the national SMP about learning Welsh.



"I really really hope that in maybe a decade or two decades, whenever, in 30 years or 40 years' time, the UK Government will look back on this BN(O) visa decision, that they will think, oh, we did a great job. I really hope that our people will be settling here, we give them just whatever we can, and then we are doing good to the society. Just I really hope that one day the government look back on today and say, oh, this is a good decision we made." – woman, Cardiff



Many Hong Kongers are already volunteering in their community.



Many Hong Kongers are already pursuing ways to give back to the local community by volunteering. One stakeholder noted that around half of those working at a local food bank at weekends were Hong Kongers. Other interviewees also shared their experiences working on, for example, the Royal British Legion's Poppy Appeal, the Red Cross, and the NHS COVID-19 vaccination scheme. Those who have been in the UK for longer are also taking on roles as welcomers to new arrivals themselves. One Hong Konger, for example, found work as a paid coordinator on a welcoming project after volunteering for several months:

“As a social worker I want to contribute something and I want Hong Kong people to integrate into the community ... I know many Hong Kong people want to do volunteer work.” – woman, Reading

The welcomers

Welcoming from local authorities

The response from local authorities has been very uneven across different regions and nations. While often keen to welcome Hong Kongers and help them integrate, without the requisite data many do not know enough about the numbers of Hong Kongers living in their jurisdictions, let alone their needs. Funding has been also an issue: one local authority stakeholder regretted that they were unable to help, as they did not have enough funding to extend to any bespoke welcoming schemes.

There is, however, a great potential for local authorities to play a role in welcoming. In the London Borough of Sutton, for example, the local council has actively engaged with a local Facebook group formed by Hong Kongers. They have collaborated on a number of schemes on which community leaders have advised, including children's storytelling and arts workshops at the local library, and a local Lunar New Year celebration where 28 BN(O) volunteers set up educational booths for the wider community to enjoy.

There needs to be a clear responsibility and pipeline for local councils to regularly engage with local groups, organisations, and

the regional or national strategic migration partnership. Many SMPs have their own small grants schemes available for welcoming. Local authorities can help signpost organisations with expertise in welcoming to this source of funding. This is crucial to connect Hong Kongers to other groups in local communities and allow them to participate in wider social and cultural life. In Sheffield, for example, such partnerships led to a local Roma group inviting local Hong Kongers to co-organise a local diversity festival.



Those more vulnerable to social isolation include the unemployed, those with caring responsibilities, the elderly and people with low levels of English

Local authorities should plan welcoming programmes that take into account the needs of particular groups within the Hong Kong BN(O) community. Those more vulnerable to social isolation include the unemployed, those with caring responsibilities, the elderly and people with low levels of English. Councils should offer safe, free spaces for them to be able to meet local people.

Awareness of the circumstances and needs of Hong Kongers may also need to be raised, since there are indications that they are seen as a self-reliant group in need of little support. One focus group participant noted that her volunteer ESOL teacher told her she could no longer teach her as she 'wanted to help refugees and those in need', only returning when another volunteer helped her explain that while BN(O)s were under a different category, they have still come under certain duress and have particular vulnerabilities

Welcoming from VCSE organisations

With the pandemic receding and a return to socialising, VCSE organisations have been meeting the desires of many Hong Kongers to meet new people with a variety of activities. For example, over the Platinum Jubilee bank holiday weekend, Volunteer Centre Sutton hosted a garden tea party for Hong Kongers and locals, which involved activities for all ages to connect with each other over. Churches in particular have been working hard to participate in welcoming. UKHK Welcome Churches has held a friendship festival in Sutton for 2 consecutive years, expanding to Reading, Belfast and Manchester this summer. Meanwhile, over 6,000 churches have now signed up to the UKHK Welcome Churches network, so that those looking for help and support can find it in virtually every locality.



Many Hong Kongers who said they were not Christian felt welcome at church events, so there is an opportunity here for Hong Kong welcoming.

Church-organised activities have reached people who do not identify as Christian. A survey conducted by UKHK found that only 46% of Hong Kongers identify as such,⁵² but many of our interviewees who said they were not Christian felt welcome at church events. There is an opportunity here for non-faith-based groups and organisations working in the migration, diversity and inclusion area to widen their remits for Hong Kong welcoming. They should also be coordinated with efforts to welcome other groups of new arrivals, including Afghans and Ukrainians.

52 UKHK, '2021 UKHK HKers settlement survey report' (October 2021)

We have already referred to workplaces and schools as places where Hong Kongers, and other new arrivals, should be welcomed and helped to integrate and feel at home. Other institutions include adult education colleges, where Hong Kongers could be encouraged to take up a range of leisure and learning opportunities. This wider involvement, beyond faith organisations, needs to gain momentum, with national and local government, civic society and secular organisations all engaged in both direct provision and coordination of welcoming activities.

Bringing welcoming organisations and ideas together

Rather than happen coincidentally, welcoming could therefore become part of a coordinated provision at national, regional and local level. This could include ESOL, employment outreach, education and careers guidance, with the engagement of civic society and new arrivals themselves. There is no blueprint for welcoming that could be designed and adopted for all types of institutions or new groups of arrivals: relevant institutions and services need to develop effective approaches. These should consist of core elements built on the basic welcoming needs of all new arrivals, with bespoke elements to address more specific circumstances and needs.

