

Chapter 12

Education

Hong Kong aspires to become an international education hub, with world-renowned universities and outstanding research talent. It boasts an international and highly diversified post-secondary education sector, with five universities in the world's top 100.

The total government expenditure on education increased by 50 per cent from \$76.4 billion in 2013-14 to \$114.7 billion in 2023-24 estimates, with \$104 billion being recurrent expenditure, accounting for 18.6 per cent of the total recurrent government expenditure.

The Education Bureau formulates, develops and reviews education policies, and oversees the implementation of education programmes, nurturing young people into quality citizens with a sense of national identity and social responsibility, an affection for Hong Kong as well as an international perspective.

Education in Hong Kong

The government provides 12 years' free primary and secondary education through public sector schools. In 2022-23, around 80 per cent of the relevant age group participated in post-secondary education, including about 55 per cent at degree level.

The education sector is characterised by diversity and quality. In the 2023-24 school year, there were 847 public sector schools, comprising 65 government schools operated directly by the government as well as 780 aided schools and two caput schools that are fully subsidised by the government and mostly run by religious, charitable or clan organisations. To provide for more diversity, there are 80 Direct Subsidy Scheme (DSS) schools, which enjoy greater flexibility in charging school fees, while receiving government subsidies mainly based on enrolment. There are also 100 private primary and secondary day schools offering local and non-local curriculum.

There are 54 international schools in Hong Kong, including 15 run by the English Schools Foundation, which cater mainly to the demand of non-local families living in Hong Kong for work and investment. Generally operated on a self-financing basis, these schools offer different non-local curricula, including those of Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Japan, Korea, Singapore, the United Kingdom and the United States, as well as the International Baccalaureate programme.

At the post-secondary level, secondary school graduates have access to various publicly funded and self-financing post-secondary programmes at sub-degree, undergraduate and higher levels with multiple entry and exit points, offered by 22 degree-awarding institutions, including 11 universities.

Kindergarten Education

Kindergarten education in Hong Kong is optional, but virtually all children aged three to five attend kindergartens. In the 2023-24 school year, the enrolment was about 136,100.

Since 2017-18, a subsidy sufficient for the provision of good quality half-day kindergarten education to all eligible children aged three to six is provided to local non-profit-making kindergartens joining the Kindergarten Education Scheme. The quality of kindergarten education is enhanced through a series of support measures. There were about 1,010 kindergartens in 2023-24, of which about 770 were eligible to join the scheme and about 740 had done so.

Primary Education

Public sector primary schools offer six years' free education. A child starts primary education at about age six. In September, about 257,700 children were enrolled in 456 public sector primary schools, comprising 34 government schools and 422 aided schools. In addition, 21 DSS primary schools offered about 16,600 places and 71 private primary schools offered about 34,900 places.

Admissions to Primary 1 in public sector schools are administered through the centralised Primary One Admission System, divided into two stages: Discretionary Places Admission and Central Allocation. Each school will first earmark about half of its Primary 1 places as discretionary places for parents to directly apply to one public sector school in any school catchment area, or 'school net'. The remaining half are for central allocation, of which 10 per cent are for students from any school net while 90 per cent are for students in the school net of their residence in order of parental preference.

Secondary Education

Public sector secondary schools provide six years' free education. In September, about 254,100 students were enrolled in 391 public sector secondary schools, comprising 358 aided schools, 31 government schools and two caput schools that are subsidised mainly according to the number of students admitted. There were also 59 DSS secondary schools offering about 55,600 places and 29 private secondary day schools offering about 10,900 places.

Secondary education comprises three years of junior secondary and three years of senior secondary education leading to the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE) Examination.

Subsidised Secondary 1 places are allocated through the Secondary School Places Allocation System, divided into two stages: Discretionary Places and Central Allocation. Schools participating in the system reserve not more than 30 per cent of their Secondary 1 places as discretionary places for parents to directly apply to not more than two participating schools in any district. The remaining places are for central allocation, of which 10 per cent are for students from any school net while 90 per cent are for students from their respective school nets.

Students completing junior secondary education normally remain in the same school for their senior secondary education while some attend full-time, fully subsidised vocational training courses run by the Vocational Training Council (VTC).

Local Curriculum and Learning and Teaching Initiatives

The Hong Kong school curriculum features a broad and balanced curriculum with an open and flexible framework, highlighting seven learning goals¹ and five essential learning

¹ For primary education, the aspects covered are national identity, proper values and attitudes, knowledge of key learning areas, language skills, generic skills, reading and information literacy, and healthy lifestyle. For secondary education, the aspects covered are national and global identity, breadth of knowledge, language proficiency, generic skills, information literacy, life planning, and healthy lifestyle.

experiences². It comprises the three interconnected components of knowledge (subjects from Key Learning Areas³), generic skills, and values and attitudes. A 15-year school curriculum framework from kindergarten to Secondary 6 helps students progress through the different stages of learning to achieve whole-person development and lifelong learning.

