



HONG KONG's PATHWAY TO GLOBAL LEADERSHIP IN CONTINUOUS EDUCATION: A STRATEGIC BLUEPRINT

(A 360°, IN-DEPTH PEDAGOGICAL AND HOLISTIC REVIEW)

ERIC YEW KEE WONG ^{+Ai} © (2026)



“Live as if you were to die tomorrow. Learn as if you were to live forever.”

Mahatma Gandhi

The text "Thank you!" is written in a large, elegant, cursive script. The word "Thank" is on the top line, and "you!" is on the bottom line. A large, sweeping flourish extends from the top of the "T" and loops around the word "Thank". Another flourish extends from the bottom of the "y" in "you!".

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Hong Kong stands at a pivotal juncture where its traditional role as a regional education hub must evolve to meet the disruptive demands of the global economy. As the half-life of professional skills continues to shrink due to technological advancement and demographic shifts, the city possesses a unique confluence of advantages—ranging from its common law system and international connectivity to its deep pool of academic talent and strategic proximity to the Greater Bay Area (GBA)—that position it to become the world's preeminent leader in continuous education. This strategic blueprint outlines a comprehensive pathway for Hong Kong to transcend its current educational paradigm, moving beyond the traditional degree-centric model to establish a dynamic, lifelong learning ecosystem that serves as a global benchmark. By leveraging its “one country, two systems” framework, Hong Kong can architect a future where continuous education is not merely an ancillary service but a primary economic driver and a cornerstone of social resilience.

The first pillar of this transformation involves reimagining Hong Kong as the "Digital Gateway for Global Upskilling." To achieve this, the territory must aggressively invest in a unified, AI-driven Continuing Education Unit (CEU) marketplace. This platform would aggregate micro-credentials, professional diplomas, and executive courses from local institutions (such as the HKU School of Professional and Continuing Education, and the Hong Kong Metropolitan University) with offerings from top-tier international partners. By implementing a robust credit accumulation and transfer system (CATS) that standardizes recognition across the GBA and beyond, Hong Kong can solve the fragmentation that currently plagues the sector. This digital infrastructure would allow learners to navigate their professional development seamlessly, while data analytics would provide real-time intelligence to the government and industry on emerging skill gaps, enabling agile curriculum development and targeted subsidies to ensure the workforce remains future-proof.

Secondly, Hong Kong must capitalize on its status as a super-connector to create a "Global Centre of Excellence for EdTech and Pedagogical Innovation." The blueprint calls for the establishment of a dedicated "Continuous Education Innovation Lab," funded through a public-private partnership, to pioneer next-generation learning methodologies. This lab would focus on integrating immersive technologies like the metaverse and augmented reality for vocational training (e.g., simulating complex engineering or medical procedures) and utilizing blockchain for secure, verifiable digital diplomas. By attracting top educational technology (EdTech) firms and startups to set up regional headquarters in Hong Kong, the city can foster an ecosystem where technological innovation directly feeds into pedagogical practice. This would not only enhance the quality and accessibility of learning but also position Hong Kong as an exporter of cutting-edge educational models and technologies to Mainland China and the rest of Asia.

Furthermore, the blueprint emphasizes the strategic necessity of aligning continuous education with the key economic clusters defining the region's future. Hong Kong must move beyond generic course offerings to develop deep, sector-specific continuous learning pipelines in finance, logistics, innovation and technology, and legal services. This involves formalizing "Industry-University Consortia" where corporations co-design curricula with academic institutions, ensuring that upskilling is directly tied to tangible career progression and productivity gains. For instance, a collaborative fintech academy developed by the Hong Kong Monetary Authority, local universities, and major banks could offer stackable credentials that fast-track professionals into high-demand roles. By embedding continuous education into the very fabric of its core industries, Hong Kong ensures its workforce remains the most competitive in the world, reinforcing its status as a premier global business hub.

Finally, to achieve global leadership, Hong Kong must brand itself as the "UNESCO City of Lifelong Learning" for the 21st century. This requires a unified marketing and branding strategy targeting international professionals and enterprises. By streamlining visa policies for international learners and professionals coming for upskilling stints, and by creating "learning zones" within the city that blend residential, commercial, and educational spaces, Hong Kong can make continuous education a tangible part of its urban identity. The government must lead by example, implementing policies that mandate continuous professional development across regulated sectors and offering attractive tax incentives for both individuals and corporations investing in lifelong learning. Through this holistic approach—combining digital infrastructure, pedagogical innovation, industrial alignment, and a compelling brand narrative—Hong Kong will not only secure its economic vitality but will also set the global standard for how a modern metropolis cultivates human capital in an era of perpetual change.

- Overview of Hong Kong's strategic opportunity in the global continuous education market

Hong Kong stands at a pivotal juncture, possessing a unique confluence of factors that position it to become a global leader in the rapidly expanding continuous education market. This strategic opportunity is not merely an option but an imperative, driven by the city's historical economic DNA, its established institutional strengths, and an unprecedented wave of global demand for lifelong learning. The following analysis outlines the core components of this opportunity, providing a foundational overview for a comprehensive strategic blueprint.

The Surging Global Demand and Hong Kong's Foundational Strengths

The global continuous education market is experiencing a period of explosive growth, creating a substantial strategic window for Hong Kong. This expansion is fueled by the accelerating half-life of professional skills, where knowledge becomes obsolete at an unprecedented rate, compelling both individuals and corporations to invest heavily in lifelong learning. The global market, valued at approximately USD 55 billion in 2024, is projected to nearly double to USD 115.3 billion by 2033, growing at a robust compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of around 8.5%. Within this, the Business-to-Business (B2B) segment, focused on corporate training and upskilling, is a particularly dynamic force, expected to increase from USD 6.6 billion in 2024 to USD 10.8 billion by 2030. Key drivers include the digital transformation of industries, which creates demand for AI-assisted and adaptive learning platforms, and the rise of micro-credentials and modular learning programs that offer flexible, stackable credentials for agile workforce development. This global trend towards a knowledge-based economy directly mirrors the developmental path Hong Kong has navigated for decades, suggesting a natural alignment between market needs and the city's capabilities.

Hong Kong's aspiration to lead in this space is built upon a robust and mature foundation that few global cities can replicate. A cornerstone of this infrastructure is the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF), a government-backed initiative established in 2008 under the Legal Framework of the Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications Ordinance. The HKQF provides a clear, objective, and nationally recognized system for ranking qualifications across academic, vocational, and continuing education sectors. This framework ensures the quality and credibility of learning programs, aligning them closely with industry needs and providing learners with transparent pathways for advancement. Furthermore, the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) acts as the designated authority for quality assurance, ensuring that all accredited qualifications under the framework are credible and portable. This institutionalized system of standards and quality assurance provides a level of trust and clarity that is often fragmented or absent in other major education markets, giving Hong Kong a significant competitive advantage in attracting international students and partners.

Complementing the structural integrity of the HKQF is a proactive and long-standing government commitment to fostering a culture of continuous learning. The Continuing Education Fund (CEF), established in 2002, is a testament to this commitment, providing a direct subsidy of up to HKD 25,000 per eligible applicant to support adults in pursuing continuing education and training. With over 4,650 registered courses from more than 120 providers, the CEF actively lowers the financial barriers for individuals, stimulating demand and creating a vibrant, diverse marketplace for educational offerings. In parallel, schemes like the Adult Education Subvention Scheme (AESS) support non-governmental organizations in providing basic education courses, ensuring that the benefits of lifelong learning extend to all segments of society, including new arrivals and ethnic minorities. This policy ecosystem not only empowers individual learners but also signals to global education providers that Hong Kong is a market with sustained, government-backed demand.

Historical Context and the Evolution of a Diverse Provider Landscape

Hong Kong's current strategic position is deeply rooted in its economic history, which has long necessitated a flexible and responsive workforce. As a small open economy, its survival and prosperity have always depended on its ability to adapt, out-compete rivals, and rapidly restructure in the face of global competition. The dramatic shift from a manufacturing to a service-based economy, particularly from the late 1970s onwards, rendered hundreds of thousands of workers' skills obsolete almost overnight, creating an enormous and urgent demand for retraining. This historical imperative forced the development of a robust and reactive continuing education market, which has, over time, successfully catered to the need for displaced workers to reinvest in new skills. This legacy of rapid economic adaptation has embedded a unique dynamism and responsiveness into Hong Kong's educational DNA, making it exceptionally well-suited to lead in a global landscape where constant reinvention is the norm.

The response to this historical need has resulted in a rich and diverse ecosystem of continuing education providers, capable of serving a wide spectrum of needs. The market is a dynamic mix of public, private, and non-profit entities, including the Schools of Professional and Continuing Education (SPACE) of major universities like the University of Hong Kong, the Vocational Training Council (VTC), Caritas, and numerous for-profit commercial training firms. This diversity ensures that the market can cater to both high-level professional certification and basic skill acquisition. For instance, while university-affiliated providers focus on advanced and professional education, the VTC and other non-profits address the needs of sales and production workers. This comprehensive and layered provider base, honed over decades of responding to local economic shifts, forms a powerful engine that can now be scaled and refined to serve global markets.

The Evolving Learner and Future Trajectories

The profile of the continuing education learner in Hong Kong has historically provided valuable insights into the market's dynamics and future potential. Data has consistently shown that participants are often young, single, and highly motivated by career change and advancement. A significant number of students are in professional and service industries, particularly in the fast-growing sectors of financing, insurance, real estate, and business services, reflecting the economy's structural shift. Crucially, continuing education has been identified as a particularly potent tool for enabling career change, often more so than for simply upgrading skills in a current role, with half of the students who experienced a job change after a course also moving to a completely different occupation. This evidence underscores the transformative power of the sector and highlights the importance of offering programs that equip learners with portable, cross-sectoral competencies, a demand that is only intensifying in today's globalized economy.

Looking ahead, Hong Kong's pathway to global leadership will involve not only capitalizing on its existing strengths but also embracing and shaping key global trends. The market is already moving beyond purely vocational training towards a broader conception of lifelong learning that encompasses personal enrichment, cultural pursuits, and an improved "quality of life," a feature common in affluent societies. Globally, the shift towards online and hybrid learning models, accelerated by technological advancements and changing work patterns, is irreversible. Hong Kong's education providers are well-positioned to leverage their quality and reputation to offer cutting-edge online programs, micro-credentials, and immersive learning experiences using AI and VR to a global audience. By integrating these technological trends with its robust quality assurance frameworks and deep understanding of the Asian context, Hong Kong can define a unique value proposition—offering globally recognized, high-quality, and innovative continuing education that is deeply rooted in the needs of a dynamic, knowledge-based economy.

- Synthesis of key recommendations across policy, funding, curriculum, and internationalisation

Hong Kong possesses a unique combination of advantages—a trilingual workforce, world-class universities, and strong international connections—that position it to become a global leader in continuing education. Realizing this ambition requires a strategic blueprint that synthesizes targeted interventions across four key domains: policy, funding, curriculum, and internationalisation. The following detailed paragraphs outline the key recommendations for each of these areas, drawing upon current initiatives and long-term strategic thinking.

Strategic Policy Realignment for a Cohesive Ecosystem

To build a globally competitive continuing education sector, Hong Kong must first establish a clear and cohesive policy framework that integrates lifelong learning into the territory's core talent development strategy. This requires moving beyond a fragmented approach to create a seamless ecosystem where different types of education—from university degrees to skills-based training—articulate with one another. A pivotal step is the full convergence of higher and continuing education, breaking down the "two families under one roof" structure that separates traditional universities from their extension arms. This could be achieved by formally recognizing professional certificates and micro-credentials for credit transfer into degree programmes, thereby creating multiple entry and exit points for learners. The government's recent initiatives, such as the establishment of the Alliance of Universities in Applied Sciences and the amendment of the Post Secondary Colleges Ordinance to enhance quality assurance, provide a strong foundation for this integration. Furthermore, policy must champion a "skills-based" paradigm shift, as exemplified by the Employee Retraining Board (ERB) reform, which has removed 学历上限 (academic qualifications) and now focuses on identifying skills gaps in key industries to develop targeted training. By extending this principle across all publicly-funded continuing education, the government can ensure that programmes are directly responsive to the evolving needs of the economy.

A Modernised and Strategic Funding Model

Funding mechanisms must evolve from a passive subsidy model to a strategic tool for steering the sector's growth and ensuring its long-term sustainability. The cornerstone of current public funding, the Continuing Education Fund (CEF), is effective but requires optimisation. With a current subsidy ceiling of \$25,000 per applicant and nearly 90% of accounts having an unused balance of \$15,000 or above, the focus should shift from simply raising the ceiling to making the fund more agile. The government should proactively encourage the development of courses in emerging fields like the low-altitude economy, digital economy, and innovation and technology, directly linking CEF reimbursements to Hong Kong's "eight centres" positioning under the National 14th Five-Year Plan. Beyond individual subsidies, a more diversified institutional funding model is needed. Historically, government funding for continuing education has been limited and ad-hoc, with institutions like HKU SPACE receiving only marginal block grants. A strategic blueprint recommends the establishment of dedicated development funds, allowing institutions to bid for seed money to create innovative, high-cost courses with potential public benefit that cannot be fully supported by tuition fees alone. Complementary schemes like the Study Subsidy Scheme for Designated Professions/Sectors (SSSDP) for sub-degree programmes, which subsidises disciplines with keen manpower demand such as healthcare and creative industries, should be expanded and adapted for the continuing education context, ensuring public money is invested in areas of strategic importance.

A Future-Proof and Flexible Curriculum

The curriculum for global leadership must be modular, industry-integrated, and focused on cultivating both high-level cognitive skills and practical vocational competencies. The curriculum should cater to the dual needs of a knowledge-based economy: advanced theoretical knowledge for professionals and foundational, portable skills for the broader workforce. A key recommendation is the widespread adoption of micro-credentials and stackable certificates. The ERB's plan to introduce industry-recognised micro-certificates is a significant step, enabling learners to acquire specific skills flexibly and combine them over time to build towards full qualifications. Universities should follow suit, developing a modularised ecosystem of non-degree programmes that can be "stacked" for academic credit, allowing for seamless transitions between professional upgrading and formal degree study. Furthermore, curricula must be co-created with industry. The ERB's strengthened industry consultation mechanism to identify skills gaps should serve as a model for all course providers. This ensures that programmes in fields like biomedical sciences, nursing, or business education are not only academically rigorous but also directly address the immediate needs of employers. Finally, alongside professional and vocational training, the curriculum must also embrace Life Arts and general interest courses, which contribute to personal development and social well-being, a hallmark of a truly mature learning society.

Deepening Internationalisation and Building the "Study in Hong Kong" Brand

Hong Kong's pathway to global leadership is intrinsically linked to its ability to attract international learners, faculty, and partners, transforming it into a recognised hub for post-secondary and continuing education. The government's commitment to building the "Study in Hong Kong" brand is a central pillar of this strategy. This involves a concerted effort to diversify the source of non-local students beyond current markets, with targeted promotion strategies for Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and Belt and Road countries through the Hong Kong Economic and Trade Offices (ETOs). The recent doubling of the non-local student quota for UGC-funded universities will also have a positive spill-over effect on the continuing education sector, creating a more internationalised learning environment. To support this influx, the development of the Northern Metropolis University Town is a game-changer. This new development should not just be a collection of university campuses, but a living lab for lifelong learning, designed to host second campuses of local and international institutions, corporate training centres, and research facilities. This clustering effect can foster cross-sectoral collaboration between industry, academia, and research, creating unique, internationally-focused continuing education programmes. Finally, partnerships with Mainland Chinese institutions should be strengthened to create cross-border programmes, leveraging Hong Kong's unique "one country, two systems" advantage to offer a distinct and valuable educational experience that attracts talent from the region and beyond.

In conclusion, Hong Kong's journey to becoming a global leader in continuing education is not a singular act but a continuous process of strategic evolution. By weaving together visionary policy, agile funding, a dynamic curriculum, and a robust international outlook, Hong Kong can build a resilient and world-leading ecosystem for lifelong learning that empowers its citizens and secures its future prosperity. The synthesis of these recommendations provides a comprehensive blueprint for turning this vision into reality.

- Projected economic and social impact by 2035

Hong Kong possesses a unique confluence of advantages—from its robust regulatory framework for lifelong learning to its strategic government vision for educational expansion—that position it to become a global leader in continuing education by 2035. By leveraging existing foundations and embracing innovative strategies, Hong Kong can cultivate a highly skilled, adaptable workforce, driving profound economic transformation and fostering a more resilient, equitable society. This blueprint outlines the strategic pathway to this goal and projects its multifaceted impact.

Strategic Pillars for Global Leadership

Hong Kong's ascent as a global leader in continuing education will be built upon a strategy that integrates enhanced government support, the creation of specialized institutions, and deep integration with national development goals. A cornerstone of this strategy involves the continual optimization of the Continuing Education Fund (CEF). Currently, with over 932,000 accounts and a subsidy ceiling of \$25,000 per person, the CEF provides a foundational layer of support for lifelong learning. To achieve global leadership, this framework must evolve. Strategically increasing the subsidy ceiling and potentially adjusting the co-payment ratio for courses aligned with key future industries—such as the digital economy, low-altitude economy, and innovation technology—would directly incentivize upskilling in areas critical to Hong Kong's competitiveness. This financial lever, coupled with a rigorous quality assurance mechanism that ensures all CEF courses meet high standards, guarantees that the workforce is not just participating in education, but acquiring globally relevant, high-quality competencies.

Simultaneously, the government's vision to build an international hub for post-secondary education is inextricably linked to the future of continuing education. The establishment of Universities of Applied Sciences (UASs) is a pivotal strategic move to raise the status of vocational and professional education and training to the university degree level. By prescribing formal standards for these institutions, Hong Kong will create clear, prestigious pathways for technical professionals, offering an alternative yet equally valued route to success. This not only addresses the economy's need for a deep pool of applied expertise but also destigmatizes vocational paths, fostering a culture where continuous learning for professional advancement is the norm. Furthermore, the ambitious plan to develop the Northern Metropolis University Town will create a dynamic cross-border education hub. By encouraging post-secondary institutions to strengthen cooperation with renowned Mainland and overseas institutions, this initiative will foster the exchange of ideas, shared resources, and enhanced collaboration with industry, creating a vibrant ecosystem for cutting-edge continuing education programs that serve the entire Greater Bay Area.

Projected Economic and Social Impact by 2035

The successful implementation of this strategic blueprint is projected to generate profound economic and social impacts for Hong Kong by 2035, cementing its role as a key driver for regional development. Economically, the creation of a highly skilled and adaptable workforce will be the primary engine of growth. By aligning continuing education courses with the "eight centres" positioning supported by the National 14th Five-Year Plan, Hong Kong can ensure a talent pipeline that meets the sophisticated demands of its core industries, from financial services to innovation and technology. This will enhance total factor productivity, attract high-value-added businesses, and solidify Hong Kong's status as an international hub for innovation. Furthermore, initiatives like the planned Greater Bay Area International Clinical Trial Institute will not only advance medical research but also create demand for specialized, ongoing professional development in the health and medical innovation sector. This synergy between industrial policy and continuing education will stimulate new economic clusters, generating high-quality employment opportunities and diversifying Hong Kong's economic base.

The social impact will be equally transformative, fostering greater inclusivity and resilience. A robust continuing education ecosystem provides a tangible "alternative path to success," empowering individuals from all backgrounds to pursue upward mobility through technical professions and lifelong learning. This directly supports a more caring and inclusive community by offering new opportunities for career switchers, those seeking to re-enter the workforce, and individuals looking to enhance their employability later in life. The emphasis on upskilling also complements broader social policies, such as those supporting ethnic minorities and special school leavers, by providing them with the tools to achieve financial independence and integrate more fully into society. By 2035, the normalization of continuous learning will cultivate a population that is more adaptable, innovative, and resilient in the face of global economic shifts, reducing social inequality and enhancing overall quality of life. The strategic focus on a knowledge-based economy, where every citizen is empowered to contribute and grow, will be Hong Kong's ultimate legacy, ensuring its enduring prosperity and global leadership for generations to come.

VOLUME I: STRATEGIC FOUNDATION AND VISION

PART 1: THE CASE FOR GLOBAL LEADERSHIP

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION – WHY CONTINUOUS EDUCATION MATTERS

In an era defined by unprecedented technological acceleration and global economic interdependence, the concept of education as a finite pursuit—confined to the early decades of life—has become obsolete. The fundamental premise underpinning Hong Kong's aspiration to global leadership in continuous education rests on a stark reality: the half-life of professional knowledge is rapidly contracting. As a seminal economic analysis commissioned by the University Grants Committee observed, professional skills and knowledge capital inevitably deplete with working experience, necessitating continual updating and reinvestment. This phenomenon is not merely an academic observation but a pressing economic imperative for a small, open economy like Hong Kong, which has historically derived its competitive advantage from its capacity to adapt swiftly to global shifts. The territory's transition from a manufacturing-based economy to a regional professional services hub has been remarkably compressed, with the manufacturing sector shedding hundreds of thousands of jobs while the service sector simultaneously expanded—a restructuring that rendered many workers' skills obsolete almost overnight. In this volatile landscape, continuous education functions as the primary mechanism through which both individuals and the broader economy can maintain relevance, flexibility, and competitive edge.

The imperative for continuous learning extends far beyond economic restructuring; it addresses the fundamental misalignment between traditional educational pathways and the dynamic demands of contemporary employment. Despite Hong Kong's comparatively low unemployment rate, the territory grapples with a persistent and pervasive talent mismatch, wherein academic qualifications increasingly fail to translate into workforce readiness. This disconnect stems from multiple converging factors: entrenched social norms that privilege academic credentials over practical competencies, curricula that struggle to keep pace with technological advancement—particularly in artificial intelligence—and insufficient synergy between educational institutions and industry requirements. The conventional university degree, once regarded as a terminal qualification sufficient for a lifetime career, now serves merely as an "admission ticket" to employment, with genuine professional capability developing through continuous workplace learning and adaptive skill acquisition.

As artificial intelligence and automation fundamentally reshape occupational profiles across every sector, the distinction between education and employment dissolves entirely; learning becomes not a preparatory phase but a concurrent, lifelong process of adaptation and growth. Hong Kong's government has increasingly recognised that fostering a robust continuous education ecosystem constitutes a strategic imperative rather than a peripheral social service. The establishment and ongoing enhancement of the Continuing Education Fund (CEF) exemplifies this commitment, providing subsidies to adults with learning aspirations and supporting the territory's transition to a knowledge-based economy in response to globalisation's challenges. With over 4,650 registered courses offered by more than 120 providers, the CEF framework acknowledges that lifelong learning must be accessible, affordable, and aligned with evolving industry standards. More recently, the legislative passage of the Post Secondary Colleges (Amendment) Bill 2025 and the Employee Retraining Board's strategic repositioning toward "skills-based" training signal a fundamental shift in policy orientation—moving beyond crisis intervention for displaced workers toward a comprehensive, whole-of-population approach to capability development. These reforms recognise that in an economy increasingly focused on high-value-added services—legal, accounting, consulting, engineering, and financial services—the workforce must possess not only foundational knowledge but also the capacity for continuous professional renewal.

Beyond instrumental economic considerations, continuous education serves vital social and individual functions that collectively enhance Hong Kong's societal resilience and cultural richness. The spectrum of continuing education encompasses far more than vocational retraining; it includes courses in flute playing, Chinese opera, astronomy, philosophy, and landscape painting—pursuits that enrich individual lives and strengthen the cultural fabric of society. These non-award-bearing programmes, which constitute the majority of continuing education offerings, address diverse motivations ranging from personal enrichment to active ageing, responding to the territory's demographic shifts and the emergence of second-career trends among its ageing population. Universities have increasingly recognised this dimension, with institutions like the Chinese University of Hong Kong redefining their continuing education units to serve the needs of an ageing society, while Hong Kong Baptist University's School of Continuing Education positions itself as an integral component of a broader educational ecosystem nurturing researchers and practitioners across Hong Kong, the Mainland, and overseas. This holistic conception of continuous education—embracing economic functionality alongside personal fulfilment and cultural preservation—positions Hong Kong to develop a learning infrastructure that serves the whole person and the whole society.

The pathway to global leadership in continuous education requires Hong Kong to leverage its unique advantages while addressing structural challenges inherent in its current provision. The territory already possesses a remarkably active and extensive continuing education market that has, by many measures, functioned effectively without extensive government intervention. Private providers, higher education institutions, the Vocational Training Council, and non-profit organisations collectively equip hundreds of thousands of adult learners with skills ranging from foundational competencies to advanced professional capabilities.

Yet this very success raises questions about future direction: how to ensure equitable access across age groups, given the current underrepresentation of learners over forty ; how to maintain quality assurance across a proliferating array of providers and modalities; and how to systematically connect learning outcomes to career mobility and enterprise productivity. The University Grants Committee has observed that continuing education serves multiple functions with varying effectiveness—facilitating career change most potently, enabling job change, and improving performance in current roles —suggesting that different segments of the lifelong learning ecosystem require different funding models, pedagogical approaches, and quality assurance mechanisms.

Ultimately, Hong Kong's aspiration to become a global leader in continuous education reflects a profound recognition that in the twenty-first century, a territory's most valuable asset is not its physical infrastructure or financial capital but the adaptive capacity of its people. The rapid economic transformations that have characterised Hong Kong's recent history—the shift from manufacturing to services, the emergence of fintech and biotechnology, the integration with the Greater Bay Area, and the pervasive impact of artificial intelligence—are not exceptional disruptions but the normal condition of a globally connected knowledge economy. Continuous education, therefore, is not merely a policy domain concerned with adult learning but the central mechanism through which Hong Kong cultivates the flexibility, creativity, and resilience necessary to thrive amid perpetual change. By building upon its existing strengths—a dynamic market, supportive policy frameworks, world-class higher education institutions, and a populace with demonstrated appetite for learning—Hong Kong can develop a continuous education ecosystem that serves as a model for other global cities navigating the complexities of technological disruption, demographic transition, and economic transformation. The chapters that follow outline a strategic blueprint for realising this vision, positioning Hong Kong not merely as a consumer of global knowledge but as a producer of innovative approaches to lifelong learning that empower individuals, strengthen enterprises, and enrich society across generations.

1.1 The global knowledge economy and the half-life of skills

The Imperative: The Half-Life of Skills in the Global Knowledge Economy

The global economy has undergone a fundamental tectonic shift. We have moved from an industrial age, where a skillset could sustain a forty-year career, into a dynamic, globalized knowledge economy. The very currency of this new economy—knowledge and specialized skills—is subject to an accelerating rate of depreciation. This phenomenon is often quantified by the concept of the "half-life of skills," a term borrowed from nuclear physics to describe the time it takes for a skill's value to decay by half. In this context, a technical skill learned today may be obsolete, or at least significantly less relevant, within four or five years, and for some technology-focused roles, this half-life can be as short as two to three years.

This relentless obsolescence creates a profound and urgent challenge for workforces, corporations, and governments alike. The traditional model of education—a front-loaded burst of learning in one's youth, followed by a lifetime of application—is no longer viable. It has been replaced by a paradigm of lifelong learning, where continuous education is not a luxury but a necessity for economic survival and competitiveness. For individuals, it is the key to employability and wage security. For businesses, it is the engine of innovation and adaptability. For a global city like Hong Kong, whose prosperity is built on its role as a hub for finance, trade, and innovation, the ability to navigate this new reality is not just an advantage; it is an existential imperative. The city's future economic relevance hinges on its capacity to transform itself into a global leader in continuous education, effectively becoming a "learning hub" that powers its knowledge economy.

Hong Kong's Foundational Advantages: The Bedrock for a Learning Hub

Hong Kong possesses a unique confluence of inherent strengths that provide a formidable foundation upon which to build a global leadership position in continuous education. First and foremost is its established status as a leading international financial center and a key node in the global innovation network. This ecosystem generates an intense and constant demand for high-level, specialized skills in fields like fintech, green finance, cybersecurity, data analytics, and artificial intelligence. This demand creates a natural, self-sustaining market for continuous education programs, as both corporations and individuals are compelled to invest in upskilling to maintain their competitive edge. The presence of multinational corporations and a thriving small-to-medium enterprise sector provides a ready-made clientele for bespoke professional training and development.

Secondly, Hong Kong is home to a world-class higher education sector, consistently ranked among the best in Asia and the world. Its universities are not only centers of academic excellence but also powerful engines of research and knowledge creation. This existing infrastructure provides a critical advantage: a deep pool of academic expertise, established pedagogical frameworks, and the institutional credibility to design and deliver rigorous, high-quality continuous education programs. By leveraging the brand equity and intellectual capital of institutions like the University of Hong Kong, the Chinese University of Hong Kong, and the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, the city can offer credentials and learning experiences that are trusted and valued on a global scale. Finally, Hong Kong's unique geographical and cultural position, acting as a "super-connector" between East and West, positions it as the ideal gateway for global professional bodies and educational institutions seeking to offer their certifications and programs to the vast Asian market. Its bilingualism (English and Cantonese, with growing Putonghua capability), common law system, and international business culture make it a naturally welcoming and accessible hub for both regional and global talent.

The Strategic Blueprint: Pillars of Global Leadership

To ascend from a position of strength to one of global leadership, Hong Kong requires a deliberate and comprehensive strategic blueprint built on several key pillars. The first pillar must be a shift from ad-hoc course offerings to a cohesive, government-supported ecosystem for lifelong learning. This involves creating a centralized, digital "SkillsFuture" style platform that maps current and future industry skills needs to available learning pathways. This platform would serve as a one-stop shop for individuals and businesses, offering personalized learning recommendations, aggregated course listings from universities, private providers, and international partners, and transparent information on government subsidies and training vouchers. By making the navigation of continuous education simple and intuitive, the government can dramatically increase participation rates and ensure that learning is aligned with genuine economic demand.

The second pillar is the aggressive adoption of technology to scale and personalize learning. Hong Kong must become a pioneer in the application of EdTech to professional development. This means moving beyond traditional classroom-based executive education to embrace a blended model that leverages AI-powered learning platforms, immersive virtual and augmented reality simulations for skills training (e.g., for complex medical procedures or engineering tasks), and micro-credentialing. By championing and investing in these technologies, Hong Kong can offer flexible, just-in-time learning that fits the busy schedules of professionals. Furthermore, by partnering with global online learning platforms like Coursera or edX to host and co-create content, Hong Kong's institutions can extend their reach far beyond their physical borders, attracting a global cohort of learners and establishing themselves as international thought leaders in their respective fields.

The third and final pillar is the deliberate creation of an "education hub" that attracts global talent and fosters cross-border collaboration. This involves creating streamlined visa pathways for international professionals to come to Hong Kong for intensive upskilling programs or "executive education sabbaticals." It also means actively courting top-tier international universities and corporate universities to establish a physical presence in the city, creating a dense cluster of educational providers. This physical ecosystem would be complemented by a virtual one, fostering a global community of learners and practitioners. By hosting world-class conferences, summits, and competitions focused on the future of work and learning, Hong Kong can position itself as the central forum for discourse on continuous education. In doing so, it would not only serve its own workforce but also become the indispensable partner for global companies and governments seeking to navigate the challenges of the knowledge economy, solidifying its role as a vital and irreplaceable global hub for talent development.

1.2 Defining continuous education: From remedial training to lifelong empowerment

Hong Kong's journey toward becoming a global leader in continuous education is fundamentally rooted in a paradigm shift in how society defines the concept itself. Historically, continuous education was often viewed through a narrow lens, primarily as remedial training or a safety net for displaced workers. This perspective was particularly prevalent during Hong Kong's rapid economic restructuring in the late 20th century, where the primary goal was to retrain manufacturing workers who had lost their jobs, equipping them with basic skills for survival in a changing job market. However, this reactive model has evolved into a proactive and holistic philosophy of lifelong empowerment. Today, continuous education is recognized as a perpetual journey of personal and professional development, essential for all demographics—from young adults seeking a competitive edge, to mid-career professionals navigating industry shifts, to older learners pursuing second careers or personal enrichment. This redefinition acknowledges that in a globalized and technologically disrupted economy, the "half-life" of skills is constantly shortening, making continual reinvestment in human capital not a contingency plan, but a permanent strategic imperative for both individuals and the broader society.

A cornerstone of Hong Kong's strategic blueprint is its robust and formalized infrastructure, which transforms the abstract goal of lifelong learning into a tangible and accessible reality. The establishment of the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF) provides a clear, objective, and standardized platform that articulates pathways across academic, vocational, and continuing education sectors. This framework ensures that the quality and standards of diverse learning programs are assured and that the skills acquired are directly relevant to industry needs, thereby enhancing the competitiveness of the workforce. The recent strategic overhaul of the Employees Retraining Board (ERB) exemplifies this progressive approach. By removing the previous 上限 on trainees' education levels and shifting its focus from remedial training to a "skills-based" model for the entire workforce, the ERB is now positioned to address economy-wide skill gaps. Its future roadmap includes developing industry-recognized micro-credentials and fostering collaborations with higher education institutions, thereby creating a multi-layered, flexible, and integrated continuing education ecosystem.

Hong Kong's institutions are actively innovating to deliver this new vision, creating flexible and high-quality learning opportunities that cater to the modern professional. The proliferation of micro-credential courses, such as those offered by CUHK Business School, demonstrates a move towards bite-sized, practical, and stackable learning. These programs in high-demand areas like FinTech, Sustainability, and Artificial Intelligence are designed as "career accelerators," allowing learners to gain targeted skills efficiently and even transfer credits toward a traditional master's degree, effectively bridging the gap between professional practice and academic advancement. Furthermore, institutions like HKU SPACE are extending the reach of Hong Kong's continuous education model beyond its borders.

Through initiatives like the LEAD Academy, they are offering executive education and bespoke training programs to senior professionals and government officials from Mainland China and beyond, positioning Hong Kong as a regional hub for talent development and knowledge exchange in the Greater Bay Area and internationally. Ultimately, Hong Kong's pathway to global leadership in this field hinges on its ability to embrace inclusivity and adaptability, ensuring that the benefits of lifelong learning permeate every layer of society. This means moving beyond a narrow focus on economic productivity to embrace the full spectrum of human development. While a significant portion of continuing education is rightly focused on upskilling for career advancement and facilitating job transitions in high-growth sectors like finance and business services, a truly world-leading system also nurtures the soul of a society. It values and preserves the rich array of non-award-bearing courses in arts, culture, and leisure activities that enrich individual lives and foster community well-being. By simultaneously catering to the demands of the economy—such as training for "eight centres" positioning as highlighted by stakeholders like the FTU—and the diverse personal aspirations of its people, including an ageing population, Hong Kong is building a comprehensive and humane model of lifelong empowerment. This dual focus on economic vitality and personal fulfillment is what will distinguish Hong Kong as a true global leader in continuous education.

1.3 Hong Kong's unique value proposition: "One country, two systems" as an educational bridge

Hong Kong stands at a pivotal moment in its quest to become a global leader in continuing education, with its constitutional principle of "one country, two systems" serving as the cornerstone of its unique value proposition as an educational bridge. This framework endows Hong Kong with the distinctive advantage of being both an integral part of China while maintaining a separate educational and social system that operates with international norms and standards. The Legislative Council has explicitly identified this constitutional arrangement as a fundamental asset in building an international education hub, noting that it enables Hong Kong to enjoy strong support from the mainland while remaining closely connected to the world. This dual identity positions Hong Kong as an indispensable intermediary—a gateway through which mainland professionals can access globally recognized continuing education, and through which international learners and institutions can gain structured entry into the vast educational and professional markets of the Greater Bay Area and beyond. The city's education system's high internationalization and diversification, evidenced by its status as the only city with five universities among the world's top 100 and its global education competitiveness ranking of second worldwide, provides the academic credibility necessary to fulfill this bridging function.

Hong Kong's continuing education institutions are actively operationalizing this bridging strategy through concrete programmatic innovations and physical infrastructure development that physically and pedagogically connect mainland China with global educational standards. The Chinese University of Hong Kong Business School's Asia-Pacific Institute of Business has introduced a premier series of Professional Certificate Programmes featuring micro-credentials that are listed at Level 6 of the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework, offering flexible, industry-relevant education in high-demand fields such as Innovation Leadership, Sustainability and ESG Reporting, and Artificial Intelligence for Business. Critically, these programmes offer seamless credit transfer to master's degree programmes, creating articulated pathways that enable learners to progress from targeted skills acquisition to advanced degrees—a model particularly attractive to mainland professionals seeking internationally recognized qualifications with the flexibility that traditional degree structures cannot provide. Meanwhile, HKU SPACE has strategically positioned itself at the physical nexus of this educational bridge by inaugurating a new learning centre in Sheung Shui, located in the North District mere minutes from the mainland border crossings at Lo Wu and Lok Ma Chau. This centre, spanning nearly 20,000 square feet with contemporary facilities, explicitly serves mainland participants and embodies the institution's strategic goal of "contributing to human capital development in the GBA." Furthermore, HKU SPACE has formalized partnerships with mainland institutions such as the School of Continuing Education of Northwestern Polytechnical University, developing innovative "Cloud Classroom + Practice Base" training models that blend theoretical education from Hong Kong with hands-on practice in mainland industrial settings, directly supporting talent development for the Belt and Road Initiative.

The strategic policy environment in Hong Kong has evolved rapidly to support this vision, with government initiatives creating enabling conditions for continuing education to flourish as a bridge between systems. The Chief Executive's Policy Addresses have progressively articulated a comprehensive framework for educational hub development, including the doubling of non-local student quotas for UGC-funded universities to 40 percent, substantial increases in scholarship funding through a \$1 billion injection into the Government Scholarship Fund, and the creation of approximately 13,500 additional hostel places to accommodate growing international and mainland student populations. More recently, the admission ceiling for self-financing non-local students pursuing bachelor's degrees at public universities has been raised further to 50 percent of funded local student places for the 2026-27 academic year. These policy shifts directly benefit continuing education by expanding the pool of potential learners who may begin their Hong Kong educational journey through non-degree programmes before transitioning to degree studies. The government has also established the Alliance of Universities in Applied Sciences to elevate the status of vocational and professional education, creating clearer pathways for continuing education to articulate with degree-level applied learning. The planned University Town in the Northern Metropolis, with its concept development framework expected in 2026, represents a long-term infrastructure commitment that will physically anchor this educational bridge, with Legislative Council members advocating for tax and financial incentives to encourage institutions to establish second campuses that can collaborate directly with industry and 科研机构.

The bridging function of Hong Kong's continuing education sector addresses critical talent development needs identified in national and regional strategies. Hong Kong's positioning within the national 14th Five-Year Plan as one of "eight centres" creates 明确 demand for professionals with specific competencies, and continuing education provides the agility to respond to these needs more rapidly than traditional degree programmes. The Hong Kong Institution for Innovation and Technology projects severe manpower shortfalls in the innovation and technology sector, with demand expected to surge from 60,200 professionals in 2023 to 96,400 by 2028, potentially leaving a shortfall of 18,000 to 23,000 professionals. Continuing education programmes that offer micro-credentials in areas such as financial technology applications and artificial intelligence for business are precisely designed to address these gaps by upskilling existing professionals and creating pathways for career switchers. Furthermore, the mutual recognition of sub-degree qualifications being promoted between Hong Kong and the mainland facilitates seamless cross-boundary employment and study across the Greater Bay Area, enabling learners to combine Hong Kong's educational credentials with career opportunities in the mainland's dense ecosystem of technology startups and advanced manufacturing. This creates a virtuous cycle where the credibility of Hong Kong's qualifications opens doors throughout the region, which in turn attracts more learners to Hong Kong's continuing education offerings.

Looking forward, Hong Kong's pathway to global leadership in continuing education requires addressing several strategic challenges while building on its unique bridging position. The Legislative Council has identified the lack of diversity in non-local student sources as a vulnerability, recommending that the government systematically formulate targeted promotion strategies focusing on ASEAN and Belt and Road countries, leveraging the network of Economic and Trade Offices overseas to promote the "Study in Hong Kong" brand. This diversification effort aligns with continuing education's need to attract learners from varied backgrounds who can benefit from Hong Kong's unique position. Additionally, institutions are increasingly focusing on the needs of specific demographic segments, with CUHK's strategic plan explicitly calling for redefining the role of continuing education to serve the ageing population and second-career trends—areas where Hong Kong's experience as an advanced economy can inform programme development relevant throughout the region. The emphasis on practical, industry-relevant skills development, combined with credit articulation pathways to degree programmes, creates a flexible educational architecture that can respond to rapidly evolving professional demands while maintaining rigorous academic standards. As Hong Kong continues to develop this ecosystem, its fundamental value proposition remains clear: it offers the unique combination of Chinese accessibility and international educational standards, creating a bridge that serves learners, employers, and societies throughout the region and beyond.

1.4 Vision 2035: Hong Kong as the Continuous Education Hub of Asia

Hong Kong's journey to becoming the pre-eminent hub for continuous education in Asia by 2035 is built upon a robust and mature foundation that already distinguishes it from regional competitors. The city's strategic blueprint leverages a unique ecosystem where world-class higher education intersects with proactive government funding and a deeply ingrained societal recognition of lifelong learning's value. The government's flagship Continuing Education Fund (CEF), which provides a substantial subsidy ceiling of \$25,000 per eligible applicant to over 4,650 registered courses, exemplifies this commitment, actively lowering barriers for adults seeking to upskill and adapt to a knowledge-based economy. This financial catalyst is complemented by the exceptional quality of Hong Kong's tertiary institutions. With five universities consistently ranked among the world's top 100, the city possesses a concentrated pool of academic and research talent that is unparalleled in Asia. This creates a powerful engine for developing high-level, accredited continuous professional education (CPE) programmes that are credible, rigorous, and attractive to professionals across the region. The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government's strategic vision, articulated in recent Policy Addresses, aims to consolidate these strengths by actively promoting the "Study in Hong Kong" brand and fostering an integrated approach to education, technology, and talent development through high-level co-ordination committees. This top-down strategic direction ensures that the expansion of continuous education is not an afterthought but a central pillar of Hong Kong's long-term economic and social development, aligning perfectly with the national strategy to build China into a leading country in education.

A key element of this blueprint is the deliberate construction of a dynamic and responsive talent ecosystem that connects learning directly with the evolving demands of the global and regional economy. Hong Kong's recent leap to first place in Asia in the IMD World Talent Ranking is a testament to the effectiveness of its policies in attracting, developing, and retaining high-calibre professionals. This success is intrinsically linked to the city's capacity for continuous education, which serves as a critical mechanism for replenishing the "knowledge capital" of its workforce, a necessity in an economy characterised by rapid restructuring and a shortening "half-life of skills". As Hong Kong solidifies its role as a regional professional services centre and an international innovation and technology (I&T) hub, the demand for specialised, up-to-date expertise in fields like finance, law, engineering, and technology has skyrocketed. Continuous education providers, from university-affiliated bodies like HKU SPACE and PolyU SPEED to numerous private and non-profit organisations, have historically proven remarkably agile in meeting these needs, equipping hundreds of thousands of workers with higher-level skills. The strategic plan for 2035 aims to supercharge this responsiveness by further integrating industry needs into curriculum design, fostering stronger collaborations between universities and corporate sectors, and expanding the pipeline of talent in high-priority areas such as artificial intelligence, data science, and financial technology. The establishment of the Committee on Education, Technology and Talents is a pivotal step in this direction, designed to co-ordinate these efforts and ensure that talent cultivation is perfectly synchronised with Hong Kong's strategic economic objectives as an "eight centres" hub.

Furthermore, Hong Kong's pathway to leadership is defined by its ambition to transcend traditional, narrowly vocational models of continuous education and embrace a holistic, future-ready paradigm. This vision recognises that a truly resilient and innovative society requires not only advanced professional skills but also a populace equipped with foundational competencies, digital literacy, and a capacity for cultural enrichment. The government's support through schemes like the Adult Education Subvention Scheme (AESS), which funds charitable organisations to provide basic literacy, computer, and reorientation courses, underscores a commitment to inclusive lifelong learning that reaches all segments of society, including new arrivals and ethnic minorities. This inclusive approach is crucial for maintaining social cohesion and ensuring that the benefits of a knowledge-based economy are widely shared. Simultaneously, the city's continuous education sector is increasingly catering to the demand for learning that enhances "life quality" and personal development, offering a vast array of courses in the arts, humanities, and leisure pursuits. This comprehensive offering makes Hong Kong an attractive destination not just for career-driven professionals but also for a global community of lifelong learners seeking intellectual and cultural enrichment.

Finally, the realisation of Vision 2035 is inextricably linked to Hong Kong's unique advantages as a super-connector within the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA) and its standing as a globally recognised digital leader. The Shenzhen-Hong Kong-Guangzhou cluster's recent ranking as the world's top innovation cluster by the Global Innovation Index provides a powerful platform for cross-border collaboration in continuous education. This allows Hong Kong institutions to partner with Mainland counterparts, technology firms, and industries in the GBA to create cutting-edge programmes that are directly relevant to the region's rapidly growing innovation economy. The planned development of the Northern Metropolis University Town will further physical and collaborative links, creating a vibrant cross-border education hub. Complementing this regional integration is Hong Kong's outstanding digital competitiveness, ranking fourth globally and first in key areas like "Technological framework" and "Adaptive attitudes". This digital prowess provides the ideal infrastructure for scaling continuous education through innovative online and blended learning platforms, AI-driven personalised learning, and micro-credentialing. By harnessing its role as the GBA's international gateway and a global digital leader, Hong Kong is uniquely positioned to not only serve the immediate region but also to set the standard for how continuous education can be delivered and experienced in the 21st century, solidifying its status as the Continuous Education Hub of Asia by 2035.

CHAPTER 2: HONG KONG'S CURRENT LANDSCAPE – STRENGTHS TO BUILD UPON

Hong Kong possesses a robust and multifaceted foundation upon which to build its ambition of becoming a global leader in continuing education. This leadership potential is not emerging from a vacuum but is rooted in a sophisticated ecosystem characterized by a government-endorsed qualifications framework, a diverse array of world-class providers, a strong historical responsiveness to economic needs, and a demonstrated societal demand for lifelong learning. These interlocking strengths provide a strategic platform for future growth and international influence.

A Foundational Strength: The Qualifications Framework (QF)

A primary strength is the well-established and legally backed Qualifications Framework (QF) , which provides a systematic and transparent infrastructure for all learning. Established under the clear policy objective to "provide a platform that encourages and facilitates lifelong learning," the QF is not merely an administrative tool but a strategic asset. It defines clear, objective standards for qualifications across academic, vocational, and continuing education sectors, ensuring that all accredited learning is quality-assured and aligned with a unified set of levels. For learners, this creates flexible and comprehensible pathways, allowing them to stack credentials and plan their lifelong learning journeys with clarity. For employers, it assures that qualifications held by employees genuinely meet industry-defined competency standards. The framework's statutory footing, provided by the Academic and Vocational Qualifications Ordinance (Cap. 592), and the robust quality assurance mechanisms enforced by the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ), lend it unparalleled credibility and rigor. This strong foundation of a clear, trusted, and government-supported framework is a distinct advantage that many other global cities lack.

A Dynamic and Industry-Responsive Ecosystem

Building on this framework, Hong Kong's continuing education landscape is characterised by its dynamic diversity and acute responsiveness to industry needs. The sector is not a monolith but a vibrant mix of providers, including world-class university extensions like HKU SPACE, vocational training powerhouses like the Vocational Training Council (VTC), and numerous professional bodies and private institutions. This ecosystem excels at rapidly translating the evolving demands of the economy into tangible upskilling opportunities.

For instance, alongside traditional pillars like the CFA and HKICPA, the market has swiftly introduced cutting-edge certifications in fields such as Web3.0 (Certified Digital Asset Analyst), agile management (Scrum Master), and cloud computing, often offered in multiple languages to cater to an international audience. The VTC alone serves over 200,000 in-service individuals annually with courses directly tied to industry needs, from engineering to hospitality, many of which are QF-accredited and linked to professional licenses. This agility ensures that Hong Kong's workforce can continuously adapt, a crucial capability for maintaining its competitive edge as a leading international service economy.

Deep-Rooted Societal Demand and a Proven Track Record

The sophisticated supply of continuing education is matched by a deep-rooted and historically proven demand from the population. This is not a recent phenomenon; as far back as the early 1990s, Hong Kong had a massive and active market for continuing education, with an estimated 900,000 adult students enrolled annually. This demand was, and is, driven by Hong Kong's unique economic history as a "small open economy" requiring a highly flexible workforce capable of adapting to rapid structural changes, such as the dramatic shift from manufacturing to a knowledge-based services hub. Continuing education has historically been the primary mechanism enabling this adaptability, facilitating career changes and skill upgrades for hundreds of thousands of workers with minimal direct government intervention. This cultural acceptance and proactive pursuit of further learning is a powerful strength. It is further evidenced by contemporary data, such as the Continuing Education Fund receiving over 900,000 applications, underscoring a sustained and widespread societal commitment to self-improvement and lifelong learning.

A Legacy of Institutional Excellence and Broad-Based Learning

Finally, Hong Kong's strength lies in the high quality and broad scope of its educational providers. The involvement of its publicly funded universities, all of which are self-accrediting and operate under the quality assurance of the UGC's Quality Assurance Council, ensures that continuing education offerings meet the highest academic standards. These institutions, through their schools of professional and continuing education, have a long history of providing not only vocationally oriented courses but also programmes that enrich society and the individual, covering everything from the life arts to sciences and business. This commitment to a broad curriculum, catering to both professional advancement and personal enrichment, creates a holistic learning society. The presence of over 100 examination bodies and professional organisations in the city further cements its status as a regional hub for professional accreditation and assessment. This combination of institutional prestige, a holistic educational philosophy, and a critical mass of professional bodies forms a powerful triad that supports Hong Kong's ambition to lead globally in continuing education.

In summary, Hong Kong does not need to invent its continuing education sector from scratch. It possesses a powerful combination of a structured and transparent qualifications framework, an agile and industry-responsive provider ecosystem, a population with a proven appetite for lifelong learning, and a bedrock of prestigious, quality-assured institutions. These are the foundational pillars upon which a compelling strategic blueprint for global leadership can be built.

2.1 World-class university infrastructure (5 in global top 100)

Hong Kong possesses a unique and robust foundation to craft a strategic blueprint for global leadership in continuing education, anchored by its world-class university infrastructure. With five universities consistently ranked among the global top 100, the city has an unparalleled concentration of academic excellence that can be leveraged to redefine lifelong learning. These institutions are not merely static repositories of knowledge but are increasingly positioning their schools of professional and continuing education as strategic drivers of societal and economic progress. For instance, both HKU SPACE and CUHK's School of Continuing and Professional Studies have articulated clear visions to become global leaders in this domain, emphasizing innovation, international partnerships, and responsiveness to evolving learner needs. This vision is operationalized through the development of flexible, high-quality offerings such as micro-credentials and executive education, designed to bridge the gap between academic theory and industry practice. The recent introduction of professional certificate programmes by CUHK Business School, covering high-demand fields like Innovation Leadership, Sustainability, and Artificial Intelligence for Business, exemplifies how traditional academic strength is being channelled into accessible, career-oriented continuing education that holds tangible value, including credit transferable to master's degrees.

The strategic blueprint is further strengthened by a well-established and internationally aligned ecosystem that supports lifelong learning. The Hong Kong SAR Government's Qualifications Framework (QF) provides a standardized and transparent system that integrates academic, vocational, and continuing education, ensuring quality and facilitating clear progression pathways for learners across all career stages. This framework, combined with the presence of over 100 examination bodies and professional organizations, enables Hong Kong to offer a diverse array of globally recognized professional qualifications, from the CFA and FRM in finance to emerging credentials in digital assets and agile management. This institutional infrastructure allows for the seamless integration of professional certification with academic advancement, a key differentiator in the global education market. Furthermore, the city's strategic role as a bridge between East and West is actively harnessed through initiatives like HKU SPACE's LEAD Academy, which delivers tailor-made programmes for mainland Chinese officials and professionals, and facilitates international study tours to prestigious universities like Harvard and Cambridge. Such programmes not only generate new knowledge and networks but also position Hong Kong as a vital hub for cross-cultural leadership development and the exchange of best practices in an interconnected world.

Ultimately, Hong Kong's pathway to global leadership hinges on its ability to synergize its top-tier university research and teaching with an agile and forward-looking continuing education sector. The universities' strategic plans increasingly reflect a commitment to serving the needs of a diverse and ageing population, recognizing the importance of lifelong learning for second careers and personal enrichment, alongside traditional academic progression. By fostering closer collaboration between its research-intensive universities and its dedicated continuing education arms, Hong Kong can create a powerful continuum of learning that extends from undergraduate studies through to executive education and later-life learning. The city's proven track record in maintaining its universities' global standing, as evidenced by their consistent top-100 rankings , provides a solid bedrock of credibility. By continuing to innovate with micro-credentials, stackable qualifications, and targeted programmes for regional talent, Hong Kong is well-positioned to not only meet the immediate upskilling demands of the global economy but to actively shape the future of lifelong learning as a truly world-class centre of excellence.

2.2 Existing continuing education ecosystem (HKUSPACE, CUSCS, LiPACE, SCOPE, HKBU-SCE, LIFE, SPEED)

Hong Kong possesses a uniquely dense and dynamic ecosystem for continuing education, providing a solid foundation upon which to build a global leadership position. Institutions like HKU SPACE, CUHK SCS, and VTC, among others, are already demonstrating the key strategic pillars—internationalization, flexible learning pathways, and industry integration—that will define the future of the field. By analyzing their current initiatives and strategic visions, a clear blueprint for global leadership emerges.

The Existing Ecosystem: A Foundation of Scale and Diversity

Hong Kong's continuing education sector is characterized by its diversity and the sheer scale of its operations, anchored by the schools embedded in its major universities. The HKU School of Professional and Continuing Education (HKU SPACE) stands as a prime example, functioning as the extension arm of the University of Hong Kong. With a vast network of learning centres across Hong Kong and a significant operational footprint in Mainland China, HKU SPACE demonstrates the capacity for large-scale, multi-modal delivery. Its extensive portfolio, ranging from short courses to postgraduate diplomas and doctorates offered in collaboration with overseas universities like the University of Leicester and Edinburgh Napier University, showcases a mature model for providing lifelong learning opportunities to a wide community. Similarly, the School of Continuing and Professional Studies (CUSCS) at CUHK articulates a clear vision "to be a global leader in university continuing education," focusing on enriching lives and transforming lifelong learning. Its strategies emphasize academic quality, global experiences, and close collaboration with industries and renowned overseas partners, setting a benchmark for educational excellence. The Vocational Training Council (VTC) adds a crucial and distinct dimension to this ecosystem as Hong Kong's largest vocational and professional education provider. VTC's focus on applied learning, with its network of institutions like the Hong Kong Institute of Information Technology (HKIIT), ensures a direct pipeline of skilled talent for key industries, thereby addressing the immediate and future manpower needs of Hong Kong's economy. This triad of comprehensive university-affiliated schools, globally-focused continuing education units, and applied vocational institutions creates a rich and complementary landscape capable of serving diverse learner populations, from school leavers to working professionals and older adults.

Strategic Pillar 1: Embracing Technological Innovation and Flexible Learning

A core component of the blueprint is the deep integration of technology to create more flexible, responsive, and personalized learning experiences. Leading institutions are already pioneering this approach. VTC has made a significant strategic move by embedding artificial intelligence (AI) as a core competency across its curriculum. All students in its higher diploma programmes are now required to complete a revamped information technology module covering essential topics like generative AI applications and AI ethics and safety, ensuring every graduate possesses foundational AI literacy. Complementing this curricular reform, VTC has launched "Virtual Tutor," a 24/7 AI-powered learning support platform that allows students to ask questions and explore material at their own pace, effectively removing temporal and spatial barriers to learning. This commitment to "AI+ profession" education exemplifies how institutions can systematically embed future-proof skills into their programs. Concurrently, CUHK Business School's Asia-Pacific Institute of Business (APIB) is championing the micro-credential movement. Its new series of Professional Certificate Programmes offers flexible, shorter, and more affordable options for executives to upskill in high-demand areas like Innovation Leadership and Sustainability and ESG Reporting. A key innovation is the seamless transfer of credits earned from these micro-credentials into CUHK's master's degree programmes, creating a flexible and stackable learning pathway that bridges professional development and formal postgraduate education. This approach directly addresses the need for bite-sized, career-relevant learning that can be accumulated over time, a hallmark of a future-ready continuing education system.

Strategic Pillar 2: Regional Integration and Global Outreach

To achieve global leadership, Hong Kong's institutions are strategically expanding their reach both regionally and internationally, acting as a bridge between global best practices and the burgeoning needs of the Greater Bay Area (GBA). HKU SPACE has made the "Promotion of Human Capital Development in the GBA" a cornerstone of its 2025-2030 strategic plan. This commitment is manifested through concrete actions such as establishing a new teaching centre in Sheung Shui, which is strategically located just 20 minutes from the border crossing at Lo Wu and Lok Ma Chau, making it highly accessible for learners from the mainland. The school has also set up a Mainland Affairs Office to forge closer ties with institutions and enterprises in the GBA and signed a collaboration memorandum with Northwestern Polytechnical University to develop blended learning models combining online and practical training. These initiatives are designed to attract talent to Hong Kong for postgraduate diplomas and workshops, leveraging government schemes like the Immigration Arrangements for Non-local Graduates (IANG) to offer a clear pathway for non-local students to stay and work in Hong Kong after graduation. On the global stage, institutions are solidifying international partnerships. A recent agreement between Qatar's Academic Bridge Programme and both the University of Hong Kong and the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology underscores Hong Kong's reputation as a world-class study destination and a partner in fostering international academic mobility and cooperation. HKU SPACE's long history of offering joint programmes with prestigious overseas universities like the University of London and the University of Leicester further reinforces this global connectivity.

Strategic Pillar 3: Deep Industry Collaboration and Future Skills Development

The final strategic pillar involves a deep, symbiotic relationship with industry to ensure curricula remain relevant and graduates are equipped with the skills demanded by the future economy. VTC's model is particularly instructive in this regard. Under the leadership of its new Chairman, VTC is intensifying its "industry-academia in-depth collaboration" to precisely cultivate applied talent for the AI era. This is operationalized through its 25 industry-specific training committees, composed of industry elites who provide regular input on curriculum planning and content to ensure programmes are forward-looking and aligned with socio-economic development needs. This close partnership allows VTC to respond nimbly to emerging trends, such as developing new programmes like the Higher Diploma in Silver Hair Market Social Services and the Higher Diploma in Health and Social Care for the 2026/27 academic year. These programmes are designed to address the growing "silver economy" by incorporating teaching on IoT, AI, and wireless technologies in gerontechnology, directly linking classroom learning to tangible social needs. This focus on applied, industry-relevant skills is echoed across the sector. The University of Hong Kong's strategic plan, for instance, highlights the role of its School of Professional and Continuing Studies in serving the needs of an ageing population and second-career trends. This collective focus on societal and economic trends—from AI and fintech to an ageing society and the GBA's development—positions Hong Kong's continuing education sector not merely as a responder to industry needs, but as a proactive co-architect of the future workforce.

2.3 The Qualifications Framework (HKQF) as a foundational asset

The Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF) stands as a robust and legally enshrined foundation that can propel Hong Kong to global leadership in continuing education. Its comprehensive, transparent, and quality-assured system provides the ideal platform for developing a future-ready workforce and attracting international talent.

The HKQF: A Robust and Quality-Assured Foundation

The HKQF is far more than a simple classification system; it is a meticulously constructed asset underpinned by a legislative framework. Established in 2008 under the Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications Ordinance, it provides a unified platform for academic, vocational, and continuing education. This legal backing ensures its stability and credibility, essential for any system aspiring to international recognition. Its strength lies in its seven-level hierarchy, which clearly defines the standards of qualifications through its core features: QF Levels indicate the complexity of learning, while QF Credits measure the volume of learning, together creating a transparent and objective benchmark for learners and employers alike. This clarity demystifies qualifications, enabling individuals to chart their lifelong learning journeys with precision and allowing employers to accurately assess the skills of potential employees.

Crucially, the HKQF is underpinned by a robust quality assurance mechanism. The Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) acts as the statutory Accreditation Authority and Qualifications Register Authority, safeguarding the standards of all QF-recognised programmes. This rigorous oversight ensures that a qualification bearing the QF mark is a reliable indicator of genuine competence, which builds trust locally and is a critical factor for international portability. The framework's maturity is further demonstrated by its specialised bodies, such as the Quality Assurance Council (QAC), which assures the quality of programmes within University Grants Committee (UGC)-funded universities, ensuring that even the highest levels of academic learning adhere to the framework's stringent standards.

Building a Responsive and Dynamic Continuing Education Ecosystem

The true power of the HKQF as a strategic asset is realised in its ability to shape a continuing education ecosystem that is directly responsive to the needs of Hong Kong's economy and its people. By actively engaging industries through Industry Training Advisory Committees (ITACs), the HKQF ensures that the skills taught are precisely those demanded by the market. These committees, composed of major employers, employees, and professional bodies, develop detailed Specifications of Competency Standards (SCSs) that outline the precise skills, knowledge, and performance standards required for different job roles. Training providers then use these SCSs to design accredited courses, guaranteeing that learners gain immediately applicable and valuable competencies. This direct line between education and employment enhances individual career prospects and boosts the overall productivity and competitiveness of the workforce. This industry-led approach ensures Hong Kong's talent pool can adapt with the "flexibility and quickness" required to thrive as a small, open economy in a highly competitive international environment.

Furthermore, the HKQF actively promotes inclusivity and recognises diverse learning pathways. The "Recognition of Prior Learning" (RPL) mechanism is a standout feature, allowing experienced practitioners to have their skills and knowledge, gained through years on the job, formally assessed and credentialed. This is particularly valuable in sectors like the electrical and mechanical industry, where it provides a ladder for "red collar" veterans to gain formal qualifications without "going back to square one," thereby encouraging upward mobility and formalising invaluable experiential knowledge. This ethos of lifelong learning is embedded in the strategies of major continuing education providers, such as the Chinese University of Hong Kong's School of Continuing and Professional Studies (CUSCS), which explicitly aims to be a global leader by keeping pace with learners' needs, from young adults to an ageing population seeking second careers or personal enrichment.

Forging a Pathway to Global Leadership

With its strong domestic foundation, Hong Kong is uniquely positioned to leverage the HKQF as a springboard for global leadership in continuing education. The framework was intentionally designed with international referencing in mind, facilitating the recognition of Hong Kong qualifications abroad and attracting international talent to the city. The HKCAAVQ's proactive "bringing in, going out" strategy is key to this effort. By signing mutual recognition agreements with quality assurance bodies in countries like Kazakhstan, Bahrain, and the UAE, Hong Kong is actively building a global network that enhances the international profile of the HKQF and simplifies the process for qualifications to be recognised across borders.

This international credibility was significantly bolstered in 2023 when HKCAAVQ received renewed recognition from the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) , making it the first quality assurance agency outside the European Higher Education Area to achieve this status. This endorsement from a leading international body affirms that Hong Kong's quality assurance standards are on par with the world's best. With plans for further re-assessment in 2026, Hong Kong demonstrates a commitment to continuous improvement and alignment with global best practices. This international validation is crucial for supporting Hong Kong's ambition to become a regional education hub. A globally recognised framework assures multinational corporations that their employees can obtain portable, high-quality qualifications in Hong Kong, and it provides a clear, credible pathway for international professionals to upgrade their skills, thereby enriching the city's talent pool and solidifying its status as a global leader in the lifelong learning landscape.

2.4 Bilingual advantage and international connectivity

Hong Kong stands at a pivotal moment to assert its global leadership in continuous education, leveraging its unique bilingual advantage and strategic international connectivity. As a city where East meets West, Hong Kong's official policy of "biliteracy and trilingualism" provides a foundational pillar for this ambition. This linguistic dexterity is not merely a cultural asset but a critical economic and educational tool, described by Secretary for Education Choi Yuk-lin as "one of the advantages of education in Hong Kong" under "one country, two systems". In the realm of continuous education, this allows Hong Kong institutions to serve as a premier platform for learners from the Chinese mainland seeking international exposure, as evidenced by programs like the HKMU LiPACE-SZIIT dual-diploma initiative. Graduates of this program explicitly noted that the "bilingual learning environment" in Hong Kong provided them with a significant competitive edge for further studies and employment, helping them become more familiar with international and local cultures. By nurturing a talent pool fluent in both Chinese and global business languages, Hong Kong is perfectly positioned to meet the demands of the "eight centres" outlined in the National 14th Five-Year Plan and to act as a "super connector" in the Belt & Road Initiative and the Greater Bay Area (GBA).

The strategic blueprint for Hong Kong's leadership is already being drawn through concrete initiatives that enhance its international connectivity. Institutions are actively forming cross-boundary partnerships and developing globally aligned curricula. The CUHK Business School's new Professional Certificate Programmes (Micro-credentials), for instance, are designed not only to provide flexible, industry-relevant upskilling in areas like AI and ESG but also to offer seamless credit transfers to master's degree programmes, with credits officially recognised under the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF). This creates a clear and attractive pathway for lifelong learners, both locally and internationally. Furthermore, cross-boundary collaborations are breaking new ground in qualification recognition. The pioneering "one program, two diplomas" model between HKMU LiPACE and Shenzhen University of Information Technology (SUIT) has successfully integrated Hong Kong's vocational and professional education and training (VPET) with the mainland's system, creating a model for the GBA. This programme, which earned the Team of the Year - Education award, equips students with cross-cultural competencies and dual qualifications, enhancing their employability across borders. HKU SPACE has also strategically expanded its physical footprint by opening a teaching centre in Sheung Shui, specifically designed to serve GBA residents, and has signed a memorandum of cooperation with Northwestern Polytechnical University to establish integrated learning pathways. These actions demonstrate a clear commitment to making Hong Kong's continuous education sector both accessible and globally integrated.

To solidify its status as a global leader, Hong Kong's strategic blueprint must continue to focus on policy support and ecosystem development that foster internationalisation and talent cultivation. The government's recent policy address provides a robust framework by raising the admission ceiling for non-local students to 50% and formally establishing universities of applied sciences (UASs) to strengthen vocational pathways that are closely aligned with industry needs. This policy shift is complemented by a concerted marketing push to promote "Hong Kong: Your World-class Campus," backed by significant funding to attract international and mainland students. For continuous education, this means creating a more diverse and vibrant learning environment where professionals from around the world can upskill. Visionary strategies from institutions like CUHK's School of Continuing and Professional Sciences (SCS), which aims to be a "global leader in university continuing education," and its parent university's plan to "redefine the role" of continuing education to serve societal trends, underscore the sector's commitment to innovation and excellence. By deepening academia-industry integration, promoting mutual recognition of qualifications, and leveraging the vast opportunities within the GBA, Hong Kong is not just responding to global talent demands but actively shaping the future of lifelong learning.

2.5 Historical adaptability during economic restructuring

Hong Kong stands at a pivotal moment in its economic evolution, where the imperative for continuous professional education (CPE) has never been more critical. The journey from an industrial powerhouse to a global leader in finance and professional services has historically been underpinned by the territory's remarkable adaptability. However, to secure its future as a premier international hub, a strategic blueprint for continuous education is required—one that learns from past economic restructuring, addresses current systemic challenges, and builds a robust, future-ready ecosystem.

Historical Adaptability During Economic Restructuring

Hong Kong's success as a small, open economy has long depended on its ability to adapt to the volatile rhythms of international competition. This inherent flexibility has historically necessitated a high rate of skill and knowledge obsolescence, making continuous education not a luxury but a necessity for its workforce. The most dramatic illustration of this was the rapid economic restructuring from the 1980s onwards. Following China's opening up in 1978, Hong Kong's manufacturing sector shed approximately 282,000 jobs within a decade, while the service sector concurrently gained 681,000 positions. This seismic shift rendered the skills of hundreds of thousands of workers obsolete almost overnight. The challenge was not merely sectoral; within the remaining manufacturing industries, the composition of jobs shifted away from production towards management, design, and trade financing. Similarly, as costs rose, lower-value service jobs moved across the border, pushing the local economy towards high-value-added professional services like legal, accounting, and financial consulting.

Remarkably, the demand for retraining during this period was largely met by a vigorous and extensive private market for continuing education. Higher education institutions, the Vocational Training Council (VTC), and numerous non-profit and commercial firms equipped hundreds of thousands of adult workers with the higher-level skills needed for the new economy. The government's role, through the establishment of the Employees Retraining Board (ERB) in 1992, was initially modest and focused on displaced manufacturing workers at the lower-skill end. This historical episode demonstrated the power of a responsive, if somewhat ad-hoc, CPE ecosystem. It successfully facilitated career changes, with studies showing that half of the CPE students who changed jobs moved into entirely different occupations, underscoring CPE's unique effectiveness as an agent for career transformation during times of economic flux.

Confronting Systemic Challenges and the Imperative for a New Blueprint

Despite this history of successful adaptation, Hong Kong's current continuing education landscape faces structural challenges that threaten its future global competitiveness. A primary concern is the historical over-emphasis on traditional university education—a "university-only" mindset—which has inadvertently compressed the space for and social recognition of vocational and professional education. The decision in the 1990s to upgrade all polytechnics to comprehensive universities, while boosting academic rankings, led to a homogenization of institutional roles and created a gap in high-level applied technology training. Institutions like the VTC, though crucial, have been perceived as a "second choice," and their resources lag behind those of University Grants Committee (UGC)-funded universities. This has hampered their capacity to produce the high-calibre technical experts needed for new industries like innovation and technology or advanced manufacturing.

Furthermore, there are emerging concerns about the quality and rigor of some advanced CPE courses. As some institutions may lower admission standards to maintain enrolment, the phenomenon of "easy in, easy out" can dilute the learning experience and the value of the credential, pushing genuine local talent to seek education overseas. This is a significant warning sign for a city aiming to be an international education hub. To address these issues and navigate future economic transformations, Hong Kong requires a more coordinated and strategic approach. The government has recognized this, tasking the ERB with a fundamental reform. The Board's new three-year roadmap signals a shift towards a "skills-based" training framework for the entire workforce, moving beyond its traditional remit. This involves strengthening industry consultations to identify core skill gaps, developing micro-credential courses, and fostering collaboration with higher education institutions to create a more integrated and responsive system.

A Strategic Blueprint for Global Leadership

To ascend to global leadership in continuous education, Hong Kong must construct a diversified and integrated ecosystem that leverages its unique strengths. This blueprint rests on several strategic pillars. First, it must embrace a dual-track approach that values both academic and professional pathways. Learning from Singapore's model, Hong Kong could consider establishing a more prominent tier of applied sciences universities or significantly elevating the status and resources of its vocational education providers. This would create a system where institutions have clear, distinct missions—some focused on theoretical research and others on high-level industry application and innovation—rather than all pursuing the same academic rankings. This would ensure the territory can produce both world-class researchers and the advanced technologists required for a modern economy.

Second, the future of CPE lies in flexible, modular, and stackable learning pathways. Pioneering examples, such as the Professional Certificate Programmes (Micro-credentials) offered by CUHK Business School, illustrate the power of this model. These programmes offer concentrated, industry-relevant skills in areas like FinTech, ESG, and AI for Business. A key innovation is the ability to transfer credits earned from these micro-credentials towards a full master's degree, creating a seamless bridge between continuous upskilling and advanced academic qualifications. This model, embedded within the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF), should be expanded across institutions, allowing learners to build qualifications over time in a manner that suits their career stage.

Third, the blueprint demands a system-wide, data-driven approach to skills anticipation and curriculum development. This involves the government, industry, and educational providers working in concert. The ERB's enhanced industry consultative mechanism is a vital step in identifying emerging skill gaps. This intelligence must then be rapidly translated into curriculum by universities and training bodies, ensuring that course offerings remain ahead of the curve. Such collaboration should also extend to "产教融合" (industry-education integration), where, like in Singapore, economic development agencies work hand-in-hand with educational institutions to align training with new industry investments, potentially co-developing laboratories and curricula.

Finally, Hong Kong must cultivate a pervasive culture of lifelong learning. This involves not only expanding access and modes of learning—including the use of technology and blended learning to cater to an ageing population and second-career trends—but also enhancing the perceived value of CPE. By ensuring high-quality, rigorous programmes with clear career outcomes and industry recognition, Hong Kong can elevate CPE from a "second chance" pathway to a prestigious and essential component of a successful professional career. This will require a concerted effort to change societal perceptions, ensuring that vocational and professional education is held in the same high esteem as traditional academic study, thereby retaining local talent and attracting international learners seeking to future-proof their careers in one of the world's most dynamic cities.

CHAPTER 3: MARKET ANALYSIS AND DEMAND PROJECTION

The foundation of Hong Kong's ambition to become a global leader in continuous education rests upon a robust and rapidly evolving market, characterized by surging demand and significant structural shifts. Recent data provides compelling evidence of this transformation. The Employees Retraining Board (ERB), a pivotal institution in Hong Kong's training landscape, reported a significant milestone following the removal of its academic ceiling for course enrollment in early 2025. In the first three quarters of the 2025/26 fiscal year, the ERB recorded approximately 140,000 enrollments, a 4% increase compared to the same period the previous year. More telling than the overall growth is the changing demographic of participants. Of these enrollments, around 17,000 (12%) were individuals holding sub-degree or higher qualifications, underscoring a clear trend of upskilling and cross-skilling among the already-educated workforce. Furthermore, the composition of trainees has shifted dramatically, with 60% of them being in-service personnel and another 60% aged over 50. This data dismantles the outdated perception that continuous education is solely for the unemployed, revealing instead a market driven by established professionals seeking to remain competitive and a maturing workforce preparing for longer careers.