The view from the welcomers

Research by British Future finds strong public support for the BN(O) scheme. The 'Immigration Attitudes tracker', in partnership with Ipsos Mori, repeats every 6 months, and has included questions on the BN(O) visa route since the June/July 2021 wave.

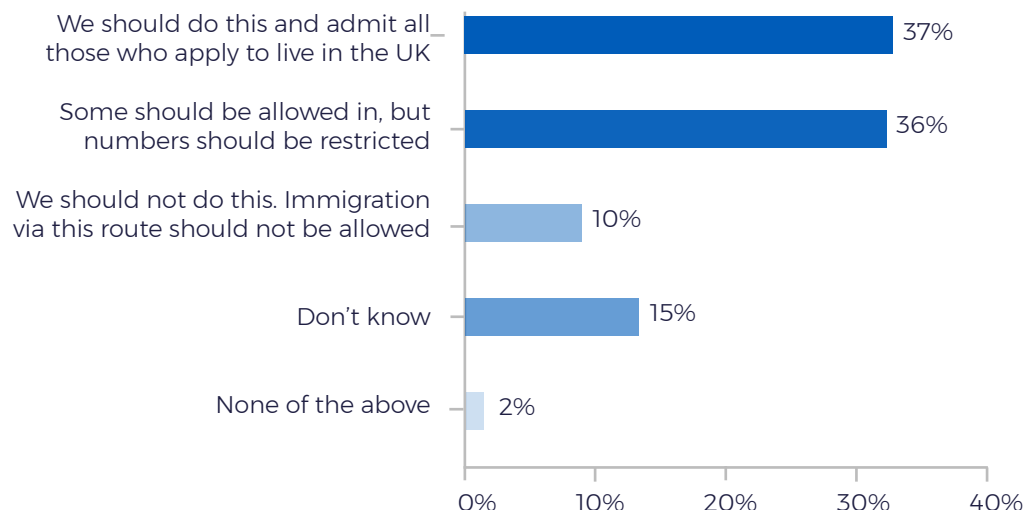
In 2022 almost three-quarters (73%) of the UK public surveyed supported the visa programme (see Figure 6.1), with respondents aged over 55 more likely to support an unrestricted approach compared to 18–24-year-olds.⁵³ This is likely to reflect greater knowledge of the background, as well as the visa itself. Along with older voters, Labour voters were more likely to say that all should be admitted, and people living in Scotland and in London were also more in favour of no restrictions.

There is no blueprint for welcoming: relevant institutions and services need to develop effective approaches addressing core basic welcoming needs of new arrivals.

53 Heather Rolfe, Sunder Katwala and Steve Ballinger, 'Immigration: a changing debate' (September 2021) [<https://www.britishfuture.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Immigration.A-changing-debate.pdf>]

Figure 6.1: ‘Immigration Attitudes tracker’ – responses to whether BN(O)s should be able to live in the UK

“Which of the following statements, if any, comes closest to your view about those with BN(O) status coming to live in the UK?”



Source: Immigration Tracker Survey February 2022, sample size 3,026

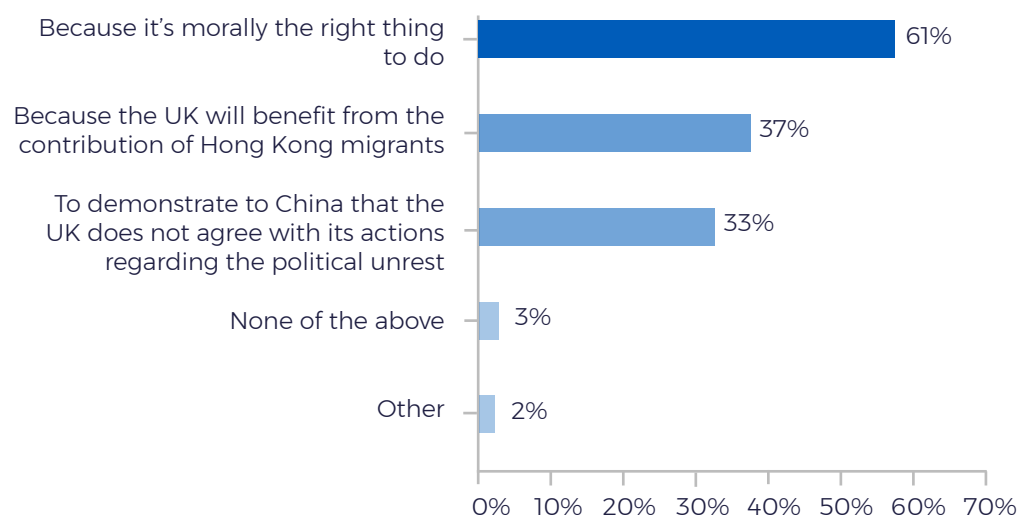
An earlier survey by Savanta ComRes likewise found that only 1 in 4 expressed any opposition to government proposals, with support higher in those stating familiarity with events in Hong Kong.

The British Future immigration tracker also asked why respondents thought Hong Kong BN(O) visa holders should be able to apply to live in the UK (Figure 6.2).