Kindergarten, Primary and Secondary Curriculum

The kindergarten education curriculum promotes balanced development in children covering five developmental objectives, namely moral development, cognitive and language development, physical development, affective and social development, and aesthetic development. The curriculum promotes the use of real-life themes to provide children with comprehensive learning experiences.

Primary education continues to develop students' learning capabilities and interests, and lays a solid foundation for them to proceed to secondary education. The Primary Education Curriculum Guide (Pilot Version) prepared by the Curriculum Development Council was released in 2022. It recommends schools to provide students with diversified learning experiences to help them achieve whole-person development and lifelong learning.

The junior secondary curriculum extends from primary education and further develops students' knowledge, generic skills, and values and attitudes to nurture them into self-directed learners. The senior secondary curriculum is flexible, coherent and diversified. It aims to cater for students' varied interests, needs, aptitudes and abilities. Students take four core subjects (Chinese language, English language, Mathematics, and Citizenship and Social Development) and two to three elective subjects, and participate in Other Learning Experiences.

Applied Learning courses are offered as elective subjects at the senior secondary level, with dual emphasis placed on practice and theory linked to broad professional and vocational fields. Applied Learning covers six areas of studies: creative studies; media and communication; business, management and law; services; applied science; and engineering and production. In addition, Applied Learning Chinese for non-Chinese speaking (NCS) students is provided.

On completion of their study at Secondary 6, students take the HKDSE Examination. This qualification is recognised internationally by more than 600 tertiary institutions for admission purposes, and more are being added.

In 2022, about 94 per cent of Secondary 6 graduates pursued further full-time studies, among whom about 12.4 per cent studied outside Hong Kong.

Values Education

The bureau supports schools in implementing values education within and beyond the classroom to enable students to cultivate and display proper values and a positive attitude

² The five essential learning experiences are values education, intellectual development, community service, physical and aesthetic development, and career-related experiences.

³ Key Learning Areas are Chinese language education; English language education; mathematics education; science education; technology education; personal, social and humanities education; arts education; and physical education.

towards life, as well as to strengthen their sense of belonging to the country and their sense of national identity from an early age.

To tie in with the roll-out of patriotic education announced in the Chief Executive's 2023 Policy Address, the Values Education Curriculum Framework (Pilot Version) was enriched with the optimised content of Priority Values and Attitudes in December. It stresses Chinese culture as the backbone of values education and provides clear directions for schools to nurture students' proper values and attitudes on the basis of the interests and well-being of individuals, groups and the country.

To support the implementation of national security education in schools, the bureau has organised onsite teacher workshops for all primary and secondary schools which implement the local curriculum. Enrichment seminars are conducted for publicly funded secondary schools to enable teachers to gain a deeper understanding of how to implement national security in different learning areas.

It also organises diversified activities to promote national education, including the Constitution and Basic Law Territory-wide Inter-school Competition, National Education Mascots Naming Competition and online quizzes for National Constitution Day and National Security Education Day.

Chinese History Education

Chinese history is an integral part of the curriculum for all kindergartens, primary and secondary schools. Relevant learning content has been included in the kindergarten education curriculum and General Studies at the primary level. At the junior secondary level, Chinese History has been offered as an independent compulsory subject since the 2018-19 school year, and the revised Chinese History curriculum implemented from Secondary 1 since September 2020. At the senior secondary level, Chinese History is an elective subject.

Primary Humanities

The introduction of Primary Humanities was announced during the Chief Executive's 2023 Policy Address. Starting from the 2025-26 school year, all primary schools in Hong Kong will implement Primary Humanities progressively.

The Primary Humanities curriculum is based on the current General Studies curriculum, and is reorganised with enrichment on the elements of Chinese culture, national history and national geography. The enrichment aims to cultivate in students a sense of belonging towards the country, an affection for the Chinese people, and a sense of national identity more systematically and in line with the implementation of patriotic education.

Language Education

The government's language education policy is to train the younger generation to become biliterate in written Chinese and English and trilingual in Cantonese, Putonghua and spoken English.

At the same time, the government believes students should undertake their general education in a language that is not itself a barrier to learning. The policy on medium of instruction is therefore to uphold mother-tongue teaching while enhancing students' proficiency in both Chinese and English. Public sector primary schools generally teach in Chinese. Public sector secondary schools can increase junior secondary students' opportunities for exposure to, and use of, English, taking into account their ability and desire to learn in English, teachers' capability and readiness to teach in English, and support measures to facilitate learning in English.

At senior secondary level, schools can select either Chinese or English as the medium of instruction on a subject basis.

Schools are encouraged to devise a whole-school language policy in line with the policy goal on medium of instruction, sustain good practices and deepen students' language learning through cross-curricular learning within and beyond the classroom. A wide variety of materials, such as Chinese classical passages and English language arts materials, are used to enhance students' interest in Chinese culture and sensitivity to creative use of English. Technology is applied to promote language learning across the curriculum through the use of printed and multimodal texts to motivate students and broaden their knowledge.

