



# Building an international education hub

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## Overview

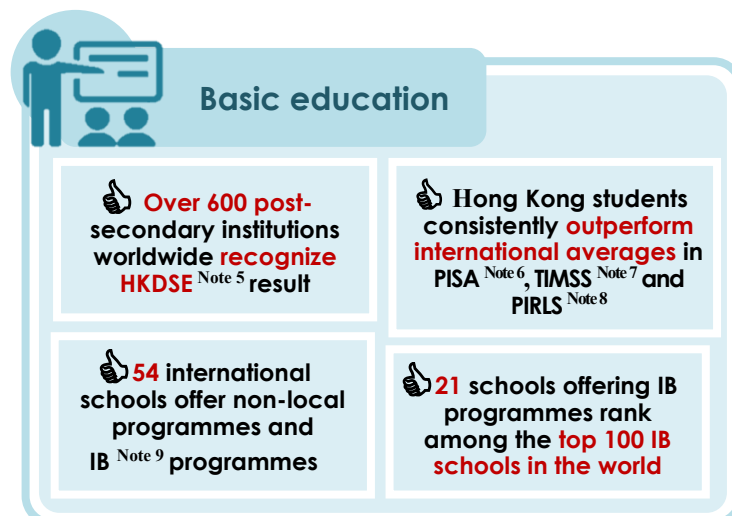
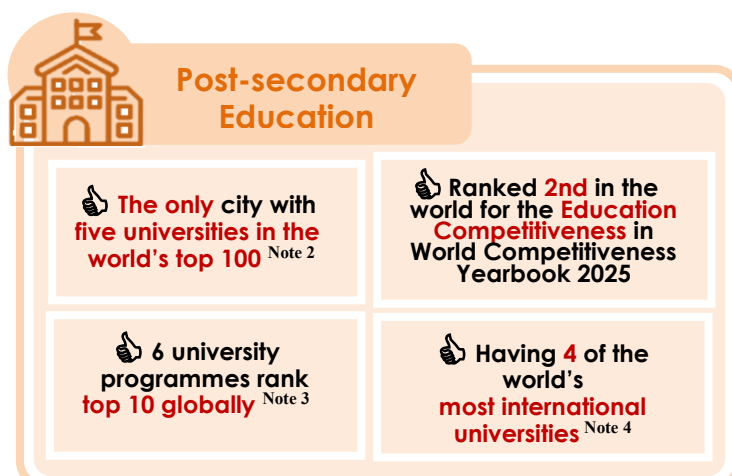
As a cosmopolitan city, **Hong Kong**'s education is highly internationalized and diversified, with great potential to become an international education hub. To broaden global perspectives of students and further expand capacity and enhance standard of education in Hong Kong, the Chief Executive has announced in his 2023 Policy Address the establishment of an **"international hub for post-secondary education and a cradle for future talents"**. The 2024 Policy Address has further proposed building the **"Study in Hong Kong" brand**. With the implementation of national policies and support initiatives of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government ("SAR Government"), Hong Kong has achieved outstanding academic results in various international rankings, fully leveraging the city's appeal as an international talent hub.

This issue of **Policy Pulse** briefly describes the competitiveness of education in Hong Kong, the unique advantages of Hong Kong in developing as an international education hub, and the support measures implemented by the SAR Government. It also summarizes relevant discussions in the Legislative Council ("LegCo").

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## Highlights of education in Hong Kong

The SAR Government **attaches great importance to education** and has been investing heavily to promote high-quality development of education <sup>Note 1</sup>. Hong Kong possesses excellent educational infrastructures, world-renowned universities, outstanding research talent and a diverse and high-quality basic education system, ranking among the top in numerous international comparisons:



Note 1 The Government's recurrent expenditure on education in 2025-2026 is \$102.9 billion, accounting for 17.5% of the total recurrent government expenditure

Note 2 Quacquarelli Symonds ("QS") World University Rankings 2026

Note 3 Concerning QS World University Rankings by Subject 2025, the six subjects are Dentistry, Education, Linguistics, Geography, as well as Nursing and Linguistics (details on page 5)

Note 4 Times Higher Education ("THE") World University Rankings 2025 (World's most international universities) (details on page 6)

Note 5 Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination

Note 6 Programme for International Student Assessment

Note 7 Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study

Note 8 Progress in International Reading Literacy Study

Note 9 International Baccalaureate Examination

## Overview of post-secondary education

Hong Kong offers young people **flexible and diverse pathways** to pursue post-secondary education. Currently, there are a total of **22** degree-awarding **post-secondary institutions** in Hong Kong, which include:

- ✦ **eight** University Grants Committee (“UGC”)-funded universities providing an annual total of 15 000 first-year-first-degree places and 5 000 senior year undergraduate intake places;
- ✦ **one publicly-funded university** (The Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts); and
- ✦ **13 self-financing institutions** (from private universities providing applied and liberal arts education to specialized boutique institutions providing healthcare or early childhood education).