A sizeable majority said ‘because it’s morally the right thing to do’. This was agreed upon by people across different age groups. Other reasons included in the survey were ‘the UK will benefit from the contribution of Hong Kongers’ and ‘to demonstrate to China that the UK does not support its actions leading to political unrest’, both of which were supported by around a third of the public. No real differences were found in response by demographic characteristics. However, those aged 18–34 were somewhat more likely to say that the UK will benefit from the contribution of Hong Kongers; older people were more likely to say that it will demonstrate to China that the UK does not support its political actions. This may reflect awareness of the situation in Hong Kong, with older people more knowledgeable of its historical connection to the UK and current situation there.

Figure 6.2: ‘Immigration Attitudes tracker’ – reasons for supporting BN(O) visa applications to the UK

“Which of the following, if any, come closest to explaining why you think those with BN(O) status from Hong Kong should be able to apply to live in the UK?”



Source: Immigration Tracker Survey February 2022, sample size 3,026 (note: respondents could choose more than one answer option)

Interest in welcoming

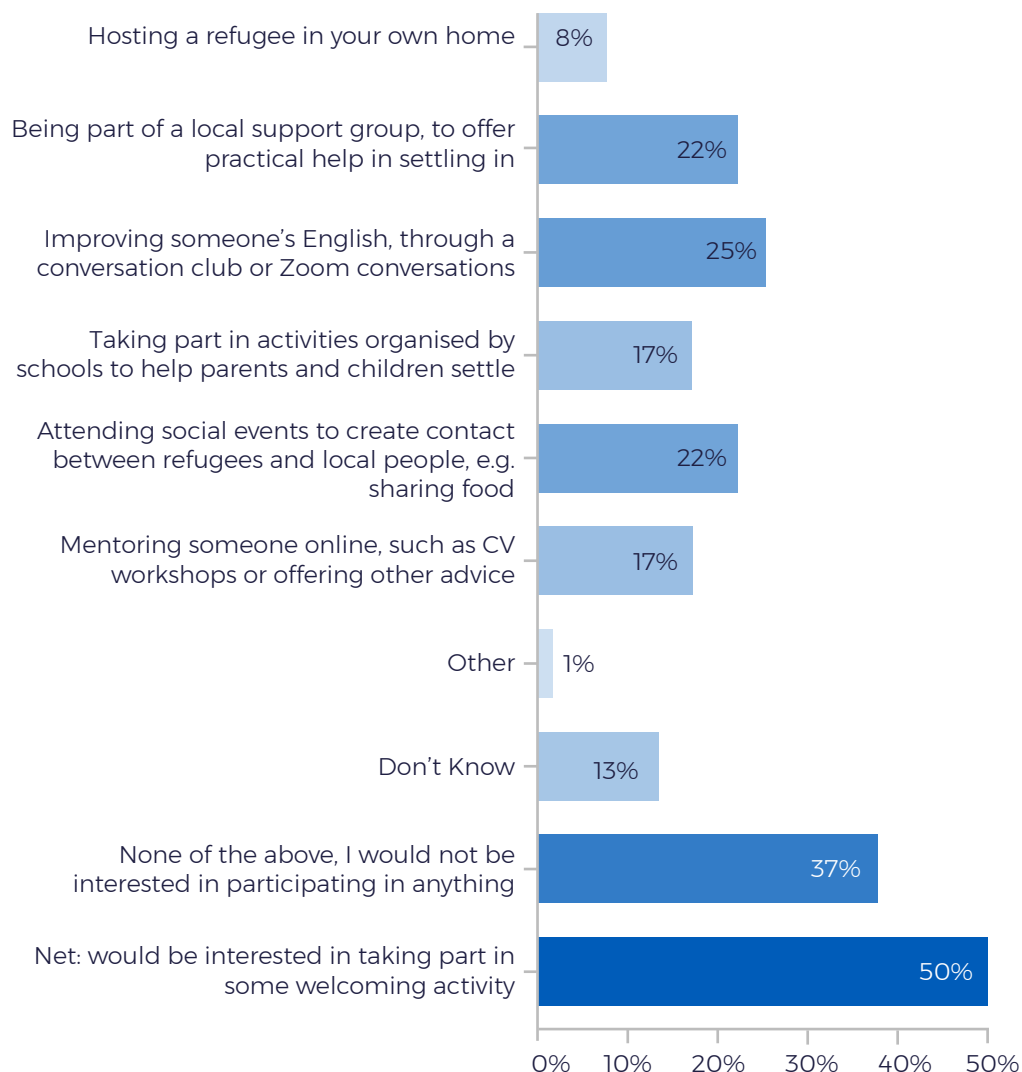
It is clear that the UK public supports migration of people from Hong Kong via the BN(O) scheme, and this helps to lay the foundations for welcoming. Research carried out by ICM Research for the Welcoming Committee for Hong Kongers found that more than half the adults in Britain say they would be interested in taking part in welcoming activities for refugees and other new arrivals.⁵⁵ The findings shown in Figure 6.3 indicate that nearly 13 million people (25% of adults in Britain) would be interested in helping someone improve their English, through a conversation club or Zoom conversations. Some 11 million (22%) would be interested in becoming part of a local support group to offer practical help in settling into life in the UK. A similar number (22%) would be interested in attending social events to create contact between refugees and local people. Some 17% would be open to mentoring somebody online, in the form of CV workshops or other advice.

It is clear that the UK public supports migration of people from Hong Kong via the BN(O) scheme, and this helps to lay the foundations for welcoming.