The Standing Committee on Language Education and Research advises the government on language education issues in general and on the use of the Language Fund. The fund supports initiatives to improve the community's proficiency in Chinese (including Putonghua) and English.

Native-speaking English Teacher Scheme

There are about 370 Native-speaking English Teachers working in secondary schools and about 470 in primary schools. They collaborate with local English teachers to bring diversified teaching strategies, professional experience and cultural literacy to local English classrooms to enrich students' language learning experience and strengthen the English language learning environment. Overall, the scheme enhances classroom practices and students' attitudes towards learning English.

STEAM Education

The government has been stepping up the promotion of STEAM (science, technology, engineering, the arts and mathematics) education 'for all', 'for fun' and 'for diversity' in primary and secondary schools with a view to nurturing students' interest and developing their abilities in science and innovation and technology (I&T), as well as enhancing their creativity, collaboration and problem-solving skills.

Curriculum support programmes were launched in the 2023-24 school year to strengthen students' capability in the application of mathematics. In addition to the incorporation of enriched coding education and artificial intelligence education at the upper primary level and junior secondary level, more I&T elements were also integrated in science learning at the junior secondary level starting from the 2023-24 school year. Starting from the 2025-26 school year, all

primary schools in Hong Kong will progressively implement Primary Science, starting with Primary 1 and 4.

All publicly funded schools have designated coordinators to holistically plan the implementation of STEAM education within and beyond the classroom, and organise or arrange for students to participate in quality STEAM activities. The bureau continues to collaborate with tertiary institutions, professional bodies and I&T organisations to provide STEAM/I&T-related programmes for teachers to keep abreast of the latest developments in I&T, and to organise diversified learning activities to students to inspire their interest and aspiration in science and I&T.

Blended Learning

Blended learning flourished during the Covid-19 epidemic and has become a trend in education. The bureau supports schools to implement blended learning by establishing on-campus Wi-Fi and providing professional development programmes for teachers, support services under the Information Technology (IT) in Education Centre of Excellence Scheme, online resources and recurrent funding.

The bureau launched a three-year programme in 2021 through the Quality Education Fund to support the provision of ancillary facilities for e-learning and subsidise schools to buy mobile computer devices and internet access facilities, such as portable Wi-Fi routers and mobile data cards, for loan to financially needy students.

Life-wide Learning

Life-wide learning is an integral part of learning outside classrooms to help students pursue whole-person development and develop the lifelong learning capabilities that are needed in the ever-changing society. Schools can deploy funds and additional grants to organise activities, such as visits to exhibitions, field trips, service learning, uniformed group activities and study tours. Mainland exchange programmes commissioned by the bureau provide more than 100,000 quotas annually, which are sufficient for all students to join at least one Mainland exchange activity each in the primary and secondary stages.

Support for Students

The bureau has implemented measures to support students' learning, social and emotional needs. Professional services such as the school social work service, School-based Educational Psychology Service and School-based Speech Therapy Service are provided to schools. The one-stop information website, Mental Health@School, provides information on promoting mental health among students. Schools are encouraged to provide appropriate activities directed at three levels – universal, selective and indicated – to promote mental health among students and strengthen support for students with mental health needs.

After-school Programmes, Activities and Grants

School-based after-school learning and support programmes subsidise activities that help eligible students improve their learning effectiveness, broaden their learning experiences

outside the classroom and raise their understanding of the community and sense of belonging. In 2023-24, 911 schools and 143 non-governmental organisations (NGOs) received the subsidies, benefitting about 165,000 students.

The Student Activities Support Grant helps students with financial needs participate in activities organised or recognised by schools. It benefitted about 155,000 students from 931 schools in 2023-24.

Life Planning Education

An additional teaching post is provided to public sector and DSS schools providing senior secondary education to help prepare students for the transition from school to post-secondary education, including Vocational and Professional Education and Training (VPET), or the workplace. The bureau also assists schools to begin life planning education at upper primary and junior secondary levels.

The bureau strengthens collaboration between schools and various sectors in organising activities for secondary students to enhance their exposure to the corporate world and provide first-hand experience in different industries and careers through the Business-School Partnership Programme 2.0. More than 200 business partners conducted 1,500 activities benefitting about 180,000 student participants in 2022-23.

