

# **New Arrivals from Hong Kong: Language Learning, Orientation and Employment Support Needs**

**Learning and Work Institute  
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WORK INSTITUTE**

## Introduction

Commissioned by the South East Strategic Partnership for Migration, this briefing aims to provide local authorities, English language providers and wider stakeholders with information and early intelligence on the likely English language learning, orientation and employment support needs of new arrivals under the Government's Hong Kong British Nationals Overseas (BNOs) visa route.

It is based on time-limited desk research, interviews with English language providers in the South East region and interviews with Hong Kong community organisations nationally and in the South East.

# Context - the new Hong Kong visa

- British National Overseas (BNO) passport holders from Hong Kong are entitled to apply for a visa from end of January 2021 and to arrive in UK from late Feb 2021 - though early arrival has been permitted.
- Gain 5 years visa (or 30 months visa that can be extended), to be followed by indefinite leave to remain (ILR). Then after a further year have the right to apply for citizenship if criteria are met. This is known as 5+1 in Hong Kong.
- UK Gov't anticipates numbers arriving at 300,000 over 5 years (others predict anywhere between 10,000 - 1,000,000). Estimated 7,000 already here (Feb 2021).
- The new arrivals are not considered to be part of the refugee system, but there may be some people from Hong Kong who will seek asylum.
- No recourse to public funds (NRPF) is in place for this visa - so no benefits or social housing are available.
- Ineligible for Adult Education Budget learning provision until AEB ordinary residency criteria (3 years) are met.
- However, local authorities can apply to MHCLG's £30.7m [targeted support fund](#) (England only) for ESOL and destitution to support access to English language learning, up to £800 per head.

# Findings – overview of new arrivals

- UK Government expects that most people will arrive with resources, means, qualifications and the ability to get a job or start a business. It appears to be assumed that the majority will already speak good English.
- However, community stakeholders suggest it is possible that some people will arrive without any of these conditions or with only some of them. Government has introduced support measures for local authorities to help mitigate associated risks e.g. destitution.
- Some people will in effect have fled if they have been involved in pro-democracy activism. These people may not have been able to access resources and may not have access to money or other resources.
- Local areas may currently be unaware of and uncertain how to prepare for this group of new arrivals.
- In the SE region, stakeholders suggest that arrivals will tend to cluster where:
  - They can find and afford housing
  - There are ‘good schools’ for children and good access to universities
  - There are employment opportunities
  - There are existing links to Chinese communities, including access to Chinese food and shops
  - There is proximity to London – e.g. 45 minutes train journey

## Findings – Preparation for Arrival

- Some Hong Kong/Chinese Community Associations have started to think about some preparations but are waiting for more details.
- People from China/Hong Kong are well networked through social media platforms – the most popular one is WeChat
- Churches are taking a lead in some areas in SE
- A number of new websites and organisations are springing up - see links
- Individuals are putting themselves forward as buddies / mentors

# Findings - Preparations made in Hong Kong

- Community stakeholders report that commercial workshops and services are offered in Hong Kong on:
  - UK job search and job opportunities
  - Property purchase in the UK
  - Support with visa applications
  - Applying to university and studying in the UK
- Community organisations in the UK are offering information, including free webinars on the above topics, through social media and websites.

# Findings - Who will come?

- Community stakeholders anticipate that the majority of arrivals will be families with children; adults in their 30s and 40s. A priority will be to obtain entry to good schools for their children.
- Some younger people will come alone. Some middle-aged men may come alone, in advance of the rest of the family.
- Community stakeholders suggest that arrivals will be professionals – example professions included estate agent, airline pilot, financier, along with prospective or current university students.
- Community stakeholders did not imagine that many less well qualified people would come - but this was not consistent. Others thought that a wider range of people would come.
- Community stakeholders assumed that many people will have money, will be able to buy or rent property and may be able to work if they are professionally qualified. Some suggested that arrivals will be flexible and pragmatic about the kind of jobs initially undertaken as their priorities will be to secure income and accommodation.
- Some pro-democracy protesters will need to come immediately and will need refuge and support.
- Stakeholders tended to agree that it was unlikely that many older people would come to the UK as there are good welfare systems in place locally in Hong Kong.

# Findings - Educational background

- The Hong Kong education system has changed since the handover to an internationally more common system.
- Different experiences of English language depending on education:
  - Chinese schools, where the instruction is in Chinese and English is studied as a subject
  - English schools, where instruction is in English
  - International schools, where instruction is in English
- Anyone taking higher level qualifications or university study is likely to have learned English to a reasonably high level.
- Teaching and learning tend to be didactic, with formal methods including rote learning. Little experience of approaches such as group work or practical work common in UK ESOL / FE. From a language learning perspective, there are pros and cons of each.