⁵⁵ Welcoming Committee for Hong Kongers (2022) polling by ICM Unlimited, sample size 2,012

Figure 6.3: Public support for welcoming activities

“There are many different ways that people could take part in a migrant or refugee welcoming programme. Which, if any, would you be interested in participating in?”



Source: Poll by ICM Unlimited for the Welcoming Committee for Hong Kongers, 25-28 March 22, sample size 2,012

The same ICM survey in March 2022 found that most of the public (54%) would be supportive if the British government created a welcoming programme linking British people with newly arrived migrants to help them settle and integrate into Britain. This requires the necessary infrastructure and processes to be put in place. As far as the welcoming of Hong Kongers is concerned, there are many stakeholder organisations who can take part in this process. They include a number who were set up by Hong Kongers themselves and others who also have strong insights into what is needed.

Voting and political participation

Many Hong Kongers are interested in and feel strongly about the importance of political participation. This is influenced partly by their experiences in their home country and the changes they experienced since the 2019 protests.

Most of those asked said they had registered to vote and/or had voted in the recent local elections in May. Some saw this as an important civic responsibility and an element of integrating into the local community:



“If you want to be a member of the community, you have to try to participate in all the activities like with the local people.” – woman, Southampton

A notable exception to this was in Northern Ireland, where a local stakeholder noted that people were unsure about the local political tensions and thought it was better not to vote because of this. The Northern Ireland Strategic Migration Partnership is planning sessions to educate people about this. One interviewee noted that they had been encouraged by their peers to stay quiet about politics in case they ‘incited violence’, and that they should avoid buying a British car or wearing a green shirt in public.

There needs to be more information available explaining how UK politics works, as well as information about key historical issues such as the ‘Troubles’, targeted at new arrivals. Many interviewees there noted they were eager to learn more about local and national history. One stakeholder said that she recommended the film *Belfast* to many Hong Kongers enquiring about the Troubles. Signposting to resources like these can also help new arrivals understand the complex cultural zeitgeist of the UK and encourage them to make informed political choices rather than staying away due to lack of comprehension.

Mental health and wellbeing

In order that Hong Kongers feel welcomed into a new society, the state of mental health and general wellbeing must be considered. Some interviewees spoke candidly about their struggles with depression, anxiety and even PTSD as a result of what they experienced in Hong Kong and the sudden loss of what they left behind. The way of life in Britain can be very unfamiliar and unsettling for Hong Kongers in many respects, for example, the sunset causing days to end much earlier in the winter.



Many stakeholders spoke of the need for therapists who are Cantonese-speaking and understand what has taken place in Hong Kong. This will enable Hong Kongers to feel that they can really open up during the course of mental health treatment. For example, one man mentioned that he was referred to the local Chinese Association for help by his local GP due to long waiting times. However, this association was one of many that signed an advertisement taken out in a Hong Kong newspaper in support of the passing of the National Security Law there, and the man in question felt that he could not turn to them. One woman similarly shared in relation to events and her experience:



“I am still upset at the situation, I get low moods, I can’t believe why all this happened. The people can no longer have the freedom to speak out, everything will be controlled. Every time when I watch the TV and news and things happen, I feel upset and cry. So at the moment I am very depressed.” – woman, Reading

Another also mentioned that several people they knew had miscarried, which they felt could be due to the stress of moving and separating from family. One interviewee noted that mothers in particular could be feeling some strain transitioning from an independent, professional life to that of a stay-at-home mother. As we noted in Section 5, teenagers are also particularly vulnerable to stress-related conditions, especially if feeling isolated due to lack of English or resentment towards their parents for having them move away from their home to the UK.

There are several community projects beginning to help address the mental health needs of Hong Kongers. For example, the Hong Kong Assistance and Resettlement Community (HKARC) is collaborating with the organisation Half Talk on a mental health programme involving six qualified Cantonese-speaking mental health professionals. A group of BN(O)s have also recently launched a community interest company (CIC) called 'Companion HK' to promote mindfulness and wellbeing techniques via workshops.

However, across the UK in general there is a severe strain on mental health services and long waiting times for treatment. There should be more guidance and signposting for psychiatrists, therapists and interpreters to transfer their qualifications to the UK (as explained in Section 4). This would help meet the demand for Cantonese-language treatment while relaxing the strain on existing services. Service providers such as the NHS should include awareness of the difference between Hong Kongers and other Chinese speakers and of community tensions within existing sensitivity training.



7. Conclusions and policy recommendations

Conclusions

The British National (Overseas) visa route for Hong Kongers to live and work in the UK has now been open for more than a year. From the outset, the Welcoming Committee for Hong Kongers has helped to design the UK government's BN(O) welcome programme and to coordinate efforts across the UK's nations and regions to support Hong Kongers settling in the UK.

The latest government data shows that between January 2021 and March 2022 113,742 Hong Kongers were granted visas to come to the UK through the British Nationals (Overseas) BN(O) scheme. Surveys suggest that many more will make the move in coming months and years. Of those who are here already, almost all say they are here to stay and to build a future for themselves and their families in the UK.⁵⁶ Hong Kongers are here to stay and are settling in locations across the UK.