Supporting Students with Diverse Needs and Abilities

Non-Chinese-speaking Students

The government encourages and supports the integration of NCS students into the community through facilitating their early adaptation to the local education system and mastery of the Chinese language. The Chinese Language Curriculum Second Language Learning Framework helps primary and secondary NCS students learn Chinese progressively. Support measures include professional training for teachers, learning and teaching resources, and funding for schools to enhance support for NCS students in learning Chinese and create an inclusive learning environment. The bureau has also promulgated the Adapted Framework of the Revised Chinese History (Secondary 1-3) Curriculum for Non-Chinese Speaking Students for reference and adoption by schools admitting NCS students. Applied Learning Chinese (for NCS students) is offered at senior secondary level as an additional channel to help NCS students obtain an alternative Chinese language qualification and prepare them for further studies and career pursuits. In addition to the HKDSE qualification, it is also pegged at Qualifications Framework (QF) levels 1 to 3. It is accepted for admission to University Grants Committee (UGC)-funded universities and most post-secondary institutions as well as appointments to the civil service.

UGC-funded universities accept various Chinese language qualifications under specified circumstances as alternatives to the HKDSE so that applicants may meet the general entrance requirements under the Joint University Programmes Admissions System. These qualifications include the General Certificate of Secondary Education, International General Certificate of Secondary Education, and General Certificate of Education AS-Level and A-Level. Similar arrangements are available for admission to sub-degree programmes. Eligible NCS students

taking these Chinese language examinations are subsidised so the fees they pay are the same as the HKDSE Chinese Language examination fee. Those with financial needs may also receive half or full remission of the subsidised examination fees.

Through the Language Fund, the government provides funding to NGOs for holding district-based programmes to motivate NCS children to learn Chinese. Funding is also provided to tertiary institutions to run vocational Chinese language courses pegged at QF level 1 or 2 for NCS school-leavers.

Students with Special Educational Needs

The government adopts a dual-track mode in providing special education. Students with more severe or multiple disabilities are placed in special schools for intensive support, subject to the assessment and recommendation of specialists and parents' consent. Others with special educational needs (SEN) attend ordinary schools. As of September, there were 62 aided special schools, 24 of which had boarding facilities, providing about 9,800 school places and 1,300 boarding places. About 60,960 students with SEN were enrolled in public sector ordinary primary and secondary schools. The government provides these schools with additional resources, professional support and teacher training. Professional officers from the bureau visit these schools regularly to advise on policies and support measures in implementing integrated education.

All public sector ordinary primary and secondary schools are provided with an SEN coordinator post and the Learning Support Grant, as well as additional regular teaching posts offered as appropriate, to support the implementation of integrated education. To support schools in catering for the diverse educational needs of students, all public sector ordinary schools also receive the School-based Educational Psychology Service, under which the ratio of educational psychologists to schools is about 1:4 at schools with a comparatively large number of students with SEN. Besides, school-based speech therapist posts are created in public sector ordinary schools to implement the Enhanced School-based Speech Therapy Service. At the beginning of 2023-24, about 49 per cent of teachers in public sector ordinary schools completed structured training programmes of 30 hours or more to help them cater for students with SEN.

The Endeavour Merit Award and Endeavour Scholarship recognise excellence in post-secondary students with SEN at publicly funded and self-financing institutions respectively.

Gifted Education

The government attaches great importance to supporting gifted students in developing their potential and offering challenging learning opportunities both within and outside school. Setting up school-based student talent pools in schools is being promoted to identify and nurture students with special talents. Professional development programmes, together with learning and teaching resources, are provided to equip teachers with knowledge and skills in gifted education. Territory-wide competitions in different disciplines enable students to demonstrate their strengths and widen their horizons. Outstanding students thus identified are given further training and nominated to take part in national and international competitions.

The government-subvented Hong Kong Academy for Gifted Education provides gifted students with out-of-school learning through advanced learning programmes, competitions, conferences and mentoring. For parents of gifted children, it offers the Parent Education Programme, outreach, assessment and consultation services.

The Gifted Education Fund supports the academy and finances a variety of advanced learning programmes outside school for gifted students.

Professional Development of Educators

Teachers

The Committee on Professional Development of Teachers and Principals advises the bureau on policies and measures relating to the professional development of the teaching profession at different career stages and provides a platform for professional sharing, collaboration and networking.

The Chief Executive's Award for Teaching Excellence, organised by the bureau, recognises accomplished teachers and fosters a culture of excellence in the teaching profession.

To implement the Professional Ladder for Teachers, the government provides teachers with opportunities for more systematic and focused professional development and strengthens the contents on their professional roles and conduct and on Constitution, Basic Law and national security education.

Principals

Professional development requirements are in place to help aspiring, newly appointed and serving principals enhance their leadership knowledge and address their development needs at different career stages. Since 2004-05, around 2,170 aspiring principals have attained the Certification for Principals and about 930 of them have become principals.

School-based Support Services

School-based support services foster leadership in schools and disseminate informed practices to enhance the professional capacity of teachers. In the 2022-23 school year, the bureau provided school-based support services to 190 secondary schools, 350 primary schools, 15 special schools, and 207 kindergartens and kindergarten-cum-child care centres.

Regional education offices offer school-based support services in response to the needs of students, teachers, schools and other stakeholders.