### Admission of non-local students

- Starting from the 2024-2025 academic year, the **non-local student quota for UGC-funded universities** has been doubled from 20% to **40%** to support Hong Kong’s development as an international post-secondary education hub.
- In the past five years, the **number of non-local students** in UGC-funded universities has **gradually increased**. By the 2024-2025 academic year, the number of non-local students enrolled in UGC-funded university programmes was 26 600, with approximately 17 200 enrolled in undergraduate degree programmes. This accounted for approximately 23.2% of local student places.

	Enrolment cap on non-local students	
	UGC-funded universities	Self-financing institutions
Sub-degree and Bachelor Note 10	40%	Mainland, Macao, and Taiwan (10% - 40%); No restrictions for other regions
Postgraduates	Lecture-based (40%) No other restrictions	No restriction

### Student scholarships

- The SAR Government **offers various scholarships** including the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government Scholarship Fund, the Self-Financed Post-Secondary Scholarship Scheme, the Belt and Road Scholarship, and Hong Kong PhD Fellowship Scheme, to **recognize outstanding students** and **attract more overseas students** to pursue their studies in Hong Kong.

	Number of non-local students receiving scholarships from the SAR Government	
	2023-2024 academic year	2024-2025 academic year
HKSAR Government Scholarship Fund	About 700	About 800
Self-financing Post-secondary Scholarship Scheme	About 300	About 400
Belt and Road Scholarship	100 (from 21 Belt & Road countries/regions)	150 (from 31 Belt & Road countries/regions)
Hong Kong PhD Fellowship Scheme	300	350



Recipients of Belt and Road Scholarship in the 2024-2025 academic year



### Members’ views

- Members opine that the Administration should **make clear to the public** that admitting non-local students will not affect local students’ study opportunities as non-local students pursuing UGC-funded programmes do not receive public funding, and that the number of such non-local students is accounted for separately from local student places.
- Members note that at present, most non-local students are from the Mainland, and suggest that the Administration should step up its efforts in **attracting more overseas non-local students** in the future.

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## Future development of post-secondary education

### Northern Metropolis University Town (“NMUT”)

- The SAR Government has kick-started the construction of the **University Town** project in Hung Shui Kiu/Ha Tsuen, Ngau Tam Mei and New Territories North New Town of the **Northern Metropolis**. The **University Town Development Conceptual Framework** is expected to be announced in the first half of 2026.
- The **Hung Shui Kiu/Ha Tsuen** project, which involves the development of new campuses for self-financing post-secondary institutions, is leading the way. **Land formation** is scheduled for **completion in 2026** at the earliest.
- **The third medical school and an integrated medical teaching and research hospital will be** built at NMUT. The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (“HKUST”), Hong Kong Baptist University (“HKBU”) and The Hong Kong Polytechnic University (“PolyU”) have submitted the proposals for the third medical school. The assessment is expected to be completed by the end of this year.
- **The Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts** has been ranked first in Asia in the QS World University Rankings for Performing Arts for several consecutive years. The Academy is currently exploring plans to establish new campus facilities in NMUT, with the aim of providing higher-quality teaching and performance facilities to cultivate cultural and artistic talent within the local community and the Greater Bay Area.

### Expanding vocational and professional education and training (“VPET”)

- In 2024, the Hong Kong Metropolitan University (“HKMU”) and Saint Francis University became **universities of applied sciences** (“UAS”), thereby upgrading the status of **VPET** degree programmes.<sup>Note 10</sup> The SAR Government will continue to support VPET at various levels, which include helping more self-financing institutions become UAS, developing the Lift and Escalator Technology Centre, and constructing a campus for the Hong Kong Institute of Information Technology.