Through our research and policy project we have gained an understanding of the needs and aspirations of Hong Kongers and how these could be best addressed to facilitate settlement and integration. We looked across areas of life in the UK, including location, schools, jobs and learning English. We interviewed a total of 97 stakeholders and individuals. Hong Kongers' perspectives were particularly canvassed in 8 focus groups with 44 Hong Kongers and individual interviews with another 18 Hong Kongers.

Evidence to date suggests that the UK welcome programme has been a success: Hong Kongers have access to information, support and guidance from a range of organisations. This is helping individuals and families to plan their new lives in the UK to weigh up options and to set their own priorities. At the same time, there are risks, both short- and longer-term, that some Hong Kongers will not achieve their potential in their work, education, social and

56 HM Government-commissioned IFF research, 'Survey of Hong Kong British National (Overseas) visa holders, 2021' (March 2022) [<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/survey-of-hong-kong-british-national-overseas-visa-holders-2021>]

personal lives, and therefore neither be able to reap the benefits for themselves nor for the country that they are embracing as their home. As we have taken stock of the successes of the BN(O) visa scheme, we've also observed that the barriers to settlement need to be addressed so that all can benefit from the welcome programme and what the UK has to offer.

Our recommendations

Spreading the benefits across the UK

Data on Hong Kongers in the UK is not adequate for understanding who Hong Kongers are, or where they are in the UK. Home Office data only lists all who have successfully applied for a visa; within this group, the data does not currently distinguish between those who have already arrived in the UK and those who have not. This distinction should be made.

More detailed data is also needed on where in the UK Hong Kongers are settling. With modifications, this data could be compiled through data on school registrations, if data collected were made comparable across nations and regions of the UK. It could also be collected through National Insurance number applications, if the form included a separate category for BN(O) visa holders. Local authorities could also be funded to collate local data and produce regular population estimates. From the data we do have, it's evident that some areas of the UK have proven more popular to Hong Kongers, at least initially. Others have attracted relatively few and stand to miss out on the benefits Hong Kongers bring with them. Any pressures, for example on school places or housing, are also unevenly felt.

Nations and regions of the UK need to publicise their offer to Hong Kongers, using online platforms that Hong Kongers access. Messaging would be most effective when focused around Hong Kongers' priorities and concerns. These are the quality of local schools, the availability of good housing, low crime rates, good job opportunities and a relaxed pace of life.

Work matters: integrating through employment

Some Hong Kongers, including teachers and nurses, are experiencing barriers to working in their professional area. Better signposting

is needed to help Hong Kong BN(O) visa holders to allocate information about how to have their professional skills recognised in the UK. Professional bodies should also review requirements for countries that have significant numbers of new arrivals, to check for particular issues that might need to be addressed.

There is evidence of low levels of awareness of the BN(O) visa among employers. Steps should be taken to ensure employers have access to information about the visa so that they understand holders' full rights to employment.

A specific barrier for Hong Kongers wishing to work in some sectors is the need for a criminal record check through the Disclosure and Barring Service. Alternatives to the DBS need to be in place for Hong Kongers who are unable or reluctant to apply for a DBS check because of the requirement to provide a CNCC (Certificate of No Criminal Conviction), which is produced by the Hong Kong Police.

Some Hong Kongers have taken up work below their levels of skills and experience, motivated by financial guarantees and gaining a foot-hold in the labour market. Hong Kongers need access to careers information, advice and guidance that can enable them to transfer qualifications or to switch careers, including setting up a business. The adequacy of current provision for new arrivals in the UK needs to be reviewed with a view to providing a bespoke service.

To prevent under-utilisation of skills and potential, employers recruiting Hong Kongers (and other migrants) for lower-skilled and lower-paid work should be encouraged to check their qualifications and previous experience, to identify their potential for more senior positions. Employer bodies should encourage this as good practice which will benefit both individuals and employers.

Confidence is also a factor holding some Hong Kongers back from pursuing aspirations for their new working lives. Some Hong Kongers are working as volunteers which helps as a form of preparation and also as a way to meet people. Volunteer organisations should make opportunities known to Hong Kongers through contact with local stakeholder organisations and social media platforms.

There is evidence of low levels of awareness of the BN(O) visa among employers. Steps should be taken to ensure they have access to information about it.

Getting welcoming right for pupils and their families

Education and schools are of paramount importance to Hong Kongers: many were motivated to move to the UK by the prospect of better opportunities and greater freedom for their children. Initially parents have targeted outstanding schools using Ofsted ratings of academic performance. Not all children will be successful in gaining places, and parents are also realising the importance of factors such as school ethos and extra-curricular activities. DfE and the devolved nations could produce a guide to migrant parents in choosing a UK school which addresses the particular needs of new arrivals.

Some parents said their children are experiencing racist bullying. While schools have generally responded well, they need to ensure that policies and practices work for migrant pupils: parents may not be aware of school policies and schools need to ensure that they are, and report any incidents or concerns that their children experience.

Parents reported the transition to school in the UK as more difficult for young people of secondary school age than for those in primary or pre-school years, because of the demands of the curriculum and their stage of life. Schools should take particular care to ensure the wellbeing of Hong Kong students in secondary school who may experience difficulties. This should include fast-tracking young students who are experiencing difficulties to counselling and support.