Post-secondary Education

The government supports the parallel and complementary development of publicly funded and self-financing post-secondary education. Hong Kong has 22 local degree-awarding

institutions, namely eight universities⁴ funded by the UGC, the publicly funded Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts (HKAPA), the self-financing Hong Kong Metropolitan University (HKMU), the VTC's Technological and Higher Education Institute of Hong Kong (THEi), and 11 post-secondary colleges.⁵

All UGC-funded universities, the HKMU and the HKAPA are statutory bodies governed by their own ordinances. Eleven approved post-secondary colleges are registered under and governed by the Post Secondary Colleges Ordinance. Each post-secondary institution has its own structure of governance, normally including a governing body, called the council or board of governors, and a body to regulate academic affairs, called the senate or academic board.

In terms of full-time studies in the 2023-24 academic year, the UGC-funded universities and the HKAPA together provided around 15,220 publicly funded, first-year-first-degree intake places, while self-financing undergraduate programmes offered about 7,400 places. The UGC-funded universities and the self-financing, degree-awarding institutions also provided around 5,000 senior-year undergraduate intake places and 8,700 top-up degree places respectively, mainly for sub-degree graduates. At sub-degree level, about 15,600 self-financing and 7,800 publicly funded intake places were available.

The School Nominations Direct Admission Scheme provides opportunities for students with special and diversified talents that cannot be fully assessed by the HKDSE to be considered for direct admission to local universities. In the 2023-24 academic year, more than 700 valid nominations were received with over 230 successful nominees.

At postgraduate level, about 2,600 and 6,400 UGC-funded taught and research places were available in 2023-24 respectively. As regards self-financing places, taught and research programmes registered actual enrolments of 53,600 and 7,200 respectively in 2022-23.

Under the Ministry of Education's Scheme for Admission of Hong Kong Students to Mainland Higher Education Institutions, Mainland higher education institutions admit Hong Kong students on the basis of their HKDSE Examination results and exempt them from taking the Joint Entrance Examination for Mainland Institutions. In the 2023-24 academic year, the number of participating institutions increased from 129 to 132 across 21 Mainland provinces and municipalities and one autonomous region. In 2022-23, more than 4,800 Hong Kong students applied and about 2,400 were offered places.

⁴ The eight UGC-funded universities are City University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong Baptist University, Lingnan University, the Chinese University of Hong Kong, the Education University of Hong Kong, the Hong Kong Polytechnic University, the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology and the University of Hong Kong.

⁵ The 11 post-secondary colleges are Caritas Institute of Higher Education, Centennial College, Gratia Christian College, Hong Kong Chu Hai College, HKCT Institute of Higher Education, Hong Kong Nang Yan College of Higher Education, Hong Kong Shue Yan University, the Hang Seng University of Hong Kong, Tung Wah College, UOW College Hong Kong and Yew Chung College of Early Childhood Education.

Self-financing Post-secondary Education Sector

The government promotes the sustainable development of the self-financing post-secondary sector by providing land and premises at nominal premium and rent, interest-free start-up loans, the \$3.52 billion Self-financing Post-secondary Education Fund, the \$1.26 billion Enhancement and Start-up Grant Scheme for Self-financing Post-secondary Education, financial assistance for students and quality assurance subsidies.

The Study Subsidy Scheme for Designated Professions/Sectors subsidises students who pursue designated full-time locally accredited self-financing undergraduate, including top-up degree, and sub-degree programmes in selected disciplines. It currently benefits about 4,000 undergraduate students and 2,000 sub-degree students per cohort.

The government also provides means-tested and non-means-tested financial assistance to eligible students pursuing full-time, locally accredited local and non-local self-financing undergraduate programmes, including top-up degree programmes, offered in Hong Kong by eligible institutions. In 2023-24, about 11,700 students received assistance under the Non-means-tested Subsidy Scheme for Self-financing Undergraduate Studies in Hong Kong.

Research

The government supports research conducted by the higher education sector. The \$46 billion Research Endowment Fund generates stable funding for competitive research grants, while the \$3 billion Research Matching Grant Scheme aims to encourage support for research from the private sector and diversify research funding sources.

The government announced in 2023 that the quota of the Hong Kong PhD Fellowship Scheme would increase gradually from 300 to 400 places per academic year, starting from 2024-25, to attract outstanding talents to study and conduct research in Hong Kong.

Vocational and Professional Education and Training and Adult Education

The government fosters industry-institution collaboration and diversified development to promote VPET as a pathway parallel to conventional academic education, providing a range of learning and employment opportunities for young people.

Universities of Applied Sciences

The government will promote the development of universities of applied sciences to raise the status of VPET at degree level and provide an alternative pathway for young people to pursue a career in professional skills sectors. These universities will provide applied degree programmes with an applied focus blending theory and practice, and closely collaborate with professional skills sectors and incorporate substantial internship and work-based learning opportunities in their programmes.