### Improving the regulatory mechanism of self-financing institutions

- **The Post Secondary Colleges (Amendment) Bill 2025** was passed by the LegCo on 25 June 2025. The Bill seeks to reform the regulatory regime of post-secondary colleges and to establish a unified regulatory framework for all, local self-financing institutions offering post-secondary education programmes at degree and sub-degree levels, ensuring quality, transparency and accountability of self-financing institutions.

Note 10 UAS offers applied degree programmes that combine theory with practical application. These programmes incorporate extensive internship and work-study opportunities, which focus on developing students’ practical skills



### Members’ views

- Members urge the Administration to **expedite the planning** of **NMUT**, including confirming its development direction and details as soon as possible. Members also suggest that the Government should **communicate with post-secondary institutions on the site distribution and demand for NMUT**, make proper planning and arrangements, and consider providing **tax and financial incentives** to encourage institutions to build second campuses in the University Town, cooperate with industry and scientific research institutions, give play to the industry-university-research effect, promote industrial development, and attract scientific research talents.
- Members hope that the Administration will coordinate and **support self-financing post-secondary institutions, particularly smaller ones, to develop into UAS**. These include streamlining the process for vetting and approving new programmes offered by self-financing institutions, enriching students’ work-based learning experience and establishing a comprehensive, integrated progression pathway.

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## Building an international education hub and a highland for attracting talents

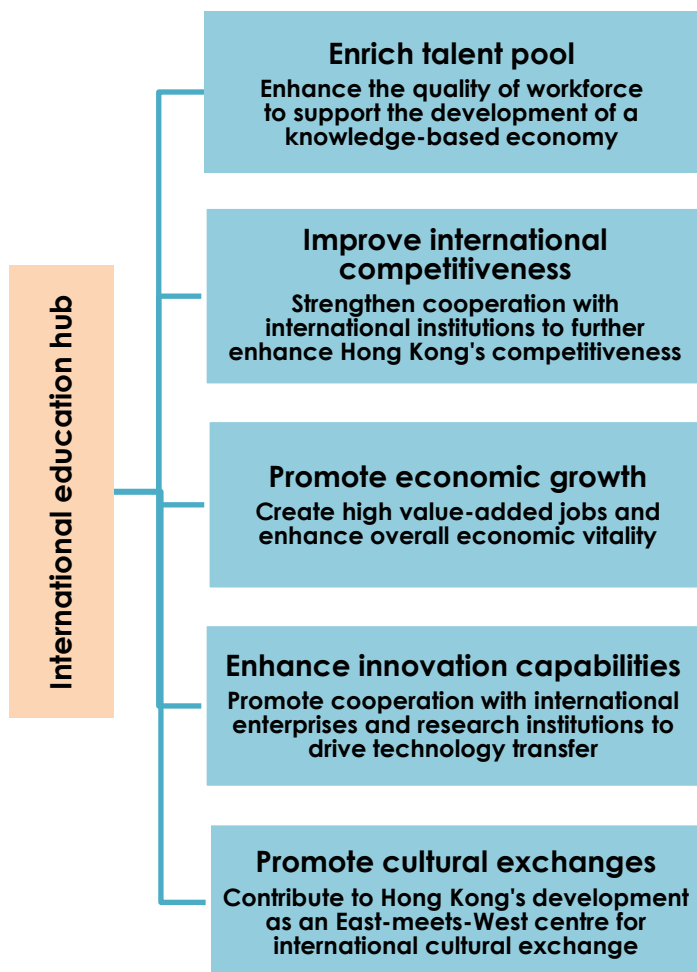
Hong Kong should strive to introduce overseas educational resources and go global. **Developing an international education hub** is a measure that aligns with the national education development goals.

- To achieve governance with prosperity, Hong Kong must actively integrate into the country's overall development and establish an international hub for high-calibre talent. Attracting more non-local students to study and work in Hong Kong will not only further **enhance the city's international status, but also enrich its talent pool and generate substantial direct or indirect economic contributions.**

### Enormous economic potential

- The **number of international students worldwide** has **increased significantly** by 60% over the past decade, reaching 6.4 million in 2021. It is expected to increase by another 25% to 40% by 2030, reaching 8 to 9 million.
- In 2019, the total expenditure of **international students worldwide** on tuition fees, accommodation, meals, retail, insurance, and transportation was estimated to be HK\$152.9 billion. Related **expenditures are projected** to reach **HK\$3.4 trillion** by 2030.

