



From HK to UK: Hong Kongers and their new lives in Britain

REPORT

NOVEMBER 2023

Heather Rolfe and Thomas Benson



Welcoming
Committee for
Hong Kongers

British
Future...

Funded by



Department for Levelling Up,
Housing & Communities

Published 2023 by the Welcoming Committee for Hong Kongers

Authors: Heather Rolfe and Thomas Benson

Editors: Joyce Chiang and Steve Ballinger

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About the Welcoming Committee for Hong Kongers:

The Welcoming Committee for Hong Kongers is an umbrella organisation helping to coordinate the UK's welcoming efforts across civil society, communities, business, education and government. It is conducting research to inform policy and shares best practice around the integration of Hong Kongers. It also supports welcoming organisations working to help new arrivals from Hong Kong to settle and integrate in the UK. It is housed at the thinktank British Future.

Twitter: [@welcominghk](https://twitter.com/welcominghk)

www.welcomehk.org

About British Future:

British Future is an independent, non-partisan think tank engaging people's hopes and fears about integration and migration, identity and race, so that we share a confident and welcoming Britain, inclusive and fair to all. Registered Charity number 1159291

www.britishfuture.org

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The research for this report was carried out as part of the Welcoming Committee for Hong Kongers programme of work funded by the Government's Hong Kong British Nationals (Overseas) Welcome Programme. Editorial control and full responsibility for the report content belong to the Welcoming Committee for Hong Kongers and British Future. We would like to thank the Welcome Programme team at the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) for supporting the Welcoming Committee for Hong Kongers. We are also grateful to staff at the Home Office who worked with the DLUHC team to produce the sample and deliver the survey to Hong Kongers. We would also like to thank David Young at the University of Cambridge for expert input into the data analysis.



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FOREWORD

More than 120,000 people have moved to the UK from Hong Kong since January 2021 under the new British National (Overseas) visa scheme, set up after Hong Kong's National Security law restricted its citizens' democratic freedoms. This generous offer by the government was met with an incredible wave of hospitality and support from across the UK. Local communities put on welcome festivals, language classes, and other events and services that signalled welcome and offered practical and emotional support to new arrivals from Hong Kong. Anecdotal evidence indicated that many Hong Kongers were so appreciative of these efforts that they in turn joined initiatives to welcome other new arrivals to the UK, or found other ways to contribute to our national life.

To better understand how Hong Kongers are settling-in to the UK now, the Welcoming Committee for Hong Kongers has conducted this new research, the most authoritative survey to date of BN(O) Hong Kongers in the UK. It finds that Hong Kongers are here to stay and become part of Britain. Most feel welcomed in the communities they have joined and are building new relationships with neighbours and work colleagues. They are keen to integrate and the vast majority intend to settle here and become British citizens.

As with any group that has experienced such upheaval in their lives, they are also facing some challenges. Although BN(O) Hong Kongers are more highly-educated and skilled than the average person in the UK, for various reasons they are currently less likely to be working, or are working in roles that do not fully use their skills and experience.

If Hong Kongers are to realise their full potential – and the UK economy is to benefit as much as it could from these new arrivals – they will need support with employment and careers advice, recognition of Hong Kong qualifications and help to improve and boost their confidence in the English language.

Some BN(O) Hong Kongers are finding the transition to life in the UK harder than others. They may feel isolated or be struggling to make new connections; others are worried about their futures here, or about friends and family back in Hong Kong. Four in ten BN(O) Hong Kongers say that their financial health and wellbeing has worsened since arriving in the UK, with the rising cost of living affecting them as it has so many of us.

In many cases, support is available – through the national Welcoming Programme funded by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, and from local authorities and voluntary organisations – but people are not always accessing it.

So we hope that this new research will illuminate both the overall success of efforts to Welcome Hong Kongers to the UK and also the challenges that remain, so we can start to address them and ensure that Hong Kongers can fully participate in the society that we all share.

Krish Kandiah
Chair, Welcoming Committee
for Hong Kongers

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

The Welcoming Committee for Hong Kongers is an umbrella organisation that helps coordinate efforts from different sectors to support Hong Kongers who came under the British Nationals (Overseas) – visa scheme to settle in the UK. It also conducts research to inform policy and share best practice.

This report uses evidence from a new survey of BN(O) Hong Kongers – also referred to in this report as (BN(O)s) – in the UK to understand some of the key aspects of their new lives here and to inform policy and practice on settlement and integration. Our findings indicate that, while BN(O)s are settling in well to life in the UK, they are also experiencing challenges and obstacles that need to be addressed.

The survey ran over a period of 4 weeks between 12 June and 10 July 2023, with a sample of 2,089 people. Through enabling a large, representative survey to be carried out, the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities has provided a rare opportunity for the needs of new migrants to be understood. While providing a clear picture of the decisions, challenges, and opportunities for Hong Kongers, the findings may also be applicable to a much wider group of newcomers.

The survey covered diverse aspects of BN(O) Hong Kongers' new lives: decisions about where to live, employment, learning English, belonging and feeling welcome, financial pressures and physical and emotional wellbeing. We hope to repeat this exercise in the future and will include topic areas that could not be included in the survey for reasons of length.

Our Findings

1. Many BN(O) Hong Kongers are well-qualified, but often say that their skills and experience are underused.

BN(O)s are more highly educated than the average person in both Hong Kong and the UK and are over-represented in professional occupational groups. More than six in ten (59%) respondents have a degree at graduate (36%) or postgraduate (23%) level. This compares to just over a third (34%) of the UK population as a whole.

Though most BN(O)s are aged 25-64, currently only half are working: 35% full-time, 9% part-time and 6% self-employed. The employment rate of just over 52% compares to the current UK national rate of 76%. This lower rate is explained by unemployment (of 18%) and lower participation rates among women and older BN(O) Hong Kongers. One in eight (12%) of all BNOs of working age are unemployed and seeking work. Those who are not in work see confidence in speaking English (59%) and recognition of qualifications as the main barriers (28%).

Almost half of employed BN(O)s, of all levels of skill and qualifications, say that their job doesn't match their skills and experience at all, or only a little. Those aged over 45 were least likely to have a good match, as were BN(O) Hong Kongers in Scotland, the East Midlands, the North West and the South West. Non-graduates and those with weaker English were also less likely to be in a well-matched job. More than a quarter of those in work are looking for another job, with higher pay the main motivation, followed by a better skills match or a more senior role.

There are marked gender differences in labour force participation rates, with men more likely to be working full-time (41% vs 28%) and women more likely to be taking care of the home (23% vs 4%). Men are also more likely than women to be self-employed.

Hong Kongers need careers information and advice, and two-thirds say they would like it. Yet more than three-quarters have not received such help.

2. BN(O) Hong Kongers are coming to stay and integrate. Most feel welcomed but some have experienced isolation and discrimination.

BN(O) Hong Kongers feel welcome in the communities where they have settled. They appreciate the positive reception they have received and are keen to become part of their local communities.

Almost all respondents (99%) said they intended to apply for settlement and also for British citizenship. A large majority (90%) have made contact with people where they live who are not Hong Kongers. Those in work, as well as parents, are especially likely to have contact with



non-Hong Kongers. The most common type of social contact is with neighbours but schools, churches, sports and hobbies are also common ways of meeting people locally.

Yet despite relatively high levels of social contact, some BN(O)s are experiencing social isolation. Some respondents said they would like to meet more people, including other Hong Kongers. There is particularly strong interest in taking part in cultural events and festivals, with three-quarters of BN(O) Hong Kongers saying they are interested in these activities.

Most working BN(O) Hong Kongers feel welcome or very welcome at work but one in eight (12%) working BN(O) Hong Kongers feels isolated at work. A small proportion (5%) say they have experienced discrimination from colleagues.

3. Some locations are attracting fewer BN(O) Hong Kongers

BN(O) Hong Kongers are settling in locations across the UK. There are higher concentrations in London (18%), the South East (19%) and the North West (20%) but also significant numbers across the South and Midlands of England. Some locations are attracting smaller numbers, including nations of the UK other than England (4% in Scotland and just 1% Wales and Northern Ireland). Lack of familiarity is one factor in this uneven spread.

4. Financial struggles and emotional wellbeing

More than four in ten BN(O)s in the UK say their financial health and wellbeing has worsened since arriving in the UK, with one in ten saying it had worsened greatly. The principal factor negatively impacting on financial wellbeing is general higher costs of living than anticipated (53%). Difficulties accessing Hong Kong pensions is a source of financial stress for more than one in four BN(O) Hong Kongers.

Sections of the BN(O) community report low financial wellbeing: one in ten gave a score below 5 out of 10, rising to a fifth of those aged 25-34. More than 1 in 5 say they are living beyond their means, and almost 1 in 10 have no savings to draw on. For younger people the biggest financial issue is finding employment. This makes it particularly urgent that Hong Kongers can overcome their difficulties finding work.

Physical and emotional wellbeing levels are generally good. However, anxiety about future life in the UK is also a common source of stress, cited by more than four in ten people. Coming to the UK has also not meant that BN(O) Hong Kongers have left worries about their homeland behind: many have concerns for friends and family and about the social and political climate in Hong Kong.

BN(O) Hong Kongers would like better access to support services and there are numerous organisations, including those funded through the government's Welcome Programme, that can provide advice and help. However, fewer than one in six (15%) have had contact with organisations that help BN(O)s to settle and integrate into the UK.

5. There is a need for more English language teaching, but few have accessed what is available

Most BN(O) Hong Kongers rate their English reading, speaking and writing skills as good or very good. However, more than a third rate their speaking and writing skills as poor. Some say that a lack of confidence in English is holding them back in the labour market. Older BN(O) Hong Kongers, particularly the over-65s, are more likely to rate their English skills as poor.

BN(O)s are not eligible for ESOL provision funded by the Adult Education Budget. The visa conditions require a 3-year wait, yet because integration is dependent on English, this is too late. DLUHC has put in place a targeted support fund open to local authorities, now providing up to £850 per head to support ESOL needs. However, only around 1 in 6 BN(O)s, and 1 in 10 over 65s, have attended an English class or received formal training to help with their English.

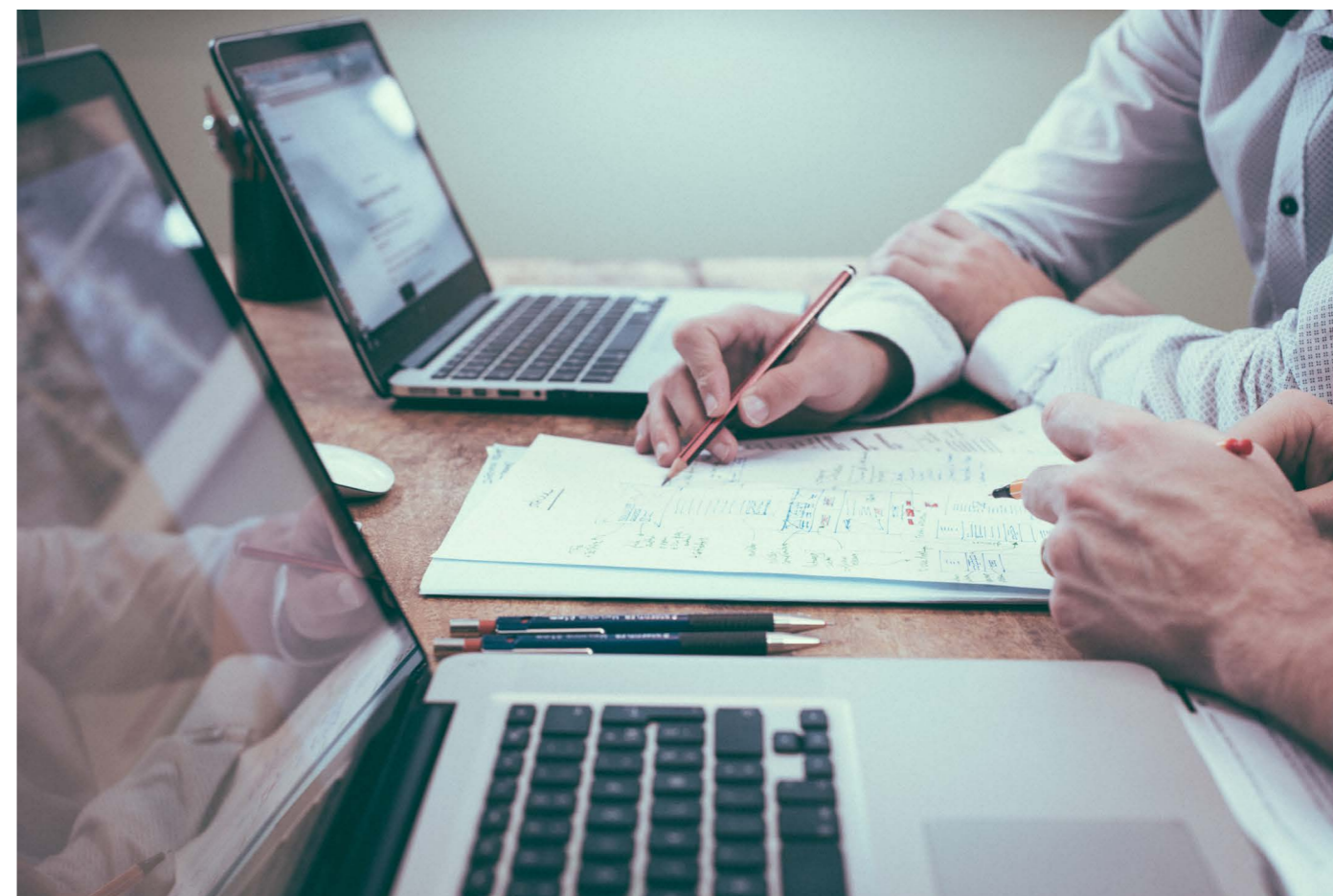


Photo by Scott Graham

Our Recommendations

1. Making the most of BN(O) Hong Kongers' skills and abilities

BN(O)s are more highly educated than the average person in both Hong Kong and the UK and are over-represented in professional occupational groups. If their skills are properly utilised, these Hong Kongers can help to address skills gaps in a number of occupational areas and stimulate economic growth through new enterprises across the nations and regions of the UK.

The government and employers have given insufficient consideration to the potential of migrants who have arrived in the UK on non-work visas, including via humanitarian routes. There are likely to be at least as many as on work visas, yet many are likely to be unemployed or underemployed. This could be addressed through a coordinated strategy involving the key UK government departments of DLUHC, DWP, Business and Trade and the Cabinet Office, working with key employer bodies across sectors and regions.

A similar approach should be adopted by the governments of Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland. Government departments should work closely with regions, including the Combined Mayoral Authorities, to put in place strategies and action to make the most of migrants' skills and potential.

This strategy could include regular audits of labour market participation and, where possible, skills utilisation. It should include the most sizable groups of migrants who have arrived on humanitarian visas, for example Ukrainians, Afghans and Syrians.

To address the needs of BN(O) Hong Kongers for careers information and advice, the National Careers Service, Jobcentre Plus and other providers of advice and guidance on jobs and careers should ensure they meet the needs of migrants. This should include raising awareness of services available. It should also include referral to professional bodies that can help those with professional qualifications with recognition and transfer of qualifications. These organisations can also help raise awareness of the BN(O) visa among employers, since this may be contributing to difficulties many experience in finding work.

BN(O)s are excluded from publicly funded training provision until they have been in the UK for three years. The Government and the Department for Education should review eligibility criteria since it exacerbates skill shortages as well as putting career progression of new migrants on hold.

As part of strategies on levelling up, social integration and skills and enterprise, the government should monitor labour market participation of Hong Kongers and other migrants who have arrived on humanitarian routes. The first aim should be to move participation rates much closer to the UK average. The second should be to monitor under-utilisation of skills where data is available to do this.

2. Spreading the gains and impacts

More BN(O)s are expected to arrive in the coming months and years, and around a third of those already here are thinking of moving in the next year. This provides areas of the UK where there are fewer Hong Kongers with opportunities to attract more. With word of mouth and recommendations the key influences on people's decisions about where to live, nations and regions with fewer Hong Kongers will need to be more proactive. Nations and regions could provide information online, including on websites, YouTube and other social media platforms. Information might also include case studies and testimonies.

To attract more BN(O) Hong Kongers, nations and regions could provide information about the things that matter to them. These include crime and safety, affordable housing options, good schools, local transport and social and cultural opportunities. Employment opportunities, particularly in professional roles, will also be of interest to Hong Kongers.

3. Steps to belonging and feeling welcome

While many BN(O) Hong Kongers feel welcomed in their communities and eager to integrate, our survey also found that some face isolation in the community and at work.

We recommend that local authorities take the lead in collating and disseminating information about social and cultural activities that bring together migrants and the host community. They can work closely with key local institutions, to encourage participation: libraries and schools, for example, can become hubs to bring together migrants and the wider community. Online listings of regular activities and of events, as well as social media, are likely to be effective in reaching a wider audience, including migrants with weak social connections.

Employers should ensure that workplaces are not segregated by ethnicity or country of origin, either occupationally or socially. Employer and industry bodies should give consideration to how social connection and integration at work can be improved so that migrants feel fully involved and included in all aspects of workplace life.

4. Supporting financial and emotional wellbeing

BN(O) Hong Kongers would like better access to support services and there are numerous organisations, including those funded through the government's Welcome Programme, that can provide advice and help. However, fewer than one in six (15%) have had contact with organisations that help BN(O)s to settle and integrate into the UK. Local authorities should help to make BN(O)s aware of organisations offering support and activities. This information should be made available online and through social media as well as through libraries, schools and other local venues.

Services such as health and education should also be made aware that BN(O)s may need help. The government should provide information to schools and to health services about the Hong Konger population, so that service providers are aware of factors impacting on emotional wellbeing.

The NRPF requirement in the BN(O) visa should be reviewed, since it is affecting the integration of some newcomers with the greatest need. It is also likely to be a factor in low take up of English classes, and is limiting access to further and higher education.

Difficulties accessing the Hong Kong pension is a source of financial stress for more than one in four BN(O) Hong Kongers, as the survey revealed. This issue should be taken up by government bodies and agencies with responsibility for access to pensions, as well as by the financial institutions themselves.

5. English as the key to integration

Good spoken and written English is needed for all aspects of integration, including for work, social mixing and political and civic participation. To strengthen the current provision and the awareness of English teaching available to BN(O)s, they should be made aware of the availability of free college courses during the visa application process. Information should also be distributed by local authorities and by key institutions such as schools and workplaces.

Colleges and local authorities should ensure that English courses cover all levels from beginner to advanced. They should also refer to providers who do not operate the 3-year residency rule. Some combined authorities and local areas have ESOL hubs and networks. These should monitor demand and take-up from BN(O)s and facilitate onward referral between providers.

Awareness of provision could also be improved through outreach in community organisations, libraries and other social venues as well as through advertising online and in social media. Local authorities have an important role to play in this process.



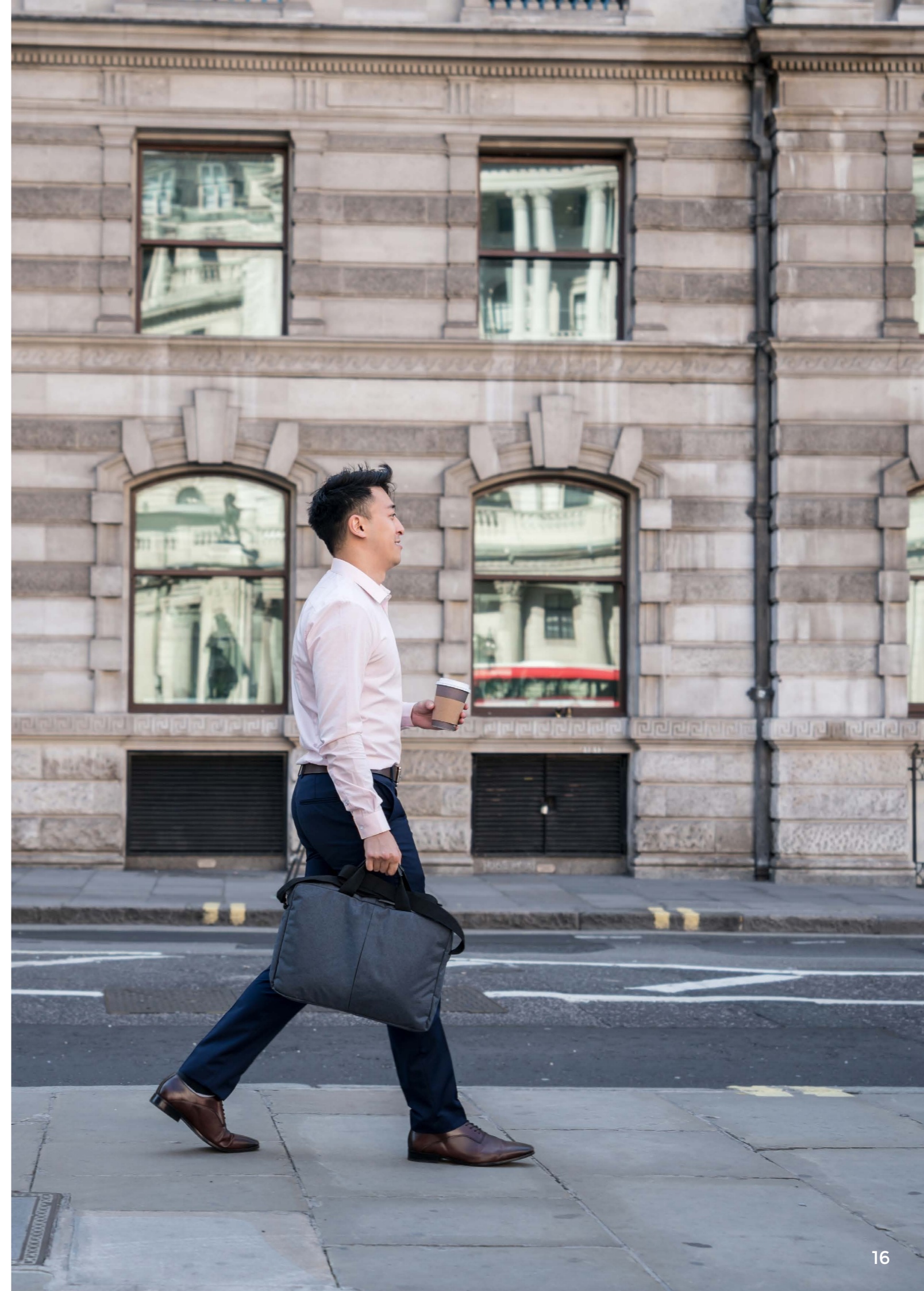
1. INTRODUCTION

This report gives an in-depth account of how BN(O) Hong Kongers are settling into their new lives, choosing where to live, where to work and the challenges they are encountering. Using evidence from a survey of 2,000 BN(O) Hong Kongers and additional stakeholder research, it describes key aspects of their lives as new Britons, identifying and exploring implications for policy and practice. The research was carried out by the Welcoming Committee for Hong Kongers which is housed within the think tank British Future¹.

While each migrant group is different, the story of Hong Kongers in the UK is an unusual one. Like much migration, it is connected with the UK's colonial past. The BN(O) visa scheme was introduced on the 31st January 2021 following the passing of the 2020 National Security Law in Hong Kong, which the UK government considers to have violated agreements made between the UK and China. In total, an estimated 2.9 million Hong Kongers currently hold BN(O) status. By the end of June 2023 over 176,407 BN(O) Hong Kong visas had been granted. Of these visa holders 123,800 have arrived in the UK. The visa enables BN(O)s and dependent family members to come to live in the UK for up to five years, and then apply for permanent settlement and British citizenship².

The story of Hong Kongers is different to that of most new migrants in the extent to which the Government has supported funding and infrastructure for welcoming and integration. The Government's Hong Kong BN(O) Welcome Programme, in place since 2021, has funded the UK's 12 Strategic Migration Partnerships and over 50 national and local projects. This support has meant organisations across the country have been able to help BN(O) Hong Kongers navigate the changes in their lives as new migrants. Our own project at the Welcoming Committee for Hong Kongers and British Future has helped to coordinate the efforts of these organisations and has carried out a programme of research since 2021. This report is the latest and largest of our research outputs to date.

The support of the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) and of the Home Office in distributing the survey on our behalf has given us a rare opportunity to capture information about the lives, experiences and challenges faced by a new migrant group soon after their arrival in the UK. An earlier survey, largely on demographics, was commissioned by the Home Office in 2021, which included 500 BN(O) visa holders arriving within the first 8 months of the scheme³. There have also been a number of surveys of BN(O) Hong Kongers to date carried out by stakeholder organisations including Strategic Migration





Partnerships. However, this is the first with a large, nationally representative sample covering a wide range of issues connected with settlement and integration.

To distribute the survey the Home Office produced a sample of 8,000 randomly selected email addresses, balanced between lead applicants and dependents aged 18+ and resident in the UK. Selected individuals were given a unique link to our online survey. The survey ran over a period of four weeks between 12 June and 10 July 2023 and achieved a final sample of 2,089. Further information about the survey methods is provided in the report appendix.

We designed the survey to cover key aspects of arrival and settlement. These include choosing where to live, finding work, learning English, meeting people and integrating and coping with the financial and emotional stresses of migration. Respondents could choose between answering the survey questions in either English or in Cantonese. To capture the experiences of BN(O) Hong Kongers in greater depth, we included open questions inviting respondents to tell us more about their experiences. Further detail about the research methodology can be found in Appendix 1.

The aims of this report are to use the survey evidence to understand some of the key aspects of settling in the UK and to inform policy and practice on settlement and integration of new migrants. While the findings are specific to a particular group, the experiences of other new arrivals are likely to be similar in some respects. The survey does not cover all aspects of Hong Kongers' new lives in the UK. We hope to repeat this

exercise in the future and will include topic areas that could not be included in the survey for reasons of length.

Structure of the report

This report consists of nine chapters: in Chapter 2 we look at the demographic characteristics of BN(O) Hong Kongers who have moved to the UK. Chapter 3 looks at English language and Chapter 4 at where in the UK Hong Kongers are settling and why. Employment, a key component of settlement and integration, is the focus of Chapter 5. Building on decisions about where to live and finding work, Chapter 6 looks at belonging and feeling welcome, whether in neighbourhoods, towns and cities or at work. Chapter 7 turns to the cost of living and how BN(O)s are affected by unexpected everyday price increases which coincided with their arrival. Chapter 8 looks at BN(O) Hong Kongers' assessments of their mental and physical health. Finally, Chapter 9 pulls together the main findings and messages from each chapter and concludes with some recommendations and implications for policy.

2. Who are the UK's new Hong Kongers?

Key Findings



- The BN(O) visa route was opened on January 31st 2021. The Hong Kongers in our sample started to arrive in substantial numbers from March 2021 onwards and flows have been quite steady over time. The data shows month on month variations, with peaks in the summer months. These are likely to be explained by families' plans to find schools.
- BN(O) Hong Kongers are not mobile citizens or temporary migrants. They have come to the UK to make new lives here and to stay. Almost all respondents (99%) said they intended to apply for settlement and also for British citizenship.
- While welcoming should be considered important for all new arrivals to the UK, BN(O) Hong Kongers' plans to stay here permanently and to become British make it particularly important that the barriers and enablers to settling and integrating are well understood and acted upon.
- There is an equal gender balance in the Hong Kong BN(O) community. In terms of age, there are higher proportions in the middle aged groups, and smaller numbers aged under 25 and over 65.
- Almost three-quarters of BN(O)s live with a husband, wife or partner. Just under half are living in households that include children, with most parents having one or two children.
- Six in ten BN(O)s (59%) have a degree at graduate (36%) or postgraduate (23%) level. This compares to just over a third (34%) in the UK population as a whole. Just under one in five (18%) have the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (equivalent to GCSE) as their highest qualification. These are largely the over-55s.

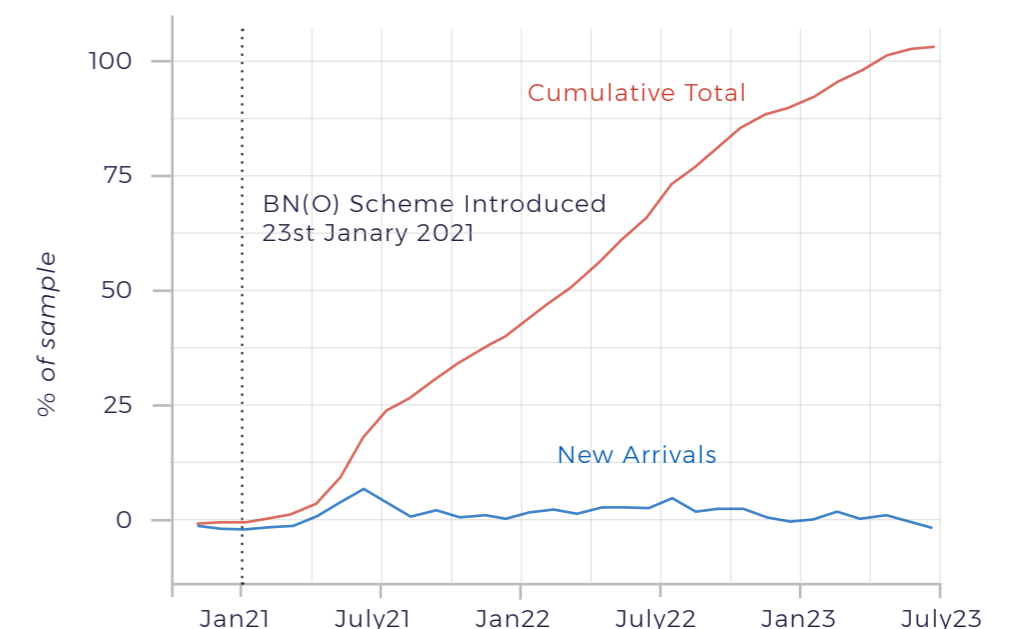
The first and essential step to understanding the needs of a migrant group is to know who they are. Successive surveys have produced a similar picture of the characteristics of Hong Kong BN(O) visa holders. One of the earliest surveys, by IFF for the Home Office, found BN(O) Hong Kongers are mostly in early to late middle age, are often married with children, and typically have at least an undergraduate level education⁴. These findings are generally replicated by surveys carried out by stakeholder groups, for example Hong Kongers in Britain and UKHK. These are both stakeholder organisations that have carried out a range of surveys of aspects of Hong Kongers' new lives, including employment and mental health⁵.

Our survey asked respondents a series of questions about who they are: their gender, age and educational background. We asked who they live with and whether they still have relatives in Hong Kong who plan to join them. We also asked when they came to the UK, whether they have been here before, and whether they plan to make the UK their permanent home.