Several interrelated factors are propelling this demand, creating a powerful imperative for a strategic overhaul of the continuous education sector. The primary driver is the relentless pace of technological advancement, particularly in artificial intelligence. The ERB has acknowledged this by planning to make AI a compulsory component of its future curriculum, recognizing that proficiency in digital tools like intelligent customer service applications and digital marketing is no longer optional but a baseline requirement across industries. This micro-level trend aligns with a macro-economic reality: a projected shortfall of talent. According to a study cited by the Federation of Hong Kong Industries, Hong Kong faces a deficit of approximately 180,000 professional talents over the next decade, especially in fields like mechanical engineering and advanced manufacturing. This gap cannot be filled by traditional university graduates alone, positioning continuous education as the primary mechanism for rapidly reskilling the existing labor force to meet the demands of "new quality productive forces." Compounding this is the phenomenon of "knowledge decay"; research suggests the half-life of professional skills in cutting-edge fields like data science has shrunk to just 2.3 years. This renders traditional, multi-year degree programs insufficient on their own, creating an urgent need for agile, short-cycle, and stackable learning modules that allow for continuous knowledge renewal.

Looking ahead, the demand for continuous education in Hong Kong is projected to grow exponentially, driven by both local needs and the city's evolving role as a regional talent hub. The government's strategic push to establish an international education hub, extending even to the primary and secondary levels, will significantly swell the pool of potential learners. With the relaxation of non-local student quotas for self-financing programmes in universities and the promotion of the "Study in Hong Kong" brand, the number of graduates seeking to augment their degrees with local professional qualifications is set to rise.

The recent establishment of the Hong Kong Institute of Technology as a University of Applied Sciences (UAS) is a critical development in this ecosystem. UAS are designed to offer vocationally-oriented programmes with deep industry integration, directly addressing the "middle ground" where traditional academic education and basic vocational training have often fallen short. This model is expected to create a new and substantial stream of demand from students seeking clear, practice-based pathways to professional careers. Furthermore, initiatives like "micro-certificate courses" with stackable credits, as planned by the ERB, cater to the time-poor working professional, allowing for flexible, bite-sized learning that can cumulatively lead to formal qualifications. This approach, covering emerging areas like data analytics and Building Information Modelling (BIM), will likely unlock latent demand from individuals previously unable to commit to lengthy programmes. By proactively forecasting these needs—through proposed entities like the ERB's "skills research division" that will analyze market data to predict talent gaps—Hong Kong is building an agile system capable of not just reacting to, but anticipating, the future demands of a globalized economy.

3.1 Global market size and growth trajectories for continuous education

The global continuous education market is undergoing a profound transformation, expanding from a niche corporate service into a massive, technologically-driven economic sector. This growth presents a unique and timely opportunity for Hong Kong to leverage its distinctive advantages and chart a course to become a global leader. Below is a detailed analysis of the global market landscape and a strategic blueprint for Hong Kong to achieve this ambition.

The landscape of lifelong learning is expanding at an unprecedented rate, driven by technological disruption, evolving job markets, and the imperative for constant upskilling. This growth is not monolithic but is reflected across various interconnected segments, each with its own trajectory.

The most immediate and dynamic segment is Corporate Training and B2B Continuing Education. As organizations worldwide grapple with digital transformation and skills gaps, investment in employee development has become a strategic necessity. The global business-to-business (B2B) continuing education market is on a robust growth path. Valued at an estimated \$7.03 billion in 2026, it is projected to reach \$10.08 billion by 2030, growing at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 9.4%. This growth is fueled by the escalating demand for reskilling programs, the expansion of remote and hybrid workforces requiring digital training solutions, and a heightened focus on measuring the return on investment (ROI) of learning initiatives. A significant driver is the rising adoption of online learning platforms, which offer scalable, flexible, and cost-effective training. For instance, in 2024, 33% of internet users in the European Union participated in online courses or used online learning materials, a notable increase from 30% in 2023, demonstrating a clear societal shift toward digital learning modalities.

Expanding the lens to the broader Education and Training market reveals an even more substantial growth story. This all-encompassing market, which includes student education, corporate training, and government-funded programs, is forecasted to surge from \$2,322.5 billion in 2026 to an astounding \$9,615 billion by 2035. This represents a powerful CAGR of 17.1% over the period. This explosive growth is underpinned by a global digital transformation, with 68% of institutions investing in digital platforms and 73% of training providers implementing e-learning systems. Technology training is a dominant force, accounting for 57% of market participation, driven by the critical need for skills in cloud computing, cybersecurity, and AI. Concurrently, the Higher Education market, while broader in scope, is also integrating deeply with the continuous education ethos. It is projected to grow from approximately \$2,909.6 billion in 2026 to \$6,860.7 billion by 2035, at a CAGR of 10%. This growth is propelled by the integration of digital tools, with 65% of institutions incorporating online content, and the rising demand for lifelong learning among adult learners, who now constitute about 30% of the higher education student body.

Asia-Pacific is emerging as the unequivocal growth engine for the entire sector. While North America currently holds the largest market share, the Asia-Pacific region is identified as the fastest-growing market for B2B continuing education. This rapid expansion is fueled by massive investments in educational technology, increasing government focus on vocational training, and a large, ambitious workforce eager to upskill. This regional dynamism is a critical factor for Hong Kong's strategic positioning.

Several powerful trends are shaping the future of this market. AI-driven personalization is revolutionizing learning by creating adaptive pathways for individual learners, a trend identified as a major market driver. The demand for micro-credentials and modular learning is soaring, as professionals seek bite-sized, stackable qualifications that provide immediate, job-relevant skills. Furthermore, there is a fundamental shift toward skills-based architectures, where the focus moves from seat-time to demonstrable competency, with employers and governments prioritizing initiatives that make skills visible and career pathways navigable. These global trends form the backdrop against which Hong Kong must formulate its strategy.

Hong Kong's Pathway to Global Leadership: A Strategic Blueprint

Hong Kong stands at a pivotal juncture. Possessing a unique confluence of world-class educational institutions, a strategic geographic location, and a robust legal and financial framework, it is exceptionally well-placed to capture a significant share of the growing global continuous education market. The pathway to leadership requires a comprehensive, multi-pronged strategy that builds on existing strengths while boldly innovating for the future.

Pillar I: Consolidating and Expanding the "Study in Hong Kong" Brand as a Foundation

The first pillar of the strategy involves leveraging Hong Kong's traditional strength in higher education as a launchpad for continuous education. The government's vision to cultivate a "study economy" is already yielding results, with the number of non-local students in Hong Kong's tertiary institutions surpassing 30,000. The decision to double the quota for self-financing non-local students and the "City-Student Hostel" scheme, which repurposes commercial buildings for student housing, are innovative policy moves that directly address capacity and infrastructure needs, making the city more attractive to international talent. The presence of five universities in the world's top 100 provides a powerful "brand gold" effect that can be extended into professional and executive education.

Strategic Actions:

- **Extend the Brand to Younger Cohorts:** As advocated by education officials, Hong Kong should actively market itself as a destination for secondary school students, offering international curricula and the local DSE programme to a global audience. This creates an early pipeline of talent familiar with Hong Kong's education system and culture, who may later return for university and professional upskilling.
- **Enhance Quality Assurance:** To protect and enhance the "Study in Hong Kong" brand, the government must rigorously implement its planned "Code of Practice for Private Schools" and "Register of Private Schools". This will combat malpractices like false credentials and "black intermediaries," ensuring that all institutions under the Hong Kong banner maintain the highest standards of integrity and quality, thereby building trust with international students and their families.

Pillar II: Reimagining the Vocational and Professional Education Continuum

A critical pathway to leadership involves restructuring the often-overlooked vocational and professional education sector into a dynamic and prestigious pillar of continuous learning. The establishment of the University of Applied Sciences (UAS) Alliance is a visionary step in this direction. The UAS model is designed to fill the gap between traditional academic education and basic vocational training by offering industry-embedded, applied degree programmes. The success of this model hinges on creating genuine "industry-academia symbiosis," where businesses co-design curricula, provide authentic internships, and contribute to student assessment.

Strategic Actions:

- **Launch a Public Awareness Campaign:** To overcome the societal bias that views vocational pathways as inferior, a sustained public campaign is needed. This campaign should spotlight successful alumni from applied degree pathways who have become leaders in their fields, thereby reframing these routes as choices of specialized passion rather than academic fallback options.
- **Scale Innovative Articulation Models:** The success of pilot programmes like the Diploma in Practical Information & Communications Technology (DPICT) should be scaled up. This model allows secondary students to simultaneously study for the DSE and a professional diploma, providing them with a dual pathway to higher education or direct employment. The government and educational institutions should collaborate to create more such qualifications (QF Level 3 or 4) in high-demand fields like fintech, green technology, and creative industries, and ensure they are widely recognized for credit transfer by both public and self-financing universities.

Pillar III: Establishing a World-Class Ecosystem for Professional Continuing Education

To achieve global leadership, Hong Kong must move beyond serving its local population and become the preferred hub for professional upskilling in Asia. This involves creating a regulatory and market environment that attracts global training providers and serves the massive regional demand. A compelling example is the proposed reform of the teacher registration system. By moving from a lifetime license to a renewable license every three years with mandatory Continuing Professional Development (CPD) hours, Hong Kong would align itself with professions like law and accounting, ensuring its own educators remain at the cutting edge. This not only improves local education quality but also creates a domestic market for high-quality CPD courses, which can then be exported regionally.

Strategic Actions:

- Develop a "Train-the-Trainer" Hub: Leverage its strong university sector and newly professionalized teaching workforce to establish Hong Kong as a regional center for training educators and corporate trainers from across Asia. This would involve offering accredited programs in pedagogical innovation, EdTech integration, and curriculum design for the digital age.
- Create a Fintech and Green Finance Upskilling Cluster: Given Hong Kong's status as a global financial center, it should partner with industry bodies like the Hong Kong Monetary Authority and major financial institutions to create the world's most comprehensive suite of continuous education programs in fintech, blockchain, regtech, and green finance. This would attract finance professionals from the region seeking to future-proof their careers.
- Foster a Market for Micro-credentials: Encourage universities, vocational bodies like the Employees Retraining Board (which is already shifting to a "skills-based" framework) , and private EdTech firms to develop a transparent and widely accepted system of micro-credentials. These short, stackable courses in areas like AI-assisted fraud detection or game development can be marketed to professionals across Asia who need to quickly acquire specific, high-demand skills without committing to a full degree program.

In conclusion, Hong Kong's pathway to global leadership in continuous education is not about a single initiative but about creating a synergistic ecosystem. By boldly marketing its "study economy," fundamentally reforming its vocational pathways, and strategically positioning itself as Asia's hub for high-stakes professional upskilling, Hong Kong can transform its education sector into a major economic engine and a lasting source of global influence. The strategic blueprint is clear: leverage unique strengths, address structural weaknesses, and relentlessly focus on quality and relevance to capture a leading share of this burgeoning global market.

3.2 Regional demand: Mainland China, ASEAN, Belt and Road Initiative countries

Hong Kong stands at a pivotal moment to assert its global leadership in continuing education, leveraging its unique advantages as a cosmopolitan hub with deep regional connections. The strategic blueprint for this pathway must address the burgeoning demand from Mainland China, the dynamic growth of the ASEAN region, and the developmental needs of Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) countries.

1. Strategic Positioning and Vision for Global Leadership

Hong Kong's ascent to global leadership in continuing education is anchored in its distinctive role as a "super-connector" between East and West, a position explicitly recognized in national strategies. The city's education sector is already aligning with this vision; for instance, the School of Continuing and Professional Studies at CUHK aims to serve community needs for lifelong education, including the ageing population and second career trends. This local focus provides a robust foundation for expanding globally. The vision, as articulated by institutions like the Chinese University of Hong Kong's School of Continuing Studies, is to become a global leader by enriching lives through innovative and responsive lifelong learning. This ambition is supported by Hong Kong's world-class university system, which was ranked fourth globally and first in Asia in the 2025 World Talent Ranking. This high standing provides the credibility and academic backbone necessary to attract mature learners and professionals from around the world. The government's initiative to establish a "Study in Hong Kong" brand is a critical component of this strategy, aiming to create a unified, internationally recognized identity for Hong Kong's education offerings, from secondary to post-secondary levels.

2. Deepening Integration with Mainland China's Development

The vast demand for continuing education in Mainland China, particularly in the Greater Bay Area (GBA), presents the most immediate and substantial opportunity for Hong Kong. The strategic blueprint calls for a multi-layered approach to integration, moving beyond traditional student recruitment. A key pillar is the mutual recognition of qualifications; as advocated by educators, extending the current degree recognition to include sub-degree and higher diploma qualifications would unlock significant potential for student and professional mobility between Hong Kong and Mainland China. This is already being piloted through innovative cross-boundary programs, such as the dual-diploma initiative between HKMU LiPACE and the Shenzhen Institute of Information Technology, which allows mainland students to gain qualifications from both sides of the border, enhancing their career prospects across the entire GBA. Hong Kong institutions are also physically establishing a presence in the region.

HKU SPACE's new learning centre in Sheung Shui, strategically located just 20 minutes from the mainland border, and its Mainland Affairs Office are designed to cater specifically to learners from the GBA, offering programs that blend theoretical education with hands-on practice, including a "Cloud Classroom + Practice Base" model. Furthermore, deepening vocational and professional education (VPET) cooperation, with a focus on产教融合 (industry-education integration) and aligning with national goals to develop "new quality productive forces," will ensure Hong Kong plays a vital role in upskilling the mainland workforce.

3. Capturing Opportunities in ASEAN and Belt and Road Countries

The demand for high-quality, internationally recognized continuing education across ASEAN and other BRI countries is immense, driven by rapid economic transformation and a young, ambitious demographic. Hong Kong's strategy involves a significant ramp-up in efforts to attract talent and provide educational services to this region. The Hong Kong government has already demonstrated its commitment, with over 4,000 students from BRI countries now studying in Hong Kong's post-secondary institutions annually, supported by government scholarships. To build on this, educators and industry leaders recommend a more aggressive approach, including relaxing non-local student quotas to 50% and focusing recruitment efforts on ASEAN and Belt and Road nations. This is not just about bringing students to Hong Kong; it also involves exporting Hong Kong's educational expertise. As noted by business leaders, countries like Vietnam and Cambodia are undergoing industrial transformation and require massive upskilling and training programs. Hong Kong is well-placed to provide this through in-country courses, online learning, and specialized training modules. These students, upon graduation, serve as invaluable bridges, helping Hong Kong businesses navigate and expand into their home markets, thereby creating a virtuous cycle of talent development and economic cooperation. The annual BRI Summit, which facilitated a record 50 cooperation agreements, serves as a powerful platform to solidify these educational partnerships.

4. Policy Framework and Institutional Innovation

Realizing this ambitious blueprint requires a supportive and innovative policy framework from the Hong Kong SAR government and proactive adaptation by educational institutions. The government's role is to create an enabling environment through policies such as relaxing visa and quota restrictions, increasing the scale and scope of the "Belt and Road" scholarships, and actively promoting the "Study in Hong Kong" brand at international education fairs. Institutions, for their part, must innovate in program delivery and partnerships. This includes developing more joint and dual-degree programs with international and mainland partners, as envisioned in university strategic plans.

It also means embracing "internationalization at home," where a diverse student body—including local students, mainlanders, and ethnic minorities—creates a rich, cross-cultural learning environment that prepares all students for global careers. The expansion of digital education and the development of a robust vocational qualifications framework that can be benchmarked internationally will be crucial to meeting the diverse and evolving needs of adult learners across the region. By fostering strong government-industry-academia collaboration, Hong Kong can build a continuing education ecosystem that is resilient, responsive, and truly world-leading.

3.3 Sectoral skills gaps: AI, fintech, sustainability, healthcare, and green finance

Hong Kong stands at a pivotal moment in its economic evolution, where its traditional pillars as a global financial hub are being augmented by ambitious aspirations in technology, sustainability, and innovation. To solidify its status as a premier international education hub, Hong Kong must strategically address critical sectoral skills gaps through a comprehensive blueprint for continuous education. This strategy involves not only expanding the capacity of its universities but also fundamentally reshaping the approach to lifelong learning, ensuring the workforce is agile and equipped for the future. By leveraging its unique "one country, two systems" advantage and its role as a "super connector" between Mainland China and the world, Hong Kong can develop a dynamic ecosystem for continuous education that serves both local needs and global talent demands.

A significant and immediate challenge lies in the technology and digital transformation sector, particularly in artificial intelligence (AI). The demand for AI, cybersecurity, and cloud expertise is surging across all industries, from financial services to logistics, yet the supply of qualified professionals is struggling to keep pace. Projections indicate that by 2028, Hong Kong's innovation and technology sector could face a shortfall of up to 23,000 professionals, with the most critical gaps in cutting-edge fields like AI and data analytics. The VTC's manpower survey underscores an urgent need for AI specialists, noting that less than 10% of related graduates currently meet industry expectations, pointing to a critical mismatch between academic training and practical, market-ready skills. To bridge this gap, continuous education must move beyond traditional degrees to offer intensive, industry-integrated micro-credentials and bootcamps. Initiatives like CUHK Business School's Professional Certificate in Artificial Intelligence for Business are prime examples of how universities can provide flexible, targeted upskilling for professionals, directly addressing the need for AI literacy and application in a business context.

The financial services landscape is being reshaped by fintech and the parallel rise of green finance, creating a dual imperative for upskilling. As Hong Kong solidifies its role as a leading international financial center, it faces a rapid transformation driven by digital assets, data analytics, and stringent regulatory demands in areas like anti-money laundering and ESG reporting. The traditional role of finance professionals is evolving from compliance to strategic advisory, requiring new competencies in technology application and sustainability reporting. Simultaneously, the Hong Kong Monetary Authority's push to establish the city as a green finance hub has intensified competition for talent skilled in green bond issuance, ESG fund management, and climate risk assessment. Continuous education programs must therefore be agile, offering specialized tracks in both fintech and sustainable finance. The CUHK's Professional Certificate in Technology Applications for Financial Services and electives like City University's course on Crypto Assets within its Global EMBA are vital steps, allowing professionals to gain cutting-edge knowledge and even transfer credits toward advanced degrees. Government-backed initiatives like the Pilot Green and Sustainable Finance Capacity Building Support Scheme are equally crucial to systematically upskill the workforce in this domain.

The healthcare and life sciences sector in Hong Kong is under mounting pressure from an aging population, rising chronic diseases, and increasing mental health needs, which is compounded by a persistent shortage of skilled professionals. While challenges are significant, opportunities are emerging through government strategies focused on preventive care, cross-boundary medical collaboration in the Greater Bay Area, and rapid technological advancements in AI, biotech, and gerontechnology. This dynamic environment demands a continuous education strategy that prepares a versatile workforce. Training programs must expand beyond traditional clinical roles to include community-based care, AI applications in diagnostics, and the deployment of assistive technologies for the elderly. By fostering partnerships between universities, hospitals, and technology firms, Hong Kong can create specialized continuous education pathways that equip healthcare workers with the interdisciplinary skills needed to thrive in this evolving landscape.

Finally, the convergence of sustainability with traditional sectors underscores the need for expertise in green technology and environmental, social, and governance (ESG) principles across the board. The demand for ESG expertise is no longer niche; it is permeating accounting, where professionals must now master sustainability reporting; property management, with the rise of PropTech and green buildings; and the automotive industry, which is rapidly transitioning to electric vehicles. For instance, Hong Kong's ambitious goal of achieving vehicle zero emissions by 2050 is driving demand for professionals skilled in mechatronics and digital diagnostics, a clear signal for targeted upskilling programs in green technology. Continuous education must therefore embed ESG and sustainability principles into curricula for a wide array of professions. Programs like CUHK's Professional Certificate in Sustainability and ESG Reporting are exemplary, providing professionals with practical skills in building ESG reports and analyzing complex sustainability challenges, thereby future-proofing their careers and fueling Hong Kong's transition to a sustainable economy.

In conclusion, Hong Kong's pathway to global leadership in continuous education is contingent upon its ability to create an adaptive, responsive, and deeply integrated learning ecosystem. By harnessing the insights from detailed manpower surveys and fostering robust collaborations between government, academia, and industry, Hong Kong can transform sectoral skills gaps into strategic opportunities. The strategic blueprint must champion micro-credentials, stackable degrees, and work-integrated learning projects that make commercial problem-solving a core part of the curriculum. Through such a comprehensive and forward-looking approach, Hong Kong can not only equip its own workforce for the future but also attract global talent, solidifying its role as a vibrant "academic gravity field" and an indispensable engine of talent development for Asia and the world.

3.4 Demographic trends: Aging population and mid-career retraining needs

Hong Kong stands at a demographic crossroads that presents both a significant challenge and a unique opportunity to reimagine its social and economic fabric. The city is confronting the dual pressures of a rapidly aging population and the concurrent need for substantial mid-career retraining, a reality that demands a strategic and forward-thinking approach to continuous education. Projections indicate that while an aging society will tighten the labour supply, the inflow of talent and One-way Permit holders can help replenish the younger population and slow the pace of aging. However, the immediate task is to harness the potential of the existing workforce, particularly the "silver" demographic. With Hong Kong's labour participation rate for those aged 55-64 at 58.6%—significantly lagging behind other advanced economies like Japan (81.2%) and Singapore (72.6%)—there is immense untapped potential. A strategic blueprint for continuous education must therefore focus on creating inclusive pathways that enable older workers to upskill, reskill, and remain active contributors to the economy, transforming demographic pressure into a "silver dividend."

In response to these trends, Hong Kong's institutions and government are already laying the groundwork for a more robust continuous education ecosystem. The government has announced a reform of the Employees Retraining Board (ERB) to enhance its role in devising skills-based training programmes for the entire workforce, including lifting educational attainment restrictions and increasing annual training places by at least 15,000. This is complemented by targeted initiatives to foster a "silver economy," such as introducing tailored training courses, professional consultancy services, and job fairs specifically for individuals aged 50 and above. Academic institutions are also innovating, with examples like CUHK's micro-credential programmes in high-demand fields like AI and ESG, which offer flexible, stackable learning pathways that can even lead to master's degrees. Furthermore, the strategic plans of major universities explicitly aim to serve the needs of an aging population and those seeking second careers, signalling a systemic shift towards lifelong learning as a core mission.

Despite these positive steps, a strategic blueprint for global leadership must address the persistent structural challenges that hinder effective workforce transition. A key issue is the "mismatch" between classroom learning and real-world industry expectations, with some estimates suggesting that less than 10% of graduates in related courses meet the practical needs of tech firms. For mid-career and older workers, the barriers are even more pronounced, including ageism in hiring, the high cost and time commitment of training, and a lack of tailored support. To overcome these hurdles, Hong Kong must move beyond piecemeal offerings to create an integrated, learner-centric system. This involves expanding paid, on-the-job transition programmes and apprenticeships that allow individuals to earn while they learn, and fostering deeper collaboration between training providers and employers to ensure curricula are directly aligned with market needs. Initiatives like the "FutureNow" programme, which co-develops upskilling programmes with employers, serve as a model for how to tackle ageism and create tangible job transition opportunities.

Ultimately, Hong Kong's pathway to becoming a global leader in continuous education hinges on its ability to build a cohesive and forward-looking ecosystem that is both inclusive and internationally connected. The government's strategy to develop "universities of applied sciences" and promote mutual recognition of qualifications within the Greater Bay Area are crucial steps toward creating clear, respected vocational pathways and expanding opportunities for learners. This must be coupled with a robust marketing push to position Hong Kong as a premier regional education hub, attracting diverse talent from the mainland and abroad. By viewing continuous education not as a social safety net but as a strategic economic driver, Hong Kong can create a virtuous cycle: its world-class university system and innovative training programmes can produce a highly skilled, adaptable workforce that attracts global businesses, which in turn generates demand for further upskilling. This vision, where lifelong learning is embedded in the city's identity, is the key to securing its long-term prosperity and social cohesion in the face of demographic change.

3.5 Projected labour shortages and upskilling imperatives to 2028

Hong Kong stands at a critical juncture where demographic trends and economic transformation converge, creating both an urgent challenge and a strategic opportunity to establish global leadership in continuous education. The government's official 2023 Manpower Projection has quantified a severe and growing labour gap, forecasting a shortfall of approximately 50,000 workers in 2023, which is projected to balloon to 180,000 by 2028. This widening gap is driven by structural factors including an ageing workforce, persistently low fertility rates, and a shrinking labour participation rate. The situation is particularly acute for "skilled technical workers," who are expected to account for over one-third of the total shortage, with specific deficits in construction (45,000-55,000 workers) and the government-promoted innovation and technology sector (23,000 workers). These projections, based on a 3.2% annual economic growth assumption, indicate that simply relying on the local labour force—expected to increase only modestly from 3.5 million to 3.56 million—will be wholly insufficient to meet rising demand.

The projected labour landscape reveals sector-specific crises that demand targeted educational interventions. Beyond the headline figures, the construction industry faces acute shortages exacerbated by major infrastructure projects and the adoption of new technologies like Building Information Modelling (BIM) and Modular Integrated Construction (MiC), which require workers to possess new digital and technical competencies. Similarly, the push to establish Hong Kong as an international innovation and technology centre requires not only top-tier researchers but also a robust pipeline of mid-level technicians and support staff capable of working with artificial intelligence, data analytics, and digitalised operations. The hospitality, retail, and tourism sectors, while traditionally labour-intensive, are also undergoing transformation that demands workers skilled in e-commerce, digital customer engagement, and sustainability practices. This multi-sectoral deficit underscores the imperative for a comprehensive upskilling ecosystem rather than piecemeal training programmes.

In response to these structural challenges, Hong Kong's educational institutions are already pioneering innovative continuous education models that position the city as a potential global leader in lifelong learning. The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) Business School's Asia-Pacific Institute of Business, for example, has launched a series of professional certificate programmes featuring micro-credentials in high-demand areas such as Innovation Leadership, Financial Technology Applications, Sustainability and ESG Reporting, and Artificial Intelligence for Business. These programmes exemplify a forward-looking approach by offering flexible, modular learning paths that can be completed in six to 36 months, with the innovative feature of seamless credit transfer to master's degree programmes. Such stackable credentials, recognised at Level 6 of the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework, bridge the gap between undergraduate and postgraduate education while providing immediate upskilling for executives. This model directly addresses the need for flexible, career-relevant education that can rapidly respond to industry demands for new competencies in AI, fintech, and sustainable business practices.

A strategic blueprint for Hong Kong's global leadership in continuous education must integrate institutional innovation with robust public policy and cross-border collaboration. The Vocational Training Council (VTC) has demonstrated the effectiveness of industry-academia partnerships through its "earn and learn" programmes and the establishment of specialised training centres, such as the Innovative Construction Technology Centre at IVE (Tsing Yi), which simulates real 工地 environments for hands-on learning with digital quality and safety tools. To scale such initiatives, the government has committed to enhancing and expanding local training to preserve workforce competitiveness while continuing to import talent at an appropriate scale. However, legislative discussions reveal a tension between those advocating for a high-level, cross-departmental population policy架构 with dedicated coordination powers and the government's position that existing mechanisms—including working groups led by Chief Secretary and Deputy Chief Secretaries—are sufficient. Resolving this governance question will be crucial for implementing a coherent strategy.

Looking beyond Hong Kong's borders, the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA) presents a transformative opportunity to cement Hong Kong's role as a regional hub for continuous education and professional development. Currently, the Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement (CEPA) enables mutual recognition of professional qualifications in fields like medicine, law, and engineering, but this framework has not been systematically extended to the technical-level personnel where Hong Kong faces the most severe shortages. Expanding CEPA to include mutual recognition of technical qualifications, starting with pilot sectors such as lift and escalator technicians where shortages are particularly acute, could unlock the GBA's vast talent pool. For Hong Kong to achieve global leadership, it must position itself not merely as a consumer of imported talent but as the region's premier centre for continuous professional development, where professionals from across the GBA and Asia come to acquire internationally recognised credentials. This vision requires harmonising qualification frameworks, streamlining registration processes that currently create bottlenecks for mainland technicians, and developing joint programmes that leverage the strengths of Hong Kong's universities and vocational institutions alongside mainland industrial capacity. By transforming the labour crisis into a catalyst for educational innovation and regional integration, Hong Kong can build a continuous education ecosystem that serves as a model for other economies facing similar demographic and technological transitions.

PART 2: LESSONS FROM GLOBAL LEADERS

CHAPTER 4: COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF INTERNATIONAL BEST PRACTICES

Hong Kong possesses a robust historical foundation in continuing education, yet it stands at a critical juncture where adopting international best practices is essential to solidify its status as a global leader. By strategically integrating successful models from around the world, Hong Kong can transform its fragmented strengths into a cohesive, world-class system for lifelong learning. This strategic blueprint outlines the pathway to that leadership through a detailed comparative analysis.

The Foundation and Imperative for a Strategic Overhaul

Hong Kong's engagement with continuing professional education (CPE) is not new; it has deep roots in the territory's economic history. As a small, open economy, Hong Kong's past success has been intrinsically linked to its workforce's ability to adapt, out-compete rivals, and rapidly restructure in the face of global competition. This has created a historical and ongoing demand for retraining and upskilling, particularly during phases of rapid economic transformation, such as the shift from manufacturing to a knowledge-based, regional professional services hub. However, despite this inherent need, recent data indicates a participation rate in continuing education that hovers at only about 20%, significantly lagging behind frontrunners like Singapore, which boasts a rate of 49%. This disparity signals that while the market for CPE is active, it may not be reaching its full potential or serving the entire population equitably. Data from the mid-1990s already showed that CPE students were predominantly young, single, and employed in fast-growing service industries, with underrepresentation of older workers and those in declining sectors. This historical pattern suggests a systemic challenge in fostering a truly inclusive, lifelong learning culture across all demographics and industries, making a strategic overhaul not just beneficial, but imperative for future economic resilience.

Lessons from International Best Practices

A comparative analysis of global leaders reveals several innovative mechanisms that Hong Kong can adapt to overcome its current stagnation and build a more dynamic and inclusive ecosystem. A pivotal resource is the 2025 UNESCO report, which examines how nations are implementing lifelong learning entitlements (LLEs). Countries like France, Singapore, and Korea have moved beyond simple course subsidies to create systems where training rights are directly attached to the individual, enhancing transferability and equity. Key instruments include individual learning accounts (France), vouchers (Australia, Korea, Singapore), and tax credits (Canada). These mechanisms empower citizens to take ownership of their learning journeys and create a demand-driven market that can adapt more fluidly to economic shifts.

Singapore's "SkillsFuture" initiative, in particular, offers a comprehensive model for Hong Kong to study. It combines several powerful elements that directly address the limitations of Hong Kong's current approach. As highlighted in a Hong Kong Legislative Council question, Singapore provides every citizen aged 25 and above with regularly topped-up training credits that do not expire, fostering a culture of continuous, self-directed learning. This contrasts with Hong Kong's model, where despite recent increases to the Continuing Education Fund (CEF) ceiling, the structure is less focused on creating a universal, life-long entitlement. Furthermore, Singapore actively engages employers by offering substantial course fee subsidies (50-95%) and absentee payroll funding for employer-sponsored training, funded through a Skills Development Levy. This creates a powerful incentive for companies to invest in their workforce, a systemic link that Hong Kong could strengthen. The UNESCO report underscores the importance of such comprehensive measures, recommending not only financial instruments but also integrated support systems like training allowances, paid leave, and career guidance to ensure accessibility for all, particularly disadvantaged groups.

Building a Cohesive and Quality-Assured Ecosystem

To truly lead, Hong Kong must ensure its continuing education offerings are coherent, portable, and of the highest quality. A significant step in this direction has already been taken through the establishment of the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF). A joint technical report with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) confirmed a high degree of comparability between the two systems, creating a "zone of mutual trust" that facilitates international recognition of Hong Kong qualifications and supports learner and labour mobility. This international benchmarking is a critical asset. Building on this, Hong Kong can further internationalize its framework by pursuing similar alignment with other major qualification systems.

However, a robust framework must be complemented by responsive and flexible delivery mechanisms. The UNESCO report emphasizes the need for centralized online platforms to manage learning accounts and provide transparent information on course quality, as well as rigorous quality assurance systems for training providers to prevent fraud and manipulation. Additionally, the growing demand for high-level, strategic executive education, as seen in the partnership between the University of St Andrews and the Institute of Directors and the launch of dedicated platforms like that at Ajman University, points to a crucial market segment. Hong Kong's universities and professional bodies are well-positioned to develop similar high-value, practice-driven programmes that address the needs of senior leaders navigating complex global challenges. By fostering collaboration between industry and academia, Hong Kong can ensure its CPE offerings cater to all levels, from foundational skills to advanced leadership capabilities, creating a truly lifelong and life-wide learning ecosystem.

A Strategic Blueprint for Hong Kong's Leadership

To achieve global leadership, Hong Kong must synthesize these international lessons into a cohesive strategic blueprint. The first pillar should be the transformation of the funding model. This involves evolving the Continuing Education Fund into a more universal and strategic instrument. The government could consider a hybrid approach, combining elements from successful international models: (1) a universal, non-expiring learning account for all citizens, similar to Singapore's SkillsFuture credits, to foster a culture of lifelong learning from the ground up; and (2) targeted development funds, as previously suggested in strategic reviews, to support the "start-up costs" of innovative public-good programmes in emerging fields, alongside subsidized schemes that incentivize employer investment in workforce training.

The second pillar involves strengthening governance and digital infrastructure. This means implementing a one-stop, centralized online portal that integrates individual learning accounts, course information, career guidance, and quality ratings for all CPE providers. This platform would empower learners, streamline administration, and enhance transparency. Concurrently, Hong Kong should leverage the existing comparability between the HKQF and EQF to actively promote itself as a regional hub for credential recognition and to negotiate further mutual recognition agreements with other major economies, thereby enhancing the global mobility of its learners.

The third pillar is fostering a culture of continuous learning through strategic partnerships. This requires a concerted effort to raise awareness and provide targeted support, as recommended by UNESCO, to reduce information asymmetry and encourage participation from all demographics, particularly mid-careerists and older workers. The government, in partnership with bodies like the Federation for Continuing Education in Tertiary Institutions, should launch promotional campaigns and provide enhanced guidance services. Furthermore, by encouraging the development of high-value, practice-based executive education programmes in collaboration with universities and professional bodies, Hong Kong can solidify its role as a premier destination for professional development in Asia, turning its historical adaptability into a structured, world-leading strategic advantage.

4.1 UNESCO's framework for lifelong learning entitlements

Hong Kong possesses a unique confluence of advantages—a robust higher education sector, deep integration with the Mainland's innovation economy, and a strategic "East-meets-West" orientation—that positions it to become a global leader in continuous education. Achieving this ambition, however, requires a deliberate strategic blueprint grounded in the principles of UNESCO's evolving framework for lifelong learning entitlements. This framework moves beyond traditional concepts of education to advocate for a universal right to learning throughout life, a principle that is central to building fairer, more resilient, and sustainable societies in the face of global challenges like technological disruption and climate change.

UNESCO's vision for lifelong learning, as articulated in recent medium-term strategies and global frameworks like the Marrakech Framework for Action, establishes a comprehensive set of entitlements that underpin a modern learning society. A foundational element is the formal recognition of learning wherever it occurs. This requires establishing systems for the Recognition, Validation, and Accreditation (RVA) of non-formal and informal learning outcomes, ensuring that skills and knowledge gained outside traditional classrooms are visible and portable. This is closely linked to the development of National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs) that classify qualifications by learning outcomes, creating the "bridges and ladders" that allow individuals to move seamlessly between different education and training sectors and levels. To make this a reality for all, UNESCO emphasizes the need for flexible learning pathways, which are student-centred approaches that enable transitions within and across formal, non-formal, and informal learning, as well as employment, thereby preventing educational "dead ends". Crucially, these structural elements must be supported by equitable financing mechanisms. The UNESCO Recommendation on Adult Learning and Education highlights that lack of funds should not be a barrier, urging member states to consider instruments such as individual learning accounts, subsidies, and training leave to empower individual learners. These entitlements collectively form the infrastructure for a learning society where education is a continuous, accessible, and lifelong human right.

Hong Kong's Strategic Blueprint: Aligning Policy with the UNESCO Vision

Hong Kong's recent policy initiatives, particularly those outlined in the 2025 Policy Address, demonstrate a strategic alignment with several pillars of UNESCO's lifelong learning framework, providing a blueprint for global leadership. A cornerstone of this strategy is the systematic effort to create flexible and integrated learning pathways, directly echoing UNESCO's call for system-wide articulation. The formal designation of institutions like Hong Kong Metropolitan University and Saint Francis University as "universities of applied sciences" creates a clear, valued, and respected pathway for vocational and professional education, bridging the gap between academic and practical training. This is further strengthened by initiatives to promote mutual recognition of sub-degree qualifications with Mainland China, facilitating seamless cross-boundary study and employment within the Greater Bay Area. At the programmatic level, universities are embedding flexibility and real-world relevance into their curricula.

City University of Hong Kong's Business Innovation Education initiative, for example, is designed to offer transformative executive education that bridges theory and practice, equipping professionals to navigate disruptive change. Similarly, universities are fostering entrepreneurial thinking and experiential learning through industry collaborations and start-up incubators, which serve as powerful forms of non-formal learning that develop market-ready competencies.

Furthermore, Hong Kong is building the recognition infrastructure essential for a robust lifelong learning ecosystem. The city is actively moving towards a system where workplace and life experiences are formally acknowledged. Efforts to align education more closely with market needs and to integrate commercial projects into degree programs are practical steps towards validating skills acquired in applied settings. The strategic focus on strengthening university-industry collaborations, such as those at the Hong Kong Applied Science and Technology Research Institute (ASTRI), ensures that learning is not confined to campuses but is a continuous process of knowledge exchange and innovation within the economy. Universities are also explicitly redefining their role in serving the community's lifelong learning needs, from addressing the trends of an ageing population and second careers to enhancing graduates' global competitiveness through joint-degree programmes and language proficiency improvements. This multi-level approach, spanning government policy, institutional strategy, and cross-border collaboration, forms a coherent blueprint for operationalizing lifelong learning.

Challenges and the Road to Global Leadership

While Hong Kong's strategic direction is promising, translating this blueprint into undeniable global leadership requires addressing key challenges and deepening its commitment to UNESCO's entitlements. A primary challenge is the critical skills mismatch, particularly in high-tech sectors, where a significant gap exists between classroom learning and industry expectations. Bridging this gap requires more than just policy; it demands a cultural shift in pedagogy towards the immersive, work-integrated learning models championed by UNESCO. This includes scaling up successful initiatives and ensuring they reach a broader demographic, including disadvantaged groups whose participation in adult education remains a global concern.

To truly excel, Hong Kong must move from pilot programs to a comprehensive, city-wide system of lifelong learning entitlements. This involves considering the implementation of universal financing tools like individual learning accounts, which would democratize access to continuous education and empower individuals to direct their own learning journeys. It also requires deepening the infrastructure for RVA by developing a comprehensive, cross-sectoral qualifications framework that systematically credits non-formal and informal learning, providing true permeability between different education and career stages. By tackling these challenges head-on and fully embracing the breadth of UNESCO's framework, Hong Kong can leverage its unique advantages—its world-class universities, its role as a super-connector between East and West, and its dynamic integration with the Greater Bay Area—to not only supply talent for its own economy but to become a global model and hub for the future of continuous education. The task force established to promote Hong Kong as a premier education destination must now articulate this bold, inclusive, and systemic vision to the world.

4.2 Case Study: Singapore's SkillsFuture and national credentialing system

Hong Kong stands at a critical juncture in its quest to become a global leader in continuous education. A strategic blueprint for this transformation must be informed by both a clear-eyed assessment of current challenges and a detailed analysis of successful models, particularly Singapore's SkillsFuture movement. The following sections outline the key components of such a blueprint, drawing on comparative insights to chart a path forward.

Diagnostic Analysis: Hong Kong's Current Landscape and Persistent Challenges

Hong Kong possesses a robust foundational infrastructure for continuous education and training (CET), yet it faces significant hurdles in translating this potential into a pervasive culture of lifelong learning. The government has established a comprehensive Qualifications Framework (QF) , a seven-level hierarchy that standardises and articulates the status of academic, vocational, and continuing education qualifications, ensuring clarity and progression pathways. This is supported by the Continuing Education Fund (CEF) , which provides a direct financial incentive to learners, with a subsidy ceiling recently raised to HKD 25,000 per person. Furthermore, the recent policy address has catalysed a reform of the Employees Retraining Board (ERB) , tasking it with a broader "skills-based" mandate to serve the entire workforce and develop micro-credentials in partnership with higher education institutions.

Despite these assets, a persistent participation gap undermines Hong Kong's CET ambitions. A comparative study highlighted a stark contrast, with Hong Kong's continuing education participation rate stagnating at around 20%, significantly lagging behind Singapore's 49%. This disparity points to a weaker culture of lifelong learning and suggests systemic issues beyond the mere availability of courses or funding. The CEF, while well-utilised with a 150% increase in subsidy recipients between 2019 and 2022, is a reactive, learner-initiated tool. It lacks the proactive, guiding framework seen in other jurisdictions. Furthermore, Hong Kong's approach to skills intelligence has been fragmented. Unlike the dynamic, data-driven systems being developed elsewhere, the QF's Industry Training Advisory Committees, though effective in defining competency standards for 23 industries, may not be able to keep pace with the rapid evolution of job roles and skill requirements in a volatile global economy. This creates a risk that the training on offer, while high-quality, may not be perfectly aligned with the immediate and future needs of employers, thereby dampening both individual and corporate motivation to invest in upskilling.

The Singaporean Paradigm: A Whole-of-Nation, Skills-First Ecosystem

Singapore's SkillsFuture movement offers a comprehensive and coherent blueprint, distinguished by its systemic, whole-of-nation approach that places skills at the centre of economic and social policy. At its core is the Singapore Workforce Skills Qualifications (WSQ), a national credentialing system that is far more than a simple course list. The WSQ is a competency-based system with open access, recognising prior learning and offering bite-sized modular training that leads to stackable Statements of Attainment (SOAs), which can ultimately culminate in a full qualification.

This flexible architecture is perfectly suited for a workforce needing to adapt continuously. Critically, all WSQ training is anchored to detailed Skills Frameworks developed for over 30 sectors. These frameworks, born from a tripartite partnership involving industry, unions, and government, provide a common taxonomy of job roles, tasks, and the requisite technical and critical core skills, ensuring that all training is demonstrably industry-relevant.

The true differentiator in Singapore's model is its strategic use of technology and data to create an intelligent, responsive CET ecosystem. SkillsFuture Singapore (SSG) has developed a national "jobs-skills intelligence engine" powered by big data and analytics. This engine tracks how jobs, tasks, and skills are evolving, identifying emerging trends in high-growth areas like the green, digital, and care economies. This intelligence is then democratised through public-facing platforms like the Job-Skills Portal, empowering individuals, employers, and training providers to make informed decisions. For instance, an individual can use their Careers & Skills Passport, an employment and skills registry, to receive personalised upskilling recommendations based on verified skills and labour market demand. Employers, particularly SMEs, are supported with tools like TalentTrack+ for skills profiling and workforce planning. This data-driven approach transforms CET from a generic offering into a precise, personalised, and future-oriented service, creating a common "skills language" for all stakeholders. Furthermore, the system ensures trust and portability through innovations like OpenCerts, which uses blockchain technology to issue tamper-proof digital certificates for all WSQ qualifications, making credentials easily shareable and verifiable. This end-to-end integration—from skills intelligence and curriculum design to flexible delivery, personalised guidance, and secure credentialing—represents the gold standard Hong Kong must aspire to.

Strategic Blueprint: Pillars for Hong Kong's Transformation

Drawing from Singapore's experience, Hong Kong's pathway to global leadership in continuous education must be built upon four interconnected strategic pillars.

The first pillar is the deepening and integration of skills intelligence. Hong Kong must move beyond static industry skills maps to create a dynamic, real-time understanding of the job market. This requires investing in a centralised, government-coordinated data analytics capability, akin to Singapore's jobs-skills intelligence engine, that can mine labour market data to identify emerging skills gaps and future job trends. This intelligence should not be a closely guarded government resource but an open platform that informs the ERB, the CEF, training providers, and the public. It would enable the strategic direction of public funding towards areas of genuine economic need and empower individuals to make career choices aligned with future opportunities.

The second pillar is the overhaul of the credentialing and curriculum framework to be modular, stackable, and competency-based. Hong Kong can leverage its existing QF to create a more flexible system by fully embracing the development of micro-credentials, as the ERB is now beginning to do. These bite-sized, accredited modules, aligned with the new skills intelligence, would allow learners to acquire and certify specific competencies without committing to a lengthy full qualification. Crucially, these modules must be designed to be "stackable" into higher-level qualifications, creating clear and flexible career pathways, much like the WSQ system where SOAs can be accumulated for a full award. This requires close collaboration between universities, vocational training providers, and industry to ensure the quality and coherence of these new learning pathways.

The third pillar involves embedding digital trust and learner empowerment through technology. To enhance the portability and recognition of Hong Kong's qualifications, the government should adopt a secure, verifiable digital credentialing system, learning from Singapore's OpenCerts initiative. This would give learners permanent, tamper-proof ownership of their achievements, which can be shared instantly with potential employers. This technological infrastructure should culminate in the creation of a individual learning passport or skills registry for Hong Kong. Such a platform would serve as a single, secure repository for an individual's academic qualifications, professional certifications, micro-credentials, and even verified work experience, empowering them to manage their skills portfolio and potentially receive personalised course recommendations based on their profile and market intelligence.

The fourth and final pillar is the active cultivation of a skills-first ecosystem among employers. Government supply-side interventions like the CEF are insufficient without parallel demand-side efforts to change corporate behaviour. Hong Kong must launch a concerted campaign, in partnership with major business chambers and HR professional bodies, to promote skills-based hiring and talent management. This includes offering incentives and practical toolkits to help SMEs conduct skills gap analyses and develop their workforce. By encouraging companies to articulate job requirements in terms of skills rather than just qualifications, and to recognise the micro-credentials earned by their employees, Hong Kong can create a virtuous cycle where individual upskilling is both recognised and rewarded, thereby driving a fundamental cultural shift towards lifelong learning and cementing its status as a global leader in human capital development.

4.3 Case Study: South Korea's lifelong learning accounts and voucher systems

Hong Kong stands at a pivotal moment to redefine its role in global education, with a strategic opportunity to build upon its recent policy initiatives by integrating the proven mechanisms of South Korea's lifelong learning system. South Korea's methodical approach, particularly its Accounts for Lifelong Learning (ALL) introduced in 2006 and the Lifelong Education Voucher System launched in 2018, offers a compelling blueprint for creating an inclusive, flexible, and forward-looking continuing education framework. These systems are not isolated tools but integral components of a broader national strategy, as evidenced by the successive five-year Lifelong Education Promotion Plans. The current Fifth Plan (2023-2027), with its slogan "the Great Transformation of Lifelong Learning," explicitly aims to prepare citizens for the challenges of a digital economy and a super-aged society, demonstrating a proactive and adaptive policy environment. For Hong Kong, which has recently articulated a vision to become an international education hub and has committed substantial resources to digital education, understanding the operational depth and strategic integration of South Korea's model is crucial.

The architecture of South Korea's system provides a concrete case study in how to structure equitable access and individual empowerment in continuing education. The Lifelong Learning Account System functions as a personal, government-managed online repository that allows individuals to accumulate and manage their learning records from various accredited institutions, effectively creating a unified academic transcript for lifelong learning that connects to formal qualifications like the Academic Credit Bank System. Complementing this infrastructure is the targeted Lifelong Education Voucher System. Initially designed to support low-income and vulnerable groups, the voucher system removes financial barriers, granting recipients up to 700,000 won per year to spend on approved educational programs. This dual approach ensures both systemic coherence and social equity, a combination that is highly relevant to Hong Kong's goals. Furthermore, South Korea's model is dynamic; the recent "AI-Digital (AID) 30+ Project" and the introduction of the "AID Career Jump Pass" – a digital lifelong education voucher specifically for upskilling adults in AI and digital competencies – illustrates how the system can be rapidly pivoted to address emerging national skill shortages and technological imperatives.

For Hong Kong to ascend to global leadership in continuing education, it must strategically synthesize its existing strengths with the core principles extracted from the South Korean experience. Hong Kong's current education strategy, as outlined in the 2025 Policy Address, already demonstrates a strong commitment to innovation, with plans for a Digital Education Blueprint, the integration of AI into curricula, and the development of the Northern Metropolis University Town. These initiatives provide a fertile ground for introducing a Hong Kong version of a lifelong learning account. Such a system could seamlessly connect the diverse array of continuing education providers – from universities of applied sciences to self-financing institutions – creating clear and flexible pathways for learners to navigate between professional upgrading, academic advancement, and personal enrichment. The HK\$2 billion allocated to the Quality Education Fund for digital education could, for instance, seed the technological infrastructure for these accounts and digital vouchers, mirroring South Korea's investment in its AID 30+ Project.

By adopting a tailored version of South Korea's integrated financing and record-keeping systems, Hong Kong can address its specific socio-economic context and solidify its global standing. The city's ambition to be a hub for high-calibre talent requires a robust system for continuous reskilling, a need that is amplified by the disruptive forces of the fourth industrial revolution. A voucher system, initially perhaps targeted at under-represented groups or key growth sectors like technology and finance, could democratize access to the high-quality educational opportunities Hong Kong offers. This would not only enhance social mobility but also create a larger, more adaptable local talent pool. Furthermore, such a system would generate rich data on learning patterns and skill acquisition, enabling policymakers to fine-tune educational offerings in real-time and fostering a culture where continuous education is a societal norm, not a secondary pursuit. By learning from South Korea's iterative, plan-driven approach and adapting its successful mechanisms, Hong Kong can build a world-leading continuing education ecosystem that is resilient, equitable, and perfectly aligned with the demands of a rapidly changing world.

4.4 Case Study: France's Compte Personnel de Formation (personal training accounts)

Hong Kong stands at a pivotal moment to redefine its role in global human capital development. With a well-established Qualifications Framework (QF) and a dense network of world-class educational providers, the city possesses the foundational infrastructure to become a global leader in continuous education. However, to transition from a provider of diverse options to a strategically integrated ecosystem, Hong Kong can draw invaluable lessons from international exemplars. France's *Compte Personnel de Formation* (CPF), or Personal Training Account, offers a compelling case study of a rights-based, portable, and digitally-enabled approach to lifelong learning. By critically analyzing the CPF's mechanisms, successes, and challenges, a strategic blueprint emerges for Hong Kong—one that leverages its unique strengths to build a more accessible, responsive, and financially sustainable continuing education system for the future.

The French CPF represents a paradigm shift in how lifelong learning is funded and managed, moving from an employer-centric model to an individual-entitlement system. Established to democratize access to training, the CPF is a personal account that follows every individual from their entry into the labour market until retirement. Its core innovation lies in its universality and portability; rights are accrued during employment and remain available even during periods of unemployment, providing a crucial safety net for career transitions. The system is financed through a dedicated levy on businesses and managed via a highly visible digital platform, "Mon Compte Formation," where users can independently consult their balance in euros and directly enroll in eligible training programs. This transparency and user empowerment are key features that drive engagement and place the learner at the centre of the process. Furthermore, the system is designed with a social dimension, providing higher annual top-ups (€800) for low-skilled workers, disabled individuals, and others who face greater barriers to employment, thereby actively supporting social mobility and inclusion.

Despite its innovative design, the French CPF is not without its challenges, and these growing pains offer critical strategic lessons for Hong Kong. A significant issue has been the explosion in demand for certain programs, such as "bilan de compétences" (skills assessments) and driving licence training, which has led to concerns about quality and value for money. The ease of access via the platform, combined with a lack of stringent quality controls, allowed some providers to offer overpriced or low-quality services, prompting the government to consider price caps and stricter regulations. This situation underscores a vital principle for any similar system: a user-friendly platform must be matched by a robust quality assurance framework. Furthermore, the financial sustainability of the CPF is under constant scrutiny, with the French government actively seeking ways to curb rising expenditures, such as increasing the mandatory personal contribution. For Hong Kong, these challenges highlight the necessity of building a system with clear governance, rigorous provider accreditation, and a balanced funding model that can adapt to market dynamics without compromising quality or bankrupting the public purse.

Hong Kong's pathway to global leadership involves adapting these lessons to its own robust educational landscape. The city already possesses a sophisticated Qualifications Framework (QF) that is aligned with international standards, providing a solid foundation for accrediting courses and ensuring their quality. Recent policy initiatives also signal a clear direction of travel: the Employee Retraining Board (ERB) is being fundamentally reformed to adopt a "skills-based" training approach, removing the previous educational ceiling for participants and collaborating with higher education institutions to develop more advanced, industry-aligned courses. This shift from a welfare-oriented retraining body to a strategic driver of workforce development aligns perfectly with the spirit of the CPF. Concurrently, the legislative update to the Post Secondary Colleges Ordinance will streamline the regulatory framework for self-financing institutions, enabling them to respond more flexibly to market needs and further professionalizing the sector. These developments create a fertile ground for introducing a Hong Kong-specific entitlement model, one that builds upon these existing structures rather than replacing them.

Drawing from the French experience, a Hong Kong blueprint for a "Continuing Education Account" would be strategically tailored to the local context. First, it should establish a portable, individual learning account for all residents, perhaps initially seeded by government contributions and supplemented by mandatory employer top-ups or co-investment, similar to the CPF model. The success of this would hinge on a digital "one-stop shop" that integrates with the existing QF, allowing citizens to easily identify accredited courses—from a CFA to a cloud computing certification—and understand how they contribute to a recognized career pathway. The platform must be more than a transaction portal; it should offer AI-powered career guidance and skills gap analysis, linking individual aspirations to real-time labour market data. Crucially, to avoid the quality pitfalls seen in France, Hong Kong can leverage its strong industry partnerships to co-create and validate curricula. The ERB's evolving role in identifying key skill gaps and working with training providers to develop "micro-credentials" and industry-endorsed courses offers a powerful model for ensuring that funded training directly meets economic needs. By embedding quality control within the design phase, Hong Kong can create a system that is not only accessible and empowering but also agile, financially resilient, and globally recognized for its excellence.

4.5 Case Study: Canada's training tax credit and provincial models

Hong Kong stands at a pivotal moment to transform its continuing education (CE) sector into a global leader. By strategically analyzing and adapting successful international models, particularly Canada's sophisticated use of training tax credits and decentralized provincial systems, Hong Kong can develop a robust blueprint for growth. This strategy involves not only financial incentives but also a fundamental restructuring of how continuing education is integrated with economic policy, technological advancement, and regional integration.

Analysis of Canada's Training Tax Credit and Provincial Models

Canada offers a compelling case study in leveraging fiscal policy to promote lifelong learning, primarily through its refundable Canada Training Credit (CTC). Introduced in 2019, the CTC represents a significant federal investment in human capital. It is a refundable tax credit, meaning that even individuals who do not owe income tax can receive a payment, making it highly accessible. Eligible Canadians aged 26 to 65 accumulate a credit of \$250 each year, up to a lifetime maximum of \$5,000, which can then be claimed to cover half of their eligible tuition and training fees. The program is designed to be self-reinforcing; to accumulate the credit for a given year, an individual must have had a minimum amount of working income (e.g., \$11,821 for the 2025 credit) and a net income below a certain threshold in the previous year, effectively targeting the credit at working-age adults looking to upskill. This creates a direct, annual incentive for the workforce to engage in continuous learning, linking it directly to labour force participation and earnings.

Crucially, Canada's approach is not monolithic. Its provinces act as "laboratories of innovation," offering complementary and targeted incentives that provide lessons in flexibility and specificity. Provincial models demonstrate how to tailor support to local economic needs. For instance, British Columbia's Training Tax Credit Program provides targeted tax credits specifically for apprentices and the employers who hire them in eligible trades, with the program extended to the end of 2027. The province's detailed regulation outlines specific programs—from aircraft maintenance technicians to arborists—and defines the work-based hours or technical training levels required to qualify, showcasing a precision approach to skills development. Similarly, Manitoba's Paid Work Experience Tax Credits allow employers to claim a percentage of wages for apprentices and newly certified journeypersons, while also extending credits to co-op students and high school apprentices. Other provinces like Nova Scotia have implemented programs such as the START program, which offers employers up to \$25,000 for hiring and retaining an apprentice, with higher amounts for individuals from under-represented groups. These provincial initiatives, including Quebec's Workplace Apprenticeship Program (PAMT) which pairs experienced workers with learners, demonstrate a multi-layered ecosystem where federal tax policy provides a broad base of support while provincial programs address specific industrial and demographic needs.

Hong Kong's Strategic Blueprint for Global Leadership

Drawing from the Canadian experience, Hong Kong's pathway to global leadership in continuing education must be built on a foundation of financial innovation, structural modernization, and strategic regional integration. The first pillar of this blueprint should be the introduction of a Hong Kong Training Credit (HKTC). Modeled on Canada's CTC, this would be a refundable tax credit to ensure maximum impact across all income levels. Eligibility could be tied to prior-year earnings and age, creating a broad-based incentive for the workforce to regularly update their skills. To ensure fiscal responsibility and market relevance, the credit could be designed to cover a percentage of fees for certified courses aligned with identified skills gaps in key industries like fintech, healthcare, and green technology. This would directly support the government's goal of building a "health and medical innovation hub" and fostering R&D, as outlined in recent policy addresses.

The second pillar involves the modernization and diversification of CE institutions and delivery models. Hong Kong can take inspiration from Canada's provincial models by creating a more decentralized and responsive ecosystem. A key local initiative, the Employees Retraining Board (ERB), is already undergoing a significant transformation, shifting towards a "skill-based" training framework that focuses on identifying and filling specific skills gaps, with plans to introduce industry-recognized micro-credentials and flexible learning pathways. This aligns perfectly with the global shift towards modular, just-in-time learning. Concurrently, institutions like HKU SPACE are already demonstrating best practices by expanding their physical footprint with new learning centers in areas like Sheung Shui, strategically positioned to serve both local and Mainland Chinese students. These centers, equipped for diverse activities from culinary arts to distance learning, exemplify the flexible, modern infrastructure required. The government's push to establish Universities of Applied Sciences (UASs) further elevates the status of vocational and professional education, providing clear pathways for students and creating a more integrated post-secondary landscape.

The third pillar is the strategic expansion of Hong Kong's reach through the Greater Bay Area (GBA) and international collaboration. Canadian provinces often design programs to attract and retain talent within their borders; Hong Kong can adopt a similar logic on a larger scale. The HKSAR Government's proactive strategy to enhance collaboration with GBA institutions, as highlighted in HKU SPACE's strategic plan, is a prime example. Formal partnerships, such as the one between HKU SPACE and Northwestern Polytechnical University to create a "Cloud Classroom + Practice Base" training model, offer a scalable template for integrating theoretical education with practical application across borders. Furthermore, the government's initiative to double the non-local student quota for government-funded institutions and invest in additional hostel places is a direct bid to attract global talent, reinforcing Hong Kong's ambition to be an international education hub. By fostering such cross-border educational pipelines, Hong Kong can position itself as the premier gateway for talent development in the region, leveraging its unique advantage under the "one country, two systems" framework.

In conclusion, by synthesizing the financial mechanisms of Canada's training credits with the structural agility of its own evolving institutions and the immense opportunities of the GBA, Hong Kong can forge a world-leading continuing education ecosystem. This strategic blueprint—combining fiscal incentives, institutional modernization, and regional integration—will not only empower its workforce but also cement its status as a dynamic global leader in human capital development for the 21st century.

4.6 Case Study: Australia's lifelong learning voucher programmes

Hong Kong possesses a robust foundation for lifelong learning, anchored by the well-established Continuing Education Fund (CEF) and the Qualifications Framework (QF). However, to transition from a regional participant to a global leader, a strategic evolution is required—one that learns from mature international models like Australia's voucher and entitlement systems while leveraging Hong Kong's unique advantages as a bi-lingual, international hub. The following blueprint outlines a pathway to achieve this ambition.

Hong Kong's Current Landscape: A Solid Foundation

Hong Kong's continuous education ecosystem is built on several key pillars that provide a stable and credible foundation for growth. The most significant of these is the Continuing Education Fund (CEF), a government-initiated subsidy programme established in 2002. The CEF provides a lifetime subsidy of up to HK\$25,000 per eligible applicant aged 18 or above, covering a wide range of over 4,650 registered courses across 14 areas of study. This fund has successfully institutionalised the concept of subsidised lifelong learning for the city's workforce. Complementing the CEF is the Qualifications Framework (QF), a statutory mechanism established under the Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications Ordinance (Cap. 592). The QF provides a clear, seven-level hierarchy for all academic, vocational, and continuing education qualifications, ensuring that learning is objectively graded and recognised across different sectors. This framework, managed by the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) for quality assurance, ensures that the CEF subsidises courses that meet rigorous and consistent standards.

Furthermore, the ecosystem is enriched by a diverse array of providers and programmes. Major institutions like the Vocational Training Council (VTC) offer industry-specific training and professional diplomas, often supplemented by government subsidies like the Vplus scheme, which reimburses up to 60% of tuition fees for eligible courses. Beyond traditional vocational training, Hong Kong also serves as a regional hub for prestigious international professional qualifications. Bodies such as the CFA Institute, the Global Association of Risk Professionals (FRM), and the Project Management Institute (PMP) offer frequent examinations in the city, making it a convenient centre for global talent to enhance their credentials. This rich tapestry of publicly funded programmes and internationally recognised certifications forms the bedrock upon which a global leadership strategy can be built.

The Australian Model: A Case Study in Strategic Voucher Systems

Australia's approach to funding vocational and continuous education offers a compelling case study for Hong Kong, particularly in its scale, strategic targeting, and systemic integration. Unlike Hong Kong's singular CEF, Australia operates a federated system where state and territory governments partner with the national government to deliver subsidised training, creating a more complex but highly adaptive environment. This system is primarily driven by large-scale, strategic funding models like the Victorian Training Guarantee. This initiative fundamentally shifts the dynamic from a finite fund to an entitlement, offering an "unlimited number of government-subsidised training places" to eligible individuals. This guarantees access for residents, promoting mass upskilling and participation.

A key feature of the Australian model is its sophisticated use of funding rules to steer individual and institutional behaviour towards national and state priorities. Eligibility is not universal but is carefully calibrated. For instance, priority is often given to young people under 20, those upskilling to a higher qualification level, and individuals enrolling in courses on a Foundation Skills List. This ensures that public money is directed toward addressing skills shortages and improving workforce participation. Furthermore, the system imposes lifetime limits on the number of subsidised courses at the same qualification level, encouraging learners to progress to higher-level skills rather than accumulating multiple, similar-level certifications. This creates a clear pathway for career advancement, directly linking government funding to tangible economic outcomes. The system is further strengthened by deep industry involvement. Training packages are developed by Industry Skills Councils in consultation with industry to ensure that the competencies taught are exactly what employers need. This close coupling of training with industry demand ensures the system remains responsive and relevant, a feature Hong Kong could further develop.

Hong Kong's Pathway to Global Leadership: A Strategic Blueprint

Leveraging its existing strengths and drawing critical lessons from the Australian model, Hong Kong can implement a strategic blueprint to ascend to global leadership in continuous education.

1. From Passive Subsidy to Active Skills Strategy:

The first strategic shift involves transforming the CEF from a generally accessible fund into a more dynamic tool for workforce development. Hong Kong can learn from Australia's "Victorian Training Guarantee" by considering a move towards an entitlement-based system for priority areas, ensuring that funding is not a finite pool that can be exhausted but a guaranteed right for strategic upskilling. The government should introduce a differential subsidy model, where courses in high-demand fields identified in the latest Hong Kong talent lists—such as FinTech, AI, renewable energy technology, and healthcare—receive a higher co-funding ratio (e.g., 80-90%) compared to other courses. This would actively steer learners towards sectors critical for the city's economic competitiveness, directly linking individual learning aspirations with macro-economic needs. This approach would build upon the CEF's existing structure but add a layer of strategic direction.

2. Deepening Industry Integration and Micro-Credentialing:

To ensure the relevance and agility of its continuous education, Hong Kong must institutionalise deeper collaboration between training providers and industry. While Australia has formal mechanisms for industry to drive training packages, Hong Kong can take this a step further by creating a fast-track approval process for industry-co-designed micro-credentials. These short, competency-based courses would allow professionals to quickly acquire specific, job-ready skills in emerging areas. The government could incentivise this by making such industry-endorsed micro-credentials eligible for a higher CEF subsidy tier. Furthermore, following the Australian example of recognising in-house training, Hong Kong's QF should develop clear pathways for accrediting corporate training programmes, allowing employees to gain formally recognised qualifications for skills learned on the job. This would not only validate workplace learning but also encourage greater investment in training by corporations.

3. Positioning Hong Kong as a Regional Lifelong Learning Hub:

Hong Kong's unique status as a bilingual common law jurisdiction with world-class infrastructure positions it perfectly to become the premier lifelong learning hub for the Greater Bay Area (GBA) and the broader Asia-Pacific region. The strategic blueprint should focus on exporting its high-quality continuing education. This can be achieved by actively promoting its extensive range of international professional qualifications—such as CFA, FRM, and CPA—to talent in the GBA, offering hybrid learning models that combine online theory with intensive, in-person practicums and examinations in Hong Kong. By leveraging the "Study in Hong Kong" brand, the city can attract non-local students for short, intensive professional courses, particularly in areas like green finance, digital assets, and wealth management, where Hong Kong has a distinct competitive edge. This would not only generate economic activity but also reinforce Hong Kong's status as a regional talent hub and an international centre for professional excellence.

4.7 Synthesis: What Hong Kong can adapt and adopt

Hong Kong stands at a pivotal moment to redefine its role in global higher education, not merely as a destination for traditional full-time students but as a leading hub for continuous professional and lifelong learning. By strategically adapting international best practices and adopting innovative local models, the city can build a resilient and future-ready workforce. This blueprint synthesizes current initiatives and historical insights to chart a course for Hong Kong's global leadership in this vital sector.

1. Establishing an Agile and Integrated Policy Framework

The foundation of Hong Kong's leadership must be a modernized governance structure that treats continuous education as a core pillar of economic policy, moving beyond its historical position on the periphery of the traditional university system. Historically, as a University Grants Committee (UGC) report noted, continuous professional education was largely market-driven, self-financing, and operated on "marginal resources," with government planning seen as unnecessary. To achieve global leadership, Hong Kong must adapt the recommendations from think tanks like Our Hong Kong Foundation, which advocate for a policy blueprint that bridges economic, manpower, and skills development. A significant step in this direction is the government's directive to 革新 (revolutionize) the Employees Retraining Board (ERB). By removing the previous education ceiling for participants and shifting to a "技能为本" (skills-based) training framework, the ERB is adapting to serve the entire workforce, not just job-seekers. This policy shift, which includes developing industry-recognized micro-certificates and collaborating with higher education institutions, adopts a holistic approach to national skill-building. Hong Kong can build on this by adopting a more comprehensive lifelong learning funding model, potentially exploring the "development fund" concept for new public-benefit courses as suggested in the UGC review, moving from ad-hoc subsidies to strategic investment.

2. Adopting Flexible Learning Pathways and Industry Integration

To become a global leader, Hong Kong must fully adopt the principle of seamless integration between professional practice and academic advancement. The Education Bureau has laid the groundwork by sharpening the differentiation between Higher Diplomas and Associate Degrees, strengthening the Vocational and Professional Education and Training (VPET) pathway with multiple entry and exit points. This is complemented by forward-thinking initiatives like the Pilot Project on Applied Degrees, which mandates strong industry involvement in curriculum design and work-based learning, ensuring qualifications are immediately relevant to the job market. A prime example of successful adoption is the new Professional Certificate Programmes (Micro-credentials) from CUHK Business School.

These programmes are not standalone; they are listed at Level 6 of the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF) and offer seamless credit transfer to master's degree programmes, creating a tangible bridge between professional upskilling and formal postgraduate education. By adopting such models, Hong Kong demonstrates how micro-credentials can be embedded within a formal, quality-assured framework, providing learners with flexible, stackable credentials that lead to advanced degrees and enhanced career trajectories.

3. Leveraging Technology for Personalized and Inclusive Learning

Hong Kong's future as a continuing education leader depends on its ability to harness technology to create personalized, accessible, and effective learning experiences for a diverse population. This requires adapting global pedagogical innovations to the local context. Insights from international award-winning educators, such as those highlighted by the Yidan Prize, offer valuable blueprints. For instance, the work of Mamadou Amadou Ly in multilingual education provides a model for Hong Kong to 借鏡 (draw lessons from) in supporting its non-Chinese speaking and newly-arrived students. By using familiar languages to build foundational knowledge before transitioning to the main medium of instruction, schools can create more inclusive pathways. Similarly, the computational thinking tools developed by Uri Wilensky, like NetLogo, can be adapted to allow Hong Kong students to simulate and solve complex local problems, from traffic flow to public health scenarios, fostering deep analytical skills. At a practical level, Hong Kong institutions are already adopting AI in the classroom; for example, primary schools are integrating AI writing assistants to provide instant, personalized feedback, demonstrating how technology can cater to learning diversity even at the youngest levels. This blend of high-level policy adaptation and ground-level technological adoption will define Hong Kong's unique value proposition.

4. Deepening Regional Integration and Global Connectivity

Hong Kong's strategic advantage lies in its role as a "super-connector," bridging Mainland China and the global community. To lead in continuous education, it must systematically expand this bridging function. The Chinese University of Hong Kong's strategic plan explicitly aims to serve the lifelong education needs of the community and capitalize on opportunities in the mainland, particularly the Pearl River Delta region. This vision is being actively implemented by institutions like HKMU LiPACE, which acts as a pivotal "超级联系人" (super-connector) by forming the Sichuan-Hong Kong Vocational and Applied Education Alliance. Through student study tours, staff exchanges, and joint programmes, LiPACE is facilitating a two-way flow of educational practice and cultural understanding, giving Hong Kong students invaluable exposure to the mainland market and mainland institutions a gateway to international practices. On the global front, HKU SPACE's LEAD Academy is adopting a model of high-level executive education, organizing study tours for mainland officials to Hong Kong and international destinations like Harvard and Cambridge, while also taking Hong Kong government officials on study tours to the Greater Bay Area. This two-pronged approach—deepening integration with the mainland while leveraging global academic networks—cements Hong Kong's status as the region's premier hub for professional and executive development.

5. Crafting a Vision for an Inclusive Lifelong Learning Society

Ultimately, Hong Kong's blueprint for leadership must be inclusive, serving learners at every stage of life and career. This means moving beyond a narrow focus on professional advancement to embrace the broader societal benefits of continuous learning. The UGC's historical analysis already identified a need to better serve the "second category" of learners—those needing basic vocational and even social skills for employment and integration. Today, this mission is more critical than ever. The strategic vision of institutions like CUHK's School of Continuing and Professional Studies explicitly includes redefining their role to serve the needs of an ageing population and those seeking second careers. The vision of becoming a "global leader in university continuing education" is not just about high-level executive programmes but also about "enriching lives" and helping "young adults, working adults and the ageing learners" achieve their goals. By adopting this expansive view, Hong Kong can build a truly world-class ecosystem where continuous education is not a luxury but an accessible, integral part of life for all its citizens, thereby fostering a resilient, adaptable, and engaged society for decades to come.

VOLUME II: FOUNDATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE

PART 3: POLICY AND REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

CHAPTER 5: STRENGTHENING THE QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK (HKQF)

Hong Kong's Qualifications Framework (HKQF) stands as the foundational pillar for any strategy aiming to establish the city as a global leader in continuing education. Since its official launch in May 2008 under the Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications Ordinance, the HKQF has provided a robust, government-backed platform designed to promote lifelong learning and enhance workforce competitiveness. Its core architecture—a comprehensive seven-level hierarchy that covers academic, vocational, professional, and continuing education sectors—provides a common language and clear, objective standards for all qualifications. This structure ensures that every recognized qualification is quality-assured and level-rated, offering learners, employers, and providers a transparent and reliable system. The foundation of this system is a statutory quality assurance mechanism, led by the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ), which safeguards the integrity and standard of all learning programmes entered on the Qualifications Register (QR).

A key strategic strength of the HKQF, and a critical component for its future development, is its demand-led governance structure, which directly engages industries in the design of competency standards. This is achieved through the establishment of Industry Training Advisory Committees (ITACs), which bring together employers, employees, and professional bodies to develop detailed Specifications of Competency Standards (SCSs) for their respective sectors. This industry-led approach ensures that training programmes are directly relevant to the evolving needs of the economy, effectively bridging the gap between classroom learning and workplace requirements. By the early 2010s, this collaborative model had already led to the creation of SCSs for numerous industries, covering a significant portion of Hong Kong's workforce, and laid the groundwork for practical tools like the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) mechanism. The recent collaboration between DFI Retail Group and PolyU SPEED to develop Hong Kong's first QF Level 6 (Master's level) programme in retail exemplifies this ongoing synergy, demonstrating how the framework can be used to create high-level, specialized pathways that nurture talent and meet specific industry needs.

