



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

REPORT SUMMARY JULY 2022

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Welcoming
Committee for
Hong Kongers

British
Future...



Department for Levelling Up,
Housing & Communities

INTRODUCTION

The British National (Overseas) (BN(O)) 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.

113,742

Hong Kongers have so far been granted visas to come to the UK through the BN(O) scheme

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 BN(O) scheme. Surveys suggest that many more will make the move in the future. Of those who are here already, almost all say they intend to build a future for themselves and their families in the UK. Hong Kongers are here to stay and are settling in locations across the UK.

As part of its overall programme, the Welcoming Committee for Hong Kongers undertook an evidence-gathering research and policy project. Through this project we 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, interviewing 100 stakeholders and individuals. Hong Kongers' perspectives were particularly canvassed in 8 focus groups with 44 Hong Kongers and 18 one-to-one interviews.



Evidence to date suggests that the UK welcome programme has successfully helped Hong Kongers access information, support and guidance from a range of organisations. Individuals and families have gained a secure foothold in the UK to build their new lives. The challenge now is to ensure that Hong Kongers achieve their potential in work, education and their social and personal lives. Barriers to settlement need to be addressed so that all can benefit from the BN(O) welcome programme and what the UK has to offer.

This booklet provides a summary of the full report of the research and policy project. Read the full report at www.welcomehk.org/SettlingInReport



Read the full 'Settling in' report at www.welcomehk.org/SettlingInReport

SUMMARY OF OUR FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Location, location, location

Spreading the benefits across the UK

There is not adequate data to understand who Hong Kongers in the UK are, or where they are located. 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 school registrations or National Insurance Number applications. 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 with Hong Kongers, at least initially, while others have attracted relatively few and stand to miss out on the benefits Hong Kongers bring. 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 which Hong Kongers access and messaging focused on Hong Kongers' priorities: 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. In particular, there is evidence of low levels of awareness of the BN(O) visa among employers. Employers should have access to information about the visa so that they understand holders' rights to employment. Better signposting is also needed to help BN(O) Hong Kongers access information about having professional skills recognised in the UK. Professional bodies should likewise review requirements to address any issues.

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). Alternatives to the DBS are needed for Hong Kongers who are unable or reluctant to obtain one 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 also taken up work below their levels of skill and experience. Hong Kongers need access to careers information, and to advice

and guidance about how to transfer qualifications or switch careers, including setting up a business. Current provision for new arrivals in the UK needs to be reviewed.

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

Welcoming schools

Ensuring success for children and young people

Schools are of paramount importance to Hong Kongers: many have moved to the UK for better opportunities and greater freedom for their children. Initially parents have targeted outstanding schools using Ofsted ratings. Not all children will gain places and parents are also realising the importance of school ethos and extra-curricular activities. The Department for Education (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, both parents and pupils need to be made aware of any school policies and report any incidents experienced in and out of school.

Parents reported that the transition to school in the UK has been more difficult for students of secondary school age, 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. Young students who are experiencing difficulties should be fast-tracked to counselling and support.

Parents also reported 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 varies. Schools should be required to have welcoming and support programmes, with guidance from the DfE and equivalents in devolved nations.

The school day and curriculum are very different in the UK to Hong Kong, leaving many Hong Konger parents less able to assist their children than they would like. 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 and ESOL (English for speakers of other languages) support differs from school to school. 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 develop GCSE and A-level courses in Hong Kong Cantonese. Encouraging Hong Kong children to continue developing bilingual language skills is important for cognitive development, their sense of identity and future career prospects. There should be proper accreditation of these skills.

Schools should be required to have welcoming and support programmes



Future prospects

Post-school options for young people

Hong Kong parents are often 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 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.



International student fees and a lack of access to student finance are likely to be significant barriers to higher education for young people

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). The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) has, however, funded provision for 12 months but this is not universally understood, by organisations and Hong Kongers alike. The exclusion of Hong Kongers from AEB ESOL provision should be removed. Funding in the devolved nations should be ring-fenced so that providers know 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, who can flex their AEB criteria, should remove this barrier.

Much available ESOL provision in the UK is at lower language levels while the demand from Hong Kongers is for intermediate and advanced levels. Provision at higher levels needs to be expanded, alongside provision in person, online and at all times of the day and week.

Some Hong Kongers, particularly those with very young children as well as older people, find it difficult to attend college ESOL classes. ESOL should be made available in community venues, schools and workplaces with a stable funding stream, administered by local authorities, set up for this purpose.





The welcomed and the welcomers

Social and cultural integration

Surveys by British Future and Welcoming Committee for Hong Kongers show broad support for the BN(O) scheme among the British public, with active interest in participating in welcoming. Hong Kongers are keen to meet local people and to learn about national and local culture and heritage. Some projects have successfully brought Hong Kongers into more meaningful social contact with local people, including art workshops and local festivals, but there is a need for more such opportunities.

Churches are actively engaged in welcoming, particularly via the UKHK Welcome Churches network. Civic organisations including schools, colleges

and sports clubs should be more active in welcoming Hong Kongers and other new arrivals.

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. Schools offer natural opportunities for social mixing and could help parents make friends. Some currently organise social activities but others need to improve their links with parents and the wider community.

Local authorities could play a bigger and more defined role in the UK's BN(O) welcome programme. Departments for communities in local councils should work with strategic migration partnerships (SMPs) to reach out to Hong Kongers and connect them with local organisations and service providers. This has worked well in Sutton, where the local library and volunteer centre are engaging effectively with Hong Kongers.

Providers need to 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.

Hong Kongers are keen to take part in the UK's democratic process: for many, the opportunity to take part in local and national political decisions was a key factor in their decision to leave Hong Kong. Difficulty in understanding UK politics, however, was sometimes cited as a reason why individuals do not vote. To help Hong Kongers and other new arrivals to make informed political choices, more signposting is needed to resources explaining the political system and key national debates.

The research identified worrying levels of unmet demand for mental health

treatment amongst Hong Kongers, including symptoms of PTSD, depression and anxiety resulting from dislocation from their former lives. The NHS and other service providers need to be trained on community sensitivities so that Hong Kongers feel safe to talk. Trained psychiatrists, therapists and interpreters should be able 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 BN(O) welcome programme for Hong Kongers 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 and build on the successes of each. The lessons learned can then help get welcoming right for future groups of new arrivals.



Lessons from Hong Kong welcoming can help get welcoming right for other new arrivals

Working with the Welcoming Committee for Hong Kongers

The Welcoming Committee for Hong Kongers is building a network of welcomers across the UK so we can share new challenges, opportunities and best practice.

One of the main purposes of the Welcoming Committee for Hong Kongers is to act as an umbrella body that brings welcoming organisations together and offers support.

Our communications team helps welcomers share their stories - in the media and online. We offer media support and expertise, and convene a regular communications network.

We also act as a conduit between grassroots organisations and government officials, helping to highlight gaps that need addressing.

We conduct research to inform policy, share best practice and support organisations in making their voices heard.

Every month our online forum meeting offers a space for those involved in the work of welcoming to share updates and discuss new issues.

We encourage anyone who is involved in welcoming Hong Kongers to join this network.

We invite everyone involved in welcoming Hong Kongers to join our network. Contact us: info@welcomehk.org

Sign up for our newsletter to receive regular updates and invites to our latest events: www.welcomehk.org

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

Picture by Andy Aitchison.



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.

Website: www.welcomehk.org

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**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