Arriving in the UK

The BN(O) visa route was opened on January 31st 2021. The Hong Kongers in our sample started to arrive in substantial numbers from May 2021 onwards and flows have been quite steady over time. The data shows month on month variations, with peaks in the summer months. These are likely to be explained by families' plans to find schools and to settle children into their new lives before term starts in September.

Figure 2.1: Arrival dates of Hong Kong BN(O)s



BN(O) Hong Kongers are not mobile citizens or temporary migrants. They have come to the UK to make new lives here and to stay.

More than half (55%) say they visited the UK before moving here. This did not vary much by age, though respondents in their fifties and sixties were most likely to have come to the UK as visitors, most likely reflecting financial resources. In the great majority of cases (81%) prior visits were for tourism, though one in six visitors (16%) had come on business. Other reasons for previous visits were for university study (12%) and to visit family (13%). Motivations differed by age, with a quarter of respondents aged 25-34 coming as students; while a third of people aged over 65 had come to visit family. A small number gave other reasons, which included a preparatory visit to inform decisions about taking up the visa and moving to the UK.

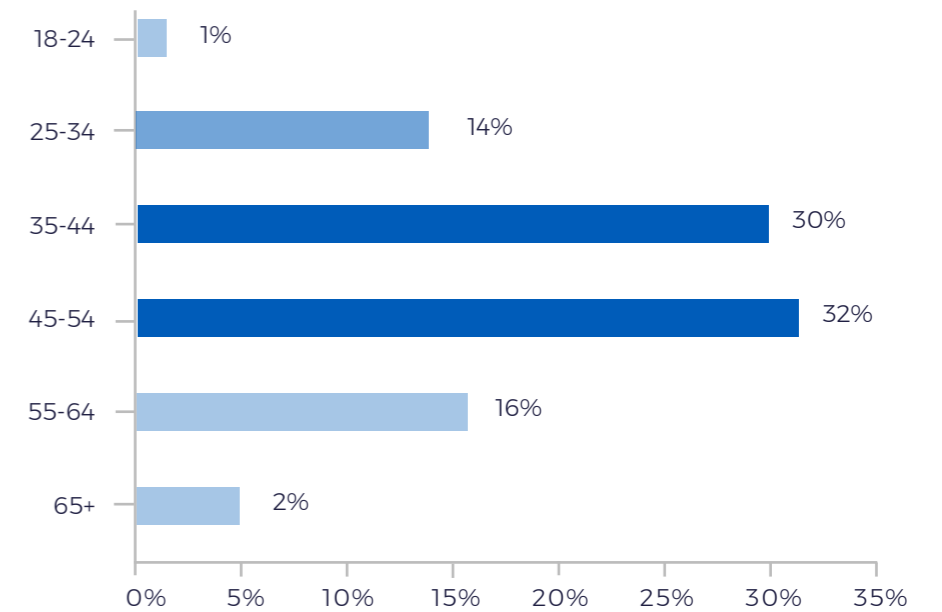
While most respondents (55% vs 41%) said their decision to move to the UK was not influenced by their experience of visiting or living in the UK previously, those aged 25-34 and the over 65s were more likely to say it had been. This suggests that study and family ties are important for BN(O) Hong Kongers in these age groups.

BN(O) Hong Kongers are not mobile citizens or temporary migrants. They have come to the UK to make new lives here and to stay. Almost all respondents (99%) said they intended to apply for settlement and also for British citizenship.

Age and family composition

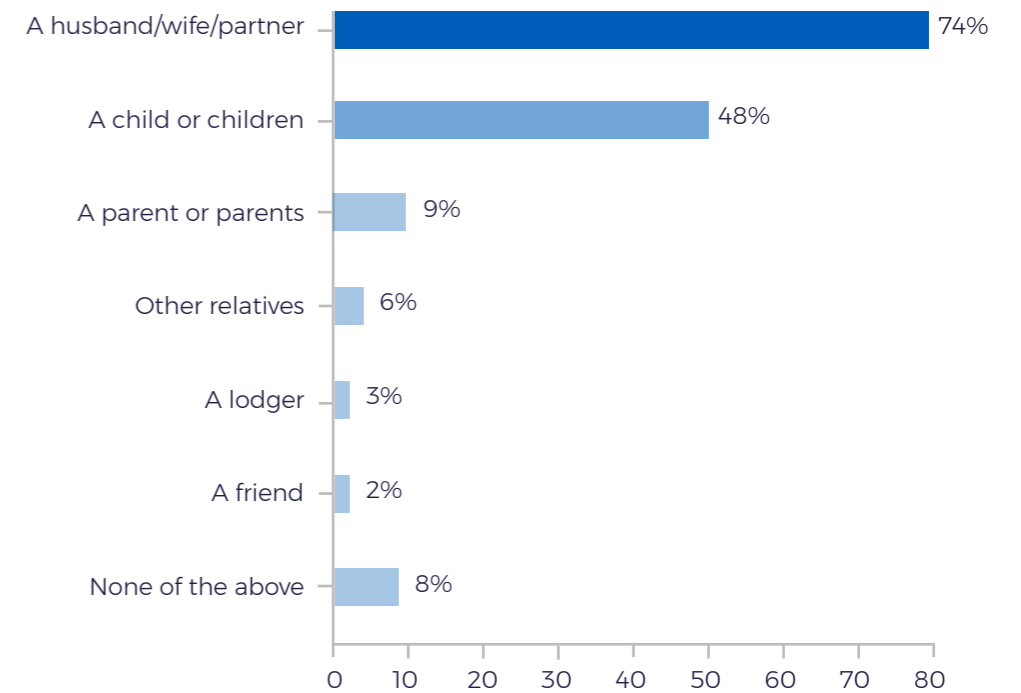
Survey responses were divided almost equally between men and women. As Figure 2.2 shows, the survey found BN(O) Hong Kongers clustered in middle age groups, with roughly 60% aged 35 to 54. Some 14% are aged 24-34 and a similar proportion aged 55-64. Those aged 18-24 and over 65 are a much smaller group. As we show later, the age profile of BN(O)s varies across regions and nations of the UK, with Londoners a younger group.

Figure 2.2: Age profile of BN(O)s in the UK



The majority (60%) of BN(O)s have children, though they include people with adult children who are living separately. Just under half are living in households which include children, with most parents having one (46%) or two (48%) children; only 6% of those with children have more than two.

Figure 2.3: Who are BN(O)s living with?



As Figure 2.3 shows, almost three-quarters (74%) of BN(O)s are living with a husband, wife or partner though younger people are less likely to. Almost one in ten (9%) live with a parent or parents,

but this is as high as 60% for those aged 18-24. Other arrangements were also more common among younger people, for example 20% of respondents aged 18-24 live with other relatives. While fewer than one in ten (8%) live alone, those aged 25-34 or 55-64 are more likely to do so.

There are some differences in household composition by location. In London, fewer BN(O)s are living with a partner than in the North West or South East. A third (32%) of London's BN(O) Hong Kongers are living with children, compared to 43% in the North West and 52% in the South East of England. These differences partly reflect age differences, since the age profile of BN(O)s in London is lower than elsewhere.

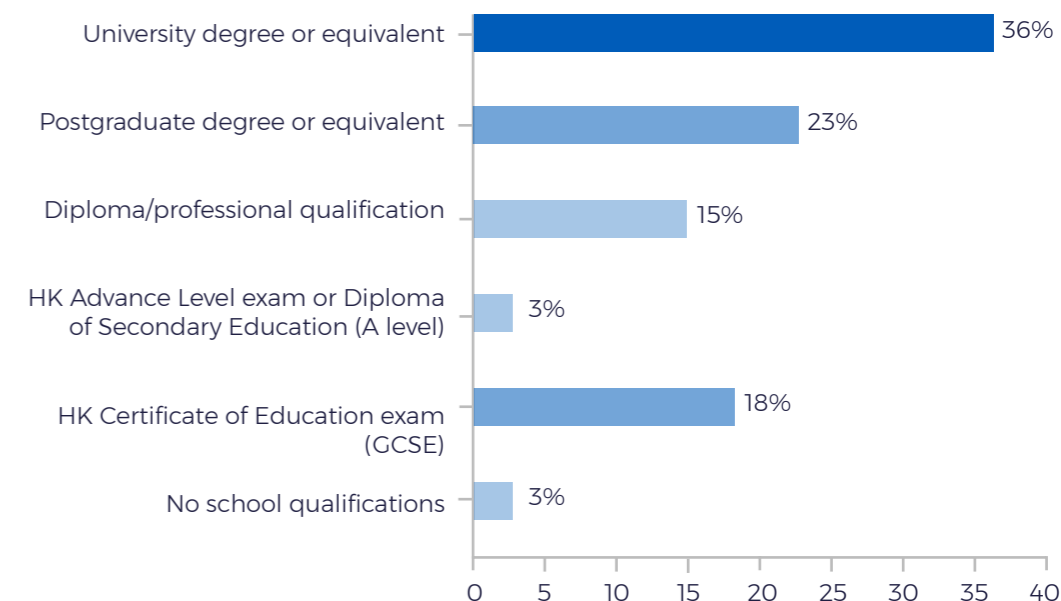
Some respondents said they had children who are planning to join them in the UK. However, of the 28% of respondents who said they have relatives who are planning to come to the UK, only 10% said these are children; these respondents are largely aged 55+. It was more common for respondents to say that parent(s) (24%) or sibling(s) (38%) plan to join them. In most cases (55%) these relatives are not planning to live with the respondent.

Qualifications

BN(O) Hong Kongers are a relatively well qualified group. As Figure 2.4 shows, 59% have a degree at graduate (36%) or postgraduate (23%) level. This compares to just over a third (34%) in the UK population as a whole⁶. A diploma or professional qualification is the highest qualification for 15%. Just under one in five (18%) have the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (equivalent to GCSE) as their highest qualification.

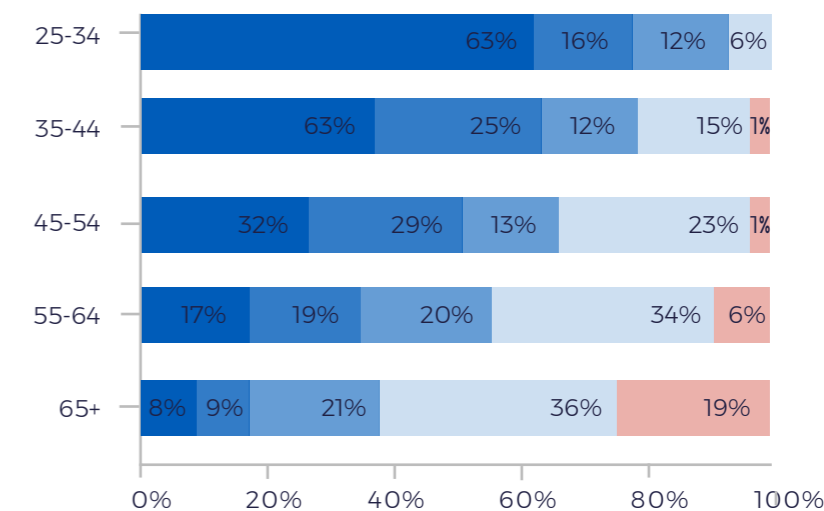
BN(O) Hong Kongers are a relatively well qualified group. As Figure 2.4 shows, 59% have a degree at graduate (36%) or postgraduate (23%) level

Figure 2.4: Qualification levels of BN(O)s in the UK⁷



As Figure 2.5 shows, younger BN(O) Hong Kongers are particularly well qualified: almost 8 in 10 have an undergraduate or postgraduate degree compared to just over a third of those aged 55-64. A third of BN(O)s aged over 55 have no qualification higher than a certificate of secondary education (equivalent either to GCSE or A level) and are less likely to have an undergraduate or postgraduate degree, with those aged over 65 the least likely to have degree-level qualifications. This is likely to reflect the expansion of Higher Education opportunities in Hong Kong since older participants left education.

Figure 2.5: Qualification levels of BN(O)s in the UK, by age



■ University degree or equivalent
■ Postgraduate degree or equivalent
■ Diploma/professional qualification
■ School qualification (GCSE or A Level)
■ No school qualifications

Most BN(O)s (82%) have gained their highest qualification in Hong Kong, which is to be expected given the relatively short time for which they have lived in the UK. However, younger age groups were more likely to have gained this qualification elsewhere: overall only 9% of respondents had gained their highest qualification in the UK but almost four in ten (39%) of 18-24 year olds and one in five (19%) of 25-34 year olds had done so in the UK, probably since they arrived under the BN(O) scheme. Just under one in ten (9%) had gained their highest qualification in a country other than Hong Kong or the UK. The USA and Canada were the most common locations to study outside of Hong Kong and the UK, accounting for 55% and 38% respectively.



3. English proficiency

Key Findings



- Over half of BN(O) Hong Kongers rate their English reading, speaking and writing skills as good. Only just over one in ten rate their spoken and written English as very good. However, more than a third rate these skills as poor. Older Hong Kongers are more likely to rate their English skills as poor.
- The percentage in London who rate their skills as good or very good is higher than the national average, reflecting differences of age and education.
- Arrivals on the Hong Kong BN(O) visa route are not eligible for provision funded by the Adult Education Budget, which funds much further education provision. The BN(O) visa conditions mean that they will become eligible for funded places once they have lived in the UK for three years. However, in recognition of BN(O) Hong Kongers' needs, in April 2021 DLUHC put in place a targeted support fund open to local authorities, which now provides up to £850 per head to support ESOL needs where necessary.
- Despite the clear need for English tuition and support, only around 1 in 6 say they have attended an English class or received formal training to help with their English. Only just over one in ten of the over-65s have attended a class, yet this group is most likely to need such help.

English language is important for all areas of integration into life in the UK, but especially so in relation to work. As we show in Chapter 5, confidence in speaking English is the biggest barrier to work for BN(O) Hong Kongers, by some way. Survey responses also show it is a barrier to mixing socially and integrating with non-Hong Kongers.

Cantonese is the main language spoken in Hong Kong, in all areas of life. At the same time, English is one of the official languages in Hong Kong and is used in business, government and other areas. The Hong Kong 2016 census update found a majority of citizens saying they can speak (51%), read (64%) and write (66%) English. Levels are even higher among younger Hong Kongers⁸.

Research by the Learning and Work Institute (L&W) suggests that most Hong Kongers have good proficiency in English, which suggests there may be little demand for English tuition at a basic level. It also suggests that some new arrivals will have 'spiky' profiles as a result of the system for language teaching and opportunities for English language use in Hong Kong: some may therefore have strong reading and writing skills but be weaker at speaking and listening.

L&W identifies a number of learning routes for new migrants from Hong Kong: EAL support in schools; language support for students in FE and universities; and ESOL, especially for beginners. Specific language needs for settling into daily life will be very similar to other new arrivals. Many will also be seeking to find employment and will therefore need guidance on job search, career planning and occupationally specific language and skills⁹.

Arrivals on the Hong Kong BN(O) visa route are not eligible for provision funded by the Adult Education Budget, which funds much further education provision. Hong Kongers will be eligible for funded places once they have lived in the UK for three years. However, in recognition of BN(O) Hong Kongers' needs, in April 2021 DLUHC put in place a targeted support fund open to local authorities, which provides up to £850 per head to support ESOL needs where necessary¹⁰.

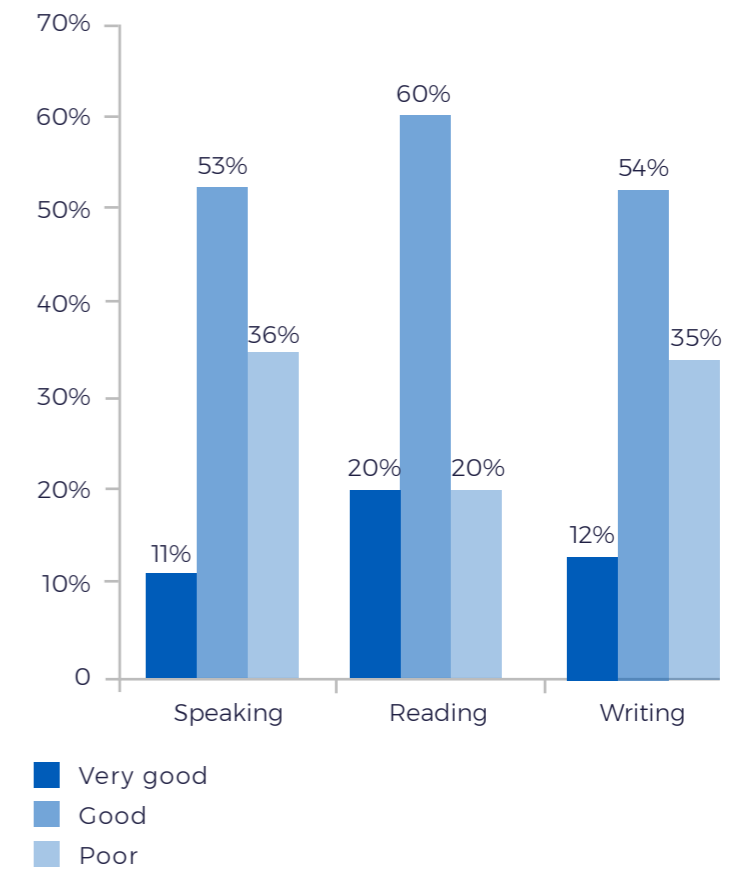


Despite the clear need for English tuition and support, only around 1 in 6 say they have attended an English class or received formal training to help with their English

What we found

The survey asked about English language proficiency. BN(O) Hong Kongers rate their speaking skills as lower than their reading or writing ability. More than half (53%) rate their spoken English as good, 11% as very good and 36% as poor. Self-ratings for reading are higher. This reflects prior learning and widespread use of English in Hong Kong. It is also less affected by confidence issues, including concerns about correct pronunciation, which affect spoken English.

Figure 3.1: Self-assessment of English language level



Self-assessments varied by age with people in older age groups, particularly those aged over 65, more likely to rate their English skills as poor, at around 25% above the rate for all age groups. Respondents in London and the South East rate their English as stronger than those in the North West, reflecting differences of age and educational profile.

Despite the clear need for English tuition and support, only around 1 in 6 say they have attended an English class or received formal training to help with their English. This is a little higher among BN(O)s aged over 45.

Among those in greatest need, aged over 65, only 11% had been helped with their English.

This is not through lack of interest. Of those who said they had not received such help, 71% said they were interested in attending classes. Interest reflects need: the over 65s were more likely to say they would like English tuition. There is stronger demand among BN(O) Hong Kongers who are not working, among non-graduates, and those living outside London.

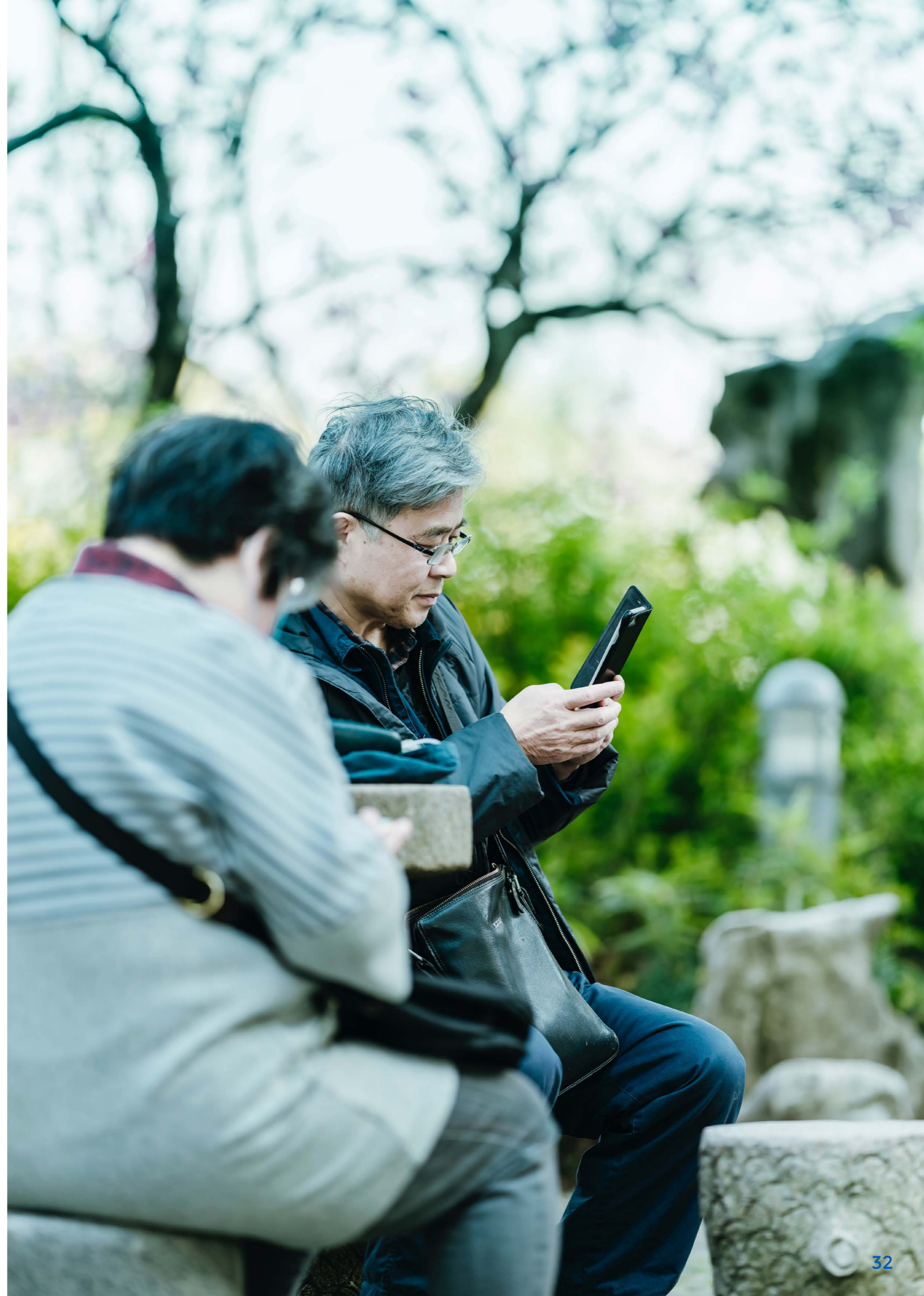
The open responses also included comments about English classes. As well as availability, these included their value in meeting people, both BN(O) Hong Kongers and learners from other countries:



“A small comment, the publicity of the English classes in the city hall is a bit low key. The English class is a great way to get to know people, and I have friends who met in the English class.”

– Male, 45-54, Buckinghamshire

We return to the role of English language later in the report, in particular with regard to employment, belonging and feeling welcome.



4. Where in the UK are BN(O) Hong Kongers settling, and why?

Key Findings



- BN(O) Hong Kongers are dispersed across the UK. However, more than a third of BN(O)s (37%) have settled, at least initially, in London and the South East. One in five are living in the North West (20%), with another 20% living in the Midlands. Only 4% of BN(O)s have initially settled in Scotland, while very small numbers have chosen to live in Wales and Northern Ireland, at 1% each.
- Almost a third (31%) said they had decided against living in Northern Ireland, 27% against Scotland and 19% Wales. Weather, perceived remoteness and lack of familiarity were behind these decisions. The most important factors when choosing where to live are safety/low crime, affordable housing and reputation of an area. Good local transport, access to a city and to employment are also important. Proximity to good schools is very important for parents.
- BN(O) Hong Kongers place a relatively low priority on having friends and family close by. They attach even less importance to living near other Hong Kongers.
- A large majority (85%) say they like their area, including 29% who say they like it a lot. Very few dislike their area (2%).
- The most commonly used sources of information about where to live in the UK are recommendations from family or friends (62%). UK websites (45%) and You Tubers (44%) are also very commonly used and a third (35%) use word of mouth.
- Just over half (53%) are renting accommodation, while 43% either own a property outright or have a mortgage. A relatively small proportion have other arrangements, most commonly living with parents or adult children who own a property.



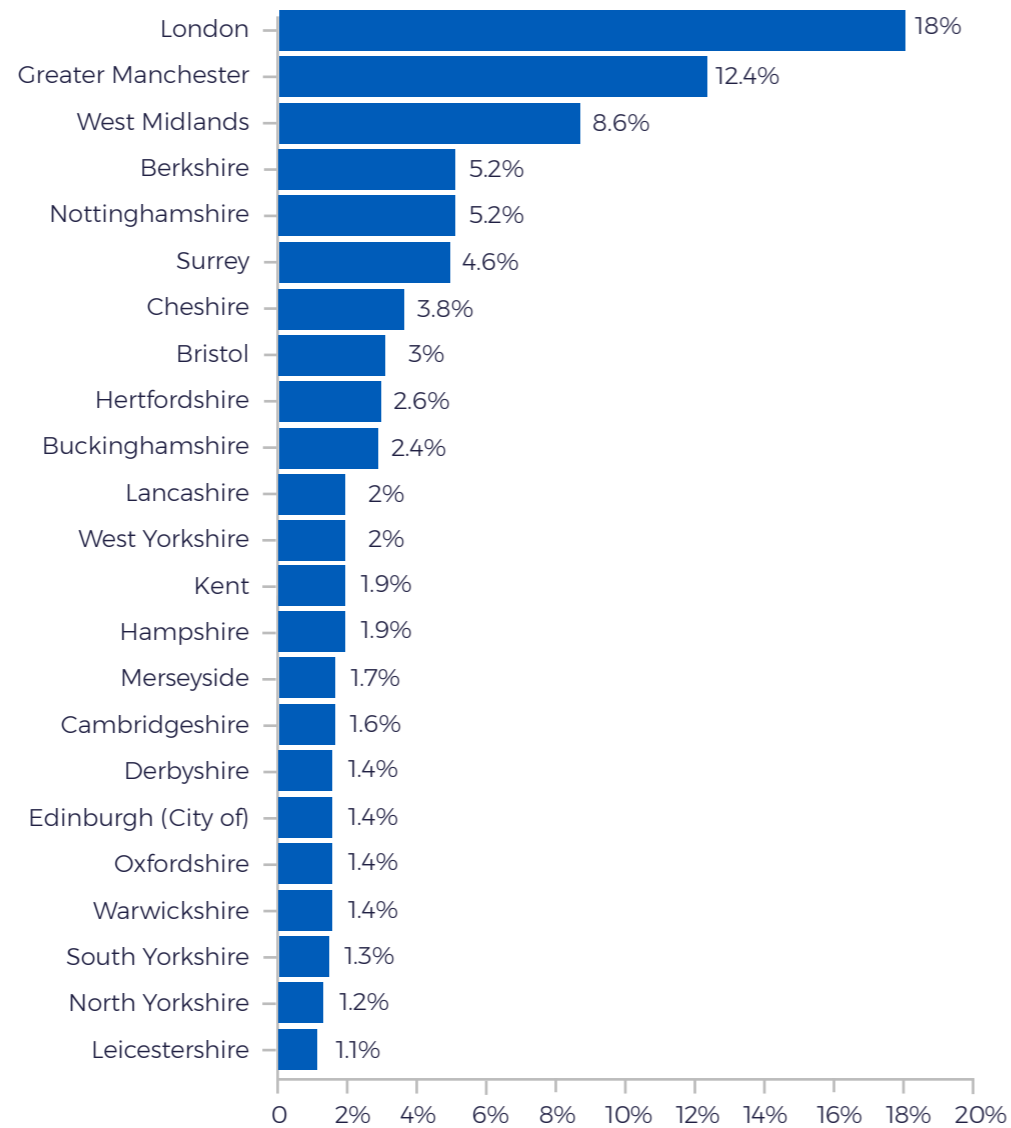
The settlement patterns of BN(O) Hong Kongers in the UK are different from those of other groups of migrants. Earlier arrivals to the UK have often been more constrained in their choice of where to live, for reasons of work, or have chosen to live with others from their home country.

While evidence from previous research suggests that BN(O) Hong Kongers are dispersed across the UK, it is generally agreed that this is not explained by job opportunities. Our previous qualitative research has found decisions are believed to be explained by factors including the presence of very good state schools, relatively affordable housing, commutable proximity to cities, lower crime rates and a more affluent feel¹¹.

Patterns of settlement are seen to reflect the profile of BN(O) Hong Kongers as relatively older and more affluent than other migrant groups, and with a greater proportion of families and white-collar workers. Research from stakeholder organisations including UKHK found more than 80% have over £100,000 total household assets and 34% have over £500,000¹². This enables BN(O)s to consider a wider range of locations and dwelling types than many other migrant groups in the UK. The survey was able to establish patterns of settlement and to measure and explain these in greater depth than previous research.

Figure 4.1 shows the 23 top locations where BN(O) Hong Kongers have settled so far, each accounting for at least 1% of the BN(O) population:

Figure 4.1: Locations where BN(O)s are living

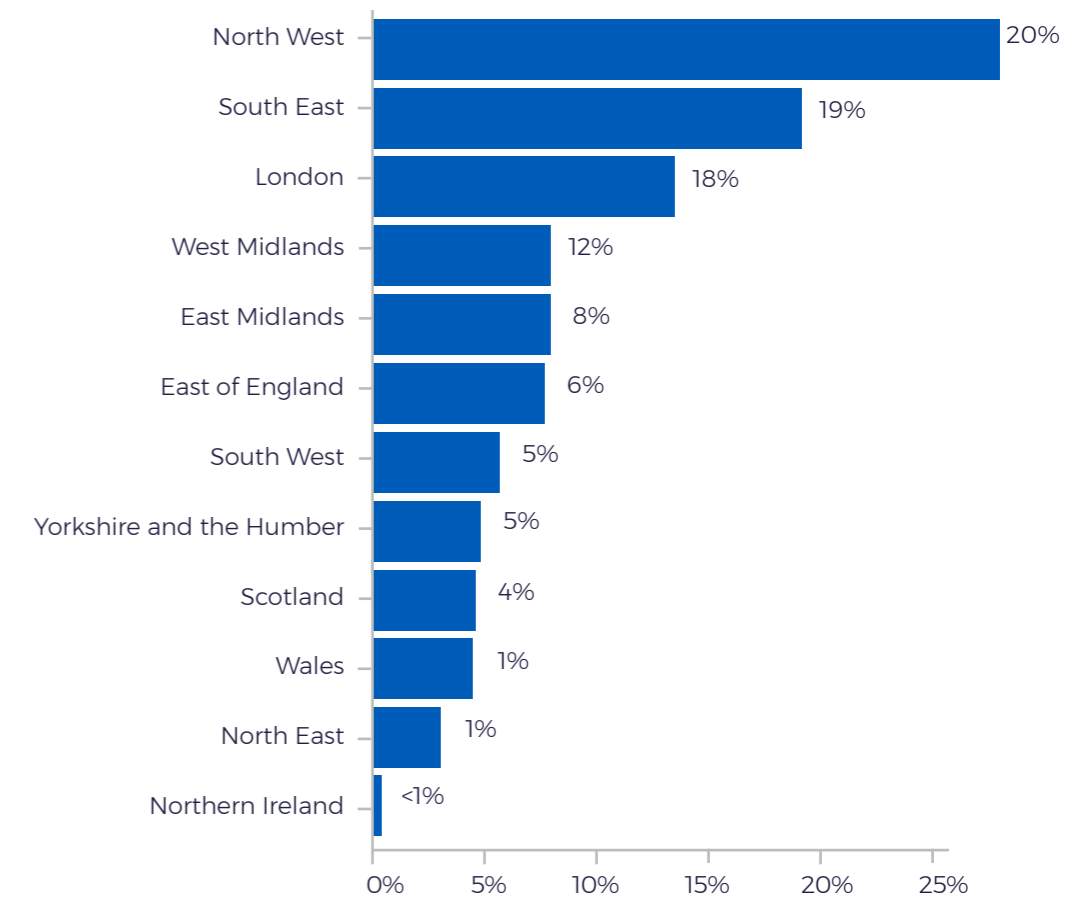


London is home for almost one in five BN(O) Hong Kongers, while Greater Manchester is where one in eight have chosen to live (almost 22% including Cheshire). The West Midlands is also a popular choice, as well as Nottinghamshire in the East Midlands. Bristol is also in the top 10 location choices. Substantial numbers of BN(O)s are living in the Home Counties of Berkshire, Surrey, Hertfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Kent. Beyond the most popular choices, the survey finds BN(O) Hong Kongers scattered across the UK.