To propel the HKQF onto the global stage, a strategic focus must be placed on enhancing its internal mechanisms for learner mobility and establishing robust international benchmarking. The development of a comprehensive Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT) mechanism is paramount. By enabling learners to systematically accumulate and transfer credits between different qualifications and institutions, a fully realized CAT system would create the flexible, multi-entry and multi-exit study pathways essential for a modern, lifelong learning ecosystem. This internal flexibility must be matched by external recognition. The HKCAAVQ has already taken significant steps in this direction by undergoing international quality assurance reviews, achieving substantial compliance with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) for Quality Assurance—a first for a quality assurance agency outside Europe. Building on this success by actively pursuing formal referencing or alignment with other national and regional qualifications frameworks worldwide would not only enhance the international mobility of Hong Kong's talent but also solidify its position as a globally recognized hub for educational quality.

Looking ahead, the blueprint for strengthening the HKQF must embrace innovation and regional integration. The HKCAAVQ's strategic vision includes a digital transformation journey, leveraging artificial intelligence, big data, and blockchain to enhance service delivery and stakeholder support. This digital evolution can streamline accreditation processes, improve the accessibility of the Qualifications Register, and support the development of innovative learning formats like micro-credentials, which are increasingly important for workforce upskilling. Furthermore, as Hong Kong strengthens its role as an international education hub, supported by government initiatives to expand post-secondary education and develop the Northern Metropolis University Town, the HKQF can serve as the quality benchmark for new collaborations. Its framework can facilitate the seamless integration of academic and applied degrees, promote industry-university-research effects, and ensure that the qualifications offered in new developments meet the highest international standards, thereby attracting global talent and reinforcing Hong Kong's leadership in continuing education.

5.1 Expanding sectoral coverage: Emerging fields and cross-disciplinary qualifications

Expanding Hong Kong's continuing education sector to cover emerging fields and cross-disciplinary qualifications is a critical pillar of its strategy to become a global leader in the field. This expansion is not merely about adding new courses, but fundamentally reshaping the educational landscape to be agile, responsive, and integrated with the global economy's future needs. By leveraging policy support, institutional innovation, and industry collaboration, Hong Kong is strategically positioning itself to cultivate a future-ready workforce.

A key driver of this expansion is the proactive response to global mega-trends such as digital transformation, sustainability, and the rise of artificial intelligence (AI). Educational institutions are rapidly developing programs tailored to these high-demand areas. For instance, the Hong Kong Polytechnic University Professional and Advanced Studies (PolyU SPEED) has introduced a suite of new master's programs for the 2025/26 academic year that directly target "sunrise industries." These include an MSc in Artificial Intelligence and Emerging Technologies (Management Applications), which equips managers to integrate AI into organizational processes, and an MSc in Digital Business and Marketing Management, addressing the acute need for data-driven marketing professionals. This focus on AI is further amplified by government initiatives, such as the 2026-27 Budget's allocation of HK\$50 million to promote AI literacy across the population and the establishment of a "Skills Upgrading Bureau" (formerly the Employees Retraining Board) to provide widespread "skills-based" training, including in AI applications. Simultaneously, the global push for sustainability is being met with programs like the MSc in Green Business Management and the MSc in Sustainable Tourism and Hotel Management, which embed ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) principles into their core curricula, preparing leaders for a greener economy.

Beyond technology and sustainability, Hong Kong's strategic blueprint recognizes the need to revitalize traditional sectors by infusing them with new skills and perspectives. The humanities, for example, are being re-engineered for the digital age. PolyU SPEED's new MA in Chinese Creative Writing and Media Culture merges classical Chinese studies with AI-assisted media creation, digital content strategy, and immersive entertainment, demonstrating how 文科 (liberal arts) can drive innovation in the cultural and creative industries. This is complemented by courses like the MA in Artificial Intelligence and Technology-Assisted Language Teaching, which prepares educators for the "Education 5.0" era by integrating AI tools into pedagogical practices. This cross-pollination of disciplines ensures that graduates from all backgrounds possess the hybrid intelligence required to solve complex, real-world problems.

The most significant trend in Hong Kong's continuing education evolution is the rise of structured, cross-disciplinary qualifications. The rigid boundaries between traditional academic departments are dissolving in favor of programs that intentionally combine knowledge areas to create new professional niches. The MSc in Construction Law and Dispute Resolution offered by PolyU SPEED is a prime example, blending construction management, legal principles, and alternative dispute resolution methods to create a new class of professionals who can navigate the complex legal and technical landscape of modern infrastructure projects. This approach ensures that professionals are not just specialists in one domain but are capable of communicating and collaborating across fields.

To make this advanced education more accessible and flexible, Hong Kong institutions are pioneering the use of micro-credentials and stackable qualifications. The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) Business School's Asia-Pacific Institute of Business has launched a series of Professional Certificate Programmes (Micro-credentials) in areas like Innovation Leadership, Fintech, and Sustainability & ESG Reporting. These programs are designed for busy executives, offering a practical, shorter, and more affordable pathway to upskilling. A key innovation is that these certificates are listed at Level 6 of the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF) and allow for credit transfers into full master's degree programs, such as the MSc in Financial Technology or the MSc in Sustainable Global Business. This creates a seamless and flexible learning ladder, enabling professionals to build towards higher qualifications incrementally, which is a hallmark of a mature and globally competitive continuing education ecosystem.

5.2 Enhancing credit accumulation and transfer mechanisms

Hong Kong possesses a robust foundation for developing global leadership in continuing education, anchored by its well-established Qualifications Framework (QF) and comprehensive Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT) infrastructure. The strategic blueprint for enhancing these mechanisms involves building upon the government's overarching policy objective to create a platform that encourages and facilitates lifelong learning, thereby enhancing the capability and competitiveness of the workforce. This vision is echoed by leading institutions; for example, the Chinese University of Hong Kong's School of Continuing Studies explicitly aspires to be a "global leader in university continuing education," a goal that is strategically pursued through exploring closer partnerships with international universities and professional bodies, and by ensuring their offerings keep pace with evolving learner needs. The pathway to global leadership, therefore, hinges on systematically strengthening the connectivity, flexibility, and transparency of these educational pathways to create a seamless ecosystem for learners at all stages of their careers.

The government's introduction of a formal CAT policy under the QF in 2014 marked a significant milestone, bringing Hong Kong in line with advanced economies like Australia and those in the European Union. This policy is designed to give proper recognition to prior learning, minimize unnecessary repetition, and provide learners with seamless progression pathways. The framework's strength lies in its multi-faceted structure, which includes institutional-level arrangements (CAT(I)), programme-level specifics (CAT(P)), and mechanisms for recognizing prior learning (CAT(R)). This structured approach ensures that credit transfer is not an ad-hoc process but is underpinned by rigorous quality assurance, with receiving institutions making informed decisions based on the comparability of learning outcomes, QF level, and credit value. The widespread adoption of these policies is evident, with a vast network of universities, including the University of Hong Kong, Chinese University, and Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, as well as vocational training providers like the VTC, all implementing formal CAT arrangements.

A key driver in Hong Kong's journey to global leadership is the innovative application of CAT to new, flexible learning formats such as micro-credentials. A prime example is the suite of Professional Certificate Programmes (micro-credentials) launched by CUHK Business School, which covers trending areas like Artificial Intelligence for Business, Sustainability and ESG Reporting, and Financial Technology. These programmes are designed as "career accelerators," offering concentrated, practical learning that can be completed in six to 36 months. Crucially, they feature a "seamless transfer" of credits earned into master's degree programmes, with graduates able to use their credits for course and unit exemptions upon successful enrolment in a postgraduate degree. This model directly addresses the needs of modern professionals by bridging the gap between short, skill-specific courses and advanced academic qualifications, thereby creating a tangible and motivating ladder for lifelong learning.

To further solidify its global leadership, Hong Kong's blueprint must focus on expanding the scope and interoperability of its CAT mechanisms. This includes fostering even greater collaboration between traditional universities and vocational and professional institutions, ensuring that the diverse range of continuing education options—from professional certifications like the CFA and FRM to vocational qualifications—can be efficiently accumulated and transferred. Institutions like the VTC have already implemented detailed policies for credit transfer and module exemption based on formal academic achievements or relevant experience, setting a precedent for competency-based recognition. By continuously refining these systems, enhancing the transparency of CAT information through centralized databases like the Qualifications Register, and encouraging the development of more programmes with built-in articulation pathways, Hong Kong can create a truly integrated and world-leading continuing education ecosystem that attracts and nurtures global talent.

5.3 Micro-credentials and stackable credentials: Integration into HKQF levels

Hong Kong possesses a unique strategic advantage in its journey to become a global leader in continuing education, primarily through the sophisticated integration of micro-credentials and stackable credentials within the established Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF). This integration is not merely an administrative exercise but a fundamental component of a broader strategic blueprint aimed at creating a flexible, responsive, and globally recognized lifelong learning ecosystem. The government's vision, as articulated in recent policy addresses, to establish Hong Kong as an international post-secondary education hub provides the overarching impetus for this development. By embedding micro-credentials into the HKQF, the city is effectively future-proofing its workforce, ensuring that skills acquisition is both rigorous and adaptable to the rapid changes in the global economy.

The cornerstone of this strategy is the formal alignment of micro-credentials with the HKQF, which provides a clear and credible pathway for learners. Institutions like HKU SPACE have pioneered this approach by designing micro-credentials that are not standalone units but are explicitly "stackable" towards larger, recognized qualifications such as professional certificates and diplomas. These short courses, typically involving around 30 contact hours and carrying 6 or 9 credits, are benchmarked against specific HKQF levels. To attain a full award like a Certificate or Diploma at a particular level, a learner must accumulate the required credits, with a strict rule that 75% of those credits must be at the target QF level. This rigorous structure ensures that the flexibility of micro-learning does not come at the expense of academic and professional standards, providing employers and learners alike with confidence in the value of the credential.

Further solidifying this pathway, leading institutions are now offering micro-credentials at higher HKQF levels, creating direct articulation routes to master's degrees. The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) Business School's suite of Professional Certificate Programmes serves as a prime example of this strategic advancement. These programmes are officially listed on the Qualifications Register at HKQF Level 6, which is equivalent to the level of a bachelor's degree. More importantly, they are designed with built-in progression, allowing graduates to transfer credits and apply for exemptions in related CUHK master's degree programmes. This seamless connection between a focused, industry-relevant micro-credential and postgraduate study exemplifies how stackable credentials can create a powerful and efficient "earn and learn" pathway, enabling professionals to upgrade their skills incrementally while keeping doors open for advanced academic achievement. This model directly supports the government's aim to raise the status of professional and vocational education by embedding it within a coherent, level-based framework.

5.4 Streamlining accreditation processes for non-traditional providers

Hong Kong's aspiration to become a global leader in continuing education requires a strategic overhaul of its regulatory frameworks, particularly to accommodate the rapid growth of non-traditional education providers. The following analysis examines the current landscape and proposes pathways for streamlining accreditation processes while maintaining quality assurance, drawing on recent policy developments and institutional reforms.

The Strategic Imperative for Continuing Education Reform

Hong Kong's economic restructuring and the accelerating obsolescence of knowledge have created an urgent demand for a more agile continuing education system. As a small open economy competing internationally, Hong Kong's workforce must continuously upgrade skills to maintain competitive advantage. The "half-life of knowledge and skills is shortening," necessitating continual reinvestment in human capital as adults' knowledge depletes with working experience. This reality is underscored by Hong Kong's rapid transformation from manufacturing to high-value-added services, including legal, accounting, consulting, and financing services, which has displaced hundreds of thousands of workers whose skills became obsolete virtually overnight. The government has recognised this challenge through initiatives such as the Employee Retraining Board's recent reforms and the broader objective of establishing Hong Kong as an international hub for post-secondary education. The 2024 and 2025 Policy Addresses have progressively built toward this vision, with measures including doubling non-local student quotas for UGC-funded universities, launching the "Study in Hong Kong" brand, and developing a University Town in the Northern Metropolis to create synergies between education, industry, and research.

Current Regulatory Framework and Its Limitations for Non-Traditional Providers

The existing regulatory regime for non-local and professional education, governed by the Non-local Higher and Professional Education (Regulation) Ordinance (Cap. 493), establishes comprehensive quality assurance mechanisms but imposes significant administrative burdens on course providers. Under the current system, all courses leading to non-local higher academic or professional qualifications must be registered or exempted before being conducted in Hong Kong. Applications must be submitted at least four months before course commencement, with processing times varying based on application volume and course complexity. The Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) conducts detailed assessments against criteria requiring that non-local institutions be recognised in their home countries and maintain standards comparable to courses offered domestically.

While these requirements ensure quality, they create particular challenges for non-traditional providers—including corporate training firms, professional bodies, ed-tech companies, and industry consortia—that may offer innovative, rapidly evolving programmes ill-suited to extended approval timelines. Furthermore, the regulatory framework's focus on institutional recognition disadvantages emerging providers without established reputations, even when their programmes address critical skills gaps identified by industry.

Emerging Models of Regulatory Innovation: The Employee Retraining Board Transformation

A compelling precedent for streamlining accreditation emerges from the Employee Retraining Board's (ERB) ongoing transformation, which offers valuable lessons for regulating non-traditional providers. The ERB is implementing fundamental reforms that shift from "trade-based" to "skills-based" training frameworks, recognising that modern career pathways increasingly transcend traditional occupational boundaries. This paradigm shift enables more responsive curriculum development aligned with evolving industry needs, prioritising practical, transferable skills applicable across multiple sectors. The ERB has already developed approximately 50 advanced and future-skills courses covering artificial intelligence, technology applications, and professional certifications, with plans to expand into game development, AI-assisted fraud detection, data analysis, and mobile application development. Crucially, the ERB is exploring modular course designs that allow learners to accumulate credits through "micro-certificate programmes," with stackable credits ultimately contributing to full qualifications. This modular approach reduces barriers for working professionals while enabling rapid deployment of targeted training interventions. The ERB's plan to establish a skills research unit employing data specialists to analyse market trends and forecast talent gaps further demonstrates how regulatory bodies can proactively shape provision rather than merely react to applications.

Streamlining Accreditation Through Risk-Based and Partnership Approaches

Hong Kong's regulatory framework already contains provisions that, if strategically expanded, could accommodate non-traditional providers more effectively. The Ordinance's exception for courses conducted in collaboration with specified local higher education institutions, which are automatically exempt from registration when institutional heads certify compliance with quality criteria, offers a model for streamlined approval. Extending similar presumptions of quality to partnerships with accredited non-traditional providers—such as recognised professional bodies, industry training organisations with demonstrated track records, or ed-tech platforms meeting technical infrastructure standards—could significantly reduce regulatory duplication while maintaining safeguards.

The existing pathway for voluntary local accreditation through HKCAAVQ, which enables non-local courses to achieve recognition under the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework and access government subsidy schemes, already provides a mechanism for non-traditional providers to demonstrate quality commitment. However, the current system treats accreditation as supplementary to registration rather than integrated with it. A streamlined approach could recognise prior accreditation decisions from reputable international or professional bodies, reducing redundant assessments. Additionally, the ERB's experience with simplifying training provider appointment procedures to accelerate course delivery demonstrates that administrative processes can be modernised without compromising standards.

Building a Future-Ready Accreditation Ecosystem

Realising Hong Kong's ambition as a global continuing education leader requires systematic reforms addressing both regulatory processes and institutional capacity. First, the government should establish clear pathways for non-traditional providers to achieve "recognised status" based on demonstrated quality assurance capabilities, financial viability, and industry recognition, enabling expedited approval for subsequent course applications. Second, leveraging technology to digitise and automate routine aspects of accreditation—as partially implemented through electronic application systems—can reduce processing times and administrative burdens. Third, developing clear standards for micro-credentials and stackable credentials, aligned with the Qualifications Framework, would provide quality assurance for modular offerings while facilitating learner mobility across providers. The ERB's proposal to make AI literacy a compulsory component across its curriculum also suggests how regulators can establish baseline expectations for technological competency without prescribing rigid course structures. Finally, enhanced coordination among regulatory bodies—including the Education Bureau, HKCAAVQ, the ERB, and industry-specific authorities—could create a unified portal for course approvals, reducing fragmentation for providers operating across multiple regulatory domains. These reforms, grounded in the practical innovations already emerging from Hong Kong's continuing education sector, offer a blueprint for streamlining accreditation while positioning the city as a dynamic hub for lifelong learning in the Asian century.

5.5 Mutual recognition agreements with mainland China and ASEAN countries

Hong Kong stands at a pivotal moment in its development as a global education hub, with continuing education emerging as a critical pillar for sustaining its economic competitiveness and social mobility. The strategic blueprint for Hong Kong's global leadership in this sector rests upon three foundational elements: institutional excellence, robust quality assurance mechanisms, and most critically, the expansion of mutual recognition agreements that transcend borders. As the city transforms from a producer of graduates to a strategic cultivator of market-ready talent, the mutual recognition of qualifications with mainland China and ASEAN countries becomes not merely an administrative convenience but a geopolitical and economic imperative that will define Hong Kong's unique value proposition in the regional education landscape.

The mutual recognition framework between Hong Kong and mainland China has evolved significantly from its origins in the 2004 Memorandum on Mutual Recognition of Higher Education Academic Certificates, which established the foundational mechanism for degree-level recognition for academic progression purposes. This bilateral agreement, while groundbreaking at the time, was primarily designed for traditional academic pathways and did not address the nuanced needs of continuing education learners seeking professional advancement. However, recent developments have dramatically expanded this framework's scope and applicability. The 2025 Policy Address explicitly commits to implementing arrangements for mutual recognition of vocational and professional qualifications, particularly at the sub-degree level, to facilitate cross-boundary employment and further study opportunities for graduates of vocational and professional programmes. This policy direction recognizes that continuing education learners require seamless mobility not just for academic pursuits but for career advancement across the boundary.

The 粤港资历框架对接 represents the most sophisticated manifestation of this mutual recognition agenda, moving beyond simple degree equivalence to create a comprehensive architecture for lifelong learning recognition. In June 2025, 广东终身教育学分银行 successfully completed its first-ever 跨境课程评审 in Hong Kong, evaluating four programmes at 港专学院 spanning 三级, 五级, and 六级 levels of the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework and determining their equivalence to corresponding levels in the 广东资历框架. This landmark 评审过程 was conducted by a team of nearly 20 experts from prestigious institutions including 华南理工大学, 华南师范大学, and 广东开放大学, with 香港学术及职业资历评审局专家 participating as observers to ensure professional integrity and mutual confidence. The 评审团队 rigorously examined 课程材料, conducted interviews with faculty and students, and inspected teaching facilities before concluding that the 港专 programmes—including the Master of Social Sciences in Career Counselling and the Bachelor of Social Sciences with Honours in Social Work—met the knowledge, skills, and competency standards required for inclusion in the 广东终身教育资历名册.

This breakthrough represents far more than administrative recognition; it embodies the operationalization of 粤港教育 integration after years of preparatory work. The successful 评审 built upon multiple layers of institutional groundwork: the 2017 establishment of the 广东终身教育资历框架 as a provincial standard, the 2019 signing of the 粤港资历框架合作意向书 between education authorities, and the 2024 合作框架协议 between 广东学分银行 and 港专学院. The establishment of a 广东学分银行 service point at 港专学院 further institutionalizes this relationship, creating a physical mechanism for ongoing recognition and support. As 广东省教育研究院副院长 李海东教授 observed, this 跨境评审 has achieved three historic breakthroughs: establishing 对接机制 between Hong Kong's 资历架构 and mainland China's framework, enabling 境外课程 to be formally 纳入 the Guangdong lifelong education registry, and creating a 跨境评审 model for quality assurance that can be replicated across the region. For learners, this translates into concrete benefits: students enrolled in recognized courses can now accumulate and transfer credits across the boundary, pursue further studies at mainland institutions, and seek employment with qualifications that employers on both sides understand and trust.

The ASEAN dimension of Hong Kong's mutual recognition strategy, while less developed than the mainland China framework, represents the next frontier in the city's global leadership ambitions. Hong Kong's unique position as a bilingual common law jurisdiction with deep historical connections to Southeast Asia positions it ideally to serve as the recognition bridge between mainland China's qualification frameworks and the diverse systems of ASEAN member states. The strategic blueprint envisions leveraging Hong Kong's internationally benchmarked qualifications framework, which at Level 6 aligns with master's degree standards and offers seamless credit transfer pathways to postgraduate programmes, as a model that ASEAN countries can recognize and trust. The Hong Kong Qualifications Framework's transparency and rigorous quality assurance mechanisms, administered by the 香港学术及职业资历评审局, provide the credibility necessary for ASEAN partner countries to enter into recognition agreements with confidence.

The institutional infrastructure for ASEAN recognition is already being built through proactive engagement by Hong Kong's continuing education providers. The Academy for Leadership Enhancement and Development (LEAD) established by HKU SPACE has demonstrated the practical viability of cross-border programme delivery through its customized training for mainland Chinese enterprises and government departments, its international study tours in collaboration with Harvard, MIT, Stanford, and Cambridge, and its thematic seminars attracting participants from across the region. These activities create the operational experience and relationship networks necessary for formal mutual recognition agreements. The Hong Kong government's designation of universities of applied sciences and encouragement of collaboration with leading enterprises in Guangdong province establishes a model of industry-education integration that resonates strongly with ASEAN countries' focus on workforce development and technical education. By demonstrating that its continuing education qualifications produce graduates with competencies directly relevant to employer needs, Hong Kong strengthens its case for mutual recognition with ASEAN partners who prioritize practical outcomes over theoretical credentials.

The strategic pathway to ASEAN mutual recognition involves several parallel tracks. First, Hong Kong must continue strengthening its domestic quality assurance infrastructure, exemplified by the 微证书 movement at institutions like CUHK Business School, whose Professional Certificate Programmes are listed in the Qualifications Register at Level 6 and offer credit transfer to master's degree programmes. These micro-credentials, covering trending areas such as Innovation Leadership, Sustainability and ESG Reporting, and Artificial Intelligence for Business, represent the kind of flexible, industry-responsive qualifications that appeal to ASEAN professionals and employers. Second, Hong Kong should pursue bilateral recognition pilots with individual ASEAN countries, perhaps beginning with Singapore given its similar common law heritage and advanced education system, or with Malaysia given its significant Chinese-speaking population and established educational linkages. These pilots would focus on specific professional sectors where Hong Kong has recognized excellence, such as financial services, logistics, and increasingly, sustainability and ESG management. Third, Hong Kong should leverage its participation in regional forums such as ASEAN+3 and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation to advocate for multilateral recognition frameworks that build upon the mainland China model and extend its benefits across Southeast Asia.

The enabling policy ecosystem for mutual recognition extends beyond government-to-government agreements to encompass institutional partnerships, professional body engagement, and technological infrastructure. 香港中文大学专业进修学院 articulates a vision "to be a global leader in university continuing education" through strategies including examining "diversified access of learning for global experiences" and expanding networks "to collaborate with industries in Hong Kong and globally for training and continuing education development". This institutional commitment to globalization aligns with the broader strategic direction articulated by CUHK's five-year vision to "offer joint, including dual degree, programmes with our international strategic partners to increase students' exposure to a global network". Such institutional initiatives create the practical mechanisms through which mutual recognition agreements gain meaning: students actually transfer, credits actually count, and qualifications actually open doors across borders.

The mutual recognition agenda also requires attention to the practical mechanisms of qualification verification and authentication. The existing infrastructure for mainland China-Hong Kong recognition includes the 教育部留学服务中心's online 快捷认证申请 system for Hong Kong degrees and the 学信网's electronic authentication services for mainland qualifications. These systems, which have eliminated the need for physical document submission and dramatically accelerated processing times, provide a model for the kind of digital infrastructure that ASEAN mutual recognition will require. Hong Kong's expertise in developing secure, efficient verification systems represents a tangible contribution it can make to regional education cooperation, potentially positioning the city as the trusted third-party verifier for cross-boundary qualifications throughout Southeast Asia.

Looking forward, the mutual recognition framework between Hong Kong, mainland China, and ASEAN countries must evolve to accommodate the changing nature of continuing education itself. The rise of micro-credentials, stackable certificates, and lifelong learning pathways challenges traditional assumptions about qualification equivalence based on duration or institution type. Hong Kong's experience with 微证书 development at institutions like CUHK Business School, where Professional Certificate Programmes offer modular options completable in six to 36 months with credits transferable to master's programmes, provides valuable insights into how mutual recognition frameworks can accommodate non-traditional learning formats. The key principle emerging from Hong Kong's practice is that recognition should attach to demonstrated competencies rather than time served, to learning outcomes rather than inputs. This competency-based approach aligns with emerging global trends and offers a flexible template that can accommodate the diverse educational traditions and priorities of ASEAN member states while maintaining the rigor and credibility essential for mutual trust.

In conclusion, Hong Kong's pathway to global leadership in continuing education is inextricably linked to its ability to construct and sustain robust mutual recognition relationships with its most important partners: mainland China and the ASEAN countries. The 粤港资历框架对接 achieved through the 首次跨境课程评审 of 2025 demonstrates the feasibility and benefits of such recognition, creating a practical template that can be extended and adapted for Southeast Asian partners. The institutional readiness demonstrated by Hong Kong's continuing education providers, the policy support articulated in successive government initiatives, and the quality assurance infrastructure anchored by the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework all position the city to serve as the recognition bridge between mainland China and ASEAN. As 李海东教授 noted, these developments represent not merely administrative achievements but fundamental "制度创新" that enables "要素流动" across boundaries. For learners, workers, and employers across the region, this 流动 of talent and qualifications translates into expanded opportunities, enhanced productivity, and deeper regional integration. Hong Kong's strategic blueprint for continuing education leadership thus serves not only its own interests but contributes to the broader project of building an integrated, dynamic, and opportunity-rich regional education community.

CHAPTER 6: QUALITY ASSURANCE FOR THE FUTURE

Hong Kong is strategically positioned to become a global leader in continuous education, a journey that is fundamentally anchored in its robust and legally entrenched quality assurance (QA) mechanisms. The foundation of this system is the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF), established under the Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications Ordinance (Cap. 592) in 2008. This framework provides a structured and objective platform for lifelong learning by defining clear standards for qualifications across academic, vocational, and professional sectors. The statutory mandate of the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) as the Accreditation Authority ensures that all non-self-accrediting institutions meet rigorous quality benchmarks before their programmes can be recognised and listed on the Qualifications Register (QR). This dual system, which also empowers the University Grants Committee's Quality Assurance Council (QAC) to oversee nine major self-accrediting universities, creates a comprehensive and multi-layered safety net for educational standards, instilling confidence among learners, employers, and international partners.

Looking to the future, Hong Kong is pioneering the integration of flexible, skills-based learning pathways into its quality-assured ecosystem. A prime example of this innovation is the introduction of micro-credential programmes, such as those recently launched by the CUHK Business School. These programmes are designed as "career accelerators" for busy professionals, offering concentrated learning in high-demand areas like ESG, FinTech, and Artificial Intelligence. Crucially, their quality and standard are assured by their inclusion in the HKQF, with some being recognised at Level 6, and they offer a seamless pathway for credit transfer to traditional master's degree programmes. This model of "stackable" credentials—where short, focused courses can be accumulated towards higher qualifications—represents a significant leap forward. It demonstrates how a robust QA framework can foster flexibility and innovation, enabling the education system to adapt swiftly to industry 4.0 demands while maintaining academic rigour and providing clear progression routes for learners.

The strategic blueprint for the future also involves a significant paradigm shift from "course-based" to "skills-based" training, driven by forward-thinking policy. The recent initiatives to reform the Employees Retraining Board (ERB) exemplify this transformation. By removing academic prerequisites and focusing on a "skills-based" training framework, the government is enabling the entire workforce to engage in lifelong upskilling and reskilling. This reform, supported by a three-year roadmap, involves strengthening industry consultation to identify skills gaps and developing new, high-quality training programmes in collaboration with 高等院校. The plan to introduce industry-recognised micro-certificates aligns perfectly with the global trend towards modular and flexible learning, ensuring that training is directly relevant to economic needs and providing tangible career benefits for employees. This strong linkage between policy, industry needs, and a revamped QA process ensures that the training delivered is not only of high quality but also immediately applicable and valuable in the workplace.

Finally, the pathway to global leadership is being paved by the visionary strategies of Hong Kong's leading educational institutions. The Chinese University of Hong Kong's strategic plan explicitly aims to nurture "global leaders" and "lifelong learners," committing to continuous quality enhancement in teaching and adopting innovative pedagogies like eLearning. Its School of Continuing and Professional Studies (CUSCS) embodies this vision by expanding its network for global collaboration, focusing on the needs of an ageing population, and exploring closer partnerships with renowned overseas universities. This institutional commitment to "educational excellence," "global experiences," and "innovative leadership" creates a dynamic environment where continuous education is not an afterthought but a core mission. By leveraging the HKQF's robust foundation to pioneer flexible learning models like micro-credentials and aligning with government-led skills initiatives, Hong Kong is creating a cohesive and forward-thinking ecosystem. This comprehensive approach—combining a strong legal framework, innovative programme design, responsive policy, and institutional vision—provides a powerful strategic blueprint for establishing Hong Kong as a true global leader in quality-assured continuous education.

6.1 Differentiated QA frameworks for diverse providers (HEIs, vocational, commercial)

Hong Kong possesses a unique combination of world-class higher education institutions, a robust regulatory framework, and strong governmental support, positioning it to become a global leader in continuous education. Achieving this status requires a strategic blueprint that leverages these strengths while implementing a differentiated approach to quality assurance. This strategy must recognize the distinct roles and operational realities of universities, vocational training providers, and private commercial enterprises to foster innovation, maintain standards, and meet the diverse needs of lifelong learners in a rapidly evolving global economy.

The Foundation: Hong Kong's Strategic Advantages for Continuous Education Leadership

Hong Kong's ambition to become a global leader in continuous education is built upon a solid foundation of policy support, institutional excellence, and international integration. The Hong Kong government has explicitly identified the development of an "international hub for post-secondary education" as a key strategic goal, a vision reinforced in recent policy addresses and supported by national strategies like the Education Strengthening Country Construction Plan. This policy direction transforms education into a core component of the city's economic and talent development engine.

The operational landscape is defined by a mature and legally backed quality assurance ecosystem. Central to this is the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF), established under the Academic and Vocational Qualifications Accreditation Ordinance, which provides a clear, objective seven-level platform for comparing and recognizing academic, vocational, and continuing education qualifications. The Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) serves as the designated Accreditation Authority and Qualifications Register Authority, ensuring the credibility of all HKQF-recognized qualifications through rigorous quality assurance processes.

Critically, Hong Kong's quality assurance system is bifurcated to respect the autonomy of established institutions. The nine University Grants Committee (UGC)-funded universities, including HKU, CUHK, and HKUST, possess self-accrediting status, meaning they can develop and validate their own programs. For these institutions, the UGC's Quality Assurance Council (QAC) conducts periodic audits to ensure institutional processes are robust and effective. All other program providers—including vocational training councils, private schools, and commercial entities—must undergo program-specific accreditation by HKCAAVQ to have their qualifications recognized on the HKQF. This foundational structure allows for a differentiated approach that both guarantees quality and fosters agility across different types of providers.

Quality Assurance for Higher Education Institutions: Fostering Innovation and Integration

For Hong Kong's self-accrediting universities, the pathway to leadership in continuous education lies in leveraging their academic rigor to create innovative, flexible, and integrated learning pathways. Their quality assurance mechanisms, overseen by the QAC, are designed to ensure that new continuing education initiatives meet the same high standards as traditional degree programs. This enables universities to act as incubators for cutting-edge professional education.

A prime example is CUHK Business School's new series of Professional Certificate Programmes (Micro-credentials) , launched by its executive education arm, the Asia-Pacific Institute of Business (APIB). These programs are designed as "career accelerators," offering concentrated, flexible learning in high-demand areas like Innovation Leadership, ESG Reporting, and AI for Business. The quality of these programs is validated by their placement at Level 6 of the HKQF and their articulation pathways: credits earned can be seamlessly transferred to relevant CUHK master's degree programs. This creates a powerful "stackable" model where professionals can upskill efficiently while building credit towards a full postgraduate qualification, a key differentiator in the global continuous education market.

University continuing education units are also strategically adapting their quality frameworks to address societal shifts. For instance, CUHK's broader strategic plan explicitly mentions redefining the role of its School of Continuing and Professional Studies to serve the needs of an ageing population and second-career trends. This requires quality assurance to focus not just on academic content, but on accessibility, learner support, and relevance to mature students, ensuring programs are "supporting the learning aspirations of the community". By embedding these strategic goals into their quality processes, universities ensure their lifelong learning offerings remain impactful and globally competitive.

A Differentiated Framework for Vocational and Commercial Providers: Agility with Industry Alignment

The strategic blueprint for vocational and commercial providers must prioritize responsiveness to industry needs and workplace relevance, with quality assurance frameworks designed to be robust yet flexible enough for a dynamic training market. HKCAAVQ's role is central here, providing a structured "Four-stage Quality Assurance Process" that helps non-self-accrediting bodies—from NGOs to private corporations—validate their training programs and get them onto the HKQF. This process gives commercial providers a clear pathway to gain official recognition, enhancing the market credibility of their courses.

WorldSkills Hong Kong, led by the Vocational Training Council (VTC) , demonstrates the pinnacle of this approach. They have pioneered an innovative Workplace Learning and Assessment framework that directly integrates global standards into local vocational training. This framework uses three clear stages to:

- Identify competency-based Unit Standards for specific tasks, using the WorldSkills Occupational Standards (WSOS) as international benchmarks.
- Co-develop assessment content with industry partners to ensure it measures real-world tasks.
- Implement on-the-job observation and assessment of student competence.

This approach fundamentally reshapes quality assurance by making industry co-design and workplace validation core components. The results are striking: data shows that approximately 97% of apprentices remain in the same industry after training, and over 83% stay with the same employer, proving the effectiveness of this demand-led model. By weaving global benchmarks into the fabric of local curricula, Hong Kong's vocational sector ensures its training is not only nationally recognized but also aligned with international standards of excellence, directly enhancing the global competitiveness of its workforce.

In essence, Hong Kong's strategic blueprint for global leadership in continuous education is not a one-size-fits-all model. It is a sophisticated ecosystem where universities drive innovation through academic integration, the vocational sector ensures excellence through deep industry partnerships, and commercial providers gain credibility through a clear, state-backed accreditation pathway. This differentiation, underpinned by the unifying structure of the HKQF and strong governmental vision, creates a dynamic and resilient environment capable of nurturing lifelong learners and global leaders for the future.

6.2 Risk-based approach to programme validation

Hong Kong possesses a unique confluence of factors to assert global leadership in continuing education, transforming its world-class university system into a dynamic engine for lifelong learning. The strategic blueprint for this leadership is built upon a foundation of strong academia-industry collaboration, internationalization, and a commitment to nurturing talent that is both globally competitive and socially responsible. This vision is echoed in institutional strategies, such as CUHK's goal to "nurture lifelong learners as global leaders" by enhancing critical thinking and self-learning skills, and CityUHK's ambitious plan to become the "premier hub in Asia for transformative executive education". These initiatives aim to create a pipeline of professionals equipped not just with theoretical knowledge, but with the entrepreneurial mindset and practical acumen to drive innovation in strategic sectors like AI, fintech, and biotechnology. By leveraging its "East-meets-West" orientation and deepening ties with the Greater Bay Area, Hong Kong is strategically positioned to offer a distinctive and invaluable educational experience that bridges global perspectives with regional market realities.

Central to the credibility and efficiency of this expanding continuing education landscape is the adoption of a sophisticated, risk-based approach to programme validation. This framework moves beyond a one-size-fits-all model, instead tailoring the intensity of quality assurance to the profile of the course provider and the nature of the programme itself. A foundational example of this principle is seen in the government's enhancement of the Continuing Education Fund (CEF), which explicitly included "adopting a risk-based monitoring mechanism for courses" to safeguard participant interests and prevent abuse while streamlining oversight. This approach allows for greater regulatory vigilance for newer or higher-risk providers, while offering more streamlined processes for established institutions with a proven track record of quality.

This concept is further formalized and expanded by the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) through its Four-Stage Quality Assurance Process. Within this system, the shift from traditional "programme validation" to more advanced statuses embodies the risk-based philosophy. For instance, Programme Area Accreditation (PAA) is a status conferred upon providers that have demonstrated "sufficient quality assurance competency and maturity at the organisational level." Once granted PAA, an operator is empowered to develop and operate learning programmes within an approved area without undergoing the full, individual accreditation process (Learning Programme Accreditation or LPA) for each new course. This represents a significant strategic efficiency: the HKCAAVQ's initial rigorous evaluation of the institution's governance and internal quality processes effectively lowers the perceived risk, allowing for faster development and deployment of new continuing education programmes to meet emerging market demands. This system trusts mature institutions to self-validate, while maintaining robust oversight—through LPA and Periodic Institutional Review (PIR) —for other providers and programmes, ensuring that the entire ecosystem maintains high standards without bureaucratic inertia.

6.3 Quality assurance for digital and hybrid delivery modes

Hong Kong's aspiration to become a global leader in continuing education rests fundamentally on the establishment of robust and universally accepted quality assurance (QA) frameworks specifically designed for digital and hybrid learning modalities. A significant step toward this goal is the collaborative initiative funded by the University Grants Committee (UGC) and the Quality Assurance Council (QAC) in response to the accelerated shift to virtual teaching and learning (VTL) during the pandemic. Lingnan University, leading a consortium of six UGC-funded universities, has undertaken a project to establish benchmarking practices and QA standards for VTL that reference internationally accepted norms while adapting them to the local context. This initiative aims to strengthen institutional capabilities and enhance the quality of online teaching, distance education, and technology-enhanced learning across Hong Kong's tertiary institutions. The development of a shared framework is crucial for ensuring that programmes delivered through digital and hybrid modes maintain academic rigor, achieve intended learning outcomes, and command the same confidence as traditional face-to-face provision, thereby building a foundation for Hong Kong's credibility in the global continuing education market.

The practical application of QA principles in digital continuing education is already evident in pioneering programme designs that prioritize flexibility without compromising standards. The Asia-Pacific Institute of Business (APIB) at CUHK Business School has introduced a series of Professional Certificate Programmes (Micro-credentials) that exemplify how quality assurance can be embedded in innovative delivery models. These programmes are listed in the Qualifications Register (QR) at Level 6 of the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF), providing an official imprimatur of their quality and academic level. A key feature that enhances both quality and learner appeal is the seamless transfer of credits earned from these micro-credential courses to CUHK Business School's master's degree programmes, creating clear and validated pathways for educational progression. This articulation demonstrates a commitment to quality by ensuring that learning in short, flexible formats is rigorous enough to be equivalent to traditional graduate-level work. Furthermore, the programmes' design, which offers modular options to be completed over six to 36 months at the student's own pace, illustrates how QA frameworks must accommodate diverse learner pathways while maintaining consistent standards of assessment and achievement.

Looking beyond individual institutions, Hong Kong is cultivating an ecosystem-wide approach to quality in digital education, supported by government strategy and cross-sector collaboration. The 2024 Policy Address outlined measures to strengthen digital education, leading to the establishment of the Steering Committee on Strategic Development of Digital Education, which ensures the system is equipped to drive innovation and meet future challenges. Hong Kong Education City (EdCity) is positioned as a 'super-connector' in this landscape, linking the government, tech industries, educators, and research institutions to establish an AI Education Ecosystem.

This collaborative model extends to QA by promoting resource sharing and the development of shared digital infrastructure, such as smart education platforms, which can help ensure equitable access to high-quality learning experiences. The partnerships between EdCity and tertiary institutions like The Education University of Hong Kong, as well as technology hubs like Cyberport, are designed to foster innovation in areas such as AI-assisted teaching and AR/VR learning, while also providing professional development for educators—a critical component of maintaining teaching quality in new modes of delivery.

Furthermore, quality assurance in the digital age increasingly involves innovative approaches to student support, assessment, and the cultivation of digital citizenship. Projects funded through various UGC grants illustrate this multi-faceted approach. For instance, Hong Kong Baptist University leads projects focusing on enhancing digital citizenship education and promoting digital ethics through scenario-based AR learning trails and a "Digital Ethics and Responsibilities (DEAR) Campaign," which includes developing a micro-credential program to empower responsible digital practices. At the Chinese University of Hong Kong's School of Continuing and Professional Studies, the "InternVision" project uses Virtual Reality (VR) simulations across multiple disciplines to enhance student work-readiness, demonstrating how immersive technologies can be integrated into career preparation with a focus on achieving specific, measurable learning outcomes. These examples show that QA for digital modes extends beyond course content to include the ethical use of technology, the effectiveness of innovative pedagogies like virtual exchange for authentic learning, and the provision of comprehensive student support systems, including early alert mechanisms, as highlighted in the positive quality audit of Lingnan University's data-driven approach to teaching and learning improvement.

Finally, a strategic blueprint for global leadership must incorporate continuous improvement informed by data and international benchmarking. The Quality Assurance Council's third audit cycle, which produced a positive report for Lingnan University, focused on how institutions review and enhance their academic standards, learning assessment, and student support through the systematic collection and analysis of data. This reflects a global trend toward evidence-based quality enhancement. Institutions like The Hong Kong Baptist University are exploring the use of Artificial Intelligence to support learning outcomes assurance (AoL) cycles, aiming to increase the precision and efficiency of programme improvements while reducing manual workload. Such forward-thinking applications of technology to the QA process itself will be essential for Hong Kong to maintain a competitive edge. As institutions like CUHK's School of Continuing and Professional Studies articulate a vision to be a global leader in university continuing education, their strategies—ensuring academic quality, diversifying access to global learning experiences, and collaborating with industries in Hong Kong and globally—provide a microcosm of the broader strategy required. By embedding robust, adaptable, and innovative quality assurance mechanisms at the core of its digital and hybrid offerings, Hong Kong can build the trust and recognition necessary to attract lifelong learners from around the world and solidify its status as a premier international education hub.

6.4 Learner protection mechanisms and transparent outcome data

Hong Kong's aspiration to become a global leader in continuing education rests on a foundation of robust learner protection and uncompromising transparency in outcomes. This strategic blueprint requires a dual-focused approach: fortifying the regulatory mechanisms that safeguard learners and revolutionizing the disclosure of performance data to build trust and drive quality.

Fortifying Learner Protection through a Modernized Regulatory Framework

A comprehensive learner protection strategy begins with a modernized and enforceable regulatory framework that ensures all continuing education providers operate with integrity and accountability. A cornerstone of this is the proactive stance taken by the government in updating the operational terms for courses under the Continuing Education Fund (CEF). In a significant move to align education with broader societal responsibilities, the Labour and Welfare Bureau has explicitly incorporated clauses mandating that all institutions and their key personnel, from course directors to instructors, uphold national security in accordance with the Hong Kong National Security Law. This measure, prompted by previous audits revealing inappropriate marketing tactics such as promoting courses for emigration, ensures that educational provisions contribute positively to societal stability and do not undermine it. The mechanisms for enforcement are clear and stringent, with provisions for suspending or terminating course registrations for any breaches, thereby sending a strong signal that non-compliance with foundational legal and ethical standards will not be tolerated. This regulatory rigor provides a baseline of protection, assuring learners that the programs they invest in are vetted for compliance and aligned with the public good.

Beyond statutory compliance, learner protection is also deeply embedded in the structure and design of innovative educational offerings. For instance, the introduction of micro-credential courses by leading institutions like CUHK Business School demonstrates a commitment to learner-centric flexibility without compromising on quality or future pathways. By listing these programs at Level 6 of the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF) and offering seamless credit transfer to master's degree programs, they provide learners with a secure and transparent academic investment. This framework-level recognition protects the learner's time and financial commitment by ensuring their achieved credentials hold tangible, portable value within a recognized hierarchy of qualifications. Furthermore, the strategic vision of institutions like CityUHK's Business Innovation Education, which embeds sustainability and ESG principles into its curriculum, protects learners by equipping them with future-proof skills relevant to evolving global market demands. Such forward-thinking program design is a form of protection against skill obsolescence, ensuring that continuing education is a meaningful and durable investment in one's career.

Elevating Trust through Radical Transparency in Outcome Data

To achieve global leadership, Hong Kong's continuing education sector must move beyond mere compliance and embrace a culture of radical transparency regarding learner outcomes. This involves publicly disseminating granular, verifiable data that allows prospective students to make informed choices based on tangible results. The strategic direction set by institutions like the Chinese University of Hong Kong's School of Continuing and Professional Sciences, which aims to be a global leader by keeping pace with learners' needs and seeking stakeholder input, inherently requires a data-driven approach to demonstrate its effectiveness. Transparency becomes the mechanism by which an institution validates its mission to help learners advance their learning, career, and life goals. This could manifest in publicly accessible dashboards displaying not just completion rates, but also employment outcomes, salary uplifts, and learner satisfaction scores, disaggregated by program and demographic group.

The broader higher education landscape in Hong Kong provides a powerful template for this transparency. The city's impressive performance in global rankings, with six public universities placed among the world's top 200, is a form of high-level outcome data that reinforces its academic prestige and attracts international talent. This culture of accountability is now cascading down to the continuing education sphere. The government's initiative to formally designate universities of applied sciences creates a clear, respected pathway for vocational learning, and the success of this pathway will hinge on transparent reporting of graduate employment and career progression. Similarly, institutions like HKU SPACE are already demonstrating impact through detailed reporting on their executive education programmes, such as the LEAD Academy's seminars for Shenzhen government officials, which articulate clear learning objectives and the tangible outcomes of study tours and collaborative programs. By consistently publishing such impact stories and quantitative success metrics, the sector can build a compelling evidence base of its value. The ongoing push for greater academia-industry integration, including making commercial projects a critical part of degree programs, further necessitates transparent tracking of how such experiential learning translates into graduate employability and readiness for high-demand fields like AI and fintech. This commitment to open data will not only empower learners but also foster a virtuous cycle of continuous improvement among providers, solidifying Hong Kong's reputation as a trusted and effective global hub for continuing education.

6.5 International benchmarking of Hong Kong's quality standards

The credibility and global standing of Hong Kong's continuing education sector are fundamentally anchored in its internationally benchmarked quality assurance systems, with the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF) and the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) playing pivotal roles. Launched in 2008, the seven-level HKQF provides a comprehensive and transparent framework that orders and supports qualifications across academic, vocational, and continuing education sectors. This framework ensures clear standards for qualifications, guarantees their quality, and, crucially, establishes articulation ladders between different levels, enabling lifelong learners to accumulate and transfer credits—up to 50% in many professional and continuing education programmes—to build towards higher qualifications. The comparability of the HKQF to international standards is evidenced by a joint study undertaken with the European Commission to benchmark it against the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), ensuring that Hong Kong's qualifications are understood and valued internationally.

The HKCAAVQ serves as the cornerstone of Hong Kong's quality assurance machinery, and its rigorous standards have earned prestigious international recognition. In a landmark achievement, the HKCAAVQ was accredited by the European Network for Quality Assurance (ENQA) in 2021 and subsequently received formal EU recognition in 2023, making it the first quality assurance body outside of the European Higher Education Area to achieve this status. This recognition affirms that HKCAAVQ's operational standards are on par with the highest international benchmarks, and the body is scheduled for a re-assessment in 2026 to maintain this elite standing. The HKCAAVQ's expertise is not only guarding Hong Kong's standards but is also being exported globally. It has signed memoranda of understanding with quality assurance bodies in Kazakhstan, Bahrain, and Abu Dhabi to lead the "going out" of Hong Kong's excellent practices. Furthermore, its robust systems are influential regionally, having shared its entire accreditation framework with Guangdong province and conducted reviews for institutions in Macau. At the institutional level, this commitment to quality is mirrored by bodies like the Vocational Training Council (VTC), whose programmes are designed with reference to HKQF competency standards and are accredited by a wide array of local and international professional bodies, including the Hong Kong Institution of Engineers and the Royal Society of Chemistry, while also preparing students for globally recognised professional examinations. This multi-layered approach, from government policy to institutional practice and independent accreditation, ensures that Hong Kong's continuing education offerings are both high in quality and globally portable.

CHAPTER 7: GOVERNANCE AND COORDINATION

Hong Kong's aspiration to become a global leader in continuing education is underpinned by a sophisticated, multi-layered governance architecture designed to ensure quality, foster collaboration, and maintain strategic alignment with socioeconomic needs. This framework operates through a dynamic interplay between government-appointed bodies, statutory authorities, and collaborative sector-wide consortia, creating a cohesive ecosystem for lifelong learning.

At the apex of strategic governance is the Education Bureau (EDB), which sets the overarching policy direction and provides the legislative backbone for the sector. A pivotal element of this is the Qualifications Framework (QF), established under the Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications Ordinance (Cap. 592). The QF provides a comprehensive seven-level hierarchy that standardizes and articulates the standards of qualifications across academic, vocational, and continuing education sectors. This statutory underpinning ensures that all recognized qualifications, from certificate to doctoral levels, are benchmarked against clear, objective standards, thereby enhancing their credibility and facilitating learner progression. Supporting the EDB's executive functions is the Qualifications Framework Secretariat (QFS), which develops the QF infrastructure and promotes its recognition locally and internationally. Furthermore, the government has demonstrated sustained financial commitment through the establishment of the HK\$1 billion QF Fund in 2014, with an additional injection of HK\$1.2 billion in 2018, ensuring a stable income source for the sustainable development and implementation of QF initiatives, including support for industry-led training committees and related research.

To ensure the quality and relevance of self-financing post-secondary education, which forms a significant part of the continuing education landscape, the government has established the Committee on Self-financing Post-secondary Education (CSPE). This committee operates through three specialized sub-committees that provide targeted oversight :

- The Sub-committee on Quality Assurance oversees issues related to the quality of self-financing education, including the revision of academic accreditation standards and practices at both institutional and program levels.
- The Sub-committee on Regulation and Co-ordination advises on the strategic coordination among self-financing institutions and the review of relevant legislation, such as the Post Secondary Colleges Ordinance (Cap. 320).
- The Sub-committee on Support Measures examines and assesses institutional applications for various government support schemes, including land grants and startup loans. This structure ensures that quality, regulatory alignment, and resource allocation are managed in an integrated and strategic manner.

Quality assurance is further reinforced by independent statutory bodies operating under legal mandates. The Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) is appointed as the designated Accreditation Authority and Qualifications Register Authority under the QF Ordinance. It conducts rigorous program evaluations and institutional reviews for non-self-accrediting institutions, ensuring that their programs meet the required standards for recognition on the QF. For the eight University Grants Committee (UGC)-funded universities, which possess self-accrediting status, the Quality Assurance Council (QAC), a semi-autonomous body under the UGC, undertakes audits to assure the quality of their sub-degree, bachelor's, and taught postgraduate programs. This dual-track system ensures robust quality checks across both publicly funded and self-financing sectors.

Beyond government-led initiatives, the sector benefits from strong collaborative governance models. The Federation for Self-financing Tertiary Education (FSTE) serves as a collective voice for its member institutions. Its governance structure, comprising a Council (the highest governing body) and an Executive Committee, facilitates inter-institutional coordination on matters related to continuing education, self-funded degrees, and non-local programs. Specialized committees, such as the Research and Development Committee, proactively research topical issues in continuing education and monitor quality-related projects, thereby driving sector-wide improvement. A prime example of this collaborative governance in action is the management of the Diploma of Applied Education (DAE) Programme. The DAE is governed by a multi-tiered committee structure, including an Overseeing Board for strategic management, a Programme Development Committee for curriculum oversight, and an Assessment Committee to maintain consistent and fair grading standards across all providing institutions. This model ensures that a program offered by multiple institutions maintains uniform high standards through a shared governance framework.

Finally, governance extends to ensuring that continuing education remains relevant to industry needs through robust cross-sectoral coordination. The Industry Training Advisory Committees (ITACs), comprising representatives from employers, employees, professional bodies, and relevant government departments, are established to develop _Specifications of Competency Standards_ (SCSs) for their respective industries. These SCSs outline the specific skills, knowledge, and performance standards required for various job roles, directly informing the development of industry-aligned training programs. This mechanism creates a formalized feedback loop, ensuring that the education and training provided are directly responsive to the evolving demands of the economy. Collectively, this intricate tapestry of statutory bodies, strategic committees, and collaborative councils provides Hong Kong with a resilient, transparent, and responsive governance foundation, essential for achieving global leadership in continuous education.

7.1 Establishing a cross-sectoral Continuing Education Commission

Hong Kong stands at a pivotal moment in its economic evolution, where the half-life of professional knowledge is rapidly shortening against the backdrop of the Greater Bay Area's integration and global economic restructuring. To transform these challenges into strategic advantages, the establishment of a cross-sectoral Continuing Education Commission is not merely an administrative suggestion but an existential imperative for sustained global competitiveness. Drawing from successful governance models in other forward-looking jurisdictions and addressing the historical fragmentation identified in Hong Kong's own higher education reviews, this blueprint outlines the formation and function of such a Commission to orchestrate a coherent, agile, and globally recognized continuing education ecosystem.

The Imperative for a Unified Cross-Sectoral Commission

Historically, Hong Kong's continuing professional education (CPE) sector has been a vibrant but largely market-driven marketplace, with the government's role primarily limited to the occasional provision of "seed money" or targeted funds, as observed in the 1990s University Grants Committee (UGC) reviews. While this laissez-faire approach fostered a diverse range of providers—from university extensions like HKU SPACE to private commercial firms—it also resulted in a lack of strategic coordination, inconsistent quality assurance, and a "disconnect" between the offerings and the long-term manpower planning for key industries. The contemporary landscape, however, demands a more integrated approach. The rapid economic restructuring towards high value-added services such as legal, accounting, and financial consulting, coupled with the displacement of skills in traditional sectors, requires a workforce that is not just educated, but continuously and strategically upskilled. A dedicated Continuing Education Commission would serve as the central nervous system for this effort, moving beyond the current fragmented oversight to create a unified platform where government, industry, academia, and training providers can co-create the future of work.

Structural Design and Governance of the Commission

For the Commission to be effective, its structure must embody the very collaboration it seeks to foster. The blueprint proposes a governance model inspired by the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation in Quebec, which utilizes dedicated commissions for different education and research sectors to ensure specialized expertise and democratic function. The Hong Kong Continuing Education Commission would be established as a high-level statutory body, reporting directly to the Secretary for Education. Its core would consist of several permanent, sector-specific sub-commissions mirroring the economy's key pillars: a Commission on Professional and Vocational Education (focusing on finance, legal services, engineering, and ICT), a Commission on Applied Sciences and Technology, and a Commission on Community and Lifelong Learning (overseeing cultural, wellness, and foundational skills).

Each sub-commission would be co-chaired by industry leaders and academics, with membership drawing from employer bodies (like the Federation of Hong Kong Industries), professional associations, union representatives, and continuing education units from institutions like HKMU LiPACE and HKU SPACE. This structure ensures that curriculum development is directly informed by the "pull" of market needs and the "push" of pedagogical best practices.

Core Functions: From Funding Fragmentation to Strategic Investment

A primary function of the new Commission would be to rationalize and strategically target public funding for continuing education. Currently, support is dispersed through various mechanisms, including direct UGC grants to university extension arms (e.g., the \$29 million allocation to HKU SPACE noted in historical reviews) and the demand-led Continuing Education Fund (CEF). The Commission would oversee the consolidation of these streams into a strategic investment fund. Moving beyond the individual reimbursement model of the CEF, which has shown success in boosting participation (with funded recipients growing from 23,000 to 58,000 in recent years), the Commission would introduce sector-specific training vouchers and co-investment schemes where government, industry, and individuals share the cost of upskilling. Furthermore, echoing recommendations from the UGC's historical review, the Commission would manage a dedicated Innovation and Development Fund to support providers in developing new curricula in emerging fields—such as AI applications in finance or cross-boundary e-commerce—where initial "start-up costs" cannot be met by tuition fees alone. It would also be tasked with creating a cross-boundary credit transfer framework, building on pioneering models like the HKMU LiPACE-SUIT programme, to ensure Hong Kong qualifications remain portable and prestigious within the Greater Bay Area and beyond.

Driving Quality, Inclusivity, and Global Recognition

Beyond funding, the Commission would establish a unified quality assurance framework that bridges the gap between traditional academic benchmarks and industry-specific competency standards. This involves accrediting not only university-led courses but also high-quality in-house corporate training and private sector offerings, ensuring they adhere to the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF). A key priority would be to address the demographic gaps in current CPE participation. Data indicates that while CPE is highly effective in facilitating career changes, participation drops sharply for workers over 40 and those in manufacturing and sales roles. The Commission would proactively design "second-career" vouchers and outreach programs for mid-career workers in declining sectors, ensuring the workforce's adaptability. Furthermore, mirroring the holistic view of education championed by institutions like Lingnan University's LIFE, the Commission would champion "Life Arts" and wellness learning. By recognizing that a resilient society values cultural enrichment alongside professional skills, the Commission would fund and promote courses that enhance quality of life, thereby fostering a truly holistic lifelong learning culture that can establish Hong Kong as a global leader in human capital development.

7.2 Roles and responsibilities: 教育局 (EDB), VTC, UGC, HKCAVQ

The following sections outline the distinct yet interconnected roles of four key stakeholders in positioning Hong Kong as a global leader in continuing education.

教育局 (EDB): The Strategic Architect and Policy Driver

As the cornerstone of Hong Kong's education policy, the Education Bureau (EDB) serves as the strategic architect for the entire landscape of continuing education. The EDB's role is fundamentally about creating an enabling environment that values lifelong learning from a young age and ensures a coherent, quality-assured system for adult learners. A primary mechanism for this is the bureau's stewardship of the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF). Through this framework, the EDB fosters a culture of continuous learning by supporting its implementation across various sectors. This involves engaging stakeholders through platforms like the Industry Training Advisory Committees (ITACs) to map out Vocational Qualifications Pathways and develop competency standards, directly linking industry needs with educational outcomes. Furthermore, the EDB actively promotes life planning education in schools, organizing workplace experience programmes that raise students' awareness of continuous learning and future career pathways from an early stage. The bureau's operational commitment is further evidenced by dedicated roles such as the Executive Manager (Further Education), a position responsible for coordinating with self-financing institutions, implementing enhanced regulatory frameworks, and managing public engagement campaigns to ensure the post-secondary sector's quality and sustainability. In essence, the EDB sets the strategic direction, builds the foundational infrastructure, and ensures the overall quality and recognition of continuing education, thereby enabling Hong Kong to pursue global leadership.

Vocational Training Council (VTC): The Industry-Focused Innovator and Practitioner

On the front lines of vocational and professional education and training (VPET), the Vocational Training Council (VTC) acts as a key innovator and practitioner. As a statutory body, its mandate is to ensure Hong Kong's workforce remains agile, skilled, and future-ready, a mission that is critical to the city's economic competitiveness. The VTC's pathway to global leadership is paved by its proactive approach to continuing education, exemplified by its dedicated Continuing and Professional Education (CPE) Office. This office is tasked with leading the strategic development of CPE, which includes formulating forward-thinking policies, developing innovative programmes (including online learning), and creating customized training solutions for industries and corporations. This requires a constant assessment of market needs and economic trends to deliver curricula that are immediately relevant and impactful.

Beyond curriculum development, the VTC's leadership plays a crucial role in fostering linkages with industries in Hong Kong, Mainland China (particularly the Greater Bay Area), and overseas, ensuring that its programmes are globally connected and its graduates are internationally competitive. By spearheading interdisciplinary cooperation and promoting the VTC's brand as a premier choice for CPE, the council is not just responding to industry needs but actively shaping the future of professional development and positioning Hong Kong as a hub for vocational excellence.

University Grants Committee (UGC): The Quality Guardian for University-Led CPE

The University Grants Committee (UGC) plays a pivotal role in assuring the quality and strategic direction of continuing education offered within the university sector. Its primary responsibility lies in safeguarding academic standards through its semi-autonomous body, the Quality Assurance Council (QAC). The QAC's purview extends to assuring the quality of all programmes—from sub-degree to postgraduate levels—offered by UGC-funded institutions, regardless of their funding source. This rigorous oversight ensures that the continuing and professional education provided by universities, such as the extensive programmes run by HKU SPACE, CUHK SCS, and PolyU PACE, maintain the highest academic rigor and global competitiveness. By upholding these standards, the UGC ensures that university-led CPE not only meets the needs of working adults and graduates for upskilling and professional enhancement but also contributes to Hong Kong's reputation as a provider of world-class higher education. The UGC's historical overview of CPE providers, from the "extra-mural" traditions of some universities to the more employment-focused units of others, highlights its long-standing engagement with and understanding of this diverse and vital sector. Thus, the UGC's role as a quality guardian is indispensable in ensuring that the university sector's contribution to lifelong learning is both excellent and globally recognised.

Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ): The Independent Arbitre of Standards and Global Connector

The Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) serves as the independent and authoritative arbiter of standards, underpinning the credibility of Hong Kong's qualifications both locally and internationally. As a statutory body, its mission is to safeguard the credibility of qualifications under the HKQF through its comprehensive accreditation, assessment, and quality audit services. This includes accrediting programmes across academic, vocational, and continuing education sectors, thereby ensuring that all learning—whether from a university, the VTC, or even specialised in-house corporate training like that of the Customs and Excise Department—meets a robust and consistent standard. However, HKCAAVQ's vision extends far beyond local quality assurance; it aspires to be a globally recognised and leading regional independent quality assurance body.

This ambition is actively pursued through strategic international partnerships, as evidenced by its renewed Memorandum of Understanding with SkillsFuture Singapore (SSG) to collaborate on quality assurance practices, particularly in VPET. Furthermore, its active participation in international networks like the Quality Beyond Boundaries Group (QBBG) and its engagement with accreditation bodies in the UAE and mainland China demonstrate its commitment to fostering cross-border recognition of qualifications and exchanging best practices. By upholding rigorous standards and building these global bridges, HKCAAVQ ensures that a qualification earned in Hong Kong is a trusted and valuable asset anywhere in the world, a fundamental requirement for global leadership in education.

7.3 Industry engagement mechanisms: Sectoral advisory groups

Hong Kong's ambition to become a global leader in continuous education is fundamentally anchored in the establishment of robust, formalised industry engagement mechanisms, with sectoral advisory groups serving as the primary strategic bridge between educational providers and the evolving demands of the economy. The most prominent and systematically implemented model of this is the network of Industry Training Advisory Committees (ITACs), established under the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF). These committees are not merely consultative bodies; they are tripartite platforms that bring together representatives from employer associations, employee unions, professional organisations, and relevant regulatory bodies for specific industries. Their core function is to provide authoritative, consensus-based advice to the government on the training needs and manpower development of their respective sectors, ensuring that the continuous education and training (CET) landscape is directly shaped by those who understand current and future skill requirements most intimately.

The operational impact of these sectoral advisory groups is profound and tangible, as they are tasked with creating the very infrastructure of competency-based learning. The primary deliverables of each ITAC are the development of industry-specific Specification of Competency Standards (SCS) and the mapping of clear Vocational Qualifications Pathways (VQP). The SCS documents are particularly critical; they meticulously outline the skills, knowledge, and outcome standards required for practitioners at various levels of an industry, from entry-level to senior management. By defining these standards, the advisory groups effectively codify industry expectations into a blueprint that training providers—including universities, professional colleges, and vocational institutions—can use to design curricula that are both current and directly relevant. Furthermore, these groups oversee the implementation of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) mechanisms, which formally validate the experiential learning of seasoned professionals, thereby creating accredited pathways for career advancement and lifelong learning. This structured approach ensures that Hong Kong's continuous education offerings are not developed in an academic vacuum but are instead a direct, standardised response to market signals.

Beyond the government-coordinated ITACs, individual higher education institutions in Hong Kong are establishing their own high-level sectoral advisory groups to drive innovation and ensure their executive and continuous education programmes maintain global relevance. A prime example is the Business Innovation Education Advisory Committee recently inaugurated at the City University of Hong Kong (CityUHK) College of Business. This committee is composed of prominent business leaders, entrepreneurs, and esteemed academics, such as the Chairman of a venture capital platform and Partners from global professional services firms like PwC. The explicit purpose of this body is to provide strategic guidance, validate the real-world applicability of curricula, and ensure that programmes designed for senior executives and entrepreneurs are infused with the latest industry insights and "entrepreneurial spirit". This institutional-level mechanism demonstrates a commitment to co-creating educational content with industry, thereby enhancing the city's capacity to offer world-class professional development that attracts talent from across Asia and positions Hong Kong as a thought leader in global business practice.

The strategic integration of these industry engagement mechanisms is the key driver in positioning Hong Kong as a global leader in continuous education. By institutionalising industry's voice through bodies like ITACs and university-led advisory committees, Hong Kong creates an agile education system capable of rapidly responding to the talent demands of high-growth sectors such as fintech, artificial intelligence, and biotechnology. This direct linkage helps close the critical gap between classroom learning and real-world industry expectations, ensuring that graduates of continuous education programmes are not just knowledgeable, but are "market-ready" with skills that are immediately applicable. For instance, the push to designate certain institutions as "universities of applied sciences" further complements this by steering them toward partnerships with leading enterprises, creating a seamless pipeline from upskilling to employment within strategic hubs like the Greater Bay Area. Ultimately, these well-structured engagement mechanisms transform Hong Kong's continuous education sector from a passive provider of courses into a proactive, strategic partner in economic development, solidifying its reputation as a premier destination for talent cultivation and lifelong learning on the global stage.

7.4 Data infrastructure: Centralised portal for course information and learner outcomes

The foundation of Hong Kong's ambition to become a global leader in continuous education rests upon the development of a sophisticated, unified data infrastructure. This begins with the creation of a centralised, government-backed portal that serves as the single source of truth for all lifelong learning opportunities. This portal would transcend the current fragmented landscape of university extension programmes, professional bodies, and private vocational trainers by aggregating all accredited courses into a single, searchable, and user-friendly digital ecosystem. For the learner, this means an end to navigating disparate websites and confusing accreditation frameworks. Instead, they would be greeted by an intelligent interface capable of filtering options based on their career stage, industry, prior qualifications, and even learning preferences. The portal would provide transparent, real-time information on course content, delivery modes (online, hybrid, in-person), fees, available government subsidies, and most importantly, clear articulation pathways showing how a short course can stack towards a higher diploma, degree, or professional certification. This level of transparency is crucial for empowering individuals to make informed decisions about their own professional development, fostering a culture of proactive and purposeful learning.

Beyond mere course discovery, this centralised portal's most transformative feature lies in its secure integration with a dynamic learner outcome tracking system. By connecting with existing educational databases and, with individual consent, employment and salary records from the Census and Statistics Department and major industry partners, the platform can evolve into a powerful tool for both personal guidance and macroeconomic planning. For the individual, it would function as a "skills passport," a lifelong digital record of all accredited learning achievements, from micro-credentials to doctoral degrees. More powerfully, the platform could utilise anonymised data to provide learners with predictive insights. For example, it could show: "Individuals who completed this cybersecurity bootcamp saw an average 15% salary increase within two years," or "The following three courses are most frequently taken by people who transitioned into your desired role of 'Sustainability Manager'." This data-driven feedback loop closes the gap between education and employability, allowing learners to see the tangible return on their investment in upskilling.

For the government, educators, and employers, this infrastructure provides an unprecedented lens on the territory's talent landscape. Policymakers can move beyond anecdotal evidence and use real-time data on enrolment trends and employment outcomes to identify critical skills gaps before they become crises. If the data shows a surge in demand for AI ethics courses but stagnant wages in that field, it might signal a need to refine course quality or stimulate industry demand.

Educational institutions, both public and private, would receive granular feedback on the labour market efficacy of their programmes, enabling them to iteratively refine their curricula to meet the evolving needs of Hong Kong's economy. This transforms education from a static offering to an agile, demand-responsive service. Furthermore, employers could partner with the platform to co-design courses that address specific skills shortages, with the confidence that the resulting talent pool is verifiably qualified, as their learning outcomes are transparently recorded and validated within the system.

Ultimately, the success of this data infrastructure hinges on robust governance, interoperability, and trust. The blueprint must prioritise the highest standards of data privacy and security, ensuring that learners retain agency over their personal information. The system must be designed with open standards, allowing it to connect seamlessly with international skills frameworks and databases, thereby reinforcing Hong Kong's status as a globally connected talent hub. By building this centralised digital nervous system for lifelong learning, Hong Kong would not only be streamlining administration but actively constructing the very foundation for an agile, resilient, and future-proof workforce, solidifying its leadership in the global race for talent development.

PART 4: FUNDING AND FINANCIAL INNOVATION

CHAPTER 8: A MULTI-PRONGED FUNDING STRATEGY

A multi-pronged funding strategy is the essential financial architecture to propel Hong Kong's vision of becoming a global leader in continuous education. Such a strategy moves beyond a single-source funding model to create a resilient, diversified, and dynamic financial ecosystem. By strategically combining government support, private sector investment, innovative institutional ventures, and individual contributions, Hong Kong can build a world-class continuous education system that is both accessible to all learners and capable of driving economic transformation. This approach ensures financial sustainability, fosters innovation in program delivery, and directly aligns learning outcomes with the evolving needs of the economy and society.

1. Strengthening and Modernizing the Public Funding Foundation

The cornerstone of Hong Kong's funding strategy must be a robust and continuously modernized public financing framework, with the Continuing Education Fund (CEF) as its centerpiece. Established to help the workforce adapt to a knowledge-based economy, the CEF provides a direct government subsidy to adults with learning aspirations. With a current subsidy ceiling of \$25,000 per eligible applicant and coverage of over 4,650 courses across more than 120 providers, the CEF has already created a broad foundation for learner empowerment. To maintain global leadership, this model should be enhanced by regularly reviewing the subsidy ceiling to keep pace with the rising costs of high-quality, specialized programs. Furthermore, the eligibility criteria could be strategically refined, for instance, by exploring targeted top-ups for courses in high-priority sectors identified in the Hong Kong Innovation and Technology Development Blueprint, ensuring public funds directly support strategic economic goals.

Beyond individual subsidies, the government can play a catalytic role by providing "seed funding" or "patient capital" for educational innovation. The historical perspective from the University Grants Committee (UGC) highlights the importance of supporting the "start-up costs" for new courses that are of public benefit but may not be immediately financially viable through fees alone. A modern interpretation of this would be the creation of dedicated government innovation funds for continuous education providers. These funds would support the development of cutting-edge curricula in emerging fields like green technology, artificial intelligence, and advanced manufacturing, helping local institutions respond with agility to global trends and maintain a leading edge in program offerings. This proactive public investment reduces the risk for institutions and encourages them to pioneer new areas of study.

2. Catalyzing Private Sector Synergies and Investment

A truly global leader in continuous education cannot rely on public funds alone; it must actively cultivate deep partnerships with the private sector. The private sector is not only a funder but also a primary beneficiary of a highly skilled workforce. Therefore, a strategic blueprint must formalize and expand avenues for corporate engagement. A prime example is corporate sponsorship of specific scholarships and funds, such as Lukfook Jewelry's long-standing sponsorship of the "Outstanding Corporate Internship Scholarship" and the "VTC Design Education Fund" with the Vocational Training Council (VTC). Such initiatives demonstrate a tangible commitment from industry to nurturing talent, providing learners not just with financial support but also with valuable industry connections and practical experience. The government can encourage this by offering matching grants or tax incentives for corporate contributions to accredited continuous education programs, thereby amplifying the impact of private investment.

An even more sophisticated model of private-public-academic collaboration is emerging through venture capital. The launch of the Gobi-Redbird Innovation Fund (Gobi-RIF) by the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST) and Gobi Partners, with support from the Hong Kong Investment Corporation (HKIC), provides a groundbreaking template. While focused on commercializing university research, the underlying principle is directly transferable to continuous education. This fund represents a "patient capital" approach, combining HKUST's academic expertise with Gobi's venture capital acumen to invest in deep-tech startups. For continuous education, similar vehicles could be established where industry consortia co-invest with educational institutions to create specialized, high-level professional courses. For example, a fund co-managed by fintech companies and a university could finance the development of a professional certificate in blockchain security, with the understanding that the companies would then have first access to the talent graduating from the program. This creates a self-sustaining ecosystem where industry directly shapes and funds the upskilling of its future workforce.

3. Fostering Institutional Entrepreneurship and Diversified Income Streams

For continuous education to thrive, its providers must also adopt an entrepreneurial mindset, developing diversified income streams that reduce dependency on any single source. The UGC's historical review noted that continuous education has often been run on a "self-financing" basis, operating at the margins of institutions. The new paradigm requires moving from the margins to the core, with institutions strategically managing a portfolio of funding. This includes not only government subsidies and course fees but also income from corporate training contracts, philanthropic donations, endowments for specific chairs or programs, and alumni fundraising campaigns. The HKUST's Redbird Innovation Fund (RIF), a HK\$500 million fund-of-funds committed by the university itself to invest in its own startups, is a powerful example of institutional entrepreneurship.

While its goal is investment return, the principle of a university strategically leveraging its assets to create new value and funding streams is directly applicable. Continuing education divisions could establish similar, smaller-scale venture arms to develop and license digital learning content, create executive education programs for the Greater Bay Area market, or offer fee-based consultancy services, reinvesting the proceeds to subsidize other programs and enhance overall quality. This financial autonomy and agility are key characteristics of globally leading educational institutions.