Accounts from parents indicate that schools vary in how they welcome new arrivals, with some having buddy programmes and others not. The welcome that Hong Kong parents receive and the contact they have with schools likewise appears to be variable. Schools should be required to have programmes to welcome and support, with guidance from the DfE and equivalents in devolved nations, and included in inspections.

The school day and curriculum are very different in the UK to Hong Kong. This leaves many Hong Konger parents less able to assist their children than they would like, and increases stress and worry. Schools should provide migrant parents with a welcome pack

which explains the curriculum, the school day and expectations about behaviour, and covers all areas of school life.

English language needs of children and young people from Hong Kong vary considerably. While language assessment seems to be universal, provision is highly variable. Funding and provision of ESOL in schools needs an urgent review so that all pupils have the language and curriculum support they need wherever they go to school.

Exam boards should work with language experts and Chinese teachers from Hong Kong to develop GCSE and A-level courses in Hong Kong Cantonese. As for children from other ethnic minority backgrounds, encouraging Hong Kong children to continue developing their bilingual language skills is important for their cognitive development, their sense of identity and their future career prospects. Proper accreditation of these skills would also encourage parents and stakeholders to develop supplementary education provision.

Future prospects: post-school options for young people

Hong Kong parents are not familiar with post-16 options, especially vocational routes and the wide range of courses offered by UK universities. Schools and careers service providers should hold bespoke sessions for Hong Kongers and other migrants who are less familiar with education and employment opportunities in the UK, including vocational routes.

BN(O) visa holders will not acquire 'home student' status at universities until 5 years after arrival, from 2026 onwards. International student fees and a lack of access to student finance are likely to be significant barriers to higher education for young people on the BN(O) visa who take their A-levels in British schools over the next 5 years. Refugees have an exemption, being granted home student status. If there is no similar policy exemption, Higher Education providers will need to develop access schemes and pathways.

English language as a tool for settlement and integration

BN(O) visa holders have no recourse to public funds (NRPF) and are therefore ineligible for ESOL classes funded through the Adult Education Budget (AEB). DLUHC has, however, funded provision

for 12 months. This is not universally understood by providers, and classes are over-subscribed. To ensure that Hong Kongers can continue to learn, their exclusion from AEB provision should be removed.

Funding for ESOL provision for Hong Kongers in the devolved nations should be ring-fenced to ensure that providers are aware that BN(O) visa holders are entitled to free classes.

The bar to ESOL provision for people with NRPF should be removed. In the meantime, devolved nations and the Combined Mayoral Authorities are able to flex their AEB criteria and should remove this barrier without delay.

Much available ESOL provision in the UK is at lower, entry, levels while the demand from Hong Kongers is for intermediate and advanced levels. Provision at higher levels needs to be expanded. Some Hong Kongers, particularly those with very young children, as well as older people, find it difficult to attend college ESOL classes. To be accessible to Hong Kongers at all stages of life, ESOL should be made available across a range of community venues, schools and workplaces. A stable funding stream, administered by local authorities, should be set up for this purpose.

Provision should be made available for in-person and online classes during the day, evenings and weekends to meet the needs of people who have children and are in employment.

An ESOL strategy was promised in 2016 as part of the Government's Integrated Communities Strategy but has never been published. Any future strategy should take account of the need for a wide range of options to meet the varying needs of people wishing to learn or improve their English.

The welcomed and the welcomers: social and cultural integration

Surveys by British Future and Welcoming Committee for Hong Kongers show wide public support for the BN(O) visa scheme among the British public, with active interest in participating in welcoming. At the same time, Hong Kongers are keen to meet local people and to learn about local culture. However, many have said that there are few chances for them to form deeper connections

To be accessible to Hong Kongers at all stages of life, ESOL should be made available across a range of community venues, schools and workplaces.

with locals beyond basic small talk. They have also expressed a desire for more activities around local history, culture and heritage. There have been examples of projects that have brought Hong Kongers into more meaningful social contact with local people, including art workshops and local festivals that allow cultural sharing and connection.

There is a need for better opportunities for social mixing from which everyone can benefit. Churches are actively engaged in welcoming, particularly via the UKHK Welcome Churches network. Civic organisations and institutions including schools, colleges and sports clubs need to be much more active in welcoming Hong Kongers and other new arrivals.

Hong Kongers see the workplace as a place to meet people and an important part of their new life. Workplaces offer natural opportunities for people from different backgrounds and cultures to mix and for migrants to integrate into life in the UK. Employers could be more proactive in bringing about social mixing, and good practice examples need to be shared and duplicated.

Some Hong Kong parents experience social isolation, yet schools provide natural opportunities for social mixing and integration. Schools could play a role in helping parents to meet and to make friends. Some schools currently organise social activities, but others need to improve their links with parents and the wider community.

The role that local authorities play in the welcome programme should be larger and more defined. Departments for communities in local councils should work with SMPs to reach out to Hong Kongers in their area and connect them with local organisations and service providers. Examples where such synergy has worked well include Sutton, where the local library and volunteer centre are engaging effectively with Hong Kongers.

Providers should consider the needs of those more vulnerable to social isolation, such as older people with little or no English, and those with caring responsibilities. Providing spaces for coffee mornings and creches can be an important way to enable people to connect.

There is a need for better opportunities for social mixing from which everyone can benefit.