Some regions have attracted a considerably higher share of BN(O) Hong Kongers than others

When location is aggregated to regional level it is apparent that some regions have attracted a considerably higher share of BN(O) Hong Kongers than others. Figure 4.2 shows that more than a third of BN(O)s (37%) have settled, at least initially, in London and the South East. One in five are living in the North West. Others are distributed across England, with 20% in the Midlands. Other regions, including the South West, East of England and Yorkshire and the Humber, have smaller numbers. Only 4% of BN(O)s have initially settled in Scotland, while very small numbers have chosen to live in Wales, Northern Ireland and North East England.

Figure 4.2: Settlement of BN(O)s in nations and regions in the UK





BN(O) Hong Kongers settling in London are different in a number of respects. They are younger – almost a third (31%) aged under 35, compared to 15% of all BN(O)s. They are also less likely to have school-aged children (30%, compared to the 48% average).

As well as identifying the city or county where they live, respondents were asked to describe the area. Just over a third described their location as a city, and a further 21% as a suburb of a city. A quarter said they were living in a small town and 15% in a large town. Only 3% described their location as a village.

While relying on respondents' own interpretation of these categories, the survey finds that around half of BN(O) Hong Kongers are settling in cities or large towns and half in small towns or suburbs. However, the type of area chosen varies considerably by age. Younger BN(O)s aged under 35 are more likely to describe their area as a city or suburb of a city, while those in older groups were more likely to say they live in a small town. Our previous, qualitative research found many Hong Kongers were choosing to live in quieter locations, seeking a slower pace of life than they had experienced in Hong Kong¹³. This was confirmed by our survey, which found that some BN(O) Hong Kongers had decided to settle in an area very different to central Hong Kong. Some respondents also said they had not lived in the city and wanted to live in a quieter, sometimes more rural, area:



“Mostly the cost of living, lower rent means I need to move away from city centre. I end up living in a village in South Derbyshire. This is also what I intended to do, stay away from the busy city centre and experience something totally different from Hong Kong. The village is less populated which makes everyone close to each other. I feel welcomed and safe in this village. I have to say I am glad I made the right choice.”

- Male, 35-44, Derbyshire



Photo by Tom Wheatley

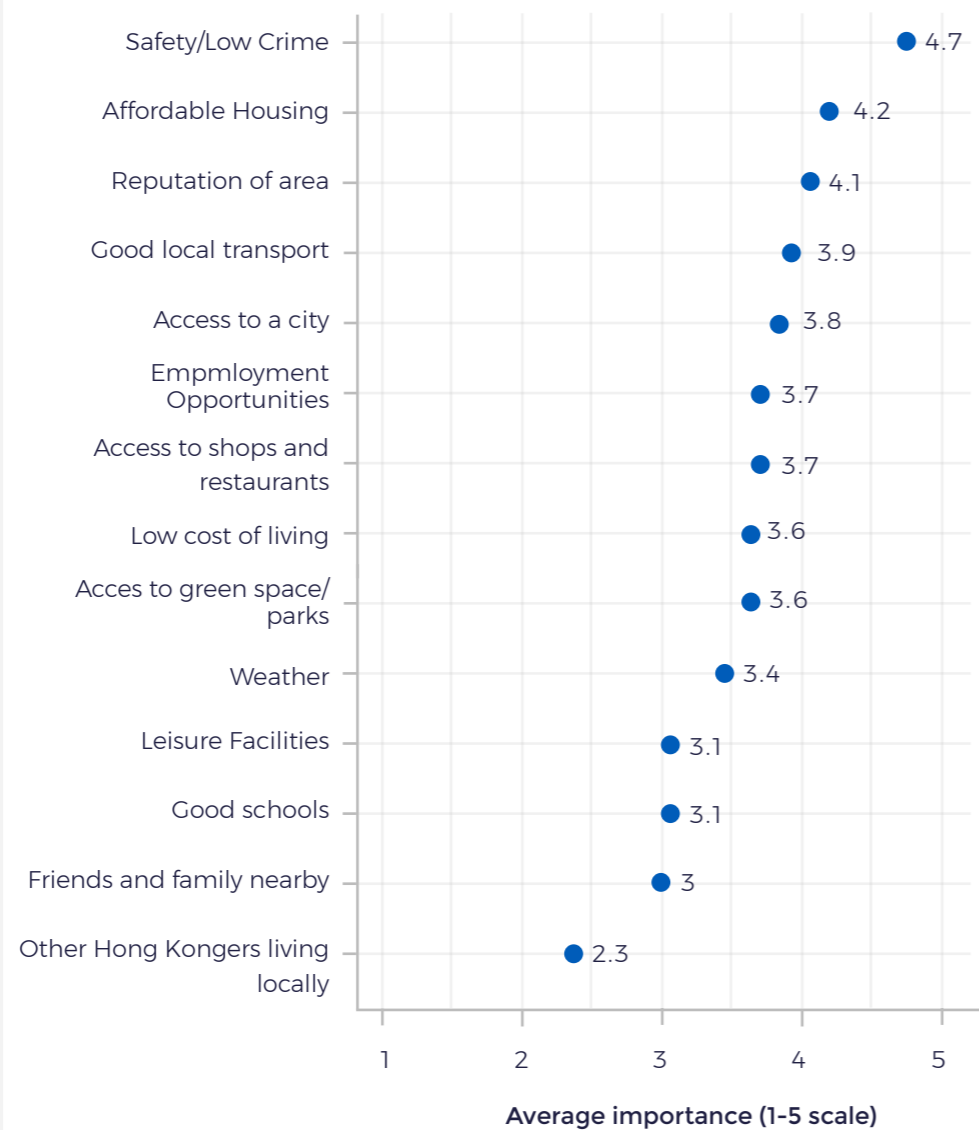


“I like the fact that the district has a lot of green areas, clean air, public transportation network, quietness and prosperity, friendly neighbours, and a slower pace of life than Hong Kong.”

- Female, 35-44, West Midlands

We asked respondents for their reasons why they chose to live where they do, rating importance from 1-5. Figure 4.3 shows how these factors are rated on average .

Figure 4.3: Most important factors when choosing somewhere to live



Of the reasons put to them, safety and low crime topped the list. In our previous, qualitative research, participants told us that they conducted in-depth, independent research into local crime reports, as well as consulting various media sources and gathering anecdotal evidence from friends and family on the relative safety of an area. Crime was also frequently mentioned in open responses:



“I now live in [a London borough], the environment is very good, there are many flowers and trees, the air is fresh, there is a beautiful park, the transportation is very convenient, and the most important thing is a sense of security. I have lived for almost a year, and no crime has occurred in the area where I live!”
 – Female, 55-64, London



Photo by Marcin Nowak



“I have no preference to where to live. I can adapt to any places as long as the place has low crime rate”
 – Female, 45-54, London

Other very important factors, scoring an average of 4 or above, were affordable housing and reputation of the area. Housing is a priority across demographic groups, including by age. It is not a greater consideration for people with children than those without.

The importance of good local transport, access to a city and employment opportunities – all at 3.7 or above – show the importance of economic activity to BN(O) Hong Kongers. Employment opportunities are as important for women and men, though more so for people without children than those with children of school age. Some respondents talked of the importance of the local jobs market in their decision about where to locate. Those who did were often looking for jobs in a particular sector, for example IT:



“I’m a programmer which is IT related. Reading is place where I find a IT company. the company previously hired a full stack developer and the job duty is well fit to me. Thus, I live in Reading over one and half year.”
 – Male, 25-34, Berkshire

In other cases, respondents were looking for a location with employment opportunities, for example within easy reach of a city. Ease of daily life and social activity are also important factors. Access to shops and restaurants is also a priority for some, as well as access to green spaces. These factors were mentioned frequently in open responses:



“Good location with shops, medical centre, post office, bus stops, church, pharmacy, country parks, shopping areas, eating places.”

– Male, 55-64, Greater Manchester



Photo by William Mccue



“The nearby living facilities (e.g. post office, library, gym....) are sufficient for me. For me, it’s enough, the supermarket is within 10 minutes’ walk. The most satisfied is the convenient transportation, there are Metro and bus stops near my house. This is the main reason why I chose this place”

– Male, 45-54, Tyne and Wear



“I have chosen to live in a house in a small town within walking distance to school to save the school runs. It’s a lovely neighbourhood where neighbours look out for each other. The town is small but has a handful of nice independent restaurants, supermarkets and a new modern leisure centre. It’s also close to a great garden centre and village cafes and pubs with great vibe and river view.”

– Female, 45-54, Nottinghamshire

Weather is not a particularly strong consideration overall, though it has affected decisions about whether to live in specific parts of the UK:



“As mentioned, the reputation of our living area is good since the crime rate, social order and transportation are good here. Also, one of our concerns is about the weather. We prefer to find the area(s) in the southern part of UK since the average temperature is higher than that in the northern part of UK.”

– Male, 45-54, Berkshire

While the availability of good schools is not a high priority overall, it is very important for BN(O) Hong Kongers with school age children

While the availability of good schools is not a high priority overall, it is very important for BN(O) Hong Kongers with school age children. The average rating given to the proximity of good schools was 4.4 for these respondents.

Our previous qualitative research found that, for many BN(O) Hong Kongers with young families, decisions on location are determined first and foremost by their children’s education. Stakeholders noted that proximity to good schools, in particular those rated ‘outstanding’ by Ofsted, is the principal factor in location decisions for the majority of BN(O)s with young families:



“I have a 12 years old daughter and I knew there is an outstanding high school which GCSE result is brilliant and the school is strict discipline. The reason I moved to UK is I hope my daughter can get good education in the UK. Therefore I bought the house in Warrington.”
 – Female, 45-54, Cheshire



“Our most important consideration is the children’s schooling, we chose this place because there are more schools in this area and the security is good, and it so happens that we have a friend who lives in the neighbourhood, so we decided to stay in this area. Now the children are very happy with their studies.”
 – Female, 45-55, Kent

Many respondents also gave additional information about how they chose an area in which to live and about the factors that are important to them. These responses indicate that BN(O) Hong Kongers have a wide range of strategies, with some giving considerable thought to their location and others going along with decisions made by family and friends. Some made initial decisions, thinking they might move later as their circumstances change.

Living near to other Hong Kongers and East Asians

BN(O) Hong Kongers place a relatively low priority on having friends and family close by. They attach even less importance to living near other Hong Kongers. However, BN(O) Hong Kongers aged over 65 attach more importance to this. We also asked a separate question on how important it is to live near to other Hong Kongers who have recently arrived in the UK. Almost half say they have no preference and only 14% say it is important (the remaining 39% say it is not). Similarly when asked how important it is to live near to established East Asian communities in the UK, more than half (53%) say it is not important and only 6% say it is (41% have no preference). Some respondents also mentioned this as a factor in the open response question:

BN(O) Hong Kongers place a relatively low priority on having friends and family close by. They attach even less importance to living near other Hong Kongers



“There are almost no Hong Kong people living in the neighbourhood, which is a good thing for me. Although it is said that Hong Kong people help each other, inevitably there will be gossips, so I prefer to live far away from Hong Kong people’s neighbourhoods. It is also a good opportunity for me to communicate with other nationalities in the area, to practise my English listening and speaking skills, and to understand more about the lifestyle, attitude and culture of the local people.”
 – Female, 23-34, Derbyshire



“Less People’s Republic of China and Hong Kong People. As I want my family and me could really integrate into the tradition and culture of the UK and get along with the British. I want my children to learn British etiquette and the living style of the UK, especially the British language..”
 – Male, 45-54, Cardiff



A large majority (85%) say they like their area, including 29% who say they like it a lot

Responses to this question also show that BN(O) Hong Kongers in both the oldest and youngest age groups are more likely than younger people to attach more importance to being near other Hong Kongers. Compared to an overall figure of 14%, the over-65s are more likely to feel this (25%), along with those aged 18-24 (22%). This is likely to reflect lower levels of confidence and familiarity, resulting in barriers to integration. More generally, and as we found in our earlier research, lack of interest in living near to other Hong Kongers stems both from trust issues, particularly regarding non-BN(O) Hong Kongers, and also in the desire not to form Hong Konger districts in the UK. Therefore, while there is some regional clustering, BN(O) Hong Kongers are considerably more dispersed than some other migrant groups.

We asked BN(O) Hong Kongers whether they like or dislike the area where they are living. A large majority (85%) say they like their area, including 29% who say they like it a lot. Very few dislike their area, though 14% are neutral.

Respondents across all nations and regions of the UK liked the area they lived to a similar extent. BN(O)s in London are less likely than elsewhere to say they like where they live, though very few said they actually dislike it. Some reasons why BN(O) Hong Kongers like the area they decided to settle in are detailed below.

In their own words: what do BN(O) Hong Kongers think of their new local areas?

SCOTLAND

“Both of Education and Safety are the main part for my decision. After moving in Edinburgh, I feel the city is very safe, quiet and peaceful. Historical buildings which I love most. Lots of hiking areas we can visit. Transportation is very convenient as there are lots of buses achieved to ALL the areas in Edinburgh, Internet connection is very strong as I learnt the Government invested on it.”

– Female, 55-64, Edinburgh

“My husband always dream of live in Scotland due to the strong relationships between Hong Kong and Scotland. And we found our perfect match dream house along the beautiful sea shore of Aberdeen past year. We then decided to settle here. The neighbourhood is very nice and safe here. Our son met a lot of friends. Everyone are friendly and considering.”

– Female, 35-44, Aberdeenshire

“I like the fact that Edinburgh is a historic place, it's in the south east of Scotland, it's beautiful, it's simple, it's safe, it's got good water quality. So I feel very comfortable living there, and I can put aside the fear of living in Hong Kong.”

– Female, 55-64, Edinburgh

“I've briefly visited Edinburgh before for a weekend and I like the city. People in Scotland are very friendly and nice. I'm having a really good time here. It's a busy city but close to the nature at the same time. You can experience a vibrant vibe in the city centre and peace and quiet just around the corner.”

– Female, 25-34, Edinburgh



Photo by Connor Mollison

MANCHESTER

"We love Manchester, there are lots of happening and things to do, people are lovely and welcoming, especially the local running club we joined, they introduce us to the city, bring us to different kind of event. Such as charity event, that allow us to have a chance to pay some affords back to the communities. So far my wife and me are happy in here, and the club, our new friend made us feel like home, we are proud to be Mancunian!"

- Male, 35-44, Greater Manchester

"City of Manchester is a vibrant city with restaurants, shops and groceries all within walking distance. The public transportation in Greater Manchester is well connected with trams, buses, trains and planes. I can travel frequently to the rest of UK, channel islands or crown dependency by choosing one or more of such public transportation without any need for driving. I am pleased that I am able to live with my family in Manchester."

- Male, 45-54, Greater Manchester

LIVERPOOL

"One of the main reasons why I live in Merseyside because I love Liverpool Football Club. Living locally makes me attending matches at Anfield regularly much easier. Also, I successfully got a permanent local job offer before I flew over, which makes my choice of settled city much easier. I honestly love the city of Liverpool and I thought this is the best place on earth. The time that I've spent here is the best in my life. People are very very nice here. You'll Never Walk Alone."

- Male, 35-44, Merseyside

"I am living in Liverpool and found the people here are very friendly and nice. I feel being welcomed by the neighbours and community in general. There were worries about higher crime rate here before I landed but the actual situation is completely not a problem during my stay so far. And the access to shops and green spaces in the city is very easy and smooth."

- Male, 35-44, Merseyside

CARDIFF

"Cardiff is a nice and safe place. It is a small city, not too crowded, but with all I want in terms of shops and green spaces. People are also kind and polite generally."

- Male, 45-54, Cardiff



Photo by Nick Fewings

DEVON

“As the weather in Devon is very good, not very cold in winter. During summer holiday, visiting Cornwall is very easy and all near area is the best place over whole England. Besides, people living in Devon is very good and easy going. Comparing with the people in other city, they are more friendly and the driving manner is very good. Last but not the least, the criminal rate is low in Devon, I feel safe to stay here.”

- Female, 25-34, Devon

SUTTON, SURREY

“After settling in Sutton, I observed the place offers a strong sense of community and hosts various local events and festivals, including HK Friendship Festival throughout the year. Local people and neighbours are extremely nice, friendly and always offer to help. The area is served by convenient supermarkets, well-organised high street and grocery shops. It also has extremely good schools, GP services and good transport connections I deeply experienced community and its people overall is inclusive with diversity with conscience and compassion. I feel connected and grateful to be part of Sutton Community.”

- Female, 45-54, London

LONDON

“London is diverse and open minded. In the last 2 years I've been here, I have hardly had racist encounters. Flashback to 6 years ago, when I was studying at the University of Warwick - I experienced racism frequently. We chose to live in London to be close to my post-graduate and subsequently my partner and my workplaces. The wide array of Asian food and supermarkets also makes it easy to integrate into London.”

- Female, 25-34, London

BOURNEMOUTH

“Bournemouth is a very good place for semi-retired or retired people to live, it is environmentally friendly and the air is good. The people are very friendly. The weather is good, not too cold in winter and not too hot in summer. I like it very much.”

- Female, 45-54, Dorset

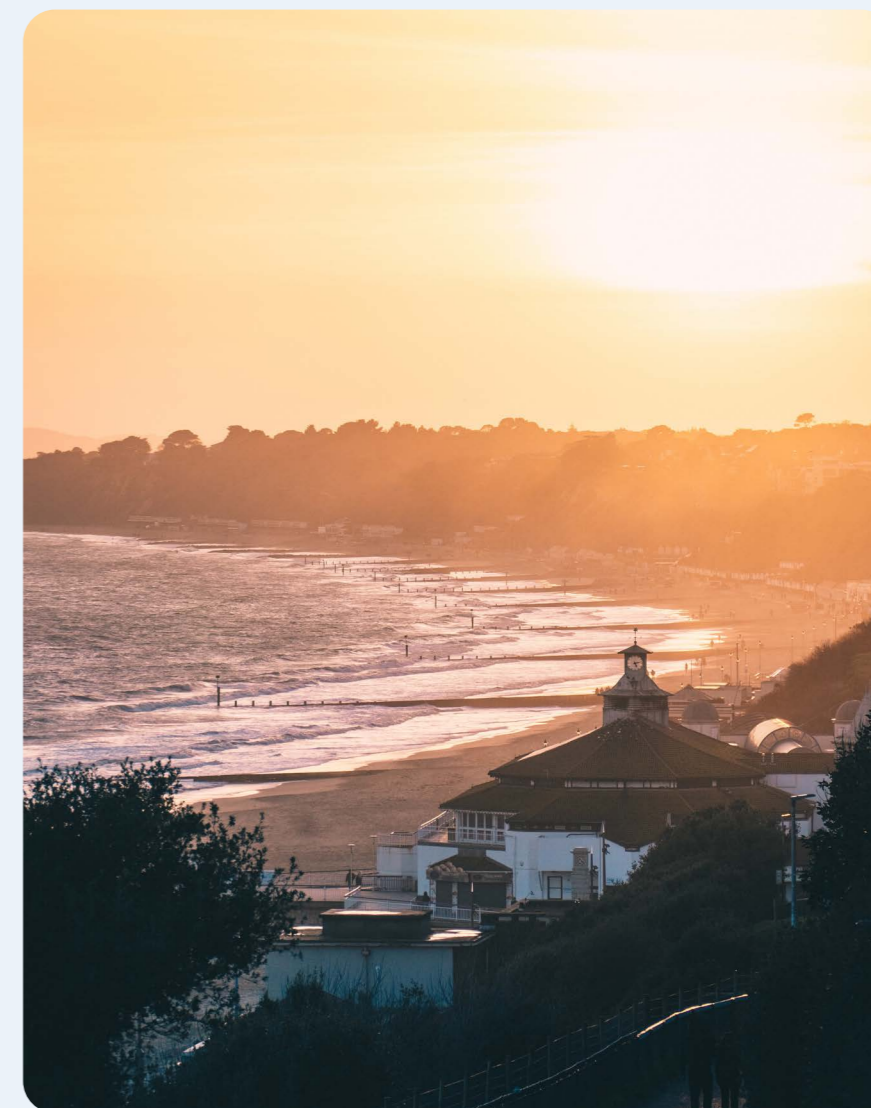


Photo by Carlos Ares

Plans to move, or to stay put

Reflecting these positive views of their local area, most BN(O) Hong Kongers do not plan to move within the next year: more than two-thirds (69%) plan to stay where they are, while only 10% say they plan to move (the remaining 21% said they might).

Potential destinations of those who plan to move are distributed right across the UK but London is the preference for almost a quarter (24%) and Greater Manchester for 11% of prospective movers. The open responses give an indication of the reasons why some BN(O) Hong Kongers are considering a future move. A number referred to a future change in circumstances, for example once school age children leave home:

“Me and my wife choose to live in area with good weather and also close to the school of my daughter so we can drive her to school within 15 mins drive. If possible, we would like to live close to our friends from Hong Kong or somewhere close to Asian towns like New Malden or Brighton so we can have more Asian food, but the proximity of the school is our priority...We may move to the area when she goes to University in the next few years.”

– Male, 55-64, East Sussex

A few said they had chosen to live in the same location as student sons or daughters at university and would probably move once they graduate.

We also asked about the sources of information used in deciding where to live in the UK. As Figure 4.4 shows, recommendation from family or friends was the most commonly used source of information, cited by almost two-thirds (62%) of BN(O) Hong Kongers. Word of mouth was cited by more than a third (35%) of respondents. UK Websites and Youtubers are also very commonly used, cited by almost half of respondents. Hong Kong websites are also used, but to a lesser extent than UK ones. Other sources, used by one in five Hong Kongers, are national or local government advice and the social media platforms WhatsApp, Telegram and Signal.

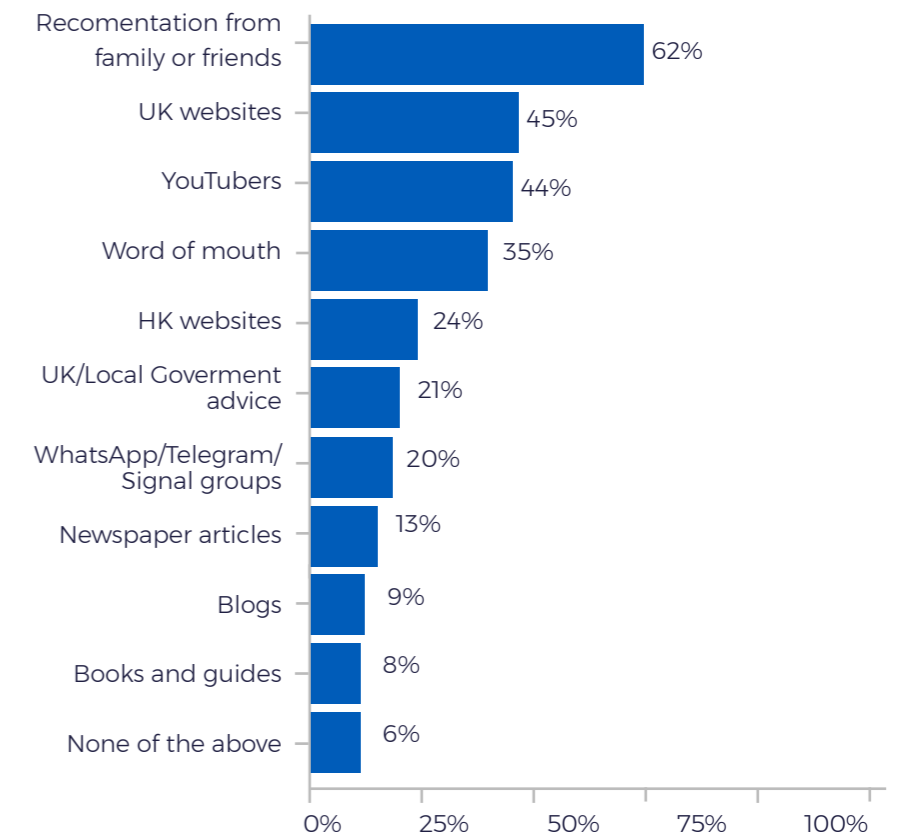


“A YouTuber introduced this area. I had a gut feeling that this area is quite good, so I chose this area”

– Female, 45-54, South Yorkshire

Smaller numbers used blogs, books, newspaper articles and guides. Other reasons included knowledge from having visited the UK previously. Sources of information were similar across age groups. However, the over 65s were much more likely than others to use recommendations from family and friends and less likely to use information from websites or government sources.

Figure 4.4: Sources of information used in deciding where to live

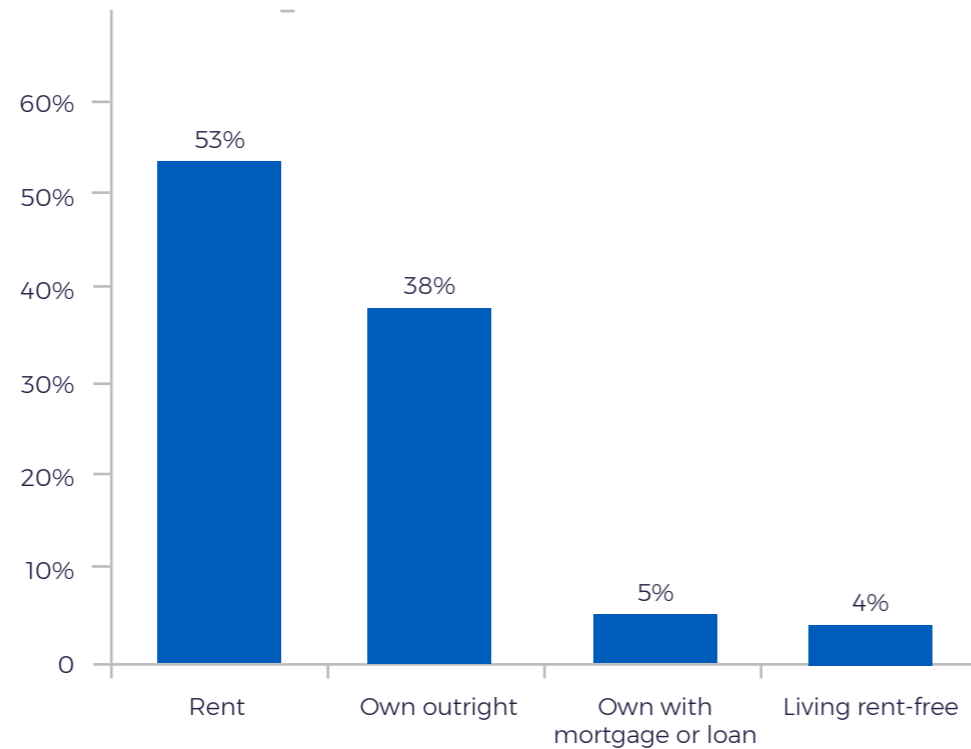


Most BN(O) Hong Kongers are renting the property where they are living.

Housing

Most BN(O) Hong Kongers are renting the property where they are living. As Figure 4.5 shows, the majority of Hong Kongers (53%) are renting, while 43% either own a property outright or have a mortgage. A relatively small proportion have other arrangements, most commonly living with parents or adult children who own a property.

Figure 4.5: Housing status of BN(O) Hong Kongers

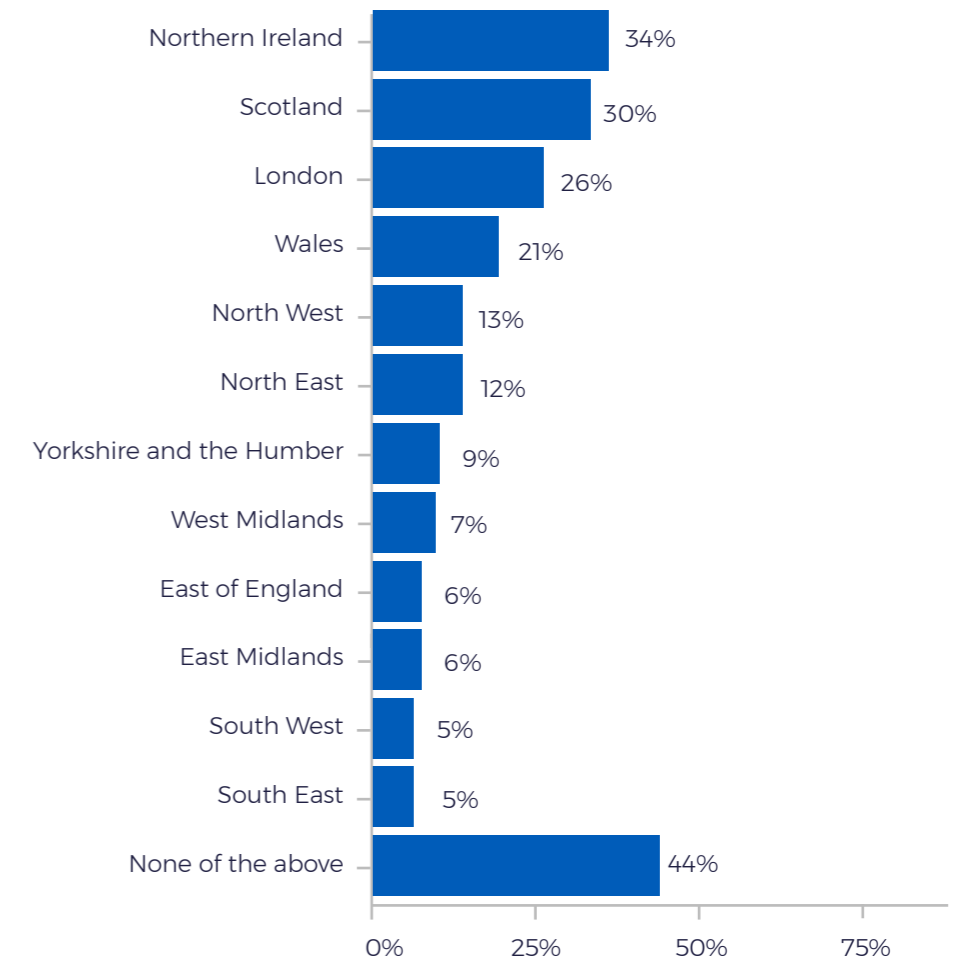


Reflecting the greater financial assets of older BN(O)s, housing status varies by age, with over 70% of those aged under 35 renting and a majority of the over 45s owning a property outright or with a mortgage. Of those who do not currently own a property or have a mortgage, over three-quarters (78%) said they plan to buy a property either in the next year or at some point in the future. Those aged 35-54 were most likely to have this plan.