VPET in Secondary Education

At junior secondary level, students are provided with career-related experiences and exposure through life-wide learning activities. At senior secondary level, students' understanding of VPET is further enhanced through Applied Learning courses, the career-related experiences

embedded in Other Learning Experiences activities, and other subjects in Key Learning Areas such as science and technology education.

Vocational Training Council

The VTC is a statutory body that offers VPET for school-leavers and adult learners. It provided some 200,000 full-time and part-time places in 2022-23.

Quality-assured, internationally recognised full-time and part-time courses up to master's degree level are available for students who have completed Secondary 3 education or above, covering business, childcare, elderly and community services, design, engineering, health and life sciences, hospitality and IT. The courses are offered through the VTC's 13 member institutions, including the Chinese Culinary Institute, Hong Kong Design Institute, Hong Kong Institute of Vocational Education, Hotel and Tourism Institute, Institute of Professional Education and Knowledge, International Culinary Institute, THEi and Youth College. Another institution, the Hong Kong Institute of Information Technology, was established in November, offering IT and relevant technology programmes for students, working adults and industry practitioners, with the first cohort to be admitted in the 2024-25 academic year. The VTC also administers an apprenticeship scheme and provides trade testing and certification.

The VTC's government-funded Training and Support Scheme offers 1,200 training places per year under an 'earn and learn' model to help trainees join industries which require specialised skills. The VTC also receives recurrent funding to provide industrial attachment for about 9,000 students every year.

Diploma of Applied Education Programme

The Diploma of Applied Education Programme, which has been introduced in place of the Diploma Yi Jin Programme, provides an alternative channel for Secondary 6 school-leavers and adult learners to earn a formal qualification for employment and continuing education purposes. It is run by eight self-financing institutions and may be taken either full-time or part-time. The 2023-24 enrolment exceeded 4,000 students.

Evening Secondary Courses

The Financial Assistance Scheme for Designated Evening Adult Education Courses offers evening secondary courses conducted by approved course providers. About 900 adult students were enrolled in 2023-24.

Qualifications and Quality Assurance

Qualifications Framework

The Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (QF), established under the Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications Ordinance, provides a transparent and accessible platform to promote lifelong learning and enhance workforce competitiveness. The QF covers academic, VPET and continuing education qualifications. It is underpinned by a robust quality assurance mechanism. All qualifications recognised under the framework are locally accredited by the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ), established under the HKCAAVQ Ordinance, or by local self-accrediting institutions.

The government maintains a web-based Qualifications Register, which lists the qualifications and associated learning programmes recognised under the framework.

As at 2023, the government had helped 23 industries set up industry training advisory committees under the QF, covering more than half of the labour force. A major task of each committee is to draw up Specification of Competency Standards for its sector, setting out the skills, knowledge and outcome standards required of employees in the sector's different functional areas, and enabling course providers to design training programmes to meet the sector's needs. These standards provide useful guides for the development of in-house training and human resources management.

The Recognition of Prior Learning mechanism under the QF enables practitioners to obtain formal recognition for the knowledge, skills and experience they acquire in the workplace, and facilitates further learning without the need to start from scratch. The QF also provides for credit accumulation and transfer (CAT) to support learning pathways for learners, and helps institutions develop and refine their CAT systems.

To ensure the sustainability of the framework, the government operates the \$2.2 billion QF Fund to provide a steady income for QF-related initiatives.

Quality Assurance of Post-secondary Education

Two quality assurance bodies monitor the quality of the post-secondary education sector. The HKCAAVQ is the statutory body responsible for the quality assurance of all operators and programmes except the UGC-funded universities, which are self-accredited. The Quality Assurance Council, a semi-autonomous non-statutory body under the UGC's aegis, conducts quality audits of the UGC-funded universities to assure that the quality of educational experience in all their programmes at the levels of sub-degree, first degree and above, however funded, is sustained, improved and internationally competitive.

Non-local Courses of Higher and Professional Education

The Non-local Higher and Professional Education (Regulation) Ordinance regulates non-local courses of higher and professional education conducted in Hong Kong through a system of registration to ensure the standards of the courses and qualifications are comparable with those in their home countries. It protects consumers from non-local courses which do not fulfil the registration criteria. As at end-December, 783 non-local courses were registered or exempted from registration under the ordinance.

Student Achievements

Hong Kong students excel in international competitions. In 2023, Hong Kong teams won five gold, 12 silver and 10 bronze medals in the International Mathematical Olympiad, International Physics Olympiad, International Biology Olympiad, International Junior Science Olympiad, Asian Physics Olympiad and International Olympiad in Informatics.

In music, Hong Kong students secured nine first prizes in the Vivaldi International Music Competition; two unique awards, six second prizes and two third prizes in the Chopin Avenue

International Piano Competition; one platinum and two gold medals in the Canadian International Music Competition; two awards in the Lyrical Flute International Championship; and a second prize in the String Avenue International String Competition.