### The benefits of establishing Hong Kong as an international education hub:



### Members' views

- The Panel on Education of the Seventh LegCo **formed a subcommittee** to focus on exploring **how to speed up the development of Hong Kong into an international post-secondary education hub**. The subcommittee has completed its work and put forward a series of recommendations to the Administration and the post-secondary education sector. These include promoting VPET, improving hostel facilities, enhancing international promotion, supporting non-local students and local institutions, and retaining talent. For details, please refer to the Subcommittee's report.
- At its meetings on 17 January 2024 and 22 January 2025, LegCo passed motions entitled **"Actively building Hong Kong into an international education hub by formulating a comprehensive strategic development blueprint for Hong Kong's education"** and **"Seizing strategic opportunities to promote the integrated development of education, technology and talents in Hong Kong"** respectively. A number of specific recommendations have been put forward by Members to enhance the high-quality development of Hong Kong's education sector. These include promoting the internationalization of HKDSE, encouraging local institutions to collaborate with Mainland and overseas institutions to offer more dual-degree programmes, and implementing flexible measures to attract specialized talent from various sectors.

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## Leveraging Hong Kong's strengths to seize opportunities

With the distinctive advantages of enjoying strong support from the Motherland and being closely connected to the world, as well as possessing several world-class universities, Hong Kong is exceptionally well-positioned as an international education hub.

### Internationally acclaimed institutions

- Five of the eight UGC-funded universities are ranked among the world's top 100 universities, making Hong Kong **the only city with five top 100 universities globally**. In the recently released **QS World University Rankings 2026**, several local universities achieved their highest rankings ever. (See figure on lower right)
- According to **THE Asia University Rankings 2025**, **six universities** (The University of Hong Kong ("HKU"), The Chinese University of Hong Kong ("CUHK"), HKUST, City University of Hong Kong ("CityU"), PolyU, and HKBU have **made them into the top 50**. Among them, HKU and CUHK continue to rank among the top 10.
- According to QS World University Rankings by Subject 2025, **six programmes have risen to the top 10 globally**. These include **HKU's Dentistry**, which is **ranked second globally**. The other five subjects are HKU's Education (3rd), Linguistics (9th) and Geography (10th), as well as CUHK's Nursing (5th) and Linguistics (10th).
- Hong Kong's post-secondary institutions are committed to **world-class research**. The results of the UGC's Research Assessment Exercise 2020 showed that:
  - ✦ about 70% of the research projects were recognized as "internationally excellent" or above;
  - ✦ approximately 80% of research impact cases were rated as having "outstanding" or "considerable" impact; and
  - ✦ more than 80% of the projects in the research environment were rated as "world-leading" or "internationally excellent".
- According to Clarivate's "Highly Cited Researchers 2024 List", **134 Hong Kong scholars were selected**, ranking 8th globally. Among them, 53 are from HKU which rank 10th among global institutions. CityU also has 31 scholars on the list.
- The self-financing post-secondary education sector **has a robust and rigorous quality assurance system** administered by the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications ("HKCAAVQ"). HKCAAVQ is the only quality assurance body in the Asia-Pacific region recognized by the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education and the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education.

Institutions	QS World University Rankings		THE World University Rankings	
	2026	2025	2025	2024
HKU	11	17	35	35
CUHK	32	36	44	53
HKUST	44	47	66	64
PolyU	54	57	84	87
CityU	63	62	78	82



### Members' views

- Members suggest that the Administration should **establish clear objectives and directions for promoting Hong Kong as an international education hub; develop a comprehensive development blueprint**; formulate strategies for nurturing and attracting talent (including the direction and priorities for recruiting students); and ensure that **the entire society clearly understands the policy objectives**.
- Members opine that to develop Hong Kong into an international education hub, both high-quality teaching and research have to be pursued. In this regard, the Administration can consider **setting key performance indicators** for post-secondary institutions to enhance their teaching and research standards, thereby attracting more non-local students.