Deciding where not to live

We also asked BN(O) Hong Kongers if there are regions of the UK that they decided against when choosing where to live. More than four in ten (44%) said they didn't rule out anywhere. As Figure 4.6 shows, locations most likely to have been decided against were Northern Ireland (34%), Scotland (30%), London (26%) and Wales (21%)

Figure 4.6: Which nations and regions did BN(O)s decide against?



These preferences against particular nations and regions are consistent across age groups. Responses to an open-ended question about decisions indicate the importance of factors including weather, familiarity, proximity to family and friends and perceived crime rate.

The most common reasons for choosing not to live in Northern Ireland relate to its colder climate compared to other locations in the UK. Respondents were also less familiar with Northern Ireland, had no contacts there and believed there were fewer job opportunities. There were also worries about language and accent.

Wales was viewed in a similar way to Northern Ireland as being far from family and friends and as somewhere unfamiliar. Some respondents were also concerned about language and accent and that they might experience communication difficulties.

Some respondents were also concerned about language and accent and that they might experience communication difficulties.

BN(O)s in Scotland were the most positive about where they live

BN(O) Hong Kongers are more familiar with Scotland and concerns about culture and opportunities were not common. The principal and overriding reason for deciding against locating there is the colder climate. Understanding the Scottish accent is also a common concern. Concerns about the cold were also raised in relation to other northern areas of the UK, including the North East, the North West and Yorkshire and the Humber.

However, it was clear from open responses that BN(O) Hong Kongers who had settled in less popular areas were very pleased with their decision. As we noted earlier, respondents across all nations and regions of the UK like the area they live to a similar extent. However, BN(O)s in Scotland were the most positive about where they live and this was also reflected in open responses. BN(O) Hong Kongers in Wales also commented positively on their choice of where to live. BN(O)s in London are less likely than elsewhere to say they like where they live, though very few said they actually dislike it.

Figure 4.7: Reasons for deciding against Northern Ireland



Figure 4.8: Reasons for deciding against Wales



Figure 4.9: Reasons for deciding against Scotland



Figure 4.10: Reasons for deciding against London



Reasons for not moving to the East of England and West and East Midlands were largely around job opportunities, and distance from London, but general unfamiliarity was also a factor. Some respondents also mentioned crime rates. The South West is seen as having fewer employment opportunities and to be too far from London. Reasons for not choosing the South East were very varied but include house prices and living costs.

Almost half of respondents chose not to live in London, with high costs of living the principal reason for their decision. Population density and overcrowding was also mentioned by many. Some compared London to Hong Kong in these respects. One respondent commented:



“Too expensive and urbanised. Other areas are better for my children to study and grow up.”

– Male, 35-44, Cheshire



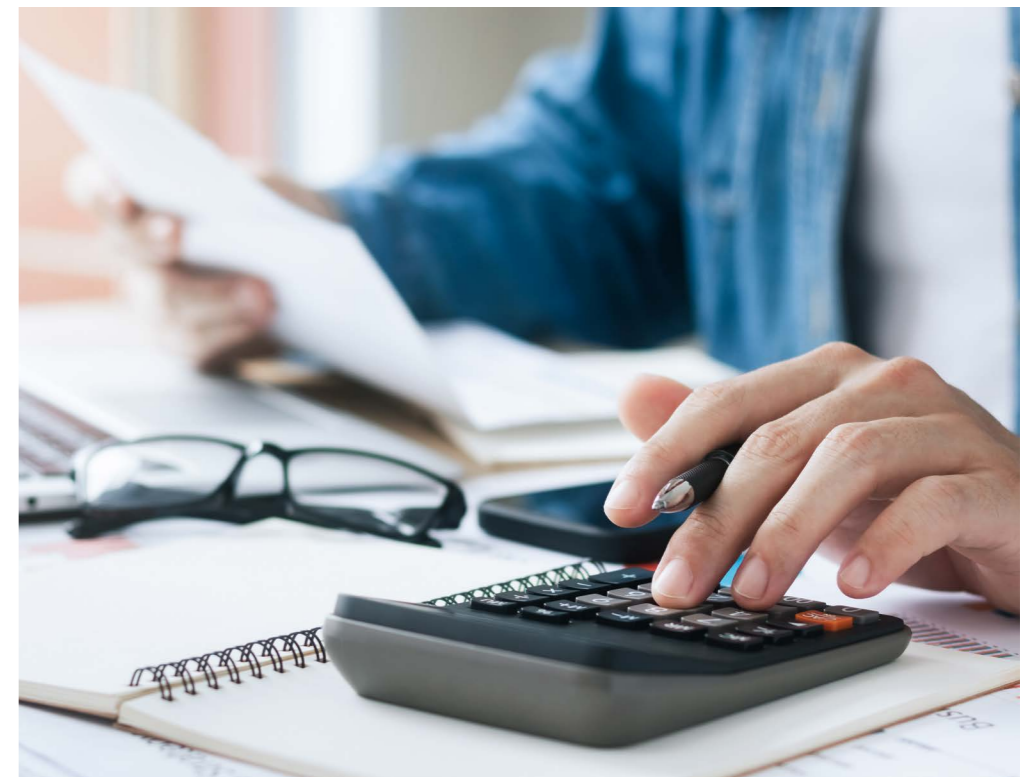
5. Employment

Key Findings



- Half of BN(O)s are working: 35% full-time, 9% part-time and 6% self-employed. The employment rate of just over 52% (excluding over-65s) is significantly lower than the current UK national rate of 76%. Some 18% of BN(O)s describe themselves as unemployed, including 12% who are looking for work – considerably higher than the current unemployment rate of 4.3%.
- Women are less likely to be working full-time than men (28% vs 41%) and more likely to be taking care of the home (23% vs 4%). Those aged over 55 are also less likely to be working.
- Some 20% of BN(O)s are in temporary employment, compared to the national average of 6%. One in five is employed by an agency, compared to around 5% of the UK working population.
- Almost half of all respondents with a job said it doesn't match their skills and experience at all (27%), or only a little (20%). Most over-45s with a professional qualification said they were not using it in their current job.
- BN(O)s see confidence in speaking English as the biggest barrier to finding work or a job that matches their skills and qualifications. Other issues include recognition of qualifications and lack of UK experience.
- More than three-quarters of respondents said they had not received careers information or advice. Most said they would like this help.
- Common difficulties experienced at work were problems with pay (24%) and feeling overworked (20%). Some 12% feel isolated at work and 5% have experienced discrimination from colleagues.

Employment rates are lower than might be expected

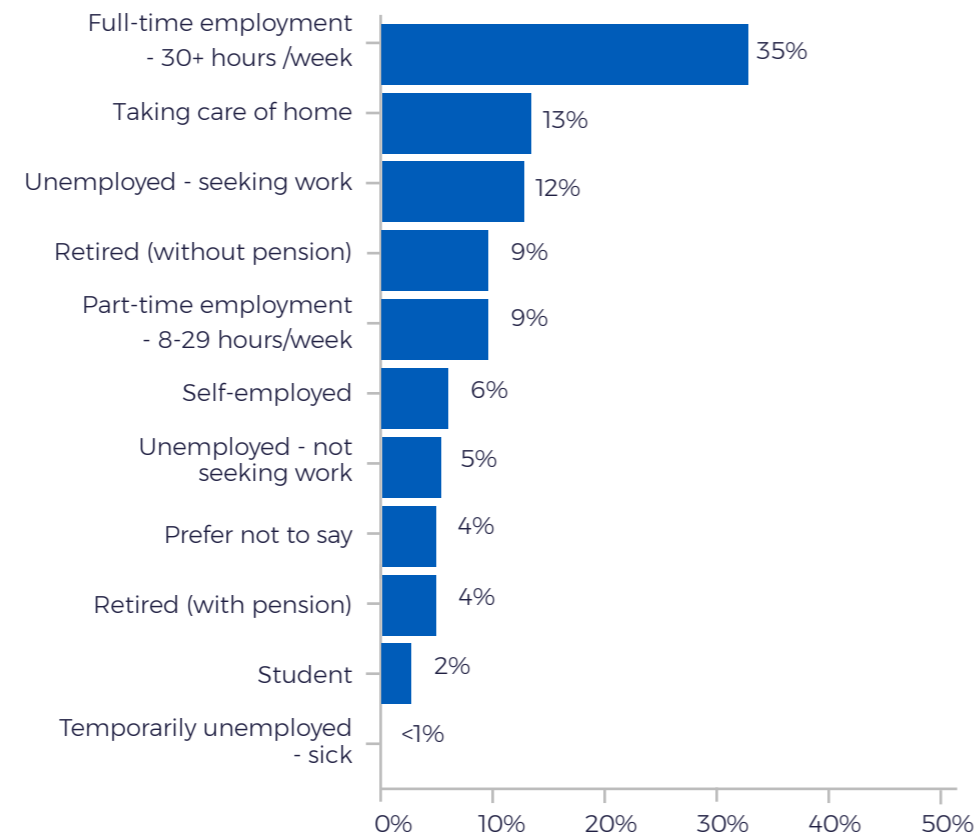


Applicants for the BN(O) visa do not need to have already secured a job or have a specified level of English, though they do need to show an ability to accommodate and maintain themselves for their first six months in the UK. There are no restrictions on the right to work, but the visa has 'no recourse to public funds' (NRPF) stated, which means visa holders are not able to claim in-work or out of work benefits or housing benefit. Families are, however, eligible for Free School Meals if they meet the criteria.

It has been apparent from the first pieces of research on Hong Kongers living in the UK that employment rates are lower than might be expected. Our survey finds that of all respondents in the sample, half are working. This includes 35% in full-time employment and 9% part-time. A small proportion of survey respondents (6%) are self-employed.

If BN(O)s aged over 65 and students are excluded, the employment rate increases to just over 52%. This compares to the current UK national employment rate of 76%.¹⁴

Figure 5.1: Employment status of BN(O)s



There are marked gender differences in participation rates, with men more likely to be working full-time (41% vs 28%) and women more likely to be taking care of the home (23% vs 4%). Men are also more likely than women to be self-employed.

There are also very marked age differences in participation in work. Rates are higher among those aged 25-45, with employment participation falling off at age 55. As Figure 5.2 shows, 65% of those aged 25-34 work full-time, yet this falls to 13% among those aged 55-64. Participation in part-time work is highest among those aged 45-54. It should be noted that the base sizes of those aged 18-24 and over 65 are low for this question.

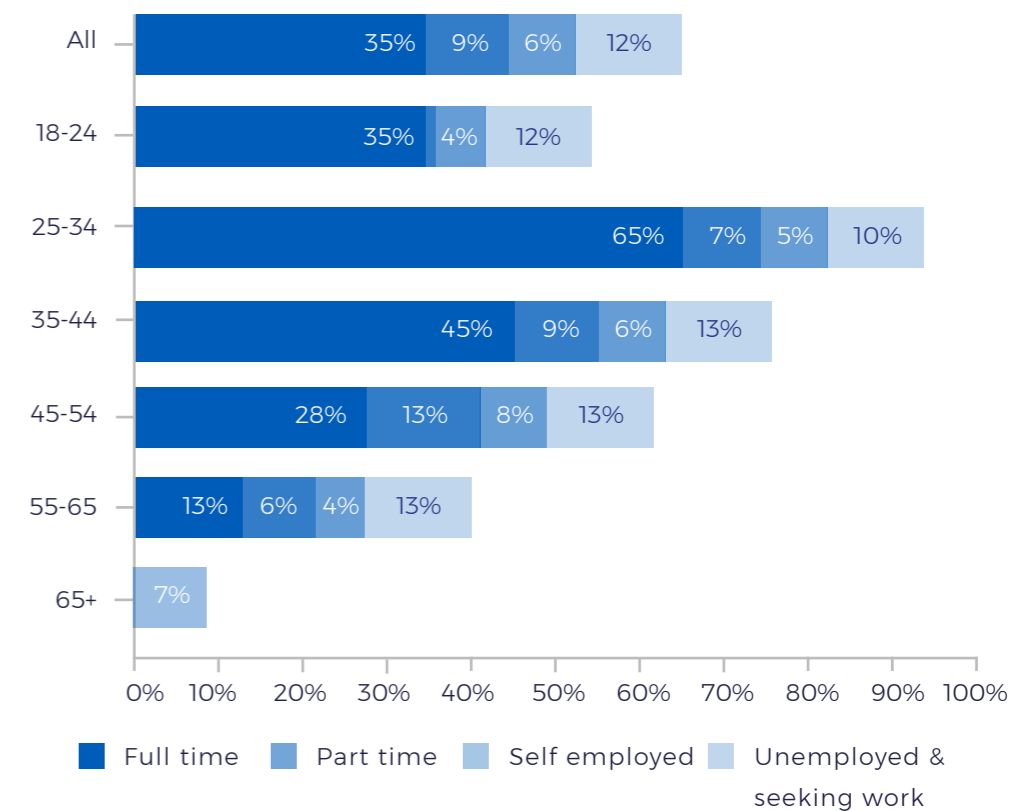
More than four in ten (43%) BN(O)s aged 55-64 have retired, and 83% of those aged 65+, while more than four in ten (42%) respondents aged 18-24 are students.

These findings are explained partly by the approach that some BN(O) Hong Kongers have taken to settling into their new lives in the UK. It is also explained by difficulties experienced by Hong

Kongers in obtaining work matching their skills and qualifications, as we explain below.

Most working respondents (78%) said they are employed on a permanent contract, while 20% said their contract was temporary, either up to 6 months (8%) or between 6 months and 2 years (20%). This is considerably higher than the national average of 6%¹⁵. Twenty percent of respondents with a job said they are employed by an agency, compared to around 5% of the working population as a whole¹⁶.

Figure 5.2: Employment by age



Self-employment

Overall, 6% of BN(O)s are self-employed, compared to around 13% in the general UK population¹⁷. They are a small number in our sample, so our findings may not be fully representative of all self-employed BN(O) Hong Kongers in the UK. However, the survey suggests that self-employed BN(O)s are mostly people working for themselves, with only 11% employing someone else, and most of these employing fewer than 3 people. They are also likely to include employees with self-employed status, common in the construction industry for example. Partly reflecting this, most self-employed respondents (56%) did not work for themselves in Hong Kong.

There are marked differences by gender in the types of work that BN(O)s are doing

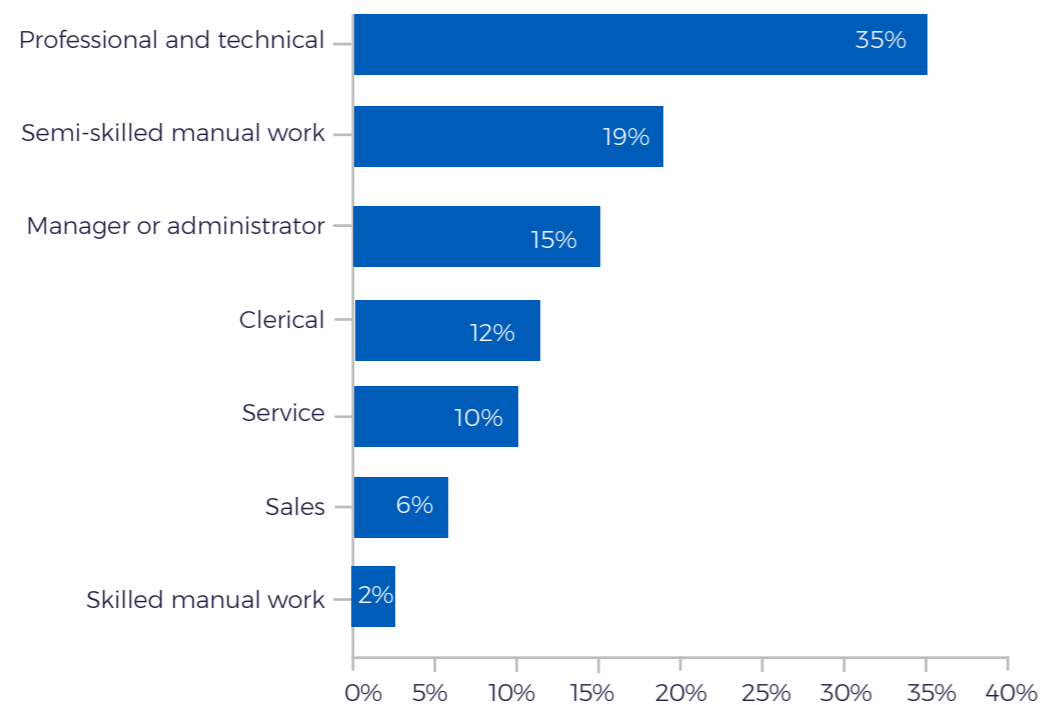
Most BN(O) Hong Kongers who are self-employed (76%) are men. More than two-thirds say they are self-employed because it gives them flexibility of hours. However, around 1 in 5 say they have chosen this option for a career change and 18% because they have been unable to find employment.

Occupations

We asked respondents in employment (including self-employment) about their occupation and the sector in which they work. As Figure 5.3 shows, while more than a third (35%) are in professional or technical occupations and 15% in managerial or administrative work, others are employed in a wide range of occupations. More than a quarter are in clerical, sales or service jobs, with more than one in five in manual occupations, mostly at semi-skilled level.

There are marked differences by gender in the types of work that BN(O)s are doing: women are more likely than men to be in clerical work (19% vs 7%) and men to be in professional and technical occupations (41% vs 27%) and semi-skilled manual work (22% vs 13%). There are also differences by age and region, with younger BN(O) Hong Kongers more likely to be in professional roles, along with those in London and the South East, compared with the North West.

Figure 5.3: Broad occupational level of working BN(O)s in the UK



As Figure 5.4 below shows, BN(O) Hong Kongers work across a wide range of sectors. Sectors in which Hong Kongers are most likely to be employed are wholesale and retail, professional scientific and technical service, IT, education and hospitality. Each of these accounts for the employment of at least 10% of Hong Kongers in work in the UK. BN(O) Hong Kongers are therefore contributing to key industries and occupations, some of which have experienced serious and ongoing skills and labour shortages in recent years.

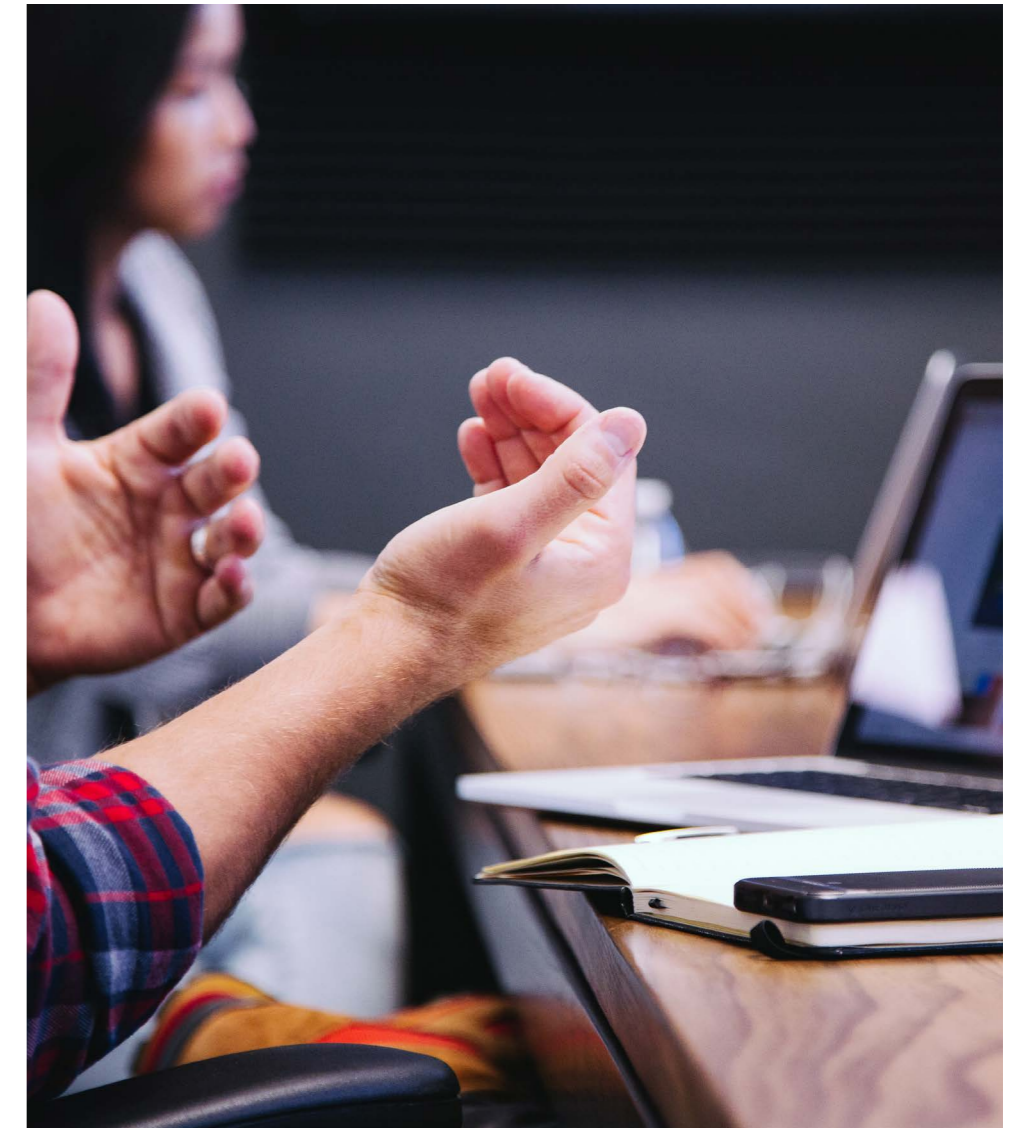
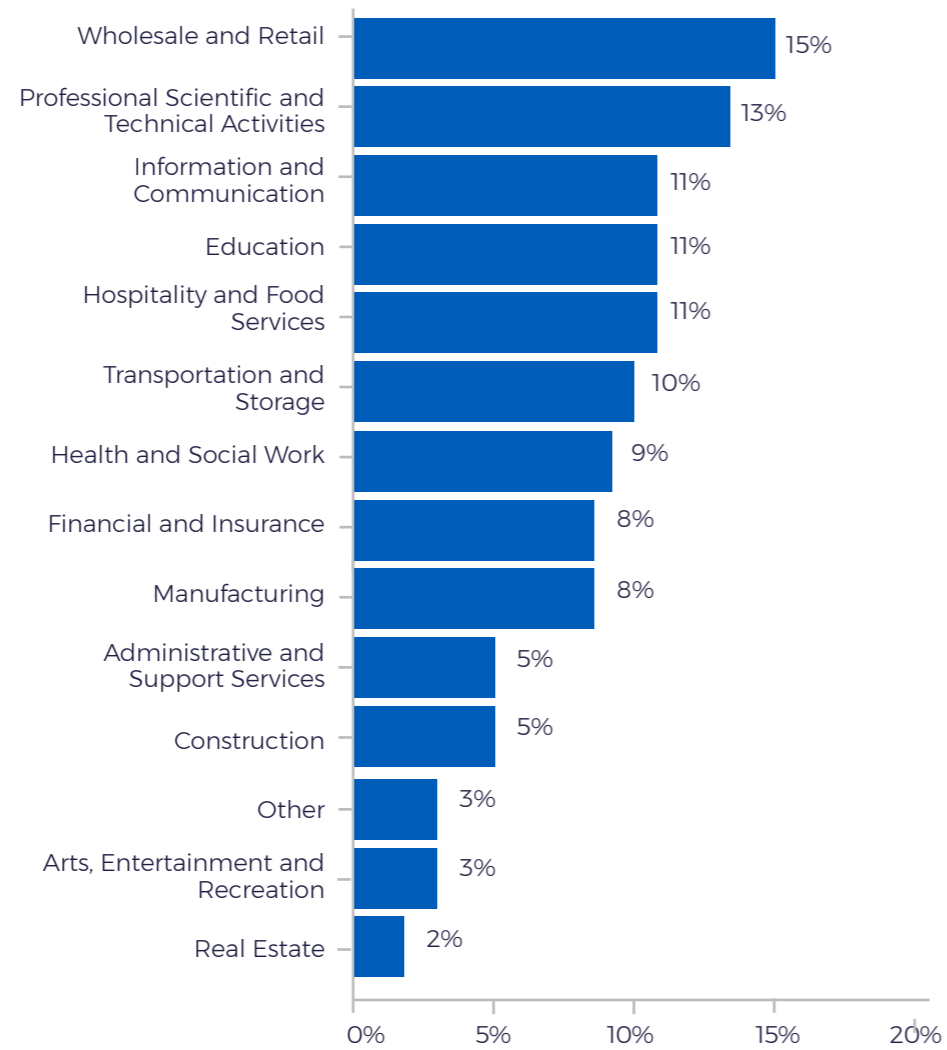


Figure 5.4: Sectors in which BN(O)s are working



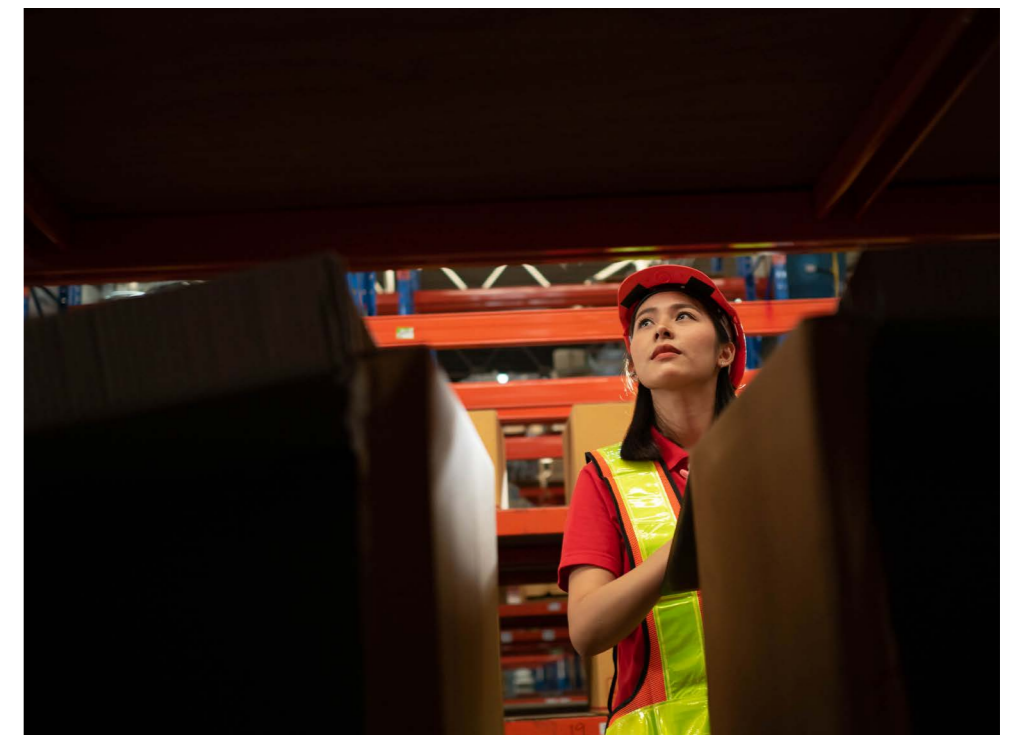
There are, again, some marked gender differences, with women more likely than men to work in education (17% vs 7%), health and social work (14% vs 5%) and hospitality and food services (15% vs 9%). Men are more likely than women to work in professional, scientific and technical activities (15% vs 10%), IT (14% vs 7%) and in transportation and storage (14% vs 4%).

Our findings suggest considerable scope for BN(O) Hong Kongers to have stronger participation in the labour market, in particular from the over 55s

BN(O) Hong Kongers who are not employed or seeking work

Almost one in five (18%) BN(O) Hong Kongers describe themselves as unemployed, including 12 per cent who say they are looking for work. This is considerably higher than the current unemployment rate of 4.3%. Others who are not working include students, people taking care of the home and those who have retired. Students constitute a small group (2%) in our sample. Almost a quarter of women (23%) are looking after the home, accounting for 85% of those who are in this position. Those who are retired with a pension are only 4% overall, but 13% of those aged 55-65 and, as might be expected, 30% of the over 65s. Almost one in ten respondents are retired without a pension, but almost a third of those aged 55-64 are in this position (and more than half of the over 65s).

Our findings suggest considerable scope for BN(O) Hong Kongers to have stronger participation in the labour market, in particular from the over 55s. There is also scope for greater labour market participation from Hong Kongers who are taking care of the home, a group very largely of working age: 98% are 25-64. More than half of this group say they plan to look for work in the future, but most have not decided on a timeline for applying.