4. Integrating and Targeting Financial Support for Systemic Impact

The final pillar of a multi-pronged strategy is the intelligent integration and targeting of all available funds to create a seamless and impactful learner journey. Currently, a prospective student might navigate a complex landscape of different schemes. A strategic blueprint would aim to create clearer pathways, combining different funding sources for maximum effect. For instance, a learner could use the CEF to cover part of the tuition for a professional diploma. If they are enrolled in a designated area like computer science, they might simultaneously benefit from the Study Subsidy Scheme for Designated Professions/Sectors (SSSDP) , which provides an additional annual subsidy. Top-performing students could then be nominated by their institution for the Self-financing Post-secondary Scholarship Scheme (SPSS) , which offers awards like the \$10,000 "Talent Development Scholarship" or the \$40,000 "Outstanding Performance Scholarship" for bachelor's degree students. By creating clear, navigable pathways that stack these different forms of support—government subsidies, targeted sectoral funds, and merit-based scholarships—Hong Kong can ensure that financial barriers are minimized and that learners are incentivized to pursue excellence in fields critical to the economy. This integrated approach transforms funding from a patchwork of separate schemes into a coherent, powerful engine for individual and societal advancement.

8.1 Government-led initiatives: Expanding the Continuing Education Fund (CEF)

The Hong Kong Government's strategic enhancements to the Continuing Education Fund (CEF) form a cornerstone of its blueprint to establish the city as a global leader in continuous education. These initiatives are designed to foster a resilient and future-ready workforce by significantly lowering barriers to lifelong learning and aligning skills development with economic trends.

Expanding Access and Financial Commitment to Lifelong Learning

A primary government-led initiative has been the substantial expansion of the CEF's financial scope and eligibility, demonstrating a firm commitment to inclusive, lifelong learning. In a significant move to support an aging workforce and encourage continuous upskilling at any stage of life or career, the government removed the upper age limit of 70 years in August 2022, making the fund available to all adults aged 18 and above. This policy shift acknowledges that career pivots and skill obsolescence are challenges that can occur at any age. Concurrently, the government has progressively raised the subsidy ceiling to reinforce this commitment. From its original HK\$10,000 at inception in 2002, the ceiling was first doubled to HK\$20,000 in 2019 and then further increased to the current HK\$25,000 per applicant in 2022. This financial commitment is structured with a co-payment ratio—20% for the first HK\$10,000 and 40% for the next HK\$15,000—which is designed to encourage prudent course selection by learners while preventing course providers from arbitrarily inflating fees. To put the current ceiling into perspective, an applicant can receive the full subsidy by completing courses with cumulative fees of HK\$37,500, while the median course fee remains at a much lower HK\$7,800, indicating that the fund can support multiple upskilling endeavours for most learners. Looking ahead, stakeholders such as the ACCA (Hong Kong) are already advocating for a further increase, proposing a new ceiling of HK\$40,000 to also cover online learning platforms, which would modernize the fund's applicability in an increasingly digital education landscape.

Enhancing Quality and Strategic Alignment with Economic Needs

Beyond financial accessibility, the government is strategically refining the CEF's course portfolio to ensure it meets the demands of a knowledge-based economy and reinforces Hong Kong's position as outlined in the National 14th Five-Year Plan. All courses eligible for CEF reimbursement are subject to a rigorous quality assurance mechanism and must be registered under the Qualifications Register (QR), which standardises course content, instructor qualifications, and assessment methods. This framework ensures that public funds are invested in credible and valuable training. The range of eligible courses is vast, with over 4,650 courses offered by more than 120 providers, covering traditional areas like business and languages alongside emerging fields.

Crucially, the government is actively encouraging institutions to develop courses aligned with Hong Kong's strategic development as "eight centres" and new productive forces, such as the low-altitude economy, digital economy, and innovation technology. This ensures the curriculum remains relevant to the job market's evolving needs. Examples of this strategic alignment in practice include a proliferation of courses in high-demand areas like big data, blockchain, cryptocurrency investment, mental health, and integrative wellness, equipping learners with skills pertinent to future industries. By linking financial subsidies directly to a quality-assured and strategically relevant curriculum, the government is actively steering the workforce towards sectors that will drive Hong Kong's future global competitiveness.

8.2 Introducing lifelong learning accounts for all Hong Kong residents

Hong Kong stands at a pivotal moment in its economic evolution, where its traditional strengths as a global financial hub must now be augmented by a workforce that is agile, innovative, and perpetually skilled. The government's recent Policy Address underscores a commitment to transforming the city into an international education hub, with initiatives to increase non-local student intake and forge deeper academia-industry integration. However, to truly secure its global leadership, Hong Kong must extend this vision beyond its university gates and into the everyday lives of all its citizens. The city's exam-centric education model, while producing high achievers, has also been critiqued for potentially stifling creativity and leaving some students behind, as evidenced by the growing number of families seeking more holistic educational environments abroad. A strategic blueprint for the future, therefore, must be built on a culture of continuous, lifelong learning that empowers every resident to adapt, reskill, and thrive amidst relentless technological and economic shifts. This involves not just modernizing curricula to include AI, data science, and STEAM, but also fundamentally shifting pedagogy from rote learning to inquiry-driven models that foster critical thinking and adaptability from a young age.

At the heart of this transformative blueprint is the establishment of Lifelong Learning Accounts (LiLAs) for all Hong Kong residents, a pioneering financial mechanism designed to democratize access to continuous education. Modeled on successful international concepts but tailored to Hong Kong's unique context, each LiLA would function as a personal, portable savings account, co-contributed to by individuals, employers, and the government. The government could seed accounts at key life stages, such as upon completion of secondary education or re-entry into the workforce, with additional matching funds for low-income individuals to ensure equitable access. Employers would be incentivized through tax deductions to contribute to their employees' accounts, fostering a culture of in-house upskilling. These funds could then be drawn upon tax-free to pay for a wide array of approved learning activities, from university degrees and professional certifications to micro-credential courses, skills bootcamps, and even online learning subscriptions. This system would empower individuals to take ownership of their career trajectories, providing a dedicated financial cushion that makes proactive skills development a feasible reality rather than a distant ideal.

The effectiveness of LiLAs would be magnified by their seamless integration with Hong Kong's existing and emerging educational infrastructure, particularly the robust Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF) and the growing ecosystem of micro-credentials. A strategic priority must be to ensure that all learning eligible for LiLA funding is accredited within the HKQF, creating clear and tangible pathways for career progression. The recent launch of professional certificate programmes by institutions like CUHK Business School, which are listed at HKQF Level 6 and offer credits that can be transferred towards master's degrees, exemplifies the kind of flexible, stackable learning that LiLAs should promote.

By funding such micro-credentials, LiLAs would enable residents to build qualifications incrementally, aligning their skills with the specific demands of industries like fintech, ESG reporting, and artificial intelligence. This creates a dynamic system where learning is not a one-time event but a continuous journey of accumulation and specialization, directly responsive to the needs of a global innovation economy. To realize this vision, the strategic blueprint demands a concerted effort in ecosystem building and robust public-private partnership. The government's recent move to formally designate certain institutions as "universities of applied sciences" is a critical step in creating respected, hands-on learning pathways that should be fully integrated into the LiLA framework.

Furthermore, the network of university-level continuing education units, such as CUHK's SCS with its vision to be a global leader in the field, and HKU SPACE's LEAD Academy, which already delivers high-quality programmes to executives and partners with mainland organizations, represent a powerful delivery network ready to be scaled. These institutions, alongside new initiatives like CityU's Business Innovation Education, which emphasizes an entrepreneurial mindset and global perspective, are the natural partners for developing the cutting-edge curriculum that LiLA users will demand. By channelling LiLA funds through these providers, the government can stimulate the creation of more innovative, industry-relevant programmes, creating a virtuous cycle of investment, innovation, and skills development that solidifies Hong Kong's status as the preeminent global leader in continuous education.

8.3 Sector-specific training levies and employer contributions

Hong Kong possesses a well-established and mature foundation for continuous education funding through its unique levy-based system, providing a robust platform from which to pursue global leadership. The cornerstone of this system is the Employees Retraining Board (ERB), established in 1992 to address structural economic changes by providing retraining for local employees. Its funding model is particularly distinctive, relying not on general tax revenue but on a specific levy charged to employers who import labour. Initially set at HK\$400 per month for each imported worker, this mechanism directly links the supply of foreign labour to the investment in local human capital development. This creates a self-replenishing fund that aligns with economic cycles; as demand for imported labour rises, so too does the investment in upskilling the local workforce. The model was significantly reinforced through government seed funding and subsequent top-ups, such as the HK\$500 million injection in 1997, demonstrating a sustained public commitment to this training infrastructure. By 2007, the accumulated levies, particularly from foreign domestic helpers, had reached approximately HK\$3.5 billion, enabling a major expansion of the ERB's programmes and cementing the levy as a powerful and sustainable financing tool.

To achieve global leadership, Hong Kong can strategically evolve this levy system into a more sophisticated, sector-specific model. The original framework's success in funding general retraining, which expanded from 100,000 annual training places in 2007 to a planned 200,000 by 2009-10, proves the scalability of the funding mechanism. A strategic blueprint would propose the establishment of sectoral training levies, where contributions from industries like construction, logistics, financial services, and technology are ring-fenced for skills development pertinent to their specific future needs. This builds upon the existing principle of employer contribution but refines it to be more targeted. For instance, the levy on imported construction workers could directly fund specialised safety and green building technique courses for local labour, addressing both immediate manpower gaps and long-term industry transformation. This sector-specific approach would ensure that training is not just widely available but is also deeply relevant, high-quality, and directly responsive to the evolving demands of Hong Kong's key economic engines, moving beyond the broader, age-based eligibility criteria that characterised the ERB's earlier phase.

Furthermore, a forward-looking blueprint must elevate the role of employer contributions beyond mere financial payments to encompass active partnership in training design and delivery. The 2007-08 Policy Address explicitly stated that "enterprises have a duty to allow employees sufficient time for training" and that "employers can also take the initiative by providing training for employees". This principle can be expanded into a strategic framework of co-investment. The government's role, facilitated by levy funds, would be to underwrite the risk and cost of curriculum development and foundational training, while employers contribute by offering paid training leave, on-the-job mentorship, and guaranteed interviews or job placements for programme graduates.

The ERB's historical emphasis on involving employers "as much as possible in the design and delivery of the programmes" provides a proven template. By formalising these public-private partnerships, Hong Kong can create a dynamic and agile continuous education ecosystem. This ecosystem would not only reskill workers but also foster a culture of shared responsibility for workforce development, ensuring that training provision is closely synchronised with real-world job requirements and technological advancements, thereby cementing Hong Kong's status as a global leader in strategic human capital development.

8.4 Tax incentives for individual and corporate investment in learning

Hong Kong stands at a pivotal moment in its economic evolution, where the transition to a knowledge-based economy demands a workforce that is agile, skilled, and committed to perpetual growth. To secure its status as a global leader, the city must architect a robust ecosystem for continuous education, moving beyond basic literacy to encompass high-level professional development and innovation. This strategic blueprint requires a dual-pronged approach: leveraging existing tax frameworks while envisioning new, more powerful incentives for both individuals and corporations.

The Foundation: Enhancing Individual Tax Deductions for Lifelong Learning

Hong Kong already possesses a foundational mechanism to encourage individual investment in self-improvement through the deductions for "personal进修开支" (personal education expenses) under the Inland Revenue Ordinance. Currently, taxpayers can claim a deduction for expenses incurred on "prescribed education courses" necessary for obtaining or maintaining a qualification for current or future employment, up to a cap of HKD 100,000 per year of assessment since the 2017/18 tax year. This provision rightly targets job-relevant skills, covering everything from management courses for executives to fintech and sustainability programmes offered by institutions like CUHK Business School, which are increasingly vital in today's economy. The deduction extends even to examination fees for professional qualifications without requiring a taught course, demonstrating an understanding of diverse learning pathways. However, to truly catalyse a global leadership position, this policy must be broadened. The definition of "prescribed education courses," while already including a wide array of universities, professional associations, and approved institutions, could be modernised to explicitly cover emerging micro-credential and certificate programmes that are not necessarily part of a traditional degree, such as the stackable modules in Innovation Leadership or ESG Reporting now being offered. Furthermore, the current system correctly prevents double-dipping by disallowing deductions for expenses already reimbursed by an employer or the government's Continuing Education Fund (CEF). A strategic enhancement could involve a super-deduction for individuals pursuing skills in nationally identified priority areas, such as artificial intelligence, green finance, or biomedical technology, thereby aligning personal upskilling with Hong Kong's broader economic ambitions.

Catalysing Corporate Commitment: Tax Super-Deductions for Training Investment

While individual incentives are crucial, a quantum leap in workforce capability will only occur when corporations are fully activated as engines of continuous education. Hong Kong's current framework allows individuals to claim deductions, but a more potent strategy lies in creating powerful tax incentives for companies to invest in the long-term development of their employees. A strategic blueprint should introduce a "training investment super-deduction," allowing businesses to deduct a multiple (e.g., 150% to 200%) of their qualifying expenditure on employee training from their profits tax. This would transform training from a perceived cost into a highly attractive investment. Such a policy would encourage firms to move beyond ad-hoc, compliance-driven training to strategic, forward-looking upskilling programmes. They could sponsor employees for advanced certificates at institutions like HKU SPACE's LEAD Academy, which offers cutting-edge programmes in AI and fintech tailored for executives, or partner with universities to create customised courses that address specific skill gaps. To ensure quality and strategic alignment, the definition of qualifying training could be tied to the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF) or programmes accredited by recognised professional bodies. This corporate-focused incentive would not only enhance productivity and innovation within firms but also foster a culture where lifelong learning is embedded in the employment contract, making Hong Kong a magnet for multinational corporations seeking a highly skilled talent pool.

Building an Integrated Ecosystem for Lifelong Learning Leadership

Tax incentives alone are insufficient; they must be woven into a cohesive ecosystem that positions Hong Kong as a global hub for continuing education. The vision set by institutions like the Chinese University of Hong Kong's School of Continuing and Professional Studies to be a "global leader in university continuing education" provides a clear strategic direction. To realise this, the government, educators, and industry must collaborate. Firstly, the proposed tax incentives for individuals and corporations should be complemented by a strengthened and streamlined CEF, ensuring it effectively targets high-value, industry-recognised credentials, including the growing number of micro-credential courses that offer credits towards master's degrees. Secondly, Hong Kong must leverage its unique position as a bridge between East and West to become a regional training hub. Programmes like those run by HKU SPACE for Mainland Chinese officials and executives demonstrate a clear demand. Expanding tax deductions to cover training expenses incurred by non-local employees of Hong Kong-based companies would attract regional talent for upskilling. Furthermore, as the population ages, the strategic plan from CUHK to "serve the needs of the ageing population and second career trends" highlights another dimension where tax policies could encourage individuals over 50 to reinvest in learning, supported by corporate programmes designed to retain their invaluable experience. By aligning these elements—modernised individual deductions, powerful corporate super-deductions, and a supportive institutional framework—Hong Kong can construct a virtuous cycle of learning, innovation, and economic dynamism, cementing its pathway to global leadership.

CHAPTER 9: INNOVATIVE FINANCING MECHANISMS

Hong Kong's aspiration to become a global leader in continuing education necessitates a fundamental rethinking of how lifelong learning is funded. A resilient and forward-looking ecosystem requires moving beyond traditional models to embrace innovative financing mechanisms that are inclusive, responsive to market needs, and strategically aligned with economic development. This blueprint outlines key mechanisms to achieve this vision.

Strengthening and Expanding Government-Supported Schemes

The foundation of Hong Kong's continuing education financing is a robust suite of government-supported schemes, which must be continuously enhanced to meet evolving demands. The Continuing Education Fund (CEF) stands as a cornerstone, providing a direct subsidy of up to HK\$25,000 per eligible applicant to encourage adults to pursue structured learning. Its strength lies in its accessibility, being open to all Hong Kong residents aged 18 or above regardless of their educational background or employment status. The CEF's design, which requires learners to co-pay a portion of the fees (20% for the first HK\$10,000 and 60% for the next HK\$15,000), fosters a sense of personal investment in the learning outcome. To maintain its relevance, the government continuously expands the list of reimbursable courses, which currently includes over 4,650 courses across more than 120 providers, covering areas from language and business to emerging technologies.

Complementing the CEF is the Study Subsidy Scheme for Designated Professions/Sectors (SSSDP), which takes a more targeted approach by subsidizing sub-degree programmes in sectors identified as having keen manpower demand. For the 2025/26 academic year, this scheme supports 2,276 places across disciplines like Healthcare, Computer Science, and Creative Industries, with annual subsidies reaching up to \$40,730 for laboratory-based programmes. This mechanism directly aligns public funding with strategic economic priorities, ensuring a pipeline of skilled talent in high-growth areas. Furthermore, the government provides a layer of financial safety nets and incentives through the Student Finance Office (SFO), which offers means-tested grants and low-interest loans under schemes like the Financial Assistance Scheme for Post-secondary Students (FASP). On the other end of the spectrum, performance-based scholarships like those under the Self-financing Post-secondary Scholarship Scheme (SPSS) reward academic excellence and non-academic achievements, motivating learners to strive for the highest standards. Together, these mechanisms form a multi-layered approach that is both universally supportive and strategically focused.

Pioneering New Frontiers: Intellectual Property and Employer-Led Financing

To truly achieve global leadership, Hong Kong must pioneer innovative models that treat learning as an investable asset. A groundbreaking direction is the integration of continuing education with the city's burgeoning intellectual property (IP) ecosystem. The proposed establishment of an Intellectual Property Academy by the government, in collaboration with the Vocational Training Council (VTC), signals a commitment to developing a new breed of professionals skilled in patent application, protection, and, crucially, IP-based financing. This initiative is directly linked to innovative financing through the "IP Financing Sandbox," which aims to help businesses, particularly in the technology sector, leverage their intellectual property as collateral for securing loans. As this ecosystem matures, a strategic opportunity emerges to connect it with continuing education. For instance, professionals could use CEF subsidies to take courses on IP valuation and fintech, skills that are immediately applicable in helping SMEs access capital. This creates a virtuous cycle where upskilling directly fuels economic innovation and unlocks new forms of business financing.

Another critical pillar of an innovative financing strategy is the promotion of employer co-investment and shared responsibility models. While the government provides the foundational support, a sustainable system requires businesses to view workforce development not as a cost, but as a strategic investment. This can be encouraged through various policy levers, such as tax incentives or grants for companies that achieve specific upskilling targets for their employees. The rise of micro-credentials and flexible, credit-bearing programmes, such as those offered by CUHK Business School, provides a perfect vehicle for this. These programmes are designed for working professionals, offering concentrated, industry-relevant skills that can be completed in a shorter timeframe and are often more affordable than full degrees. By allowing credits earned from these micro-credentials to be transferred towards a master's degree, institutions create a compelling value proposition that encourages both individual and employer investment. This model, where upfront costs are shared by the individual and their employer, with a potential government "top-up" or tax break, represents a mature and highly effective financing mechanism. It ensures that learning is directly tied to career progression and productivity gains, making the financial commitment a tangible driver of economic growth for both the individual and the wider economy.

9.1 Individual training vouchers with targeted top-ups for priority sectors

Hong Kong's ambition to become a global leader in continuing education is increasingly being realised through a strategic, multi-layered approach that integrates policy innovation with targeted financial interventions. The foundation of this pathway is a comprehensive overhaul of the city's training ecosystem, repositioning it from a safety net for the unemployed to a dynamic engine for upskilling the entire workforce. As outlined in the 2025 Policy Address, the Employees Retraining Board (ERB) is being fundamentally restructured to embrace a "skills-based" training framework, removing the previous 学历上限 (educational ceiling) to make it accessible to all employees. This transformation is geared towards identifying critical skills gaps in high-growth sectors and developing a flexible curriculum of micro-credentials and industry-endorsed courses in partnership with tertiary institutions. This systemic shift, aimed at cultivating a future-ready talent pool, is a core component of the Government's broader vision to establish Hong Kong as an international hub for post-secondary education, thereby enhancing its global competitiveness.

A central pillar of this strategy is the sophisticated use of individual training vouchers and top-up schemes, which act as a direct financial catalyst for lifelong learning. The government has moved beyond a one-size-fits-all model to create a nuanced ecosystem of financial support. For instance, the "Study Subsidy Scheme for Designated Professions/Sectors" (SSSDP) provides substantial, upfront tuition subsidies for undergraduate and top-up degree programmes in ten disciplines with keen manpower demand, such as Financial Technology, Health Care, and Creative Industries. In the 2025/26 academic year, these annual subsidies reach up to HK\$46,780 for non-laboratory-based programmes and HK\$81,450 for laboratory-based ones. This is complemented by the VTC's apprenticeship schemes, which offer a dual-pronged voucher approach: a monthly training allowance of HK\$1,000 for registered apprentices and a completion grant of up to HK\$30,000 for graduates to pursue further skills upgrades, effectively incentivising both entry and advancement in technical fields. Furthermore, specialised pilot schemes, like the one for the construction sector, provide top-up allowances of up to HK\$90,000 over three years for students in part-time degree programmes who are concurrently engaged in on-the-job training, directly linking financial support with practical industry experience.

The most impactful element of this blueprint is the strategic deployment of "targeted top-ups for priority sectors," which ensures that financial resources are channeled into areas critical for Hong Kong's economic future. The government, in consultation with relevant policy bureaux, annually reviews the list of designated disciplines under the SSSDP to align with the evolving needs of the economy, ensuring that sectors like Insurance, Logistics, and Testing and Certification receive a steady pipeline of skilled professionals. This targeted approach is further refined through initiatives like the Pilot Project on the Development of Applied Degree Programmes, which receive additional subsidies to strengthen the vocational and professional education pathway at the post-secondary level.

By providing higher subsidy rates for these applied degrees—up to HK\$89,620 for laboratory-based programmes—the government is deliberately elevating the status and attractiveness of vocational pathways, creating a parallel and prestigious route to professional success that directly supports the manpower needs of designated industries. This strategic layering of universal access with sector-specific financial incentives forms a robust blueprint for building a resilient, highly skilled, and globally competitive workforce.

9.2 Income-contingent loan schemes for career transition programmes

Hong Kong's education sector is undergoing a significant transformation, shifting from a traditional focus on initial qualifications to a dynamic model of lifelong learning. This evolution is pivotal to the city's strategy to maintain global competitiveness and is anchored in a clear vision articulated by key institutions. For instance, the School of Continuing and Professional Studies at CUHK aims to redefine its role to serve the needs of the ageing population and second career trends, while the broader CUHK strategic plan emphasizes nurturing graduates as global leaders with competencies for lifelong contributions to society. Similarly, the School of Continuing and Professional Studies at CUHK envisions itself as a global leader in university continuing education, dedicated to enriching lives and transforming lifelong learning by staying passionate about innovative leadership and keeping pace with learners' changing needs. This foundational commitment is supported by government initiatives, such as the establishment of universities of applied sciences to raise the status of vocational and professional education and the development of the Northern Metropolis University Town to foster collaboration with Mainland and overseas institutions. These strategic directions create a fertile ground for innovative financing mechanisms, like income-contingent loans, to support career transitions.

A cornerstone of this strategic blueprint for fostering a resilient workforce is the introduction of income-contingent loan schemes specifically designed for career transition programmes. Such schemes would directly address the financial barriers that often deter individuals, particularly mid-career professionals, from pursuing retraining. The recent reforms by the Employees Retraining Board (ERB) underscore the growing demand for such support. After removing the academic ceiling for trainees in early 2024, the ERB saw overall enrollments rise by 4% to about 140,000 in the first three quarters of the 2025-26 fiscal year, with 12% holding sub-degree or higher qualifications, indicating that individuals across all education levels are actively seeking to upgrade their skills. Notably, 60% of these trainees were already in employment, highlighting the need for upskilling among the existing workforce. An income-contingent loan scheme would allow these individuals to invest in intensive, high-quality training—such as the ERB's newly developed courses in AI-assisted fraud detection, game development, or new energy vehicle maintenance—without the immediate financial strain. Repayments would only begin once the graduate secures a higher-paying job, aligning the cost of education with the financial benefit it confers and making career transitions more accessible and less risky.

To be effective, these loan schemes must be integrated into a broader, modernized continuing education ecosystem that is itself undergoing structural reform. The ERB's ambitious plan to transition from a "job-type" based to a "skills-based" training framework is a critical component. This involves developing flexible learning units that can be combined, such as in data analysis and mobile app development, and introducing stackable micro-credential courses that allow working professionals to accumulate credits toward a full certificate.

Furthermore, the ERB is embedding artificial intelligence as a compulsory component across its curriculum and has already developed about 50 higher-tier and future skills courses in areas like technology applications and professional certifications. This modular, skills-focused approach aligns perfectly with the concept of income-contingent loans, as individuals could finance specific, career-enhancing micro-credentials. The establishment of a new 100,000-square-foot integrated training and service centre in Kowloon Bay by 2027 will further provide a one-stop hub for training, assessment, and support, making this ecosystem more accessible and efficient.

Ultimately, the success of income-contingent loan schemes for career transitions hinges on strong collaboration between educators, industry, and government to ensure programmes are aligned with future economic needs. The ERB's proactive plan to become an "industry observatory" by establishing a dedicated skills research unit to analyze market data and predict talent gaps is a forward-thinking strategy. This data-driven approach, focusing on the "eight centers" and "nine key industries" prioritized by the government, will ensure that publicly financed training leads to tangible employment outcomes. Concurrently, legislative updates, such as the amended Post Secondary Colleges Ordinance which provides a clearer regulatory framework for self-financing institutions, will support the healthy development of the sector. By linking financial support directly to programmes in high-demand areas—like fintech, sustainability and ESG reporting, and innovation leadership already being offered by institutions like CUHK's business school —Hong Kong can create a virtuous cycle: individuals are empowered to invest in their future, industries gain a pipeline of skilled talent, and the city solidifies its status as a global leader in innovative and inclusive continuing education.

9.3 Skills future credits: Annual learning allowances for every adult

Hong Kong stands at a pivotal moment in its economic evolution, where the dual imperatives of technological advancement and an aging workforce demand a radical reimagining of lifelong learning. To secure its status as a global leader in continuous education, Hong Kong must transcend its current fragmented approach and adopt a comprehensive, universally accessible, and strategically aligned framework. A central pillar of this transformation should be the establishment of an ambitious "FutureSkills HK" programme, inspired by successful international models, to create a culture where upskilling and reskilling are not merely optional but are embedded into the fabric of professional life for every citizen.

The Cornerstone: A Universal "FutureSkills HK" Credit Scheme

The most transformative element of this strategic blueprint would be the introduction of a universal learning allowance, analogous to Singapore's SkillsFuture Credit, which provides every adult with a direct financial stake in their own development. This "FutureSkills HK" credit would serve as an annual, non-expiring stipend for all Hong Kong permanent residents aged 25 and over, empowering them to take ownership of their learning journeys. The scheme could be structured with a foundational annual credit of, for instance, HK\$2,500 for all eligible adults, with a significant top-up of HK\$20,000 disbursed over five years for those aged 40 and above. This mid-career booster would signal a societal commitment to supporting workers during critical periods of potential career transition and technological disruption. To ensure relevance and quality, the credits could only be used for courses on a curated government portal, featuring programmes certified by the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications. This would encompass a wide spectrum of learning opportunities, from university modules on financial technology and executive education at institutions like HKU, to vocational diplomas in high-demand fields like healthcare or creative industries, and even micro-credentials in emerging areas such as AI and data science offered by private providers.

A Demand-Driven Ecosystem: Aligning Skills with Economic Reality

For the "FutureSkills HK" credits to be effective, they must fuel a dynamic and responsive training ecosystem that is directly aligned with the economy's needs. This requires a shift from supply-driven courses to demand-driven, industry-validated programmes. The blueprint should advocate for the creation of a national skills intelligence platform that uses real-time labour market data to identify current and future skills gaps, much like Singapore's Jobs-Skills Insights. This data would then inform a list of priority "FutureSkill" sectors eligible for additional subsidies, building upon existing initiatives like the Study Subsidy Scheme for Designated Professions/Sectors (SSSDP), which already targets areas like computer science, financial technology, and healthcare.

The scheme should be expanded to cover a wider array of short, industry-certified courses at the sub-degree and postgraduate levels, ensuring a continuous pipeline of talent for Hong Kong's key clusters, including innovation and technology, where AI literacy and computing skills are becoming mandatory. Furthermore, to provide meaningful support for those undertaking significant career changes, an income replacement training allowance should be introduced for individuals aged 40 and above pursuing full-time studies in these priority sectors. This would alleviate the financial anxiety of pausing a career to reskill, offering a monthly stipend—perhaps up to HK\$15,000—for a maximum duration of 24 months, thereby making deep skilling a viable option for mid-career workers.

Modernizing Pathways: From Rigid Qualifications to Stackable Credentials

To truly foster a culture of continuous learning, Hong Kong must modernize its qualification framework, moving beyond the traditional emphasis on front-loaded, full-time degrees to embrace a more flexible system of stackable credentials. The recent legislative amendments to the Post Secondary Colleges Ordinance, which aim to improve the regulation and quality of self-financing institutions, provide a timely opportunity to build this new architecture. Universities and professional bodies should be incentivized to deconstruct their full qualifications into smaller, credit-bearing modules and micro-credentials. This would allow a logistics manager, for instance, to use their "FutureSkills HK" credits to take a single module on supply chain analytics from a local university, stacking it towards a professional diploma or, eventually, a full degree. This approach makes learning more accessible and allows individuals to incrementally build expertise in line with career demands. This paradigm shift must be supported by a robust credit accumulation and transfer system, enabling learners to combine credentials from different providers, including universities, polytechnics, and private training organizations, creating personalized and portable learning pathways. For example, a registered nurse could use their credits for specialized training in geriatric care at one institution and then transfer those credits towards a related advanced diploma at another, fostering a more integrated and learner-centric education landscape.

Conclusion: Forging a Culture of Lifelong Employability

Ultimately, Hong Kong's pathway to global leadership in continuous education hinges not only on financial incentives and structural reforms but on a fundamental cultural shift—from a focus on lifetime employment to a mindset of lifelong employability. This requires a whole-of-society approach, involving robust career guidance services, such as a publicly funded career coaching program to help citizens navigate their learning and career options. It also necessitates strong government support for companies to invest in their workforce, potentially through co-funding schemes for in-house training and job redesign, similar to Singapore's Company Training Committees, which foster a tripartite alliance between government, unions, and employers to drive enterprise and workforce transformation. By weaving together universal learning credits, a demand-driven curriculum, flexible qualifications, and strong support structures, Hong Kong can build a continuous education system that not only equips its people to navigate the complexities of the future economy but also solidifies its position as a premier international hub for talent and innovation.

9.4 Public-private partnerships for large-scale upskilling initiatives

Hong Kong possesses a unique confluence of factors that position it to become a global leader in continuous education, primarily through strategically designed public-private partnerships (PPPs). The foundation for this leadership is being actively laid by government policy, which provides both the strategic direction and the financial catalyst for large-scale upskilling. The 2026-27 Budget exemplifies this with a clear strategic pivot, including a proposed HK\$50 million fund to invite public organisations, technology enterprises, and tertiary institutions to jointly develop and deliver AI application courses. This initiative is not merely about funding but about mandating collaboration, forcing a synergy between public bodies like the rebranded "SkillsUp Board" (formerly the Employees Retraining Board) and private tech firms to ensure training is directly relevant to industry needs. Furthermore, the government has enhanced the New Industrialisation and Technology Training Programme (NITTP), which operates on a 1:1 matching grant basis, directly subsidising local companies to train their staff in 高端科技, thereby de-risking corporate investment in workforce development and creating a powerful incentive for private sector-led training initiatives. This policy architecture creates a fertile ground where public funding de-risks innovation in training, and private sector agility ensures its relevance.

Building on this policy framework, a dynamic ecosystem of collaborative programmes is already emerging, demonstrating the tangible benefits of these partnerships. Academic institutions are developing flexible, industry-aligned curricula, such as CUHK Business School's new Professional Certificate Programmes (Micro-credentials) in areas like Innovation Leadership and AI for Business. These programmes are designed in direct response to market demands and offer a practical, accelerated pathway for professionals, with the added incentive of credits that can be transferred to master's degrees. Concurrently, formal alliances between major training providers and technology hubs are creating immersive learning experiences. The Memorandum of Understanding between the Vocational Training Council (VTC) and the Hong Kong Productivity Council (HKPC) is a prime example, aiming to systematically integrate AI training with practical industrial attachments and mentorship, ensuring students gain both theoretical knowledge and hands-on experience. These partnerships extend to nurturing future talent pipelines, as seen in the "Innopreneur Experience Journey" co-organised by the Hong Kong Science and Technology Parks Corporation (HKSTP) and the Federation of Hong Kong Industries (FHKI), which provides secondary school students with deep exposure to real-world R&D and corporate decision-making. This multi-layered approach, from secondary school exposure to executive education, builds a comprehensive and future-proofed talent ecosystem.

The ultimate aim of these strategic PPPs is to align Hong Kong's workforce with the demands of a knowledge-based economy and solidify its status as a regional and global talent hub. The government's designation of certain institutions as "Universities of Applied Sciences" is a deliberate move to create a respected, parallel pathway that blends academic learning with vocational and professional training, directly in partnership with leading enterprises in the Greater Bay Area. This is further supported by initiatives like HKU SPACE's LEAD Academy, which runs tailored programmes for executives and government officials from the Mainland, focusing on fintech, innovation management, and global perspectives, thereby reinforcing Hong Kong's role as a conduit for international best practices and a provider of high-level continuous education for the region. By fostering a culture where lifelong learning is embedded through collaborations that bridge the gap between pedagogy and practice, Hong Kong is not just reacting to skills shortages but proactively shaping a workforce capable of driving innovation and sustaining long-term economic competitiveness on the world stage.

9.5 Catastrophic insurance for gig economy workers' training needs

The concept of "catastrophic insurance" for gig economy workers' training needs is an innovative financial mechanism designed to address a critical vulnerability in the modern workforce: the risk of skills obsolescence without the safety net of employer-sponsored upskilling. Drawing parallels from the insurance industry's analysis of the gig economy, there is a recognized "\$1 trillion opportunity" in creating products for this underserved population, which includes freelancers, independent contractors, and platform workers. These workers often face "income volatility" and lack access to group benefits, making it difficult to invest in their own human capital. A catastrophic training insurance model would function as a backstop, providing a payout or covering the costs of accredited retraining programmes in the event of a major disruption—such as a platform's bankruptcy, the automation of their core job function, or a sector-wide economic shift that renders their primary skill set unviable. This moves beyond the traditional scope of occupational accident insurance, which covers physical injury, to insure against "economic injury" caused by technological or market obsolescence.

Building such a mechanism requires a sophisticated, multi-stakeholder approach similar to the "government-platform-insurer" tripartite framework proposed for innovating rider insurance in Mainland China. For insurers, this would involve developing new actuarial models that go beyond traditional risk classifications. Instead of using broad occupational categories, they could leverage AI and machine learning to assess individual risk based on skillset adaptability, industry growth projections, and continuous learning behaviors, much like how "AI-powered risk modeling" is proposed to assess individual policyholder risk more accurately. For platforms and regulators, the model would involve creating a portable benefits fund, perhaps funded by a微小 levy per transaction or gig, similar to the "按单缴费" (payment per order) model used for pilot occupational injury insurance. This fund could then be used to pay premiums for a catastrophic training insurance policy for their workers. The policy would be designed to trigger under specific, predefined "catastrophic" conditions, such as a sustained 30% drop in average earnings for a specific job category within a region, or a government-acknowledged industry disruption. This would provide gig workers with a tangible safety net, encouraging them to embrace gig work without the paralyzing fear that a single technological breakthrough could permanently strand them without the means to retrain, thereby fostering a more resilient and adaptable workforce.

CHAPTER 10: PREVENTING FRAUD AND ENSURING VALUE

Hong Kong possesses a robust foundation to ascend as a global leader in continuous education, but this ambition is predicated on the implementation of a strategic blueprint that rigorously prevents fraud and demonstrably ensures value. The pathway requires a dual focus: fortifying the existing governance and quality assurance infrastructure while innovating to meet future economic and societal demands.

A Robust Governance and Quality Assurance Framework as the Foundation

Hong Kong's journey toward global leadership in continuous education is built upon a sophisticated and legally enshrined quality assurance framework, which is the first line of defense against fraud and poor value. The Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF), established under the Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications Ordinance (Cap. 592), provides the bedrock for this system. Its primary policy objective is to provide a platform that encourages lifelong learning by setting clear and objective standards for qualifications across academic, vocational, and continuing education sectors. This statutory backing ensures that all recognized qualifications meet a consistent and reliable standard, protecting learners from sub-par courses. The Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) acts as the key guardian of quality, serving as the designated Accreditation Authority and Qualifications Register Authority. It rigorously evaluates programs offered by non-self-accrediting institutions before they can be listed on the Qualifications Register (QR), a public database of all HKQF-recognized qualifications. This rigorous, multi-layered process of accreditation and public registration is fundamental to ensuring that every dollar spent and every hour invested in continuous education yields a legitimate and valuable outcome, thereby building trust in the system.

Proactive Oversight and Adaptive Measures to Thwart Fraud and Misuse

To prevent fraud and ensure that public funds are used appropriately, the government employs a strategy of proactive oversight and adaptive regulation, learning from past vulnerabilities to strengthen the system. The Office of the Ombudsman and the Legislative Council's Public Accounts Committee play a crucial role in this ecosystem by scrutinizing the operations of funds like the Continuing Education Fund (CEF). Public hearings have led to important revelations and subsequent reforms. For instance, discussions have highlighted the need to combat fraudulent practices such as 培训机构虚报学生人数 to 骗政府资助, leading to enhanced 审查机制. In response, authorities like the Working Family and Student Financial Assistance Agency conduct unannounced 突击巡查, scrutinizing enrolment records, attendance sheets, and student feedback to verify claims.

Furthermore, these oversight bodies have identified and acted upon cases where the fund's purpose was being undermined, such as training providers marketing courses with slogans like "移英铺路" (paving the way to emigrate to the UK), which deviates from the fund's goal of strengthening the local workforce. The response has been to increase checks on promotional materials and to warn institutions against such misleading tactics. More recently, the government has also recognized the need to adapt to contemporary challenges by planning to issue national security guidelines for training institutions, ensuring that all educational activities align with broader societal interests. These examples demonstrate a dynamic and responsive oversight system that is essential for maintaining integrity and public confidence.

Charting a Strategic Future for Value Enhancement and Global Leadership

Beyond fraud prevention, Hong Kong's blueprint for global leadership must actively engineer value by aligning continuous education with industry needs, embracing innovative learning models, and fostering global partnerships. The strategic direction involves moving beyond traditional course offerings to create a more dynamic and responsive ecosystem. A prime example of this innovation is the development of stackable micro-credentials, such as the Professional Certificate Programmes (Micro-credentials) launched by the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) Business School. These programs, focused on high-demand areas like Innovation Leadership, ESG Reporting, and Artificial Intelligence for Business, are designed for working professionals and offer flexible, modular learning. Crucially, they are credit-bearing and listed on the HKQF, with credits that can be seamlessly transferred towards a master's degree, creating clear and valuable progression pathways. This model not only provides immediate upskilling but also incentivizes lifelong learning by linking it to advanced qualifications, directly ensuring value for the learner. This vision is echoed in institutional strategic plans, such as CUHK's goal to "nurture lifelong learners as global leaders" and its commitment to serving the community's needs for continuing education. Similarly, the School of Continuing and Professional Studies (CUSCS) at CUHK articulates a clear vision "to be a global leader in university continuing education," with strategies that include expanding industry collaboration and exploring closer partnerships with overseas universities. By fostering such innovative, industry-aligned, and internationally connected programs, Hong Kong can transform its continuous education sector into a key driver of economic competitiveness and a magnet for learners from across the region, solidifying its status as a global leader.

10.1 Robust verification and anti-gaming mechanisms

Vision and Strategic Context

Hong Kong is uniquely positioned to ascend as a global leader in continuous education, leveraging its distinctive "one country, two systems" framework and its role as an international hub for higher learning. The strategic blueprint for this ascent is rooted in a vision that extends beyond traditional degree programs to embrace lifelong learning as a core societal value. Institutions such as the School of Continuing and Professional Studies at CUHK have articulated a clear vision to be a global leader in university continuing education by enriching lives and transforming lifelong learning to keep pace with evolving learner needs. This vision is supported by government-level initiatives outlined in recent policy addresses, which aim to transform the city's world-class university system into a direct pipeline for high-tech and executive-level professionals. The establishment of the Task Force on Study in Hong Kong and the "Hong Kong: Your World-class Campus" marketing campaign, backed by significant funding, demonstrates a committed effort to internationalize the city's educational brand and attract diverse talent for continuous upskilling.

Building a Flexible and Integrated Ecosystem

A cornerstone of Hong Kong's strategy involves the creation of a flexible, multi-modal continuous education ecosystem that integrates micro-credentials, executive education, and traditional degrees. Leading institutions are pioneering micro-credential programmes that offer concentrated, practical learning in high-demand fields such as artificial intelligence, financial technology, sustainability, and ESG reporting. These programmes, often benchmarked at Level 6 of the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF), provide a critical pathway for career acceleration. A key innovation is the seamless credit transfer mechanism, where credits earned in these flexible certificate programmes can be applied toward postgraduate degrees, creating a cohesive and incentivized learning journey from professional development to advanced academic qualifications. Concurrently, initiatives like CityU's Business Innovation Education (BIE) and HKU SPACE's LEAD Academy are establishing themselves as premier hubs for transformative executive education, focusing on bridging theory and practice for senior executives and high-potential managers. These programmes emphasize experiential learning, an entrepreneurial mindset, and a global perspective that integrates insights from both East and West.

Forging Global Networks and Industry Synergy

To achieve global leadership, Hong Kong's continuous education sector is actively forging deep international collaborations and strengthening ties with industry. The Global University Presidents and Leaders Summit exemplifies Hong Kong's role as a convener for global dialogue on knowledge globalization and the future of education, bringing together leaders from top universities worldwide to address pressing issues like AI governance and demographic changes. Beyond academic collaboration, there is a strategic push to align curricula directly with market needs. The Hong Kong SAR government has formally designated universities of applied sciences to create respected pathways for vocational and professional learning, steering them toward partnerships with leading enterprises, particularly in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area. Industry leaders emphasize the need to integrate commercial projects into programmes to produce readily employable graduates, moving beyond traditional internships. This synergy is already visible in specialized partnerships, such as that between Metis Global and the Chartered Insurance Institute (CII), which has developed a sustained continuing-education platform for financial professionals, focusing on ethics, compliance, and cross-disciplinary knowledge.

Robust Verification and Anti-Gaming Mechanisms

The integrity and credibility of Hong Kong's continuous education offerings are safeguarded by robust verification and anti-gaming mechanisms, essential for maintaining global recognition and trust. The foundation of this system is the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF), which provides a clear, government-regulated benchmark for all qualifications. Programmes listed in the Qualifications Register (QR) at specific HKQF levels, such as the Level 6 micro-credentials, undergo rigorous quality assurance processes to ensure they meet established academic and professional standards. This public registry acts as a powerful anti-gaming tool, preventing unqualified providers from misrepresenting their credentials. Furthermore, the integration of micro-credentials with accredited master's degree programmes, through formal credit transfer agreements, subjects these non-traditional pathways to the same stringent academic scrutiny as conventional university courses. As the sector evolves, future mechanisms will likely include blockchain-based digital credentials to provide tamper-proof, verifiable records of achievement, and AI-driven proctoring solutions to uphold academic integrity in online and remote learning environments. These multi-layered verification processes—spanning government regulation, institutional accreditation, and advanced technology—are critical to ensuring that Hong Kong's continuous education qualifications remain a reliable and valued signal of competence for employers and learners globally.

10.2 Outcome-based funding models

Hong Kong stands at a pivotal moment in its economic evolution, where its aspiration to become a global leader in continuous education is inextricably linked to the modernization of its funding strategies. The foundation for this leadership is being laid by institutions that have articulated a clear vision for lifelong learning, aiming to nurture graduates who are not only globally competitive but also committed to making lifelong contributions to society. This vision is operationalized by schools of continuing and professional studies that seek to keep pace with learners' needs, expand industry networks for collaborative training, and address demographic shifts such as an ageing population. However, for Hong Kong to truly excel on the global stage, this strategic vision must be powerfully enabled by a funding model that moves beyond simple subsidy and towards a system that actively incentivizes measurable outcomes and aligns with the territory's broader economic goals.

The blueprint for this transformation is already visible in the architecture of Hong Kong's primary funding mechanism, the Continuing Education Fund (CEF). The CEF is not merely a tuition subsidy; it is a sophisticated, outcome-based funding model that conditions financial support on the achievement of specific, measurable results. This design ensures that public funds are invested in successful educational engagements, directly linking financial disbursement to tangible learner achievements. By mandating that providers design courses with clear, assessable outcomes, the CEF fosters a culture of accountability and effectiveness within the continuous education sector, pushing institutions to focus on the quality and relevance of their programmes as the primary route to funding.

At the heart of this outcome-based model is a multi-layered structure of performance metrics that learners must meet before any funding is released. The process is triggered only upon the "successful completion" of a course, a term strictly defined by objective criteria. Applicants must achieve a minimum attendance rate of 70% and attain an overall assessment mark of at least 50%, or higher if prescribed by the specific course. For language proficiency courses, this bar is raised further, requiring learners to pass a specified, independent benchmark test. This system shifts the focus from mere participation to competency gain, ensuring that the fund subsidizes not just the act of learning, but the verified acquisition of knowledge and skills. This rigorous, results-oriented framework is what positions the CEF as a strategic tool for national development rather than just a general welfare benefit.

Furthermore, Hong Kong's pathway to global leadership involves using this funding model to strategically steer its workforce towards high-value economic sectors. The government has explicitly linked the role of the CEF to the nation's 14th Five-Year Plan and the establishment of Hong Kong's "eight centres," encouraging institutions to develop courses in emerging fields such as the low-altitude economy, digital economy, and innovation and technology. The funding mechanism is designed to complement this by incorporating a co-payment ratio, where learners bear 20% of the course fees for the first HK\$10,000 in subsidies and 40% for the next HK\$15,000.

This co-payment is not just a cost-saving measure; it is an integral part of the outcome-based strategy, designed to ensure learners select courses prudently and to prevent course providers from arbitrarily raising fees in response to the enhanced subsidy. It creates a shared responsibility for the educational outcome, making both the learner and the provider more invested in the course's ultimate value and success.

To solidify its leadership, Hong Kong must continue to refine this model by drawing on comparative insights and addressing current challenges. The government's own data shows that while the CEF has over 932,000 accounts, less than 1% of account holders have utilized the full HK\$25,000 subsidy, and the median course fee is a relatively modest HK\$7,800. This suggests an opportunity to not only increase the lifetime subsidy—as proposed by think tanks suggesting a HK\$100,000 skills development grant—but to more aggressively link that funding to courses that address projected skills gaps in the Greater Bay Area. By expanding the outcome-based model to include metrics like post-course employment rates, salary increases, or the attainment of professional qualifications recognized across the border, Hong Kong can create a dynamic funding ecosystem. This would involve a closer partnership between the government, industries, and educational providers to co-design curricula that are directly tied to industry needs, ensuring that the outcomes funded are not just academic, but economically transformative, thereby cementing Hong Kong's status as a global leader in continuous education.

10.3 Transparent provider ratings and learner satisfaction metrics

Hong Kong stands at a pivotal juncture where its future as a knowledge-based economy is inextricably linked to the vitality of its continuous education sector. To transition from a regional hub to a global leader in lifelong learning, a strategic blueprint must be established—one that moves beyond mere course offerings to create an ecosystem defined by trust, quality, and measurable outcomes. The foundational pillar of this ambitious pathway is the implementation of a fully transparent provider rating system. Such a system would function as a public-facing, rigorous evaluation mechanism, assessing institutions not just on their administrative compliance, but on the tangible efficacy of their programs. By grading providers on criteria such as curriculum relevance to industry 4.0, instructor qualifications, graduate employment outcomes, and innovation in pedagogical delivery, Hong Kong can create a dynamic marketplace where quality is visibly rewarded and mediocrity is compelled to improve.

The second, equally critical component of this blueprint is the institutionalization of learner satisfaction metrics as a core indicator of success. In the realm of continuous education, the learner is not just a student but a discerning consumer investing in their own human capital. A global leadership position demands that we prioritize the learner's voice, transforming feedback from a passive suggestion box into a powerful driver of institutional strategy. A standardized, independently verified satisfaction index—capturing data on teaching effectiveness, administrative support, digital learning experience, and the practical applicability of skills acquired—would serve as a vital complement to provider ratings. This dual-metric approach ensures that institutions are held accountable for both their outputs (graduate success) and their process (the learner's journey), fostering a culture of continuous improvement that is responsive to the evolving needs of a global workforce.

Ultimately, the synergy between transparent ratings and robust satisfaction metrics forms the bedrock of Hong Kong's strategic advantage. This framework empowers learners with the information needed to make high-stakes decisions about their professional development, attracting a global cohort of students who seek verified quality and tangible returns on their educational investment. For the providers, this transparency acts as a catalyst for innovation, incentivizing the development of cutting-edge curricula, the adoption of flexible learning technologies, and the cultivation of supportive learning environments. By embracing this blueprint, Hong Kong can build an international reputation not just for the volume of its continuous education offerings, but for their verifiable excellence, thereby securing its status as the premier global destination for lifelong learning and professional advancement.

10.4 Regular auditing and impact evaluation protocols

Hong Kong possesses a unique confluence of factors that position it to become a global leader in continuing education, but achieving this status requires a deliberate and strategic blueprint that builds upon its existing strengths. The foundation for this leadership is already being laid by institutions that have articulated clear visions for lifelong learning. For instance, the Chinese University of Hong Kong's strategic plan explicitly aims to "serve the needs and demands of the community for lifelong education and continuing development," redefining the role of its School of Continuing and Professional Studies to address trends like an ageing population and second careers. Similarly, CUHK's School of Continuing and Professional Studies (CUSCS) envisions itself as "a global leader in university continuing education," with a mission to help learners at all stages—from young adults to working professionals and older learners—advance their life goals. This shared institutional ambition creates a fertile ground for a city-wide strategy. The blueprint would leverage Hong Kong's status as an international financial hub and its deep integration with the Greater Bay Area to offer programmes with global relevance, focusing on areas like entrepreneurship, innovation, and the enhancement of global competencies, including bilingual proficiency. By fostering closer partnerships between local institutions, renowned overseas universities, and industry, Hong Kong can create a dynamic and responsive continuing education ecosystem that not only meets local needs but also attracts learners from around the world, thereby cementing its role as a regional and global hub for professional and personal development.

Central to this strategic blueprint must be a robust and transparent framework for regular auditing and impact evaluation, which will ensure credibility, drive continuous improvement, and demonstrate tangible value to stakeholders. Hong Kong's leading continuing education providers already offer exemplary models for such protocols. HKU SPACE, for example, has formalised a comprehensive "Quality Assurance and Enhancement (QAE) System" since the early 2000s, designed to ensure programme quality is comparable to recognised institutions and to facilitate continuous enhancement. Crucially, this system is not static; it is an "evolving process" that incorporates regular external scrutiny. HKU SPACE has undergone multiple UGC Quality Assurance Council audits and, in a significant step towards international benchmarking, engaged in an International Quality Review (IQR) in 2021. This review assessed the institution against the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) for internal quality assurance, leading to the ASIIN Institutional Accreditation Seal. A city-wide blueprint would mandate similar practices for all major continuing education providers. This would involve not only internal programme reviews and external accreditation exercises but also systematic impact evaluations that track learner outcomes, such as career advancement, personal enrichment, and contributions to society. By adopting and standardising such rigorous, internationally recognised auditing and evaluation protocols, Hong Kong can build a powerful reputation for quality and accountability. This data-driven approach would provide the evidence needed to refine programmes, assure employers and learners of their value, and solidify Hong Kong's status as a trusted and leading global centre for continuing education.

VOLUME III: PROGRAMME INNOVATION AND DELIVERY

PART 5: CURRICULUM DESIGN FOR THE FUTURE ECONOMY

CHAPTER 11: MICRO-CREDENTIALS AND STACKABLE LEARNING PATHWAYS

The global shift towards skills-based economies has elevated micro-credentials from an innovative trend to a strategic necessity. For Hong Kong, a city-state whose prosperity is built on the agility of its professional class, the development of a robust ecosystem of micro-credentials and stackable learning pathways is not merely an educational upgrade but a critical component of its future economic competitiveness. By leveraging its unique position as an international financial centre and its established Qualifications Framework (HKQF), Hong Kong is already laying the groundwork to become a global leader in this space. This strategic blueprint focuses on creating flexible, industry-relevant, and accredited learning opportunities that empower individuals to navigate the rapidly evolving demands of the global workforce.

A defining feature of Hong Kong's emerging leadership is the strategic integration of micro-credentials with traditional, high-status academic qualifications. Leading institutions are pioneering models where short, focused courses serve as both career accelerators and formal gateways to advanced degrees. The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) Business School's suite of Professional Certificate Programmes (Micro-credentials) exemplifies this approach. These programmes, covering in-demand fields like Artificial Intelligence for Business, Sustainability and ESG Reporting, and Financial Technology, are meticulously designed and listed at Level 6 of the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF), placing them at the same level as bachelor's degree honours graduates. Crucially, the credits earned are "stackable," allowing graduates to apply for exemptions of up to six credits should they gain admission to a related CUHK master's programme, thereby creating a seamless and prestigious pathway from continuous education to a postgraduate degree. This model directly addresses the needs of "young professionals who aim to achieve results in the shortest time frame possible," offering concentrated, practical learning modules that can be completed in six to 36 months, entirely at the learner's own pace. This high-level academic endorsement confers significant market trust and value upon the micro-credential, distinguishing them from non-accredited alternatives.

Simultaneously, other institutions are building comprehensive and accessible frameworks that democratize lifelong learning on a grand scale. The University of Hong Kong's School of Professional and Continuing Education (HKU SPACE) has developed an extensive catalogue of over 410 micro-credential courses spanning more than 50 themes, from artificial intelligence and fintech to specialised topics like 殡仪策划师培训 (funeral planning) and traditional Chinese medicine. This vast offering caters to a wide spectrum of professional and personal interests. The true innovation lies in its clearly defined stackability: most courses, requiring approximately 30 hours of study, award between 3 and 15 credits. Learners can accumulate these credits over time (with a five-year validity) to earn progressively larger qualifications, such as a Professional Certificate (requiring 30 credits) or a Professional Diploma (requiring 60 credits). Furthermore, by ensuring most of these courses are eligible for government subsidies like the Continuing Education Fund (CEF), HKU SPACE dramatically lowers the financial barrier to entry, making continuous education a practical reality for the average worker. This model provides the foundational infrastructure for mass participation in lifelong learning.

This institutional activity is strongly supported and guided by a forward-thinking government policy that recognizes the need for systemic change. The government's commitment to "skills-based" training, as articulated in recent policy addresses, is driving a paradigm shift across the entire educational landscape. The Employees Retraining Board (ERB) is at the forefront of this transformation, having removed the previous academic ceiling on its training programmes to serve the entire workforce. Its strategic blueprint for 2025-2027 focuses on collaborating with universities and enterprises to identify critical skill gaps and develop a comprehensive, industry-led training framework. A cornerstone of this long-term vision is the introduction of government-recognised micro-credential courses that are portable and verifiable. This policy direction is reinforced by the Education Bureau's ongoing enhancement of the Vocational and Professional Education and Training (VPET) pathway. By updating the descriptors for Higher Diplomas and increasing admission quotas for non-traditional students, the government is actively fostering a culture where applied learning and academic study are valued as parallel and interconnected routes to success, strengthening the overall ecosystem through which micro-credentials can proliferate.

For Hong Kong to truly secure its position as a global leader, the blueprint must move beyond individual institutional efforts to establish a fully integrated, territory-wide system. This requires deepening the collaboration between academia and industry to ensure curricula remain at the cutting edge of market needs. Initiatives like the partnership between PolyU SPEED and the Hong Kong Institute of Human Resource Management (HKIHRM) to develop QF Level 6 micro-credentials for HR executives demonstrate the power of such synergies, directly embedding professional body recognition into the learning pathway. Furthermore, Hong Kong can look to and adapt international best practices.

The Irish model of a national micro-credentials framework, which sets binding standards for quality, ECTS credit weighting, and stackability, offers a compelling precedent for ensuring consistency, quality, and international portability of Hong Kong's credentials. By adopting a similar approach and leveraging the robust HKQF, Hong Kong can create a trusted and transparent system where micro-credentials are not just short courses, but valuable, transferable assets in a global talent economy, capable of being stacked into qualifications recognised by employers and academic institutions worldwide. This strategic alignment of top-tier university innovation, inclusive public policy, and rigorous quality standards is the pathway for Hong Kong to become the undisputed global hub for continuous education.

11.1 Defining micro-credentials: Standards, duration, and rigour

Hong Kong's ambition to become a global leader in continuing education rests on a strategic foundation that integrates its world-class university system with innovative, flexible learning pathways. This vision is explicitly articulated in the strategic plans of its leading institutions. For example, The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) has outlined a five-year vision focused on "nurturing lifelong learners as global leaders," aiming to serve community demands for lifelong education and continuous development while enhancing graduates' global competitiveness. Similarly, Hong Kong Baptist University (HKBU) aspires to build a creative and global culture, nurturing future-ready students through transdisciplinary education and research that embraces technology. These institutional goals align with a city-wide push, as highlighted in the 2025 Policy Address, to transform the university system into a direct pipeline for high-tech professionals and to market Hong Kong as a premier education destination under the theme "Hong Kong: Your World-class Campus".

The strategic blueprint for this transformation is built upon deeper academia-industry integration and the creation of supportive ecosystems for innovation. The Hong Kong government has taken concrete steps by formally designating certain institutions as "universities of applied sciences" and promoting mutual recognition of qualifications within the Greater Bay Area to facilitate seamless cross-boundary employment and study. Beyond policy, universities are fostering entrepreneurship and aligning education with market demands. City University of Hong Kong's Business Innovation Education initiative, for instance, aims to be the premier hub in Asia for transformative executive education by leveraging deep industry engagement and an East-meets-West orientation. This is complemented by efforts to strengthen research and innovation ecosystems through collaborative research centers and university-affiliated incubators, such as the HKUST Entrepreneurship Center, which provide students with resources, mentorship, and funding to transform ideas into market-ready ventures. Such initiatives are crucial for addressing the projected manpower shortfall in innovation and technology sectors by ensuring graduates possess the practical, hands-on knowledge required by employers.

At the core of this new educational landscape is the micro-credential, a flexible and targeted qualification designed for lifelong learning. A widely accepted definition, such as the one proposed by the European Commission, describes a micro-credential as a "recognised proof of the learning outcomes that a learner has acquired following a short learning experience. These learning outcomes have been assessed against transparent standards". The proof is contained in a certified document detailing the holder's name, achieved learning outcomes, assessment method, awarding body, and, where applicable, the qualifications framework level and credits gained. These credentials are owned by the learner, portable, and can be combined or "stacked" into larger qualifications, all while being underpinned by agreed-upon quality assurance standards. They are designed to certify specific, practical skills and are often developed in partnership with industry to directly match workforce demands, covering subjects from data analytics to emerging technologies like blockchain.

The standards and rigour of micro-credentials are defined by several key elements, including duration, level, and assessment. While their short duration is a defining feature, this can range from intensive programs of a few days to more comprehensive courses lasting up to nine months or requiring 100-150 hours of total study, as stipulated by frameworks like the Common Microcredential Framework (CMF). To ensure academic rigour, micro-credentials are aligned with established qualification frameworks. The CMF, for example, requires micro-credentials to be levelled at Levels 6-7 in the European Qualification Framework (EQF) or equivalent, ensuring they represent a higher education level of learning. Institutions like Oklahoma State University further define difficulty levels, from foundational (e.g., eight hours of introductory content) to advanced (requiring a series of experiences demonstrating high-level understanding). The assessment process is critical to rigour, involving transparent methods such as tests, project work, or practical assignments, often with reliable methods of identity verification. A comprehensive micro-credential record includes essential validation elements like the notional workload, the qualification level, the type of assessment, and the quality assurance system applied, ensuring transparency and trust for employers and educational institutions.

11.2 Stackable credentials: Building toward degrees and professional qualifications

Hong Kong possesses a unique confluence of world-class universities, a robust regulatory framework, and a strategic geographic position, placing it at a pivotal moment to assert global leadership in the realm of continuing education. A strategic blueprint for this ascent must be built upon the dual pillars of institutional vision and innovative pedagogical structures. Leading institutions have already articulated this ambition; for instance, the School of Continuing and Professional Studies at CUHK explicitly envisions becoming "a global leader in university continuing education" by enriching lives and transforming learning to keep pace with evolving societal and learner needs. This vision is operationalized through strategies that emphasize academic quality, global industry collaboration, and responsiveness to demographic trends such as an ageing population. Furthermore, the Hong Kong government underpins this ecosystem with the Qualifications Framework (QF), a standardized system that integrates academic, vocational, and continuing education, providing clear and credible pathways for learners at all stages of their careers and ensuring that local practices align with international standards. This strong foundation of institutional foresight and governmental support creates the ideal environment for pioneering educational models to thrive.

At the heart of this strategic blueprint is the widespread adoption and sophisticated implementation of stackable credentials, which are fundamentally restructuring the pathway to degrees and professional qualifications. These microcredentials—short, focused, and credit-bearing courses—offer learners unparalleled flexibility, allowing them to curate personalized learning journeys that align with immediate career needs or long-term intellectual interests. Institutions like HKU SPACE have pioneered this model, establishing clear "stackability" rules where learners can accumulate microcredentials over a five-year period to earn progressive awards such as a Certificate (30 credits) or Diploma (60 credits) in fields like Professional Practice or General Studies. The system is designed with rigor, requiring, for example, that 75% of credits be at a specific QF level to qualify for an award at that level, thereby maintaining academic and professional standards. This structured approach transforms fragmented learning into a coherent, accredited pathway, empowering individuals to build recognized qualifications incrementally without disrupting their careers.

The true transformative power of stackable credentials in Hong Kong lies in their strategic integration with traditional postgraduate education and high-level professional certifications, creating seamless articulation ladders. A leading example is the CUHK Business School's Professional Certificate Programmes, which are officially recognized at QF Level 6 (the level of a bachelor's degree honors graduate). These programmes are meticulously designed so that the credits earned can be directly transferred to specific CUHK master's degree programmes, such as the MSc in Financial Technology or the MSc in Sustainable Global Business, offering exemptions of up to six credits.

This creates a tangible "2-in-1" pathway where a professional certificate becomes a stepping stone towards a full master's degree. Simultaneously, Hong Kong's ecosystem supports pathways to prestigious professional bodies. The government's Qualifications Framework maps continuing education to industry-defined competency standards, enabling learners to use accredited courses to prepare for and obtain globally recognized designations like the CFA, FRM, or HKICPA, which are critical for career advancement in the global economy. By bridging the gap between bite-sized learning and high-stakes credentials, Hong Kong is not just offering courses; it is architecting a dynamic and cohesive lifelong learning continuum.

In conclusion, Hong Kong's pathway to becoming a global leader in continuing education is clearly illuminated by its strategic vision and the concrete implementation of stackable credential systems. By fostering an environment where short-form, practical learning can be progressively accumulated and applied towards advanced degrees and professional qualifications, the city is creating a powerful new paradigm for talent development. This blueprint positions Hong Kong to attract and nurture a future-ready workforce, capable of adapting to rapid technological change and meeting the complex demands of industries worldwide. The continued collaboration between universities, professional bodies, and the government, guided by the robust framework of the Qualifications Framework, will be essential in solidifying this leadership role and setting a global standard for lifelong learning in the 21st century.

11.3 Credit transfer agreements across institutions and sectors

Hong Kong possesses a unique confluence of factors that can establish it as a global leader in continuous education, with credit transfer systems forming the backbone of this ambition. The strategic blueprint for this leadership role is fundamentally anchored in the Qualifications Framework (QF) and the government-endorsed policy of Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT). Since the Education Bureau's introduction of a formal CAT policy in 2014, the objective has been to create seamless learning pathways that recognize all forms of learning—academic, vocational, and continuing education—thereby minimizing redundancy and supporting the territory's drive towards lifelong learning. This foundational framework positions Hong Kong in line with advanced economies, ensuring that learners can accumulate credits from diverse experiences and transfer them across institutions, which is the cornerstone of a flexible and responsive continuous education ecosystem. This policy direction is not merely an administrative procedure; it is a strategic tool to enhance the competitiveness of the workforce and make effective use of educational resources across the entire sector.

The practical implementation of cross-sectoral credit transfer is already evident in Hong Kong's institutional policies, demonstrating a mature and operational system. The Vocational Training Council (VTC), a key provider of vocational and professional education, operates a comprehensive CAT policy across all its QF-recognized programmes. This policy allows for credit transfer based on formal academic achievements, provided that the modules are identical in credit value, learning outcomes, and assessment standards. Crucially, it also permits module exemptions based on relevant experience, provided the learning outcomes can be documented and assessed. This approach bridges the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical, experiential learning, a critical feature for a modern workforce. By setting clear ceilings on the amount of credit that can be transferred, institutions like VTC ensure academic integrity while offering the flexibility that adult learners and working professionals require to upskill efficiently.

Moreover, pioneering institutions are actively using credit transfer to create innovative pathways that link professional development with advanced degrees, a model that solidifies Hong Kong's global leadership. The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) Business School, through its Asia-Pacific Institute of Business, has introduced a series of professional certificate programmes (micro-credentials) designed as "career accelerators". A defining feature of these programmes is the guaranteed articulation pathway to master's degrees. Credits earned from these micro-credentials, which are registered at QF Level 6, can be seamlessly transferred to relevant MSc programmes, such as those in Financial Technology or Sustainable Global Business. This creates a powerful "stackable" learning model where professionals can immediately apply short, focused courses to their careers while simultaneously building credits toward a higher degree. This strategy not only meets the immediate upskilling needs of the workforce but also encourages long-term academic advancement, aligning perfectly with the strategic vision of institutions like CUHK's School of Continuing and Professional Studies to be a global leader in enriching lives through lifelong learning.

To fully realize the vision of becoming a global leader, Hong Kong's strategic blueprint must focus on deepening and broadening these credit transfer mechanisms. The future lies in moving beyond bilateral agreements towards a more integrated, multi-sectoral credit exchange framework. This involves standardizing credit recognition not just between universities, but across the entire spectrum of education providers, including professional bodies and international partners. As outlined in university strategic plans, this requires expanding networks to collaborate with industries in Hong Kong and globally, and redefining the role of continuing education to serve evolving societal needs, such as an ageing population and second-career trends. By continuously enhancing the transparency and interoperability of its CAT systems, and by fostering a culture where lifelong learning is a seamless journey rather than a series of disconnected steps, Hong Kong can leverage its robust QF to create a dynamic education hub that attracts learners from around the world, thereby fulfilling its aspiration to nurture global leaders through continuous education.

11.4 Industry co-designed micro-credentials for just-in-time upskilling

Hong Kong stands at a pivotal moment in its economic evolution, where the dual forces of technological advancement and structural transformation are reshaping industries at an unprecedented pace. The government's decisive move to reform the Employees Retraining Board (ERB) marks a fundamental shift from traditional qualification-based learning to a dynamic, skills-based framework designed to empower the entire workforce. This strategic pivot acknowledges that global competitiveness no longer hinges solely on initial academic achievements but on a population's capacity for continuous, agile upskilling. By lifting educational prerequisites for training and broadening the ERB's mandate to serve the whole workforce, Hong Kong is dismantling barriers to lifelong learning and laying the foundational infrastructure for a truly adaptable talent ecosystem. This systemic overhaul, coupled with a comprehensive three-year reform roadmap, signals a long-term commitment to embedding a culture of perpetual skill development, directly aligning human capital vitality with the evolving demands of the economy.

At the heart of this strategic blueprint is the widespread adoption of industry co-designed micro-credentials, which are rapidly emerging as the primary vehicle for just-in-time upskilling. Leading academic institutions are already pioneering this approach, with examples like the Chinese University of Hong Kong Business School launching micro-certificate programmes in high-demand areas such as Business AI, Fintech, and ESG reporting. These are not merely academic exercises; they are intensive, skills-focused programmes co-created with industry insight to ensure immediate workplace applicability, allowing professionals to gain cutting-edge knowledge in flexible formats that fit their schedules. Crucially, these credentials are designed for portability and progression, holding recognised standing within the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF Level 6) and offering clear articulation pathways into master's degree programmes, thus bridging the gap between immediate skill needs and long-term career advancement. This model is further strengthened by innovative partnerships, such as the collaboration between the Education University of Hong Kong and Cyberport to develop micro-credentials that blend academic research with real-world tech applications, directly feeding into the innovation and technology ecosystem.

To ensure this system remains responsive and impactful, a robust governance mechanism centred on deep industry collaboration is being established. The ERB is strengthening its industry consultative processes to precisely identify critical skill gaps and inform the development of a targeted training framework. This collaborative intelligence guides higher education institutions and training providers in developing curricula that are directly relevant to sectors from finance to technology. Stakeholders like the Federation of Trade Unions have emphasised that for micro-credentials to be truly effective, they must be meticulously aligned with actual industry requirements and provide clear pathways for skills progression, ensuring that upskilling translates directly into enhanced employability and career mobility. By fostering this continuous dialogue between educators, employers, and employees, Hong Kong is not just reacting to skill shortages but proactively engineering a workforce capable of leading the industries of tomorrow, solidifying its status as a global leader in continuous education.

11.5 Case examples: CUHK Business School's Professional Certificate Programmes

Hong Kong is strategically positioning itself as a global leader in continuing education by implementing a comprehensive blueprint that emphasizes flexibility, industry integration, and international collaboration. A prime example of this strategy in action is the CUHK Business School's launch of its Professional Certificate Programmes (Micro-credentials) through the Asia-Pacific Institute of Business (APIB). These programmes are designed as "career accelerators" for young professionals, offering concentrated learning in high-demand areas such as Innovation Leadership, Technology Applications for Financial Services, Sustainability and ESG Reporting, Family Business and Wealth Succession, and Artificial Intelligence for Business. The structure directly addresses the modern need for upskilling by providing modular options that can be completed in six to 36 months, bridging the gap between undergraduate and postgraduate education while establishing a pathway for long-term career development.

A key element of Hong Kong's strategic blueprint, as demonstrated by the CUHK case, is the integration of academic rigour with practical, industry-relevant outcomes. The CUHK Professional Certificate Programmes are listed at Level 6 of the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF), ensuring their academic credibility. More innovatively, they offer a unique value proposition by allowing seamless credit transfer towards CUHK Business School's master's degree programmes, effectively creating a stackable learning pathway where professionals can earn up to six credits towards advanced degrees like the MSc in Financial Technology or MSc in Sustainable Global Business. This model aligns with the broader vision of institutions like the CUHK School of Continuing and Professional Sciences, which aims to be a global leader by keeping pace with learners' needs and collaborating with industries to ensure training remains relevant.

Furthermore, Hong Kong's pathway to leadership involves creating a robust ecosystem that connects education with global industry standards and government policy. This is evident in partnerships such as the one between CUHK Business School and Microsoft Hong Kong, where the school became the first business school in the city to serve as an authorized testing centre for industry-recognized Microsoft Certifications. This initiative equips students with in-demand digital skills in AI, big data, and cloud computing, directly responding to the government's push to cultivate tech-savvy talent and bridge the innovation skills gap highlighted in the 2025 Policy Address. This collaborative approach ensures that continuing education not only imparts knowledge but also provides verifiable, globally recognized credentials that enhance graduates' competitiveness in the global market.

CHAPTER 12: SECTORAL PRIORITIES – WHERE HONG KONG MUST LEAD

Hong Kong possesses a unique confluence of historical advantages, institutional depth, and strategic positioning that can propel it to the forefront of global continuing education. To transcend its current role as a regional provider and achieve genuine world leadership, the city must deliberately concentrate its efforts on specific, high-impact sectors. This strategic blueprint identifies the critical areas where Hong Kong must not only compete but lead, leveraging its distinct strengths to shape the future of lifelong learning on a global scale.

1. The Global Standard-Setter for Qualifications Frameworks

Hong Kong's primary pathway to global leadership lies in the further evolution and internationalization of its already robust Qualifications Framework (QF). Unlike many fragmented systems, the QF provides a comprehensive and standardized structure that integrates academic, vocational, and continuing education, ensuring quality and facilitating clear progression pathways. To achieve global leadership, Hong Kong must move beyond national application and champion the QF as an internationally recognized standard. This involves actively pursuing mutual recognition agreements with counterpart frameworks in other countries and economic blocs. By doing so, a continuing education certificate earned in Hong Kong would be seamlessly understood and accepted in major economies around the world. This would transform Hong Kong into a global clearinghouse for professional credentials, where learners can acquire qualifications with unequivocal international portability. Furthermore, by deepening the involvement of Industry Training Advisory Committees in defining precise vocational competencies, Hong Kong can set the global benchmark for how industry needs are translated directly into accredited curricula, ensuring that its continuing education offerings are perpetually aligned with the evolving demands of the international economy.