# Findings - education needs

- Early language assessments will need to be offered.
- Explanation of the different routes to education: adult ed, FE, university etc. – what each can offer and how to access.
- This [example from the Hong Kong Brits website](#) explains what an FE college is and has bilingual info for HK new arrivals. Aimed at children of new arrivals (not all parts of the UK system are covered).
- There may be some needs for vocational transfer or top-up training in a wide range of vocational areas.
- Understanding of requirements and routes for regulated professions – may differ in UK.

# Findings - barriers and challenges

- Some of the usual barriers and challenges to ESOL learners may not apply e.g. childcare or travel
- Devices, digital skills and broadband access are key issues during the pandemic. These may or may not affect Hong Kong students in future.
- Online provision can be more challenging for teaching and learning speaking and listening skills, which contacts suggested may be a priority for many.
- New arrivals may not know what is on offer or how /if they can access courses, including ESOL. Ineligible for Adult Education Budget learning provision until AEB ordinary residency criteria (3 years) are met, meaning that private sector EFL provision may need to be identified.
- Costs for EFL, ESOL, vocational training, university or other qualifications.
- There may be a lack of clarity amongst providers around the different entitlements as the HK situation is different from other new arrivals.
- Lack of awareness of rights, employment pathways, education options.

# Findings - Language needs

- ‘Spiky profile’ likely but not all interviewees concurred:
  - Speaking and listening skills may be less well developed amongst people whose written English is good/very good.
  - Reading and writing skills are likely to be much stronger - and up to excellent.
- Unlikely that many new arrivals will be below E3. Even people with lower levels of English are likely to be able to get by in everyday communications such as shopping.
- Few new arrivals are likely to be total beginners, but even beginners will have some English language awareness as much English is present in Hong Kong daily life (e.g. adverts/ TV etc.)
- EAL support will be needed in schools.
- Language support / pre-sessional English for Academic Purposes (EAP) will be needed in FE and universities for some students – these are common in HE institutions.
- Some learners may need an ‘EFL route’ towards EAP either via private language schools or via FE colleges. Some will need to achieve IELTS at higher levels (or another recognised exam) in order to transfer their professional standing/skills/qualifications.
- Some, especially beginners, will need an ‘ESOL route’. Specific language needs for settling into daily life will be very similar to other new arrivals, also requiring approaches / content more common in ESOL.
- Digital skills likely to be good already and many will have devices – could explore the use of popular platforms like WeChat to support delivery.

# Orientation support - Language

- Cultural orientation around everyday language use in the UK e.g. colloquialisms, levels of formality expected, regional / local dialects and accent.
- Everyday English in the workplace – conventions around appropriate communications in (different) workplace settings.
- Access to high quality, impartial IAG to support short and long term career planning, and the language provision required to support these plans.

# Findings - Practitioner Guidance

ESOL / English language teachers may benefit from support / development opportunities on:

- Cultural awareness and intercultural competence to work with Hong Kong BNOs, as this may be an unfamiliar learner cohort
- Awareness of 'EFL routes' – provision, qualifications and delivery e.g. IELTS etc.
- Initial assessments may be at a higher level than many recent arrivals with ESOL needs – need to be familiar with higher ESOL levels at Entry 3 and above
- Supporting learners with high literacy rates (in Cantonese and to an extent in English too) to develop speaking and listening skills
- Need to support and tailor language content to work and career aspirations
- Understanding of need to embed access to IAG to support work aspirations, and NARIC for recognition of qualifications.

# Orientation support priorities - local / UK

Community contacts suggested the following as priorities:

- Cultural awareness - as for any new arrivals
- Local arrangements for daily life - council tax, bins etc.
- Registering with GP, opening bank accounts etc.
- National conventions e.g. holidays
- Access to job fairs and other similar events.
- Renting / buying property – many may rent before buying or rent long-term depending on local housing types.

Bilingual (Cantonese) information is available in the Gov.uk Welcome Pack (see links).

# Findings - employability pathways

Contacts suggested that the following will need to be a focus of employment support:

- Supporting transfer to UK employment and/or employers
- Basics of finding work in the UK - employability and job search
- Soft skills for cultural orientation and working in the UK
- Occupationally specific skills and language
- Short/long term career planning

## Some useful links

- Gov.uk information and welcome guide (bilingual)  
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/welcome-a-guide-for-hong-kong-british-national-overseas-visa-holders-in-the-uk>
- MHCLG Guidance for local authorities:  
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/hong-kong-uk-welcome-programme-guidance-for-local-authorities>
- <https://www.hongkongers.org.uk/> - has preparation and advice material
- <http://hongkongarc.org/> - Hong Kong Assistance and Resettlement Community is registering as a charity
- <https://www.hkbrits.com/> - bilingual website