In visual arts, Hong Kong students won 39 medals and six honourable mentions in the 51st International Children's Exhibition of Fine Art Lidice; one grand prize and one first prize of the Minister for Foreign Affairs Award in the 22nd Kanagawa Biennial World Children's Art Exhibition; as well as two Laureate Diploma prizes and a Diploma prize in the 18th International Art and Graphics Contest.

In sports, Hong Kong students won four champion, two first runner-up and nine second runner-up prizes in the 1st National Student (Youth) Games of the People's Republic of China, including in swimming, wushu, tennis, and shuttlecock events. The Hong Kong team was runner-up in the Asia Rugby U18 Men Sevens. At the World Table Tennis Youth Contender competition in Bangkok, one Hong Kong student was runner-up in the under-19s competition while another reached the semi-final of the under-15s. In fencing, two students were crowned champion and three others won second runner-up prizes at events, including the Asian Cadet Fencing Championships, the Fencing Tournoi Satellite, the World Junior and Cadet Fencing Championships, and the Junior Fencing World Cup Coupe du Monde.

More Funding Resources

Quality Education Fund

This fund seeks to raise the quality of school education and promote quality school education. As at end-2023, it had approved about 13,800 projects involving about \$6.9 billion.

Student Finance Schemes

To ensure no student is denied access to education because of a lack of means, the Student Finance Office of the Working Family and Student Financial Assistance Agency provides means-tested and non-means-tested financial assistance at various study levels. The office also administers a number of scholarship schemes.

Financial Assistance for Pre-primary Education

Eligible children may receive means-tested assistance, including fee remission and an additional grant to defray their kindergarten-related expenses. In the 2022-23 school year, subsidies totalling around \$404 million were granted to about 34,900 students.

Financial Assistance for Primary and Secondary Education

At primary and secondary levels, means-tested assistance covers textbooks, travel, internet access and examination fees. In the 2022-23 school year, around \$875 million was disbursed to about 193,700 students to pay for essential textbooks and miscellaneous school-related expenses, \$365 million to 140,600 students as travel subsidies and \$177 million to 138,400 families to subsidise internet access by students at home. The government paid examination fees for eligible senior secondary students sitting public examinations in the 2022-23 school year as a one-off measure. The government also disburses school-based and district-based grants to support the whole-person development of needy students.

Financial Assistance for Post-secondary Education

Means-tested grants and low-interest loans are offered to eligible full-time students pursuing eligible publicly funded or locally accredited self-financing post-secondary programmes. In 2022-23, around \$1,457 million in grants and \$243 million in loans were provided to about 28,000 students.

Non-means-tested loans operating on a no-gain-no-loss and full-cost-recovery basis are available to students pursuing eligible publicly funded or locally accredited self-financing post-secondary programmes, and eligible professional or continuing education courses. In 2022-23, about 27,200 students received loans amounting to around \$1,512 million.

Travel subsidies totalling around \$99 million were provided to about 23,600 post-secondary students.

Tuition Fee Reimbursement for Diploma of Applied Education/Diploma Yi Jin Programme and Evening Secondary Courses

Eligible students pursuing the Diploma of Applied Education/Diploma Yi Jin Programme or designated evening secondary education courses may receive reimbursement of 30 per cent of the tuition fee. Those who pass a means test will be reimbursed a higher percentage.

Grants for Programmes Below Sub-degree Level

Students who are eligible to receive a full or half means-tested grant under the Student Finance Office and are pursuing eligible programmes below sub-degree level, such as the Diploma of Applied Education, Diploma Yi Jin and the VTC's Diploma of Vocational Education, are entitled to reimbursement of all or half of the tuition fee respectively. For programmes of one year or longer, they may also receive all or half of the flat-rate academic expenses grant.

Mainland University Study Subsidy

For the 2023-24 academic year, a means-tested subsidy of up to \$19,400 or non-means-tested subsidy of up to \$6,500 per year is provided to eligible local students pursuing undergraduate studies in designated Mainland institutions under the Mainland University Study Subsidy Scheme after enhancements to the subsidy rates. In 2022-23, around \$62 million was granted in subsidies to 4,551 students, and in 2023-24, the scheme attracted more than 5,000 applications.

Scholarships

Hong Kong Scholarship for Excellence

The Hong Kong Scholarship for Excellence Scheme supports up to 100 local students per cohort to pursue undergraduate or postgraduate studies at world-renowned universities outside Hong Kong. It has awarded the scholarship to around 870 students and granted scholarships and bursaries totalling \$489 million since 2015-16. The scholarship ceiling is set at \$300,000 per student per annum and students with financial needs may also apply for a means-tested bursary that provides up to \$200,000 per annum to cover living and study-related expenses.