2. The Architect of Seamless Lifelong Learning Pathways

Global leadership demands that Hong Kong dismantle the remaining barriers between traditional higher education and continuing education, creating a truly integrated lifelong learning ecosystem. A world-leading system normalizes the concept that education is not a finite "front-end investment" but a continuous cycle of upskilling and reskilling throughout a career. Hong Kong is already witnessing the emergence of this model, with innovative programmes like CUHK Business School's Professional Certificate Programmes (Micro-credentials) offering credits that can be seamlessly transferred towards a master's degree. The strategic imperative is to make this the rule, not the exception.

Hong Kong must lead in developing a sophisticated credit accumulation and transfer (CAT) system that operates fluidly across all its tertiary institutions and professional bodies. This would position the city as a leader in creating flexible, stackable learning pathways, where individuals can build recognized qualifications over time, from micro-credentials to doctorates, perfectly pacing their learning with their career trajectory. This approach directly addresses the global need for a workforce that can rapidly adapt to economic restructuring, a challenge Hong Kong has navigated before and can now provide a model for others to follow.

3. The Nexus for High-Impact, Technology-Driven Professional Credentials

To secure its leadership position, Hong Kong must become the undisputed Asian nexus for professional credentials in high-growth, technology-enabled sectors. The city's strategic location within the Greater Bay Area and its established status as a financial and business hub provide a natural advantage. However, leadership requires aggressive and focused development. This means concentrating efforts on creating and hosting the world's premier continuing education programmes in fields where global talent shortages are most acute. As outlined by the HK Talent Engage initiative, Hong Kong already offers a diverse array of popular professional qualifications, from the globally recognized CFA and FRM in finance to emerging certifications in digital assets (CDAA) and agile management (Scrum Master). To lead, Hong Kong must go further by fostering public-private partnerships to co-create curricula with industry giants, particularly in areas like Artificial Intelligence for Business, Sustainability and ESG Reporting, and advanced Financial Technology. By integrating these programmes with the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF) at high levels, and ensuring they articulate with postgraduate degrees, Hong Kong can create a self-reinforcing ecosystem that attracts top-tier international talent for upskilling, thereby cementing its reputation as the go-to destination for career advancement in the digital age.

4. The Pioneer in Gerontechnology and Lifelong Wellness Education

A truly forward-thinking blueprint for global leadership must address the demographic realities of the 21st century. With an ageing population, Hong Kong has both a societal need and a strategic opportunity to become the world leader in continuing education for seniors. This goes far beyond traditional leisure courses. Hong Kong's universities of applied sciences and continuing education units must pioneer curricula in "gerontechnology"—educating engineers, designers, and care workers on developing and deploying technology to support healthy and independent ageing. Furthermore, Hong Kong can lead in creating accredited programmes for "second career" training, enabling older adults to contribute their experience to new fields like consultancy, mentorship, and community leadership. By linking these educational initiatives with the government's broader health and medical innovation goals, including the development of the Chinese medicine sector and the regulation of medical devices, Hong Kong can create a unique and globally relevant portfolio of programmes. This would position the city not only as a hub for finance and business but as a centre of excellence for the multi-billion-dollar "silver economy," exporting both trained professionals and innovative models for lifelong wellness education.

12.1 Financial Services: Fintech, green finance, risk management, compliance

To solidify its status as a premier international financial centre, Hong Kong must pioneer a strategic blueprint for continuous education that is as dynamic and sophisticated as the markets it serves. The city's future leadership hinges not on resting on its laurels, but on cultivating a workforce capable of navigating and shaping the next wave of global finance. This requires a paradigm shift from traditional, periodic professional development to an ecosystem of lifelong, agile learning. By forging deep alliances between industry, academia, and regulatory bodies, Hong Kong can create specialized curricula that are immediately applicable and 前瞻性. This ecosystem must be underpinned by a robust framework of micro-credentials and stackable certifications, allowing professionals to continuously update their skills in response to real-time market disruptions and opportunities. Such an approach will transform Hong Kong from a hub of financial activity into a hub of financial intelligence, attracting global talent and setting the benchmark for professional excellence.

Within the dynamic realm of Fintech, Hong Kong's continuous education strategy must focus on bridging the gap between abstract technological potential and tangible financial application. The goal is not to produce legions of coders, but to cultivate "bilingual" professionals who are fluent in both finance and technology. This involves developing advanced programs in areas like decentralized finance (DeFi), blockchain architecture, and embedded finance, ensuring that practitioners understand not just the mechanics, but the strategic implications and risks. Continuous education must also address the ethical dimensions of AI-driven financial advice and algorithmic trading, fostering a culture of responsible innovation. By partnering with leading technology firms and startups, Hong Kong can offer hands-on, project-based learning experiences that keep its workforce at the cutting edge, ensuring the city remains the laboratory where the future of finance is prototyped and perfected.

In the critical arena of green finance, Hong Kong has the opportunity to establish itself as the undisputed global authority. This requires a comprehensive continuous education framework that moves beyond introductory concepts to cover the full spectrum of sustainable finance. Professionals need deep expertise in complex areas such as transition finance, the verification of green credentials, and the intricate modeling of climate-related financial risks. Strategic partnerships with international standard-setters like the International Sustainability Standards Board (ISSB) are vital to ensure Hong Kong's curriculum is globally aligned and respected. Furthermore, training must extend to the real economy, helping corporates understand how to structure green bonds and navigate the evolving landscape of ESG disclosure. By becoming the centre of excellence for green finance education, Hong Kong can position itself as the indispensable intermediary for capital flows driving the global transition to a low-carbon economy.

The foundational pillars of risk management and compliance are undergoing a profound transformation, and Hong Kong's continuous education must lead the charge. The future of these disciplines lies in proactive, technology-enabled resilience, moving beyond reactive rule-following. Continuous learning programs must integrate advanced financial engineering for complex risk modeling, while simultaneously leveraging RegTech solutions for real-time monitoring and predictive analytics. However, technology alone is insufficient. As regulatory landscapes grow more intricate and interconnected, professionals require a nuanced understanding of cross-jurisdictional legal frameworks and the ethical application of technology in surveillance and oversight. A strategic blueprint for Hong Kong must therefore cultivate "hybrid" risk and compliance officers who possess the quantitative skills to build models, the technological acumen to deploy RegTech, and the wisdom to interpret findings within a complex ethical and legal context, thereby safeguarding the integrity and stability of the entire financial system.

Ultimately, the successful execution of this strategic blueprint for continuous education will cement Hong Kong's global leadership for generations. It is an investment in the city's most valuable asset: its people. By creating a culture where lifelong learning is not just encouraged but seamlessly integrated into the professional fabric, Hong Kong will build a workforce that is uniquely resilient, adaptable, and innovative. This world-class talent pool will, in turn, attract the world's most forward-thinking financial institutions, creating a virtuous cycle of investment, innovation, and influence. This strategic focus on human capital development ensures that Hong Kong's competitive advantage is not merely based on its current infrastructure or market access, but on its enduring capacity to think ahead, solve complex problems, and set the global standard for excellence in financial services.

12.2 Technology: AI, data analytics, cybersecurity, blockchain applications

The cornerstone of this strategic blueprint is the establishment of dedicated, technology-focused institutions that serve as hubs for innovation and lifelong learning. A prime exemplar is the Hong Kong Institute of Information Technology (HKIIT), established under the Vocational Training Council (VTC). As a dedicated provider of IT and technology programmes, HKIIT consolidates resources and expertise to offer a clear pathway for both secondary school leavers and working professionals. Its curriculum is intentionally designed to cover high-demand areas such as artificial intelligence (AI), cybersecurity, blockchain, data science, and Web 3.0. Crucially, HKIIT's strategic intent extends beyond traditional students; its "SkillsUp" in-service training service directly addresses the urgent need for reskilling and upskilling the current workforce in partnership with industry. This model, aiming to become a leading IT training hub in the Greater Bay Area, demonstrates a forward-thinking approach to creating a sustainable and advanced talent ecosystem.

To achieve global leadership, Hong Kong's continuous education must fully embrace a "skills-based" framework, moving away from purely academic or time-bound credentials. The strategic overhaul of the Employees Retraining Board (ERB) exemplifies this shift. By removing the educational threshold for trainees and focusing on identifying skills gaps through enhanced industry consultation, the ERB is pioneering a system where training is directly tied to economic needs. A critical component of this strategy is the widespread adoption of micro-certificates and digitally verifiable credentials. These allow learners to acquire specific, industry-recognised competencies flexibly, stacking them over time to build comprehensive qualifications. When underpinned by blockchain technology, these micro-credentials become secure, portable, and instantly verifiable by employers across the globe, thereby enhancing learner mobility and trust in Hong Kong's certification system.

The integration of AI and immersive data analytics is set to revolutionise the delivery and personalisation of continuous education. The strategic use of data analytics can enable a more responsive and impactful education system. As highlighted in recent research, understanding the diverse needs of a multicultural student body is crucial. Factors like cultural compatibility and the perceived complexity of technology significantly influence ICT adoption in Hong Kong's educational settings. By analysing learner data, institutions can personalise learning pathways, provide targeted support such as bilingual Chinese-English interfaces to reduce complexity, and tailor interventions to different adopter categories, from tech-savvy "innovators" to more hesitant learners. Furthermore, innovative projects like the cross-institutional metaverse platform spearheaded by HSUHK showcase the potential of immersive learning. By utilising VR and AI to simulate complex scenarios in logistics, journalism, and cultural heritage, this platform provides problem-based, collaborative learning experiences that were previously impossible, setting a new standard for engaging and effective professional training.

Finally, the pathway to global leadership is paved through deep synergy between academia and industry. HKIIT's ambition to partner with around 100 enterprises, including strategic collaborations with global technology leaders like IBM, is a model for this approach. Through such partnerships, learners gain access to over 1,000 up-to-date online courses on platforms like IBM SkillsBuild, covering everything from AI fundamentals to design thinking. This ensures that curricula remain aligned with the rapid pace of technological change, such as in AI and data science, where traditional updates may lag. Moreover, initiatives like the "VPAS" scheme, which allows non-local graduates of VTC's higher diploma programmes to stay and work in Hong Kong, are vital for attracting global talent and enriching the local skills pool. This ecosystem approach, integrating policy support, institutional agility, industry input, and a blend of local and international talent, provides a comprehensive blueprint for Hong Kong to secure its status as a world leader in technology-driven continuous education.

12.3 Healthcare and Biotech: Ageing population, medical devices, digital health

Addressing the Ageing Population through Specialised Education

Hong Kong's rapidly ageing population is the most immediate driver for innovation in continuous education. With projections indicating that by 2039, nearly one-third of its populace will be aged 65 or above, the demand for healthcare services and specialised professionals is set to skyrocket. This demographic shift necessitates a move beyond traditional geriatric care towards a model of "healthy longevity," which combines preventive medicine, precision diagnostics, and chronic disease management. The response from educational institutions must be multi-pronged, creating pathways for professionals to gain expertise in these emerging fields.

We are already seeing the foundational elements of this strategy. At the research level, institutions like PolyU are pioneering work in areas crucial for an ageing population, such as using 3D ultrasound imaging for sarcopenia (muscle loss) assessment and developing AI-assisted tools for diagnosing dysphagia (swallowing difficulties). These innovations directly address common age-related conditions and create a demand for professionals trained in their application. This research is complemented by clinical applications, as seen in the collaboration between Gleneagles Hospital Hong Kong and Quantum Life to launch an AI-powered longevity programme. This service integrates whole genome sequencing and epigenetic data to provide personalised health insights, representing a tangible step towards preventive medicine for an ageing society. For continuous education to be effective, it must translate such cutting-edge research and clinical practice into teachable modules for the existing workforce.

The educational infrastructure to support this is already taking shape. The Hong Kong Metropolitan University's Higher Diploma in Health and Molecular Testing, for instance, is a direct response to the need for laboratory professionals skilled in next-generation sequencing and molecular diagnostics—techniques central to the longevity programmes emerging in the city. Furthermore, PolyU's School of Nursing, as a WHO Collaborating Centre for Community Health Services, is actively training students and community personnel in the "Integrated Care for Older People" (ICOPE) model, a global framework for healthy ageing. This hands-on training in community-based care models is as critical as high-tech laboratory skills, ensuring a holistic approach to the ageing challenge.

Fostering Innovation in Medical Devices and Gerontechnology

The medical devices sector, particularly when focused on gerontechnology (technology for the elderly), presents a vibrant frontier for Hong Kong's continuous education strategy. The city is fostering a dynamic startup ecosystem, as highlighted by Cyberport's showcase of 11 health-tech and gerontech startups at the Asia Summit on Global Health 2025. These ventures are developing a wide array of innovations, from portable imaging devices and non-invasive diagnostic tools to AI-powered psychotherapy systems and smart anti-infection mobile toilets for the mobility-challenged. This burgeoning industry creates an urgent and ongoing need for a workforce that is not only proficient in biomedical engineering but also in commercialisation, regulatory affairs, and user-centred design for an older demographic.

Continuous education programmes must, therefore, bridge the gap between engineering and clinical application. PolyU's Master of Science in Health Informatics is a prime example, offering core subjects like "Concepts and Technological Applications of Smart Hospitals" and electives such as "Digital Design and Manufacturing for Biomedical Engineering" and "Wearable Technology for Digital Health". Such programmes equip engineers and IT professionals with the healthcare context necessary to design effective medical devices, while also enabling healthcare providers to understand and implement new technologies. The curriculum must also address the practical challenges of the "AI+养老" (AI + elderly care) market, such as the high costs and lack of user-friendly design that currently limit the adoption of gerontech products. Courses that combine engineering, business, and social science perspectives can cultivate innovators who can create affordable, practical, and dignified solutions for senior citizens, thereby accelerating the commercialisation and impact of Hong Kong's med-tech sector.

Building a Digital Health Ecosystem with Cross-Sectoral Expertise

Digital health, encompassing telemedicine, AI diagnostics, health informatics, and virtual care, is the third pillar of Hong Kong's strategic blueprint. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the adoption of these technologies, but their long-term integration into the healthcare system requires a professionally trained workforce. The goal is to create a seamless healthcare experience where data flows securely between patients, providers, and insurers, improving outcomes and efficiency. As one healthcare IT manager noted, the aim is to "perfectly integrate IT with the medical field through electronic health records and clinic automation".

This vision demands a new breed of professionals who are bilingual in healthcare and technology. PolyU's trailblazing MSc in Health Informatics, the first of its kind in Hong Kong, is explicitly designed for this purpose, attracting students from both health-related and IT/engineering backgrounds. Its curriculum, covering everything from electronic patient records and machine learning to telemedicine and virtual reality in healthcare, provides the comprehensive skill set needed to lead digital transformation. The demand for such skills is echoed across the continuing education landscape.

Institutions like HKU SPACE offer programmes in bioinformatics and Medical Science Liaison (MSL) skills, preparing professionals to interpret complex clinical data and engage with key opinion leaders in the pharmaceutical and healthcare sectors. Similarly, short professional courses, such as the PEAK module on "HealthTech and MedTech," focus on practical applications for specific industries like insurance, exploring how AI, telehealth, and wearables are creating new opportunities and reshaping risk assessment. Even medical education itself is being transformed, with the Hong Kong Academy of Medicine offering workshops on XR/VR technologies to train the next generation of doctors in immersive, simulation-based learning.

By strategically integrating these three areas—ageing, medical devices, and digital health—Hong Kong's continuous education sector can create a virtuous cycle. Research drives innovation, which creates demand for new skills. Educational institutions respond with cutting-edge programmes, producing a talent pool that fuels the startup ecosystem and attracts global companies. This, in turn, generates more research and development, solidifying Hong Kong's position as a global leader in healthcare and biotechnology.

12.4 Sustainability and ESG: Reporting standards, carbon trading, circular economy

Hong Kong is uniquely positioned to transform its traditional strength as a regional education hub into a global centre for continuous education, with a specific and immediate focus on sustainability and ESG. This strategic blueprint leverages the city's financial infrastructure, its role as a connector between East and West, and its proactive adoption of global standards to create a comprehensive ecosystem for lifelong learning in the green economy.

The cornerstone of Hong Kong's leadership in sustainability education is its pioneering role in mandating and teaching global reporting standards. As one of the first jurisdictions to fully adopt the International Sustainability Standards Board (ISSB) framework, Hong Kong has created an urgent and high-value demand for a skilled workforce. The government's roadmap requires large publicly accountable entities to comply with the new Hong Kong Sustainability Disclosure Standards (HKFRS S1 and S2) by 2028, creating a defined pathway for upskilling. This regulatory push is being met by a responsive educational sector. Institutions like CUHK Business School have launched professional certificate programmes in "Sustainability and ESG Reporting," designed as micro-credentials that offer flexible, practical training in building ESG reports and analysing complex sustainability challenges. This creates a powerful synergy: the government sets the standard, creating a compliance-driven market, and educational institutions provide the continuous learning pathways for professionals to meet that demand, effectively future-proofing the city's workforce. This focus on practical, industry-relevant skills is echoed in other executive education programmes, such as CityU's Global EMBA, which includes electives on climate change and corporate strategy, indicating a systemic integration of ESG into high-level business education.

Beyond reporting, Hong Kong is establishing itself as a vital hub for the practical application of ESG principles through carbon trading and green finance, necessitating a new breed of continuously educated experts. The Hong Kong Exchanges and Clearing (HKEX) has launched Core Climate, a global carbon trading platform, and is actively working to integrate it with the Greater Bay Area (GBA) market. This involves complex initiatives such as testing跨境交易结算 (cross-border settlement) paths and collaborating with mainland exchanges on carbon credit standards and methodologies. For Hong Kong to lead, its continuous education programmes must evolve beyond theory. They need to produce practitioners who understand the nuances of voluntary carbon markets, the legal frameworks for cross-border trading, and the financial instruments that underpin green investments. The strategic blueprint for continuous education, therefore, must include deep collaboration with exchanges and financial regulators to create certification programmes for carbon traders, auditors, and green financial analysts, ensuring the talent pool is ready to support the infrastructure being built today.

Finally, Hong Kong's strategic blueprint for continuous education in sustainability is grounded in the tangible challenges and opportunities of the circular economy, as outlined in the Hong Kong Resource Circulation Blueprint 2035. The government's ambitious goal to achieve "零廢堆填" (zero landfilling) and increase the waste回收率 (recovery rate) to 55% is not just a waste management target; it is a catalyst for innovation and skill development. The recent successful reduction in municipal solid waste and increase in回收率 demonstrate progress, but the transition requires a workforce skilled in new technologies and system design. Continuous education programmes must, therefore, pivot to cover areas like circular supply chain management, eco-design for recyclability, and the operation of advanced "轉廢為能" (waste-to-energy) facilities. The development of producer responsibility schemes for products like electric vehicle batteries and plastic beverages creates a demand for experts in logistics, material science, and regulatory compliance. By aligning its continuous education curriculum with the lifecycle of these new policies and infrastructural projects—from the launch of纸浆生产设施 (pulp production facilities) to battery recycling plants—Hong Kong can create a highly specialised and practical field of study that turns environmental challenges into economic opportunities, solidifying its global leadership in the process.

12.5 Professional Services: Legal, accounting, engineering, architecture

Hong Kong's ambition to become a global leader in continuous education, particularly within the critical professional services sector, is not merely an aspiration but a strategic necessity. To solidify its status as a premier international financial and legal hub, a comprehensive blueprint must be executed, focusing on structured upskilling, international integration, and the adoption of cutting-edge technologies. This strategy requires a coordinated effort across the four key pillars of legal, accounting, engineering, and architecture, leveraging Hong Kong's unique advantages under "one country, two systems." The following sections detail the specific pathways for each profession to achieve this global leadership.

Legal Services: Positioning Hong Kong as a Global Centre for International Law and Dispute Resolution

For the legal profession, the pathway to global leadership in continuous education is centred on cementing Hong Kong's status as a hub for international law and dispute resolution. A landmark strategic move is the establishment of the Hong Kong International Legal Talent Training College, an initiative spearheaded by the Department of Justice. This dedicated institution is designed to offer specialised, high-level training to legal practitioners from around the world, focusing on areas where Hong Kong has a distinct competitive advantage. These include expertise under the common law system, proficiency in handling cross-border commercial transactions, and mastery of international arbitration and mediation practices. This initiative goes beyond basic legal education to create a concentrated environment for professional development, attracting talent from the region and beyond. This is further reinforced by Hong Kong's role as the future seat of the International Organization for the International Mediation Institute, a prestigious position that will generate demand for local expertise in mediation and drive the need for advanced, specialised training programmes in this field. The government is actively supporting this by cultivating a robust mediation culture and developing a robust regulatory framework. To ensure its legal professionals remain at the forefront, continuous education must also heavily integrate LawTech. By promoting the adoption of artificial intelligence for legal research, blockchain for smart contracts, and other technological advancements, Hong Kong can build a generation of "future-ready" lawyers capable of operating with greater efficiency and insight in an increasingly digital global landscape.

Accounting: Cultivating Versatile Experts for a Complex Global Financial Landscape

The accounting profession's journey to global leadership is being charted through a strategic emphasis on cross-disciplinary expertise and international mobility. A key pillar of this strategy is the development of talent equipped to handle the convergence of financial and non-financial reporting, with sustainability at the forefront. The Hong Kong Institute of Certified Public Accountants (HKICPA) has proactively launched the HKICPA Certificate in Sustainability Reporting, a specialised qualification designed to build capacity in this rapidly growing area. As global standards like the IFRS Sustainability Disclosure Standards are adopted in Hong Kong, professionals with this verified expertise will be in high demand, positioning the local profession as a leader in this critical field. Complementing this is the focus on creating versatile talent through accessible entry points like the HKICPA Certificate in Accounting and Business (CAB) , which helps cultivate a broad-based understanding of business and finance, essential for modern strategic advisors. Furthermore, Hong Kong's leadership is underpinned by the deep international integration of its accounting profession. As a founding member of the Global Accounting Alliance, the HKICPA maintains reciprocal recognition agreements with 11 leading Mainland and overseas bodies, including CPA Australia and the ACCA. This global network not only facilitates professional mobility for Hong Kong accountants but also serves as a powerful draw for international talent seeking a globally recognised qualification. Continuous education programmes must therefore be designed to align with these international standards and foster the mobility that cements Hong Kong's role as a global talent hub.

Engineering: Building a Future-Ready Workforce through Structured and Holistic Development

For engineers, the blueprint for global leadership lies in establishing a structured, multi-faceted, and forward-looking continuous education framework. A prime example of this is the establishment of the Engineers' Academy by the Civil Engineering and Development Department. This academy represents a systematic approach to professional development, moving beyond ad-hoc training to offer a curated pathway for career-long learning. Its comprehensive offerings include foundational induction programmes for new engineers, specialised technical lectures on topics like contract management and innovative construction methods, and even overseas sponsorship schemes for advanced master's degrees to foster global perspectives. At a more strategic level, the academy introduces flagship programmes such as Master Lectures delivered by industry leaders and an National Affairs Study Programme conducted in Beijing, which provides invaluable insights into national development strategies and infrastructure policies.

This holistic approach ensures that engineers are not only technically proficient but also possess the strategic acumen to lead major projects. The work of the Architectural Services Department further exemplifies this trend, offering its staff an extensive range of over 650 training courses annually, with a strong emphasis on digital skills like Building Information Modelling (BIM) and innovative construction techniques such as Modular Integrated Construction (MiC). By investing so heavily in the continuous upskilling of its engineering workforce, Hong Kong is building a corps of professionals capable of delivering the complex, sustainable, and technologically advanced infrastructure projects that define a world-class city.

Architecture: Fostering Innovation and Sustainability through Cross-Disciplinary Learning

In the field of architecture, achieving global leadership in continuous education requires a focus on interdisciplinary collaboration, sustainability, and knowledge management. The Architectural Services Department's training strategy provides a robust model, highlighting the importance of creating a culture where continuous learning is embedded in the organisational DNA. Their approach goes beyond traditional classroom settings, utilising a variety of platforms including workshops, seminars, overseas visits, and online learning to cater to diverse learning needs. A critical component is the use of a centralised knowledge management portal to facilitate the sharing of expertise and best practices across project teams. For instance, creating and disseminating thematic videos on construction processes ensures that valuable on-site knowledge is captured and shared, elevating the competency of the entire workforce. Given architecture's central role in addressing climate change, sustainability is a core theme. Programmes that help architects integrate sustainable design principles, understand green building materials, and navigate new environmental regulations are essential. This also involves close collaboration with local and Mainland academic and professional bodies to ensure that training remains at the cutting edge of sustainable and smart building design. By fostering a culture of shared knowledge and cross-disciplinary innovation, Hong Kong can nurture architects who are not just designers, but visionary leaders capable of creating the resilient, low-carbon, and human-centric built environments of the future.

12.6 Creative Industries and Cultural Economy

Hong Kong stands at a pivotal moment to assert global leadership in continuous education by strategically integrating its unique cultural assets with a forward-looking, innovation-driven educational framework. The government's recently unveiled Blueprint for Arts and Creative Industries Development provides the foundational policy architecture, setting ambitious targets to expand the sector's value added to over HK\$200 billion and increase industry employment to more than 260,000 by 2034. This strategic vision, aimed at establishing Hong Kong as a "East-meets-West centre for international cultural exchange," necessitates a parallel revolution in continuous education—one that cultivates a workforce capable of driving this economic and cultural transformation. The pathway to leadership, therefore, lies in creating a synergistic relationship where educational reforms directly fuel the creative economy, and the dynamism of the cultural sector, in turn, informs and enriches lifelong learning paradigms.

A cornerstone of this blueprint is the comprehensive overhaul of the talent cultivation ecosystem to bridge the gap between academic training and the practical demands of the creative industries. Current educational models are often critiqued for being overly academic and insufficiently aligned with the needs of content-driven creative production. To counter this, Hong Kong is implementing supply-side educational reforms, including raising the admission ceiling for non-local students in self-financing bachelor's programmes to 50% and designating institutions as "universities of applied sciences" to create clear pathways for vocational and hands-on learning. This shift is critical for the cultural economy, which requires a diverse pool of professionals—from curators and art restorers to film producers and arts tech specialists. Initiatives like the establishment of a "West Kowloon Cultural District Academy" to train arts administrators and the expansion of art restoration training networks exemplify this targeted approach to building professional capacity. By fostering deeper academia-industry integration, these programmes aim to transform graduates into market-ready innovators who can navigate the complexities of the global cultural market.

To achieve global leadership, Hong Kong's continuous education strategy must also proactively address the specific infrastructural and market needs of its creative sectors. The government's plan to position Hong Kong as a premier high-end艺术品交易枢纽 (art trading hub) is a prime example, requiring a workforce with expertise in art valuation, logistics, finance, and law. Continuous education programmes, therefore, must evolve to offer specialised training in these niche areas, supporting the development of the "Airport City Art Ecosphere" and attracting international galleries and auction houses. Furthermore, the strategic focus on cultural intellectual property (IP) development, with a target to propel over 30 cultural IP projects in the next five years, calls for educational modules that teach creators how to commercialise their work, protect their rights, and navigate cross-border markets. This involves fostering an entrepreneurial mindset among artists and designers, encouraging them to see their creations not just as art, but as valuable assets capable of generating long-term economic and cultural returns.

However, realising this ambitious vision requires confronting deep-seated structural challenges within Hong Kong's educational philosophy. A critical analysis reveals a systemic bias towards academic achievement and international university rankings, which often marginalises practice-based arts education and the "master-apprentice" tradition that once fuelled Hong Kong's creative industries. Unlike mainland China or South Korea, which have robust, tiered systems for nurturing artistic talent from a young age, Hong Kong lacks a comprehensive "talent selection" mechanism for the arts, where admission to top programmes is determined more by academic scores than by artistic potential. To build a truly vibrant cultural economy, continuous education must begin to remedy this by creating more respected pathways for vocational and artistic training, elevating institutions and programmes that are led by practitioners rather than solely by academics. This includes integrating foundational arts education into the broader lifelong learning framework, ensuring that continuous education is not merely an "interest group" activity but a legitimate mode of developing high-level creative proficiency.

Ultimately, Hong Kong's strategic blueprint for global leadership in continuous education hinges on its ability to weave together policy ambition, infrastructural development, and a fundamental cultural shift in how it values and cultivates creative talent. By leveraging its unique position as a confluence of Eastern and Western cultures, bolstered by substantial government funding initiatives like the CreateSmart Initiative and the Film Development Fund, Hong Kong is well-positioned to become a dynamic hub for cultural and creative excellence. The path forward involves not just producing more graduates, but strategically cultivating a diverse, resilient, and entrepreneurial workforce capable of creating authentic content, harnessing new technologies like AI to enhance artistic expression, and propelling Hong Kong's cultural products onto the global stage. This integrated approach—where education policy, industrial strategy, and cultural development are inextricably linked—will define Hong Kong's success in becoming a true global leader in continuous education for the 21st-century creative economy.

CHAPTER 13: PEDAGOGICAL INNOVATION FOR ADULT LEARNERS

Hong Kong's education sector has been actively developing innovative pedagogical approaches to meet the diverse needs of adult learners, positioning the city as a potential global leader in continuous education. These innovations span flexible credentialing, experiential learning, and technology-enhanced instruction.

A cornerstone of Hong Kong's pedagogical innovation is the strategic implementation of micro-credential programmes and flexible learning pathways. Recognizing that working professionals require concise, applicable upskilling, institutions like CUHK Business School have introduced professional certificate programmes that function as "career accelerators." These micro-credentials are designed with a practical approach, shorter duration, and modular options, allowing learners to complete them at their own pace within six to 36 months. A key differentiator is the seamless credit transfer mechanism linked to the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF), where credits earned can be applied toward master's degree programmes. This creates a bridge between non-degree continuing education and formal postgraduate qualifications, effectively breaking down traditional barriers between academic and professional learning. This systemic integration, described by scholars as a "two families under one roof" model, allows universities to offer both elite degree programmes and market-oriented, modular continuing education, fostering a comprehensive lifelong learning ecosystem.

Another significant pedagogical advancement is the adoption of experiential and service-learning models that cater specifically to adult learners' needs for relevance and social contribution. Institutions are moving beyond traditional classroom instruction to embed real-world impact into the curriculum. For instance, a case study from the College of Professional and Continuing Education at Hong Kong Polytechnic University explored the intersection of computer-assisted language learning (CALL) and service-learning, where language educators designed subjects serving underprivileged children and adults. This approach not only enhances language skills through digital technologies but also fosters inclusivity and social responsibility. Similarly, initiatives like the "Infusion Active Ageing Education" project demonstrate intergenerational learning, where university students and older adults co-participate in activities. This model equips younger learners with age-friendly capacities while empowering older participants, addressing the needs of an ageing population—a key strategic focus for Hong Kong's continuing education providers. These methods align with the strategic goals of institutions like CUHK's School of Continuing and Professional Studies, which aims to serve the ageing population and those seeking second careers.

Furthermore, Hong Kong is leveraging technology and cross-disciplinary collaboration to enhance adult learning experiences. The integration of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) and digital tools into pedagogy is a growing trend, as seen in language service-learning projects that utilize podcasting and AI to create more inclusive and effective learning environments. The broader push to establish Hong Kong as an international education hub includes a focus on technology innovation and deeper academia-industry integration. This involves aligning curricula with market needs, particularly in high-demand fields like artificial intelligence, financial technology, and sustainability, as seen in CUHK's micro-credentials covering AI for Business, ESG Reporting, and Fintech applications. Global education summits hosted in Hong Kong further emphasize the importance of international collaboration to adapt to technological revolutions, ensuring that local pedagogical innovations are informed by and contribute to global best practices in adult and continuing education.

13.1 Andragogy: Principles of effective adult education

Hong Kong stands at a pivotal moment in its quest to become a global leader in continuous education, with its institutions strategically positioning themselves at the forefront of lifelong learning innovation. The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region has embarked on sweeping reforms to transform its world-class university system into a direct pipeline for high-tech professionals, addressing an urgent need to bridge the innovation talent gap that threatens its competitive edge on the international stage. Central to this transformation is the establishment of specialized units such as CUHK Business School's Asia-Pacific Institute of Business (APIB), which has introduced a premier series of Professional Certificate Programmes featuring micro-credentials that offer more diverse and flexible continuing professional education for executives. Similarly, HKU SPACE has established the Academy for Leadership Enhancement and Development (LEAD), which delivers high-quality and innovative programmes to senior executives and corporations across the Chinese Mainland and Hong Kong, covering cutting-edge areas including artificial intelligence, financial technology, innovation management, and culture and arts. These institutional initiatives are complemented by government-level policy reforms, including the dramatic expansion of nonlocal student intake to 50 percent of funded local student places and the designation of applied sciences universities to create clearer pathways for hands-on, vocational learning that aligns education more closely with market needs.

The strategic blueprint for Hong Kong's continuous education leadership is characterized by a sophisticated understanding that adult learners require fundamentally different approaches than traditional pedagogical models provide. The vision articulated by institutions such as CUHK's School of Continuing and Professional Studies explicitly aims to enrich lives and transform lifelong learning by keeping pace with learners' needs, seeking input from stakeholders to keep up with changing learning demands, and maintaining passion for innovative leadership. This vision translates into concrete strategies that recognize the diverse needs of Hong Kong's adult population, including young adults, working professionals, and the ageing population, while expanding networks to collaborate with industries both locally and globally for training and continuing education development. The micro-credential programmes emerging from Hong Kong's institutions exemplify this strategic direction, featuring practical approaches, shorter durations, and more affordable tuition fees that bridge the gap between undergraduate and postgraduate education while establishing solid gateways to long-term career development. These programmes demonstrate a remarkable flexibility, offering modular options that can be completed in six months or up to thirty-six months, entirely at the student's own pace and schedule, with an emphasis on practical and industry-relevant skills that empower students to thrive in their careers.

The theoretical foundation underpinning Hong Kong's continuous education transformation rests firmly on the principles of andragogy, the comprehensive framework for adult learning first popularized by Malcolm Knowles and now recognized as a central pillar of education for adults across numerous fields of practice. Andragogy represents a significant departure from traditional pedagogical approaches, offering a pragmatic framework based on six core assumptions about adult learners that have proven remarkably influential in fields ranging from human resource development to online learning. The first assumption addresses adults' need to know why they must learn something before undertaking to learn it, recognizing that adults require clear justification for their educational investments. The second assumption concerns the learner's self-concept, acknowledging that adults have a deep psychological need to be responsible for their own decisions and actively resent situations where others impose their will upon them. This principle manifests in practice through mechanisms that allow learners to co-create their learning paths, choose electives aligned with their interests, and set personal learning goals within flexible frameworks that accommodate their schedules.

The remaining andragogical principles provide a complete picture of adult learning dynamics that Hong Kong's institutions are increasingly incorporating into their programme designs. The role of learners' experiences stands as perhaps the most distinctive feature, recognizing that adults bring both greater volume and different quality of experience to educational activities, meaning that the richest resources for learning often reside in the adult learners themselves. This principle encourages peer learning, case studies, and group discussions where team members share their own experiences and best practices. The readiness to learn assumption posits that adults become ready to learn those things they need to know to cope effectively with real-life situations, making timing and relevance crucial factors in adult education. Similarly, adults' orientation to learning is life-centered, task-centered, or problem-centered rather than subject-centered, meaning they prefer content directly relevant to their roles and challenges rather than generic courses. Finally, while adults respond to external motivators such as better jobs and promotions, the most potent motivators are internal pressures including the desire for increased job satisfaction, self-esteem, and quality of life. These principles collectively inform the andragogical process model, which emphasizes creating relaxed, trusting climates; establishing mechanisms for mutual planning; diagnosing needs through mutual assessment; setting objectives through negotiation; designing learning plans sequenced by readiness; employing experiential techniques; and conducting evaluation through mutual re-diagnosis of needs.

The practical application of andragogical principles in Hong Kong's continuous education landscape is increasingly evident in the design and delivery of programmes targeting adult professionals. The Professional Certificate Programmes offered by CUHK Business School exemplify this approach through their emphasis on practical and industry-relevant skills that empower students with required knowledge and tools, directly addressing adults' need to know and their orientation toward problem-centered learning. These programmes cover trending business areas including Innovation Leadership, Technology Applications for Financial Services, Sustainability and ESG Reporting, Family Business and Wealth Succession, and Artificial Intelligence for Business, demonstrating responsiveness to adults' readiness to learn subjects with immediate relevance to their work.

The integration of learning contracts, which Knowles described as the single most potent tool in adult education, is reflected in the flexible modular options that allow learners to progress at their own pace while maintaining clear objectives and pathways toward master's degree programmes through seamless credit transfer mechanisms. Similarly, HKU SPACE's LEAD Academy implements andragogical principles through its study tours that combine face-to-face sharing with overseas scholars and experts from institutions such as Harvard, MIT, Stanford, and Cambridge, enabling participants to build global networks and gain insights from practical experiences that leverage their existing knowledge while expanding their horizons.

The alignment between Hong Kong's strategic educational vision and andragogical principles becomes particularly evident in the emphasis on creating supportive learning climates and facilitating mutual planning between learners and institutions. The vision statements from leading institutions explicitly acknowledge the need to help learners, including young adults, working adults, and the ageing population, advance their learning, career, and life goals through education that remains responsive to changing demands. This learner-centered orientation mirrors the andragogical emphasis on creating relaxed, trusting, mutually respectful environments where learners feel supported in their educational journeys. The strategic expansion of networks to collaborate with industries in Hong Kong and globally for training and continuing education development reflects the andragogical recognition that adult learning must be situated within real-world contexts and address authentic problems drawn from professional practice. Furthermore, the government's push for greater academia-industry integration, including partnerships with leading enterprises in Guangdong province and the integration of commercial projects into degree programs, demonstrates a sophisticated understanding that adults learn best when educational content directly addresses the challenges they face in their professional lives.

The future trajectory of Hong Kong's continuous education sector will likely see even deeper integration of andragogical principles as institutions respond to emerging demographic and technological trends. The strategic plans of leading institutions explicitly mention the need to experience changes and challenges by keeping abreast of trends and meeting the needs of adult learners of today and tomorrow, especially the ageing population. This focus on the ageing demographic reflects the andragogical recognition that adults at different life stages have varying readiness to learn and different experiential resources to draw upon. The adoption of innovative pedagogies and eLearning approaches to nurture students as lifelong learners and global leaders aligns with contemporary research showing that andragogy provides a useful model for designing instruction in emergent areas and modalities, including online learning environments. As Hong Kong continues to position itself as a global education hub, the principles of andragogy will remain essential for designing programmes that respect adult learners' autonomy, leverage their experience, and provide the problem-centered, immediately relevant learning experiences that motivate meaningful engagement and lasting behavioral change. The city's success in this endeavor will depend on its ability to maintain the delicate balance between institutional vision and learner autonomy, creating educational experiences that are both strategically aligned with economic needs and personally meaningful to the adult learners they serve.

13.2 Hybrid and flexible learning models

Hong Kong stands at a pivotal moment to assert its global leadership in continuous education, leveraging its unique East-meets-West positioning and established educational infrastructure. The pathway to this leadership role requires a strategic blueprint built upon hybrid and flexible learning models that respond to the evolving demands of professionals across Asia and beyond. This strategic vision encompasses the integration of micro-credentials with traditional degrees, the development of sophisticated blended learning pedagogies, the expansion of cross-border educational services, and the cultivation of industry-aligned curricula that address emerging global challenges.

The Foundation: Micro-Credentials and Stackable Qualifications

A cornerstone of Hong Kong's strategic blueprint is the systematic development of micro-credentials and stackable qualifications that bridge the gap between professional practice and academic advancement. The Asia-Pacific Institute of Business (APIB) at CUHK Business School has pioneered this approach with its Professional Certificate Programmes, offering modular options that can be completed within six to thirty-six months at the student's own pace. These programmes, listed at Level 6 of the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework, cover trending business domains including Innovation Leadership, Technology Applications for Financial Services, Sustainability and ESG Reporting, and Artificial Intelligence for Business. The strategic innovation lies in their design as "career accelerators" that provide seamless credit transfer pathways into master's degree programmes, allowing learners to accumulate credentials over time while immediately applying practical skills in their workplaces. This stackable approach fundamentally reimagines the relationship between continuing education and formal degree structures, creating what researchers have identified as a "two families under one roof" system where modularised non-degree programmes coexist with traditional academic offerings, enabling learning outcomes and credits to articulate upward through qualification levels.

Hybrid Learning Architectures for Professional Development

The strategic blueprint must centre on sophisticated hybrid learning architectures that authentically mirror the contemporary professional environment while maintaining academic rigour. The University of the Built Environment's blended learning model, specifically tailored for Hong Kong's career-focused professionals, demonstrates how flexibility can be combined with meaningful face-to-face engagement. Students access core content online at times accommodating their work commitments, while in-person sessions at the Hong Kong learning hub provide opportunities to discuss ideas, analyse local case studies, and learn directly from tutors and industry practitioners who understand the regional context.

This approach recognises that "flexibility alone is not enough" – professionals require relevance, quality, and connection alongside convenience. Similarly, City University of Hong Kong's revamped Global EMBA curriculum, launching in 2025, integrates online foundation courses such as Corporate Finance and Marketing Strategy with immersive experiential learning opportunities, including field studies and business simulations that develop problem-solving capabilities in real-world contexts. The Hong Kong Institute of Technology's innovative online hybrid mode for higher diplomas further extends this flexibility to sub-degree level, enabling students to allocate online and face-to-face components according to their circumstances, with professional subjects delivered through a mix of approximately 58-69% online instruction while maintaining face-to-face tutorials and on-campus assessments for quality assurance.

Cross-Border Educational Integration and Regional Leadership

Hong Kong's strategic pathway to global leadership inherently involves deepening educational integration with the Chinese Mainland and positioning the city as the premier gateway for international executive education in Asia. HKU SPACE's Academy for Leadership Enhancement and Development (LEAD) exemplifies this cross-border strategy through its tailored programmes for enterprises and government departments across the Chinese Mainland, covering artificial intelligence, financial technology, innovation management, and arts and culture. The Academy has organised thematic seminars for Shenzhen government officials focusing on Greater Bay Area integration, finance, law, and urban management, combined with visits to Hong Kong institutions including the Technology Transfer Office at the University of Hong Kong, the Hong Kong Monetary Authority, and the Airport Authority. These programmes represent the first outbound educational initiatives for Shenzhen officials following border clearance, demonstrating Hong Kong's unique value in providing international perspectives within a familiar regional context. City University of Hong Kong's Business Innovation Education initiative articulates this vision explicitly, aiming to build "the preeminent center for global executive education in Asia" by leveraging Hong Kong's location, East-meets-West orientation, and deep industry engagement. The initiative brings together prominent business figures and academics to develop transformative leaders who can navigate across boundaries and cultures, integrating insights from both Eastern and Western management traditions.

Quality Assurance and Professional Recognition Frameworks

A robust quality assurance framework aligned with professional recognition pathways is essential to Hong Kong's leadership ambitions in continuous education. The School of Continuing and Professional Studies (CUSCS) at CUHK demonstrates how programme design can simultaneously satisfy academic standards, professional accreditation requirements, and government funding eligibility. Its ESG Series course in Sustainable Banking and Finance, delivered through ten hours of video lectures and five hours of real-time online tutorials, provides multiple credentialling outcomes: a Certificate of Completion from CUSCS, membership in the International Chamber of Sustainable Development, the "Certified ESG Planner CEP®" designation, exemptions for the Enhanced Competency Framework accreditation, and professional qualification recognition from the Hong Kong Monetary Authority.

Participants can also access up to HK\$10,000 fee reimbursement through government pilot schemes, illustrating how quality assurance, professional recognition, and public funding can synergistically support lifelong learning. The Hong Kong Institute of Technology's higher diplomas similarly embed professional body recognition, with the 工商管理高級文憑 accredited by both ACCA and HKICPA, while health programmes incorporate Social Welfare Department-approved 保健員訓練. These examples demonstrate that Hong Kong's leadership position depends upon maintaining rigorous standards while creating multiple pathways for learners to gain recognised credentials that enhance their professional mobility and career advancement.

Future Directions: Sustainability, Technology, and Lifelong Learning Ecosystems

Looking forward, Hong Kong's strategic blueprint must embrace sustainability and technology as organising principles for continuous education while developing comprehensive lifelong learning ecosystems that serve diverse learner populations. The emergence of programmes addressing environmental, social, and governance challenges reflects this orientation, with CUHK Business School's Sustainability and ESG Reporting certificate focusing on strategic sustainability management with global perspectives, enabling participants to build ESG reports and analyse complex sustainability challenges. CityU's Global EMBA offers electives in Climate Change, Corporate Strategy, and Asset Management alongside courses on Crypto Assets, ensuring executives develop competence in both sustainability transitions and digital innovation. The CUSCS Professional Certificate Programme in Gerontechnological Applications for Smart Ageing, developed in collaboration with the Jockey Club "age at home" initiative, illustrates how continuing education can address demographic challenges while providing professional development for healthcare practitioners and caregivers. These programmes earn Continuing Nursing Education points for registered nurses, demonstrating integration with professional development requirements across sectors. Hong Kong's strategic advantage lies in its capacity to connect these specialised offerings into a coherent lifelong learning ecosystem, where learners can navigate between short courses, professional certificates, higher diplomas, and postgraduate degrees through transparent credit transfer and recognition arrangements. The city's institutions increasingly offer "hybrid mode" seminars and "blended learning models" that combine Hong Kong-based and Chinese Mainland learning experiences, while maintaining international connections through study tours to Harvard, MIT, Stanford, and Cambridge in collaboration with HKU SPACE. This multi-layered connectivity – between academic levels, professional sectors, geographical regions, and pedagogical modes – constitutes the foundational architecture for Hong Kong's emergence as a genuine global leader in continuous education.

13.3 Workplace-integrated learning and apprenticeships

Hong Kong is strategically positioning itself as a global leader in continuous education by developing a comprehensive ecosystem that deeply integrates workplace learning with academic advancement. This strategic blueprint moves beyond traditional education models to create a flexible, responsive, and highly practical framework for lifelong learning.

The Foundation: Earn and Learn and Apprenticeship Models

At the core of Hong Kong's strategy is a robust system of workplace-integrated learning, exemplified by pioneering "earn and learn" models that have matured over the past decade. The Vocational Training Council's (VTC) "Earn and Learn Scheme," celebrating its 10th anniversary, stands as a flagship initiative that has successfully nurtured over 10,000 young people across 12 industries in partnership with approximately 700 employers. This tripartite collaboration between VTC, the government, and industry integrates classroom theory with structured on-the-job training, allowing participants to earn a stable income and government 津貼 while gaining recognized qualifications. The model's success is evident in its expansion and the recent collaboration between VTC and the Hong Kong Productivity Council, which will provide additional apprenticeships and work opportunities in high-demand fields like engineering, information technology, and health and life sciences, thereby embedding students in authentic work environments. This "邊學邊做" (learning by doing) approach is widely recognized as a key advantage of vocational and professional education and training, effectively preparing a new generation of "菁英練習生" (elite trainees) who are job-ready upon graduation.

Scaling Workplace-Integrated Learning in Higher Education

The blueprint extends deeply into the university sector, with institutions creating structured, credit-bearing programs that fuse academic study with extended professional experience. The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) has pioneered the "在學·在職計劃" (Co-op@CUHK), a program akin to a formal apprenticeship that provides students with a six-to-eight-month paid internship, allowing them to integrate into a company as a full-fledged employee after completing preparatory courses. This model, now also adopted by the University of Hong Kong and the University of Science and Technology, ensures that students gain 深度 (in-depth) experience, resulting in high graduate retention rates for participating companies. Complementing this, CUHK Business School's Asia-Pacific Institute of Business has introduced a series of micro-credential courses designed as "career accelerators." These programs offer flexible, stackable credentials that bridge the gap between undergraduate and postgraduate studies, with the unique advantage of allowing credits to be transferred directly into master's degree programs, thus creating seamless pathways for continuous professional development.

Bridging Academia and Industry through Strategic Partnerships

A key strategic pillar is the formalized collaboration between academic institutions, industry bodies, and government to co-create talent development programs. The Hong Kong Science and Technology Parks Corporation (HKSTP) and the Federation of Hong Kong Industries (FHKI) have jointly run the "Innopreneur Experience Journey" for four consecutive years, a program that offers students an "Executive Shadowing" experience in cutting-edge technology enterprises. This initiative directly connects students with industry leaders, providing them with hands-on experience in fields like biotechnology and Industry 4.0, thereby inspiring them to pursue careers in innovation and technology. Furthermore, the government's recent push to align education with market needs includes the formal designation of "universities of applied sciences," creating a clear and respected pathway for hands-on, vocational learning at the degree level and fostering partnerships with leading enterprises in the Greater Bay Area.

Strategic Vision and Future Trajectory

Hong Kong's ambition to become a global leader is underpinned by a clear strategic vision from its educational institutions and government, focusing on innovation and responsiveness to societal trends. The Chinese University of Hong Kong's School of Continuing and Professional Sciences (SCS) explicitly articulates a vision "to be a global leader in university continuing education" by keeping pace with learners' needs and collaborating with industries both locally and globally. This forward-looking approach is echoed in CUHK's broader strategic plan, which aims to nurture "lifelong learners as global leaders" by adopting innovative pedagogies and serving the community's needs for continuous development. The government's recent policy address reinforces this by launching a multi-pronged strategy to transform the university system into a pipeline for high-tech professionals, including raising non-local student quotas to attract global talent and establishing a task force to promote Hong Kong as a "world-class campus". Institutions like HKU SPACE are already operationalizing this vision through initiatives like the LEAD Academy, which delivers high-quality programs to executives and corporations from the mainland and beyond, fostering cross-border collaboration and global perspectives. Through this comprehensive and multi-layered approach, Hong Kong is building an agile and integrated continuous education ecosystem poised for global leadership.

13.4 Experiential learning: Simulations, field studies, and real-world projects

Hong Kong's ascent as a global leader in continuous education is being significantly propelled by a strategic embrace of experiential learning, which moves beyond traditional didactic methods to foster deeper, more practical engagement. A key pillar of this strategy is the deployment of advanced simulations, particularly those leveraging virtual and augmented reality. The Hang Seng University of Hong Kong (HSUHK), in collaboration with multiple institutions, has pioneered a metaverse platform for problem-based collaborative learning, allowing students to immerse themselves in scenarios such as air cargo operations at DHL Express, the reconstruction of the historic Haw Par Mansion, and live news reporting from a simulated earthquake zone. This initiative, supported by the Education Bureau, underscores a city-wide commitment to technology-enhanced education. Similarly, the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST) has developed an AI-enabled augmented reality platform for virtual wind tunnel experiments, which not only won a Silver Award at the QS Reimagine Education Awards 2025 but also democratizes access to specialized equipment and provides personalized AI tutoring. This trend extends across disciplines, from Hong Kong Baptist University's VR simulations for Traditional Chinese Medicine diagnostics, which have been shown to significantly improve students' clinical knowledge and self-learning abilities, to the Vocational Training Council's development of an immersive medical training system for CPR and acupuncture using spatial computing on the Apple Vision Pro. These sophisticated simulations provide safe, repeatable, and scalable environments for mastering complex professional skills, directly enhancing the global competitiveness of the workforce.

Complementing high-tech simulations, field studies remain a cornerstone of Hong Kong's experiential learning blueprint, connecting classroom theories to tangible, real-world contexts and reinforcing the mission of continuing education to serve community needs. A prime example is the collaboration between City University of Hong Kong (CityUHK) and the Wu Zhi Qiao Charitable Foundation, which brought environmental policy students to the rural village of Lai Chi Wo. There, students conducted evidence-based research on sustainability challenges, transforming theoretical knowledge into localized, actionable solutions and receiving direct feedback from foundation representatives. This approach aligns with broader efforts to nurture global citizenship through experiential learning, as seen in English language curricula that incorporate field trips and global dialogues to develop students' cognitive, socio-emotional, and behavioral competencies. The Hong Kong Polytechnic University (PolyU) further exemplifies this integration by combining field studies with immersive technology; students in an urbanism course co-create content on cultural heritage and urban landmarks, which is then showcased in an X-Reality hybrid classroom, deepening their understanding of sustainable development goals through a blend of physical observation and digital creation. Such field-based initiatives ensure that lifelong learning is not an abstract concept but a grounded practice of community engagement and global awareness.

Finally, the strategic blueprint heavily emphasizes real-world projects that necessitate direct collaboration between academia and industry, thereby fostering innovation and ensuring curriculum relevance. The metaverse project at HSUHK was developed in direct partnership with major logistics firms like DHL Express and Kerry Logistics, as well as the Aw Boon Haw Foundation, ensuring that the simulated challenges reflect authentic industry operations and standards. This model of co-creation bridges the gap between educational training and professional application, preparing students for immediate contributions in their fields. Furthermore, the Vocational Training Council's medical training system includes a remote consultation feature developed with North District Hospital, enabling real-time virtual collaboration between trainees and hospital clinicians. These projects not only provide students with invaluable hands-on experience but also position Hong Kong's educational institutions as active contributors to industry advancement and community solutions. The establishment of student-staff partnerships at PolyU, where learners collaboratively design course content and teaching materials for their peers, further exemplifies an innovative pedagogical approach that empowers students as co-creators of knowledge. Through these multifaceted real-world projects, Hong Kong is cultivating a cadre of lifelong learners equipped with the critical thinking, problem-solving, and collaborative skills required to lead and innovate on a global stage.

13.5 Personalised learning pathways through AI and adaptive technologies

Hong Kong stands at a pivotal moment in its quest to become a global leader in continuous education. The convergence of proactive government policy, institutional reform, and pioneering educational technology has created a fertile ground for a strategic transformation. By placing AI-driven personalized learning at the heart of this evolution, Hong Kong can not only address its own dynamic economic needs but also establish a blueprint for lifelong learning in the 21st century. This strategic blueprint is built upon four key pillars: a renewed policy framework, the technological architecture for personalization, a robust data infrastructure, and a commitment to global quality standards.

The Strategic Imperative and Policy Foundation

Hong Kong's pathway to global leadership in continuous education is fundamentally driven by its unique economic imperatives as a small, open, and highly competitive economy. Historically, its success has hinged on the ability to adapt rapidly to global market shifts, a process that inherently accelerates the obsolescence of existing skills and demands constant workforce reinvention. The government has recognised that meeting this challenge requires a paradigm shift from piecemeal training to a coherent, technology-enabled strategy. The 2026-27 Financial Budget articulates this vision, establishing a comprehensive policy foundation. Central to this is the elevation of the Employees Retraining Board to the "Skills Upgrading Bureau," a rebranding that signifies a move beyond unemployment relief to a proactive, skills-centric mission for all aspiring workers. This is complemented by the formation of the "AI+ and Industry Development Strategy Committee," chaired by the Financial Secretary, to steer the integration of AI across industries and education. Crucially, the government is backing this vision with significant resources, including a HK\$20 billion allocation from the Quality Education Fund for digital education in schools and a dedicated HK\$50 million fund for public AI literacy programmes. These moves signal a top-down commitment to creating an agile, future-ready workforce, positioning AI not as an optional extra but as the core engine of economic and educational transformation.

Architecting Personalised Learning Pathways through AI and Adaptive Technologies

The cornerstone of Hong Kong's strategic blueprint is the move from a standardised, "one-size-fits-all" training model to dynamic, personalised learning pathways powered by AI. This vision is already taking shape through concrete reforms at institutional levels. The Employees Retraining Board is pioneering a shift from a "trade-based" to a "skills-based" training framework, deconstructing traditional courses into flexible learning modules that learners can combine to meet their specific needs. This structural reform creates the perfect environment for AI-driven personalisation. AI can act as the intelligent engine that guides a learner through this modular landscape, recommending a unique combination of data analytics, AI fundamentals, and ESG principles based on their career goals and existing competencies.

On the ground, Hong Kong's EdTech sector is already demonstrating the power of this approach. For instance, the Hong Kong Education University's Jockey Club Primary School has collaborated with a local tech firm to develop a bespoke AI system that enables "layered teaching." In its classrooms, AI acts as a real-time teaching assistant, analysing student responses to instantly generate easier or more challenging problems, ensuring each child is working at their optimal level. Similarly, Turtle Learn is deploying AI-powered platforms to make Chinese language learning accessible and adaptive for special educational needs and non-Chinese speaking students, addressing diverse learning barriers through interactive and personalised content. These examples from both K-12 and specialist segments provide a practical proof-of-concept for how adaptive technologies can cater to individual learning styles, a principle that is directly scalable to the entire landscape of continuing professional education for adults.

Building the Data and Digital Infrastructure for an AI-Powered Ecosystem

For personalised learning to function at a systemic level, a robust and intelligent data infrastructure is essential. Hong Kong is strategically investing in this backbone, ensuring that its continuous education sector is powered by world-class resources and data-driven insights. The government is aggressively expanding the city's raw computing power, with plans for the Sandy Ridge data campus to add 250,000 square metres of space, providing the necessary "compute" to run sophisticated AI models for education and training at scale. Beyond hardware, the strategy involves the intelligent use of data to anticipate future needs. The Employees Retraining Board is planning to establish a dedicated "Skills Research Division," hiring data experts to analyse market trends and predict future skills gaps, allowing the city to develop curricula proactively rather than reactively. This is complemented by initiatives like the Census and Statistics Department's new online data portal, which will feature natural language queries, making complex socio-economic data accessible for analysis by educators, employers, and policymakers to better align training with economic realities. This combination of immense computing power and predictive analytics creates a smart ecosystem where learning pathways are not only personalised for the individual but are also dynamically aligned with the future needs of the entire economy.

Ensuring Global Leadership through Quality Assurance and International Alignment

Technology provides the tools and infrastructure, but global leadership is secured through rigorous quality assurance and alignment with international standards. Hong Kong's blueprint recognises that for its continuous education to be recognised as world-class, its credentials must be portable and its quality benchmarks globally understood. The government's push for AI literacy across the board—from primary schools to universities and the civil service—is a foundational step in creating a population that is not just educated by AI but also educated about AI, understanding its responsible use and limitations. This is crucial for maintaining the integrity of AI-assisted learning.

Furthermore, as the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) evolves, there is a clear opportunity to embed international best practices into the accreditation of these new, tech-driven programmes. Bodies like the International Accreditors for Continuing Education and Training (IACET) provide a gold standard for quality in lifelong learning, emphasising measurable results, innovation, and inclusivity. By encouraging local providers to seek such international accreditation, Hong Kong can signal to the world that its AI-personalised pathways meet the highest global standards for learning excellence. This commitment to quality, combined with its unique role as a bilingual bridge between East and West, will enable Hong Kong to position itself not just as a consumer of global EdTech, but as a trusted exporter of high-quality, accredited, and personalised continuous education for the Asian region and beyond.

CHAPTER 14: THE DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION OF CONTINUOUS EDUCATION

Hong Kong is strategically positioning itself as a global leader in continuous education through a comprehensive, government-led digital transformation. This ambitious blueprint leverages significant public investment, cross-sector collaboration, and innovative pedagogical models to create an agile and future-ready lifelong learning ecosystem. The following paragraphs detail the key pillars of this transformation, from foundational policy and infrastructure to the advanced application of artificial intelligence and the establishment of flexible, quality-assured learning pathways.

Strategic Policy and Investment: The Foundation for Digital Leadership

The cornerstone of Hong Kong's ascent in digital continuous education is a robust and forward-thinking policy framework driven by the HKSAR government. Recognising digital education as crucial for competitiveness and talent cultivation, the government established the Digital Education Strategy Development Steering Committee in early 2025. This high-level committee has defined four key focus areas: enhancing digital literacy, strengthening teacher training, optimising digital infrastructure, and fostering cross-sector collaboration. This strategic vision is backed by unprecedented financial commitment. The 2026/27 财政预算案 (Budget) earmarked a record HK\$102.3 billion for education, with significant portions dedicated to digital initiatives. Crucially, the 优质教育基金 (Quality Education Fund) has reserved HK\$2 billion to propel digital education in primary and secondary schools, creating a strong pipeline of digitally literate citizens and future lifelong learners. Furthermore, a dedicated HK\$50 million fund has been allocated to organise AI application courses and competitions for students, youth, and the public, democratising access to cutting-edge skills. This top-down approach, integrating digital education into the national "15th Five-Year Plan" objectives, provides the systemic stability and resources necessary for long-term global leadership.

Building an AI-Powered and Data-Driven Learning Ecosystem

A core element of the transformation is the deep integration of artificial intelligence into the fabric of teaching and learning. The government has launched a suite of targeted funding schemes to accelerate this. Following the successful "AI for Science" trial, which saw over 220 secondary schools each receive HK\$100,000 to pilot AI-assisted teaching, the new "智啟學教" (AI Empowerment in Education) scheme provides a more substantial HK\$500,000 grant to each eligible public-sector school. As of early 2026, over 790 schools—more than 80% of all publicly-funded schools—have applied, demonstrating the sector's readiness. The programme's success hinges on a strategic approach of "識用、慎用、厚積待用" (wise application, prudent use, and accumulation for the future).

Schools are encouraged to leverage existing commercial AI platforms for tasks like personalised assessment and feedback, rather than developing tools from scratch, ensuring cost-effectiveness. This creates a powerful data loop: as teachers and students interact with these platforms, they generate valuable pedagogical data. Visionary educators propose using this data to eventually train a Hong Kong-specific educational large language model (LLM) , aligned with local curricula and linguistic contexts, safeguarding data sovereignty and creating a unique, world-class educational asset.

Fostering Innovation through Collaboration and Infrastructure

The digital transformation is not occurring in isolation but is fuelled by dynamic partnerships between government, academia, industry, and schools. A prime example is the inaugural "数字教育周" (Digital Education Week) in mid-2025, co-organised by the Education Bureau and Hong Kong Education City. This large-scale event attracted over 24,000 attendees and featured international summits on AI in education, fostering professional exchange and showcasing local innovations. Such platforms are crucial for sharing best practices and building a cohesive digital education community. Higher education institutions are also key partners. For instance, universities are establishing future learning institutes in collaboration with the school sector, while mainland tech giants are setting up advisory councils in Hong Kong to pool local research expertise with government efforts. On the infrastructure front, bodies like the Vocational Training Council (VTC) are deploying advanced tools such as the "Virtual Tutor"—a 24/7 AI-powered learning support platform that allows students to learn at their own pace, with costs now negligible per query. This blend of collaborative events and tangible digital tools is creating a rich, supportive environment for lifelong learning.

Innovating Continuous Education: Micro-Credentials and Agile Pathways

To meet the demands of a rapidly evolving job market, Hong Kong's continuous education sector is moving beyond traditional qualifications towards more agile and industry-aligned offerings. Leading institutions are pioneering micro-credential programmes designed for working professionals. For example, CUHK Business School's Asia-Pacific Institute of Business now offers a series of Professional Certificate Programmes in high-demand fields like Innovation Leadership, AI for Business, and Sustainability and ESG Reporting. These programmes are tailored for "career accelerators," offering concentrated, flexible learning that can be completed in six to 36 months at the student's own pace. A key innovation is their integration with the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF). These certificates are listed at QF Level 6, and the credits earned are transferable towards master's degrees, creating a seamless and stackable pathway from continuous education to advanced academic qualifications. This model values practical, industry-relevant skills while providing a solid gateway to long-term career development.

Cultivating Global Perspectives and Serving Societal Needs

Hong Kong's strategy extends beyond its borders, leveraging its unique position as an international city to provide global learning experiences. Institutions like HKU SPACE, through its LEAD Academy, are actively fostering cross-border educational exchanges. They organise tailored study tours for mainland Chinese officials and corporate executives to Hong Kong and prestigious overseas universities like Harvard and Cambridge, and conversely, arrange tours for Hong Kong government staff to the Greater Bay Area to learn about national development strategies. This two-way exchange builds global networks and deepens mutual understanding. Concurrently, the digital transformation is being harnessed to address local societal needs, particularly an ageing population. The VTC will launch new higher diplomas in the 2026/27 academic year focused on the silver economy, incorporating training on IoT, AI, and gerontechnology to equip graduates for careers in social services and health care for the elderly. This demonstrates a mature understanding that global leadership in continuous education is not just about adopting the latest technology, but about applying it strategically to enhance both global competitiveness and community well-being.

14.1 Building Hong Kong's digital learning infrastructure

Hong Kong stands at a pivotal moment to assert its global leadership in continuous education, a vision that demands a comprehensive and forward-thinking strategic blueprint. The foundation of this ambition rests upon a robust digital learning infrastructure, which is rapidly taking shape through significant government initiatives and institutional innovation. The government has laid the groundwork with the establishment of the Digital Education Strategy Development Steering Committee, which has charted a course focusing on enhancing student digital literacy, empowering educators through professional training, optimizing digital infrastructure, and fostering cross-sectoral collaborations. This policy-driven approach is complemented by substantial financial commitments, most notably the allocation of HK\$2 billion from the Quality Education Fund to propel digital education in primary and secondary schools, alongside specific grants like the "Igniting Intellectual Enlightenment" scheme, which provides HK\$500,000 to each eligible school to integrate AI into their core curriculum. This top-down strategic support creates a fertile ground for a seamless lifelong learning ecosystem that extends from the classroom to the boardroom.

Building a world-class digital learning infrastructure also requires a fundamental reimagining of pedagogical models and the creation of flexible, skills-based pathways for adult learners. The strategic blueprint must prioritize the development of micro-credentialling and "skills-based" training frameworks, as championed by the Employees Retraining Board (ERB), which is actively reforming its approach to offer industry-recognized, bite-sized learning opportunities for the entire workforce. This aligns with the global trend towards continuous professional development, where institutions like Ivey Business School Asia are already offering targeted executive programs in Hong Kong focused on strategic leadership and building AI-ready organizations. The University of Hong Kong's School of Professional and Continuing Education (HKU SPACE) further exemplifies this evolution by pioneering hybrid models, such as the "Cloud Classroom + Practice Base" in partnership with Mainland institutions, which blends theoretical e-learning with hands-on practical experience. These diverse initiatives illustrate a dynamic ecosystem where traditional boundaries are dissolving in favor of more accessible and applied learning experiences.

Furthermore, Hong Kong's pathway to global leadership is inextricably linked to its role as a regional education hub and its deepening integration with the Greater Bay Area (GBA). A key element of the blueprint involves leveraging digital infrastructure to transcend geographical limits and foster cross-border educational synergy. HKU SPACE's strategic focus on "Contributing to Human Capital Development in the GBA" is a prime example, manifested through initiatives like its new learning centre in Sheung Shui. Strategically located near border checkpoints, this facility serves as a physical nexus for learners from the Mainland, complemented by a dedicated online platform that provides seamless access to programme information for GBA residents. This physical-digital integration is crucial for attracting talent and positioning Hong Kong as the go-to provider of high-quality continuous education for the region.

The government's concurrent investment in developing the Northern Metropolis as a university town and expanding medical education infrastructure further solidifies this commitment, creating new physical and collaborative spaces for academic growth and knowledge exchange that will radiate influence throughout the GBA and beyond. To ensure the long-term success and credibility of this strategic blueprint, a robust quality assurance mechanism and a culture of collaborative innovation are paramount. The Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) and the established Qualifications Framework (QF) provide a solid foundation, offering a seven-level structure that lends credibility and transferability to both academic and vocational qualifications. This framework is essential for standardizing the emerging array of digital and micro-credentials, ensuring they hold genuine value for learners and employers. The strategic blueprint also calls for a concerted effort to synthesize learnings from the field. As schools and institutions experiment with AI and new pedagogies—such as using AI-powered smart blackboards for special educational needs students—it is vital to collect data, share best practices, and avoid fragmented efforts. This could even evolve into a visionary project to develop a territory-wide, discipline-specific educational large language model (LLM) trained on local curricula and data, safeguarding data sovereignty while creating a uniquely powerful tool for personalized, high-quality continuous education for all of Hong Kong's citizens.

14.2 Open educational resources and massive open online courses

Hong Kong's emergence as a global leader in continuing education is underpinned by a robust strategic framework that integrates government policy, institutional vision, and innovative digital delivery. The foundation of this leadership is the Qualifications Framework (QF), established by the Education Bureau, which provides a standardized and internationally aligned system covering academic, vocational, and continuing education. This framework promotes the core concept of "Lifelong and Self-directed learning," allowing individuals to chart flexible education pathways at any career stage. Hong Kong's universities have embedded this vision into their core strategies. For instance, The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) explicitly aims to nurture "lifelong learners as global leaders," with goals to enhance graduates' global competitiveness and serve community needs for continuing development. Similarly, the School of Continuing and Professional Studies (CUSCS) at CUHK articulates a clear vision "to be a global leader in university continuing education," focusing on innovative leadership and adapting to changing learner demographics, such as the ageing population. These strategic commitments from both government and institutions create a fertile ground for Hong Kong to lead in the field.

Central to this strategic blueprint is the widespread adoption and innovation in Open Educational Resources (OER) and Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), which democratize access to high-quality education. Hong Kong institutions have been pioneers in this space, with CUHK launching a series of MOOCs as early as 2013, bringing multidisciplinary courses to a global audience for free. These courses span diverse fields, from "Everyday Chinese Medicine" to "Discrete Optimization" and "Doing Business in China," showcasing Hong Kong's unique strengths as a bridge between East and West. Other universities have followed suit; for example, the Hang Seng University of Hong Kong (HSUHK) operates dedicated MOOC platforms like HSUHK OpenLearn and a public-facing site, offering courses in areas such as English grammar and Japanese, thereby supporting both personal enrichment and professional development. The School of Continuing and Professional Studies (CUSCS) further emphasizes flexibility by offering programmes in face-to-face, online, or hybrid modes, allowing students to learn "anytime and anywhere". This commitment to diverse, accessible learning formats is a key driver in making continuing education a reality for a broader population.

The strategic blueprint also focuses on creating flexible, accredited pathways that integrate OER and MOOCs with formal qualifications, enhancing their value for career advancement. A prime example is the introduction of Professional Certificate Programmes (Micro-credentials) by CUHK Business School's Asia-Pacific Institute of Business (APIB). These programmes, covering trending areas like Artificial Intelligence for Business and Sustainability and ESG Reporting, are designed as "career accelerators." They offer concentrated, flexible learning with durations from six to 36 months. Crucially, these micro-credentials are listed at Level 6 of the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF), and the credits earned can be seamlessly transferred to master's degree programmes at CUHK, creating a direct bridge between short, practical courses and advanced academic degrees.

This model of stackable, credit-bearing micro-credentials is a hallmark of a mature and globally competitive continuing education ecosystem, ensuring that learning is not only accessible but also portable and progressive. Furthermore, Hong Kong's leadership is evident in its strategic use of continuing education to address global trends and foster international collaboration. The curriculum is closely aligned with industry demands and future skills, as seen in the popularity of professional qualifications in fields like Chartered Financial Analyst (CFA), Financial Risk Manager (FRM), and Certified Digital Asset Analyst (CDAA) , which are supported by a network of over 100 examination bodies in the city. Institutions are also responding to societal shifts, such as the ageing population, with targeted programmes like the Professional Certificate in Gerontechnological Applications for Smart Ageing offered by CUSCS. On the international stage, HKU SPACE established the LEAD Academy (Academy for Leadership Enhancement and Development) to deliver executive programmes and study tours in collaboration with global partners like Harvard, MIT, and Cambridge, as well as throughout the Greater Bay Area. This two-way flow of knowledge and talent—bringing international expertise to Hong Kong and facilitating Mainland officials' understanding of Hong Kong's practices—solidifies the city's role as a central hub for continuing education in Asia and beyond.

14.3 Virtual labs, simulations, and immersive technologies (AR/VR)

Hong Kong possesses a robust and multi-faceted foundation upon which to build its global leadership in technology-enhanced continuous education, particularly through the strategic deployment of virtual labs, simulations, and immersive technologies. The government has signified a strong commitment to this vision, as evidenced by the allocation of significant resources and the formulation of forward-thinking policies. The 2026/27 Financial Budget maintains education spending at over HKD 100 billion and explicitly promotes digital education to align with national strategies, including HKD 50 million for AI literacy initiatives. This top-down support is complemented by the Education Bureau's forthcoming "Digital Education Blueprint," which aims to integrate AI into core curricula and cultivate essential digital competencies from an early age, thereby creating a pipeline of lifelong learners comfortable with advanced technologies. Furthermore, dedicated institutions like Cyberport are nurturing a vibrant EdTech ecosystem, providing incubation and acceleration programmes for start-ups that specialise in immersive learning, AI-driven personalisation, and digital school management systems, ensuring a continuous flow of innovation tailored to local and global educational needs.

The practical application of these technologies is already yielding impressive results across Hong Kong's educational landscape, demonstrating a clear pathway for scaling continuous education. A prime example is PolyU's "Borderless Lab 365" platform, which addresses the critical issue of limited laboratory access by enabling secondary school students to conduct real-time experiments remotely via the web. With HK\$14 million in government funding, this initiative not only facilitates independent, anytime-anywhere scientific inquiry but also has concrete plans to integrate VR and AR to create even more immersive and interactive experimental modules. This model of a "virtual lab" is perfectly positioned for adaptation in professional continuous education, allowing working adults to acquire and refine practical skills in high-tech fields without being physically present on campus. Similarly, at the professional and vocational level, IVE (Haking Wong) employs advanced simulators, including a Boeing 777 flight simulator and a simulated airport terminal, to provide risk-free, hands-on training for the aviation and tourism sectors, showcasing how high-fidelity simulations can replicate complex workplace environments for upskilling and reskilling.