Looking for a job

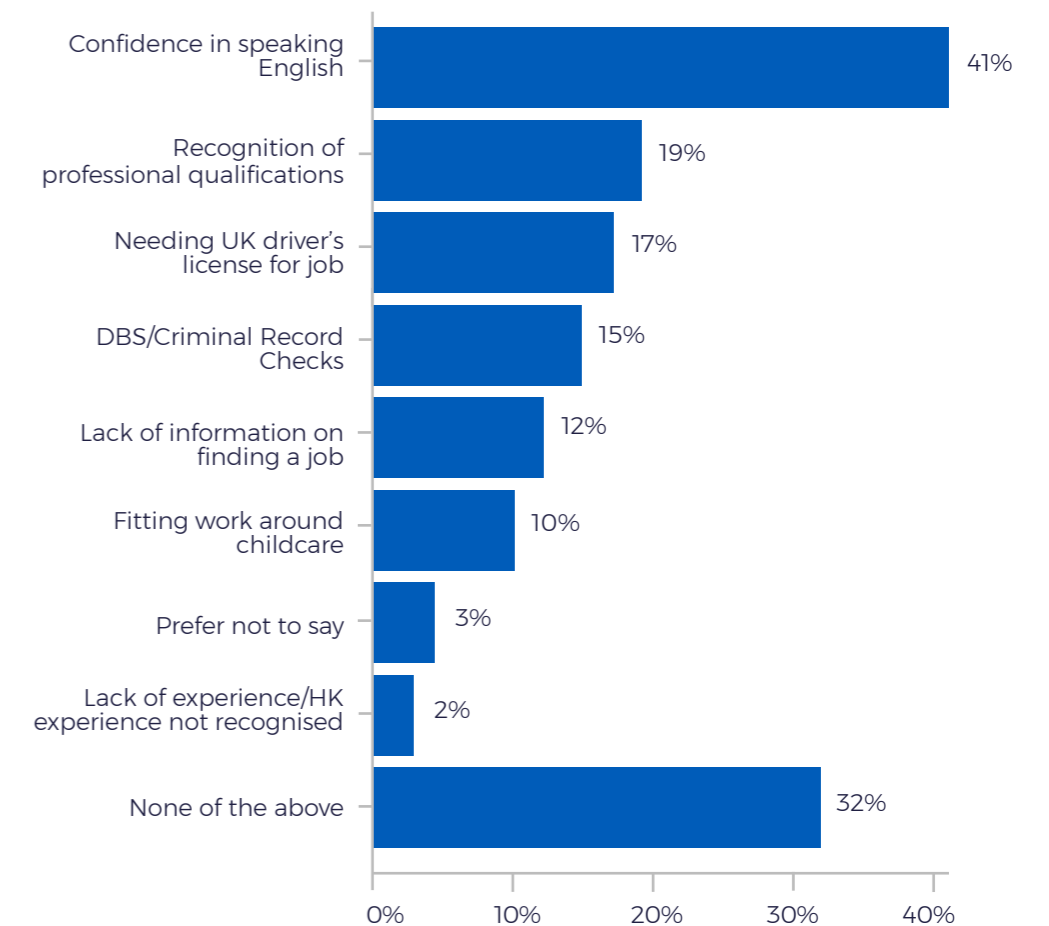
We asked people who are unemployed and looking for work – 12% of respondents – how long they had been doing so. In most cases (56%) they had been looking for less than 3 months, though small proportions had been looking for 6-12 months (7%) or more than a year (6%).

We also asked those who said they are in full-time or part-time employment how long it took them to find a job. In most cases, it had taken a relatively short time, with 29% saying it took up to a month and a third (33%) saying it took between one and three months. More than one in ten (13%) said it had taken them more than six months to find a job and a similar proportion (13%) said they had a job offer before arriving in the UK. These jobs were more likely to be located in London than elsewhere in the UK. Five percent of BN(O) Hong Kongers in employment said they are still working for an employer in Hong Kong; this is more common for men and those aged 55-64.

Almost two-thirds of respondents (62%) had found their job through a website or online listing. One in ten had found it through word of mouth, with more respondents in the North West using this method compared to those in London and the South East. One in eight (13%) had found their job through an employment or recruitment agency and, as noted earlier, 20% of working respondents said they are employed by an agency.

We asked respondents whether they had experienced any issues when looking for a job.

Figure 5.5: Issues experienced when looking for work



Confidence in speaking English was found to be a barrier for many BN(O) Hong Kongers when looking for work

As Figure 5.5 shows, confidence in speaking English was found to be a barrier for many BN(O) Hong Kongers when looking for work (41%), with recognition of qualifications a barrier for nearly one in five (19%). Other common barriers are not having a UK driver’s licence and needing a criminal record check. Related to these particular barriers, ‘other’ barriers cited by respondents included the commute required and not being able to obtain references or security clearance, an issue which has been frequently raised by BN(O) stakeholder organisations:



“Need two or more referees from previous employers when applying a job, it may be difficult for us to obtain it when we already left Hong Kong”

– Male, 45-54, Cambridgeshire



“Applying the DBS check is the most difficult as it requires a HK police record and it’s not easy to access from HK police and time consuming. Lack of flexibility on paperwork and clear instruction which frustrates most HKers as sense of not being welcome”

– Female, 25-34, West Midlands

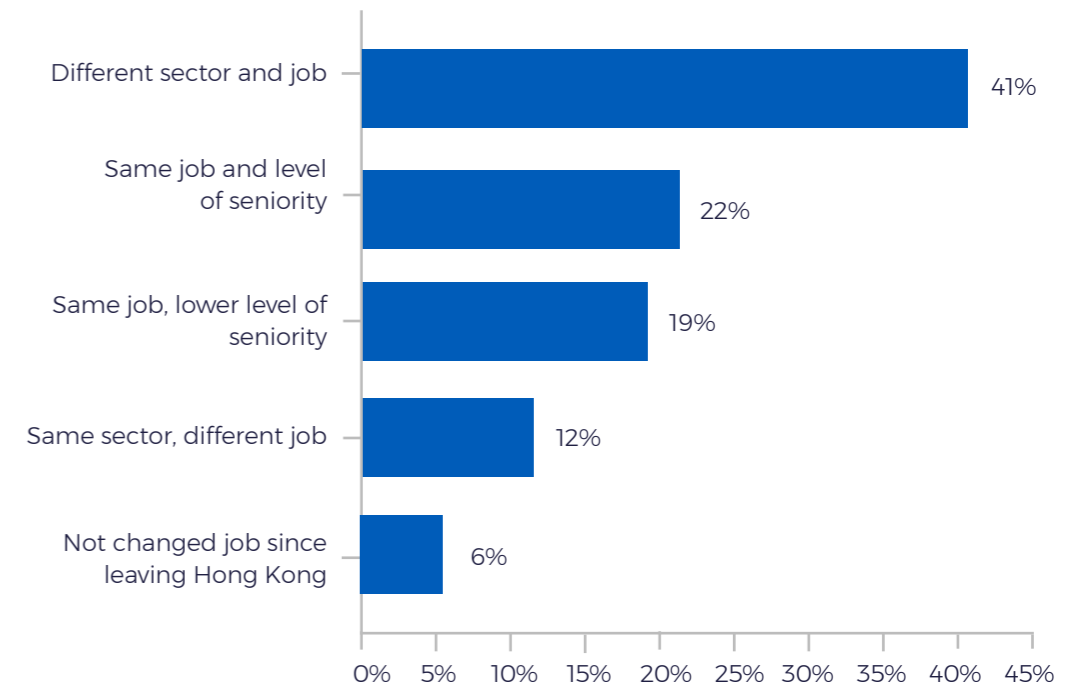
Respondents also referred to a range of other barriers, including employers not understanding the BN(O) visa, lack of suitable jobs, lack of recognition of their experience in Hong Kong, difficulties with the application process and difficulties in understanding workplace requirements and culture. As we explore in more detail later, these experiences strongly indicate a need for information, advice and guidance in finding suitable work.

Using skills and qualifications

Previous research has found that migrants to the UK find it difficult to find jobs at a level which matches their skills and experience. This suggests that the job-matching process is less efficient for migrants and that their skills are often under-utilised¹⁸. Reasons for this disparity include lack of knowledge and understanding of the labour market, as well as difficulties in transferring qualifications¹⁹.

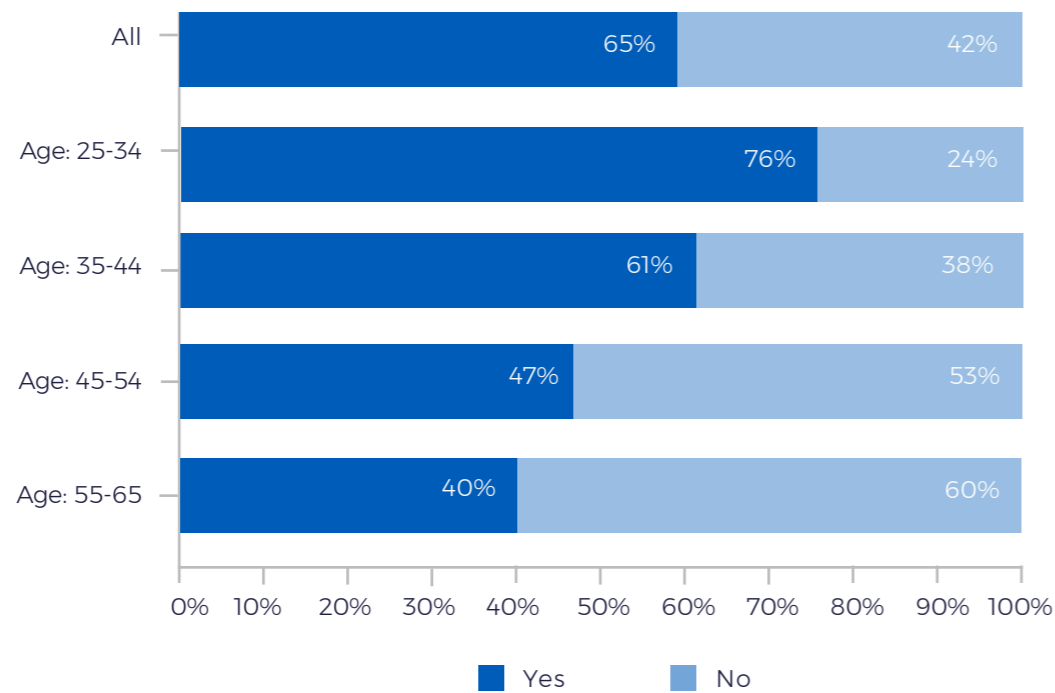
We asked respondents to compare their job with their previous occupation in Hong Kong. As Figure 5.6 shows, most were working in a different job, with four in ten employed in a different sector. Of those who were doing the same job, just under half were working at a lower level of seniority than when they were in Hong Kong. Younger people were more likely to have stayed in a similar job than when they were in Hong Kong, along with those in London and the South East. Over half of BN(O) Hong Kongers in the North West, however, are currently in a job in a different sector and role than when they lived in Hong Kong.

Figure 5.6: How do BN(O)s’ jobs compare to their previous employment in Hong Kong?



We asked respondents who said they had a professional qualification whether they use it in their current job. The majority (58%) said they did. However, as Figure 5.7 shows, this varied considerably by age, with most professionals over 45 not using their qualifications in their current job.

Figure 5.7: Proportion who use professional qualifications in current job (By age)



Respondents were asked more generally whether their current job matches their skills and experience. Less than a quarter (23%) said they had a complete match, with a further 31% saying it matches fairly well. Almost half of respondents, however, said their job doesn't match their skills and experience at all (27%), or only a little (20%).

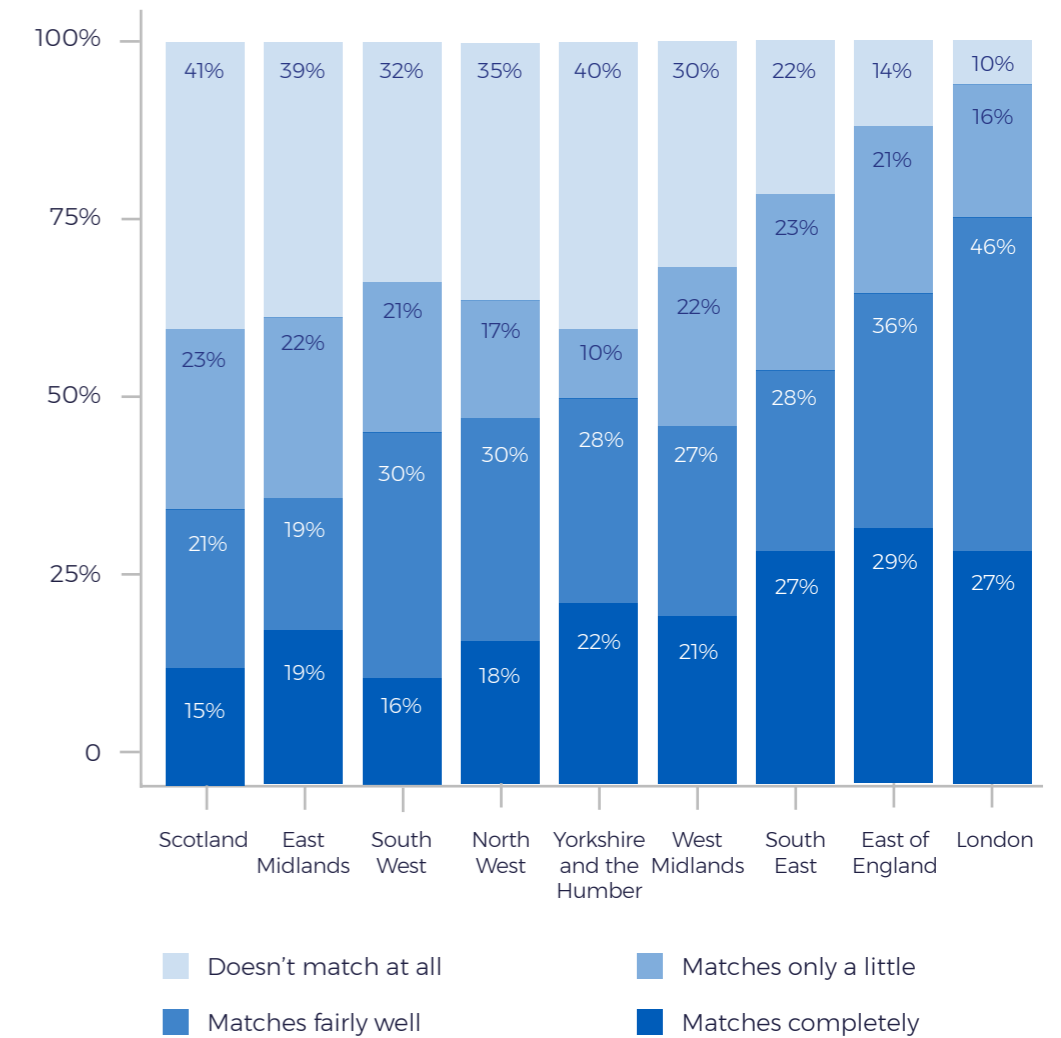
The likelihood of being in a job that doesn't match skills and experience increases by age, so that BN(O) Hong Kongers aged over 45 are more likely to say their job is not a good match than to say it is.

We also compared the jobs that respondents were doing against their level of qualification. The majority of those who said their job doesn't match their skills at all are in semi-skilled manual jobs, or in the service sector.

BN(O) Hong Kongers were also more likely to work in jobs below their level of skill in particular regions of the UK. BN(O)s in London, the South East and East of England are more likely to have found a good job match; those in Scotland, the East Midlands, the North West and the South West are much less likely to have achieved this.

Almost half of respondents said their job doesn't match their skills and experience at all, or does so only a little.

Figure 5.8: Extent to which job matches skills and qualifications (By region and nation)

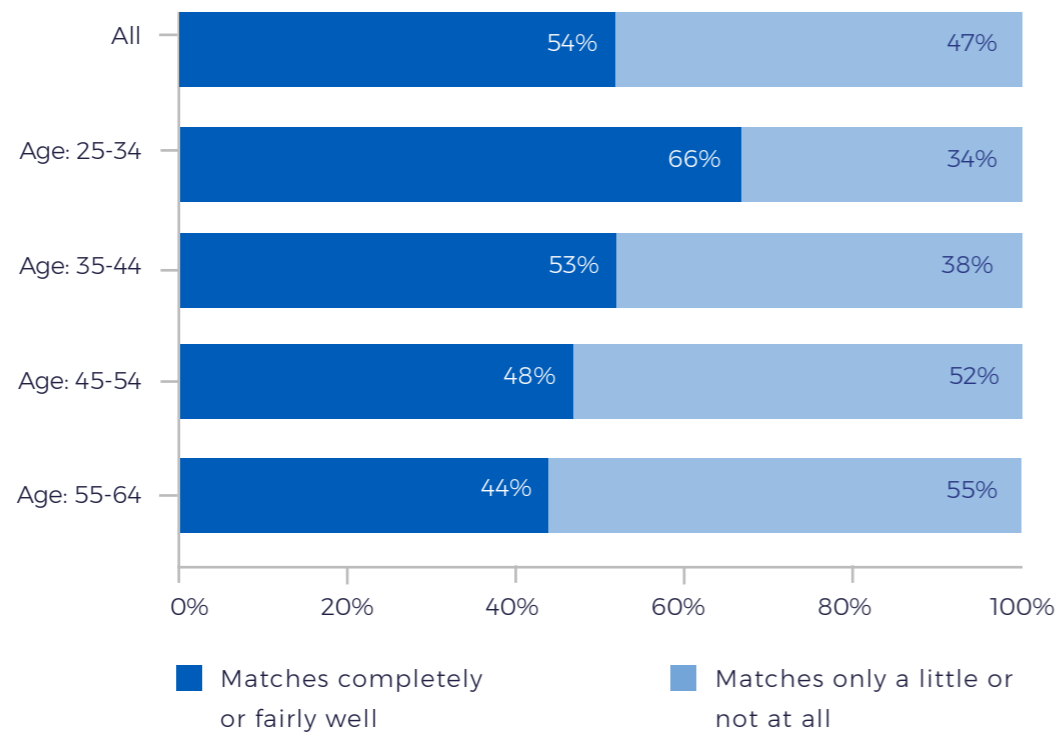


Regions with fewer than 20 employed respondents excluded



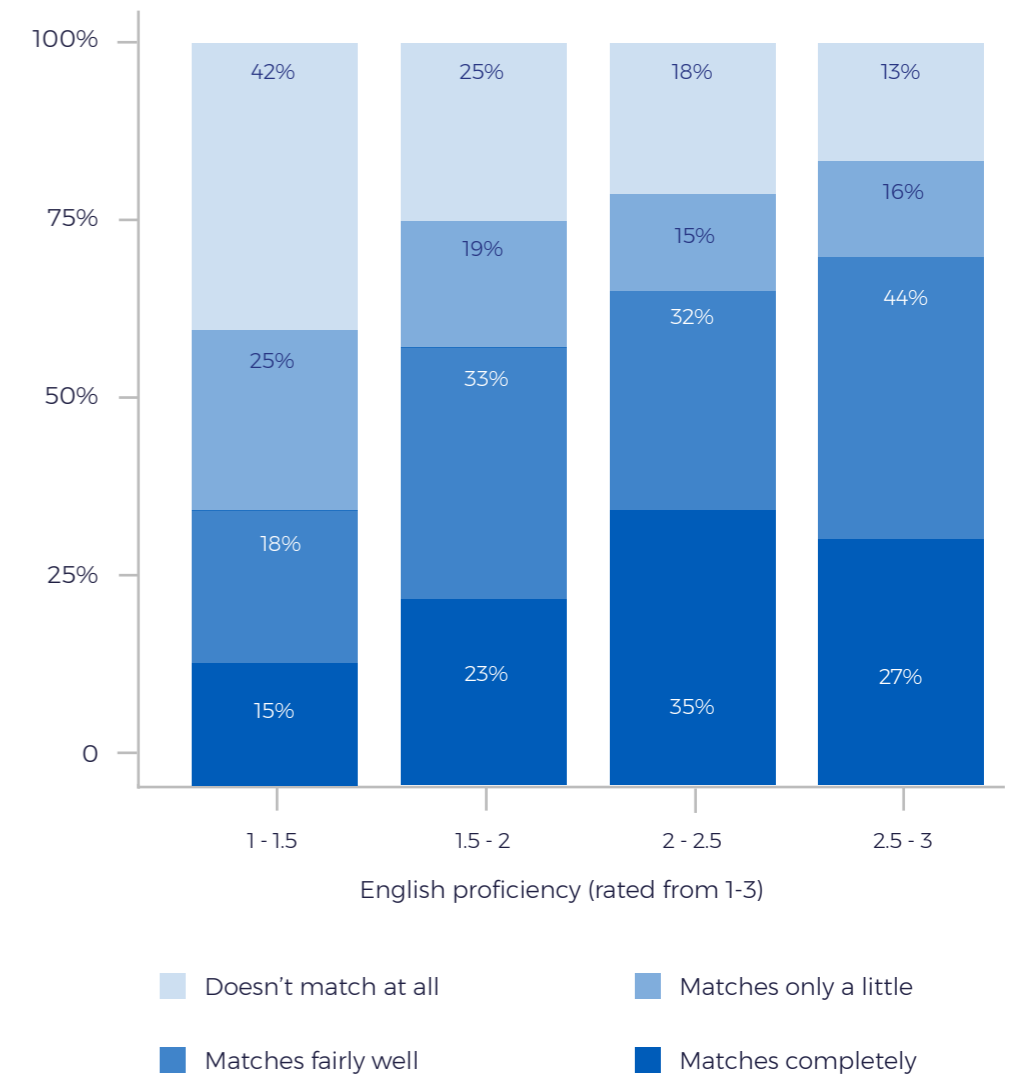
Younger BN(O) Hong Kongers were also more likely to be working in a job that matches their skills and experience, compared to older respondents to our survey.

Figure 5.9: Extent to which BN(O)s feel their job matches their skills and experience (By age)



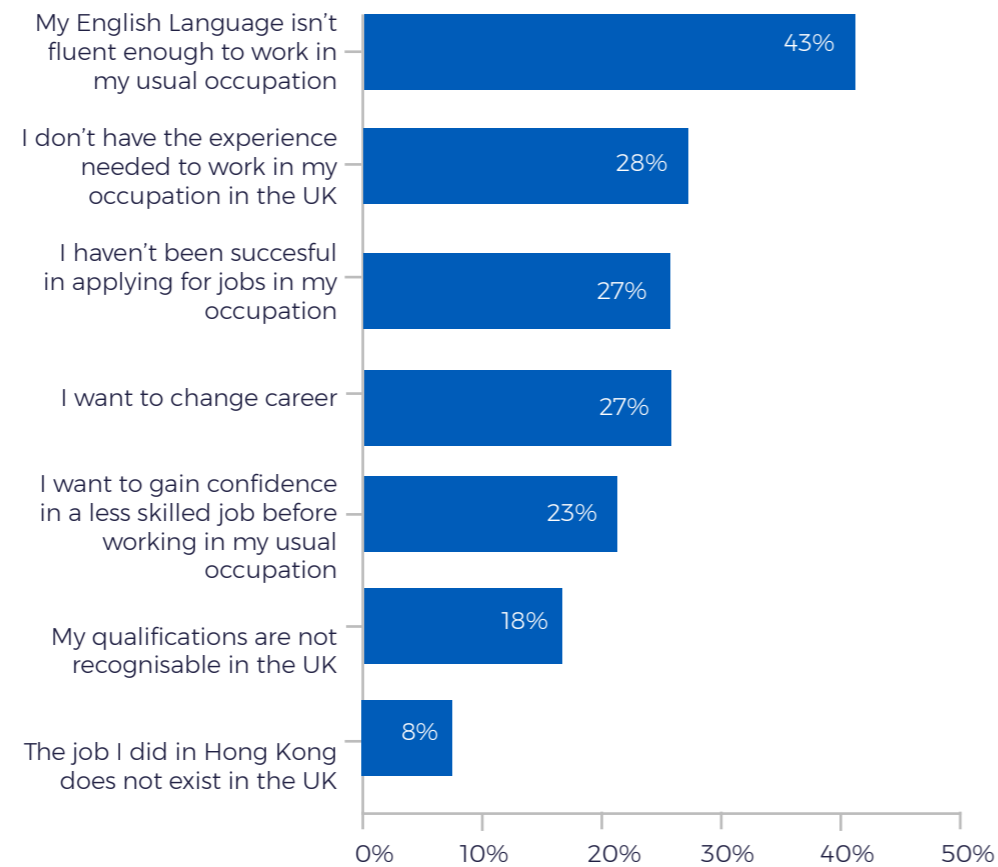
It is also apparent that non-graduates are less likely than graduates to be in jobs that match their skills: 42% said their job doesn't match their skills at all, compared to 20% of graduates. Weaker English language also impacts on the ability to find a job at the right level of skill. As Figure 5.10 shows, two-thirds of those with the lowest levels of English proficiency (calculated by averaging people's ratings of their Speaking, Reading and Writing skills) said their job matches their skills only a little, or not at all.

Figure 5.10: English proficiency and the extent to which BN(O)s' jobs match their skill levels



Confirming this, self-rated lack of fluency in English was the most common reason for under-utilisation of skills, followed by a lack of work experience in the UK. Not being successful in applications and wanting to change career were also common reasons. Some respondents said they wanted to gain confidence in a lower-skilled job before working in their usual occupation, while for some their qualifications were not recognised or the job did not exist in the UK. Other reasons included wanting a job near to home or not being able to travel to a job. Non-graduates are much more likely to say their English isn't yet fluent enough to work in their usual occupation (33% vs 60%).

Figure 5.11: Reasons for taking a job that doesn't match skills and experience



Many contributions to the open response question about experiences of working and looking for work refer to having to take a lower skilled job. Non-recognition of qualifications and lack of experience in the UK were common themes of respondents' comments:



"Everything is difficult at the beginning, Hong Kong working experience is not very useful, we suggest you to find an agent to do non-skilled job (easy to start), then you can switch to the job type you want to do will be much easier, besides, knowing how to drive a car will be much easier to find a job."

- Female, 35-44, Greater Manchester



"I used to work in Hong Kong, but my education is not high enough, I don't have relevant working experience, I can only work as a warehouse, it's ok for the time being, I hope I can learn English well enough to communicate with others, then my life will be stable again."

- Male, 45-54, Nottinghamshire



"Overall it's not difficult for Hong Kongers to have a job, but our qualifications and experiences are not that recognised in the UK. Like many new immigrants, most of my friends work here with jobs of much lower seniority. Some manage to start their own business, or are hired by Hong Kong companies to work in the UK. Many do labour work that they have never done in Hong Kong. I am not blaming anyone as we know and have expected it before moving here. It's our choice. I believe many of us are still looking for a better job or chances to contribute more."

- Female, 35-44, Lancashire

A number of respondents mentioned confidence, in English but also more generally, in their open answers:



"It was intimidating for a new immigrant for sure. I think HKers should be encouraged to look for jobs on their own expertise. I see a lot of fellow HKers giving up hopes of ever advancing their career and settling for low pay jobs because they felt unconfident about their English and socialising. They need to feel more confident in their own abilities."

- Female, 25-34, Greater Manchester

Respondents aged over 55 were more likely to say their English language isn't sufficiently fluent and also that their qualifications are not recognised in the UK. They were less likely to say they don't have the experience to work in their occupation in the UK.



"I do have a good experience on my recent job. The top management and most of the colleagues are friendly and helpful. It is just so different from my job in Hong Kong. I have to work in a different field and flexible hours. This totally changes daily life and health. And I am unable to contribute my education professional knowledge and experience here. UK employers seems hesitate to recognise HK experience."

- Female, 35-44, Kent

Open responses to questions about skills utilisation also show variations in experience according to sector and occupation. As respondents in education and in health explained:



"I was a history teacher in Hong Kong but the history curriculum is quite different from that in the UK. So, it's not easy to get the same job. My first interview as a history teacher failed. Then, I had an interview of pastoral care assistant at a high school near my home, but I believe my English is not fluent enough to counsel students. So they asked me if I want to be a teaching assistant. I am grateful that I am able to have a full time job within a month."

- Female, 35-44, Lancashire



"I am very lucky that I got my first job by sending one application. I got a job of same seniority despite the fact that I get only 1/3 pay of my previous job. Getting a job in the NHS is not difficult as a lot of local healthcare professionals are leaving. Some of my local colleagues are also planning to relocate to Australia because of the low pay here."

- Male, 25-34, Bristol

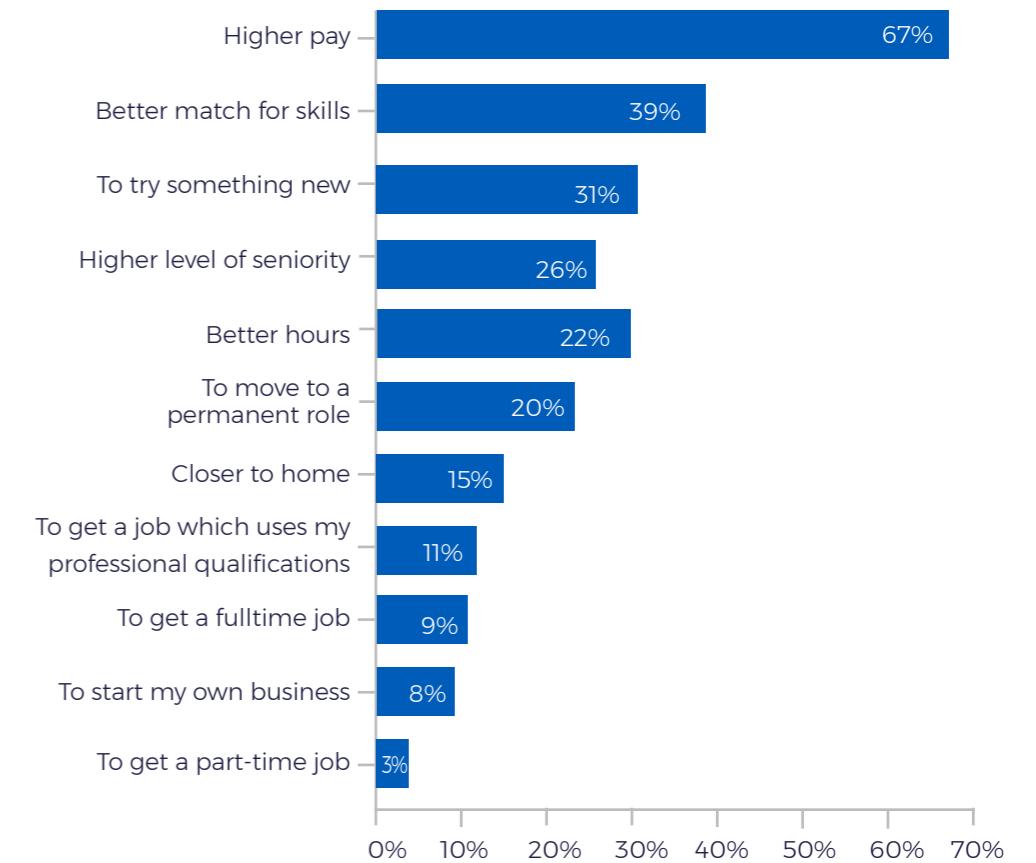
Looking to change jobs

More than a quarter (28%) of those who are in work said they are looking for another job; the same proportion said they were not, while 44% said they might. The over 55s were less likely than younger people to be interested in finding a new job.