HKSAR Government Scholarship Fund and Self-financing Post-secondary Education Fund

The \$3.07 billion HKSAR Government Scholarship Fund awards scholarships to outstanding locals and non-locals studying in full-time, publicly funded programmes at sub-degree and degree level or above in the eight UGC-funded universities, the HKAPA and the VTC. The \$3.52 billion Self-financing Post-secondary Education Fund provides scholarships and awards to outstanding students pursuing full-time, locally accredited self-financing sub-degree or undergraduate programmes, and supports worthwhile initiatives to enhance self-financing post-secondary education. In 2022-23, the two funds distributed 8,923 scholarships and awards.

Scholarship for Prospective English Teachers

The government's Scholarship for Prospective English Teachers aims to attract people proficient in English to pursue local bachelor's degree programmes and/or teacher training programmes majoring in English or a relevant subject which will qualify them to become English teachers on graduation.

Management of Schools

The Education Ordinance regulates school education services. Schools must comply with its provisions, including subsidiary legislation on the registration of schools, teachers and managers, health and safety requirements, fees and charges and teacher qualifications.

To implement school-based management, aided schools are devolved with considerable autonomy and funding flexibility. In return, they have to be more transparent and accountable in their operation and include all key stakeholders in their governance structure, including representatives of the school sponsoring body, the principal, elected teachers, parents and alumni, and independent members.

The enhanced School Development and Accountability framework increases the accountability of staff in publicly funded schools for providing quality education by strengthening school-based management through self-evaluation, complemented by external school reviews.

Community Participation in Education

Advisory Committees

The Education Commission, which is a non-statutory body appointed by the Chief Executive, advises the Secretary for Education on overall educational objectives and policies and the priorities in implementing its recommendations. The commission includes in its membership the chairpersons of nine key committees: the Committee on Home-School Cooperation, the Committee on Professional Development of Teachers and Principals, the Committee on Self-financing Post-secondary Education, the Curriculum Development Council, the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority Council, the Quality Education Fund Steering Committee, the Standing Committee on Language Education and Research, the UGC and the VTC.

The UGC is a non-statutory body appointed by the Chief Executive. It offers impartial and expert advice to the government on the funding and development of higher education, and

provides assurance to the government and the community on the standards and cost-effectiveness of the operations of the eight UGC-funded universities.

Under the UGC's aegis are the Research Grants Council, which advises on the research needs of the academic sector and the distribution of research funding, and the Quality Assurance Council, which helps assure the quality of educational experiences in all programmes of the UGC-funded universities.

UGC members are appointed by the Chief Executive. They comprise accomplished academics and higher education administrators from outside Hong Kong, eminent community leaders and academics of high standing locally. The UGC Secretariat, a government department, provides administrative support.

The Curriculum Development Council advises the Education Bureau on all matters relating to curriculum development for the school system from kindergarten to senior secondary levels.

Home-School Cooperation

There are more than 1,400 parent-teacher associations. The bureau funded more than 3,600 school-based and district-based home-school cooperation activities in the 2022-23 school year.

Collaboration with the Mainland and International Education Sector

The bureau has signed memorandums of understanding with 11 Mainland provinces, cities and regions, as well as 12 countries. Schools and universities have closer collaboration with their Mainland and overseas counterparts.

In 2023, about 880 publicly funded schools in Hong Kong formed over 2,600 sister school pairs with their Mainland counterparts.

The Mainland-Hong Kong Teachers Exchange and Collaboration Programme, co-organised by the Ministry of Education and the bureau, aims to foster professional exchange between Mainland expert teachers and local teachers. In the 2023-24 school year, 34 Mainland expert teachers were nominated by the ministry to collaborate with 110 local schools.

The Belt and Road Scholarship is offered to outstanding students from countries or regions along the Belt and Road pursuing full-time publicly funded university studies in Hong Kong. Since the 2016-17 academic year, 530 students have been awarded the scholarship.

The government supports Hong Kong post-secondary institutions to offer education services in the Mainland cities of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA) and to give full play to the strengths of Hong Kong's higher education sector in terms of high-quality teaching and research as well as internationalisation.

The VTC works with its Mainland and international partners, including academic institutions and professional bodies, to nurture young talent with a global perspective for society. They

work in major areas and cities on the Mainland, including the GBA, Beijing and Shanghai, and other countries, including Germany, the United Kingdom, Australia and Japan.

The government has been working with the relevant Mainland authorities to take forward the mutual recognition of sub-degree level qualifications and test the arrangements on a pilot basis.

Employment of Non-local Graduates

Non-local students who have obtained an undergraduate or higher qualification in a full-time and locally accredited programme in Hong Kong may apply to stay or return and work in the city under the Immigration Arrangements for Non-local Graduates. To further attract talent and enhance Hong Kong's competitiveness, the limit of stay under the arrangements was increased to 24 months. A pilot scheme was launched in 2022 to extend the arrangements to cover graduates from Hong Kong universities' campuses in the Mainland cities of the GBA.

Website

Education Bureau: www.edb.gov.hk