Hong Kongers are keen to take part in the UK's democratic process: for many, the opportunity to take part in political decisions at local and national level was a key factor in the decision to leave Hong Kong. However, the difficulty in understanding UK politics was sometimes cited as a reason why individuals do not vote. There needs to be more signposting to resources via which the political system and key national debates and issues are explained succinctly but with nuance, making it easier for Hong Kongers and other new arrivals to make informed political choices.

Our research also indicated that there is a serious demand for mental health treatment amongst Hong Kongers, many of whom suffer from symptoms of PTSD, depression and anxiety due to the dislocation from their former lives. Service providers like the NHS need to be trained on community sensitivities so that Hong Kongers feel that they are safe to open up. There also need to be routes for trained psychiatrists, therapists and interpreters to transfer their qualifications to meet the demand of Cantonese-language mental health treatment in the UK. In more practical terms, service providers, including those in the NHS, also need to understand the BN(O) visa better so that Hong Kongers are not refused treatment.

Many civic groups engaged in the Hong Kong welcome programme are also involved in projects for Ukraine and Afghanistan. This creates challenges due to the different needs experienced by each group. At the same time, bridging the schemes can help share learnings and build on the successes of each. The lessons learned can then help get welcoming right for future groups of new arrivals.

APPENDIX 1

Research methods

The project consisted of three main stages: a scoping stage; interviews with stakeholders; and focus groups and one-to-one interviews with Hong Kongers themselves.

Scoping stage

In the scoping stage of the research, starting in January 2022, the research team gathered together all available quantitative data on Hong Kong BN(O) visa holders, their location in the UK and their characteristics. This included Home Office statistics and results of surveys conducted by various organisations. The team also conducted media analysis, identifying broad themes and issues across around 30 media articles.

Interviews with stakeholders

From March, interviews were conducted with stakeholders to identify common issues that were arising as well as activities and programmes that were being set up to mitigate them. Organisations included strategic migration partnerships, a range of national and regional projects, as well as local authorities and colleges delivering ESOL. A total of 35 interviews were completed by the end of May.

Focus groups and one-to-one interviews with Hong Kongers

In order to centre the voices and concerns of Hong Kongers at the heart of the project, the research team carried out 8 focus groups, supplemented by individual interviews involving 18 individuals. All individual interviews were conducted over web conferencing. Half of the focus groups were in person and the other half online. For some of the interviews and focus groups, a qualified Cantonese interpreter was present to help clarify questions and translate answers, though most participants had some knowledge of English. A topic guide in both English and Chinese was distributed to participants prior to each session, copies of which can be found in Appendix 3. This stage of research was complete by the beginning of June 2022.

The research team took care to ensure a representative geographical spread in this part of the project, within the bounds of what was possible. In-person focus groups took place in London, Reading, Southampton and Cardiff. Meanwhile, participants from across Northern Ireland, Manchester, South Wales and across the Southeast were also included.

Policy seminars for related organisations

As part of the research project, the team also held a series of thematic policy seminars from March to June, to which regional and national SMP coordinators, representatives of VCSE grant holders, other NGOs and academics were invited. The themes covered in each session were: data and data collection, employment and enterprise, ESOL, youth and education, and finally social and cultural integration. These seminars also brought a variety of useful additional data sources to our attention.

APPENDIX 2

Sources of data on Hong Kongers in the UK

We used relatively little official data in compiling this report. We have described the limitations of data on the number of visa holders, and that data on arrivals would be more useful than visas issued. More granular detail on the characteristics of BN(O) visa holders arriving in the UK would be valuable: this could include age, accompanying children and older dependants. Any additional data captured would also be of value.

There are other sources of data that could be useful in understanding more about who and where Hong Kongers are in the UK, in particular the school census, school registration applications and National Insurance numbers. Some adaptations might be made to these sources to make them more useful as sources of information about settlement and integration.

School census

The school census, carried out at various points during the school year, collects data on children at UK state schools. Data is collected on ethnicity, and 'Hong Kong-Chinese' is included as a category (though not BN(O)-specifically). This is potentially valuable in identifying the number of BN(O) children and estimating the number of families both across the UK and by locality and region.

The accuracy of the data derived from the school census relies on school administrators recording ethnicity accurately, rather than choosing the broader 'Chinese' category. Independent schools submit aggregated data at a school level but this does not include pupil ethnicity. Consequently, equivalent information to the school census is not available for the independent sector, which may account for a reasonable proportion of pupils of Hong Kong origin.

School registration applications

Another source of schools data is school registration applications. These have to include the location of the pupil's previous school and can therefore identify pupils who have newly arrived. Surname data has also been used and is considered feasible since the most common surnames in Hong Kong are distinct, in particular from those most common in China. School registration data has therefore been used in some areas of the UK to estimate numbers, presumably through application to the local authority, but it is not coordinated across the country. This is in principle a very valuable resource, at least in identifying localities of initial settlement.

National Insurance numbers

As noted in the report, Hong Kongers do not need a National Insurance number to start work initially, but will do so soon after. Nationality fields include a range of Hong Kong categories, though not specifically BN(O).

To be useful in understanding where Hong Kongers are settling in the UK, this data needs to record the location in the UK where the NINO was applied for and issued. This is collected by the Department for Work and Pensions but does not have a separate category for Hong Kong BN(O) visa holders.