For more than two-thirds of respondents (67%), higher pay was the main motivation behind looking for another job. Other common reasons are to get a better match for skills (39%), for more seniority (26%) and to move to a permanent role (20%). However, 'to try something new' was a motivation for almost a third (31%) of respondents. Some respondents (8%) are interested in starting their own business.

Respondents in the North West are more likely than those in London to be looking to move to a job with better hours and with a permanent contract.

Figure 5.12: Reasons for considering moving to a new job



There were also some gender differences in reasons for considering finding a new job: women were more likely than men to want a job with a better match for their skills and were also more likely to want a job with better hours. Respondents had a range of other motivations for moving jobs:

“

“A lack of interview opportunities. I want to change and start a new career but they do not accept me even though the apprenticeship program. I am not eligible in some government aid training courses because of less than 3 years residence.”

– Male, 45-54, Staffordshire

“

“Working remotely from Home for a Hong Kong employer makes me feel lonely and detached from the UK community. I am helping my company to develop its market in the UK. However, owing to highly regulated control for health supplements and product import I don't know if my company will go on or divest. If they decide not to continue, I must find a job here.”

– Male, 45-54, West Midlands

“

“Have to perform labour work and moving of heavy goods, my body cannot stand.”

– Female, 45-54, Nottinghamshire

“

“I would like to do some creative work, but my English is bad, so I would improve my English first.”

– Female, 45-54, East Riding of Yorkshire

Those who wanted to start their own business were interested in a range of sectors. Popular options include food and drink, retail and IT.

The need for careers information, advice and guidance

Our findings, both on BN(O) Hong Kongers' intentions to move jobs and on under-utilisation of their skills, indicate a need for information, advice and guidance on job opportunities and career paths. This would seem to be particularly needed by older BN(O)s who are most at risk of not being able to use their skills and experience in the UK.

We asked respondents who are not in work whether they had been given any information, advice and guidance on employment or training. More than three-quarters (76%) said they had not, though respondents aged 25-34 were slightly more likely to have received this kind of support. Most of those who had received such help (56%) generally found it useful or very useful, with very few (6%) saying it was not useful.

We asked all respondents – excluding those who were retired or unemployed and not seeking work – whether they would like information, advice and guidance on employment. Two-thirds of respondents said they would like this help.

We also asked what kind of help they wanted. As Figure 5.13 shows, almost two-thirds said they would like to know more about career options and almost half were interested in education and training. There is interest, too, in knowing about workplace rights. Transferring qualifications and starting a business are also areas on which BN(O) Hong Kongers would like advice.

We asked respondents who are not in work whether they had been given any information, advice and guidance on employment or training. More than three-quarters (76%) said they had not



Figure 5.13: Kinds of information, advice and guidance that BN(O)s want



Respondents in the North West are more likely than those elsewhere in the UK to be interested in learning about education and training, and how to transfer their Hong Kong qualifications. This reflects the higher rates of underutilisation of skills among BN(O) Hong Kongers in this region.

We also asked respondents with jobs whether they had experienced any problems while at work, choosing from a list of options. As Figure 5.14 shows, the most common of these are problems with pay (24%) and feeling overworked (20%). Problems were encountered fairly similarly across age groups. Discrimination was not reported by many. However, women were slightly more likely to say they have experienced discrimination from customers or from colleagues. Open-ended responses also suggested that some may have problems with speaking and understanding English at work:



“It has been pretty good. My colleagues are nice, and the work-life balance is much better compared to Hong Kong. However, I struggle with speaking fluent English and don’t have many small talk topics, which makes it difficult for me to join in conversations with them.”

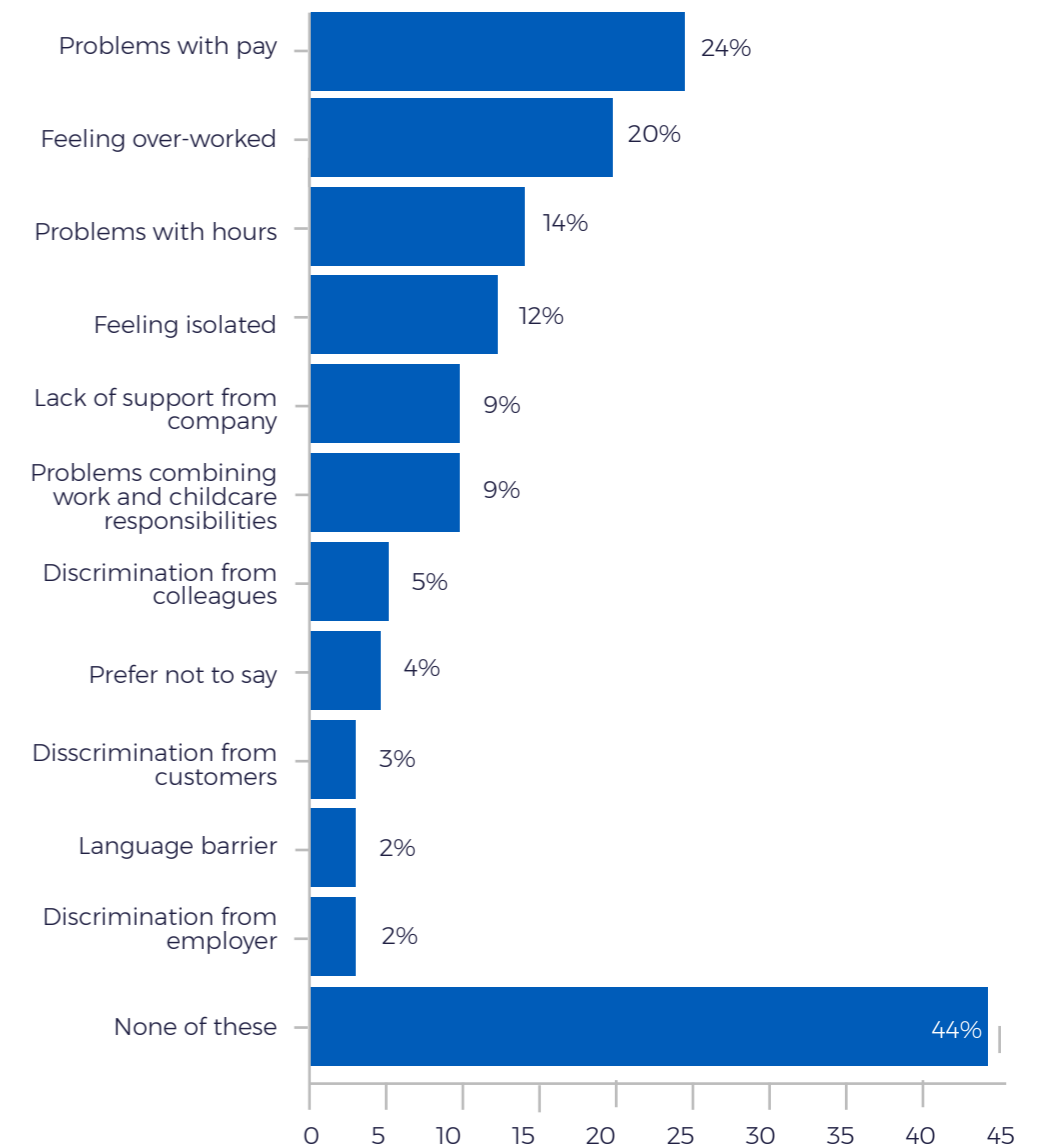
– Male, 55-64, Berkshire



“I have seen some of my colleagues joking about my English because it is normal for Asians to speak English with an accent and English is not my mother tongue. The first few times were ok, then I found them annoying and I don’t want to talk to them anymore, they don’t even have the basic respect.”

– Female, 35-44, Devon

Figure 5.14: Problems experienced at work



Reflections on working life in the UK

In responding to open questions about working life, some BN(O) Hong Kongers took the opportunity to reflect on differences between working in Hong Kong and the UK, including differences in work-life balance compared to their experiences in Hong Kong:

“

“I am so happy to work in the UK! Everyone is like a family. Although I am not yet fluent in English, my colleagues are very understanding. They don't ask for overtime, and they even change working hours due to family problems! I am very happy to join this company.”

– Female, 45-54, Greater Manchester

“

“I am very lucky and happy to go back to work, no one is bullying, it is true that it takes time to get used to the English language, but the local people are very accommodating and don't mind to teach you at all! The labour is less than Hong Kong, but the working hours are also much less, so I can really achieve work life balance!”

– Female, 35-44, Nottinghamshire

“

“The office working culture is a bit different from Hong Kong. People here do respect your personal time, they normally do not contact you after working hours even so they will apologise. I feel it is more work life balance than in Hong Kong.”

– Male, 25-34, London

Experiences of working in the UK are therefore mixed. Many feel welcome and that there is a better work-life balance than in their previous jobs in Hong Kong. At the same time, a third of BN(O) Hong Kongers feel overworked and many would like more information on their rights at work. Many also experience communication difficulties and do not feel fully included.



6. Belonging and feeling welcome

Key Findings



- BN(O) Hong Kongers are keen to become part of their local communities. In choosing where to live, many said they did not have a preference for living near other Hong Kongers, though this is more important for older people.
- A very large majority have made contact with other Hong Kongers where they live (85%). Even more have made contact with non-Hong Kongers (90%). Neighbours are the most common form of social contact of with non-Hong Kongers, along with schools, churches, sports, hobbies and work. Parents of school age children were especially likely to have contact with non-Hong Kongers.
- The friendliness of local people, including neighbours, is a strong theme in open responses to questions about location decisions. Some say they value the ethnic diversity of their area and that it makes them feel more confident.
- Despite relatively high levels of social contact, some BN(O) Hong Kongers are also experiencing social isolation. Some respondents said they would like to meet more people, including other Hong Kongers, and to have better access to support services.
- Two-thirds of working BN(O)s feel welcome or very welcome at work; and very few feel unwelcome. However, one in eight (12%) working BN(O)s feel isolated at work and a small proportion have experienced discrimination from colleagues.

BN(O) Hong Kongers are here to stay. The vast majority intend to become British and live the rest of their lives here.

BN(O) Hong Kongers are here to stay. The vast majority intend to become British and live the rest of their lives here. In recognition of the barriers that BN(O) Hong Kongers might face in settling into their new lives, the UK Government created the Hong Kong (BNO) Welcome Programme. In place since the first arrivals set foot in the UK in 2021, the programme has funded the UK's 12 Strategic Migration Partnerships and more than 50 national and local projects. This support has meant organisations across the country have been able to help BN(O) Hong Kongers navigate the changes in their lives as new migrants.

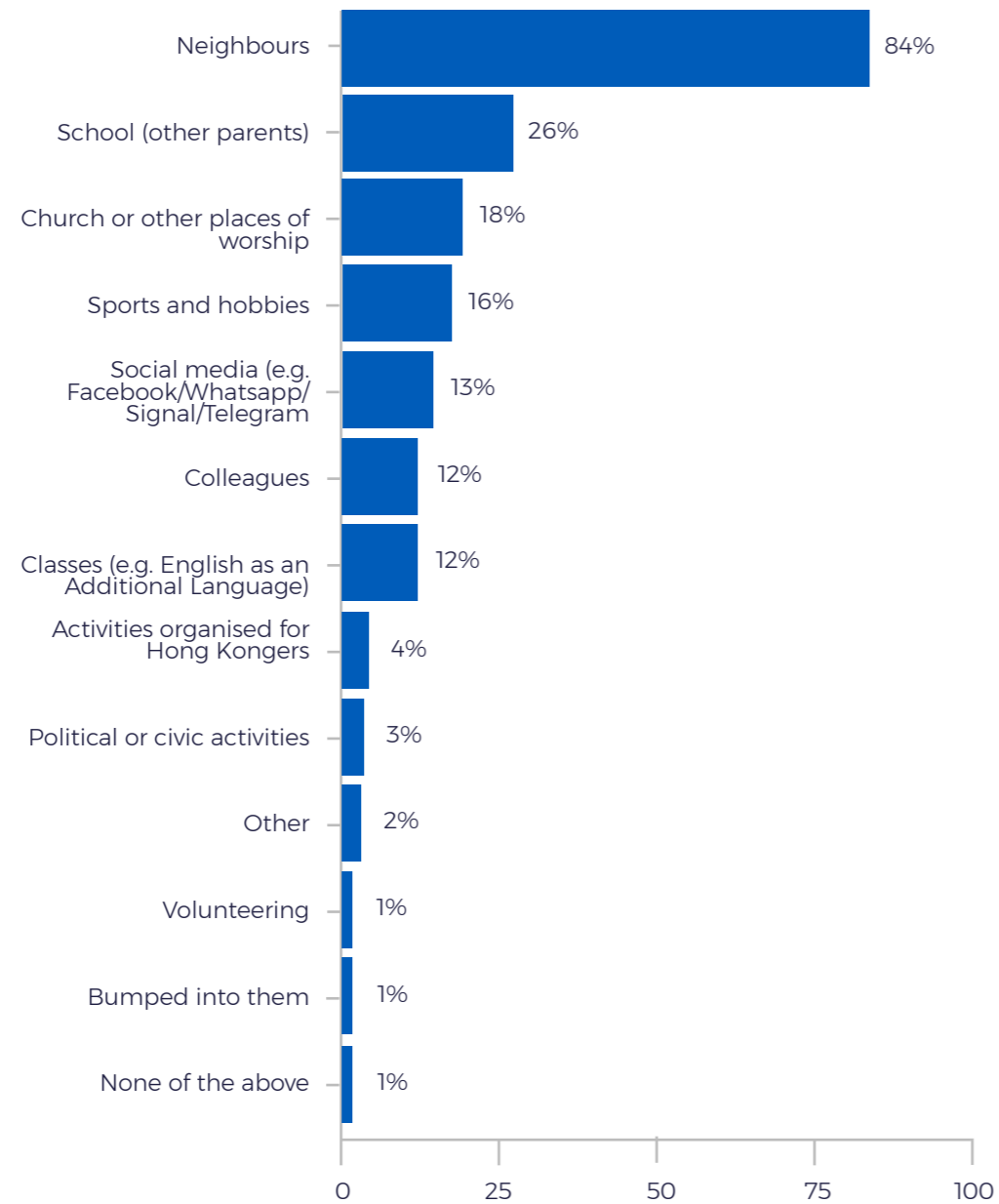
Services provided through the Welcome Programme play an important role in enabling BN(O) Hong Kongers to overcome barriers to settlement and integration. However, settling in and feeling part of local and national life is affected by day to day experiences. This includes social contact with local people including neighbours, colleagues and others in daily life.

Our findings show that BN(O) Hong Kongers are keen to become part of their local communities. In choosing where to live, many said they did not have a preference for living near other Hong Kongers. However, we also found that this is more important for older people, which is likely to be explained by the isolation resulting from weaker language skills and fewer opportunities to meet people through work and mixing with other parents.

Social Contact

Respondents were also asked whether they have made contact with people where they live who are not Hong Kongers. A very large majority, some 90%, said they had. People aged over 65 and those aged 25-34 were a little less likely to say they had. Parents were especially likely to have contact with non-Hong Kongers. As Figure 6.1 shows, the most common type of social contact is with neighbours (84%). School and meeting other parents was a source of contact for 26%, along with churches (18%), sports and hobbies (16%) and social media (13%). Other forms of contact included work, volunteering, shopping, parks and libraries. Men were more likely than women to have social contact with non-Hong Kongers through sports, hobbies and social media.

Figure 6.1: Forms of social contact with non-Hong Kongers



Hong Kongers have clearly made efforts to meet people locally, including in their neighbourhoods.



As we explained in Chapter 3, a large majority of BN(O)s (85%) say they like their area, including 29% who say they like it a lot. BN(O) Hong Kongers have clearly made efforts to meet people locally, including in their neighbourhoods. The friendliness of local people, including neighbours, is a strong theme in open response questions about location decisions:

“Good neighbourhood and people are welcoming me and caring. They really give me a lot with moral support and teach me a about the local culture and local news. They invite me to the local parties and to visit each other houses. Some of people here were also immigrants themselves and they tell me their stories and share the experience how to cope with some difficult past. We discuss news and gossip with each other. Sometimes, I do not show up in the park. They call me and to see if I am okay. I am glad to be a member of the local community which is always supportive and caring.”

- Female, 55-64, London



“The main reason is that a friend of mine lives here. My friend said this area has good catchment, good environment, and low crime rate. My friend had a good experience during the two months of living there. My friend said that the neighbours are very nice, they will help you to push the garbage cans and give you a ride; very courteous driving attitude; and a lot of people smile when they make eye contact with you.”

- Female, 45-54, Cheshire



“British neighbours are very kind to assist Hongkongers. They are willing to know the situation about Hong Kong.”

- Female, 55-64, Somerset



“I enjoy the quiet and safe neighbourhood. It takes me a 30-minute walk to go to city centre when I wish to go shopping and meeting friends. The local people (strangers) I meet in supermarkets and shops are usually friendly, sometimes we have casual conversations.”

- Female, 35-44, Cardiff



“People both local and Hong Kongers are patient to listen and chat with others, no hurry and with smiles. We learn to integrate into the society and adjust the cultural difference. To be a volunteer, join some community activities and understand the social systems.”

- Female, 55-64, Hampshire

BN(O) Hong Kongers also value contact with others from their homeland and we asked respondents whether they have made contact with other Hong Kongers where they live: a large majority (85%) said they had. This was slightly lower among the under-35s than in older age groups and among those without children. Contact with other Hong Kongers was lower in London, where more Hong Kongers are younger and do not have children.

The most common ways of being in touch with other Hong Kongers are as neighbours, through social media, other parents (via school), at places of worship or through activities organised for Hong Kongers. Work is also a way in which respondents meet other Hong Kongers, as well as in cafes, supermarkets or through relatives and friends who are living in the UK. It is clear from these responses that BN(O) Hong Kongers have quickly established social networks in the UK.

BN(O) Hong Kongers have quickly established social networks in the UK

Some respondents said they liked living in an ethnically diverse area and that they found it reassuring:



“I have no preference of staying close with East Asians. But then I'd like to highlight my sense of security in having many Indian neighbours. Knowing they're key part of the community prior to my immigration gave me confidence of how open and welcoming the neighbourhood is. Upon settling in, their care and sincerity have definitely helped my family through the winter blues.”

- Female, 35-44, West Lothian



“Warm climate, diverse population, low crime rate and good public transport. There are more job opportunities in a more diverse society.”

- Female, 35-44, Hampshire

However, some BN(O)s are also experiencing social isolation. Some respondents said they would like to meet more people, including other Hong Kongers, and to have better access to support services:



“This area is scattered, you have to drive in and out of it, and there is not much public transportation, which is very inconvenient for the elderly people who don't know how to drive. Although there are a lot of Hong Kong people in this area, there are so few joint activities, I hope there can be an organisation to contact us, to stir up activities, to get to know each other.”

- Female, 45-54, Buckinghamshire



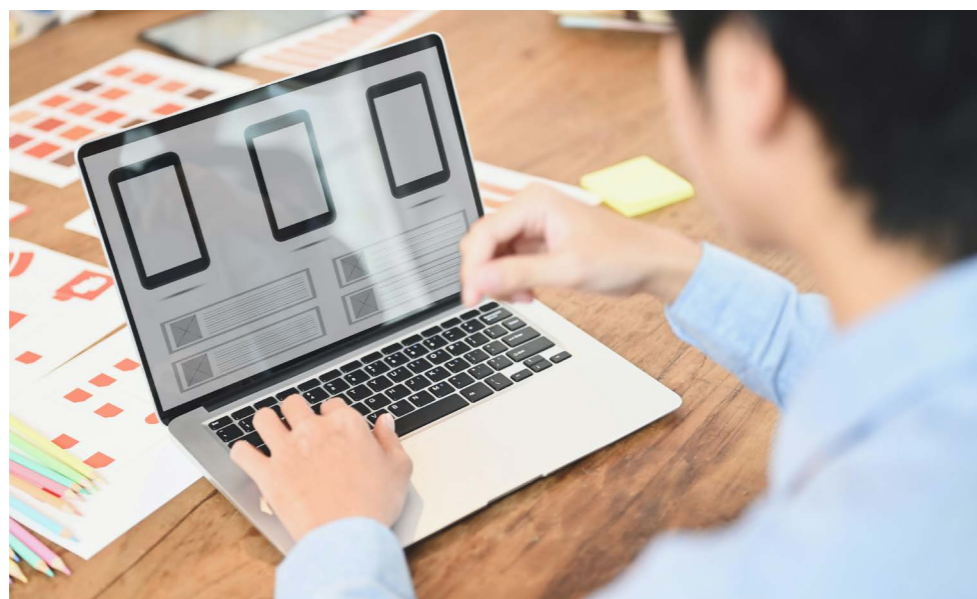
“Edinburgh and area around there is safe with enough job opportunity. People seem more nice than England and more welcoming for foreigner....However, not so many Hong Kongers (Compare with London and Manchester) and seems not so many activities to re-union all of us. Would love to see more activities for Hong Kongers in Edinburgh/ Scotland.”

– Male, 35-44, Midlothian

Experiences in the workplace

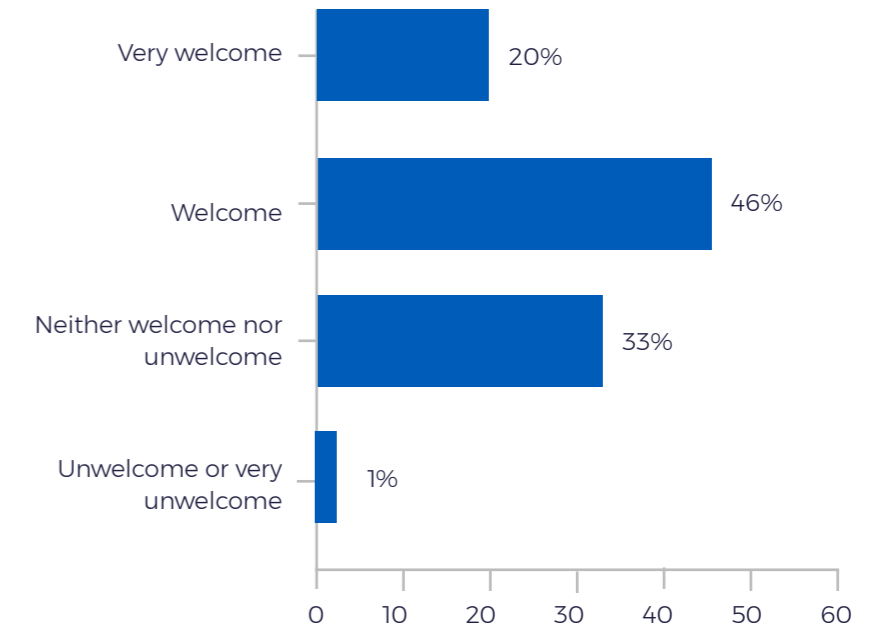
We asked respondents about their experiences of the workplace, including whether they have felt welcome at work. As Figure 6.2 shows, two-thirds of working BN(O)s feel welcome or very welcome at work., while very few respondents said they feel unwelcome or very unwelcome.

However, as we discussed in Chapter 5, some respondents had negative experiences at work: One in eight (12%) working BN(O)s feel isolated at work and one in twenty (5%) have experienced discrimination from colleagues. Problems were encountered fairly similarly across age groups. However, women were more likely to say they have experienced discrimination from customers or from colleagues.



Some respondents had negative experiences at work: One in eight working BN(O)s feel isolated at work and one in twenty have experienced discrimination

Figure 6.2: Feeling welcome or unwelcome at work



“Colleagues are very kind, willing to help in any difficulties/problems. They willing to help/teach in daily speaking English and written English. Always support in both inside and outside work. They are appreciating for the works performance and giving opportunity to growth in the careers! The only problem is underpay.”

– Female, 25-34, Hertfordshire



“My colleagues are fairly welcoming. They are also very kind to each other like celebrating each other’s birthdays and even celebrating when I get a pass on my driving test.”

– Female, 35-44, Merseyside



“The first time I felt ‘yes, I feel like I belong here’ was when I went to the company Christmas party with my colleagues to drink and dance, I felt very much taken care of during the process, I didn’t know anything (I didn’t even listen to the songs) and finally I was able to enjoy the party and felt a sense of belonging.”

– Male, 35-44, Greater Manchester



“I feel very welcomed and accepted because my colleagues are very diverse.”

– Female, 25-34, London

Some respondents also described feeling isolated and excluded at work, rather than experiencing overt discrimination:



“Workload is quite heavy, not as expected work-life balance. Need to use time to get use to different accents or acronym. Sometimes, I feel like isolated, colleagues tried to be inclusive, however, I don’t feel related to the topics or I have no ideas what they were talking about. (e.g. TV shows, places). Even if you want to be involved, you can only laugh or nod.”

– Female, 25-34, London



“Not familiar with UK social chatting, not in same interest like football sports, golf, car racing. Feel like being isolated in the office sometimes because have no common chatting topic.”

– Male, 25-34, Lancashire



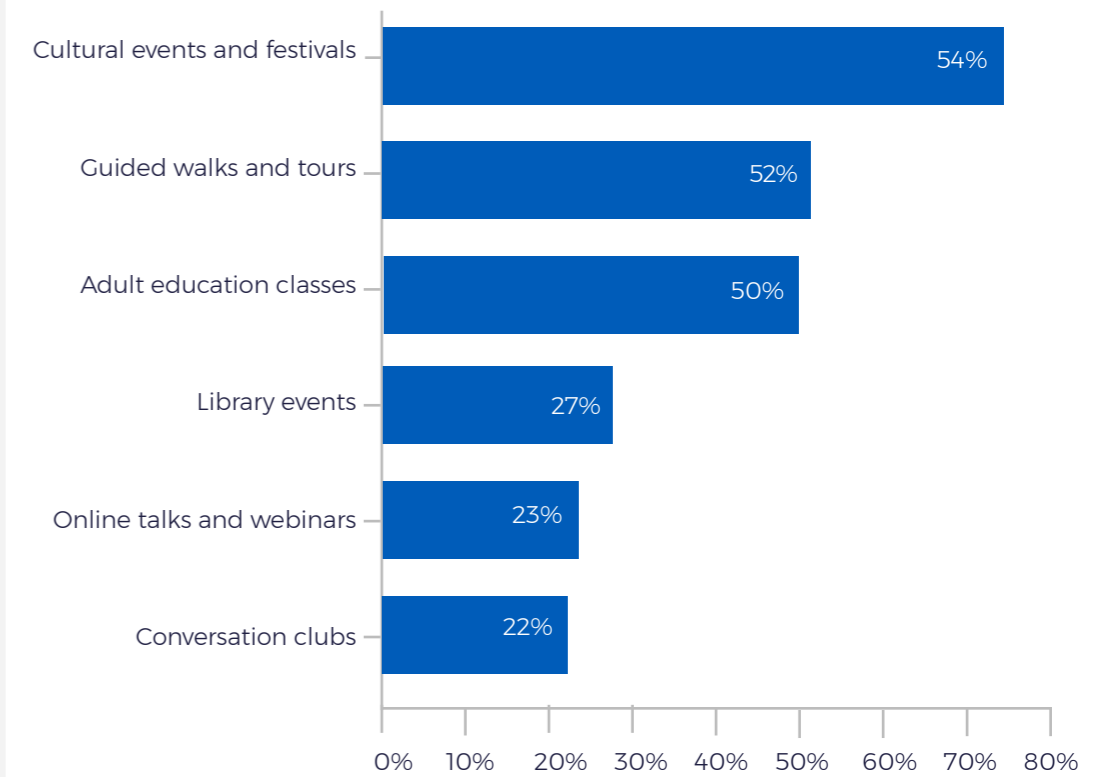
“I work in [a city hospital]. The cultural diversity in therapist is quite low. Most of them are local people and I feel I am isolated because there isn’t cultural diversity. They even don’t know where Hong Kong is. Although we don’t have any discrimination, I still feel I can’t blend in because they already have a strong bonding.”

– Male, 25-34, Bristol

Interest in social and cultural activities

We asked what kinds of social and cultural activities BN(O) Hong Kongers would like to take part in. As Figure 6.3 shows, the most popular are cultural events and festivals, with three-quarters of BN(O) Hong Kongers saying they are interested in these. A majority (52%) are also interested in guided walks and tours and in adult education classes (50%). Online talks and webinars and conversation clubs are also of interest to more than 1 in 5 BN(O)s.

Figure 6.3: Interest in social and cultural activities



In the open response survey questions, respondents mentioned a wide range of other social and cultural activities they would like to take part in. These included sports such as badminton, running and football; board games and cooking classes; hiking, singing, camping and crafts. Responses to these questions show enthusiasm among BN(O) Hong Kongers for settling and integrating into British life as well as for continuing their interests from Hong Kong.

7. Arriving during a cost of living crisis

Key Findings



- Most BN(O) Hong Kongers are not struggling financially. Asked to rate their financial wellbeing on a 1-10 scale, 75% of respondents gave a score of between 6 and 10. However, one in ten gave a score below 5, rising to one in five of those aged 25-34, indicating low financial wellbeing among some BN(O)s.
- More than four in ten said their financial health and wellbeing had worsened since arriving in the UK, with one in ten saying it had worsened greatly. Respondents aged 25-44 were most likely to say their situation had become worse.
- Eight in ten said the cost of living had affected them personally, with younger people aged between 24 and 44 most likely to say it had.
- The principal factor impacting on financial wellbeing is general high costs of living, a worry for more than half of respondents (53%). More than 1 in 5 are living beyond their means, and almost 1 in 10 have no savings to draw on.
- Difficulty accessing the Hong Kong pension is a source of financial stress for more than one in four BN(O) Hong Kongers. People of working age are more worried by lack of access to their Hong Kong pension than actual retirees.
- Fewer than one in six (15%) have had contact with organisations that help BN(O)s to settle and integrate into the UK, with those in middle age groups more likely than younger or older people to have done so.

We have described how BN(O) Hong Kongers have carefully planned their move to the UK, renting or buying properties according to their financial resources and longer term plans for their new lives. BN(O) Hong Kongers started to arrive in the UK just as the country was emerging from the Covid-19 pandemic, and as it then entered economic recession. Interest rates and inflation rose, affecting everyday costs; property prices dropped but costs of renting increased. While there are few winners and many losers in such circumstances, new migrants whose plans are often determined by their budgets are likely to be among the most affected.