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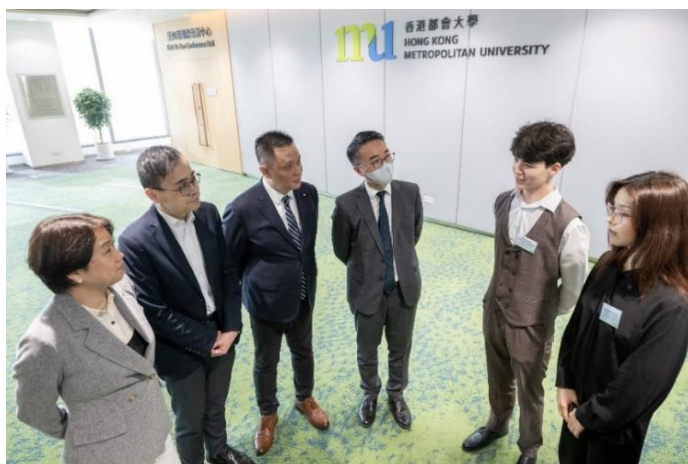


### Diversified education system and internationalized campus

- Hong Kong's higher education sector operates under a **dual-track system**, with parallel development of the **self-financed and publicly-funded sectors**. **VPET** also runs in parallel with **conventional academic education** pathways.
- Under **"one country, two systems"**, Hong Kong enjoys a high degree of autonomy and a **unique economic and social environment**. Hong Kong's convergence of Chinese and Western cultures is very popular among overseas teachers and students. According to THE World University Rankings 2025, CityU, HKUST, PolyU and HKU are among the **top 4 most international universities in the world**.
- **More than half** of the **teaching and research staff** at the eight UGC-funded universities in Hong Kong **come from overseas**, providing scholars and students with a free and diverse educational and academic environment.

### Excellent prospects for further education and employment

- **Hong Kong's strategic geographical location** at the heart of Asia, adjacent to the Mainland market (including the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area) and other Asian countries, offers the advantage of seamless domestic and international connectivity. Students not only can receive a quality education recognized internationally, but also explore the ample development opportunities in the Mainland.
- Hong Kong's **bilingual and trilingual** language education policy provides students with an excellent level of proficiency in Chinese and English. The curriculum covers internationally recognized professional knowledge, preparing students for further study and employment.
- According to the World Talent Ranking 2024 published by the International Institute for Management Development, Hong Kong was among the **global top five** in the availability of finance skills, effectiveness of management education and **remuneration of management**.



LegCo Members interact with non-local students from HKMU

### Members' views

- Members opine that developing an international post-secondary education hub will be valuable in the long run, and that the Administration should assist post-secondary institutions in strategic coordination, **identifying their respective positioning and division of labour**, **developing their distinctive niche areas**, and **strengthening ties with top universities in the country and overseas**, so as to consolidate effort for successful attraction of non-local students to study in Hong Kong.
- Members point out that **hosting international competitions** is one of the measures to attract talent. The Administration should draw on overseas experience and subsidize local institutions to organize more international competitions (including the WorldSkills Competition for VPET sector) to identify and attract talent to study or teach in Hong Kong, while broadening students' horizons at the same time.

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### Policy support for realizing the vision

To promote Hong Kong as an international post-secondary education hub and attract more talents to study and conduct research in Hong Kong, the SAR Government has introduced or will **introduce** the following **initiatives to meet the challenges**:

#### Student places



- Increase the non-local student quota at **UGC-funded universities to 40%**
- Starting from the 2025-2026 academic year, increase by phases the admission quota for students from Mainland, Macau, and Taiwan at **six self-financing post-secondary institutions** (HKMU, Hong Kong Shue Yan University, the Hang Seng University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong Chu Hai College, Tung Wah College, and the Technological and Higher Education Institute of Hong Kong Vocational Training Council) **to 40%**

#### Scholarships



- **Increase the** annual quota of the Belt and Road Scholarship **by 50%** to 150
- Gradually **increase** the annual **quota** of the Hong Kong PhD Fellowship Scheme **to 400**
- Establish the Hong Kong Future Talents Scholarship Scheme for Advanced Studies to reward outstanding local students pursuing designated postgraduate programmes, with 1 200 places available

#### Student hostels



- **Gradually increase** the number of UGC-funded university hostel places by **13 500**
- Launch a **pilot scheme** to encourage the market to **convert hotels** and other **commercial buildings into student hostels** on a self-financing and private basis, and provide suitable sites for the construction of hostels in response to market demand

#### Staying and working in Hong Kong



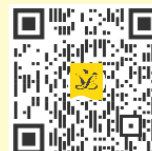
- Implement the “**Immigration Arrangement for Non-local Graduates (“IANG”)**” scheme to allow non-local students from post-secondary institutions in Hong Kong or the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area to **apply for a stay of up to 24 months after graduation to seek employment**
- **Permit** full-time non-local postgraduate students and non-local undergraduate students studying in Hong Kong to **engage in part-time work**