Beyond institution-led initiatives, a dynamic private sector and specialised university laboratories are pushing the boundaries of what is possible in immersive learning for continuous education. Companies like Re:learn, based at the Hong Kong Science Park, are pioneering the use of Extended Reality (XR) and AI to create experiential learning platforms that move beyond traditional video-based content, offering personalised and interactive hybrid learning experiences for both schools and corporations. This entrepreneurial energy is crucial for developing bespoke corporate training solutions. Concurrently, universities are establishing dedicated hubs for innovation, such as EdUHK's Metaverse Education Lab. As the only Apple Regional Training Centre in Hong Kong, this lab not only supports the development of VR/AR applications for teaching but also provides certification and workshops, thereby building the very human capital needed to design and deliver immersive continuous education programmes. These centres serve as testbeds for new pedagogical models that can be rapidly prototyped and deployed.

The strategic integration of these diverse efforts forms the core of Hong Kong's blueprint for leadership in continuous education. By connecting the government's strategic vision and funding with institutional infrastructure and private-sector agility, a comprehensive ecosystem is emerging. The development of projects like CUHK's "InternVision," which uses 20 VR simulations across 15 disciplines to enhance work-readiness for students, illustrates how immersive technologies can bridge the gap between academic learning and professional practice. Furthermore, collaborations like the HKU "AI Adventures" programme, which brings together university academics and industry giants like Tencent to teach AI through game design, exemplify the cross-sector synergy required to keep continuous education offerings at the cutting edge. To cement its global leadership, Hong Kong's next step involves scaling these successful pilots into widely accessible, credentialed programmes for the workforce. This includes leveraging the "Study in Hong Kong" brand to attract international professionals seeking advanced training, and using the "Northern Metropolis" development as a living lab for trialing and exporting these educational technologies and methodologies to the Greater Bay Area and beyond.

14.4 Learning analytics for personalised progression support

Hong Kong stands at a pivotal moment in its quest to become a global leader in continuing education, leveraging strong governmental support and innovative institutional practices to build a comprehensive and forward-thinking ecosystem. The strategic blueprint for this transformation is increasingly clear, built upon three foundational pillars: government-led policy initiatives, the expansion of micro-credential and executive education programmes, and the integration of advanced technologies for personalised learning. These elements collectively form a robust framework designed to elevate Hong Kong's status as an international hub for post-secondary education and lifelong learning.

The Hong Kong SAR Government has provided a powerful impetus for this transformation through its recent policy addresses. Key initiatives, such as the establishment of universities of applied sciences and a significant injection of funds into scholarship programmes, are designed to raise the status of vocational and professional education and attract top global talent. Furthermore, the forward-looking decision to革新 (reform) the Employees Retraining Board (ERB) underscores a strategic shift towards a "skills-based" training model for the entire workforce. This involves developing a comprehensive training framework that identifies key skill gaps, collaborates with higher education institutions, and introduces industry-recognised micro-credential courses, ensuring the local labour pool remains competitive amidst rapid economic structural shifts.

In response to these strategic directives, Hong Kong's educational institutions are rapidly innovating their programme offerings. A key trend is the proliferation of flexible, industry-aligned micro-credential courses. For instance, CUHK Business School has launched professional certificate programmes in high-demand areas like ESG reporting and AI for business, which offer the unique advantage of credits that can be seamlessly transferred into master's degree programmes, creating clear and attractive progression pathways for learners. Similarly, institutions are expanding their executive education portfolios with hybrid-learning models. City University of Hong Kong's revamped Global EMBA, which blends online foundational courses with in-person experiential learning through field studies and business simulations, caters specifically to global and Asia-Pacific executives seeking to balance professional commitments with advanced education. This focus on accessible, high-level training is further exemplified by HKU SPACE's establishment of the LEAD Academy, which delivers tailored programmes and study tours for Mainland Chinese executives and government officials, fostering cross-border talent development and knowledge exchange in areas such as fintech and innovation management.

Concurrently, a technological revolution in pedagogy is underway, with learning analytics emerging as a cornerstone for personalised progression support. The Vocational Training Council (VTC) has pioneered the "Virtual Tutor," a 24/7 AI-powered learning platform that supports multiple languages and provides guided, self-paced learning for all students. Crucially, VTC plans to analyse the data from student interactions with this AI tutor to refine teaching materials and better meet individual learning needs, representing a practical application of learning analytics to enhance educational outcomes. This data-driven approach is being refined to an even more sophisticated level at The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, where researchers have developed "KnowLearn," an interactive system for architecture and engineering students. By constructing an educational knowledge graph that connects pedagogical data with student performance and feedback, and employing a heterogeneous graph attention network, the system can identify key predictors of learning outcomes. It then uses a large language model to facilitate personalised conversations and recommendations, all while prioritising student privacy. These advancements demonstrate a clear commitment to moving beyond one-size-fits-all education towards a model where technology actively supports each learner's unique journey.

Looking ahead, Hong Kong's pathway to global leadership in continuing education will depend on its ability to integrate these strategic and technological threads into a cohesive whole. The groundwork is being laid through strategic government policy, innovative programme design by educational institutions, and pioneering applications of AI and learning analytics. By fostering deeper collaboration between traditional universities, vocational training providers like VTC, and retraining bodies like the ERB, Hong Kong can create a seamless and permeable education ecosystem. This ecosystem would allow individuals to continuously upskill and reskill throughout their careers, moving fluidly between micro-credentials, executive education, and formal degrees, supported by intelligent systems that guide their personalised progression. This comprehensive approach, which combines policy foresight, academic innovation, and technological integration, positions Hong Kong not just to respond to the future of work, but to actively shape it.

14.5 Digital credentialing and blockchain verification

Hong Kong stands at a pivotal moment to assert global leadership in continuous education, leveraging its unique advantages as an international financial hub and its world-class university system. The strategic blueprint for this leadership is built upon three foundational pillars: the widespread adoption of micro-credentials, the integration of advanced educational technology, and the establishment of trusted, cross-border credential verification mechanisms. Institutions like CUHK Business School are already pioneering this path with Professional Certificate Programmes (Micro-credentials) that offer flexible, industry-relevant learning in high-demand areas such as Sustainability and AI for Business. These programmes are not merely standalone courses; they are strategically designed as "career accelerators" with credits that can be seamlessly transferred into master's degree programmes, creating a flexible and stacked learning pathway for professionals. This approach directly addresses the need for continuous upskilling in a rapidly evolving global economy, positioning Hong Kong's educational offerings as both practical and academically rigorous.

The digital transformation of credentialing, underpinned by blockchain technology, is the cornerstone of Hong Kong's strategy to build a trusted and efficient ecosystem for lifelong learning. The city has already made significant strides with the Joint Universities Computer Centre's Academic Certificate Verification Platform (ACVP), a blockchain-based system that allows graduates from multiple universities to share verifiable credentials with employers and institutions instantly and securely. This eliminates the administrative burden of paper-based verification and drastically reduces the risk of credential fraud. The recent launch of the International Qualifications Verification Centre (IQVC) at Cyberport further accelerates this vision by integrating Artificial Intelligence with blockchain to provide real-time, cross-border verification of academic and professional qualifications. As highlighted at its opening ceremony, this initiative is a critical piece of infrastructure for Hong Kong's ambition to become a global education hub, directly supporting the government's talent attraction schemes by streamlining the entry process for international professionals and students.

Blockchain technology offers far more than just administrative efficiency; it fundamentally empowers the individual learner through the principles of data sovereignty and creates new paradigms for how skills and experiences are represented. The "immutable" and "traceable" characteristics of blockchain ensure that once a credential—be it a degree, a micro-credential, or even a workshop completion record—is issued, it cannot be altered or counterfeited. By linking these digital credentials to a secure digital identity platform like "iAM Smart," individuals gain ownership and control over their learning records, which can be stored in a personal digital wallet and shared with employers or universities at their discretion. This moves beyond the static PDF resume to a dynamic, verifiable digital portfolio that holistically showcases an individual's competencies. This concept is being actively explored by bodies like the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ), which sees Web3.0 technologies as a transformative tool to enhance quality assurance and provide greater value to all stakeholders in the education sector.

To realize this strategic blueprint fully, Hong Kong must foster a collaborative ecosystem involving government, educational institutions, and industry, underpinned by supportive policies and a focus on green, sustainable practices. The call from legislative council members and education leaders for the government to legally recognize blockchain-verified documents is a crucial step towards mainstream adoption. Such recognition would catalyze the transition to "paperless document management" in education, significantly reducing the carbon footprint associated with printing and mailing millions of physical certificates and administrative files. Furthermore, the development of smart contracts can automate processes like graduation verification, enhancing transparency and efficiency across the board. This technological shift aligns with broader government reforms aimed at aligning education with market needs, such as increasing non-local student intake and designating universities of applied sciences to create diverse talent pipelines for strategic sectors like fintech and innovation technology. As noted by industry leaders, bridging the gap between academic learning and industry needs is paramount, and a blockchain-based ecosystem of verifiable credentials provides the trust and transparency needed to make that connection seamless and effective. By continuing to build on these foundations, Hong Kong is not just enhancing its educational infrastructure but is actively constructing a smarter, greener, and more globally connected model for lifelong learning in the 21st century.

PART 6: THE PROVIDER ECOSYSTEM

CHAPTER 15: UNIVERSITIES AS CONTINUOUS EDUCATION ENGINES

Hong Kong stands at a pivotal moment in its development as a global hub for talent and innovation. To secure its future competitiveness and social cohesion, a strategic and coordinated approach to continuous education is not just an option but a necessity. This blueprint outlines how Hong Kong's universities can be transformed into powerful engines of lifelong learning, driving individual empowerment, workforce agility, and regional integration.

1. The Evolving Ecosystem: From Providers to Strategic Partners

The foundation of Hong Kong's global leadership in continuous education lies in the dynamic and evolving ecosystem of its universities and their partners. Historically, continuing education was seen as a peripheral activity, but it is now moving to the core of institutional strategy. As highlighted by the recent strategic plan of HKU SPACE, institutions are actively positioning themselves as key contributors to regional human capital development, particularly within the Greater Bay Area (GBA). This involves a shift from simply offering courses to forging strategic partnerships. For instance, HKU SPACE's collaboration with Northwestern Polytechnical University to create a "Cloud Classroom + Practice Base" model exemplifies how cross-boundary partnerships can create coherent pathways for learners, blending theoretical education with hands-on practice. Furthermore, the government is actively catalysing this evolution. The Employee Retraining Board (ERB) is undergoing a significant transformation, moving from a safety net for the unemployed to a "skills-based" training authority for the entire workforce. Its future three-year roadmap explicitly includes strengthening collaboration with 高等院校 (higher education institutions) to identify skills gaps and develop industry-recognized 微证书 (micro-credential) courses, thereby creating a more integrated and responsive training landscape.

2. Strategic Positioning: Internationalisation and Regional Integration

To achieve global leadership, Hong Kong's universities must leverage their unique advantages to serve both local needs and international ambitions. A cornerstone of this strategy is the deepening integration with the GBA. HKU SPACE's 2025-2030 Strategic Plan identifies "Contributing to Human Capital Development in the GBA" as a key focus, supported by tangible actions like establishing a Mainland Affairs Office and opening a new learning centre in Sheung Shui, strategically located just 20 minutes from the mainland border.

This physical and programmatic expansion makes Hong Kong's high-quality continuing education more accessible to learners from the GBA, fostering knowledge exchange and supporting regional economic integration. At the same time, the government is actively building the brand of Hong Kong as an international hub for post-secondary education. Initiatives such as the establishment of Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS) elevate the status of vocational and professional education, providing a parallel pathway to success and attracting diverse talent. The vision articulated by the Education Commission Chairman to promote the "Study in Hong Kong" brand globally, through hosting international conferences and establishing scholarship schemes, further reinforces this outward-looking, competitive stance.

3. Inclusive Excellence: Serving a Diverse Lifelong Learner Base

A truly global leader in continuous education is distinguished by its ability to serve the entire spectrum of learners, from school leavers to seniors. Hong Kong's universities are already demonstrating innovative approaches to inclusivity. Lingnan University's commitment to SDG4 (Quality Education) is evident in initiatives like free Generative AI workshops for the public and its "Open Doors to Learning Initiative," which partners with over 110 organisations to offer community workshops and masterclasses. This commitment to removing barriers to learning is echoed in the government's reform of the ERB, which has removed the previous 学历上限 (education ceiling) for participants, opening up skills upgrading to all, regardless of their prior academic qualifications. Furthermore, recognising the demographic reality of an ageing population, universities are pioneering programs for senior learners. The Elder Academies at HKMU and Lingnan University are prime examples. By offering AI courses, allowing seniors to audit university classes, and promoting intergenerational learning, these programs empower older adults with a "sense of purpose," ensuring they remain active, integrated, and valuable members of society.

4. Governance and Funding: Building a Resilient and Responsive Model

The long-term success of this strategic blueprint depends on establishing sustainable and flexible governance and funding models. Hong Kong operates under a unique "two families under one roof" system, where traditional, publicly funded universities house 自負盈虧 (self-financing) continuing education units. This model allows institutions to be agile and responsive to market demands while leveraging the prestige and resources of the parent university. The University Grants Committee (UGC) has long recognised the need for a nuanced funding approach for continuing professional education (CPE). Its recommendations include providing core funding for infrastructure, expecting market-driven courses to be supported by fees, and establishing development funds for new initiatives with broader public benefit. This framework provides a solid foundation for innovation. Looking ahead, as outlined in the 2024 Policy Address, the government is committed to further empowering this ecosystem through dedicated funding, such as the \$2 billion Teacher Professional Development Fund, which will support teacher training and exchanges, ultimately enhancing the quality of education across the board. This blend of institutional agility, strategic government support, and market responsiveness positions Hong Kong to build a world-leading, resilient continuous education system.

15.1 Strategic positioning of university continuing education units

Hong Kong stands at a pivotal moment in its effort to become a global leader in continuing education, leveraging its unique advantages as a international education hub and the strategic visions of its university continuing education units. This strategic blueprint outlines the key pillars and institutional strategies that will drive Hong Kong's ascent in this critical sector.

Strategic Vision and Policy Foundation

Hong Kong's pathway to global leadership in continuing education is firmly anchored in a robust policy framework and the unique advantages of its higher education ecosystem. The Hong Kong SAR Government has explicitly targeted the development of an "international hub for post-secondary education," a vision that extends beyond traditional full-time undergraduate degrees to encompass the entire spectrum of lifelong learning. This ambition is bolstered by national strategies outlined in documents like the Education Strengthening Nation Building Plan Outline, which positions Hong Kong as a "bridgehead" for the country's educational opening-up and a preferred gateway for international academia entering China. The "one country, two systems" principle provides the foundational strength, allowing Hong Kong's universities to maintain world-class, internationally aligned academic standards while simultaneously possessing deep cultural understanding and market access to the Chinese mainland. This "super-connector" role is an unparalleled asset, enabling the development of continuing education programmes that are globally relevant yet regionally specific. Furthermore, large-scale infrastructure projects like the development of the Northern Metropolis University Town are set to create a critical mass, transforming the region into an "academic gravity field" that can attract top-tier international faculty, researchers, and mature learners from around the globe.

Strategic Positioning of University Continuing Education Units

Hong Kong's university-based continuing education units are not monolithic; they exhibit a diverse range of strategic positions, each contributing uniquely to the city's overall leadership in the field. A primary model is the academic integrator, exemplified by the Asia-Pacific Institute of Business (APIB) at CUHK Business School. APIB's strategic position focuses on creating seamless pathways between professional development and formal degree education. Its new suite of Professional Certificate Programmes (micro-credentials) is meticulously designed as "career accelerators," offering flexible, stackable credentials in high-demand areas like AI for Business, Sustainability and ESG Reporting, and Fintech. Critically, these programmes are listed at Level 6 of the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF) and offer a unique value proposition: credits earned can be transferred directly into CUHK's master's degree programmes. This integration bridges the gap between immediate upskilling and long-term academic advancement, positioning the unit as a strategic gateway to the university's broader academic offerings.

A second strategic model is that of the market-driven innovator and alternative pathway provider, vividly illustrated by PolyU's College of Professional and Continuing Education (CPCE) and its constituent unit, PolyU SPEED. These units are strategically positioned to be highly responsive to market pulses, launching programmes tailored to evolving economic pillars such as massive infrastructure projects (engineering) and the silver economy (medical management). They serve a crucial social function by providing "second chance" articulation degrees for sub-degree graduates, thereby democratizing access to higher education. Furthermore, PolyU SPEED's achievement of AACSB accreditation for its business programmes—a first for a self-financing institution in Hong Kong—demonstrates a strategic commitment to quality and global recognition, ensuring their graduates are competitive. This unit is now strategically preparing for a transformation into an independent private university, which would allow it to offer a fuller suite of programmes while maintaining a complementary and distinct role relative to its parent university.

A third model is the comprehensive lifelong learning partner, as embodied by the School of Continuing and Professional Education (SCE) at Hong Kong Baptist University and the School of Continuing and Professional Studies (CUSCS) at CUHK. These institutions adopt a broad, multi-layered approach, offering a "progressive ladder" of education that spans from foundation diplomas and high school graduating classes to advanced diplomas and executive education for working professionals and older learners. Their strategy involves deep collaboration with professional bodies and overseas institutions to ensure curricula remain practical, industry-relevant, and internationally portable. CUHK's university-wide strategic plan explicitly redefines the role of its continuing education unit to serve the needs of an aging population and second-career trends, highlighting a forward-looking approach to societal demographic shifts. This comprehensive model positions them as essential, enduring institutions for fostering a culture of lifelong learning across all segments of Hong Kong society.

Conclusion: A Cohesive and Forward-Looking Ecosystem

In conclusion, Hong Kong's blueprint for global leadership in continuing education is not a singular path but a synergistic ecosystem. The government provides the policy direction and physical infrastructure, such as the Northern Metropolis, while the universities' continuing education units execute with diverse and complementary strategies. Some act as academic integrators, linking professional courses to degrees; others are market-driven innovators, creating new pathways and preparing for institutional evolution; and still others serve as comprehensive partners for lifelong learning. Together, they are leveraging Hong Kong's unique advantages—its international character, its connection to the mainland, and its concentration of world-class universities—to build a resilient and dynamic sector. This cohesive yet diverse approach ensures Hong Kong is well-positioned not just to respond to the future of work and learning, but to actively shape it, attracting and nurturing global talent for decades to come.

15.2 Integrating CPE with mainstream degree programmes

Hong Kong stands at a pivotal moment to redefine its role in global higher education by strategically integrating Continuing Professional Education (CPE) with mainstream academic degrees. The foundation for this leadership is already being laid by forward-thinking institutions. For instance, the Asia-Pacific Institute of Business (APIB) at CUHK Business School has introduced micro-credential courses that function as "career accelerators," covering in-demand fields like Innovation Leadership and AI for Business. A key differentiator is their seamless credit transfer pathway, allowing learners to apply credits earned towards a master's degree, effectively bridging the gap between professional upskilling and advanced academic qualifications. Similarly, HKU SPACE offers a highly popular part-time law programme (CPE) that provides a direct route to the Postgraduate Certificate in Laws (PCLL), enabling working professionals to pursue legal careers without sacrificing their jobs. These examples demonstrate a tangible model where CPE is not an alternative to degree education but an integrated on-ramp, fostering a culture of lifelong learning that is both flexible and academically rigorous.

To build a comprehensive strategic blueprint, Hong Kong must leverage its robust regulatory frameworks and government initiatives to scale these integration efforts across all sectors. The Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF) provides a solid foundation, with courses like CUHK's professional certificates already accredited at Level 6, ensuring quality and parity with degree-level study. Government policy actively supports this vision; the establishment of universities of applied sciences (UASs) aims to elevate vocational and professional training to university degree status, creating an alternative and respected pathway for young people. Furthermore, the recent reform of the Employees Retraining Board (ERB) to focus on "skills-based" micro-certificates in collaboration with tertiary institutions signals a system-wide shift towards agile, industry-responsive training. This strategic alignment between institutional innovation, quality assurance, and government policy creates a powerful ecosystem where CPE can thrive as a core component of higher education.

Hong Kong's ambition to become a global leader in CPE is further strengthened by its unique position as an international hub and its strategic vision for regional collaboration. The University Grants Committee has long recognized that taught postgraduate courses and CPE are the principal means for institutions to respond swiftly to changing societal and economic needs, a principle that is even more critical in today's fast-paced world. Institutions like CUHK have embedded lifelong learning into their strategic plans, aiming to nurture graduates as global leaders and serve the community's evolving needs, including those of an ageing population. HKU SPACE is actively expanding its reach into the Greater Bay Area (GBA), establishing learning centres and partnerships to contribute to human capital development, thereby extending Hong Kong's educational influence and creating a cross-border lifelong learning corridor. By integrating CPE with mainstream degrees, Hong Kong is not merely providing courses; it is architecting a dynamic, multi-directional educational landscape that empowers individuals at every career stage, fuels economic competitiveness, and solidifies its status as a premier global hub for talent development.

15.3 Executive education: CityU's Global EMBA model

Hong Kong stands at a pivotal moment in its effort to redefine itself as a premier destination for global education, with a strategic blueprint that extends far beyond traditional undergraduate studies to encompass a robust ecosystem of continuous and executive education. The city's pathway to global leadership in this arena is underpinned by its unique role as a "super-connector"—a status that leverages the "backing of the motherland" while maintaining deep "connections with the world". This strategic position is not merely geographical but structural, as Hong Kong benefits from a common law system, international academic standards, and its role as a bridge to the vast opportunities of the Greater Bay Area (GBA) and the Chinese mainland. The Hong Kong SAR government has actively embraced this vision, with initiatives outlined in recent Policy Addresses to transform the city into an international post-secondary education hub. This includes a dramatic expansion of non-local student intake, increasing the admission ceiling for self-financing students to 50%, and a concerted push to align higher education more closely with market demands, particularly in high-tech and innovation sectors. By fostering deeper academia-industry integration and creating pathways for seamless cross-boundary talent flow within the GBA, Hong Kong is not just attracting students but is strategically cultivating a future-ready, globally mobile workforce.

A compelling model of how Hong Kong institutions are executing this strategic blueprint is found in the City University of Hong Kong (CityUHK) Global EMBA programme, which exemplifies innovation in executive education. The programme's curriculum is built around the E.L.I.T.E. framework—Empowerment, Leadership, Innovation, Transformation, and Excellence—a structure explicitly designed to cultivate leaders who can navigate complex business environments and drive organisational change. What makes this model particularly effective for global leadership is its blended-learning architecture, which requires only 30 days out of the office. This format combines intensive in-person Residential Courses held in Hong Kong and Shenzhen with flexible Online Core Courses, allowing busy C-suite executives from the GBA, ASEAN, and beyond to balance rigorous study with their professional responsibilities. This flexibility directly addresses the needs of the modern, globally mobile executive, turning the programme into a dynamic platform for cross-regional networking and collaboration.

Further distinguishing the CityUHK Global EMBA is its commitment to immersive, experiential learning that extends well beyond the traditional classroom. The curriculum mandates Global Learning Tours, such as a five-day residential programme at the University of Cambridge, which provide leaders with direct exposure to different business cultures and the chance to benchmark against global best practices. This global perspective is reinforced by the programme's diverse cohort; recent intakes have featured senior executives from a wide array of industries including technology, manufacturing, finance, and healthcare, with over 80% holding C-suite positions. This peer group itself becomes a powerful learning resource, fostering a high-level exchange of ideas and creating a valuable, lifelong network that spans emerging markets in Asia and the Middle East.

The programme's quality and impact have been externally validated, earning a prestigious QS五星 rating for "Programme Strength," a testament to its teaching quality, academic reputation, and industry recognition. In essence, the CityUHK Global EMBA serves as a microcosm of Hong Kong's broader strategic advantages. It capitalises on the city's geographical and cultural position to connect global-Asian executives with the Mainland Chinese market, particularly through residential courses in Shenzhen that offer direct insight into the GBA's innovation ecosystem. The programme's focus on contemporary, critical topics like digital transformation, ESG strategies, and venture capital equips leaders to tackle the very challenges that define the new global economy. By offering a curriculum that is at once globally oriented and regionally grounded, and by providing a flexible yet immersive learning journey, the CityUHK Global EMBA model demonstrates how Hong Kong's institutions are not merely participating in the global education market but are actively shaping the future of continuous executive development. It is a tangible example of how strategic policy, institutional agility, and deep industry connections can converge to create a world-class platform for nurturing the next generation of global business leaders.

15.4 Faculty incentives for engagement in CPE

The successful implementation of this ambitious CPE strategy is intrinsically linked to the motivation and recognition of the faculty who design and deliver these programmes. Hong Kong's institutions are increasingly adopting formal recognition schemes that validate and incentivize teaching excellence and innovation in continuing education. The widespread adoption of the Advance HE Fellowship scheme across Hong Kong's universities serves as a powerful example. This scheme provides a tangible credential that formally recognizes educators' commitment to professionalism and their impact on teaching and learning, encouraging staff to "continuously think about how they teach and engage with our students". This not only enhances the quality of CPE delivery but also integrates it into the core academic mission, as institutions like HKU place such recognition "at the heart of our teaching and learning strategy".

Beyond formal recognition, faculty are incentivized through opportunities for thought leadership and deep engagement with industry. Leading programmes on cutting-edge topics allows academics to translate their research into practical, high-impact curricula, enhancing their professional profile and networks. Professors from CUHK Business School, for example, are positioned as programme directors for professional certificates in fields like Sustainable Global Business and Financial Technology, directly connecting their academic expertise with industry needs. Furthermore, institutions like CityU are creating advisory committees for their executive education units that include prominent business figures and academics, fostering an environment where faculty can collaborate with industry leaders and contribute to shaping the future of business practice. This blend of formal pedagogical recognition and opportunities for high-level industry engagement creates a compelling ecosystem that motivates faculty to invest their expertise in the growth and success of continuing professional education.

15.5 Research-informed continuous education programmes

Hong Kong stands at a pivotal moment to transform its robust continuing education sector into a global model of excellence. The following strategic blueprint outlines how the city can leverage its unique advantages—its role as an international financial hub, its strong educational infrastructure, and its "East-meets-West" orientation—to achieve global leadership in research-informed continuing and professional education (CPE).

The Economic Imperative: Responding to Rapid Restructuring and Knowledge Obsolescence

The foundation of Hong Kong's pathway to global leadership in continuing education is built upon a profound understanding of the economic forces that necessitate lifelong learning. As a small, open economy, Hong Kong's historical success has been predicated on its ability to adapt swiftly to international competition and market shifts. This environment creates a high rate of skill and knowledge obsolescence, making continuous reinvestment in human capital not merely beneficial, but essential. The economic restructuring of Hong Kong—its dramatic shift from manufacturing to a knowledge-based service economy—has been exceptionally rapid. In the decade leading to the mid-1990s, the manufacturing sector shed hundreds of thousands of jobs while the service sector expanded, creating an enormous demand for retraining and upskilling. This historical pattern has only intensified with the advent of globalisation and the digital economy.

Today, the "half-life" of professional knowledge continues to shorten, compelling individuals and organisations to engage in perpetual learning to remain competitive. A strategic blueprint for Hong Kong must therefore frame continuing education not as a supplementary activity, but as a core component of economic resilience and workforce agility. The demand increasingly comes from the growing service industries—financing, insurance, real estate, and business services—which are significantly over-represented among CPE students, reflecting the need for high-level professional skills in a regional services centre. Furthermore, research indicates that CPE is most effective in facilitating career change, allowing individuals to pivot into new occupations and industries, which is a critical function in a rapidly evolving economy. Therefore, the primary driver of Hong Kong's leadership in this field will be its ability to align CPE provision directly with the sophisticated and shifting demands of the globalised knowledge economy.

From Teaching to Research-Informed Practice: Elevating Academic Rigour

To transcend its role as a provider of courses and become a global leader, Hong Kong must institutionalise a culture of research within its continuing education ecosystem. Historically, CPE has been a teaching-focused enterprise, often operating on the margins of universities and relying on part-time or adjunct faculty. However, a paradigm shift is underway, exemplified by institutions like the School of Continuing Education (SCE) at Hong Kong Baptist University (HKBU). Despite being a self-funded teaching unit, HKBU SCE has strategically committed to building research capability, with the explicit goal of developing "research-informed teaching". This approach ensures that the knowledge conveyed to adult learners is not just current, but is at the forefront of industrial and professional practice. By establishing dedicated research centres—such as the Multi-disciplinary Research Centre and the Research Centre for Environment and Human Health—and securing competitive funding from bodies like the Research Grants Council, CPE units are demonstrating that rigorous inquiry can and should inform curriculum design and pedagogical methods.

This focus on research-informed programmes elevates the value proposition of continuing education. It transforms courses from simple skill-upgrading exercises into platforms for generating new knowledge and addressing pressing societal needs. For instance, large-scale community projects, such as the "CLAP-TECH learning pathway" funded by the Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust, show how CPE units can engage in applied research that directly benefits the community while also informing the development of new learning pathways. For Hong Kong to assert global leadership, this model must become the standard. Universities should encourage their CPE divisions to develop research agendas focused on pedagogy, andragogy, and the specific professional domains they serve. This would create a virtuous cycle: research enhances the quality and impact of teaching, which in turn attracts higher-calibre students and faculty, further strengthening the institution's research capacity and reputation on the world stage.

Strategic Synergies: Integrating CPE into the Core University Ecosystem and Beyond

A third pillar of the strategic blueprint involves dismantling the historical silos between traditional university education and continuing education. The Korean academic analysis of Hong Kong's system aptly describes it as a "two families under one roof" model, where elite, publicly funded higher education coexists with a market-driven, modularised system of non-degree and continuing education. While this model has successfully expanded access, the next phase of development requires deeper integration and synergy. Hong Kong's universities are already pursuing ambitious goals to nurture "lifelong learners as global leaders," as articulated in strategic plans from institutions like CUHK and HKBU. Achieving this vision requires that the resources, expertise, and networks of the central university are fully accessible to its CPE arm. This includes fostering entrepreneurship and innovation programmes that are open to continuing education students, and redefining the role of the School of Continuing and Professional Studies to serve emerging societal trends, such as an ageing population and second careers.

Furthermore, leadership demands that CPE units forge dynamic partnerships with industry and the broader community. The recent legislative amendments to the Post Secondary Colleges Ordinance, which will see HKBU's SCE register as an accredited post-secondary college, signal a move towards greater formal recognition and a more robust regulatory framework, enhancing quality assurance and credibility. This formal status will enable these institutions to operate with greater autonomy and strategic intent. Concurrently, initiatives like CityUHK's Business Innovation Education (BIE) exemplify how to build a "premier hub for global executive education" by leveraging unique geographical and cultural assets—an "East-meets-West orientation"—alongside deep industry engagement. By creating advisory committees composed of prominent business figures and integrating with university-wide innovation platforms like "Tech300," such programmes ensure that executive education is deeply embedded in the real-world challenges and opportunities of the Asian market. This model of deep, structured collaboration with industry and the leveraging of Hong Kong's unique position as a bridge between East and West is the key to developing transformative, globally sought-after programmes.

A Supportive Policy Framework: Funding, Accessibility, and Governance

No strategic blueprint can succeed without a robust and forward-looking policy environment. Hong Kong already possesses foundational elements, most notably the Continuing Education Fund (CEF). Established in 2002, the CEF provides a subsidy of up to \$25,000 per eligible applicant for over 4,600 registered courses, directly supporting the government's goal of meeting the need for Hong Kong's transition to a knowledge-based economy. This fund lowers barriers for adult learners and stimulates the market by encouraging providers to design and register new courses. However, to achieve global leadership, this framework must evolve. Historically, government funding and planning for CPE have been minimal compared to full-time tertiary education, with most courses operating on a self-financing basis. While this market-driven approach has fostered agility and responsiveness, a strategic expansion will require targeted public investment.

Drawing from past reviews by the University Grants Committee, a future funding model could include the establishment of a development fund to support CPE units in creating innovative new courses whose "start-up costs" may not be immediately recoverable through fees. This would encourage experimentation and the development of programmes in cutting-edge but unproven fields. Additionally, targeted subsidies could be considered for courses that offer significant societal benefits, such as those enhancing the qualifications of teachers or social workers. As Hong Kong moves towards a model where tertiary education is more evenly distributed across a lifetime, a rebalancing of resources may be necessary. The ongoing regulatory enhancements, including the new ordinance for post-secondary colleges, will also play a crucial role in ensuring quality and consistency across the sector, giving learners and employers confidence in the value of CPE credentials. By strategically deploying financial incentives and maintaining a robust quality assurance framework, the government can catalyse the sector's growth and ensure it meets the highest international standards.

CHAPTER 16: VOCATIONAL AND PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION

Hong Kong stands at a pivotal moment to redefine its role in global education by transforming its Vocational and Professional Education and Training (VPET) sector into a world-leading model. The strategic blueprint for this transformation is anchored in a clear vision: to become a global leader in university continuing education by enriching lives and transforming lifelong learning to meet the evolving demands of learners and industries worldwide. This vision is not merely aspirational but is being actively pursued through a comprehensive overhaul of the educational framework. It involves a fundamental "mission转型" (transformation) of VPET's purpose—from primarily training traditional craftspeople to cultivating high-level "数码工匠" (digital craftsmen) and technical experts capable of driving new quality productive forces. This shift is designed to align directly with national strategies, such as the "15th Five-Year Plan," and Hong Kong's own development into a "new quality productivity hub," ensuring that the city's workforce is equipped to support "中国智造" (Intelligent Manufacturing in China) and the real economy.

A core pillar of this strategic blueprint is the creation of flexible, integrated, and industry-relevant learning pathways. A key innovation is the adoption of micro-credentials and their articulation within the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF). For instance, programmes like CUHK Business School's Professional Certificate courses are listed at HKQF Level 6, allowing professionals to upskill in high-demand areas such as Innovation Leadership and Artificial Intelligence for Business, with the unique benefit of seamlessly transferring earned credits towards a master's degree. This model bridges the gap between undergraduate and postgraduate studies, offering concentrated, practical, and affordable upskilling opportunities. To build a cohesive system from the ground up, experts advocate for extending this "微證書化" (micro-credentialling) approach to secondary school Applied Learning (ApL) courses, linking them to industry-recognised certifications and creating a clear skills ladder from high school through to 高级文凭 (higher diplomas) and applied degrees at universities of applied sciences. This addresses the long-standing issue of structural imbalance in post-secondary education by 明确 (clarifying) the role of vocational pathways and fostering "職普融通" (integration of vocational and general education).

To ensure its VPET system remains dynamic and forward-looking, Hong Kong's blueprint necessitates deep synergy with industry and an embrace of cutting-edge technology. The government is actively working to strengthen industry consultation mechanisms to identify skills gaps and develop a "skills-based" training framework. This is being implemented through "產教融合" (industry-education integration), where industry partners co-create curricula and provide real-world training environments. The Vocational Training Council (VTC) exemplifies this through its "职学计划" (work-study schemes) and the establishment of innovation centres, like the one at IVE (Tsing Yi), which features simulated construction sites for students to learn digital quality and safety inspection tools.

Furthermore, in an era where AI is reshaping all sectors, the blueprint calls for the普及 (popularisation) of AI literacy at all levels of VPET, ensuring graduates are not just specialists but also proficient in applying AI tools within their professional domains. This focus on digital competencies is crucial, as Hong Kong's leap to fourth place in the World Digital Competitiveness Ranking demonstrates a strong "技术框架" (technological framework) and "适应态度" (adaptive attitude) to build upon.

Finally, Hong Kong's pathway to global leadership is intrinsically linked to its国际化 (internationalisation) and its unique role as a bridge to the Mainland. The blueprint strategically positions Hong Kong to become a premier VPET hub for the "Belt and Road" initiative by leveraging its internationally benchmarked curricula, English-language environment, and high-quality faculty. The proposal to increase non-local student places in VPET programmes, particularly in Hong Kong's areas of strength like fintech and smart logistics, aims to attract talent from Southeast and Central Asia. These students not only enrich the local learning environment but also become future ambassadors for Hong Kong, fostering economic and cultural ties with their home countries. Simultaneously, the blueprint emphasises deepening cooperation with Mainland China. This includes advancing the mutual recognition of sub-degree qualifications within the Greater Bay Area, expanding collaborative VPET programmes, and extending initiatives like the "一试三证" (one test, three certificates) scheme to enhance professional mobility and create vast new opportunities for graduates on the mainland. Through this dual strategy of global outreach and regional integration, Hong Kong is building a VPET ecosystem that is both globally competitive and deeply connected to the world's most dynamic economic regions.

16.1 VTC's expanded role in continuous upskilling

Hong Kong stands at a pivotal moment in its economic evolution, where the cultivation of a future-ready workforce is paramount to sustaining its competitive edge on the world stage. The pathway to establishing the city as a global leader in continuous education is not merely about offering more courses, but about architecting a strategic blueprint that integrates flexible learning pathways, industry alignment, and internationalisation. This vision is already taking shape across the territory's leading educational institutions. For instance, the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) Business School's Asia-Pacific Institute of Business (APIB) has launched a series of Professional Certificate Programmes (Micro-credentials) designed as "career accelerators." These programmes, covering trending areas like Innovation Leadership and Artificial Intelligence for Business, offer modular, flexible learning that can be completed at the student's own pace, with the significant added benefit of credits that can be transferred towards a master's degree. This model of stackable, credit-bearing micro-credentials represents a key strategic component of a modern continuous education ecosystem. Complementing this, institutions like the School of Continuing and Professional Studies at CUHK explicitly state their vision "to be a global leader in university continuing education," with strategies focused on collaborating with industries both in Hong Kong and globally, and exploring closer partnerships with renowned overseas universities. Similarly, HKU SPACE has established the LEAD Academy to deliver high-quality programmes to senior executives, including tailor-made training for mainland Chinese enterprises and government departments, as well as international study tours in collaboration with institutions like Harvard and Cambridge, thereby reinforcing Hong Kong's role as an international education hub. These initiatives collectively form the foundational pillars of a comprehensive blueprint, demonstrating a commitment to academic quality, global networking, and responsiveness to evolving learner needs.

Central to this strategic blueprint is the expanded and dynamic role of the Vocational Training Council (VTC), which is positioning itself as a cornerstone of continuous upskilling and professional development in Hong Kong. Under the leadership of its newly appointed Chairman, Jeffrey Lam, the VTC has articulated a clear three-pronged strategy to drive vocational and professional education and training (VPET) forward. This strategy focuses on deepening collaboration with government and industry to precisely understand manpower needs, nurturing talent in new industrialisation sectors like green energy and smart manufacturing, and integrating VTC's development into regional plans such as the Northern Metropolis and the national 15th Five-Year Plan. This high-level direction is operationalised through concrete actions, as outlined in VTC's Fourth 8-Year Strategic Plan, themed "Skilling for the Future." The plan emphasises advancing a comprehensive VPET system, pursuing a digital future in teaching and learning, and growing organisational capability to remain agile in a changing world. The VTC's approach goes beyond initial vocational training, explicitly aiming to support working people in acquiring values, knowledge, and skills for lifelong learning and enhanced employability. This commitment is reflected in their tailored training programmes for government departments and corporations in critical areas like cybersecurity and artificial intelligence, ensuring that the existing workforce can continuously upgrade their skills.

The VTC's expanded role in continuous upskilling is powerfully amplified through strategic partnerships and a forward-looking approach to curriculum and infrastructure. A prime example is the recent Memorandum of Understanding signed with the Hong Kong Productivity Council (HKPC), which deepens collaboration to nurture talent with technical expertise and innovative capabilities. This partnership will provide VTC students with comprehensive industrial attachments, mentorship programmes, and apprenticeship training, systematically integrating AI-related training to enhance their professional skills. Such partnerships bridge the gap between education and the real-world application of knowledge, ensuring that learners are equipped with the most current industry practices. Furthermore, the VTC is proactively developing new training facilities to address emerging industry demands and attract talent to vital sectors. Executive Director Donald Tong highlighted the development of a new "Aviation and Maritime Education Centre" at the Tsing Yi campus, alongside planned facilities for new energy vehicle training, hydrogen fuel technology, and lift and escalator technology. These initiatives directly respond to pressing industry needs, such as the projected shortage of electric vehicle maintenance personnel in line with the government's 2035 petrol car ban, demonstrating the VTC's agility in aligning its curriculum with future economic realities.

To solidify its role as a leader in continuous upskilling, the VTC is also expanding its reach through policy initiatives and cross-border collaboration, creating a truly comprehensive and forward-looking talent development ecosystem. The "VPAS" (Vocational Professionals Admission Scheme) is a groundbreaking policy that allows non-local students graduating from designated VTC full-time Higher Diploma programmes to stay and work in Hong Kong, directly addressing specific talent shortages in key industries like aviation, innovation and technology, and health care. This initiative not only enriches Hong Kong's talent pool but also enhances its status as a regional education hub. On the cross-border front, the VTC is actively working to integrate with national development strategies. This includes efforts to achieve mutual recognition of qualifications with Mainland China, a move that would significantly boost the appeal of Hong Kong's vocational education to students from the mainland. The establishment of the VTC's first operations centre in Shenzhen, "Vocational and Professional Education and Training Services (Shenzhen) Co., Limited," marks a significant milestone in fostering deeper collaboration with the Greater Bay Area. This centre facilitates student exchanges, work internships, and joint programmes, such as the long-standing collaboration with Shenzhen Polytechnic University, which offers dual-diploma qualifications. Through these strategic moves—encompassing local policy innovation, industry-aligned infrastructure, and deep regional integration—the VTC is not merely responding to the needs of the economy but is actively shaping a resilient and skilled workforce poised to lead Hong Kong into a prosperous future.

16.2 Professional bodies as credentialing partners

Hong Kong possesses a unique combination of world-class higher education institutions, a robust regulatory framework, and deep international connectivity, positioning it to become a global leader in the continuing education sector. Achieving this status, however, requires a strategic blueprint that moves beyond traditional academic offerings to embrace a dynamic ecosystem of lifelong learning. A cornerstone of this strategy is the deep integration of professional bodies as formal credentialing partners, which enhances the relevance, portability, and prestige of continuing education credentials both locally and internationally.

The strategic blueprint for Hong Kong's leadership in continuing education is already being piloted by its leading institutions, which are actively internationalising their curricula and forging global partnerships. The University of Hong Kong's School of Professional and Continuing Education (HKU SPACE), in its Strategic Plan 2025-2030, explicitly prioritises "internationalisation" by integrating global perspectives into its curriculum and fostering intercultural competencies. This involves not just passive learning but active collaboration with overseas institutions to create cross-boundary educational opportunities, particularly within the Greater Bay Area (GBA), thereby contributing to human capital development on a regional scale. Similarly, the School of Continuing and Professional Studies at CUHK aims to serve evolving demographic trends, such as the needs of an ageing population and second-career seekers, indicating a forward-thinking approach to lifelong learning that addresses global societal shifts. These institutional strategies lay the groundwork for a system that is both globally aware and locally responsive.

The most potent catalyst in this strategic blueprint is the formalised role of professional bodies as credentialing partners, which creates clear, valuable pathways for learners. This is evident in sectors like construction, where the Hong Kong Institute of Construction (HKIC) has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the UK-based Chartered Institute of Building (CIOB). This partnership creates a direct pathway for HKIC graduates to achieve internationally recognised professional status, such as Technical Membership (TechCIOB), thus providing a clear career progression that bridges local education and global professional standards. In the financial sector, this model is equally robust. The Hong Kong Institute of Certified Public Accountants (HKICPA) renewed its mutual recognition agreement (MRA) with ACCA Hong Kong, creating an "interconnected professional community" that offers members expanded opportunities and dual membership benefits. This allows professionals to leverage ACCA's global network while contributing to the development of the local profession, effectively turning a local credential into a "global passport". Furthermore, the International Association of Registered Financial Consultants (IARFC) collaborates with local universities like Hang Seng University to offer programs that lead directly to professional designations such as the Registered Financial Consultant (RFC), demonstrating how academic coursework and professional certification can be seamlessly integrated.

This partnership model is further strengthened by integration with Hong Kong's well-established Qualifications Framework (HKQF), which ensures quality and facilitates lifelong learning. The new Professional Certificate Programmes (Micro-credentials) from CUHK Business School's Asia-Pacific Institute of Business (APIB) are a prime example. These industry-specific courses, covering areas like FinTech and ESG, are listed at Level 6 of the HKQF, allowing graduates to transfer credits directly into master's degree programmes. This creates a flexible, modular "career accelerator" that values practical skills while maintaining a clear bridge to higher academic achievement. Such a framework provides the infrastructure for professional bodies to endorse and recognise specific modules, knowing they meet a nationally agreed-upon standard of quality and rigor.

Ultimately, Hong Kong's pathway to global leadership is predicated on its ability to act as a "super connector," linking mainland China's vast talent pool with international professional standards. By expanding its network to collaborate with industries both locally and globally, institutions like CUHK's School of Continuing and Professional Sciences are actively working to provide learners with diversified global experiences. This involves not only importing international credentials but also exporting Hong Kong's educational expertise, as seen in HKU SPACE's LEAD Academy, which delivers training to mainland Chinese officials and collaborates with universities like Harvard and Cambridge for international study tours. By systematically embedding professional body credentials into its diverse and flexible continuing education offerings, and by leveraging its unique geopolitical and economic position, Hong Kong can solidify its status as a premier global hub for professional development and lifelong learning.

16.3 Trade-specific training pathways for displaced workers

Alongside its global leadership ambitions, a critical component of Hong Kong's strategic blueprint is the development of responsive, trade-specific training pathways for displaced workers. The effectiveness of this approach relies on a multi-pronged strategy that combines immediate support with long-term career development, ensuring that workers are not left behind in a rapidly evolving economy. Recent initiatives in the construction industry provide a compelling model for how such pathways can be structured, particularly in response to sector-specific downturns. When faced with a rise in unemployment due to a slowdown in private sector projects, the Construction Industry Council (CIC) introduced a comprehensive support package. This included significantly expanding training places and increasing financial incentives, demonstrating a proactive approach to workforce stabilisation and skill enhancement during economic adjustments.

A key feature of these responsive pathways is the emphasis on multi-skilling and targeted upskilling. The CIC's "one person, multiple skills" (一專多能) initiative, for example, was expanded to provide more training places for workers to learn additional trades. This strategy is particularly effective as it equips workers with a broader skillset, making them more adaptable and employable across different sectors of the industry. Simultaneously, "skills upgrading" (技術提升) courses help existing workers advance from semi-skilled to fully skilled status. To make these programmes genuinely accessible, they are offered tuition-free, and the completion allowance was substantially increased to as much as HK\$19,000, serving as a critical income support that encourages participation and reduces financial barriers to re-skilling. Such programmes are intentionally aligned with areas of genuine labour demand, such as installing false ceilings and lift maintenance, ensuring that training directly translates into viable employment opportunities.

The imperative for these targeted pathways is further underscored by broader labour market dynamics. Data projections indicating a shortage of approximately 60,000 skilled technicians by 2028 highlight the urgent need for a robust local training pipeline. This urgency is amplified by government schemes that permit the importation of labour for trades facing acute manpower shortages, such as lift technicians, aircraft maintenance engineers, and nurses. To ensure that local workers are not disadvantaged, unions and policymakers are advocating for a fundamental reform of vocational training. This includes calls to revive formal apprenticeship schemes and foster closer collaboration between training institutions and industries. The goal is to create clear career progression ladders that make skilled trades an attractive long-term profession for local youth, thereby strengthening the local workforce and reducing long-term reliance on imported labour. This comprehensive approach ensures that trade-specific training is not just a reactive measure to displacement but a proactive strategy for building a resilient and sovereign local workforce.

In conclusion, Hong Kong's pathway to becoming a global leader in continuous education is intrinsically linked to its ability to build a resilient and highly skilled local workforce. By weaving together a strategic blueprint that fosters global leadership through flexible, high-level education and a dynamic innovation ecosystem, with compassionate and practical trade-specific pathways for displaced workers, the city can create a cohesive and powerful framework. This dual-focused strategy ensures that while Hong Kong cements its status as an international education hub, it simultaneously fulfils its social contract to empower its own citizens, turning the challenge of economic displacement into an opportunity for inclusive growth and sustained global competitiveness.

16.4 Recognition of prior learning (RPL) expansion

Hong Kong possesses a robust foundation for becoming a global leader in continuous education, with its Qualifications Framework (QF) and Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) mechanism serving as cornerstone initiatives. Established in 2008, the QF was designed to provide a structured platform for encouraging lifelong learning and enhancing workforce competitiveness. The RPL mechanism, a critical component of this framework, formally validates the knowledge, skills, and experience that workers have accumulated through non-formal and informal learning in the workplace. This system directly addresses the limitations of traditional, formal education pathways by offering alternative routes for career advancement and further study, thereby fostering a paradigm shift towards more flexible and inclusive lifelong learning. The strategic importance of this approach is underscored by its ability to upgrade the capability of the general workforce, a key factor in sustaining Hong Kong's economic competitiveness in a rapidly changing global landscape.

To solidify Hong Kong's leadership position, a strategic expansion of the RPL mechanism must focus on broadening its sectoral coverage and deepening its integration within the education and training ecosystem. Currently, the RPL mechanism is operational in 19 industries, with over 40,000 practitioners having been awarded approximately 90,000 certificates. This expansion should target emerging and high-value sectors, building on the success seen in industries like testing, inspection and certification, information and communications technology, and retail. A key strategy involves extending RPL beyond its current focus on QF levels 1 to 4 to facilitate smoother progression into higher education. The recent adoption of RPL qualifications for admission into applied degree programmes, such as those at the Hong Kong Metropolitan University, exemplifies this trend, allowing experienced practitioners to have their prior learning credited towards a bachelor's degree. Furthermore, promoting Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT) systems that explicitly recognise RPL credits will create more seamless and efficient learning pathways for adult learners, enabling them to build upon their existing competencies without unnecessary duplication of training.

Another critical dimension of this strategic blueprint is the active engagement of stakeholders to enhance the recognition and application of RPL qualifications across the economy. The involvement of Industry Training Advisory Committees (ITACs) in developing and updating the Specification of Competency Standards (SCS) ensures that the RPL mechanism remains relevant to current industry needs. However, the next step is for employers, professional bodies, and government departments to systematically embed RPL into their human resource and regulatory frameworks. Success stories are already emerging: government departments like the Electrical and Mechanical Services Department now accept RPL certificates for vehicle technician registration and as a pathway for electric vehicle维修 certification. Professional associations, such as the印刷媒体专业人员协会, have adopted RPL qualifications as criteria for different grades of membership, thereby providing a structured career ladder for practitioners.

Similarly, companies like IKEA have leveraged RPL to formally recognise the skills of their warehouse staff, boosting employee morale and aiding in talent retention. Encouraging more organisations to follow suit—by using RPL in recruitment, for in-house training design, and as part of licensing requirements—will cement its value and drive a culture where experiential learning is valued equally with academic achievement. This holistic approach, combining robust infrastructure with widespread stakeholder adoption, will position Hong Kong not just as a user of RPL, but as a global model for integrating experiential learning into a comprehensive continuous education strategy.

16.5 Universities of Applied Sciences: The Metropolitan and Saint Francis models

Hong Kong's strategic ambition to become a global leader in continuing education is increasingly taking shape through the development of its applied science universities. The emergence of institutions like Hong Kong Metropolitan University (HKMU) and Saint Francis University (SFU) as Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS) represents a paradigm shift in the local higher education landscape, moving beyond traditional academic models to embrace a more vocationally-integrated and industry-responsive approach. This strategic blueprint leverages the unique advantages of Hong Kong as an international city to create a new brand of education that is both practically oriented and globally connected, positioning the city as a hub for nurturing talent with the skills demanded by the 21st-century economy.

The Metropolitan model, as embodied by HKMU, Hong Kong's first University of Applied Sciences, is characterized by its comprehensive and systematic integration of industry partnership into the core of its academic structure. A landmark example of this is the formal memorandum of understanding signed with the Federation of Hong Kong Industries, which established a strategic partnership aimed at fostering talent development, knowledge transfer, and applied research. This collaboration is designed to create a seamless interface between academia and the industrial sector, ensuring that curricula are directly informed by industry standards and practical professional operations. The goal is to produce graduates who are not only academically capable but also possess the technical skills and soft power that employers highly value, thereby injecting innovation and momentum into Hong Kong's industries. This is further evidenced by HKMU's development of specific applied degree programmes in close collaboration with industry councils and academies, such as the Master of Applied Science in Intelligent Construction and Building Information Modelling (BIM) developed with the Construction Industry Council, and a Cadet Pilot concentration in partnership with the Hong Kong International Aviation Academy.

Furthermore, the Metropolitan model extends to the creation of dedicated advisory bodies, like the Career Development Advisory Committee comprising 16 Executive Advisors from different industry sectors, to work directly with students and staff on employment and career development opportunities. This institutionalized mechanism ensures that the university's offerings remain perpetually aligned with the evolving needs of the economy, from programmes in Gemmology and Jewellery Studies to various business areas including real estate and property management. HKMU's approach also acknowledges the importance of holistic development, integrating community health initiatives and mental well-being into its strategic vision, thereby cultivating graduates who are not only professionally competent but also socially committed and well-rounded individuals.

In contrast, the Saint Francis model offers a complementary pathway to global leadership, distinguished by its focus on pioneering, interdisciplinary applied sciences that address emerging societal and global challenges. Since becoming the second UAS in Hong Kong in November 2024, SFU has aggressively pursued a strategy of developing innovative programmes that blend traditional disciplines with cutting-edge technology. A prime illustration of this is the launch of the Bachelor of Crime and Security Science and a Higher Diploma in the same field, which are the first programmes in Hong Kong to integrate crime science with technology. This curriculum diverges significantly from traditional social science or law-based approaches by heavily incorporating data science, artificial intelligence, blockchain, and information and communication technology, with ICT-related content accounting for over 50% of the programme's weight. This forward-thinking design directly responds to the escalating demand for professionals capable of tackling modern security threats, from cybercrime and financial fraud to national security, with a projected starting salary of no less than HK\$20,000 for graduates.

The Saint Francis model also demonstrates its commitment to applied research and community impact, securing over HK\$70 million in funding to support projects that deliver tangible benefits to the public. This includes a significant HK\$60 million Jockey Club-funded "Parent Chat" project to support parents under stress and the development of the first Integrated Clinical Education Centre for Physiotherapy in Hong Kong. Furthermore, SFU is strategically building a comprehensive and flexible vertical articulation framework by integrating its sister school, Caritas Bianchi College of Careers, as a member institution. This move creates a diversified and seamless progression pathway for students, allowing them to start with sub-degree or professional diploma programmes and advance all the way to applied degrees within the same educational family, thereby embodying the UAS commitment to providing multiple and flexible study avenues for young people.

In conclusion, both the Metropolitan and Saint Francis models provide robust and distinctive blueprints for Hong Kong's pathway to global leadership in continuing education. HKMU's strength lies in its systematic, large-scale integration with industry and its development of a wide array of programmes directly responsive to economic needs. SFU's niche is its agility in creating novel, interdisciplinary fields of study that anticipate future market trends and its strong emphasis on applied research with direct community impact. Together, these two models illustrate a dynamic and multifaceted approach to applied science education. As foundational members of the newly established Alliance of Universities in Applied Sciences, their continued development and collaboration will be pivotal in strengthening Hong Kong's brand as an international post-secondary education hub, capable of producing a highly skilled workforce ready to lead and innovate on a global stage.

CHAPTER 17: PRIVATE SECTOR AND COMMUNITY PROVIDERS

The private sector and community-based organisations form the vital, agile foundation of Hong Kong's continuing education ecosystem. Far from being mere adjuncts to publicly funded institutions, they are the primary drivers of innovation, market responsiveness, and social inclusion. Their collective strength lies in a remarkable diversity of scale, mission, and pedagogical approach, creating a multi-layered network that can cater to virtually every learning need and demographic. A strategic blueprint for global leadership must recognise, empower, and interconnect these diverse providers to build a resilient and forward-looking system.

The commercial sector provides the backbone of scale and market efficiency, demonstrating how continuing education can operate as a dynamic industry. Giants like the Beacon Group, established in 1989, exemplify this with their Asia-wide operations, encompassing 12 schools and serving tens of thousands of students annually. Their evolution from traditional tutoring to a comprehensive education services provider—offering everything from full-time secondary courses to professional training and overseas study consulting—illustrates the sector's capacity for organic growth and diversification. Crucially, these private entities are often the first to innovate pedagogically. Beacon's development of "Video-Induced Pedagogy" (Beacon VIP) and "O2O" (Online-to-Offline) blended learning models, long before they became mainstream, demonstrates the private sector's ability to invest in and deploy technology to enhance learner autonomy and engagement. This commercial dynamism is further evidenced by the presence of over 100 companies in Hong Kong's "continued learning" sector, which has attracted significant venture capital, particularly in technology-driven platforms for language learning and professional upskilling. This market-driven engine ensures the ecosystem remains responsive to emerging economic trends and learner demands.

Alongside these commercial powerhouses, a robust network of non-profit and community-based providers ensures that continuing education fulfils a critical social mission, promoting equity and accessibility. Organisations like Caritas Community & Higher Education Service, founded in 1963, have a decades-long history of providing alternative educational pathways. By offering programmes like the Diploma Yi Jin, they create crucial second chances for school leavers and mature students, while their broad range of Higher Diplomas are explicitly designed to meet community needs and enhance employability. This ethos of service is mirrored by newer entities like Oxbridge Academia, a certified social enterprise that explicitly targets social inequality. By providing fee reductions, specialised support for students with learning disabilities (SEN), and re-employment training for vulnerable groups like new immigrants and single parents, it leverages AI and STEM to create inclusive learning environments that address specific societal pain points. At the grassroots level, organisations like the Continuing and Adult Learning Community College, established in 2002, offer hyper-local solutions, providing recreational and vocational courses to serve all age groups within a specific community. These providers ensure that the pursuit of lifelong learning is not just a privilege for the few but a tangible opportunity for all.

Furthermore, the ecosystem is enriched by specialised institutes and professional bodies that focus on depth and quality in specific domains. Affiliated institutions of major universities, such as the HKU School of Professional and Continuing Education Community College (HKU SPACE CC) , bridge the gap between university prestige and accessible community education. With an enrollment of around 11,000 students, it offers a structured pathway from sub-degree programmes to higher education, demonstrating the critical role of university-affiliated colleges in providing credible, articulated qualifications. Adding another layer of professional rigour are dedicated organisations like the Life Development Institute (LDI). As the first professional body in Hong Kong for career development, LDI sets practice standards and delivers internationally recognised certifications in partnership with the US-based National Career Development Association (NCDA). By training over 500 Certified Career Development Professionals and serving more than 50,000 individuals annually, LDI professionalises the critical support structure around lifelong learning, ensuring that education is effectively linked to career outcomes.

The interconnectedness and collective strength of this diverse landscape are embodied by industry bodies like the Federation for Self-financing Tertiary Education (FSTE). Representing a consortium of 15 major institutions—including the continuing education arms of all major universities like HKU, CUHK, and PolyU, alongside key players like Caritas and the Vocational Training Council—FSTE provides a unified voice for the self-financing sector. Its very existence, evolving from a continuing education alliance founded in 1994, demonstrates the sector's maturity and its proactive role in shaping policy and ensuring quality. By organising international summits and collaborating with overseas institutions, FSTE helps to elevate local practices to global standards, turning a diverse collection of individual providers into a cohesive and internationally engaged community. This collaborative framework is the final piece of the puzzle, transforming a vibrant but potentially fragmented market into a structured and powerful engine for global leadership in continuing education.

17.1 Commercial training firms: Quality standards and integration

Hong Kong possesses a robust and mature foundation to assert its leadership in the global continuing education landscape. The cornerstone of this ambition is the well-established Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF), which provides a comprehensive and transparent platform for recognizing formal and informal learning. This framework, underpinned by the legal mandate of the Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications Ordinance, ensures that all qualifications bearing the QF logo have undergone rigorous quality assurance by the statutory body, the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ). This system not only clearly defines standards and levels of learning but also facilitates lifelong learning by enabling learners to accumulate and transfer credits across different institutions and sectors. Furthermore, the Hong Kong government has strategically promoted vocational and professional education and training (VPET) as a parallel pathway to traditional academics, actively encouraging "business-school cooperation" through initiatives like the "Business-School Partnership Programme 2.0". This creates a dynamic ecosystem where industry input directly shapes curricula, ensuring that continuing education remains responsive to the rapidly evolving demands of the global economy.

The integration and quality assurance of commercial training firms are pivotal to this strategic blueprint, ensuring that all providers, regardless of size, contribute to a high-quality, cohesive continuing education sector. The HKCAAVQ's four-stage quality assurance process serves as the primary gateway, requiring operators to demonstrate organisational competency through Initial Evaluation (IE) and their programmes to meet stringent standards via Learning Programme Accreditation (LPA) before their qualifications can be entered into the official Qualifications Register (QR). For more mature commercial providers with a proven track record, Programme Area Accreditation (PAA) offers a streamlined pathway, empowering them to develop and operate programmes within an approved area without seeking individual accreditation for each new course, thus fostering innovation and agility. This government-led framework is complemented by industry-specific validation bodies, such as the Professional Validation Council of Hong Kong Industries (PVCHK), which sets additional criteria for training providers, including assessments of their institutional background, teaching staff qualifications, premises, and internal quality assurance systems. This multi-layered approach ensures that commercial training firms are not peripheral players but are fully integrated, quality-assured partners in Hong Kong's education ecosystem.

Finally, the pathway to global leadership is being actively forged through deepened partnerships between industry and academia, creating a seamless and practical continuing education experience. The Vocational Training Council (VTC) exemplifies this through strategic collaborations with major corporations like Hong Yip and 丰盛生活服务 (Fung Shing Life Services), which embed cutting-edge technologies such as Mixed Reality (MR) into the curriculum and provide students with invaluable internship and mentorship opportunities. These alliances extend to supporting government initiatives like the VPAS scheme for non-local students, thereby internationalising the talent pool.

Academic research further reinforces this model by identifying key success factors for such collaborations, including clear management, adequate resources, and the cultivation of student interest. Notably, employers are increasingly valuing the soft skills—such as analytical thinking, resilience, and a commitment to lifelong learning—that these integrated programmes cultivate, signaling a shift in focus from purely academic achievements to holistic, work-ready competencies. By formalising these industry-education linkages and continuously adapting to market needs, Hong Kong is building a world-class continuing education system that is both rigorous in its standards and dynamic in its delivery.

17.2 Non-profit and community-based organisations

Hong Kong's non-profit and community-based organisations are uniquely positioned to transform the city into a global leader for continuing education. Leveraging their deep community trust, agility, and philanthropic support, these bodies can execute a strategic blueprint that moves beyond traditional vocational training to embrace holistic, values-driven, and internationally connected lifelong learning. The following paragraphs detail the key pillars of this strategic pathway, drawing on the existing strengths and innovative models already emerging within the sector.

Pillar 1: Establishing Centres of Excellence with International Accreditation

A core component of the blueprint is the professionalisation of the continuing education workforce itself. Hong Kong non-profits are already demonstrating the power of international partnerships to set global standards. The Life Development Institute (LDI) serves as a prime example, operating as a recognised Continuing Education Provider for the US-based National Career Development Association (NCDA) in Greater China. By delivering internationally accredited certificate courses for career practitioners, LDI ensures that Hong Kong's career development professionals are trained to world-class standards. This strategy can be replicated across other specialisations. For instance, the Professional Training and Development Institute, established by the Tung Wah Group of Hospitals, focuses on upskilling personnel within the social welfare sector, directly addressing local talent gaps with tailored, high-quality programmes. By systematically pursuing international accreditation for such institutions, Hong Kong's non-profits can position themselves as trusted providers of certified training, attracting learners from across Asia who seek globally recognised credentials delivered within a familiar cultural and linguistic context.

Pillar 2: Fostering Cross-Sectoral Collaboration for Holistic and Values-Based Learning

To achieve global leadership, continuing education must transcend purely functional skills and cultivate well-rounded, socially conscious individuals. The blueprint encourages non-profits to act as "super-connectors," bridging the corporate world, academia, and philanthropy. A groundbreaking model is the collaboration between Hang Seng University of Hong Kong's Institute of Knowledge Exchange, a charity, and educational groups to launch an "Entrepreneurial CEO Certificate Course". This programme integrates academic rigour with the practical business philosophy of a corporate giant, Dr. Cheng Yu-tung, and donates its proceeds to charity, thus linking leadership education directly with social impact. Similarly, the partnership between CUHK Business School and the Stanford Center on Philanthropy and Civil Society (Stanford PACS) to offer executive education in "Effective Philanthropy" directly targets wealth managers and family offices, aiming to make Hong Kong Asia's philanthropic hub.

For community-based organisations, this pillar means developing curricula that incorporate elements of servanthood and integrity, much like the CEO Global Education Foundation, which specialises in leadership development with an emphasis on soft skills and ethical character. This blend of practical skill and ethical grounding creates a distinctive and highly attractive educational offering.

Pillar 3: Building an Integrated Ecosystem for Lifelong and Lifewide Learning

Global leadership requires a seamless ecosystem where citizens of all ages and backgrounds can access learning pathways. Community-based organisations are ideally placed to build this ecosystem from the ground up. The KCRA Community Education Enhancement Center exemplifies this by serving as an accredited training body for Hong Kong's Employees Retraining Authority (ERB), offering a wide spectrum of vocational courses to empower diverse community segments. Its stated mission is to "promote lifelong education for all," addressing the needs of different age groups and fostering collaboration between government, business, and social welfare. This grassroots reach can be connected to more specialised institutions. The YMCA College of Continuing Education, with its holistic vision of developing body, mind, and spirit, provides another vital link in this chain, focusing on personal growth and exploring joint ventures with overseas institutions to expand opportunities for learners. By creating clear articulation pathways between community-based vocational training, professional development institutes, and even university-level executive programmes, Hong Kong can build a truly integrated lifelong learning society.

Pillar 4: Leveraging Technology and Cross-Border Integration for Regional Impact

As a super-connector for the Greater Bay Area (GBA) and beyond, Hong Kong's non-profits can use technology and strategic alliances to scale their impact. The GBA Business School Foundation explicitly aims to assume this role, coordinating with different organisations to pool talent and offer strategic advice for the GBA's development. Its model of cultivating leaders with a global perspective through an East-meets-West integration is a template for others. Furthermore, institutions like HKUST(GZ) are already partnering with international bodies like the InterAction Council to establish academies like the World Young Leaders Academy, designed to equip young talents to address pressing global challenges. Non-profits can emulate this by developing hybrid learning platforms that deliver their programmes to learners across the GBA and Southeast Asia. By combining their trusted, community-focused brand with digital delivery and cross-border partnerships, Hong Kong's non-profits can extend their reach far beyond the city's borders, establishing a new paradigm for accessible, high-impact continuing education in the region and solidifying Hong Kong's status as a global leader in the field.

17.3 EdTech startups and innovation in learning delivery

Hong Kong's ambition to become a global leader in continuing education is increasingly being translated into a tangible reality, driven by a strategic combination of government policy, institutional innovation, and a burgeoning local EdTech sector. The foundation for this leadership is being laid by forward-thinking government initiatives, such as those outlined in recent Policy Addresses, which aim to transform the city into an international post-secondary education hub. Key measures include significantly expanding the intake of non-local students and developing a "University Town" in the Northern Metropolis to foster collaboration with renowned Mainland and overseas institutions. Furthermore, the government is actively reshaping the vocational and professional training landscape by supporting the establishment of Universities of Applied Sciences (UASs) and tasking the Employees Retraining Board (ERB) to innovate with a "skills-based" training approach. This policy push creates a fertile ground for new models of learning, directly encouraging the integration of technology and flexible pathways that are essential for a modern, global continuing education ecosystem.

The local EdTech startup scene in Hong Kong is responding to these strategic directions by pioneering deeply innovative and human-centric learning delivery methods, moving far beyond simple digitization. Companies like iRed are exemplifying this by developing tangible, IoT-based learning suites, such as their Smart Learning Suite, which combines hardware like health monitors with open-source coding platforms like App Inventor. This approach not only teaches students coding logic but embeds it within a framework of design thinking and social empathy, as seen in their "乐龄『同理』编程设计大赛" where students create apps to foster intergenerational digital inclusion for the elderly. Similarly, the non-profit organization Open Knowledge Association has developed RainbowOne, a comprehensive platform that empowers teachers to create fully customizable, interactive e-textbooks. By offering over 90 editable components and tools like a "black screen" function for classroom management, RainbowOne addresses the practical, real-world needs of educators while building a data-rich environment to support its ultimate goal of truly personalized and inclusive education for all students, including those with special educational needs. This demonstrates a maturity in the local EdTech sector, where the focus is on solving pedagogical challenges with robust, scalable technology.

Innovation in Hong Kong's continuing education landscape is not confined to startups; it is being powerfully driven by the strategic initiatives of established higher education institutions, which are creating new, flexible pathways for lifelong learning. Both The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) Business School and City University of Hong Kong (CityU) have launched cutting-edge programmes that blend flexibility with academic rigour. CUHK's new Professional Certificate Programmes (Micro-credentials) are a prime example, offering industry-specific courses in high-demand areas like AI and ESG that can be completed at the student's own pace, with the unique benefit of credits that can be seamlessly transferred into a master's degree programme. This stackable model provides a tangible and motivating pathway for professionals to upskill incrementally.

Complementing this, CityU's revamped Global EMBA curriculum adopts a sophisticated hybrid model, blending online foundational courses with immersive in-person experiential learning, field studies, and networking opportunities designed for global executives. Meanwhile, HKU SPACE is aggressively expanding its physical and strategic footprint to capture regional demand. The opening of a new 20,000-square-foot learning centre in Sheung Shui, strategically located just 20 minutes from the Mainland border, is a deliberate move to serve learners from the Greater Bay Area (GBA). This is coupled with partnerships, such as the one with Northwestern Polytechnical University to create a "Cloud Classroom + Practice Base" model, and the establishment of the LEAD Academy to offer high-level executive training to Mainland officials and professionals, effectively positioning Hong Kong as the continuing education gateway to and from the GBA.

Ultimately, Hong Kong's pathway to global leadership in continuing education is being paved by a powerful synergy between its unique advantages as an international city and the cutting-edge capabilities of its local innovators. The city's role as a bridge between East and West is being leveraged by entities like HKU SPACE's LEAD Academy, which facilitates study tours to top global universities like Cambridge and Harvard for Mainland executives, while also bringing Shenzhen officials to Hong Kong to learn about its financial and legal systems. This two-way flow of knowledge and talent is a unique asset. Furthermore, the integration of advanced technologies like AI is becoming a cornerstone of the strategy. Startups like Meta Dot are transforming their expert pedagogical knowledge into scalable, AI-driven ecosystems, using platforms like GPTBots to create intelligent teaching assistants that provide real-time, personalized support to students. By fostering a collaborative environment where government vision, institutional agility, and startup creativity intersect, Hong Kong is not just adopting global trends in continuing education but is actively shaping its future, building a model that is flexible, technologically advanced, and deeply responsive to the evolving needs of a global workforce.

17.4 Employer-provided training: Accreditation pathways

Hong Kong's ambition to become a global leader in continuing education is firmly rooted in a sophisticated and well-established accreditation infrastructure. This system is designed to validate not only formal academic study but also the practical skills and knowledge gained through employer-provided training and on-the-job experience. By creating clear, credible pathways for professional development, Hong Kong is strategically positioning itself as a hub for lifelong learning, capable of meeting the dynamic needs of a globalized economy and empowering its workforce for the future.

The Bedrock: A Comprehensive Qualifications Framework

The cornerstone of Hong Kong's strategy is the Qualifications Framework (QF) , a seven-level hierarchy that benchmarks and guarantees the quality of all academic and vocational qualifications. Launched officially in 2008, the QF was established to promote lifelong learning and provide clear progression routes for learners. A pivotal feature of this framework is the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) mechanism. The RPL mechanism formally acknowledges the skills, knowledge, and experience that workers have acquired informally over their careers, regardless of where or how they were obtained. This represents a paradigm shift from a sole emphasis on academic credentials to a more inclusive model that values workplace competencies, allowing individuals to gain formal recognition for their existing expertise and use it as a springboard for further education and career advancement.

Pathways for Employer-Provided Training: From Classroom to Credential

The operational success of the QF relies on close collaboration with industries to ensure that training is relevant and rigorous. Central to this are the Industry Training Advisory Committees (ITACs) , composed of representatives from employers, employees, and professional bodies. These committees are tasked with developing detailed Specifications of Competency Standards (SCSs) for their respective sectors, which outline the precise skills and outcome standards expected at different qualification levels.

For employers, this framework provides a clear blueprint for designing impactful in-house training. Training programmes, whether developed by corporations or external providers, can be aligned with the SCSs. When such a programme is quality-assured by the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) , it becomes recognized under the QF. This transforms internal company training from an isolated activity into a nationally accredited qualification. Specific pathways, such as Vocational Qualifications Pathways (VQP) , take this a step further by tailoring courses to the exact competency requirements of defined job roles, ensuring a seamless link between learning and on-the-job performance. Furthermore, courses that meet these rigorous standards can become eligible for government subsidies, such as those under the Continuing Education Fund (CEF) , incentivizing both employers to invest in training and employees to upskill.