Like most visas for living and working in the UK, conditions for BN(O)s include 'no recourse to public funds' (NRPF). This means BN(O) Hong Kongers are not able to claim in-work or out-of-work benefits, or housing benefit. Families are, however, eligible for Free School Meals if they meet the criteria. However, due to concern that some BN(O)s might be facing destitution, Home Office rules on NRPF were changed for BN(O) Hong Kongers in April 2021. These changes mean that BN(O)s can apply to have their NRPF condition lifted if they are at risk of imminent destitution, if there is a risk to the welfare of a child or if the applicant is experiencing 'exceptional financial circumstances'²⁰.

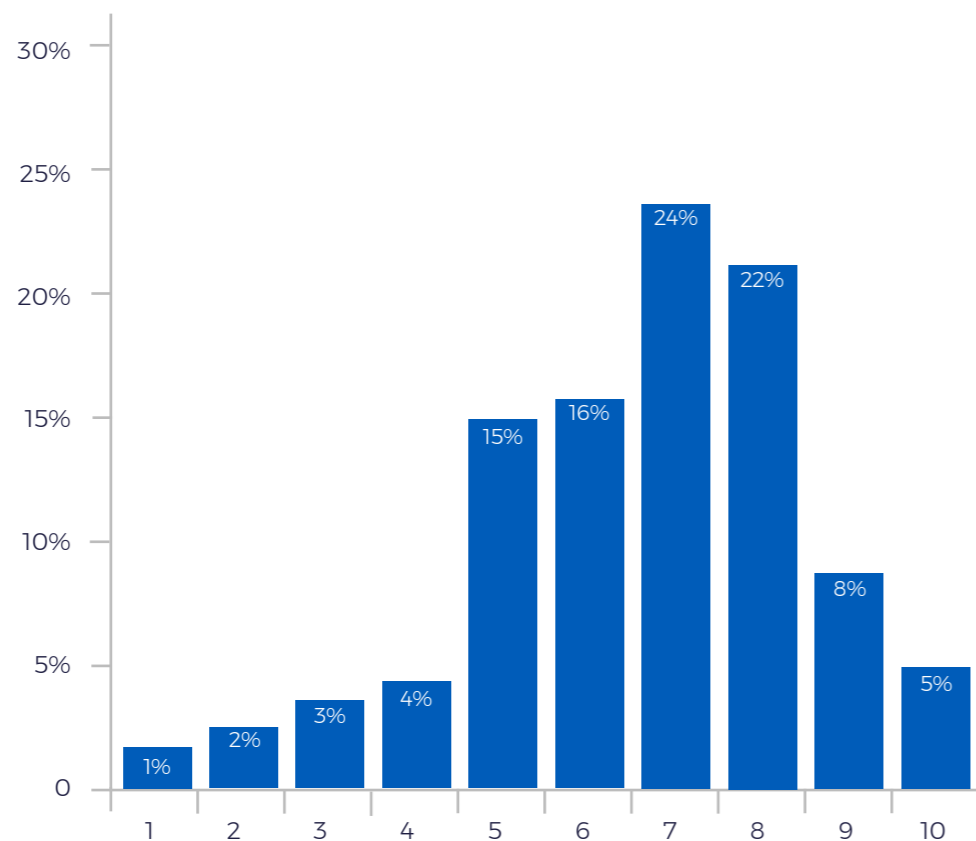
The implications of rising living costs for BN(O) Hong Kongers have been discussed by a number of stakeholder organisations in interviews and forums organised by the Welcoming Committee since 2022. Many stakeholders report that BN(O) Hong Kongers have been shocked by the cost of housing, especially in London. According to figures from Rightmove, reported in the national press, rental prices in Greater London rose 16% in the 12 months up to October 2022, during which period the majority of BN(O) Hong Kongers relocated to the UK²¹. Our stakeholder research has also found many BN(O) Hong Kongers in the rental market struggle due to a lack of credit history, with landlords requiring up to 12 months' rent in advance.

Many stakeholders report that Hong Kongers have been shocked by the cost of housing, especially in London

Stakeholders interviewed at different stages of our project also cited relatively low salaries and the cost of energy as potential shocks to BN(O) Hong Kongers. The cost of gas and electricity has rapidly increased over the past year due to supply shocks and increased demand associated with the end of the pandemic, with the energy price cap set by the government rising 12% in October 2021 and then rising a further 54% in April 2022²². Stakeholders report that gas and electricity prices are considerably lower in Hong Kong than in the UK, which might exacerbate the difficulties faced by BN(O) Hong Kongers in budgeting for their new lives in the UK. Similarly, stakeholders have reported that some BN(O)s express surprise and discontent with the relatively lower salaries and higher levels of personal income tax in the UK compared with Hong Kong.

We asked respondents to rate their financial health and wellbeing on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 as the lowest and 10 the highest. As Figure 7.1 shows, most responses were between 5 and 8, with just under a quarter rating their financial health/wellbeing at 7, a reasonably high score.

Figure 7.1: How BN(O)s rate their financial health/wellbeing on a scale of 1-10

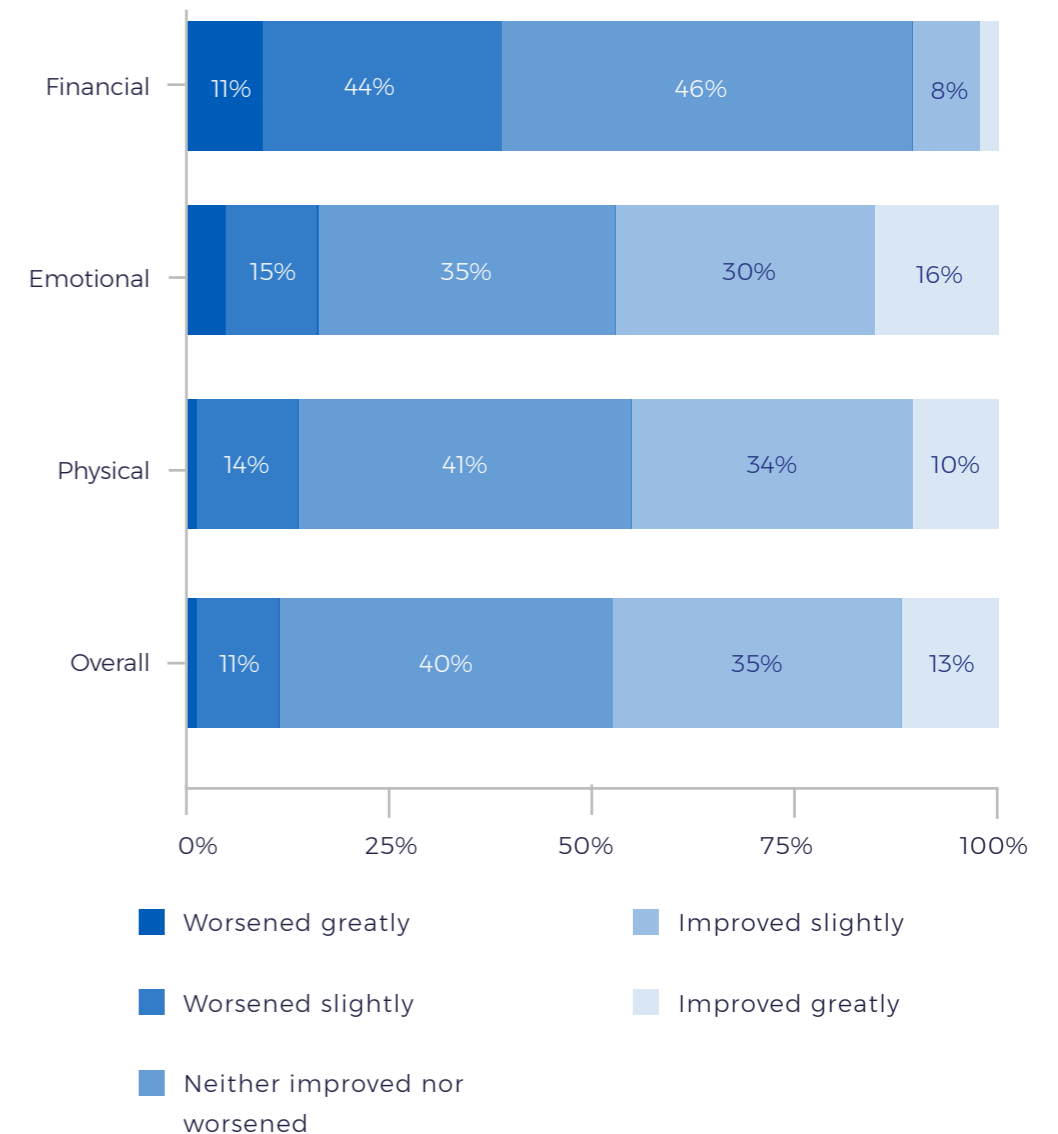


More than four in ten said their financial health and wellbeing had worsened, with one in ten saying it had worsened greatly.

These ratings indicate that financial wellbeing is generally quite strong with 75% scoring between 6 and 10. However, it is lower than other aspects of wellbeing: 92% of respondents rated their overall wellbeing above a score of 5. As we show in the following chapter, average ratings for both physical and mental health and wellbeing are higher than for financial wellbeing.

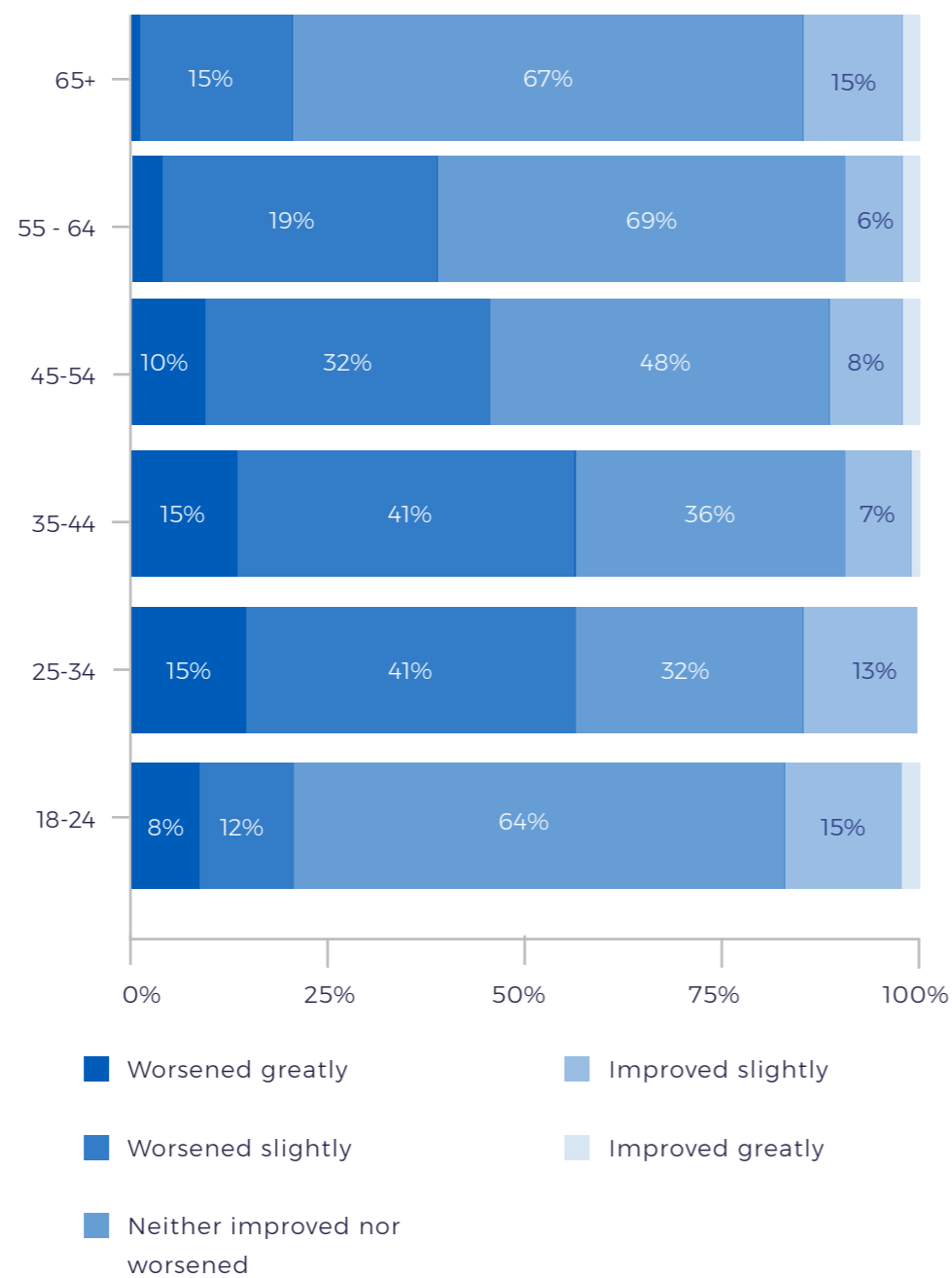
When asked whether their financial health and wellbeing had improved or worsened since arriving in the UK, experiences were varied: more than four in ten said their financial health and wellbeing had worsened, with one in ten saying it had worsened greatly. Fewer than one in ten said it had improved and 44% said it had neither improved nor worsened.

Figure 7.2: Aspects of health and wellbeing that have improved or worsened since coming to the UK



Financial stress was more likely to have worsened since coming to the UK compared to other types of stress. Respondents aged 25-44 were more likely than those in other aged groups to say their financial health and wellbeing has worsened. Those with school age children, or with none, were equally likely to be experiencing financial stress.

Figure 7.3: How BN(O)s' financial wellbeing has changed since moving to the UK (By age)

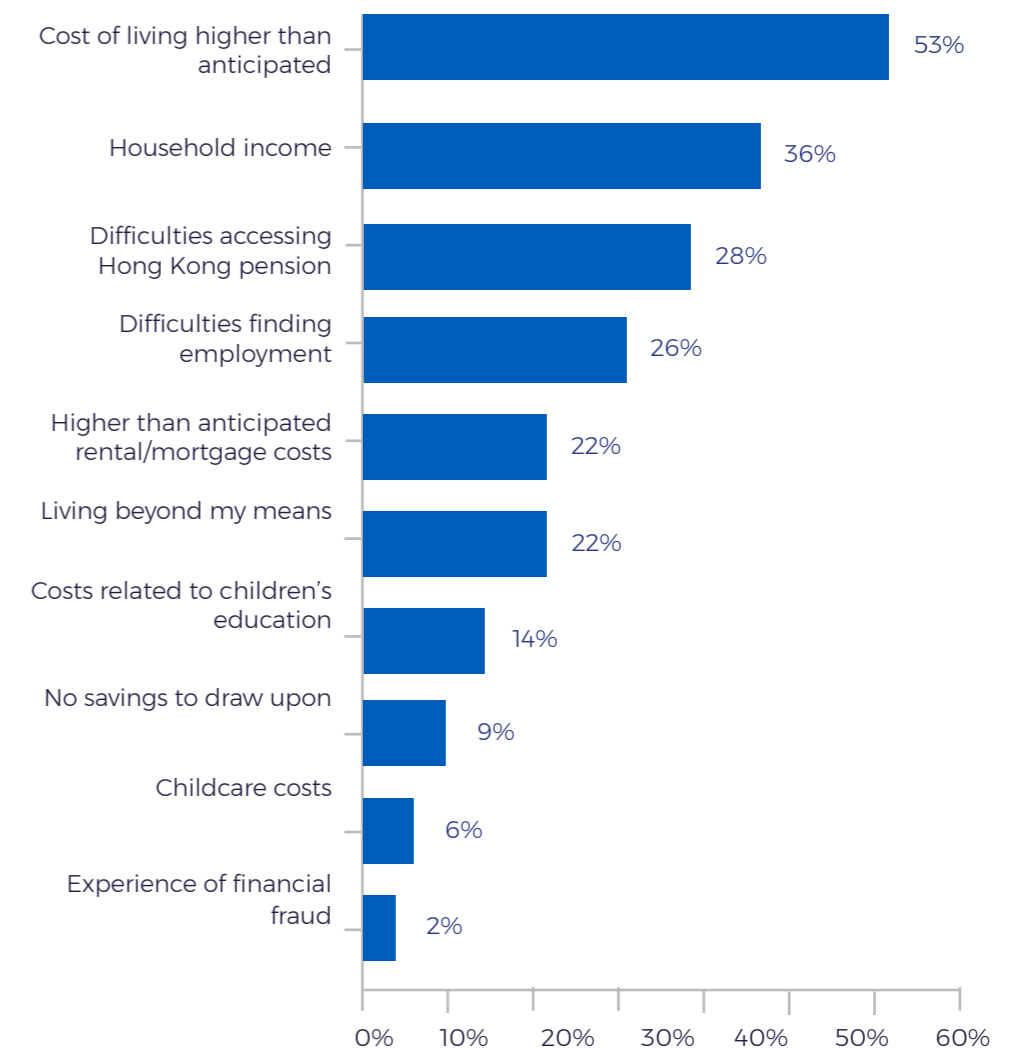


When asked what specific factors are impacting on financial wellbeing, the most commonly cited was general high costs of living, a worry for more than half of respondents

Unemployed BN(O)s seeking work are most likely to say their financial health and wellbeing has worsened, but only slightly more so than those in full-time and part-time work. Other groups are all less affected, and retired people particularly so.

When asked what specific factors are impacting on financial wellbeing, the most commonly cited was general high costs of living, a worry for more than half of respondents (53%). Other common worries were difficulties accessing Hong Kong pensions (including MPF), cited by 28% of respondents; difficulties finding employment (26%) and household income (26%). More than 1 in 5 said they are living beyond their means, and almost 1 in 10 have no savings to draw on. This makes it particularly urgent that BN(O) Hong Kongers can overcome their difficulties finding work.

Figure 7.4: Factors with the greatest negative influence on BN(O)s' financial wellbeing



Note: respondents could choose more than one option

The ways in which a worsening financial situation is experienced varies according to age and people's circumstances. People of working age are more worried by lack of access to their Hong Kong pension (MPF) than actual retirees. Older people are worried by the cost of living but feel they have high enough income or wealth to manage. The biggest financial issue for the youngest age group (18 – 24) is finding employment.

We also asked respondents whether they are personally concerned about particular financial situations happening to them. The list included eviction for failure to pay their mortgage or to repay debts, the cost of university fees, homelessness and having to leave work due to childcare costs.

BN(O) Hong Kongers' financial worries are spread across these concerns, with small percentages having these specific worries. The important exception to this is being unable to access their Hong Kong pension, including MPF: almost half of respondents (47%) have this particular worry. In line with this concern, many respondents who said they had concerns about other financial situations were worried for the future. These concerns related to not being able to find a job, inflation affecting their savings and rising rental costs.

A specific question was also asked about whether the cost of living has affected respondents personally²³. Eight in ten said it had and 17% that it had not, with a further 3% preferring not to say. Younger people aged between 24 and 44 were most likely to say they were affected. We also asked an open question inviting respondents to tell us how the cost of living crisis may have affected them personally. Rising energy costs featured strongly in these responses, in particular electricity costs. Rental costs were also mentioned by many respondents. Rising prices more generally were frequently mentioned, along with insufficient income.



“Living expenses have exceeded expectations, making the original budget wrong, and we can't apply for UK welfare, especially worrying about our children's university expenses, which will accelerate the deterioration of the economic situation!”

– Female, 45-54, Cheshire



“In fact, I think the cost of living in the UK is generally lower than Hong Kong, but renting is not cheap at all. The main reason is that I can't make ends meet and paying rent is my biggest cost, so I am more worried about the impact of my future income on my life.”

– Female, 55-64, West Midlands

Respondents were then asked whether they have had any contact with organisations that help BN(O)s to settle and integrate into the UK. Only 15% said they had, and a large majority (83%) said they had not. A small number preferred not to say. The extent of contact was higher among BN(O) Hong Kongers aged 35 to 64 than in older or younger age groups. Almost half of those who said they had been in contact with Hong Konger organisations (47%) said they had been in touch with the organisation Hong Kongers in Britain. Other organisations mentioned by more than 1 in 10 respondents were UKHK, the Welcoming Committee for Hong Kongers, local government and local welcome hubs. Respondents also mentioned a wide range of other organisations, many of them churches.

Some responses to open questions about where people live mentioned the presence or absence of support networks as being important:

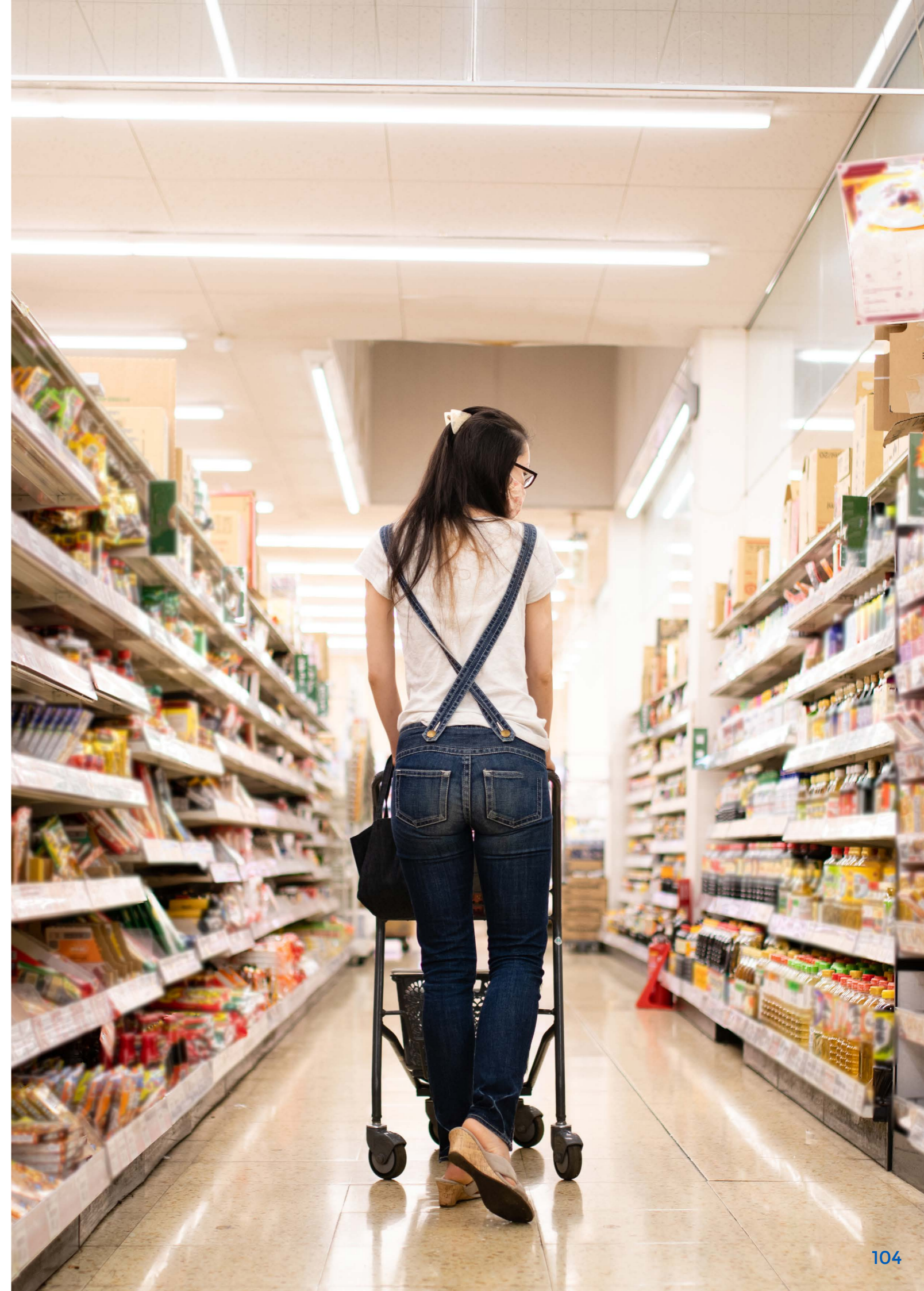


“I chose this place because I have friends in Manchester who can take care of each other, but I realised that it takes a long time to get used to the living habits of the locals and the way they deal with problems, and that it often takes a long time to do simple things, and there are not many support services for Hong Kong people.”

– Male, 45-54, Greater Manchester

We do not know the reasons for making contact, but our qualitative research suggest that some BN(O) Hong Kongers can reportedly feel constrained in their ability to access official help, due to the stipulations of NRPF and the fear that applying for destitution relief will affect their application for residency in five years' time. Often the precise boundaries of NRPF are poorly understood by BN(O) Hong Kongers, meaning they do not access forms of assistance to which they are entitled. The length of time it takes to navigate administrative procedures is also cited as an issue.

A lack of understanding of eligibility for assistance can be exacerbated by poor quality information, or a lack of awareness about where to find reliable information. Stakeholders reported that BN(O) Hong Kongers are often mistrustful of official advice and prefer to rely on information in Cantonese, often shared through social media channels that may convey inaccurate information.



8. Physical and mental wellbeing

Key Findings

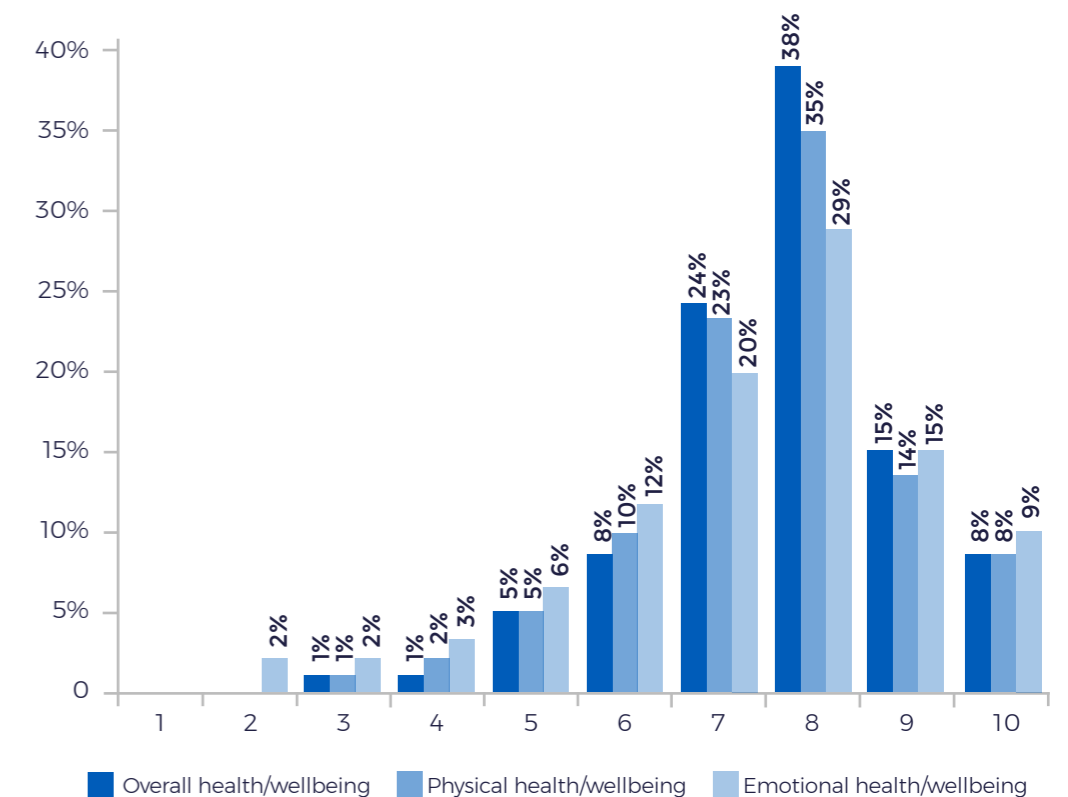


- Organisations supporting and representing BN(O) Hong Kongers in the UK have identified mental health as an issue on which individuals need support. It is also seen as an issue requiring a higher profile politically.
- A very high proportion (92%) of respondents gave themselves an overall wellbeing score higher than 5 out of 10. Self-ratings are similar across age groups, although the over-65s were slightly less positive.
- Ratings for physical health and wellbeing were similar. However, they were a little lower for emotional health and wellbeing, with 86% giving a score of above 5. Young people aged 25-34 gave lower scores, perhaps indicating greater difficulties adapting to life in the UK.
- Fewer than one in six say their health and wellbeing has worsened since coming to the UK. Nearly half (47%) say it has improved, with younger people more likely to report this.
- Financial worries have the greatest impact on emotional wellbeing, affecting almost half of BN(O) Hong Kongers experiencing emotional stress. Anxiety about future life in the UK is also a common source of stress cited by more than four in ten.
- Coming to the UK has not meant that BN(O) Hong Kongers have left worries about their homeland behind. Many have concerns about friends and family in Hong Kong and about the social and political climate of the country.

Migrating is a major life event which can have a significant impact on physical and mental health. This is especially true for people who leave their home country unwillingly because of a perceived threat to their life and freedom. It is also true of those who face no direct personal threat but believe they can no longer live the life they wish to have for themselves and their family. Both situations apply to BN(O) Hong Kongers who have moved to the UK. Organisations supporting and representing BN(O) Hong Kongers in the UK have identified mental health as an issue on which individuals may need support. It is also seen as an issue requiring a higher profile politically.

We asked respondents to rate aspects of health and wellbeing, using a scale of 1-10 (where 1 is a very poor state of health and wellbeing and 10 is the best possible state). The aspects that respondents were asked about were: overall health and wellbeing; physical health and wellbeing; and emotional wellbeing. We also asked about financial wellbeing, as discussed in Chapter 7.