In terms of location, the DWP does not collect postcode data but uses Google Analytics to identify location where people allow cookies on their computer or device. There are two drawbacks with this approach: the first is that the location at the time of application may not be a fair indicator of where they are settled – in particular, applicants may move location after applying and settle somewhere else in the UK; the second is that, given personal and political concerns, a reasonable proportion of Hong Kongers may not allow cookies on government, or other, websites. This granular data is then aggregated to regional level, so that more detailed location analysis is not possible.

An interactive map produced by the DWP allows for searches by local authority area showing breakdown into EU15, EU8, EU2, Asia and Rest of World categories but not specific countries.⁵⁷

Other official data sources

It is also important to note that collection of data on use of services, as a means of assessing the size of communities and their needs, is less applicable to Hong Kongers than to other groups because they have no recourse to public funds (NRPF). This means there is no official data on their circumstances including unemployment or assistance with housing.

A further consideration about data collected on Hong Kong BN(O) visa holders is that by no means all Hong Kongers who wish to leave the country and to settle in the UK will come via this route. Some will have come as asylum seekers and others will come by routes including visas for study, work and the youth mobility scheme. Additional information on Hong Kongers can therefore be accessed through data on these schemes published by the Home Office.⁵⁸

APPENDIX 3

Topic guides for focus groups and one-to-one interviews with Hong Kongers

Welcoming Committee for Hong Kongers Research and Policy project

The Welcoming Committee for Hong Kongers is an independent, non-profit umbrella group for all those who care about the integration of new arrivals from Hong Kong. We help coordinate efforts across the UK's nations and regions to support Hong Kongers to settle in the UK.

The research team – Heather Rolfe and Phyllis Chan – are conducting research to help improve policy and practice for current Hong Kongers and those yet to arrive. To ensure this is based on the real experiences and needs of Hong Kongers we are carrying out interviews across the UK. All participants will be anonymised, and information they give will be treated as strictly confidential.

Topics for discussion

1 What have been your priorities for making your new life in Britain?

[E.g. finding somewhere to live, finding schools, finding a job, making friends?]

2 How easy or difficult has it been to find somewhere to live?

What helped you to choose where to live? What more help would you have liked?

How happy are you with the area you have chosen to live in?

3 Do you have children you have needed to find schools for?

How easy or difficult has that been? What information have you been able to access?

How happy are you with the schools your children are at?

4 How easy or difficult has it been to access services, for example finance and health?

How could access to services be improved?

5 What are your plans for work?

How easy or difficult do you think it will be to find work that matches your skills?

What help would you like?

6 Has English language been a barrier to setting up life in the UK?

What kind of help would you like with improving your English?

7 How easy has it been to make new friends?

Would you like to have more opportunities to make friends?

8 How familiar have you become with British culture? How easy has it been?

Do you see any challenges in retaining your cultural heritage while living in Britain?

歡迎香港人委員會之研究暨政策項目

歡迎香港人委員會是一個獨立及非盈利綜合團體，為所有關心剛抵埗港人如何融入英國社會的人士而設。我們幫助協調英國國民和各地區支援打算在英定居港人的行動。

研究團隊成員路凱德 (Heather Rolfe) 及陳學賢 (Phyllis Chan) 正在進行一項研究，冀望協助改善與已經和將會抵達英國的香港人有關的政策及其執行。為確保我們的研究以香港人的真實經歷和需要為基礎，我們正在英國各地採訪港人。所有與會者都是匿名參與，而他們提供的資料均嚴格保密。

討論題目

- 1 你喺英國開展新生活嘅時候，生活事項嘅輕重緩急次序係點排列呢？

[例如：搵地方住、幫子女搵學校、搵工、結識朋友？]

- 2 搵地方住有幾容易？或者有幾難？

你得到過乜嘢幫助，先搵到住嘅地方？你仲希望得到啲乜嘢幫助？

你對自己選擇入住嘅地方有幾滿意？

- 3 你要幫囡囡囡囡搵學校嗎？

搵學校有幾容易？或者有幾困難？

您對囡囡囡囡讀緊嘅學校滿意嗎？

- 4 要得到各種日常生活服務嘅享用機會有幾容易？

或者有幾困難？例如金融服務、醫療服務。得到

5 呢啲服務嘅享用機會,應該點樣改善?

你有乜嘢搵工計劃?

你認為搵到能夠發揮你專長嘅工會有幾容易?或者有幾困難?

你想得到啲乜嘢幫助?

6 喺英國開展新生活,英文係唔係障礙?

對於改進自己嘅英文能力,你希望得到啲乜嘢幫助?

7 結識新朋友有幾容易?

你想有多啲機會結識新朋友嗎?

8 你對英國文化有幾熟悉?要熟悉英國文化有幾容易?

對於喺英國生活嘅同時又要保留你自己嘅文化傳統,你認為困難嗎?

The Welcoming Committee for Hong Kongers is an independent, non-profit umbrella group for all those who care about the integration of new arrivals from Hong Kong.

We help coordinate the efforts of multiple organisations to support Hong Kongers settling in the UK - from civil society and communities to business, education and government, across the UK's nations and regions.

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Facebook: www.facebook.com/welcominghk

**British
Future...**



Department for Levelling Up,
Housing & Communities

The Welcoming Committee for Hong Kongers is housed at the independent think tank British Future, which provides governance and a secretariat to support its work. British Future is a registered charity, number 1159291.

www.britishfuture.org