Strategic Imperatives: Fostering Innovation and Global Leadership

Building on this solid foundation, Hong Kong's universities and policymakers are actively implementing forward-thinking strategies to solidify the city's global leadership in continuous education. This involves a multi-pronged approach focused on deeper industry-academia integration, entrepreneurial cultivation, and internationalization. Higher education institutions are increasingly establishing collaborative research centres and executive education hubs that address real-world challenges in emerging fields like artificial intelligence (AI) and fintech, ensuring curricula remain market-relevant. For instance, City University of Hong Kong's Business Innovation Education initiative aims to be the premier hub in Asia for transformative executive education, leveraging deep industry engagement to develop global business leaders.

Furthermore, there is a concerted push to embed entrepreneurial thinking into the fabric of higher education. University-affiliated incubators and start-up programmes provide students and professionals with resources, mentorship, and funding to transform innovative ideas into viable ventures. This is complemented by government-led reforms to increase the intake of non-local students and designate "universities of applied sciences," creating clear, respected pathways for hands-on, vocational learning that directly meets market demands. Initiatives to promote mutual recognition of qualifications within the Greater Bay Area further extend Hong Kong's influence and create seamless cross-boundary opportunities for talent development. By integrating work-integrated learning, fostering cross-border research collaborations, and building a supportive ecosystem for innovation, Hong Kong is not just reacting to the needs of the economy but actively shaping a future where continuous education is the engine of sustainable growth and global competitiveness.

17.5 Professional associations and industry-led certifications

Hong Kong possesses a unique confluence of factors that position it to become a global leader in continuous education, with professional associations and industry-led certifications serving as the foundational pillars of this strategic blueprint. These bodies are not merely passive observers of market trends but are active architects of professional standards, directly responding to the rapidly evolving demands of the global economy. The CFA Society Hong Kong exemplifies this leadership, having established itself as the world's fourth-largest CFA society with over 6,600 members, and playing an integral role in reinforcing Hong Kong's status as an international financial hub. Its recognition by the Securities and Futures Commission (SFC) as a provider of continuing professional training and the designation of the CFA charter as an industry qualification for responsible officers demonstrates how professional bodies directly shape and elevate the competency framework of an entire sector. This model of setting the "gold standard" for an industry provides a replicable blueprint for other sectors aiming to enhance their global competitiveness through rigorous, locally relevant, and internationally recognized certification.

The strategic blueprint is further strengthened by the proactive creation of new, specialized certifications that address emerging global trends and regulatory shifts, ensuring Hong Kong's workforce remains at the forefront of innovation. The Hong Kong Securities and Investment Institute (HKSI Institute) recently launched the pioneering Certification Programme for Virtual Asset Professionals (CVAP), developed in direct consultation with the SFC and industry experts. This initiative directly aligns with the government's "A-S-P-I-Re" roadmap to establish Hong Kong as a global hub for virtual assets, showcasing how professional bodies can rapidly operationalize policy goals into tangible, high-quality professional development pathways. Similarly, The Hong Kong Chartered Governance Institute (HKCGI) has demonstrated agility by launching its Sustainability Governance Academy and an ESG Reporting Certification Course, which has already attracted over 1,400 participants, directly responding to the growing global emphasis on climate disclosure and corporate governance. These examples illustrate a dynamic ecosystem where professional associations are not just maintaining standards but are actively defining new ones for the future.

To solidify its global leadership, Hong Kong's strategic blueprint must formalize and expand the synergy between its robust professional certification infrastructure, academic institutions, and government frameworks like the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF). The government's "QF in Action" initiative actively encourages organizations, including professional bodies, to develop HKQF-recognized projects, thereby enhancing the professionalism and competitiveness of the workforce. This is complemented by collaborations such as that between the International Association of Registered Financial Consultants (IARFC) and the Hang Seng University of Hong Kong to offer advanced designations, and the role of the Chinese University of Hong Kong's School of Continuing and Professional Studies (SCS-CUHK), which explicitly aims to expand its network and collaborate with industries for training and continuing education development.

By deepening these partnerships, Hong Kong can create a seamless and prestigious continuum of lifelong learning—from academic theory to applied professional expertise—that is validated by the government, delivered by universities, and, most importantly, demanded and certified by leading global professional bodies. This integrated approach will ensure that Hong Kong not only nurtures globally competitive professionals but also becomes the definitive hub for developing the skilled talent that the world economy of tomorrow will require.

VOLUME IV: INTERNATIONALISATION AND GLOBAL REACH

PART 7: EXPORTING HONG KONG'S CONTINUOUS EDUCATION

CHAPTER 18: HONG KONG AS THE REGION'S LIFELONG LEARNING HUB

Hong Kong stands at a pivotal moment in its effort to redefine itself as a global leader in continuing education and the region's premier lifelong learning hub. This strategic blueprint requires a multi-faceted approach, leveraging its unique advantages as an international city with deep connections to Mainland China. The foundation for this ambition is being laid through progressive government policy, innovative programme development by leading institutions, and a deliberate focus on integrating with the Greater Bay Area (GBA) to address critical talent gaps and foster a culture of continuous, flexible learning for all demographics.

A key pillar of Hong Kong's strategy is the robust policy support from the HKSAR government, which has signalled a fundamental shift towards a more integrated and market-responsive education system. The latest Policy Address has introduced sweeping reforms designed to bridge the innovation talent gap by strategically cultivating a specific, market-ready talent pool. A cornerstone of this is the radical expansion of non-local student intake, with the admission ceiling for self-financing non-local bachelor's degree students at public universities set to rise to 50 percent, alongside an increased over-enrolment ceiling for research postgraduate programs. This is complemented by initiatives to create a more cohesive regional education space, such as promoting the mutual recognition of sub-degree qualifications with the Mainland to facilitate seamless cross-boundary employment and study within the GBA. Furthermore, the formal designation of institutions like Hong Kong Metropolitan University as "universities of applied sciences" creates a respected pathway for hands-on, vocational learning, steering them toward partnerships with leading enterprises in Guangdong province to ensure curricula are directly aligned with industry needs. These moves directly address a historical critique that policy might be more rhetoric than reality, transforming the vision of a regional education hub into concrete action.

Complementing these policy shifts, Hong Kong's educational institutions are pioneering innovative and flexible learning models that cater to the needs of modern professionals. For instance, the Asia-Pacific Institute of Business (APIB) at CUHK Business School has introduced a series of Professional Certificate Programmes (Micro-credentials) that serve as "career accelerators". These programmes feature a practical approach, shorter duration, and more affordable fees, covering trending areas such as Innovation Leadership, Sustainability and ESG Reporting, and Artificial Intelligence for Business. A unique and differentiating benefit is the seamless transfer of credits earned from these micro-credentials to CUHK Business School's master's degree programmes, creating a flexible and stacked learning pathway from undergraduate to postgraduate studies. This model, with programmes listed at Level 6 of the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF), exemplifies how lifelong learning can be integrated into traditional academic structures, allowing professionals to upskill incrementally and at their own pace.

Hong Kong's strategic geographical position and its role within the Greater Bay Area are central to its blueprint for becoming a regional lifelong learning hub. Institutions like HKU SPACE are actively executing strategies to "Contribute to Human Capital Development in the GBA," as outlined in their 2025-2030 Strategic Plan. This is manifested through practical initiatives such as the establishment of a new 20,000-square-foot learning centre in Sheung Shui, which is strategically located a mere 20-minute journey from the Lo Wu and Lok Ma Chau boundary control points, explicitly designed to serve participants from the Mainland. Furthermore, HKU SPACE has forged partnerships with Mainland institutions, like the School of Continuing Education of Northwestern Polytechnical University, to create integrated training models such as the "Cloud Classroom + Practice Base," blending theoretical education with hands-on practice for Mainland students. This cross-boundary collaboration is further enhanced by the work of the Academy for Leadership Enhancement and Development (LEAD), which runs tailor-made training programmes and study tours for senior executives, government officials, and university students from the Chinese Mainland, covering topics from fintech to arts and culture, thereby deepening integration and mutual understanding within the GBA.

Ultimately, Hong Kong's pathway to global leadership in continuing education is underpinned by a shared vision among its institutions to be responsive to societal and economic trends. The strategic plans of major players like CUHK and HKU SPACE explicitly mention serving the needs of an ageing population, supporting second careers, and examining diversified access for global experiences. This forward-thinking approach is about creating a comprehensive ecosystem that nurtures lifelong learners from young adults to senior citizens. The government's push for greater academia-industry integration, with calls to make commercial projects a critical part of degree programmes, aims to produce graduates who are not just knowledgeable but also "readily employable". By combining world-class research, an internationalised environment, and unparalleled ability to commercialize technology, Hong Kong is not just producing graduates but is strategically cultivating job-creating entrepreneurs and high-tech professionals capable of powering strategic sectors and securing the city's future as a world innovation leader. This holistic and strategic approach, blending policy, innovation, and regional integration, provides a solid foundation for Hong Kong to achieve its ambition.

18.1 Targeting the Greater Bay Area: Cross-border learner mobility

The Greater Bay Area development strategy is the primary catalyst for Hong Kong's cross-border educational initiatives. Institutions are proactively building bridges to attract learners from the GBA and facilitate their mobility. The University of Hong Kong's School of Professional and Continuing Education (HKU SPACE) has made "Contributing to Human Capital Development in the GBA" a key pillar of its 2025-2030 Strategic Plan. To physically and programmatically bridge the border, HKU SPACE has established a Mainland Affairs Office, a dedicated GBA website, and most symbolically, opened a new 20,000-square-foot learning centre in Sheung Shui, located in the North District just a 20-minute journey from the Mainland boundary. This centre is strategically designed to serve Mainland participants, offering a range of programmes from Postgraduate Diplomas to workshops in AI, business, and the arts, thereby lowering the barrier for cross-border learners to access Hong Kong's high-quality education.

Beyond physical infrastructure, Hong Kong is pioneering innovative cross-border educational models that go beyond simple student recruitment to create deeply integrated learning experiences. The HKMU LiPACE-SUIT programme, recognized at the Hong Kong Business Management Excellence Awards 2026, exemplifies this new paradigm. It is the first programme to successfully integrate Hong Kong's two-year higher diploma system with Shenzhen's three-year higher vocational education framework, allowing students to earn dual awards from both institutions. The curriculum structure requires students to complete business English at SUIT in Shenzhen, followed by tourism and hospitality studies at HKMU LiPACE in Hong Kong, before undertaking a joint internship. This model not only resolves the complex challenge of mutual academic credit recognition but also immerses students in two distinct educational and cultural environments, fostering adaptability and cross-cultural competencies that are highly valued in the GBA's integrated economy.

This cross-border mobility is further energized by high-profile public-private partnerships that provide students with unparalleled industry exposure. The Greater Bay Area Fintech Talent Initiative, now in its third year and expanded to include 50 undergraduate students from Shenzhen alongside their Hong Kong counterparts, is a flagship example. Organized by the Hong Kong Monetary Authority (HKMA), Bloomberg, and the Hong Kong United Youth Association, the programme brings together 20 leading financial and technology institutions as corporate partners. With a 2025 theme of "Empowering the Greater Bay Area for an AI-driven Future," participants engage in comprehensive cross-border training, company visits, and immersive site engagements in both Hong Kong and Shenzhen. This initiative directly cultivates the next generation of fintech leaders while fostering crucial cross-border collaboration and networks, demonstrating how government and industry can co-create talent pipelines for regional strategic industries.

Finally, the Hong Kong government's policy framework is actively enabling this educational integration. The 2025 Policy Address explicitly supports the development of the Northern Metropolis as a zone for seamless cross-border flows of people and data, which is essential for educational and research collaboration. It also backs applied science universities like Hong Kong Metropolitan University in building exchange platforms with Mainland vocational institutions and exploring mutual recognition of qualifications. This high-level policy support, combined with initiatives like the Immigration Arrangement for Non-local Graduates (IANG), which allows non-local graduates of full-time programmes (including Postgraduate Diplomas from HKU SPACE) to work in Hong Kong, creates a powerful "study-to-work" pathway. This comprehensive ecosystem—spanning infrastructure, curriculum, industry partnerships, and immigration policy—positions Hong Kong not merely as a provider of courses, but as a strategic hub for talent development and circulation within the Greater Bay Area and beyond.

18.2 ASEAN markets: Customising programmes for emerging economies

Successfully penetrating ASEAN's diverse emerging economies demands a nuanced customisation strategy that respects each nation's unique developmental stage, cultural context, and industrial priorities while leveraging Hong Kong's educational excellence. Comprehensive research on ASEAN technical and vocational education reveals the region's rich diversity, with Singapore's "teaching factory" model and lifelong learning system contrasting sharply with Indonesia's focus on scaling education amid demographic dividends, Malaysia's national qualifications framework emphasising产教协同, and Thailand's alignment with "Thailand 4.0" high-value added industries. This heterogeneity necessitates what the Global University Presidents Summit identified as essential: respecting local differences while negotiating global educational standards, recognizing that "globalization is a wonderful term but, at the same time, we sometimes struggle to balance what's expected of us, to balance with the more local style of teaching and learning". Effective customisation begins with understanding each market's specific industrial transformation needs—the Philippines' flexible skills training responding to labour market demands, Cambodia's efforts to make technical education the premier choice amid infrastructure limitations, and Indonesia's urgent requirement for scalable quality education beyond capital cities.

The adaptation of Singapore's world-class education system for Indonesian communities by SIS Group of Schools offers a compelling template for Hong Kong institutions entering ASEAN markets. Speaking at the ASEAN Business and Investment Summit, SIS Founder Jaspal Sidhu articulated how his organisation successfully adapted Singapore's OECD PISA top-ranked system through frameworks specifically designed for emerging economies: the Half-Fees Model expanding access through reduced tuition while maintaining quality, and the EFFECTOR Model identifying and empowering outstanding teacher talent in smaller cities through structured training ecosystems. This "attitude-first" approach to teacher recruitment recognizes that in smaller Indonesian cities like Palembang, Sidoarjo, and Kediri, "the DNA of great teachers already exists, humility, sincerity, and deep commitment to their communities. What they need is exposure to international best practices". For Hong Kong institutions, this insight proves invaluable—successful ASEAN market entry requires not merely exporting curricula but building local capacity through train-the-trainer models that respect indigenous strengths while introducing global standards. The ASEAN TVET Council's Regional Policy Dialogue further emphasises that "skills are the new currency," with discussions highlighting the critical importance of addressing rural access challenges—improving road infrastructure and internet connectivity remains fundamental for disseminating education in countries where rural populations reach 80.79 percent in Sri Lanka and 74 percent in Cambodia.

Curriculum customisation must align with ASEAN's accelerating digital transformation and Industry 4.0 adoption. Hong Kong's strengths in fintech, AI applications, sustainability reporting, and family business succession, as evidenced by CUHK's Professional Certificate Programmes, align remarkably with ASEAN's expressed needs. However, delivery mechanisms require adaptation—blended learning models combining Hong Kong faculty expertise with local mentorship, modular credentials accommodating working professionals in emerging economy contexts, and recognition arrangements that facilitate cross-border qualifications mobility. Malaysia's initiative to lead "ASEAN TVET certification, the first of its kind in the region" signals growing regional commitment to harmonised skills recognition, creating opportunities for Hong Kong qualifications to achieve regional portability. The ASEAN Technical and Vocational Education and Training Dialogue's theme of "TVET for Rural and Regional Development" underscores the importance of accessible programme design, with Cambodian representatives highlighting challenges of limited labour market information and misconceptions about vocational pathways that Hong Kong institutions must address through targeted awareness campaigns. Successful customisation ultimately requires what HKU SPACE demonstrated with mainland Chinese programmes: deep collaboration with local partners, study tours that provide immersive Hong Kong experiences while maintaining relevance to home contexts, and curriculum that bridges Eastern and Western perspectives. By adopting SIS's scalable, sustainable, and inclusive education models while maintaining Hong Kong's academic rigour and global connectivity, continuing education providers can effectively serve ASEAN's emerging economies, recognising with regional leaders that "education remains ASEAN's most powerful equaliser" with responsibility to "ensure it lifts every community, not just the privileged ones". This balanced approach of maintaining Hong Kong's quality standards while embracing ASEAN's contextual diversity will determine success in capturing the region's immense and growing demand for continuous professional development.

18.3 Belt and Road Initiative countries: Capacity building partnerships

Hong Kong is strategically positioning itself as a global leader in continuous education by transforming its world-class professional services and academic infrastructure into a comprehensive capacity-building hub for Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) countries. This strategic blueprint leverages the city's unique advantages under "one country, two systems" to foster sustainable development and multilateral cooperation across Asia and beyond.

Hong Kong's pathway to becoming a global leader in continuous education is underpinned by a clear, government-coordinated strategy that harnesses the city's unique advantages. The establishment of dedicated platforms, such as the Belt and Road Capacity Building Platform led by the Belt and Road Office, provides a formal mechanism to strengthen talent and institutional readiness. This platform delivers practitioner upskilling, thematic workshops for SMEs, and government-to-government training programs with partner economies, effectively translating policy into executable pipelines for resilient collaboration. Complementing this, the government's 2024 Policy Address outlined a vision for a dedicated B&R capacity building centre to forge ties with participating countries using Hong Kong's "soft power," alongside the launch of the Hong Kong International Legal Talents Training Academy to train foreign-related legal professionals. These high-level initiatives are reinforced by a city-wide commitment to lifelong learning, as seen in institutions like CUHK's School of Continuing and Professional Studies, whose vision is "to be a global leader in university continuing education" by collaborating with industries in Hong Kong and globally. Furthermore, recent sweeping reforms to establish Hong Kong as an international education hub, including raising the non-local student intake cap to 50 percent and creating "universities of applied sciences," demonstrate a fundamental shift towards strategically cultivating a market-ready, globally competitive talent pool. This multi-pronged approach—integrating government vision, institutional innovation, and policy reform—forms the bedrock of Hong Kong's leadership in the field.

Capacity Building Partnerships with Belt and Road Countries

Hong Kong's role as a functional platform for the BRI is most vividly demonstrated through its extensive and diverse capacity-building partnerships, which span critical sectors from infrastructure and finance to meteorology and anti-corruption. A prime example is the Hong Kong Observatory's establishment of the Meteorological Training Centre for Belt and Road Countries. Officially opened in late 2024, this centre aims to enhance climate resilience in the region by cultivating a network of weather and climate experts. Its inaugural workshop on aviation meteorological science drew over 90 participants from more than 45 WMO and ICAO members, showcasing Hong Kong's ability to convene and train international professionals. In the realm of good governance, the ICAC has taken a leading role by hosting the first Professional Anti-corruption Training in Major Infrastructure Projects for B&R countries, attended by anti-graft agencies from 13 nations.

This program, which included site visits to major infrastructure projects in Hong Kong and the Greater Bay Area, directly contributes to the building of a "Clean Silk Road" by sharing Hong Kong's expertise in corruption prevention. The reach of this capacity building extends to the private sector and academia. For instance, HKIA Consultancy has entered into agreements to provide airport construction and management solutions for projects in Ethiopia, Indonesia, and Kenya, directly transferring operational expertise. Academic institutions are also key partners; CUHK Business School now offers professional certificate programs in high-demand areas like sustainability and fintech, with credits that can be transferred to master's degrees, providing flexible, high-quality upskilling for professionals. Similarly, HKU SPACE's LEAD Academy has conducted tailor-made training and study tours for senior officials and enterprises from the Mainland, focusing on topics like fintech, innovation management, and GBA integration. These varied programs collectively illustrate Hong Kong's comprehensive approach to capacity building, effectively connecting its world-class professional services with the developmental needs of BRI partners.

18.4 India and South Asia: Tapping high-growth professional markets

Hong Kong possesses a unique confluence of factors—world-class universities, robust policy support, and a strategic geographical position—that position it to become a global leader in continuing education. Simultaneously, the vast and rapidly growing markets of India and South Asia present a significant opportunity for Hong Kong institutions to export their expertise and tap into high-growth professional sectors.

Hong Kong's ascent as a global leader in continuous education is being driven by a multi-pronged strategy that combines world-class academic infrastructure with innovative, market-responsive programming. Central to this blueprint is the establishment of dedicated institutions like The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) Business School's Asia-Pacific Institute of Business (APIB) and the University of Hong Kong's School of Professional and Continuing Education (HKU SPACE). These bodies are not mere extensions of traditional academia but are dynamic entities designed to serve the evolving needs of professionals. For instance, APIB has launched a series of Professional Certificate Programmes (Micro-credentials) that cover trending business areas such as Innovation Leadership, Artificial Intelligence for Business, and Sustainability and ESG Reporting. These programmes are explicitly designed as "career accelerators," offering flexible, modular learning that can be completed in six to 36 months, thereby bridging the gap between undergraduate theory and postgraduate specialization. This focus on flexibility and practical, industry-relevant skills is a cornerstone of Hong Kong's appeal to a global professional audience.

Furthermore, Hong Kong's strategic blueprint leverages its unique "East-meets-West" orientation and deep industry engagement to create a distinctive value proposition. Institutions like CityUHK's Business Innovation Education (BIE) explicitly aim to be the premier hub in Asia for transformative executive education, developing leaders who can navigate the complexities of the modern global economy. This is achieved by integrating insights from both Eastern and Western business practices and embedding critical themes like sustainability and ESG principles into their curricula. The government's role is also pivotal, as outlined in recent policy addresses, which seek to transform the city's university system into a direct pipeline for high-tech professionals. This includes dramatically raising the intake of non-local students and forging deeper ties between academia and industry to ensure that graduate skills meet real-world market demands. This holistic approach, which combines top-down policy support with bottom-up institutional innovation, creates an ecosystem where continuous education is not an afterthought but a strategic imperative for economic competitiveness.

A critical element of Hong Kong's pathway is the formal recognition and integration of continuous education within a broader qualifications framework, enhancing its credibility and value. The new micro-credential courses from CUHK Business School, for example, are listed in the Qualifications Register at Level 6 of the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF). This official accreditation assures learners of the quality and rigor of the programmes. More importantly, these credentials are designed with "stackability" in mind, allowing graduates to seamlessly transfer credits earned towards a master's degree programme at the same institution.

This creates a powerful incentive for lifelong learning, where professionals can upskill incrementally while building a path toward advanced academic qualifications. This model of accredited, stackable micro-credentials, combined with the government's push to create "universities of applied sciences" and promote mutual recognition of qualifications within the Greater Bay Area, establishes a robust and portable system that is attractive to learners across the region and beyond.

India and South Asia: Tapping High-Growth Professional Markets

The continuing education market in India represents a substantial and rapidly expanding opportunity for Hong Kong's educational institutions. According to market analysis, the India Continuing Education Market was valued at USD 1.74 billion in 2024 and is projected to nearly double, reaching USD 3.64 billion by 2033, growing at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 8.56%. This growth is fueled by a massive, youthful population, the increasing adoption of online learning platforms, and a high demand for professional certifications and corporate training across various sectors. While online delivery currently dominates the market, in-person and hybrid models are also expected to see significant growth, indicating a diverse range of learner preferences. For Hong Kong providers, this signals a clear opportunity to offer a blend of fully online programmes and high-value, in-person executive education, leveraging their international reputation to attract Indian professionals seeking to enhance their global competitiveness.

Looking beyond India, the broader South Asian region, while presenting diverse challenges, also offers immense potential for Hong Kong's continuing education sector. Countries like Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka have large, young populations with a burgeoning demand for skills in technology, finance, and management to support their growing economies. However, these markets are often underserved by high-quality, internationally recognized educational providers. This is where Hong Kong's unique strengths come into play. Hong Kong institutions can position themselves as the gateway to world-class, internationally accredited continuous education for South Asian professionals. By offering targeted programmes—such as those in FinTech, AI, and ESG leadership developed by CUHK and CityUHK—Hong Kong can help bridge the skills gap in these high-growth regions. The focus should be on providing credentials that are not only globally recognized but also tailored to the specific needs of emerging South Asian industries, thereby fostering a new generation of business leaders with a strong global perspective.

To successfully tap into the India and South Asia markets, Hong Kong's strategic blueprint must evolve from a passive recipient of international students to an active, engaged partner in regional human capital development. This involves establishing deeper collaborative frameworks, such as joint programmes with local universities, customized training cohorts for multinational corporations operating in the region, and leveraging Hong Kong's position as a conduit for Mainland Chinese business practices. HKU SPACE's LEAD Academy provides a successful model, having organized study tours and seminars for senior civil servants and executives from the Chinese Mainland, focusing on areas like FinTech, innovation management, and urban planning.

A similar model could be adapted for South Asia, bringing professionals to Hong Kong for immersive experiences that combine classroom learning with site visits to Hong Kong's world-class financial and technological infrastructure. By adopting a proactive, partnership-based approach, Hong Kong can not only capture a significant share of this high-growth market but also solidify its role as a vital education and training hub for all of Asia, exporting its educational expertise and strengthening its soft power across the continent.

18.5 Middle East: Opportunities in finance and infrastructure training

Based on an analysis of current developments and strategic frameworks, here are detailed paragraphs on Hong Kong's pathway to global leadership in continuing education and the specific opportunities present in the Middle East for finance and infrastructure training.

The Middle East presents a substantial and urgent opportunity for Hong Kong's continuing education sector, driven by ambitious national development plans that prioritize the upskilling of local talent. Across the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region, countries are implementing "Vision" programmes—such as Saudi Vision 2030 and Oman Vision 2040—that aim to diversify economies away from hydrocarbon dependence and build a knowledge-based workforce. This has created a surge in demand for structured, high-quality training programmes in key sectors. Hong Kong, with its world-class educational institutions and deep expertise in finance and infrastructure, is uniquely positioned to partner with Middle Eastern governments and organizations to co-create and deliver the specialized training required to achieve these national goals.

In the finance sector, the demand is for advanced, specialized knowledge that aligns with global best practices and emerging trends. Recent initiatives in the region highlight this need. For example, Oman's "Jisr" Bridging Programme was launched to develop national cadres for the financial sector, with a curriculum covering sustainable lending, climate risk management, and green financial products—areas directly aligned with Hong Kong's expertise in sustainable finance. Similarly, in Saudi Arabia, the Financial Academy is partnering with institutions like the Swiss Re Institute to deliver programmes such as "Emerging Insurance Leaders" and "High Potential Insurance Leaders," focusing on value creation, AI and data impact, and sustainability. These initiatives reveal a clear market need for cutting-edge financial training that Hong Kong institutions, with their strong credentials in fintech, ESG, and financial regulation, are exceptionally well-qualified to fill. The presence of the IMF's Middle East Center for Economics and Finance (CEF) in the region further underscores the commitment to building high-level financial and economic capabilities among Arab League countries, creating a synergistic environment for collaboration.

The infrastructure sector offers an equally compelling opportunity, as Gulf nations invest heavily in massive construction and urban development projects, requiring a new generation of skilled project leaders. Programmes like the "Bunaa Program" launched by the Abu Dhabi Projects and Infrastructure Centre (ADPIC) in partnership with the Emirati Talent Competitiveness Council (Nafis) are explicitly designed to empower national talent across the entire project lifecycle, from design and engineering to project management and financial control. This three-year career development journey includes structured mentorship and access to professional certifications, reflecting a need for comprehensive, practically oriented training frameworks.

Concurrently, Saudi Arabia's "Sharakah Program" by the Saudi Water Partnership Company (SWPC) focuses on equipping young professionals with skills in contract management, financial modeling, and Public-Private Partnership (PPP) principles—critical competencies for delivering major national infrastructure projects. Hong Kong's unparalleled experience in planning, financing, and managing complex infrastructure projects, from its world-class airport and railway networks to its new towns, provides a rich repository of case studies and expertise that can be transformed into impactful training modules and leadership programmes for Middle Eastern professionals.

CHAPTER 19: STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS AND GLOBAL NETWORKS

Hong Kong's ascent to global leadership in continuous education is being built upon a robust foundation of strategic partnerships that span geographical boundaries and sectoral divides. These collaborations are not merely ceremonial memoranda of understanding but represent deep, operational integrations that leverage Hong Kong's unique position as a crossroads between East and West. The city's educational institutions are actively forging alliances that extend from Mainland China to the Gulf region, from European academic powerhouses to Asia-Pacific professional bodies, creating a dense network of knowledge exchange and co-creation that positions Hong Kong as a central node in the global lifelong learning ecosystem.

The Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area serves as the immediate hinterland and a natural laboratory for cross-border educational integration. The establishment of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao University Alliance for Continuing Education, with founding members including HKU SPACE, Sun Yat-sen University, the University of Macau, and Hong Kong Metropolitan University, exemplifies this regional strategy. This alliance moves beyond superficial cooperation to encompass resource sharing, joint programme development, and the creation of cohesive educational standards that address the unique demands of the GBA's integrated economy. The relaunch of the Zhongshan University-HKU Joint Centre for Professional Education and plans for the second GBA Education Forum in spring 2026 demonstrate a commitment to sustained, long-term collaboration that transcends institutional boundaries and political jurisdictions. Such initiatives ensure that Hong Kong's continuing education providers remain deeply embedded in the region's rapidly evolving talent development landscape, while also serving as a gateway for international partners seeking access to the GBA's immense market.

Beyond the region, Hong Kong's institutions are cultivating partnerships with professional bodies and corporate entities that align continuing education with industry demands and global standards. The renewed collaboration between Metis Global Group and the Chartered Insurance Institute (CII) illustrates how Hong Kong serves as a platform for professionalising key industries through structured continuing education. The LEAD Programme, now in its fourth consecutive year, has become a cornerstone of professional development for insurance and financial planning practitioners, offering 15 hours of structured learning that spans professional ethics, client service, risk handling, and compliance awareness. This partnership extends beyond traditional classroom instruction to encompass cultural advocacy through sponsorships of global platforms like Dive In, which advances Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion within the insurance sector, and knowledge dissemination through contributions to authoritative publications. Such multi-dimensional collaborations demonstrate how Hong Kong's continuing education providers can serve as bridges connecting local professionals with international best practices and global professional communities.

The strategic direction of Hong Kong's partnerships also reflects a deliberate orientation toward emerging economic powers and cutting-edge technological domains. HKU Business School's Memorandum of Understanding with Argaam Investment Company, a leading financial intelligence platform in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf region, represents a pioneering effort to link Hong Kong's educational expertise with the ambitious human capital development goals of the Gulf states under Saudi Vision 2030. This collaboration involves HKU leading the design and delivery of executive curricula while Argaam facilitates local promotion and delivery, creating a symbiotic relationship that benefits both parties. Similarly, CUHK's Executive MBA Programme has forged a strategic partnership with Baidu's AI Platform and Ecosystem, integrating cutting-edge artificial intelligence innovation into executive education and ensuring that Hong Kong's business leaders remain at the forefront of digital transformation. These partnerships demonstrate Hong Kong's ability to attract world-class corporate partners and adapt its continuing education offerings to address the most pressing technological and economic trends shaping the global landscape.

Hong Kong's institutions are also strengthening ties with European academic partners, reinforcing the city's historical connections with Western educational traditions while creating new pathways for cross-cultural learning. Lingnan University's Memorandum of Understanding with the Collège de Paris, building upon an Inter-institutional Agreement of Cooperation established in 2023, aims to offer students unique blended learning experiences spanning Hong Kong and France, complete with entrance scholarships for high-achieving students. The presence of French diplomatic representatives at the signing ceremony underscores the broader geopolitical significance of such educational partnerships, which serve as vehicles for deepening bilateral understanding and friendship. These European connections complement Hong Kong's Asian partnerships, ensuring that the city's continuing education ecosystem benefits from diverse pedagogical approaches and cultural perspectives while offering learners unparalleled opportunities for international exposure.

Perhaps most significantly, Hong Kong is now positioning itself as a hub for partnerships with international organisations dedicated to addressing global challenges through education and innovation. Lingnan University's establishment of Asia's first United Nations University Hub on Humanitarian Innovation and Technology represents a landmark achievement in this regard. With an annual operating budget exceeding HK\$8 million, the UNU Hub at Lingnan University will spearhead research, education, and training programmes aimed at improving living conditions in developing countries and regions of the Global South through innovative technologies. This partnership elevates Hong Kong from a recipient of global educational trends to a contributor shaping the international agenda, leveraging the city's world-class research capabilities and geographical proximity to developing Asian economies. The Hub's focus on humanitarian technology, including projects ranging from remote monitoring rainwater harvesting systems for Philippine islands to portable infant incubators for remote communities, demonstrates how Hong Kong's continuing education sector can address pressing global needs while cultivating a new generation of leaders equipped with both technical expertise and humanitarian compassion.

These diverse partnership initiatives collectively illustrate a coherent strategic vision: Hong Kong's continuing education providers are systematically building networks that enhance their capabilities, expand their reach, and amplify their impact. By connecting regional integration with global engagement, professional accreditation with technological innovation, and institutional collaboration with humanitarian purpose, Hong Kong is constructing a partnership ecosystem that positions it uniquely as a leader in the rapidly evolving field of lifelong learning. The city's ability to serve as a bridge between Mainland China and the world, between traditional academic values and cutting-edge technological applications, and between developed economies and the Global South, ensures that its continuing education sector will remain vibrant, relevant, and influential in the decades ahead.

19.1 Twinning arrangements with international universities

Hong Kong possesses a unique combination of world-class universities, deep-rooted international connectivity, and strong governmental support, positioning it ideally to become a global leader in continuous education. The strategic blueprint for achieving this leadership is increasingly being built upon innovative twinning arrangements with prestigious international universities, creating seamless pathways that cater to learners at all stages of their careers. This strategy is not merely about exporting education but about creating a dynamic, bidirectional flow of knowledge and talent that enriches Hong Kong's own academic landscape while projecting its influence globally.

A cornerstone of this strategic blueprint is the explicit vision articulated by Hong Kong's leading institutions to become global leaders in this field. For instance, the School of Continuing and Professional Sciences at The Chinese University of Hong Kong has set its sights on being a "global leader in university continuing education," with strategies focused on expanding global networks and collaborating with renowned overseas universities and professional bodies. This vision is supported by the broader university strategy to nurture "lifelong learners as global leaders" through joint and dual degree programs with international strategic partners, thereby increasing students' exposure to a global network. This institutional commitment provides the foundational philosophy upon which specific twinning programs are built, transforming the abstract goal of global leadership into concrete educational pathways.

The most prominent manifestation of this strategy is the proliferation of high-profile twinning and double-degree programs at both the undergraduate and postgraduate levels. A flagship example is the joint bachelor's degree program between City University of Hong Kong (CityUHK) and Columbia University in New York. Launching in the 2026/27 academic year, this program uses a "2+2" model, where students spend their first two years at CityUHK and their final two at Columbia, earning degrees from both prestigious institutions. The program covers diverse fields such as business economics, computer science, and international affairs, and includes comprehensive support with academic advisors from both universities guiding students from day one. This partnership is a powerful illustration of how Hong Kong universities can leverage their strengths to offer students a truly international education, combining the rigorous foundations of an Asian education with the liberal arts tradition of an Ivy League university.

This model of twinning is being replicated across the Hong Kong tertiary sector, demonstrating a systemic embrace of international collaboration. Hong Kong Metropolitan University (HKMU) has partnered with the University of Sussex in the UK for a "3+1" undergraduate pathway in Global Business, allowing students to gain two full degrees. At the postgraduate level, the HKUST Business School has established a pioneering double-degree pathway with the Smith School of Business at Queen's University, Canada, where students spend one year at each institution and earn two master's degrees.

These programs are not limited to traditional academic paths; they also cater to working professionals seeking continuous upskilling. CUHK Business School has introduced a series of Professional Certificate Programmes (micro-credentials) with a unique "credit transfer" pathway, allowing credits earned in these flexible, industry-relevant courses to be applied toward a full master's degree at CUHK. This creates a powerful bridge between continuous professional education and formal degree qualifications, a key component of a modern lifelong learning ecosystem.

Ultimately, Hong Kong's pathway to global leadership in continuous education is reinforced by a supportive ecosystem and a clear governmental vision. The Hong Kong SAR government has actively promoted the city as an international education hub, with initiatives like the "Study in Hong Kong" campaign and a task force dedicated to attracting global talent. The government's policy address has also focused on aligning education with market needs by promoting applied sciences universities and deeper academia-industry integration. This top-down support, combined with bottom-up innovation from universities—such as PolyU's EAGLE Global Youth Leadership Hub which fosters global mindsets through cross-institutional projects and international summits — creates a fertile ground for these twinning arrangements to flourish. By strategically linking its robust academic infrastructure with the world's best universities and the practical needs of the global economy, Hong Kong is not just participating in the global education market but actively shaping its future, building a comprehensive blueprint for lifelong learning that is both globally connected and locally rooted.

19.2 Joint certification and dual awards

Hong Kong possesses a unique convergence of factors—world-class institutions, a robust legal framework, and strategic national positioning—that can propel it to global leadership in continuous education. This strategic blueprint hinges on leveraging joint certification and dual awards as primary engines for growth, fostering deeper integration with the Chinese mainland, and enhancing international competitiveness. The pathway is not merely about expanding course offerings but about creating a sophisticated, quality-assured ecosystem for lifelong learning that is recognized across borders.

The foundational element of this strategy is a clear institutional vision that places lifelong learning and global leadership at its core. Leading universities have already articulated this ambition, with entities like the Chinese University of Hong Kong's School of Continuing and Professional Studies explicitly aiming to be a "global leader in university continuing education" by enriching lives through innovative and responsive learning opportunities. This vision is operationalized through strategies that include fostering students' competencies for lifelong societal contributions and enhancing their global competitiveness. A key part of this is the commitment to internationalization through joint and dual degree programmes with strategic partners worldwide, providing students with invaluable global exposure. This top-down commitment from established institutions provides the necessary credibility and academic heft for Hong Kong's continuing education sector to compete on the world stage.

A central pillar of Hong Kong's blueprint is the aggressive pursuit of dual awards and mutual recognition, particularly with the Chinese mainland, transforming the Greater Bay Area (GBA) into a living laboratory for educational integration. Groundbreaking initiatives are already demonstrating the viability of this approach. The Hong Kong Metropolitan University's LiPACE-Shenzhen University of Information Technology (SUIT) programme is a pioneering model, seamlessly integrating Hong Kong's two-year higher diploma with Shenzhen's three-year vocational framework, allowing students to earn dual diplomas and benefit from immersive cross-boundary learning. This model has gained international recognition for addressing the complex challenges of credit and qualification mutual recognition. Concurrently, the Vocational Training Council (VTC) has successfully implemented joint programmes with Shenzhen Polytechnic University (SPU) and established a "One Examination, Multiple Certification" system for industries like beauty and hairdressing, enabling candidates to obtain professional certificates from Hong Kong, the mainland, and Macao through a single assessment. Most recently, a historic milestone was achieved when four courses from HKCT (Hong Kong College of Technology) became the first to be included in the Guangdong Credit Bank's Lifelong Education Qualifications Registry through a rigorous joint 评审 process, formally recognizing Hong Kong qualifications from master's level to certificate level within the Guangdong 资历框架. These concrete examples form the bedrock of a comprehensive strategy for cross-boundary talent development and mobility.

To scale these pilot projects into a systemic advantage, government policy and robust infrastructure are indispensable. The HKSAR Government has explicitly committed to working with mainland authorities to advance the mutual recognition of sub-degree qualifications, including Higher Diplomas. This policy direction is given physical form in the ambitious planning for the Northern Metropolis University Town (NMUT). With over 60 hectares reserved for post-secondary education, NMUT is envisioned as a hub where institutions can strengthen collaboration with mainland and overseas partners. Crucially, the government plans to adopt an "industry-led" principle within NMUT to proactively promote Vocational and Professional Education and Training (VPET), facilitating stronger industry-institution collaboration to meet the skilled manpower needs of key sectors. This synergy between policy, physical infrastructure, and industry demand creates a powerful ecosystem for the growth of internationally relevant continuing education.

Finally, the credibility and global portability of these joint qualifications are underpinned by a rigorous, independent quality assurance framework. The Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) has, since 2019, provided a dedicated 评审 service for local joint qualification programmes. This framework requires that both partner institutions share responsibility for curriculum development, delivery, and quality assurance, ensuring that the final award meets the robust standards of the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF). For programmes with non-local partners, proof of their home-country accreditation is required, safeguarding the integrity of the dual award. This meticulous approach, evident in the Guangdong-HKCT joint 评审 where HKCAAVQ experts participated as observers, ensures that a joint certification from Hong Kong is a hallmark of quality, trusted by employers and academic institutions globally. By building on this foundation of clear vision, successful cross-boundary pilots, supportive policy, and ironclad quality assurance, Hong Kong is strategically positioned to become the undisputed global leader in continuous education.

19.3 Faculty exchange for executive education

Hong Kong stands at a pivotal moment in its quest to become a global leader in continuous and executive education. The following passages outline a strategic blueprint for this transformation, with a detailed focus on the critical role of faculty exchange as a catalyst for innovation and excellence.

Hong Kong's ambition to become a global leader in continuous education is built upon a unique and powerful confluence of strategic advantages, positioning it as the region's premier hub for lifelong learning and executive development. As a city described as the "super connector," it benefits from the "backing of the motherland and connectivity with the world," a sentiment echoed by government officials and education leaders at major international forums like the 2026 APAIE conference. This allows it to serve as a bridge between Mainland China's dynamic economic landscape and global best practices in business and academia. The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region government has actively cemented this role through policy initiatives like the "Study in Hong Kong" brand and strategic investments in developing the Northern Metropolis into a "University Town," designed to be an "academic gravitational field" attracting top-tier international scholars and researchers. This is underpinned by Hong Kong's existing world-class higher education infrastructure, boasting five universities among the world's top 100, a highly internationalized faculty, and a robust legal framework that fosters intellectual exchange and innovation. This solid foundation provides the perfect launchpad for developing sophisticated continuous education programs that cater to global professionals.

Faculty Exchange as the Engine for Executive Education Innovation

A central pillar of Hong Kong's strategic blueprint is the systematic expansion of faculty exchange programs, which serve as a dynamic engine for curriculum innovation and pedagogical excellence in executive education. These exchanges are moving beyond traditional academic courtesies to become strategic partnerships that directly enrich the learning experience for business executives. The recent Memorandum of Understanding between HKUST Business School and Tsinghua University's PBC School of Finance is a prime example, explicitly aiming to "foster exchange opportunities for students and faculty" to co-develop non-degree executive programs. This collaboration allows faculty to engage with practices in both an international financial center and Mainland China's rapidly developing economy, bringing invaluable real-world comparative insights directly into the executive classroom. Such cross-pollination of ideas ensures that curricula remain at the cutting edge, blending global perspectives with deep local insights to address complex geopolitical and technological disruptions. By facilitating the movement of top academics, Hong Kong's institutions can offer executive education that is not just theoretically sound but also intensely practical and globally informed.

Deepening Ties and Developing Innovative Programmes Through Exchange

The impact of strategic faculty exchange is most visible in the development of innovative, high-caliber programs designed for the modern executive. The HKUST-Tsinghua partnership is actively developing new bilingual executive programs and a Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) program, directly leveraging the "respective strengths of both sides" in technology and finance. This synergy ensures that programs are relevant to the rapidly evolving economic landscape, driven by technological disruption. Similarly, City University of Hong Kong's College of Business has created a new Associate Dean position focused on "Global Executive Programmes," signaling a strategic intent to integrate its English-language MBA, EMBA, and DBA offerings. This internal restructuring facilitates faculty collaboration and creates a more cohesive learning experience for a global student body, with programs tailored for executives from ASEAN and Belt and Road countries. These initiatives demonstrate how institutional commitment to collaboration, both internally and externally, directly translates into a diverse and attractive portfolio of continuous education opportunities.

Building an Interdisciplinary and Virtually Connected Academic Ecosystem

Looking forward, Hong Kong's blueprint envisions an academic ecosystem where faculty exchange fosters interdisciplinary collaboration and leverages technology to transcend physical boundaries. Partnerships such as the one between HKUST's Academy of Interdisciplinary Studies and the Center for Globalization Hong Kong aim to develop courses focused on strategic decision-making, equipping corporate leaders to navigate complex global challenges by combining robust research with think tank networks. Furthermore, institutions like HKBU's School of Continuing Education are pioneering virtual exchange centers that host global summits, bringing together hundreds of scholars from dozens of countries to discuss themes like "Empowering Future Leaders for an Interconnected World". This digital dimension to exchange allows for the continuous flow of ideas and pedagogical methods, fostering "digital empathy" and cross-cultural competence among educators and, by extension, the executives they teach. Through this blend of physical mobility and virtual collaboration, Hong Kong is not just participating in the global dialogue on continuous education but is actively shaping its future, creating a resilient and forward-thinking model for talent development in the 21st century.

19.4 Research collaboration on lifelong learning policy

Hong Kong stands at a pivotal moment in its economic evolution, with continuous education emerging as a critical pillar for maintaining global competitiveness and addressing structural workforce challenges. The government's strategic commitment to transforming the lifelong learning landscape was crystallized in the 2024 and 2025 Policy Addresses, which mandated a comprehensive overhaul of the Employees Retraining Board (ERB). This reform agenda shifts the paradigm from traditional, academically-oriented training to a dynamic, "skills-based" framework designed to enhance the competitiveness of the entire local workforce. By eliminating participation caps and broadening service targets, the ERB is positioning itself as a universal upskilling body for Hong Kong's labor force, directly aligning with the talent demands of the nation's 14th Five-Year Plan and Hong Kong's own economic diversification goals. This strategic pivot acknowledges that in an era of rapid technological disruption, the agility of the workforce is paramount, and the government is proactively building the institutional architecture to foster that resilience.

Central to Hong Kong's strategic blueprint is the creation of a flexible, modular, and industry-aligned training ecosystem, with micro-credentials serving as a foundational element. The ERB's forward-looking plan to introduce industry-recognized micro-certificate courses represents a significant departure from rigid, long-form qualifications, empowering learners to acquire specific, in-demand skills through flexible learning modes. This vision is already being realized by leading institutions like CUHK Business School, whose professional certificate programmes in fields such as Innovation Leadership, ESG Reporting, and AI for Business are setting a new standard for executive education. These programmes are meticulously designed as "career accelerators," offering modular, self-paced learning that is not only listed on the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF) at Level 6 but also provides a seamless pathway to master's degrees through credit transfer. This integration of micro-credentials into the formal qualifications framework exemplifies a strategic approach to lifelong learning, making education a continuous and interconnected journey rather than a series of disjointed episodes.

Hong Kong's pathway to global leadership is being paved through the strategic expansion of collaborative networks, both regionally and internationally, which are essential for enriching the learning experience and ensuring global relevance. The formation of the Guangdong–Hong Kong–Macao University Alliance for Continuing Education, with founding members including HKU SPACE and Sun Yat-sen University, marks a milestone in regional cooperation. This alliance aims to pool resources, innovate within the "One Country, Two Systems" framework, and co-develop talent to meet the specific needs of the Greater Bay Area (GBA). Concurrently, Hong Kong institutions are forging powerful global linkages, as demonstrated by Lingnan University's Memorandum of Understanding with the Collège de Paris. This partnership is designed to offer students a binational educational experience, blending academic rigor with cross-cultural perspectives to cultivate globally-minded leaders.

Furthermore, research collaborations, such as the Sau Po Centre on Ageing's work with AARP International and European consortia, highlight how Hong Kong's academic expertise is contributing to global discourse on critical issues like intergenerational learning and longer working lives. These multifaceted partnerships underscore a strategy of open innovation, where global connectivity directly enhances local educational capacity and international standing. Ultimately, the success of Hong Kong's strategic blueprint hinges on a robust, research-driven approach to policymaking and a commitment to quality assurance that fosters public trust and industry buy-in. The ERB's reform roadmap explicitly includes strengthening industry consultation mechanisms to identify critical skill gaps, ensuring that training provision is evidence-based and directly responsive to economic signals. This is complemented by the ongoing evolution of the HKQF, which under the Education Bureau's stewardship, has established industry training advisory committees for 23 sectors covering over half of the local workforce. The government's target to expand "vocational qualifications ladders" to at least 18 industries by 2027 demonstrates a clear commitment to creating transparent career progression pathways. Moreover, institutions themselves are embedding research into their strategic vision; for example, the Chinese University of Hong Kong's plan explicitly tasks its School of Continuing and Professional Studies with researching and serving the needs of an aging population and second-career trends. This synergy between data-driven policy, robust qualification frameworks, and institutional research agendas provides the empirical foundation for Hong Kong to not only adapt to the future of work but to actively shape it, solidifying its role as a global leader in continuous education.

19.5 Hosting global continuous education forums and conferences

Hong Kong's ambition to become a global leader in continuing education is significantly bolstered by its strategic capacity to host world-class forums and conferences. This role transforms the city from a passive participant into an active shaper of the global education agenda. As a legislative council member recently noted, hosting major events like the APAIE conference allows Hong Kong to demonstrate its educational resilience and openness, reinforcing its status as an international hub. By convening thought leaders, policymakers, and practitioners, Hong Kong is not merely showcasing its own achievements but is also contributing to global solutions for shared educational challenges, such as the integration of artificial intelligence in learning or the development of sustainable internationalization strategies. This positions Hong Kong as a critical node in the global knowledge network, where best practices are exchanged and the future of learning is actively debated.

A landmark example of Hong Kong's convening power was the successful hosting of the 2026 Asia-Pacific Association for International Education (APAIE) Annual Conference and Exhibition. As one of the top three global higher education events, the conference was led by The Chinese University of Hong Kong and supported by the SAR Government. The event broke records, attracting over 3,000 international education leaders and experts from more than 70 countries and regions. The sheer scale and participation underscored Hong Kong's unique ability to draw global talent and foster cross-border collaborations. The conference featured high-level discussions, including a presidents' forum with 70 leaders from 39 universities, focusing on critical issues like geopolitical risks and the impact of AI on higher education. This event was more than a meeting; it was a powerful platform for launching the "Study in Hong Kong" brand and demonstrating the city's readiness to lead conversations on the future of education.

Complementing these large-scale, general education conferences are specialized forums that delve into the specific mechanics of continuing and executive education. For instance, the Hong Kong Baptist University - School of Continuing Education (HKBU-SCE) organized the Global Virtual Exchange Summit 2025, which attracted 937 registered participants from 52 countries. With the theme "Empowering Future Leaders for a Connected World," this summit explored niche but vital areas such as digital competency, AI literacy, and the cultivation of global citizenship through teaching—all core components of modern continuing education. Such events demonstrate the sector's agility in addressing emerging trends like virtual exchange and collaborative online learning, providing a practical, forward-looking complement to broader educational dialogues and directly engaging the professional community in skill development for the future.

To solidify its global leadership, Hong Kong's strategic blueprint must focus on creating a sustained and diverse portfolio of such events. The government's proactive approach, including the inauguration of "Study in Hong Kong Week" alongside the APAIE conference and a dedicated HK\$40 million grant for international marketing, provides a robust foundation. By leveraging its world-class infrastructure, from the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre to its globally ranked universities, the city is well-positioned to host a continuous cycle of forums. These gatherings will increasingly focus on the practicalities of the knowledge economy, linking academic discussion with industry needs in finance, technology, and beyond. Through this concerted effort, Hong Kong aims to not only attract international students but also to serve as a "super connector" and a premier destination for global educators and professionals to convene, collaborate, and co-create the next era of learning.

CHAPTER 20: THE INTERNATIONAL DSE AND GLOBAL CREDENTIALING

Hong Kong stands at a pivotal moment to assert its global leadership in continuous education, leveraging two powerful, interconnected assets: the internationally recognized Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE) and an innovative ecosystem of micro-credentials and credentialed lifelong learning pathways. The strategic blueprint for this leadership position is built upon the HKDSE's robust global recognition, which provides a trusted academic foundation for international students and establishes a seamless bridge to advanced, flexible continuing education programs worldwide.

The HKDSE has matured into a globally respected credential, with its recognition expanding steadily since its inception in 2012. This widespread acceptance is a cornerstone of Hong Kong's appeal as an education hub. The Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (HKEAA) has actively worked with institutions globally, resulting in hundreds of tertiary institutions in the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, and beyond publishing general admission requirements for HKDSE holders. Crucially, this recognition has deepened in key European markets. For instance, the German government considers the HKDSE equivalent to the Abitur, granting access to over 300 public universities, while Spain's Ministry of Education recently confirmed that HKDSE holders with five subjects at levels 2 to 5 can apply to over 90 Spanish universities without an entrance examination. This growing international confidence was reaffirmed by the HKEAA's participation in the 2026 Asia-Pacific Association for International Education (APAIE) conference, where it showcased the qualification's high academic standards and its sophisticated, tech-enabled assessment platform to over 2,500 higher education representatives from 70 countries. This active promotion, supported by the HKSAR government's vision to build an international hub for post-secondary education, ensures the DSE remains a dynamic and widely accepted passport for global academic and professional mobility.

Beyond the foundational credential of the DSE, Hong Kong's pathway to leadership is defined by its sophisticated integration of global credentialing trends, particularly the development of stackable micro-credentials aligned with the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF). Leading institutions are pioneering programs that offer flexible, industry-relevant skills training with direct pathways to higher degrees. For example, CUHK Business School's suite of Professional Certificate Programmes (Micro-credentials) in areas like Fintech, ESG Reporting, and AI for Business are officially listed at Level 6 of the HKQF, allowing graduates to transfer credits seamlessly into master's degree programs. This model of "stackable" learning—where short, focused certifications accumulate toward advanced qualifications—is precisely what modern professionals require and is a model being championed by government bodies. The Employees Retraining Board (ERB) is also undergoing a significant transformation, moving towards a "skills-based" training framework that will develop industry-recognized micro-credential courses in collaboration with tertiary institutions to empower the entire local workforce.

This strategic direction is further amplified by Hong Kong's unique role as a bridge between East and West, particularly through its deepening engagement with the Greater Bay Area (GBA). Institutions like HKU SPACE are operationalizing this vision through initiatives like the LEAD Academy, which delivers high-quality, tailor-made executive programs in AI, fintech, and innovation management for Mainland enterprises and government departments. By establishing learning centres in the New Territories, strategically positioned for easy access from the Mainland, and formalizing partnerships with institutions like Northwestern Polytechnical University, Hong Kong's continuing education providers are creating an integrated "Cloud Classroom + Practice Base" model that blends theoretical education with hands-on practice for a new generation of learners. This cross-border synergy not only expands Hong Kong's reach but also enriches its learning environment, creating a dynamic space where global best practices meet regional development needs.

Ultimately, Hong Kong's strategic blueprint for global leadership in continuous education rests on a virtuous cycle. The international credibility of the DSE attracts global talent and validates the quality of Hong Kong's academic standards. This strong foundation enables pioneering institutions to develop flexible, high-value micro-credentials and executive education programs that are responsive to global industry demands. The government's policy support, including the development of the Northern Metropolis University Town and the establishment of universities of applied sciences, provides the infrastructure and strategic impetus for this ecosystem to flourish. By connecting these advanced learning pathways to the immense opportunities within the GBA and beyond, Hong Kong is not just providing education; it is building a dynamic, lifelong learning architecture that empowers individuals and fuels economic progress, solidifying its position as a true global leader in the field.

20.1 Developing IDSE as an international secondary credential

Hong Kong stands at a pivotal moment in its quest to become a global leader in continuing education, leveraging its unique advantages as a gateway between East and West to develop a comprehensive strategic blueprint for lifelong learning. The foundation for this leadership is already being laid through initiatives that emphasize academic quality, diversified learning access, and robust industry collaboration. Hong Kong's institutions are increasingly focused on developing "global leaders with aspirations and competencies to make lifelong contributions to society," recognizing that continuing education must extend beyond traditional degree programs to encompass the needs of young adults, working professionals, and the ageing population. This inclusive approach, combined with the government's ambitious target to transform the city into an international education hub, provides the strategic imperative for reimagining how continuing education can serve both local workforce development and international talent cultivation.

A critical component of Hong Kong's pathway to continuing education leadership is the development of flexible, credit-bearing micro-credentials that bridge the gap between academic learning and industry demands. The CUHK Business School's Professional Certificate Programmes exemplify this innovative approach, offering modular courses in high-demand areas such as Artificial Intelligence for Business, Sustainability and ESG Reporting, and Financial Technology that can be completed in six to thirty-six months at the student's own pace. These programmes are listed at Level 6 of the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF) and offer seamless credit transfer to master's degree programmes, demonstrating how continuing education can create clear articulation pathways while providing immediate upskilling opportunities. Similarly, CityU's Business Innovation Education initiative aims to establish "the preeminent center for global executive education in Asia" by leveraging Hong Kong's East-meets-West orientation and deep industry engagement to develop transformative business leaders. These models of stackable credentials and industry-aligned curricula provide the pedagogical framework that could be adapted for secondary-level continuing education credentials.

The strategic expansion of Hong Kong's education ecosystem through government policy provides unprecedented opportunities for developing international secondary credentials. The HKSAR Government's decision to raise the admission ceiling for nonlocal students to 50 percent of funded local places beginning in 2026-27, coupled with the designation of universities of applied sciences and initiatives to promote mutual recognition of subdegree qualifications across the Greater Bay Area, signals a commitment to educational internationalization that extends beyond higher education. The newly established Task Force on Study in Hong Kong, backed by HK\$40 million in funding, will coordinate international campaigns to attract students from secondary through postgraduate levels, creating a pipeline that could naturally incorporate an internationally recognized secondary credential. The recent Global University Presidents and Leaders Summit, which brought together leaders from 50 world-class universities across 20 countries, further demonstrates Hong Kong's capacity to convene global education stakeholders and build the partnerships necessary for credential recognition and portability.

Hong Kong's cross-sectoral collaboration model offers valuable lessons for developing an International Secondary Credential that integrates academic rigor with practical skills development. Partnerships such as the Metis Global Group's collaboration with the Chartered Insurance Institute through the LEAD Programme demonstrate how professional bodies and educational institutions can co-create continuing education pathways that combine technical knowledge with professional ethics and compliance awareness. The HKUST(GZ) partnership with the InterAction Council to establish the World Young Leaders Academy provides another model for how Hong Kong institutions can collaborate with international organizations and former world leaders to develop programmes addressing global challenges in technology, innovation, and sustainable development. These partnership frameworks could inform the design of an IDSE that incorporates international perspectives, cross-cultural competencies, and exposure to global networks while maintaining academic rigor appropriate for secondary students.

Building on these strategic foundations, Hong Kong is uniquely positioned to develop the International Secondary Credential (IDSE) as a globally recognized qualification that addresses the gap between secondary education and the demands of the 21st-century economy and higher education. The IDSE could draw upon Hong Kong's established strengths in bilingual education, its international examination infrastructure, and its experience with diverse curricula including IB, A-levels, and local qualifications. By incorporating elements from successful continuing education models—such as the micro-credential approach with flexible completion timelines, industry validation through professional body partnerships, and clear articulation pathways to higher education—the IDSE could offer students an alternative or supplementary pathway that emphasizes critical thinking, innovation, and global competencies. The credential could be designed with modular components allowing students to demonstrate mastery in areas such as data science, sustainability, entrepreneurship, and cross-cultural communication, reflecting the interdisciplinary approach increasingly valued by universities and employers worldwide.

The successful development and international recognition of an IDSE would require strategic implementation across several dimensions aligned with Hong Kong's existing education strategies. First, it would need government backing and integration with the "Study in Hong Kong" brand promotion efforts to attract international students at the secondary level. Second, it would require partnership with overseas universities and professional bodies to ensure credential portability and recognition, building on the collaborative networks already established through initiatives like the Global University Presidents Summit. Third, the credential design should incorporate the experiential learning and study tour components that have proven successful in HKU SPACE's executive education programmes, offering IDSE candidates opportunities for international exposure and cultural exchange. Fourth, articulation agreements with universities of applied sciences and traditional universities in Hong Kong and abroad would create clear progression pathways, potentially including credit exemptions similar to those offered by CUHK for its professional certificates. Finally, the IDSE could leverage Hong Kong's Qualifications Framework expertise to ensure the credential meets international standards for quality assurance and level of learning outcomes.

In conclusion, Hong Kong's comprehensive strategic blueprint for continuing education leadership—encompassing flexible micro-credentials, industry integration, government policy support, and international partnerships—provides the ideal foundation for developing the International Secondary Credential as a transformative addition to global education offerings. By extending the principles of lifelong learning and professional development downward to the secondary level, Hong Kong can create a credential that prepares students not just for university admission, but for lifelong success in a rapidly changing global economy. The IDSE would represent a natural evolution of Hong Kong's education hub ambitions, offering the world a new model for secondary education that combines academic excellence with practical skills, local roots with global perspectives, and rigorous standards with flexible pathways. As Hong Kong continues to implement its strategic vision for continuing education leadership, the development of an internationally recognized secondary credential could become one of its most significant contributions to global education.

20.2 Positioning Hong Kong examinations as global benchmarks

Hong Kong stands at a pivotal moment in its development as a global leader in continuous education, with the government and academic institutions actively building a comprehensive strategic blueprint to transform the city into an international post-secondary education hub. This vision, reinforced in recent policy addresses and supported by legislative initiatives such as the motion on establishing Hong Kong as an international education hub, leverages the city's unique advantages under the "one country, two systems" framework. The strategy is multifaceted, aiming to optimize population structure and enhance core competitiveness by attracting global talent through world-class educational opportunities. A key component of this blueprint is the development of the Northern Metropolis University Town, envisioned as an "academic gravity field" that will host international top-tier universities and research teams, fostering deep integration with national development goals and creating a dynamic ecosystem for innovation and talent cultivation. This ambitious plan is bolstered by Hong Kong's proven track record in educational excellence, as validated by top rankings in global assessments like PISA and TIMSS, demonstrating the effectiveness of its teaching practices and robust education system.

Central to Hong Kong's pathway to global leadership is the strategic elevation of the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination as a global academic benchmark, reducing reliance on foreign qualifications and asserting greater control over international student admissions. The HKDSE, with its transparent structure, academic rigor, and alignment with global standards, is ideally suited for international expansion, offering a credible alternative to A-Levels or the International Baccalaureate. Its unique value is amplified by its recognition by over 145 prestigious institutions in the Chinese mainland, making it a rare academic currency that bridges Hong Kong and the mainland, thereby positioning Hong Kong as a primary conduit for international students seeking access to Chinese higher education. The Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority is actively promoting this agenda on the global stage, as demonstrated by its prominent participation in the 2026 APAIE annual conference. There, it showcased the HKDSE's high academic standards, international recognition, and its innovative "computerised assessment system" to over 2,500 higher education representatives from 70 countries, actively inviting global partnerships and enhancing the examination's international profile.

The continuous education landscape in Hong Kong is being strategically enhanced through the development of flexible, high-quality micro-credential programmes that are formally integrated into the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework, creating seamless pathways for lifelong learning and professional advancement. Leading institutions like CUHK Business School's Asia-Pacific Institute of Business are pioneering this approach with professional certificate programmes in high-demand fields such as Innovation Leadership, Fintech, and Sustainability, which are listed at Level 6 of the HKQF. These programmes serve as "career accelerators," offering concentrated, practical learning with the unique benefit of credit transfer to master's degree programmes, thus bridging the gap between undergraduate studies and postgraduate qualifications.

This structured approach to lifelong learning is supported by a comprehensive Qualifications Framework that standardizes academic, vocational, and continuing education, with industry-defined competencies ensuring that courses remain relevant to professional needs. Hong Kong's vision for continuous education also extends to serving diverse learner demographics, including working adults and the ageing population, with a focus on innovative pedagogies and global collaboration.

To solidify its status as a global leader, Hong Kong is harmonizing its efforts by strengthening collaborations with mainland and international institutions, fostering innovation through technology, and promoting a diverse range of professional qualifications that cater to the digital economy. The University of Hong Kong, for instance, is aligning its research and innovation capabilities with national priorities, focusing on AI, data science, and frontier technologies, while mandatory AI literacy for undergraduates ensures graduates are future-ready. The government is also actively promoting a rich ecosystem of professional qualifications, from CFA and FRM to emerging credentials like the Certified Digital Asset Analyst, with flexible examination schedules to accommodate working professionals. This is complemented by international outreach, as seen in the Secretary for Education's meetings with Belt and Road countries to explore educational collaboration. By integrating a world-class examination system with a dynamic and responsive continuous education framework, Hong Kong is not only creating a powerful engine for its own economic transformation but is also establishing its examinations and credentials as trusted global benchmarks for academic and professional excellence.

20.3 International student recruitment for continuous education programmes

Hong Kong's ambitious pursuit of global leadership in continuous education is anchored in a comprehensive strategic blueprint that integrates policy reform, infrastructure development, and targeted international marketing. The government has established a clear policy direction by significantly liberalising admission quotas for non-local students. From the 2026/27 academic year, the cap for self-financing non-local students at publicly funded institutions will rise to 50% of the local student places, a substantial increase from previous limits. This expansion is complemented by the creation of a high-level "Study in Hong Kong" Task Force, which brings together educational bodies, innovation and technology bureaus, and overseas economic offices to coordinate global promotional efforts. A central element of this strategy is a HK\$40 million grant allocated to the Universities Grants Committee's Internationalisation Sub-group, enabling the eight publicly funded universities to intensify their overseas recruitment and establish a powerful "Hong Kong: Your World-class Campus" brand. Furthermore, the blueprint addresses critical infrastructure needs through initiatives like the "Hostels in the City" scheme, which encourages the conversion of commercial buildings into student housing to ensure the city can physically accommodate a growing and diverse international student body.

Within this strategic framework, the recruitment of international students for continuous education programmes is being driven by innovative, flexible, and industry-aligned offerings that cater to the needs of global professionals. A prime example is the introduction of micro-credential courses by institutions such as the CUHK Business School, which offers professional certificate programmes in high-demand fields like Innovation Leadership, FinTech, Sustainability and ESG Reporting, and Artificial Intelligence for Business. These programmes are explicitly designed as "career accelerators," featuring practical curricula, shorter durations, and flexible completion timelines ranging from six to 36 months, making them highly attractive to working professionals worldwide. A key strategic differentiator is the seamless integration of these micro-credentials with traditional degree pathways, allowing participants to transfer earned credits towards master's degree programmes, thereby creating a compelling value proposition for lifelong learners seeking both immediate upskilling and long-term academic progression. This focus on continuous learning is also echoed in the strategic plans of leading universities, which aim to redefine the role of their continuing and professional studies schools to serve evolving societal needs, such as second-career trends and an ageing population.

Simultaneously, Hong Kong is broadening its recruitment base by strengthening its vocational and professional education and training (VPET) sector as a vital component of its continuous education landscape. The government is actively promoting Hong Kong as a destination for applied learning by supporting the development of Universities of Applied Sciences and exploring the mutual recognition of sub-degree qualifications with Mainland China, thereby creating clearer cross-boundary pathways for professional advancement.

Strategic initiatives like the extended Vocational Professionals Admission Scheme, which allows non-local graduates of designated higher diploma programmes to remain in Hong Kong for employment, are specifically designed to attract international talent to fill critical skill gaps in key industries. This multi-pronged approach—combining policy liberalisation, substantial marketing investment, innovative programme design, and clear post-graduation pathways—positions Hong Kong not merely as a degree-granting destination, but as a comprehensive global hub for continuous professional development and lifelong learning, capable of attracting a diverse range of students at various stages of their careers.

20.4 Summer institutes and short courses for global professionals

Hong Kong's emergence as a global hub for continuous education is not merely an aspiration but a strategic imperative, building upon a robust foundation of existing academic infrastructure and innovative programming. The blueprint for this leadership is already being drafted by its premier institutions, which have moved beyond traditional degree offerings to create a dynamic ecosystem of summer institutes and short courses designed for global professionals. As evidenced by the strategic goals of institutions like CUHK, there is a formal commitment to "serve the needs and demands of the community for lifelong education and continuing development," recognizing that the modern professional requires constant upskilling. This vision is actualized through a diverse array of programs, such as those offered by the HKU Summer Institute (HKUSI), which provides a comprehensive suite of courses ranging from "AI Insider: Bridging Theory and Industrial Applications" to "Leadership in Public Health," specifically designed to bridge the gap between academic theory and real-world industry demands. This direct engagement with cutting-edge fields ensures that professionals are not just learning, but are being equipped to lead in their respective sectors.

The strategic blueprint for global leadership hinges on the creation of highly specialized and flexible learning pathways that cater to the nuanced needs of a professional clientele. Hong Kong's institutions excel in offering bespoke and intensive training modules that are both academically rigorous and practically applicable. For instance, the PolyU Summer Institute offers focused five-day academic subjects that provide "university level lectures and an understanding of the latest industrial trends," covering areas from "Sustainable Urban Development" to "Introduction to Innovation and Entrepreneurship". This format is ideal for professionals seeking to update their knowledge in a specific area without a long-term commitment to a full degree program. Furthermore, the HKU Business School's "Creativity, Innovation and Entrepreneurship in China" programme exemplifies how short courses can offer deep dives into regional economic dynamics, combining lectures with real-world industry engagement from companies in the Greater Bay Area, thereby providing invaluable contextual knowledge for global professionals looking to operate in or with China. The "Bespoke Programme" offered by HKU takes this a step further by designing tailor-made training courses for specific institutional clients, combining lectures with site visits to government and business organizations, thus creating a holistic and customized educational experience.

Beyond individual skill enhancement, Hong Kong's strategic position is reinforced by its role as a convenor of cross-cultural and interdisciplinary collaboration, a key component of any global leadership strategy. The city's unique East-meets-West environment makes it an ideal neutral ground for programs that bring together diverse cohorts of professionals to tackle complex global challenges. The partnership between Hang Seng University and Beijing University of Aeronautics and Astronautics for a graduate summer school on public administration and policy innovation is a prime example. This program took mainland Chinese students into Hong Kong's legislative and governance institutions, including the Legislative Council and the ICAC, fostering a deep, experiential understanding of different governance models.

Similarly, the Lingnan-Yuanpei STEM Summer Academy, a collaboration with Peking University, is designed to support "student entrepreneurs" in transforming ideas into business plans, with mentorship from experts at institutions like the Hong Kong Science Park. These are not mere academic exchanges; they are high-level professional development programs that build networks and foster a comparative, global perspective essential for today's leaders. By facilitating these intense, collaborative experiences, Hong Kong is positioning itself as the indispensable nexus for professional growth in the Asia-Pacific region and beyond.

20.5 Online programmes with global reach

Hong Kong's higher education landscape is undergoing a significant transformation, strategically positioning itself as a global leader in continuous education. This ambitious vision is being realised through innovative programme offerings, strategic partnerships, and a robust policy framework that embraces digital transformation and international collaboration. The following blueprint outlines the key pillars of this strategy, demonstrating how Hong Kong is leveraging its unique advantages to shape the future of lifelong learning on a global scale.

Strategic Vision and a Robust Educational Framework

The foundation of Hong Kong's ascent in continuous education is a clearly articulated vision for global leadership. Institutions like The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) have explicitly set their sights on becoming global leaders, focusing on enriching lives and transforming lifelong learning to meet evolving societal needs. This vision is operationalised through strategic goals that emphasise academic excellence, global experiences, and robust industry collaboration. The government's latest policies provide a powerful tailwind for this ambition. The 2025 Policy Address outlines sweeping reforms to transform the city into a global education hub, with a specific focus on cultivating market-ready talent in high-tech sectors. A cornerstone of this is the dramatic increase in the admission ceiling for non-local students, rising to 50% of funded local places, and the formal designation of institutions like Hong Kong Metropolitan University (HKMU) as "universities of applied sciences," creating a respected pathway for vocational and professional education. This policy support is critical, validating continuous education as a core component of the territory's economic and social development strategy.

Innovative and Flexible Online Programme Delivery

At the heart of Hong Kong's global strategy is the development of flexible, high-quality online and hybrid programmes designed for the modern professional. HKMU, with its long history in distance learning, is pioneering this space by offering courses that allow students to learn at their own pace using high-quality online materials developed by local and international experts. This model is tailored for busy, working adults who require a balance between career, life, and study. Similarly, the City University of Hong Kong (CityU) has revamped its Global EMBA curriculum to feature a hybrid mode, blending online courses in core disciplines like Corporate Finance and Marketing Strategy with in-person experiential learning. This approach not only provides flexibility for executives across Asia, including those in the rapidly growing ASEAN and Belt and Road markets, but also maintains the invaluable networking and immersive aspects of a top-tier business education. The emphasis on practical, industry-relevant skills is further exemplified by CUHK Business School's launch of professional certificate programmes (micro-credentials). These programmes offer concentrated learning in high-demand areas such as Artificial Intelligence for Business, Sustainability and ESG Reporting, and Fintech, with the added flexibility of completion timelines ranging from six to 36 months.

Building a Globally Connected and Quality-Assured Ecosystem

A key differentiator for Hong Kong's offerings is the seamless integration of continuous education with traditional academic pathways and global quality standards. CUHK's micro-credentials are listed at Level 6 of the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF), and the credits earned can be transferred directly into master's degree programmes, providing a tangible and accelerated path to advanced degrees. This creates a cohesive ecosystem where lifelong learning is not a dead-end but a strategic stepping stone for career advancement. Furthermore, Hong Kong institutions are actively building global networks to amplify their reach. A notable example is the collaboration between Hong Kong Wedon Demos Group and the UNESCO-recognised International Institute of Online Education (IIOE), where they are co-creating and sharing open educational resources on cutting-edge topics like Blockchain and ESG. Through UNESCO's global platform, these resources can flow efficiently to developing regions, directly contributing to the UN's Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) of ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education. This positions Hong Kong not just as a consumer, but as a significant contributor to the global digital education infrastructure.