Figure 8.1: How BN(O)s rate their overall wellbeing and physical and emotional health and wellbeing on a 1-10 scale



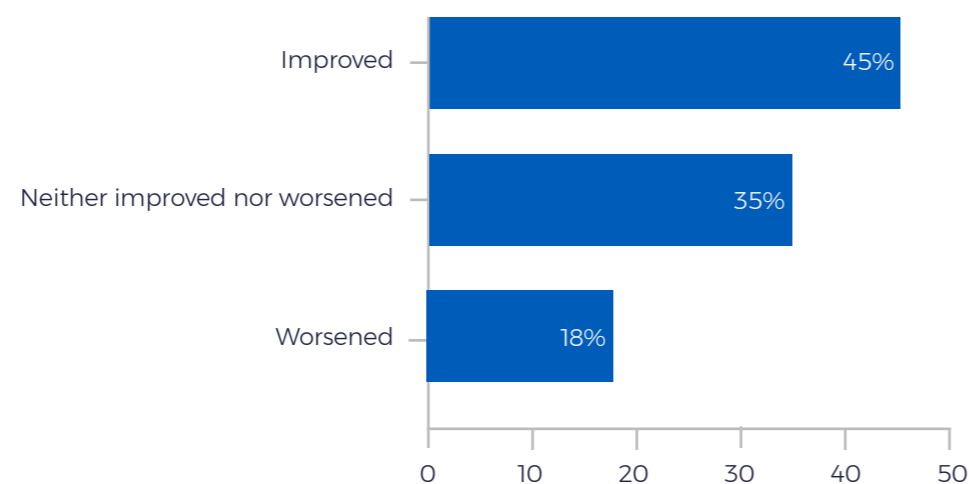
For overall health and wellbeing, a very high proportion (92%) gave themselves a score higher than 5. Self-ratings were similar across age groups, although those aged 25-34 and over 65 were slightly less positive.

Ratings of physical health and wellbeing are similar to overall ratings, suggesting that respondents saw physical health as the major determinant of their overall health and wellbeing. Again those aged 25-34 and the over 65s gave lower ratings, as did people living in London. When asked whether their health and wellbeing has changed since coming to the UK, most BN(O)s say it has stayed the same (39%) or improved (44%), while 12% say it has worsened. Among the latter group, there was little variation by age. However, younger people were more likely to say their health had improved. This might reflect age variation in health more generally.

On emotional health and wellbeing, around 86% gave a score of above 5. However on this measure there is more age variation, with lower rates among people aged 25-34 (78%) and rates of around 90% among those aged 45+.

When asked whether this has changed since coming to the UK, responses are similar to those for physical health. As Figure 8.2 shows, more than four in ten respondents said it had improved, while a third said it had stayed the same. Just under one in five said it had worsened. Those aged over 65 are more likely to say this aspect of their health has stayed the same, rather than improved.

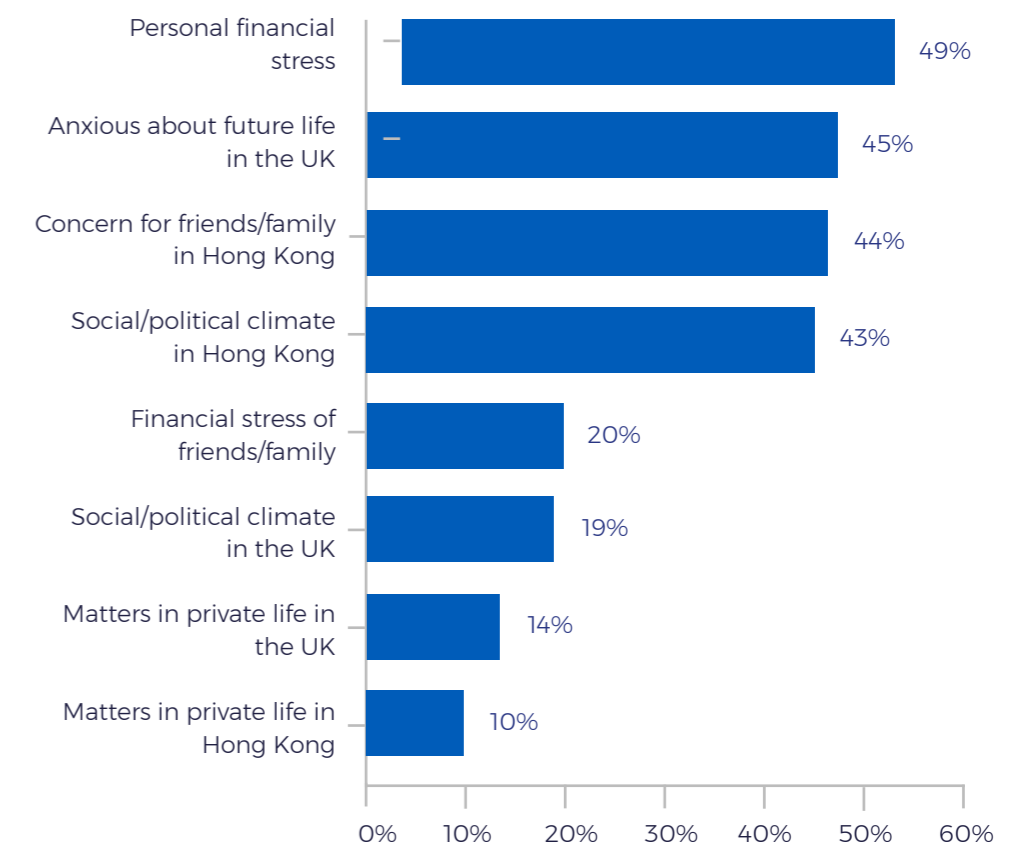
Figure 8.2: How BN(O)s feel their emotional health and wellbeing has changed since moving to the UK



Financial worries loomed large with almost half of respondents (49%) citing personal financial stress

We asked what factors are currently having the greatest negative influence on respondents' emotional wellbeing. Here, as Figure 8.3 shows, financial worries loomed large with almost half of respondents (49%) citing personal financial stress and 20% saying financial stress experienced by friends or family. Anxiety about future life in the UK was also a common source of stress, experienced by 45% of respondents.

Figure 8.3: Factors with the greatest negative influence on the emotional wellbeing of BN(O)s



Coming to the UK has not meant that BN(O) Hong Kongers have left worries about their homeland behind. As Figure 8.3 shows, more than four in ten (44%) have concerns about friends and family in Hong Kong and a similar proportion (43%) have concerns about the social and political climate in Hong Kong.

Previous surveys have also found that the mental wellbeing of Hong Kongers is linked to the political situation in Hong Kong. They have also found that, for many BN(O) Hong Kongers, the repressive political climate has been a strong motivation for moving to the UK. In one survey on motivations for moving to the UK, using social media and snowballing recruitment methods, almost half of respondents (49%) cited the 'political situation in HK' as the main reason for moving to the UK, with 'freedom/personal safety' accounting for a further 21% of answers²⁴. Similarly, our qualitative research has identified that many Hong Kongers with young families are motivated by the opportunity to raise their children in a democratic society.

Some BN(O) Hong Kongers – almost one in four – have concerns about the social and political situation in the UK. Other factors recorded as open responses included concerns about crime, health problems, the language barrier, work, weather and loneliness.

Many expressed anxieties about their future life in the UK, including finding work, making friends and integrating:

“

“Largely due to the progress of job hunting and I’m keen to have a job the soonest very much.”

– Male, 35-44, Berkshire

“

“How to find more activities and connect with more people to integrate into UK culture and life.”

– Female, 45-54, London

“

“The main reason is that my social circle is smaller than the one I used to have in Hong Kong, so I still need more time to build it up, and I like to make friends not only with Hong Kong people, but also with local people, so that I can adapt to the life here more quickly.”

– Female, 45-54, Kent



Other sources of emotional stress, recorded as open responses, included social and personal stresses, including relationships within the family and parenting problems. Some respondents were worried that family members are not adapting well to life in the UK:

“

“One of my children seems not adapting to the living here in terms of emotional unrest that makes me and the rest of family members so sad.”

– Male, 55-64, Wiltshire

Others described how just adapting to life in the UK generated emotional stress:

“

“Because I don’t know the local customs, it is difficult to find a doctor, rent a house, find a job and recycle.”

– Female, 45-54, Greater Manchester

9. Conclusions and recommendations

This report has used evidence from our survey of more than 2,000 BN(O)s to understand some of the key aspects of settling in the UK and to inform policy and practice on settlement and integration of BN(O) Hong Kongers and other new migrants. Our findings indicate that, while BN(O)s are settling in well to their new lives in the UK, they are experiencing obstacles which can be addressed through relatively simple changes to policy and practice. These changes will ensure that Hong Kongers are able to more fully contribute to all aspects of life in the UK. Recommendations are highlighted in bold.

Spreading the gains and impacts

BN(O) Hong Kongers are settling in locations across the UK. There are higher concentrations in London, the South East and the North West but significant numbers across the South and Midlands of England. Other locations are attracting smaller numbers. BN(O) Hong Kongers are also more likely to choose areas they are more familiar with, and our research also finds that weather is an important consideration in deciding where to live. This means that Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, along with the northern regions of England – with the exception of the North West – are attracting fewer BN(O) Hong Kongers.

The most important factors when choosing where to live are safety and low crime rates, affordable housing and the reputation of an area. Good local transport, access to a city and to jobs are also important. Proximity to shops and restaurants and green spaces are also considerations. The availability of good schools is very important for BN(O) Hong Kongers with school age children, a group which makes up around half of BN(O)s.

In deciding where to live, BN(O)s were most likely to use recommendations from family or friends, UK Websites, Youtubers and word of mouth. Other sources include Hong Kong websites, national or local government advice and the social media platforms WhatsApp, Telegram and Signal.

Nations and regions could provide information about crime and safety, affordable housing options, schools, local transport and social and cultural opportunities.

The Scottish government has talked of the need to attract more migrants to help address its falling population and skills shortages²⁵. Other locations across the UK, including rural areas, would experience similar benefits by attracting more Hong Kongers.

More BN(O)s are expected to arrive in the coming months and years, and around a third of those already here are thinking of moving within the UK in the next year. This provides areas of the UK where there are fewer Hong Kongers with opportunities to attract more. With word of mouth and recommendations key influences on decisions, nations and regions with fewer BN(O) Hong Kongers will need to be more proactive.

BN(O) Hong Kongers are clearly a diverse group in terms of needs and preferences. However, in aiming to attract more Hong Kongers, nations and regions could provide information about crime and safety, affordable housing options, schools, local transport and social and cultural opportunities. Employment opportunities, particularly in professional roles, will also be of interest to Hong Kongers. Nations and regions would also be advised to provide information online, including websites and YouTube as well as other social media platforms. Information might also include case studies and testimonies.

English as the key to integration

Good spoken and written English is needed for all aspects of integration, including for work, social mixing and political and civic participation. It is also needed to pass the British Citizenship test, though over-65s are exempted from this requirement.

More than half of BN(O) Hong Kongers rate their English reading, speaking and writing skills as good and more than one in ten say they are very good. However, more than a third say their spoken and written English is poor. Older BN(O) Hong Kongers, particularly over-65s, are more likely to give a low rating to their English skills.

Confidence in English is a barrier both to finding work and to getting a job which matches qualifications, skills and experience. Older BN(O) Hong Kongers' weaker English skills are likely to affect social mixing and to contribute to social isolation.



BN(O) Hong Kongers are more likely to need classes at intermediate and advanced level. Many would also benefit from conversation classes

As well as varying by age, there are also regional differences in English competency levels, with respondents in London and the South East rating their English as stronger than those in the North West. These differences, which reflect age and social class, mean that levels of need and demand for support vary across the UK.

BN(O) Hong Kongers are not eligible for provision funded by the Adult Education Budget, which funds much further education provision. The visa conditions require a 3-year wait, yet integration has to start much earlier. In recognition of this, DLUHC has put in place a targeted support fund open to local authorities, now providing up to £850 per head to support ESOL needs where necessary. However, only around 1 in 6 BN(O)s, and 1 in 10 of those over 65, have attended an English class or received formal training to help with their English.

It is possible that many BN(O) Hong Kongers are not aware of the entitlement to attend English classes at their local college. They should be made aware of the availability of free college courses at some point in the visa application process. Information should also be distributed by local authorities and by key institutions such as schools and workplaces.

It is also likely that local colleges do not offer the kind of support with English that many BN(O) Hong Kongers want. Most will speak, read and write English at intermediate or advanced level yet lack confidence in speaking, especially for work. Much college ESOL provision is at beginner level. BN(O) Hong Kongers are more likely to need classes at intermediate and advanced level. Many would also benefit from conversation classes to increase confidence in speaking English.

Colleges and local authorities should ensure that English courses meet the needs of BN(O) Hong Kongers, and other migrants, at all levels of English from beginner to advanced. They should also refer people seeking higher level provision to other providers who do not operate the 3-year residency rule. Some combined authorities and local areas have ESOL hubs and networks, which monitor demand and facilitate onward referral between providers.

Awareness of provision could also be improved through outreach in community organisations, libraries and other social venues as well as through advertising online and in social media. Local authorities have an important role to play in this process.



Making the most of Hong Kongers' skills and abilities

Work plays a key role in integration. As well as enabling migrants to use skills and abilities, it brings opportunities to mix with people from different backgrounds: many respondents mentioned how their work and relationships with colleagues had made them feel at home in the UK.

Most BN(O)s are aged 25-64 and it would therefore be expected that most would be in work. However, currently half are working: 35% full-time; 9% part-time; and 6% self-employed. The employment rate of just over 52% (excluding those over 65) compares to the current UK national rate of 76%. This lower rate is explained by unemployment (of 18%) and lower participation rates among women and older BN(O) Hong Kongers.

If their skills are properly utilised, Hong Kongers can help to address skills gaps in a number of occupational areas and stimulate economic growth.

BN(O) Hong Kongers also have the potential to make a substantial economic contribution. BN(O)s are more highly educated than the average person in both Hong Kong and the UK and are over-represented in professional occupational groups. If their skills are properly utilised, Hong Kongers can help to address skills gaps in a number of occupational areas and stimulate economic growth through new enterprises across the nations and regions of the UK.

The government, employer bodies and employers themselves have given insufficient consideration to the potential of migrants who have arrived in the UK on non-work visas, including via humanitarian routes. There are likely to be at least as many as on skills visas, yet many are likely to be unemployed or underemployed. The government should address this shortcoming in policy and practice and encourage employers to broaden their perspective. This could involve a coordinated strategy involving the key UK government departments of DLUHC, DWP, Business and Trade and the Cabinet Office working with key employer bodies across sectors and regions.

A similar approach should be adopted by the governments of Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland. Government departments should work closely with regions, including the Combined Mayoral Authorities, to put in place strategies and action to make the most of migrants' skills and potential.

This strategy could include regular audits of labour market participation and, where possible, skills utilisation. It should include the most sizable groups of migrants who have arrived on humanitarian visas, for example Ukrainians, Afghans and Syrians.

Almost a quarter of BN(O)s (23%) are taking care of the home and 85% who do so are women. More than half say they plan to work in the future, and may need guidance in job search and in using their skills and qualifications (see below). Lower employment rates are also explained by early retirement: more than four in ten (43%) BN(O) Hong Kongers aged 55-64 have retired, compared to 30% in the UK as a whole. This group may also consider working, given the opportunity.

BN(O) Hong Kongers are more than three times as likely to be in temporary work and four times as likely to be in agency work

As part of strategies on levelling up, social integration and skills and enterprise, the government should monitor labour market participation of BN(O) Hong Kongers and other migrants who have arrived on humanitarian routes. The first aim should be to move participation rates much closer to the UK average. The second should be to monitor under-utilisation of skills where data is available to do this.

BN(O) Hong Kongers are more than three times as likely to be in temporary work and four times as likely to be in agency work compared to the wider UK working population. Most of the self-employed have children and say they choose this option for flexibility of hours. However, around 1 in 5 have chosen this option because they have been unable to find employment. This is likely to reflect a keenness to get into work quickly. The downside is that BN(O) Hong Kongers are somewhat more likely to be employed in insecure work. More than a quarter of those in work are looking for another job, and those in insecure work should be assisted into more permanent roles.

BN(O) Hong Kongers are employed across a wide range of sectors, including wholesale and retail, professional scientific and technical services, IT, education and hospitality. Most are working in a different job to the one they had in Hong Kong. Of those who were doing the same job, just under half were working at a lower level of seniority in the UK compared to Hong Kong.

Almost half of respondents of all levels of skill said their job doesn't match their skills and experience at all or only a little. Those aged over 45 were most likely not to have a good match. BN(O) Hong Kongers in London, the South East and East of England are more likely to have found a good job match; those in Scotland, the East Midlands, the North West and the South West are much less likely to have achieved this. Non-graduates and those with weaker English were also less likely to be in a well-matched job.

BN(O) Hong Kongers with a poor skills match explain this by lack of fluency in English, and lacking work experience in the UK. Some wanted to gain confidence in a less skilled job before working in their usual occupation.



Those whose job does not match their skills and experience include those with a professional qualification. While most professionals are using their skills in their current job, the majority of those aged over 45 are not. Again, there are regional differences with those in the North West less likely to be using their professional qualifications than those in London and the South East.

More than a quarter of those in work are looking for another job, with higher pay the main motivation, followed by a better skills match and more senior role.

The 18% who describe themselves as unemployed also see confidence in speaking English as their biggest barrier. More than a quarter (28%) say recognition of qualifications is a barrier. Other common barriers are not having a driver's licence and needing a criminal record check or references. All of these findings strongly indicate a need for careers information, advice and guidance, as well as help with English proficiency, yet more than three-quarters of BN(O) Hong Kongers said they had not received such help. Of those who had, most said it had been useful. Two-thirds of respondents said they would like this type of help. As well as general advice on career options, almost half are interested in education and training. Worker's rights, transferring qualifications and starting a business are also areas on which BN(O) Hong Kongers would like advice.

The National Careers Service, Jobcentre Plus and other providers of advice and guidance on jobs and careers should ensure they meet the needs of migrants.

The National Careers Service, Jobcentre Plus and other providers of advice and guidance on jobs and careers should ensure they meet the needs of migrants. This is likely to include raising awareness of services available. It should also include referral to professional bodies which can help those with such qualifications with recognition and transfer of qualifications. These organisations can also help raise awareness of the BN(O) visa among employers, since this may be contributing to difficulties many experience in finding work.

While there is strong interest in education and training, BN(O) Hong Kongers are excluded from publicly funded provision until they have been in the UK for three years. The Government and the Department for Education should review eligibility criteria since it exacerbates skill shortages as well as putting career progression of new migrants on hold.

BN(O) Hong Kongers also experience difficulties at work, including problems with pay and feeling overworked. More than one in ten working BN(O) Hong Kongers feel isolated at work and some have experienced discrimination from colleagues. Greater awareness of the support available could help address these difficulties.

Almost one in ten (9%) have problems combining work and childcare and some (8%) find their employer is not supportive. These are also issues which could be addressed by trade unions, who should reach out to migrants and ensure that the support they provide covers issues experienced by migrants.

Financial struggles and emotional wellbeing

Conditions for BN(O) s include 'No recourse to public funds' (NRPF). This means BN(O) Hong Kongers are not able to claim in-work or out-of-work benefits, or housing benefit. However, following concern that some BN(O) Hong Kongers might be facing destitution, Home Office rules on NRPF were changed for BN(O) Hong Kongers in April 2021.

Difficulties accessing the Hong Kong pension is a source of financial stress for more than one in four BN(O) Hong Kongers

Aggregate scores for financial wellbeing are not low: 75% of respondents rated their financial wellbeing at more than six out of ten. However, one in ten gave a score below 5, rising to one in five of those aged 25-34, indicating low financial wellbeing among some BN(O)s. As the cost of living crisis has taken hold, financial health and wellbeing has worsened for more than four in ten BN(O) Hong Kongers; and for one in ten it has become a lot worse. Respondents aged 25-44 were most likely to say their situation had become worse. Eight in ten, especially those in this younger age group, say that the cost of living has affected them personally, citing costs of energy and rent as well as day to day necessities.

Deterioration in financial circumstances is not related to people's family situation: those with school age children, or with none, are equally likely to be experiencing financial stress. Older people are worried by the cost of living but feel they have sufficient resources to manage.

More than one in five are living beyond their means, and almost one in ten have no savings to draw on. For younger people the biggest financial issue is finding employment. This makes it particularly urgent that BN(O) Hong Kongers can overcome their difficulties finding work.

Difficulties accessing the Hong Kong pension is a source of financial stress for more than one in four BN(O) Hong Kongers. People of working age are more worried by lack of access to their Hong Kong pension than actual retirees. This issue should be taken up by government bodies and agencies with responsibility for access to pensions, as well as with the financial institutions themselves.

Anxiety about future life in the UK is also a common source of stress cited by more than four in ten. Yet coming to the UK has also not meant that BN(O) Hong Kongers have left worries about their homeland behind. Many have concerns about friends and family in Hong Kong and about the social and political climate of the country.

Information about the availability of support for BN(O)s through DLUHC-funded organisations, and others, should be disseminated through stakeholder groups.

Services such as health and education should also be made aware that BN(O)s may be experiencing emotional stress. The government should provide information to schools and to health services about the BN(O) population, so that service providers are aware of factors impacting on emotional wellbeing.

Other concerns mentioned by respondents include crime, health problems, language barriers, work and weather. Some are worried about settling in and integrating, including finding work and forming friendships.

Despite these concerns and worries, fewer than one in six (15%) have had contact with organisations that help BN(O)s to settle and integrate into the UK, with younger and older people less likely to have done so than those in middle age groups.

Local authorities, as well as stakeholder organisations themselves, should make BN(O)s aware of organisations offering support and activities. This information should be made available online and through social media as well as through libraries, schools and other local venues.

Our previous research has found that some BN(O) Hong Kongers can feel constrained in their ability to access official help. The stipulations of NRPF are a factor, with some BN(O)s fearing that applying for destitution relief will affect their application for residency in five years' time. Often the precise boundaries of NRPF are poorly understood by BN(O) Hong Kongers, meaning they do not access forms of assistance to which they are entitled. A further factor is the length of time it takes to navigate administrative procedures.

The NRPF requirement in the BN(O) visa should be reviewed, since it is affecting the integration of some newcomers with the greatest need. It is also likely to be a factor in low take up of English classes, and is limiting access to further and higher education.

A lack of understanding of eligibility for assistance can be exacerbated by poor quality information, or a lack of awareness about where to find reliable information. Stakeholders reported that BN(O) Hong Kongers are often mistrustful of official advice

and prefer to rely on information in Cantonese, often shared through social media channels, which may not always be accurate. Government and stakeholder organisations should therefore provide information relevant to BN(O) Hong Kongers in both Cantonese and English.



Steps to belonging and feeling welcome

The friendliness of local people, including neighbours, is a strong theme in open response questions about location decisions. It is clear that many BN(O)s feel welcome in the communities where they have settled and appreciate the positive reception they have received. BN(O) Hong Kongers are keen to become part of their local communities.

A very large majority (85%) have made contact with other Hong Kongers where they live. The most common ways of being in touch with other Hong Kongers is as neighbours, through social media, other parents (via school), activities organised for Hong Kongers and places of worship. Work is also a way in which respondents meet other BN(O) Hong Kongers, as well as in cafes, supermarkets, and through relatives and friends who are living in the UK. It is clear from these responses that BN(O) Hong Kongers have quickly established social networks in the UK.

An even larger majority (90%) have made contact with people where they live who are not BN(O) Hong Kongers. Those in work and parents are especially likely to have contact with non-Hong Kongers. The most common type of social contact is with neighbours, as well as through schools, churches, sports and hobbies. Other common ways of meeting people locally include work, volunteering, shopping, parks and libraries.

Local authorities, as well as stakeholder organisations themselves, should make BN(O)s aware of organisations offering support and activities.

Despite relatively high levels of social contact, some BN(O) Hong Kongers are also experiencing social isolation. Some respondents said they would like to meet more people, including other Hong Kongers, and to have better access to support services.

There is strong interest in taking part in social and cultural activities. The most popular are cultural events and festivals, with three-quarters of BN(O) Hong Kongers saying they are interested in these. A majority are also interested in guided walks and tours and in adult education classes. Other activities of interest include online talks and webinars and conversation clubs. Older BN(O) Hong Kongers are more likely to be interested in library events. There is scope for libraries to become welcoming hubs, bringing together people from across the community.

Local authorities should take the lead in collating and disseminating information about social and cultural activities which bring together migrants and the host community. They can work closely with key local institutions such as libraries and schools to encourage participation. Online listings of regular activities and events, as well as social media, are likely to be effective in reaching a wider audience, including migrants with weak social connections.

Most working BN(O) Hong Kongers feel welcome or very welcome at work, and very few feel unwelcome. However, more than one in ten working BN(O)s feel isolated at work and a small proportion (5%) have experienced discrimination from colleagues. Some describe feeling excluded at work, rather than experiencing overt discrimination.

Employers should ensure that workplaces are not segregated by occupation or socially so that staff of different backgrounds can mix. Employer and industry bodies should give consideration to how social connection and integration at work can be improved so that migrants feel fully involved and included in all aspects of workplace life.

Local authorities should take the lead in collating and disseminating information about social and cultural activities which bring together migrants and the host community.

Appendix 1: About the survey

In order to draw robust conclusions from a representative sample of the BN(O) Hong Konger population in the UK, we aimed to collect a total of 2,000 responses from BN(O) Hong Kongers across the whole of the UK. Previous surveys have relied on snowball sampling from mailing lists and online interest groups, and are likely to be less representative of some sections of the BN(O) community in the UK, in particular older people and those less connected with other Hong Kongers and with stakeholder organisations. To achieve a more representative sample, we worked with our funder DLUHC and with the Home Office who agreed to distribute the survey on our behalf.

The survey sample was drawn from the Home Office database of contact details of BN(O) Hong Kongers in their applications for the BN(O) visa. A sample of 8,000 was drawn from an overall database. Sampled individuals were contacted by email with unique ID links to the survey. This enabled us to assign IDs of the form BNO_0001 to BNO_8000 to individual responses, while maintaining anonymity for our survey respondents. We were not able to see the email addresses or names of participants at any point.

The survey was distributed by the Home Office on our behalf and carried out between the 19th June and 10th July 2023, with two reminder emails issued during this period. This was preceded by an initial test launch to 400 recipients on 12th June 2023, which achieved a response rate of 19% after a week. Based on this level of response we issued the survey to a further 7,600 contacts, making the overall sample 8,000. The response rate of the survey was 28% and survey completion was 87%. Our final sample of respondents who completed the questionnaire is 2,089.

In order to increase accessibility for our survey, and to capture the experiences of BN(O) Hong Kongers with less proficient English language ability, we offered the option to take the survey in English or Cantonese, changing within the survey should they wish to. Almost two-thirds (65%) of respondents chose to answer the survey in Cantonese.



Appendix 2: About the Hong Kong BN(O) scheme

Alongside the welcoming programmes for Ukrainian and Afghan refugees, the arrival and settlement of Hong Kongers in the UK will be a central British migration story of the 2020s. The scheme was introduced on the 31st January 2021 following the passing of the 2020 National Security Law in Hong Kong, which the UK government considers to have violated agreements made between the UK and China at the time of the Hong Kong handover. In total, an estimated 2.9 million Hong Kongers currently hold BN(O) status.

The new visa scheme enables BN(O)s and their dependent family members to come to live in the UK for up to five years, through either of two routes. The BN(O) Status Holder route is designed for those original holders of BN(O) status, while the BN(O) Household Member route is designed for the adult children of a BN(O) visa holder. Both routes allow for dependent partners or minor children to accompany the main applicant. Entrants on either route will then be able to apply for permanent settlement and, in turn, British citizenship, after a period of five years. The UK government estimates that between status holders and their dependents, a total of 5.4 million Hong Kongers are eligible to apply for the new BN(O) visa scheme.

Applicants do not need to have a BN(O) passport or a specified level of English, though they will need to show an ability to accommodate and maintain themselves for their first six months in the UK. There are no restrictions on the right to work, but the visa allows 'no recourse to public funds' (NRPF), which means visa holders are not able to claim in-work or out-of-work benefits, or housing benefit. Families are, however, eligible for Free School Meals if they meet the criteria.

After 5 continuous years' residence in the UK, BN(O) Hong Kongers will be able to apply for 'indefinite leave to remain', also known as settlement, and after a further year, they will be able to apply for full British citizenship. Time spent in the UK on any visa that allows the holder to apply for settlement can count towards the 5-year requirement, provided the last visa held was a BN(O) visa. However, time spent in the UK under asylum - also referred to as 'leave outside the rules' - or on a student visa does not count towards the 5-year requirement.



Notes and references

¹ See the website of the Welcoming Committee for Hong Kongers for more information about its purpose and activities <https://www.welcomehk.org>

² See Appendix 1 for more information about the Hong Kong BN(O) scheme

³ Home Office (2022) Survey of Hong Kong British National (Overseas) visa holders, 2021, Summary of results <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/survey-of-hong-kong-british-national-overseas-visa-holders-2021/hong-kong-bno-survey-results-accessible-version>

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⁵ For research reports by Hong Kongers in Britain see <https://www.hongkongers.org.uk/>;
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⁶ Office for National Statistics (2023) Education, England and Wales: Census 2021 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/educationandchildcare/bulletins/educationenglandandwales/census2021#highest-level-of-qualification>

⁷ Note that these figures do not include under-25s because fewer than 20 responded to the question, probably because they see their education as still in progress.

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¹² UKHK (2022) UK Hongkongers' Demographic <https://www.ukhk.org/s/2022UK-Hongkongers-Demographic.pdf>

¹³ Heather Rolfe and Phyllis Chan (2022) Settling in: Hong Kongers and their new lives in the UK, Welcoming Committee for Hong Kongers <https://www.welcomehk.org/research/settling-in-report>

¹⁴ Office for National Statistics (2023) Labour market overview, UK: August 2023 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/bulletins/uklabourmarket/august2023#:~:text=The%20UK%20employment%20rate%20was,employees%20and%20self%20employed%20workers>

¹⁵ Permanent and temporary employment (2022) <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/work-pay-and-benefits/employment/permanent-and-temporary-employment/latest>

¹⁶ There is no agreed figure of the proportion of the working population employed by agencies, due in part to definitional issues. However, statistics produced by the Office for National Statistics in 2020 indicate a proportion of around 5%. Office for National Statistics (2020) Employees in temporary and permanent agency roles by demographic and employment variables, UK, April 2019 to March 2020 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/>

¹⁷ Office for National Statistics (2022) Understanding changes in self-employment in the UK: January 2019 to March 2022 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/understandingchangesinselfemploymentintheuk/january2019tomarch2022#:~:text=Since%20then%2C%20the%20numbers%20have,13.0%25%20of%20total%20employment>

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²⁰ Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (2021) Guidance: Hong Kong British Nationals (Overseas) Welcome Programme – information for local authorities <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/hong-kong-uk-welcome-programme-guidance-for-local-authorities#no-recourse-to-public-funds-nrpf>

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²² UK Parliament (2023) Domestic energy prices <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9491/>

²³ The question described cost of living as 'a situation in which the cost of everyday essentials like energy and food is rising much faster than average households. You may have heard the term inflation used a lot in relation to this.'

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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

Email: info@welcomehk.org

Twitter: [@WelcomingHK](https://twitter.com/WelcomingHK)

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