#### Members' views

- Members consider it of vital importance to strengthen the promotion of Hong Kong's post-secondary education and suggest that the Administration should **systematically formulate targeted promotion strategies**, including producing high-quality promotional videos; identifying target countries (including ASEAN and “Belt and Road” countries) and taking the lead in **promoting the “Study in Hong Kong” brand** in these countries with the Economic and Trade Offices overseas, and **continuously reviewing the policy positioning and development strategies**.
- Members welcome the Administration's adoption of members' recommendation to increase the non-local student quota of UGC-funded universities and the quota for Mainland, Macao, and Taiwan students admitted by the six self-financing universities. They also suggest that **the feasibility of further relaxing the quotas should be explored**.
- Members suggest that the Administration should **further enhance hostel facilities**, which includes strengthening public-private partnership, incorporating new provisions in suitable new land development projects to require the provision of a certain number of student hostels, promoting the conversion of hotels, industrial buildings and vacant school premises into hostels, and implementing a homestay programme.

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### Promotion of “Study in Hong Kong” brand



- Establish the **Heads of Universities Committee’s Standing Committee on Internationalization (“HUCOMSCI”)** and allocate over HK\$20 million for participating in and organizing various overseas promotional activities <sup>Note 11</sup>
- **Strive to host international education conferences and exhibitions** to accentuate Hong Kong’s image as an international hub for post-secondary education
- **Establish the Committee on Education, Technology and Talents** to coordinate and promote the integrated development of education, technology and talents, and attract high-calibre talent to Hong Kong

### Institutional Support



- Launch a new \$1.5 billion Research Matching Grant Scheme to encourage institutions to continue to explore diversified sources of research funding
- Actively participate in and promote **close cooperation between higher education institutions in Hong Kong and the Mainland**, which includes promoting mutual recognition of sub-degree qualifications between the two places and assisting institutions in establishing branch campuses in Mainland cities <sup>Note 12</sup> and establishing alliances of tertiary institutions <sup>Note 13</sup>, so as to pool resources together and complement each other’s strengths
- Actively **promote inclusive campuses** by injecting an additional HK\$100 million into the Funding Scheme for Mainland and Global Engagement and Student Learning Experience, enabling post-secondary institutions to provide students with more exchange opportunities outside Hong Kong
- **The Post Secondary Colleges (Amendment) 2025 Bill** was passed by LegCo **to improve the monitoring and quality assurance mechanism** for self-financing post-secondary institutions

### VPET education



- **Establish UAS** to upgrade VPET education qualifications by allocating HK\$100 million to establish the **UAS Alliance** for joint promotion
- Under the **Vocational Professionals Admission Scheme**, eligible non-local vocational education graduates will be allowed to **stay in Hong Kong for one year after graduation** to **seek jobs relevant** to their disciplines

Note 11 Co-established Hong Kong pavilions at international expositions, such as the NAFSA Annual Conference and Expo, the European Association for International Education Conference, and the Asia-Pacific Association for International Education Conference, and visited various locations to recruit overseas students

Note 12 HKBU, CUHK, HKUST and CityU have established campuses in Zhuhai, Shenzhen, Guangzhou and Dongguan respectively

Note 13 Five alliances have been established: the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao University Alliance, the Beijing-Hong Kong University Alliance, the Shanghai-Hong Kong University Alliance, the Jiangsu-Hong Kong-Macao University Alliance and an alliance of institutions in Shandong



### Members’ views

- Members opine that the Administration should **enhance the quality and recognition of VPET** by developing **VPET brands**, expediting the mutual recognition of academic qualifications between the two places, and promoting the recognition of Hong Kong’s VPET qualifications in different regions, so as to facilitate the development of an international post-secondary education hub.
- Members consider attracting and **retaining talents are of equal importance**. The Administration should do a better job of attracting enterprises and investment to Hong Kong; providing more internship and employment opportunities for students; relaxing the **restrictions** on non-local students taking up part-time jobs; and extending the visa permits to allow non-local graduates of higher diploma programmes to stay and work in Hong Kong.
- Members suggest that the Administration should **review the resources for primary and secondary education**, actively promote school diversification, and leverage the strengths of Hong Kong’s basic education to enhance internationalization of post-secondary education.

### LegCo Relevant paper



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