Leveraging the Greater Bay Area and Beyond for Regional Impact

Hong Kong's strategic blueprint is intrinsically linked to its role as a super-connector within the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA). The University of Hong Kong's School of Professional and Continuing Education (HKU SPACE) has made "promoting human capital development in the GBA" a central pillar of its 2025-2030 strategy. This is actualised through initiatives like establishing a Mainland Affairs Office, creating dedicated mainland student webpages, and opening a new teaching centre in Sheung Shui, which is conveniently located just 20 minutes from the boundary with Mainland China. This physical and digital infrastructure facilitates cross-border learning, offering everything from postgraduate diplomas to workshops on topics like AI and Fintech for mainland professionals. This deep integration allows Hong Kong to address the immense talent needs of the GBA, while its institutions, like the Academy for Leadership Enhancement and Development (LEAD) at HKU SPACE, also run study tours and training programmes for mainland officials and students, fostering mutual understanding and collaboration. By acting as the GBA's premier education hub, Hong Kong solidifies its global standing, attracting international students and partners who see it as the gateway to one of the world's most dynamic economic regions.

In conclusion, Hong Kong's pathway to global leadership in continuous education is built on a comprehensive and forward-thinking blueprint. By combining strong government support, innovative and flexible online programme delivery, a commitment to global quality standards and partnerships, and its unique strategic position within the Greater Bay Area, Hong Kong is creating a powerful and sustainable model. This strategy not only meets the immediate upskilling needs of the workforce but also establishes the city as a vital node in the global network for lifelong learning, poised to nurture the talents and leaders of tomorrow.

CHAPTER 21: SUPPORTING INTERNATIONAL LEARNERS

Hong Kong possesses a unique combination of world-class infrastructure, a robust legal framework, and a strategic geographical position that positions it perfectly to become a global leader in continuous education. Realizing this ambition, particularly in supporting international learners, requires a multi-faceted strategic blueprint that builds upon existing strengths while innovating for the future. This strategy rests on three core pillars: establishing an integrated policy and funding ecosystem, diversifying and internationalizing the curriculum, and creating a comprehensive, culturally intelligent support network for all students.

The foundational pillar of this blueprint is the creation of an integrated and accessible policy and funding ecosystem. Hong Kong already has powerful financial mechanisms in place, most notably the government's Continuing Education Fund (CEF), which provides substantial subsidies to Hong Kong residents for approved courses, reducing a significant barrier to lifelong learning. To extend this to international learners, a strategic review is needed to explore reciprocal funding arrangements or targeted scholarships that would make Hong Kong's continuous education offerings competitive on a global scale. This financial infrastructure must be supported by clear government guidelines and inclusive policies, such as those already established by the Education Bureau for supporting non-Chinese speaking (NCS) students in mainstream education. These existing frameworks for integration and support at the school level provide a tested model that can be adapted and scaled for adult international learners in the continuous education sector, ensuring that the city's commitment to inclusivity is embedded from the policy level down to the classroom.

Building on this foundation, Hong Kong's institutions must offer a curriculum that is both globally relevant and locally rooted to attract a diverse body of international learners. Leading institutions are already charting this path; for instance, the Chinese University of Hong Kong's strategic plan explicitly aims to nurture "global leaders" by enhancing language proficiency and offering joint programs with international partners. Its School of Continuing and Professional Studies (SCS) further articulates a vision to be a "global leader in university continuing education" by collaborating with industries in Hong Kong and globally. This vision is being put into practice with concrete programs designed for international students. The HKU School of Professional and Continuing Education (HKU SPACE) has launched specialized full-time postgraduate diplomas in fields like international event management and luxury brand management, specifically targeting learners from Mainland China and offering a pathway to local employment. Similarly, the Vocational Training Council (VTC) provides practical pathways by offering professional certificates and industry-specific training, alongside essential language support like vocational English and Cantonese courses, which are crucial for non-Cantonese speakers to integrate into the local workforce and society. This blend of high-level academic theory and practical, employability-focused training creates a compelling value proposition.

Crucially, attracting international learners is only half the equation; retaining them and ensuring their success depends on the third pillar: a robust, culturally intelligent support network. Hong Kong's institutions are increasingly recognizing that academic offerings must be complemented by holistic student services. The Hong Kong Shue Yan University (HKSJU) has set a new benchmark by establishing a dedicated "International and Greater China Student Support Office," which acts as a first point of contact for non-local students, offering services ranging from pre-arrival online briefings and cultural orientation to personal counseling and even 24/7 emergency support. This office proactively addresses challenges like cultural adjustment and fraud prevention, fostering a safe and welcoming environment. This approach is mirrored by other institutions like VTC, which, through its Mainland and International Affairs Office (MIAO), assigns a liaison officer to each non-local student to facilitate their adaptation to life in Hong Kong. Beyond administrative support, there is a growing pedagogical focus on building "cultural intelligence" among both local and international students, turning potential cultural friction into valuable learning opportunities. By investing in this comprehensive, wrap-around support infrastructure, Hong Kong is not just educating international learners but is actively cultivating a globally-minded community where they can thrive personally and professionally, solidifying the city's reputation as a true hub for continuous education.

21.1 Visa and immigration facilitation for lifelong learners

Hong Kong is at a pivotal moment, implementing a comprehensive strategic blueprint to establish itself as a global leader in continuing education. This vision is not merely about expanding traditional academic offerings but about creating an integrated ecosystem that combines flexible, high-quality lifelong learning with proactive immigration policies to attract a global pool of talent. By leveraging its unique advantages under the "one country, two systems" framework, Hong Kong is transforming its world-class university system into a dynamic engine for professional development and international knowledge exchange.

A cornerstone of this strategy is the development of innovative, industry-aligned continuing education programmes that cater to the demands of a rapidly evolving global economy. Institutions are moving beyond conventional degrees to offer micro-credentials and professional certificates that provide flexible, stackable learning pathways. For instance, CUHK Business School has launched a series of Professional Certificate Programmes (micro-credentials) in high-demand fields like Artificial Intelligence, ESG Reporting, and Fintech, which are recognised at Level 6 of the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework. A key innovation is the seamless transfer of credits earned from these programmes into master's degrees, creating a flexible bridge between professional upskilling and advanced academic qualifications. Similarly, HKU SPACE has established the LEAD Academy to deliver tailor-made executive training and study tours for professionals and government officials from the Chinese Mainland and beyond, focusing on areas such as innovation management and financial technology. These programmes are designed with a practical, hands-on approach, often in partnership with industry, to ensure learners acquire immediately applicable skills.

This educational innovation is strongly supported by government policy aimed at creating a more diverse and internationally connected student body. The Hong Kong SAR Government's latest Policy Address outlines a multipronged strategy to bridge the talent gap and solidify the city's status as an international education hub. A flagship initiative is the dramatic expansion of non-local student intake, raising the admission ceiling for self-financing bachelor's degree programmes at public universities to 50% of local places, a significant increase that signals a strong commitment to global talent attraction. To support this influx, the government is also ramping up student housing supply through initiatives like the "Hostels in the City" programme, which incentivises the conversion of commercial buildings. Furthermore, a dedicated Task Force on Study in Hong Kong has been formed to lead international marketing campaigns under the theme "Hong Kong: Your World-class Campus," backed by a HK\$40 million grant to public universities for attracting international and mainland students. These efforts are underpinned by Hong Kong's strong academic reputation, with five of its universities ranked among the world's top 100.

Central to this blueprint is the strategic use of visa and immigration facilitation to position Hong Kong as a welcoming destination for lifelong learners from around the world. The government's policy explicitly aims to attract diverse professionals, and the expanded quotas for non-local students are a direct form of immigration facilitation, making it easier for international learners to choose Hong Kong for their studies. This is complemented by initiatives to promote the mutual recognition of sub-degree qualifications within the Greater Bay Area, facilitating seamless cross-boundary employment and study and enhancing the region's appeal as a cohesive talent hub. High-profile events like the Global University Presidents and Leaders Summit further enhance Hong Kong's global connectivity, showcasing the city as a platform for international collaboration in education and research, which in turn attracts a global community of scholars and learners. These visa and policy frameworks are designed not just to bring students to Hong Kong, but to integrate them into a vibrant ecosystem where they can build careers, supported by initiatives that connect academia with industry and provide pathways from education to entrepreneurship.

21.2 Accommodation strategies: Converting commercial buildings to student housing

Hong Kong's ambition to become a global leader in continuing education is intrinsically linked to its ability to provide a holistic and supportive ecosystem for learners. A critical, and often overlooked, component of this ecosystem is accommodation. The strategic repurposing of underutilised commercial buildings into student housing has emerged as a key policy initiative to support this vision, addressing the dual challenges of a tight housing market and elevated office vacancy rates. This approach not only provides much-needed physical infrastructure for the growing cohort of local and international continuing education students but also represents an innovative urban planning solution that aligns with global trends in adaptive reuse and sustainable development.

The cornerstone of Hong Kong's accommodation strategy is the "Hostels in the City Scheme," a pilot programme launched in July 2025 by the Development Bureau and the Education Bureau. This initiative is a direct response to the Chief Executive's policy address to consolidate Hong Kong's status as an international post-secondary education hub. The scheme's primary mechanism is to "streamline development control procedures" to encourage the market to convert existing commercial buildings—specifically offices and hotels—into student hostels. By reducing regulatory friction, the government aims to unlock a new supply of student housing quickly and cost-effectively, leveraging private sector capital and operational expertise. The scheme has been so well-received that it was expanded in the 2025 Policy Address to also cover newly built student hostels, indicating a long-term commitment to this strategic direction.

To make these conversions financially viable and practically feasible, the government has implemented several key regulatory "streamlining" or "deregulation" measures. A major historical barrier was that student hostels were classified as "residential institutions," which required complex planning applications and were subject to more stringent (and often incompatible) building regulations compared to commercial buildings. Under the new scheme, the Town Planning Board has broadened the definition of "hotel" to include qualifying student hostels. Since hotels are a permitted use in most commercial zones, this reclassification means that converting a commercial building into a student hostel no longer requires a separate planning application. Furthermore, for building control purposes, these converted hostels are still treated as non-domestic buildings. This allows developers to retain the original gross floor area of the commercial building, whereas a conversion to a traditional residential use would have required costly and technically difficult reductions in floor area to comply with residential density standards.

The financial and operational logic of the scheme is further strengthened by flexible land administration and design guidelines. Most land leases for commercial buildings permit "non-industrial" uses, allowing them to be used as student hostels without requiring a lease modification or paying land premium. In the few cases where a modification is needed, the Lands Department will assess a premium, but the process is intended to be clearer and more straightforward. Crucially, the scheme also permits the conversion of previously exempted areas—such as car parks and loading/unloading areas—into student amenities like gyms, study rooms, and common areas. This flexibility maximizes the usable space within the building and ensures that the new hostels can offer a high-quality living and learning environment, which is essential for attracting students and cementing Hong Kong's reputation as a top-tier education destination.

The "Hostels in the City Scheme" is more than just a housing policy; it is an integral part of a strategic blueprint to position Hong Kong as a global leader in continuing education. By ensuring a supply of modern, well-located student accommodation, the city becomes more attractive to top-tier international students and faculty. This, in turn, supports the broader mission of institutions like the CUHK School of Continuing and Professional Studies to provide a "supportive learning environment" and "diversified access of learning for global experiences". Industry experts and university leaders have lauded the scheme as a "timely" and "cost-effective" solution that addresses a critical market need, demonstrating a successful public-private partnership model that other global cities can learn from. As Hong Kong continues to evolve its "vertical city" concept, the adaptive reuse of commercial buildings for student housing stands as a prime example of innovative, forward-thinking urbanism that directly supports its educational and economic ambitions.

21.3 Support services for international adult learners

Hong Kong possesses a unique confluence of factors—from its international character and world-class universities to its strategic position within the Greater Bay Area—that position it as a potential global leader in continuing education. A strategic blueprint for achieving this must place a strong emphasis on the experience of the international adult learner. This involves not only providing world-class academic programmes but also creating a comprehensive ecosystem of support services that addresses their distinct cultural, social, and practical needs.

Strategic Vision and Programme Innovation

The foundation of Hong Kong's leadership in this sector is a clear and ambitious strategic vision, as articulated by leading institutions. For instance, the School of Continuing and Professional Studies at The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) explicitly aims "to be a global leader in university continuing education," focusing on enriching lives and transforming lifelong learning to meet the evolving demands of all learners, including working adults and the ageing population. This vision is operationalized through a commitment to academic quality, the creation of a supportive learning environment, and the expansion of global networks with industries and overseas universities. A critical component of this strategy is the development of flexible, high-impact programmes tailored for busy professionals. The CUHK Business School's Asia-Pacific Institute of Business (APIB) has pioneered this with a series of Professional Certificate Programmes (Micro-credentials). These programmes are specifically designed as "career accelerators," offering modular, short-duration courses in trending fields like Artificial Intelligence for Business and Sustainability and ESG Reporting. Their flexibility allows international executives to complete them in six to 36 months at their own pace, and a key differentiator is the ability to seamlessly transfer credits earned into a master's degree programme at CUHK. This innovative approach provides a tangible pathway for international learners to engage in high-quality continuing education in Hong Kong, with clear progression routes for their long-term career development.

Furthermore, Hong Kong's role as a regional education hub is enhanced by its capacity to deliver programmes that foster cross-cultural understanding and global networks. The HKU SPACE LEAD Academy (Academy for Leadership Enhancement and Development) exemplifies this by offering high-quality, tailor-made training and study tours for senior executives and corporations from the Chinese Mainland and beyond. By organising seminars that explore Hong Kong's advantages in finance, law, urban management, and arts and culture, these programmes help international professionals deepen their understanding of the Greater Bay Area's integration. Moreover, LEAD Academy's organisation of international study tours in collaboration with renowned institutions like Harvard, MIT, and Cambridge enables participants to build global networks and gain insights from direct interaction with overseas scholars and experts. This dual focus—bringing international learners to Hong Kong for immersion in the region while also connecting them to global thought leaders—solidifies Hong Kong's position as a strategic hub for global leadership development.

Building a Comprehensive Support Ecosystem for International Learners

For Hong Kong to truly excel as a global leader, its strategic blueprint must be underpinned by a robust support system that caters specifically to the needs of international adult learners. These individuals often face challenges related to navigating a new city, understanding local systems, and building social connections, which can significantly impact their learning experience. A holistic support ecosystem would integrate financial guidance, specialised accommodation, and community integration services. While many existing financial schemes, such as the Continuing Education Fund (CEF) , which provides up to HK\$25,000 in subsidies per eligible applicant, are currently restricted to Hong Kong residents , a globally competitive strategy would necessitate the development of parallel scholarship and financing options for non-local students. Similarly, loan schemes like the Extended Non-means-tested Loan Scheme (ENLS) , administered by the government's Working Family and Student Financial Assistance Agency, are explicitly unavailable to students on study visas, highlighting a clear gap in support for international learners that institutions would need to fill.

Beyond finances, the practicalities of living and integrating into Hong Kong society are paramount. A forward-thinking blueprint would encourage the development of specialised services, such as short-term accommodation designed for adult learners. A unique, existing model is The Nesbitt Centre, which provides English-based educational programmes and short-term residential facilities for international adults, specifically those with learning disabilities, to help them achieve independence and engage with the community. While serving a specific niche, this centre demonstrates the viability and impact of providing integrated learning and residential support for international adults in Hong Kong. This concept could be scaled and adapted for the broader continuing education market, offering international executives and learners a "living and learning" environment that fosters peer networking and eases the transition into the city. Complementing this, the strategic plans of major universities already emphasise improving students' English and Chinese proficiency to ensure global competitiveness and enhancing outreach to the global community. By weaving together financial aid tailored for non-locals, purpose-built accommodation, and robust community and language support services, Hong Kong can create a seamless and supportive ecosystem that attracts and retains top international talent, thereby fulfilling its ambition to be a global leader in continuing education.

21.4 Family accompaniment policies for longer-term programmes

For Hong Kong to truly establish itself as a global hub for continuing education, particularly for longer-term master's or executive programmes, it must offer a welcoming and supportive environment that extends beyond the classroom to the families of international learners. The existing immigration framework provides a clear pathway for this through the "受养人" (dependant) visa, which is critical for attracting top global talent who may be reluctant to relocate for extended periods without their loved ones. According to official guidelines, individuals who are admitted to Hong Kong for full-time bachelor's or postgraduate degree programmes are eligible to apply for dependant visas for their spouses, and their unmarried children under the age of eighteen. This policy is explicitly designed to allow families to stay together, recognizing that family unity is a crucial factor in a student's decision to pursue long-term education abroad.

The practical application of this policy involves a structured process where the main applicant (the student) acts as the "guarantor" for their dependants. The application for dependant visas is submitted alongside the student's own entry permit application, typically through the admitting educational institution. Upon approval, dependants are generally granted a stay of 12 months initially, linked to the student's own visa validity, and can subsequently apply for extensions. For the student's spouse, this status often permits them to take up employment in Hong Kong, which can be a significant factor in maintaining the family's financial stability and facilitating their integration into local society. Comprehensive guides for immigrants emphasize the importance of maintaining "genuine" connections to Hong Kong for successful续签 (visa renewals), including for dependants, by retaining records of residence, consumption, and, in the case of children, school enrolment. This supportive ecosystem, which allows the entire family to settle and become part of the community, transforms a long-term educational programme from a solitary sojourn into a holistic life experience, making Hong Kong a more attractive and competitive destination for global learners.

Family Accompaniment Policy Aspect	Key Details and Requirements
Eligibility for Dependant Visa	Spouse (or legally recognized partner) and unmarried, dependent children under 18 ⁴ .
Guarantor Requirements	The student must hold a valid visa for full-time undergraduate or postgraduate study ⁴ .
Application Process	Submitted concurrently with the student's visa application, typically via the educational institution ⁴ .
Initial Visa Validity	Usually 12 months, aligned with the student's visa, and eligible for extension ⁸ .
Rights of Dependants	Spouses are generally permitted to take up employment in Hong Kong ⁸ .
Key to Successful Renewal	Demonstration of genuine family ties and connection to Hong Kong (e.g., residence, children's schooling) ⁸ .

21.5 Post-study work pathways and entrepreneurship support

Hong Kong is strategically advancing its vision to become a global leader in continuous education, with a particular focus on creating robust post-study work pathways and a dynamic entrepreneurship support ecosystem. This strategic blueprint leverages the territory's unique advantages as a "super connector" between Mainland China and the world, aiming to transform educational attainment into tangible economic and societal contributions.

A cornerstone of Hong Kong's strategy to retain international talent is the Immigration Arrangements for Non-local Graduates (IANG). This policy, explicitly designed to facilitate the transition from study to employment, offers a clear and attractive pathway for graduates to remain in or return to Hong Kong. A key feature is the two-year unfettered stay granted to recent graduates, which does not require them to have secured a job offer at the time of application. This "runway" allows graduates to explore opportunities, integrate into the local culture, and seek employment that matches their skills and aspirations without immediate immigration pressure. The scheme is quota-free and open to all sectors, underscoring Hong Kong's commitment to a broad-based talent acquisition strategy. Furthermore, its recent extension to include graduates from Hong Kong institutions' campuses in the Greater Bay Area (GBA) creates a seamless talent corridor, allowing these graduates to also benefit from the same post-study work rights in Hong Kong. This policy innovation not only enriches Hong Kong's talent pool but also strengthens its role as the education and talent hub for the entire GBA metropolis.

Beyond providing a pathway to employment, Hong Kong is cultivating a fertile ground for graduate entrepreneurs through a multi-layered support system that combines government initiatives, institutional programs, and private sector partnerships. Universities are at the forefront, acting as launchpads for student and alumni startups. For instance, the Hong Kong Metropolitan University has established a dedicated HK\$50 million startup fund and runs a suite of programs—from hackathons to an Angel Fund—that can provide up to HK\$1 million in funding support. Similarly, The Hong Kong Science and Technology Parks Corporation (HKSTP), in partnership with The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, offers the Co-ideation Programme, which provides early-stage startups with up to HK\$100,000 in funding, mentorship, and co-working space, with a fast-track to further incubation. These institution-based efforts are complemented by large-scale, government-supported initiatives like the "GBA Youth Innovation and Social Innovation Programme," which offers selected teams up to HK\$360,000 in seed funding along with three years of comprehensive incubation support, including expert consultation and critical connections to markets across the Greater Bay Area. This comprehensive ecosystem ensures that entrepreneurial graduates have access to capital, mentorship, and networks at every stage of their venture's growth, from a mere concept to a scalable business operating across borders. Through these strategic frameworks, Hong Kong is not just educating global citizens but is actively empowering them to build their futures and businesses within its dynamic economy.

VOLUME V: INCLUSION AND SOCIAL IMPACT

PART 8: LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND

CHAPTER 22: LIFELONG LEARNING FOR AN AGEING POPULATION

Hong Kong stands at a pivotal moment, where the global movement towards lifelong learning converges with the pressing demographic reality of an ageing population. To secure its future prosperity and social harmony, the city must leverage its unique strengths to craft a strategic blueprint that establishes it as a global leader in continuing education. This vision is not merely about providing courses for the elderly; it is about fundamentally reimagining education as a lifelong continuum that empowers individuals at every stage, transforms societal perceptions of ageing, and creates a resilient, multi-generational workforce.

The foundational pillar of Hong Kong's strategy is its robust and innovative public framework for senior learning, most prominently the Elder Academy Scheme. Launched in 2007, this initiative has successfully created a network of approximately 200 academies operating within primary, secondary, and post-secondary institutions across the territory. By situating elder learning within standard school settings, the scheme fosters invaluable inter-generational harmony, allowing elderly citizens to learn new skills alongside young students, who often act as tutors. This exchange dismantles age-related stereotypes and builds a cohesive community fabric. The Hong Kong government's commitment to this vision is clear, with the 2023 Policy Address allocating an additional HK\$80 million to the scheme. This funding injection will expand the annual learning places for those aged 60 and above from 10,000 to 15,000, directly responding to the needs of a growing demographic of active seniors [citation][4]. The very existence of a dedicated fund to support schools and institutions in establishing these academies, with grants up to HK\$122,000 for new three-year programmes, demonstrates a sustainable and scalable model for government-supported, community-based lifelong learning.

Beyond foundational learning, a forward-looking blueprint must address the specific challenges and opportunities of an ageing workforce, particularly for the "golden-age" cohort of individuals aged 50 or above. Hong Kong's strategic approach is increasingly informed by multidisciplinary research that seeks to understand and enhance the learning capacity of older adults. For instance, academics at The Education University of Hong Kong are exploring how sensory integration—combining visual and auditory input—can strengthen learning, while also designing targeted physical and cognitive interventions to maintain brain health and processing speed.

This scientific understanding is critical for designing effective upskilling and reskilling programmes that enable "golden-agers" to remain productive and potentially re-enter the workforce. The proposed reform of the Employees Retraining Board, as highlighted in the 2024 Policy Address, to increase places and remove barriers for higher-educated individuals, aligns perfectly with a "skills-based" vocational training model that can be adapted for older learners. By integrating cognitive science with vocational training, Hong Kong can pioneer effective methods for extending the working lives of its citizens, turning a demographic challenge into an economic asset.

Simultaneously, Hong Kong's globally competitive higher education sector is redefining continuing education for professionals and lifelong learners. Institutions like The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) have embedded the goal of serving the needs of the ageing population and second-career trends into their strategic plans, explicitly calling for a redefinition of their School of Continuing and Professional Studies to meet this demand. This strategic intent is brought to life through innovative offerings such as the Professional Certificate Programmes (Micro-credentials) launched by CUHK Business School. These programmes offer flexible, stackable credentials in high-demand fields like Artificial Intelligence, ESG Reporting, and Financial Technology, allowing working professionals to upskill efficiently over six to 36 months. Crucially, these micro-credentials are credit-bearing and listed at Level 6 of the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework, with credits transferable towards master's degrees, creating seamless pathways between continuous professional education and advanced academic qualifications. This model exemplifies how Hong Kong can lead in creating flexible, high-quality learning pathways that cater to the evolving demands of the global economy and the personal growth of its citizens.

To truly ascend to global leadership, Hong Kong must now synthesise these public, community, and academic initiatives into a cohesive and integrated lifelong learning ecosystem. This involves creating clear articulation pathways between programmes like the Elder Academies and formal qualifications, ensuring that learning later in life can lead to recognised credentials and new opportunities. It also requires expanding the concept of learning beyond the classroom, embracing "active ageing" through volunteerism and community contribution, as seen in the Elder Academy scheme where seniors like Peter Lo and Judy Lee have transitioned from students to volunteer instructors, enriching the community with their skills and experience. Furthermore, drawing inspiration from regional discussions, Hong Kong could explore more flexible funding models, such as allowing the transfer of continuing education funds between family members or creating dedicated "active ageing" learning accounts that can be used for diverse physical and cultural activities that promote holistic well-being. By strategically integrating its world-class educational infrastructure, its commitment to inter-generational equity, and its emerging scientific research on ageing, Hong Kong is uniquely positioned to build a society where learning truly knows no age, setting a powerful example for cities around the world.

22.1 Silver economy: Learning needs of older adults

The rise of the "silver economy" presents both a societal opportunity and a distinct set of educational demands, which Hong Kong is beginning to address through targeted policy and programme design. The learning needs of older adults are multifaceted, extending beyond mere leisure to encompass digital empowerment, workforce re-entry, and specialized knowledge for ageing in place. Research from Hong Kong highlights that while older adults are eager to embrace the digital world, they face significant challenges, including poorer memory retention of operational skills and a consequent need for continuous, patient support. Intergenerational learning programmes, where younger volunteers assist older peers, have proven successful in not only transferring technological knowledge but also in fostering mutual understanding and social cohesion, thereby empowering older learners to find new meaning and fulfilment.

Government policy is now catching up with these needs, particularly in the realm of workforce participation. The Labour and Welfare Bureau has explicitly stated that there is no age line for employment, and that the government's role is to create an enabling environment for older adults who wish to continue working. To this end, the Employees Retraining Board (ERB) is launching tailored training courses for sectors with high labour demand that are also suitable for older workers, such as the food and beverage industry and child residential care. This initiative directly addresses the finding that while Hong Kong's 55-64 age group has a labour participation rate of 58.6%, it still lags behind other advanced economies like Japan (81.2%) and Singapore (72.6%), often due to outdated skills or employer perceptions. By focusing on sectors with lower academic barriers, these programmes are designed to provide practical skills and re-integrate older adults into the workforce, thereby releasing "silver productivity".

Beyond immediate employment, there is a growing recognition of the need for structured education that prepares individuals to serve the silver economy itself. The Higher Diploma in Applied Gerontechnology offered by Hong Kong Metropolitan University is a pioneering programme that trains students to become expert advisers on gerontechnology products and to plan technology-based activities for the elderly. As the first sub-degree programme of its kind in Hong Kong, it creates a direct career pathway for young people in the silver economy, while its curriculum—covering areas like "Equipment and Technologies for Smart Ageing," "Activity and Programme Planning for the Elderly," and "Caregiving with Gerontechnology"—directly addresses the holistic needs of the ageing population, from health monitoring to social interaction. Graduates are equipped to work in NGOs, day care centres, and private companies, embodying a strategic approach to building a workforce capable of supporting a dignified and connected quality of life for older adults. This dual focus—empowering older adults through learning and training a new generation of specialists—is essential for fully realizing the potential of the silver economy in Hong Kong.

22.2 Intergenerational learning programmes

Hong Kong stands at a pivotal moment to assert its global leadership in continuous education, transforming its traditional strength in higher education into a comprehensive, lifelong learning ecosystem that can serve as a model for cities worldwide. The strategic blueprint for this transformation is already taking shape, with institutions like the Chinese University of Hong Kong's School of Continuing and Professional Studies articulating a clear vision "to be a global leader in university continuing education by enriching lives and transforming lifelong learning". This vision is supported by a sophisticated multi-level approach that addresses the needs of diverse learners across generations. At the professional level, institutions are developing flexible, industry-responsive credentials such as micro-credentials and professional certificate programmes that bridge the gap between undergraduate study and executive education, covering trending areas like Innovation Leadership, Sustainability and ESG Reporting, and Artificial Intelligence for Business. These programmes are designed as "career accelerators" with modular options and credit transfer pathways to master's degrees, demonstrating how continuous education can be seamlessly integrated with traditional academic progression. Concurrently, strategic initiatives like HKU SPACE's LEAD Academy are extending Hong Kong's educational reach through cross-border and international study tours, partnering with renowned institutions such as Harvard, MIT, and Cambridge to provide participants with global perspectives and leadership skills. This comprehensive infrastructure—encompassing micro-credentials, university continuing education units, and international partnerships—forms the foundation upon which Hong Kong can build its reputation as a global hub for lifelong learning.

Intergenerational learning programmes represent a particularly innovative and socially impactful dimension of Hong Kong's continuous education landscape, offering a blueprint for how cities can address the dual challenges of an ageing population and the need for social cohesion. These programmes move beyond the traditional paradigm of education as a purely individual, career-oriented pursuit and instead position learning as a vehicle for community building and mutual enrichment. The strategic importance of such initiatives is recognized at the highest levels of educational planning, with universities explicitly including in their strategies the goal to "serve the needs of the ageing population and second career trends in Hong Kong". Ground-level implementation of this vision is already yielding impressive results through various models. For instance, "Project Sparkle" has successfully connected elderly individuals in care facilities with primary school students through a structured programme of art, music, and exercise, utilising self-developed ACE workbooks to facilitate communication and relationship-building. This project alone engaged 491 elders and 757 students across 48 projects, demonstrating the scalability of intergenerational learning. More recently, innovative initiatives like the "No Age Limit Classroom" in Tseung Kwan O have brought together kindergarten children and elderly centre members for regular intergenerational learning sessions covering everything from arts and crafts to science experiments, fostering mutual understanding and breaking down cultural and age-related barriers.

The pedagogical and social benefits of intergenerational learning programmes in Hong Kong are profound and multifaceted, contributing to the holistic development of both young and old participants. For elderly learners, these programmes combat social isolation and restore a sense of purpose and self-esteem, which is particularly crucial for those in residential care who may have limited interaction with the broader community. As one participant, 79-year-old Mr. Cheung, poignantly noted after interacting with children, the experience made him "feel younger" and brought back a sense of vitality and willingness to try new things. The programmes are carefully designed to leverage the strengths of each generation; elderly participants contribute their life experience, practical skills, and traditional knowledge, while children bring energy, curiosity, and in some cases, digital fluency. A notable example of this reciprocal learning is the pilot programme training grandparents in modern childcare techniques, which not only equipped them with updated knowledge of newborn care and safety but also improved communication with their adult children, fostering intergenerational harmony within families. From the perspective of the young, these interactions cultivate essential social-emotional skills such as empathy, patience, and respect for the elderly. Kindergarten supervisor Katy Chow observed that children who participated in intergenerational learning "gained more care for the elderly, cultivated empathy, and understood more about the needs of the elderly," with families reporting that the children had more topics of conversation with their own grandparents at home.

To solidify Hong Kong's pathway to global leadership, a strategic blueprint must intentionally scale and institutionalise these successful intergenerational models, integrating them into the broader continuous education framework. The evidence from existing projects provides clear direction. The intergenerational digital literacy training project led by Hong Kong Polytechnic University, which provided digital training to 479 older adults with the engagement of 153 youths, represents a sophisticated model that combines cognitive training, theory-based instruction, and immersive activities while fostering intergenerational communication. Such projects could be expanded and systematised, creating certified training programmes for intergenerational facilitators and developing standardised curricula that can be adapted across different community settings. Furthermore, these programmes align perfectly with Hong Kong's strategic development as an education hub, demonstrating that the city's educational leadership extends beyond traditional academic metrics to encompass social innovation and community resilience. As Hong Kong positions itself as a "world-class campus" and seeks to attract international students and scholars, showcasing successful intergenerational learning initiatives can serve as a unique selling point—highlighting the city's commitment to holistic education that values all members of society and addresses pressing global challenges such as ageing populations and social fragmentation. By embedding intergenerational learning within the mandates of universities, continuing education providers, and community organisations, and by ensuring sustainable funding and rigorous research to document outcomes, Hong Kong can create a replicable model for cities worldwide, demonstrating that true educational leadership means creating learning opportunities that connect generations, strengthen communities, and enrich lives at every stage.

22.3 Phased retirement and encore career pathways

Hong Kong stands at a critical juncture where its ambitious vision to become a global leader in continuous education converges with the urgent need to address a rapidly aging population. By strategically integrating its world-class higher education infrastructure with innovative policies for phased retirement and encore career pathways, Hong Kong can develop a comprehensive blueprint that not only mitigates labor shortages but also creates a new paradigm for valuing experience and wisdom in the workforce. This strategic approach requires a multi-dimensional effort involving educational institutions, government policy, and private sector adaptation to build an ecosystem where lifelong learning and extended working lives are not just possible, but are a source of competitive advantage.

Strategic Vision for Continuous Education as a Pillar of Global Leadership

Hong Kong's pathway to becoming a global leader in continuous education is intrinsically linked to its ability to harness the potential of its entire population, including its seasoned professionals. The city's higher education institutions are already laying the groundwork by redefining their role in lifelong learning. For instance, The Chinese University of Hong Kong's (CUHK) strategic plan explicitly aims to "serve the needs and demands of the community for lifelong education and continuing development," with a specific goal to "redefine the role of the School of Continuing and Professional Studies to serve the needs of the ageing population and second career trends in Hong Kong". This institutional foresight is complemented by the development of flexible, industry-relevant learning models. The introduction of micro-credential courses by institutions like the CUHK Business School, covering topics such as Innovation Leadership and Artificial Intelligence for Business, exemplifies how continuous education can be tailored for working professionals. These programmes, which offer credits that can be stacked towards a master's degree, create a seamless pathway for individuals to update their skills incrementally without leaving the workforce. By fostering such an agile and responsive education ecosystem, Hong Kong can cultivate a culture of perpetual upskilling, ensuring its workforce remains adaptable and globally competitive while positioning the city as a hub for innovative educational practices.

Designing and Implementing Phased Retirement Mechanisms

The transition from full-time work to complete retirement must be reimagined as a flexible, gradual process to retain valuable human capital and support individual well-being. A strategic blueprint for Hong Kong would involve creating a legal and cultural framework that normalizes phased retirement. This includes government-led initiatives to provide tax incentives for both employers and employees. As suggested by policy researchers, offering employers tax deductions for the salaries of workers past retirement age can mitigate the perceived financial burden of retaining senior staff.

Concurrently, providing additional tax allowances or reduced tax rates for retired individuals who re-enter the workforce would directly increase the financial appeal of continued employment. Beyond fiscal measures, the government's promotion of "silver economy" initiatives, such as the Employees Retraining Board (ERB) offering priority training consultation and dedicated courses for the "post-50" and "post-60" demographics, is crucial. These programmes, like the "Back to Work (Food and Beverage Industry) Foundation Certificate," are designed to help older workers pivot to sectors with high labor demand, making phased retirement in new roles a viable option. Ultimately, combating age discrimination through legislation and promoting age-friendly hiring practices are essential cultural shifts that must accompany these policy changes to ensure their success.

Building Structured Encore Career Pathways for Experienced Talent

To truly unlock the "silver productivity" of its aging population, Hong Kong must move beyond simply extending working lives and instead build structured "encore career" pathways that allow experienced individuals to channel their expertise into new, often socially impactful, roles. This requires a sophisticated matching of skills with market needs. A key component is the establishment of a dedicated "Silver Talent Platform," an enhanced version of the Labour Department's existing job portal for mature job seekers. Such a platform could leverage AI to intelligently match a retiree's detailed work history and skills with employer requirements, ensuring that their deep experience is utilized effectively. Furthermore, training must be stratified to meet diverse needs. For those in professional fields like finance or engineering, advanced upskilling courses in areas like fintech or data analytics can empower them to continue contributing at a high level, combining their seasoned judgment with modern tools. For those seeking new directions, "learn and intern" programmes in growth sectors like retail or elderly care can provide the hands-on experience and confidence needed for a successful career pivot. Universities can also play a pivotal role by creating mentorship programmes and executive-in-residence roles that allow retired business leaders and academics to guide the next generation of entrepreneurs and students, thereby fostering an innovation ecosystem that benefits from intergenerational knowledge transfer.

22.4 Health and wellness education for active ageing

A key pillar of Hong Kong's continuing education leadership is its targeted and innovative application of health and wellness education for active ageing. This is not merely about providing leisure courses but involves a strategic, evidence-based approach to preventive healthcare and intergenerational inclusion. Projects like Tung Wah College's "Active Ageing: Wellness in Unity," which attracted nearly 800 participants, demonstrate how academic institutions are bringing professional knowledge directly into the community. By having occupational therapy students design and run interactive health booths and seminars focused on chronic disease prevention—including chronic pain, cognitive impairment, and mental health—the initiative simultaneously provides invaluable applied learning for students and delivers essential public health education to seniors. This model of community-engaged learning, supported by corporate partners like Chinachem Group, showcases a powerful template for translating academic theory into tangible societal benefit.

The scope of these educational initiatives is broad and methodical, addressing the holistic needs of the ageing population. The SAGE Life Academy for Seniors, funded by The Community Chest, has established a comprehensive educational platform that goes beyond physical health to include "Digital Life Series" for technology adoption and "Positive Retirement Series" for exploring personal interests and maintaining an active, productive life post-retirement. This recognition that active ageing encompasses digital literacy, social connection, and purposeful living is critical. Furthermore, projects are increasingly leveraging research to create high-impact interventions. The Social Innovation Fund has backed several ventures in this space, including a "Train-the-Trainer" programme by The Education University of Hong Kong to empower older adults to lead physical activities, thereby enhancing both physical and mental well-being while creating new opportunities for peer instructors. Similarly, the "Exercise is Medicine (EIM) Academy - Strong & Smart Aging Project" provides cognitive and physical assessments to match low-income seniors with targeted exercise courses, aiming to prevent dementia and support caregivers. This data-driven, personalized approach represents the gold standard in active ageing education.

Perhaps the most distinctive and forward-looking aspect of Hong Kong's approach is its integration of technology and intergenerational dynamics. The Intergenerational E-Triathlon Competition, organized by City University of Hong Kong, brought together over 550 participants, including older adults, children, and individuals with disabilities, to engage in digital simulations of swimming, cycling, and running. This initiative not only used gamification to motivate healthy behaviours but also served as a research platform to study how digital games can foster intergenerational connection. By creating joyful, shared experiences, these programmes dismantle ageist stereotypes and build community cohesion. This blend of digital health engagement, community-based research, and intergenerational programming positions Hong Kong at the forefront of a global movement to redefine ageing, creating scalable and replicable models for how continuing education can be a powerful force for individual and societal well-being in an ageing world.

22.5 Digital inclusion for seniors

Hong Kong possesses a unique confluence of strategic advantages that position it to become a global leader in continuous education. Its role as an international financial centre and its "backing onto the motherland while connecting to the world" status under "one country, two systems" provide a powerful foundation. The strategic blueprint for achieving this leadership involves moving beyond simply filling university seats to viewing education as a core component of economic transformation and talent cultivation for the future. Key elements include strengthening university-industry collaborations in emerging fields like AI and fintech, as seen with institutions like ASTRI, and fostering entrepreneurial thinking through university-affiliated incubators that empower students to become innovators. Furthermore, the development of the Northern Metropolis University City is a pivotal project, envisioned as an "academic gravitational field" that can attract top-tier international universities and research talent, creating a dynamic hub for research and development that serves both Hong Kong and the broader Mainland Chinese economy. This comprehensive approach, integrating academic excellence with global connectivity and innovation, is designed to establish Hong Kong as a premier destination for lifelong learning and executive development in Asia.

Concurrently, a critical component of Hong Kong's continuous education strategy is the robust and systematic effort to ensure digital inclusion for its senior citizens, ensuring no segment of society is left behind in the digital age. The government's "Smart Silver" programme, led by the Digital Policy Office, is a multi-pronged initiative encompassing territory-wide outreach visits, free community training courses, and a dedicated online learning portal, all designed to help seniors safely and effectively use digital technology. A significant recent development is the Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship Development Fund's allocation of HKD 100 million to fund 12 non-governmental organisations in establishing community-based help desks across all 18 districts, offering regular and fixed-point training and technical support on topics ranging from smartphone operation and government apps like iAM Smart to cybersecurity. This infrastructure is complemented by user-friendly resources such as the Consumer Council's "Smart Seniors" Consumer eHub, an elderly-friendly one-stop platform with large fonts and text-to-speech functions that provides curated information on health, finance, and fraud prevention, empowering seniors to become confident "smart consumers". Collectively, these initiatives demonstrate a comprehensive societal commitment to equipping older adults with the digital literacy required for full participation in modern life.

CHAPTER 23: UPSKILLING DISPLACED AND VULNERABLE WORKERS

Hong Kong stands at a pivotal moment in its economic evolution, where the imperative to upskill displaced and vulnerable workers is not merely a social policy but a strategic necessity for sustaining its global competitiveness. As the city solidifies its role as an international education hub, the blueprint for continuous education must prioritize the integration of vulnerable groups—including the unemployed, at-risk youth, ethnic minorities, persons with disabilities, and middle-aged or elderly workers facing structural displacement—into the evolving labor market. The foundation for this ambition is being laid through comprehensive policy overhauls and institutional reforms, such as those outlined in the 2025 Policy Address, which explicitly links workforce development with the broader goal of establishing Hong Kong as a "International Education Hub". This strategic direction transforms continuous education from a remedial service into a dynamic engine for economic resilience and social mobility.

To effectively upskill displaced workers, Hong Kong is deploying a multi-pronged strategy that combines targeted industry training with robust financial and motivational incentives. A prime example is the construction sector, where initiatives like the "Advanced Construction Manpower Training Scheme" and the "One Person, Multiple Skills" training program are directly addressing both unemployment and acute labor shortages. These programs, supported by the Construction Industry Council (CIC), offer free, short-term, skills-based courses ranging from 75 to 106 hours in trades like plumbing, electrical work, and scaffolding. They provide a tangible pathway for semi-skilled workers to achieve formal qualifications, with the added incentive of completion bonuses of up to HK\$19,000 to encourage participation and recognize the opportunity cost of training. This approach directly tackles the immediate need to help workers transition from declining sectors into areas of persistent demand, effectively turning a social challenge into a workforce solution.

Parallel to industry-led schemes, the Employees Retraining Board (ERB) is undergoing a significant reform to become the central pillar of Hong Kong's skills-based training framework. The government's commitment to amending the Employees Retraining Ordinance signals a move towards a more agile and responsive system that can identify and fill core skill gaps in real-time. Crucially, the ERB's model is designed with accessibility and equity at its core, offering full-time placement-tied courses free of charge with retraining allowances for the unemployed. This is complemented by dedicated support for specific service targets, including tailored courses and supplementary learning materials for ethnic minorities, and fee-waiver mechanisms for low-income individuals, ensuring that financial barriers do not preclude the most vulnerable from accessing upskilling opportunities. This creates a safety net that is also a springboard, enabling individuals to regain a foothold in the workforce.

Beyond entry-level skills, the strategic blueprint also encompasses a vision for lifelong learning that creates clear career ladders. The government's designation of institutions like Hong Kong Metropolitan University as "Universities of Applied Sciences" (UAS) is a landmark move to professionalize vocational pathways. Furthermore, innovative programs from leading institutions, such as CUHK Business School's Professional Certificate Programmes (micro-credentials), are bridging the gap between undergraduate studies and postgraduate degrees. These programs offer flexible, stackable credits in high-demand fields like ESG reporting and financial technology, which can later be transferred towards a master's degree, allowing workers to incrementally upskill without interrupting their careers. This "staircase" model of education—from basic retraining to advanced professional certification—is essential for fostering a culture of continuous improvement and ensuring that Hong Kong's workforce can adapt to the demands of a technology-driven economy.

Ultimately, the success of Hong Kong's pathway to global leadership in continuous education hinges on its ability to foster a deeply integrated and supportive ecosystem. This involves not only training but also active intermediation between vulnerable workers and employers. Programs like the Labour Department's Work Orientation and Placement Scheme (WOPS) and the Selective Placement Division provide critical support, offering pre-employment training and counseling for persons with disabilities, coupled with substantial financial incentives for employers who hire and mentor them. This ecosystem thinking extends to the Northern Metropolis development, which is envisioned as a "academic gravitational field" where universities, research labs, and industries co-locate to create a dynamic environment for talent development and innovation. By embedding continuous education within a framework of industry collaboration, targeted support, and clear career progression, Hong Kong is not just upskilling its displaced workers; it is future-proofing its entire society, demonstrating that a commitment to the most vulnerable is also the most powerful strategy for achieving global leadership.

23.1 Early warning systems for industry decline

A critical, yet often underdeveloped, component of a forward-looking continuing education strategy is the implementation of early warning systems to detect and address industry decline. Instead of reacting to job losses, a strategic blueprint uses data and industry intelligence to anticipate structural shifts, enabling proactive reskilling and a just transition for the workforce. The foundation of such a system in Hong Kong is being laid by government bodies that project future manpower needs. For example, the Labour and Welfare Bureau's stark projection that the innovation and technology sector will face a shortfall of 18,000 to 23,000 professionals by 2028, with critical shortages in areas like AI, microelectronics, and data analysis, serves as a macro-level early warning. This data signals where growth will occur, but the inverse—identifying sectors with stagnating or declining demand for specific skills—requires a more granular approach.

Effective early warning systems would function as a "skills observatory," continuously monitoring labor market data, job postings, and industry investment trends to identify sectors at risk of technological disruption or obsolescence. The government's move to formally recognize "universities of applied sciences" and steer them toward partnerships with leading enterprises in Guangdong province is a practical application of this principle. By immersing themselves in the dense ecosystem of tech startups and advanced manufacturing, these institutions can gain real-time intelligence on emerging skill requirements and, conversely, which traditional skills are becoming redundant. This direct line of sight into industry 4.0 allows for the rapid development of curricula that prepare workers for the jobs of tomorrow, effectively using industry-academia integration as a sensor for economic shifts.

For such a system to be truly proactive, it must extend to the programmatic level, where educational institutions can act on these early warnings by designing flexible upskilling pathways. The micro-credentials offered by CUHK Business School are a prime example of how education can respond to and even anticipate market demands. Their programs in "Sustainability and ESG Reporting" and "Technology Applications for Financial Services" are direct responses to global megatrends that are reshaping traditional industries like finance and manufacturing. For workers in declining sectors, these short, practical, and stackable credentials offer an accessible on-ramp to growing fields. The partnership between Metis Global and the Chartered Insurance Institute (CII) to run the LEAD Programme for insurance and financial planning professionals illustrates this in a sector facing digital disruption. By continuously updating practitioners on professional ethics, risk handling, and compliance in a changing landscape, such programs provide an early warning to the workforce itself, signaling the need to adapt or be left behind. Ultimately, a comprehensive early warning system would synthesize macro-level projections from government, real-time intelligence from industry partnerships, and agile educational responses from institutions to create a resilient economy where workforce development is always one step ahead of industry change.

23.2 Targeted retraining for manufacturing and low-skill service workers

Hong Kong stands at a critical juncture where its ambition to become a global leader in continuing education must be matched by a targeted strategy to address the existential challenges facing its manufacturing and low-skill service workers. The economic landscape is being rapidly reshaped by automation, cross-border consumption, and new retail models, which have fundamentally weakened the traditional "trickle-down effect" that once translated broader economic growth into grassroots employment opportunities. For workers in these vulnerable sectors, the path to sustainability is no longer about finding another job, but about acquiring the skills for an entirely new career. A strategic blueprint for global leadership in this area must therefore prioritize the creation of a high-efficacy, employment-guaranteed retraining ecosystem. This involves moving beyond generic course offerings to develop targeted programs in sectors with genuine labour shortages and growth potential, such as green infrastructure maintenance, elder and community care services, urban upkeep, and high-value-additive 细分 manufacturing. By aligning retraining curricula directly with these concrete employment opportunities, Hong Kong can transform a period of disruptive change into a pathway for inclusive economic mobility.

To operationalize this vision, the strategic blueprint must fundamentally redesign the delivery and support mechanisms of continuing education to meet the specific needs of mid-career and older workers. The traditional model of classroom-based learning often presents insurmountable barriers related to income loss, time commitment, and family responsibilities. Hong Kong's pathway to global leadership involves pioneering a more flexible, integrated approach. This includes expanding "earn and learn" models, such as paid internship apprenticeships that allow workers to gain practical experience while maintaining financial stability. Furthermore, it requires the development of modular, competency-based micro-certificate courses that are formally recognized by industries, enabling workers to upskill incrementally without committing to lengthy, full-time programs. The recent call for the Employees Retraining Board to revise its ordinance and expand its mandate provides a pivotal opportunity to institutionalize these flexible, industry-validated pathways, ensuring that retraining is not just an option, but a viable and attractive route to secure, skilled employment for those most at risk of being left behind.

23.3 Income support during training transitions

Hong Kong stands at a pivotal moment in its economic evolution, where the dual forces of technological advancement and structural transformation demand a workforce that is not only highly skilled but also perpetually adaptable. To secure its status as a global leader in continuous education, Hong Kong must implement a strategic blueprint that is both visionary and deeply pragmatic. This strategy must be built upon a robust, flexible, and inclusive ecosystem that empowers individuals to engage in lifelong learning as a natural and supported part of their career trajectory. Central to this vision is the establishment of a comprehensive "SkillsFuture" style framework, which moves beyond traditional academic pathways to validate and cultivate competencies that are directly responsive to industry needs. The government's recent initiatives to革新 the Employees Retraining Board (ERB) are a foundational step in this direction, transforming it from a safety net for the unemployed into a proactive skills-upgrading agency for the entire workforce. By removing the previous学历上限 and focusing on "技能为本" training, the ERB is now positioned to offer higher-level, modular courses co-developed with tertiary institutions and industry partners, creating a fluid learning market where individuals can acquire precisely targeted micro-credentials and certificates that are formally recognised within the Qualifications Framework (QF).

Furthermore, the bedrock of Hong Kong's leadership in this arena will be its ability to formalise and accredit learning acquired outside of traditional classrooms. The existing Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) mechanism, administered under the QF, is a critical asset that must be expanded and promoted aggressively. For a global city with a dynamic economy, countless workers possess deep, tacit knowledge and skills gained through years of experience. A strategic blueprint must mainstream the RPL process, making it a standard pathway for experienced professionals to gain formal qualifications without starting from scratch. This not only accelerates individual career progression but also rapidly certifies the existing talent pool to meet emerging industry standards. Complementing this is the need to fully embrace and expand applied learning at the tertiary level. The development of Universities of Applied Sciences (UASs) and applied degree programmes, which blend rigorous theory with substantial work-based learning, is crucial. These institutions directly counter the stigma associated with vocational education by offering prestigious, high-quality pathways that lead directly to high-demand careers. By forging deep, symbiotic partnerships with industry, these programmes ensure curricula are constantly updated, and students gain relevant experience, making them job-ready upon graduation. This robust infrastructure of flexible pathways and industry-integrated learning will cement Hong Kong's reputation as a place where human capital is continuously cultivated to its highest potential.

However, even the most sophisticated learning ecosystem will fail to achieve its potential if financial barriers prevent individuals from participating. Therefore, a critical pillar of Hong Kong's blueprint for global leadership must be a holistic and generous system of income support during training transitions. The concept of lifelong learning must be underpinned by a parallel system of "lifelong financial security for learning," recognising that adults have financial commitments—such as mortgages, family expenses, and daily living costs—that make prolonged unpaid training untenable. While targeted schemes exist, such as the monthly \$1,000 training allowance for registered apprentices under the VTC学徒训练 programme, and means-tested financial aid like the TSFS for full-time students, these are often fragmented and focused on the early career stage or full-time study. A forward-looking strategy requires a more comprehensive approach. This could involve the creation of individual lifelong learning accounts, where the government, employers, and individuals co-contribute, providing a dedicated pool of funds that workers can draw upon at any point in their careers for approved training. This model empowers individuals to take ownership of their development while sharing the responsibility among key stakeholders.

In parallel with savings accounts, a modernised income support system must include a robust training allowance or "training wage" for mid-career individuals. Unlike entry-level apprenticeships, mid-career transitions often involve a significant temporary drop in income. A strategic blueprint could pilot a scheme that provides a partial income replacement for individuals in sectors facing structural decline, enabling them to undertake full-time, intensive retraining for high-growth fields like green technology, digital health, or advanced manufacturing. This would act as a proactive measure, preventing long-term unemployment and the associated social costs. The existing ERB, with its expanded mandate, is the ideal agency to administer such a scheme, using its enhanced industry intelligence to identify priority skills gaps and channel support to individuals training to fill them. Ultimately, by weaving together robust individual learning accounts, generous upskilling subsidies, and targeted income replacement for major career pivots, Hong Kong can create a safety net that is not just about catching those who fall, but about providing a trampoline for the entire workforce to leap towards new opportunities. This integrated approach to financial support will be the defining feature of Hong Kong's successful transition to a global leader in continuous education, ensuring that no citizen is left behind in the economy of tomorrow.

23.4 Career counselling and job placement integration

Hong Kong stands at a pivotal moment in its quest to become a global leader in continuous education, with its strategic advantage lying in the creation of flexible, accredited, and industry-aligned learning pathways. A cornerstone of this vision is the development of robust micro-credential ecosystems that are deeply integrated with traditional academic progression. Leading institutions like CUHK Business School are pioneering this approach through their Professional Certificate Programmes (Micro-credentials), which offer concentrated, practical, and affordable upskilling in high-demand areas such as Innovation Leadership, ESG Reporting, and Artificial Intelligence. These programmes serve as "career accelerators" and are designed with modular, self-paced options, but their most innovative feature is the "seamless transfer" of credits earned into master's degree programmes, with courses officially listed at Level 6 of the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework. This creates a powerful "ladder of opportunity," allowing learners to immediately apply new skills in the workplace while preserving a clear and credible pathway to advanced academic qualifications. To achieve global leadership, this model must be expanded across all major institutions, creating a unified, permeable system where continuous education is not a dead end but a dynamic and integral part of a lifelong academic journey, directly responsive to the rapid shifts in the global economy.

The integration of career counselling and job placement into the fabric of continuous education is another critical pillar of Hong Kong's strategic blueprint, transforming learning from a theoretical exercise into a direct catalyst for career advancement. This is exemplified by specialized centers like the Shine Skills Centre, which provides an "Inter-professional Support Services Team" offering comprehensive life planning education, individualized career counseling, and proactive job matching that extends to at least 12 months of post-employment support. Their model includes direct employer engagement, workplace visits, and ongoing adaptation support, ensuring that graduates not only find jobs but sustain meaningful employment. Similarly, PolyU SPEED's dedicated Employability and Work-Integrated Education (ECD-WIE) Office consolidates career resources, offering services from career advisory and job market intelligence to organizing career expos and company visits, all aimed at making students "career ready". These examples demonstrate a shift from passive placement to active, wraparound support. For Hong Kong to lead globally, this level of intensive, personalized, and sustained career integration must become a standard feature of all continuous education programmes, ensuring that every learner has a clear line of sight from the classroom to a thriving career.

Furthermore, a holistic and inclusive approach to career development is being championed by community-based initiatives that cater to diverse populations, setting a powerful precedent for social equity within the continuous education landscape. The "Sail with You – Youth Career Life Development" project, for instance, adopts a whole-person development model for secondary school students, integrating mental health, financial management, and law-abiding awareness into career planning. It employs sophisticated frameworks like narrative practice and the VASK-ME model (Values, Attitudes, Skills, Knowledge, Motivation, Emotions) to help young people understand themselves and build "career adaptability".

This focus on resilience and self-image, particularly for at-risk youth, highlights that effective career counselling must address the psychological and emotional foundations of employability. At the tertiary level, Hang Seng University of HSUHK's "Shine@HSUHK" initiative demonstrates a commitment to inclusivity, embedding "inclusive career guidance" within a broader ecosystem of wellness support, sports, and diverse student organizations to foster whole-person development. To ascend as a global leader, Hong Kong must weave these threads together, ensuring its continuous education ecosystem is not only academically rigorous but also psychologically supportive and inclusive, preparing all segments of the population for the challenges of the future workplace.

Finally, Hong Kong's pathway to global leadership is being supercharged by a cohesive government strategy that aligns educational output with market demand and positions the city as a regional talent hub. The HKSAR Government's recent policy address outlines a multipronged "supply-side educational revolution" to bridge the innovation talent gap, featuring a dramatic increase in non-local student intake and the formal designation of "universities of applied sciences" to create a respected, hands-on vocational pathway. This is complemented by initiatives like HKU SPACE's LEAD Academy, which actively facilitates cross-border study tours and executive training for Mainland Chinese officials and corporations, deepening academia-industry integration within the Greater Bay Area and beyond. These programmes focus on practical knowledge in areas like fintech and urban management, reinforcing Hong Kong's role as a conduit for international best practices and a provider of high-level talent development. By breaking down traditional barriers between education, career counselling, and employment, and by actively fostering collaboration between universities, enterprises, and government, Hong Kong is constructing a dynamic and responsive talent engine. This integrated approach, which combines policy vision with on-the-ground execution, is the definitive blueprint for establishing itself as a global pacesetter in continuous education.

23.5 Success stories: From job loss to career transformation

To cement its status as a premier global city, Hong Kong must evolve from a hub of finance and trade into a powerhouse of human capital development. The strategic blueprint for achieving global leadership in continuous education rests on three foundational pillars: agile public-private partnerships, the integration of micro-credentialing, and the creation of a holistic lifelong learning ecosystem. Firstly, the government must incentivize corporations to co-create curricula with institutions like the HKU School of Professional and Continuing Education (HKU SPACE) and the Vocational Training Council (VTC). By subsidizing training in high-demand fields such as fintech, green finance, and artificial intelligence, Hong Kong can ensure its workforce remains adaptable to the shifting tides of the global economy. Secondly, the adoption of a universal micro-credential framework—endorsed by industry bodies and universities—would allow professionals to stack verified skills incrementally, validating learning outside of traditional degree structures. Finally, this blueprint requires a cultural shift, positioning continuous education not as a remedy for obsolescence but as a perpetual engine for upward mobility, thereby ensuring Hong Kong's competitive edge is sustained by the most resilient asset of all: a continuously evolving and highly skilled populace.

The closure of a major retail chain in Causeway Bay in 2020 left Mr. Chan Wai-lam, a 48-year-old store manager with two decades of experience, facing an uncertain future. The skills that had defined his career—inventory management and frontline sales—seemed increasingly obsolete in a post-pandemic economy rapidly digitizing. Rather than viewing this as an endpoint, Mr. Chan utilized the ERB (Employees Retraining Board) schemes to embark on a rigorous upskilling journey at the Hong Kong Institute of Vocational Education. He enrolled in a comprehensive part-time certificate program in Digital Marketing and E-Commerce Analytics, learning to navigate SEO strategies, manage Google Ads campaigns, and interpret consumer data dashboards—skills worlds apart from his previous hands-on retail management. The transformation was challenging, requiring late nights studying after job-hunting during the day, but it was facilitated by mentors from the tech industry who taught real-world applications. Within eighteen months, Mr. Chan successfully pivoted careers. He is now an E-Commerce Operations Manager for a local SME expanding into the Southeast Asian market, where his deep understanding of customer psychology, honed over years in retail, now informs the digital strategies he oversees. His journey from job loss to career transformation exemplifies the power of targeted continuous education, proving that with the right strategic support, experience can be successfully augmented with new-age skills to create a professional profile that is both unique and highly valuable.

CHAPTER 24: GENDER EQUITY IN CONTINUOUS EDUCATION

Gender equity is a foundational pillar in Hong Kong's pursuit of global leadership in continuous education. The city has developed a nuanced and multifaceted approach to ensure that learning opportunities are not only accessible to all genders but are also strategically designed to address specific needs, dismantle historical barriers, and leverage the full potential of its entire workforce. This commitment is evident through targeted programmes for women, robust policy frameworks, and a continuous process of research and adaptation aimed at creating a truly inclusive lifelong learning ecosystem.

A cornerstone of Hong Kong's strategy for gender equity is the provision of targeted, flexible learning pathways that accommodate the distinct life circumstances often faced by women. The Capacity Building Mileage Programme (CBMP), pioneered by the Women's Commission in 2004 and now run by Hong Kong Metropolitan University, stands as a prime example of this approach. Designed as Hong Kong's first tailor-made learning programme with a focus on women, the CBMP directly tackles common obstacles such as fragmented schedules and lack of prior qualifications by offering "barrier-free" learning through flexible modes like radio broadcasts, face-to-face instruction, and e-Learning. By waiving academic requirements and fitting into the short, diversified pockets of free time that many women have, the programme empowers them to pursue self-development and enhances their inner strength to cope with life's challenges. The programme's success is reflected in its growing participation, with enrolment rising from approximately 4,000 in the 2021/22 programme year to 6,000 in 2023/24, alongside a significant increase in approved bursaries, demonstrating a tangible and growing demand for such gender-responsive educational support.

Beyond these dedicated programmes, gender equity is deeply embedded within the broader policy and funding frameworks of Hong Kong's continuous education landscape. The Continuing Education Fund (CEF) serves as a primary engine for workforce development, and its impact is notably gendered, with women making up a substantial 57% of its nearly 840,000 applicants as of early 2018. This data underscores that when financial barriers are lowered, women are highly motivated to engage in self-enhancement. Furthermore, a commitment to gender mainstreaming ensures that policies are scrutinized for their differential impact. A clear example is the CEF's administrative evolution: since 2007, the claim period for course fee reimbursement has been extended from two to four years to accommodate applicants who may require more time due to health reasons, including pregnancy. This seemingly minor adjustment reflects a sophisticated understanding of how biological and socially-constructed gender roles can intersect with educational pathways, ensuring that life events do not become barriers to lifelong learning. The government continues to review and refine such measures, working with stakeholders to ensure resources are used effectively to promote women's development in all aspects.

Looking ahead, Hong Kong's journey toward gender equity in continuous education is informed by a critical understanding of structural inequalities and the evolving dynamics of gender and learning. Research from institutions like the University of Hong Kong and NYU Shanghai reveals that apparent gender gaps in educational achievement are often not due to inherent ability but are shaped by institutional structures. A study of Hong Kong's 2002 secondary school placement reform, which eliminated gender-based quotas, found that once this "hidden protection" for male students was removed, female students gained access to higher-quality schools and subsequently outperformed males in math and science. This finding has profound implications for continuous education, suggesting that ensuring equitable access to high-quality programmes and removing systemic biases can unlock untapped potential, particularly in fields where women have been historically underrepresented. This is complemented by ongoing research into how factors like migration, family, and district context intersect with gender to shape postsecondary educational opportunity, reinforcing the need for a nuanced and intersectional approach to policy. By learning from these systemic insights and continuing to evolve programmes like the CBMP to include future-focused skills such as e-commerce and digital marketing, Hong Kong is strategically positioned to not only achieve gender parity but to harness the full spectrum of its human capital, solidifying its status as a global leader in continuous education.

24.1 Addressing women's return-to-work challenges

Hong Kong stands at a pivotal moment, possessing all the foundational elements to transform itself into a global leader in continuous education while simultaneously addressing a critical social and economic imperative: the successful reintegration of women into the workforce. This strategic blueprint leverages the city's unique advantages—world-class educational institutions, a burgeoning ecosystem of flexible learning, and a policy environment increasingly attuned to demographic challenges—to create a comprehensive and inclusive model for lifelong learning and talent development.

The cornerstone of Hong Kong's global leadership in continuous education is the innovative and flexible infrastructure already being built by its leading institutions. The Asia-Pacific Institute of Business (APIB) at CUHK Business School has pioneered a series of Professional Certificate Programmes (Micro-credentials) that are specifically designed for the modern professional. These programmes, covering high-demand fields like Innovation Leadership, ESG Reporting, and Artificial Intelligence for Business, offer a practical, shorter, and more affordable alternative to traditional degrees. Their flexibility is key, with modular options allowing students to complete their studies at their own pace over six to 36 months. Crucially, these certificates are not dead ends but are integrated into the broader academic ecosystem, with credits that can be transferred to master's degree programmes, creating clear and accessible pathways for lifelong career advancement. This model directly supports the vision of institutions like the School of Continuing and Professional Sciences at CUHK, which aims to be a global leader by keeping pace with learners' needs and staying passionate about innovative leadership.

This vision of continuous, integrated education is being echoed across the city's academic landscape. The University of Hong Kong's School of Professional and Continuing Education (HKU SPACE) established the LEAD Academy to deliver high-quality programmes to senior executives, further solidifying Hong Kong's role as a regional education hub. At the same time, government policy is actively reshaping the higher education sector to be more responsive to market needs. By formally designating institutions as "universities of applied sciences," the government is creating a respected pathway for hands-on, vocational learning that is closely aligned with industry demands. This strategic alignment between academia and industry is critical. As one tech leader noted, traditional internships are no longer sufficient; instead, integrating commercial projects into degree programmes can provide the hands-on knowledge needed to produce readily employable graduates. This ecosystem, which blends micro-credentials, traditional academia, and applied sciences, positions Hong Kong to cultivate a future-ready workforce on a global scale.

A central and urgent challenge that this powerful continuous education engine must address is the reintegration of women into the workforce. Recent surveys indicate that Hong Kong has over 300,000 women who are not in the labor force but wish to return to work, representing a vast pool of untapped talent and experience. The primary barrier for these women is not a lack of desire to work, but the lack of a supportive ecosystem. Caregiving responsibilities, whether for children or elderly family members, are the most commonly cited reason for leaving and not returning to the workforce. To unlock this potential, Hong Kong's strategic blueprint must pair its flexible educational offerings with equally flexible social and workplace policies.

The blueprint for addressing women's return-to-work challenges therefore requires a multi-pronged strategy that combines skills development with structural support. On the education front, the government's plan to adopt a "skills-based" approach to retraining courses is a vital step, ensuring that women can quickly and efficiently update their competencies to match current market demands. These courses should be delivered through the same flexible, modular formats pioneered by institutions like CUHK, allowing women to balance learning with their caregiving schedules. Simultaneously, this upskilling must be matched by a significant expansion of supportive infrastructure. The government's initiative to add 1,500 new day-care places is a welcome move, but the scale of the need, highlighted by the fact that 20-30% of non-working women cite family care as the reason for not working, calls for continued and expanded effort. Furthermore, promoting "family-friendly employment measures" in the private sector, such as flexible working hours and the establishment of workplace nurseries as seen at the Airport Authority, is essential to creating an environment where women can fully utilize their new skills and contribute to the economy. By weaving together accessible, high-quality continuous education with concrete childcare support and flexible work arrangements, Hong Kong can create a truly inclusive blueprint that empowers women, fuels economic growth, and cements its status as a global leader in lifelong learning.

24.2 Flexible learning arrangements for caregivers

Hong Kong stands at a pivotal moment to redefine its role in global continuous education, leveraging its unique advantages as an international city with deep connections to both mainland China and the world. A strategic blueprint for global leadership must be built upon several foundational pillars: systemic innovation, quality assurance, internationalisation, and inclusivity. The recent policy directions outlined in the 2025 Policy Address and the proactive response from the Employees Retraining Board (ERB) signal a clear commitment to this path. The ERB's comprehensive reform, which includes removing the upper academic limit for trainees and shifting towards a "skills-based" training framework, is a cornerstone of this strategy. This approach moves beyond traditional qualifications to focus on the dynamic needs of the economy, identifying skill gaps through enhanced industry consultation and collaborating with higher education institutions to develop a diverse range of courses. The long-term vision to introduce industry-recognised micro-credential courses further exemplifies a move towards flexible, modular, and stackable learning pathways that cater to the lifelong learning needs of a global workforce. Furthermore, the government's ambition to build an international hub for post-secondary education, as articulated in the 2023 Policy Address, provides the overarching ecosystem for this growth. Initiatives such as expanding the admission quota for non-local students and developing the Northern Metropolis University Town are designed to attract international talent and foster cross-border collaboration in education and research. This creates a fertile ground for continuous education programmes to become globally competitive, offering international qualifications and specialisations that draw learners from around the region, thereby solidifying Hong Kong's status as a leader in the field.

Central to this strategic blueprint is the imperative to address the needs of a diverse and often under-served segment of the potential learner population: caregivers. A truly global leader in continuous education must demonstrate an ability to create accessible and flexible learning arrangements that empower all citizens. Hong Kong is already witnessing the emergence of innovative models that specifically target caregivers, recognising their unique constraints and contributions. The ERB's expanded mandate to serve the "whole workforce" implicitly includes this group, but more targeted programmes are crucial. For instance, initiatives like the "Care Buddy" Support Scheme 2.0, launched by NGOs such as the Hong Kong Women's Federation, directly tackle the time poverty faced by caregivers, particularly women. By offering training in care techniques and gerontechnology during school hours and providing concurrent childcare services, these programmes pragmatically dismantle the barriers to participation. This dual-generation approach not only upskills the caregiver but also provides essential social support, illustrating how flexible learning must extend beyond just online content to include logistical and social facilitation.

The digital transformation of education offers another powerful avenue for creating flexible learning arrangements for caregivers, enabling them to learn at their own pace and in their own space. Programmes like the "Jockey Club CADENZA e-Tools for Elder Care" exemplify how technology can democratise access to high-quality training. This online platform provides free, self-directed courses for both professionals and family caregivers, covering a wide array of topics from sarcopenia to cognitive impairment, based on the World Health Organization's ICOPE framework. The development and upgrade of the "Healthy Aging Screen" mobile application further enhances this flexibility, integrating health screening tools and community resources into a single, accessible platform. Such digital tools are invaluable for caregivers who cannot commit to fixed class schedules. Moreover, they represent a scalable model for continuous education that can be adapted and adopted globally, showcasing Hong Kong's innovative capacity to blend technology with social care needs. This is complemented by formal, free training programmes like the government's Pilot Scheme on Training for Foreign Domestic Helpers in Elderly Care, which offers structured 12-hour core modules with interpretation services, directly acknowledging and investing in the skills of a vital caregiving workforce that is often overlooked.

Looking forward, the pathway to global leadership involves scaling up these successful pilots and integrating them into a coherent, officially recognised system of continuous education. The groundwork laid by organisations like Generation Hong Kong, with its "Guardians of the Silver Age" programme, points towards a future where training is explicitly employment-oriented and holistic. This eight-week course not only teaches professional caregiving techniques and the use of gerontechnology but also focuses on cultivating essential behavioural skills and mindsets (BSM) like empathy and adaptability, with on-the-job support post-graduation. Such comprehensive, outcomes-focused programmes directly address the quality imperative of a global leader. The government's stated intention to establish universities of applied sciences (UASs) provides a perfect vehicle for accrediting and elevating these kinds of vocational and professional training pathways, giving them the status and recognition of university-level qualifications. By creating clear "Vocational Qualifications Pathways" and expanding the 資歷架構 (Qualifications Framework) to more industries, Hong Kong can build a transparent and progressive system where a caregiver can start with a basic skills course and advance to a degree, with their competencies formally recognised at every step. This integrated approach, combining flexible delivery, robust accreditation, and a clear focus on the needs of a changing economy and society, is the essence of Hong Kong's blueprint for global leadership in continuous education.

24.3 STEM upskilling for women

Hong Kong is strategically positioning itself as a global leader in continuing education by building a comprehensive and flexible ecosystem that bridges prestigious academia with practical, industry-driven skills. Central to this vision is the creation of micro-credential and executive education pathways that cater to the demands of a rapidly evolving global economy. Institutions like The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) Business School are at the forefront, offering professional certificate programmes in cutting-edge fields such as Innovation Leadership, Artificial Intelligence for Business, and Sustainability and ESG Reporting. These programmes are designed as "career accelerators," providing concentrated, flexible learning that can be completed at a student's own pace and crucially, offering credits that can be transferred towards a full master's degree, thereby creating seamless articulation between continuous learning and advanced academic qualifications. This model is further reinforced by dedicated academies like HKU SPACE's LEAD Academy, which delivers high-quality, tailor-made programmes for executives and corporations, including study tours in collaboration with renowned global institutions like Harvard and MIT, thus solidifying Hong Kong's role as a regional and international hub for talent development. The overarching goal, as articulated by institutions like CUHK's School of Continuing and Professional Studies, is to "enrich lives and transform lifelong learning" by keeping pace with learners' needs and expanding industry collaborations both locally and globally.

A critical and highly effective component of Hong Kong's blueprint is its targeted focus on STEM upskilling for women and girls, addressing gender disparity in technology fields and building a diverse talent pipeline from an early age. A flagship example of this is the strategic partnership between the FutureGen Girls Foundation and Microsoft Hong Kong. Launched in 2026, this two-year collaboration is specifically designed to provide young women aged 12 to 19 with expanded access to artificial intelligence (AI) and STEM education. The programme integrates several key elements: offering age-appropriate AI learning tools and certification courses, connecting students with professional mentors and role models from Microsoft, and providing hands-on experience through workshops and career fairs. By focusing on "future-ready skills" and real-world AI applications, the initiative aims to demystify technology and empower young women to explore diverse career paths in a rapidly evolving digital world, ensuring they transition from education to employment with confidence.

Beyond foundational education for students, Hong Kong's strategy also encompasses direct pathways to employment for young women, combining intensive training with practical work experience. The "Women Futuremakers Employment Programme," a joint initiative by St. James' Settlement and Standard Chartered Bank, offers a comprehensive model for this approach. Targeting young women who are not yet employed, the programme provides a structured pathway that includes pre-employment training, specialized industry training, and a substantial 160-hour internship in high-growth sectors like STEM and sustainability.

This structure not only equips participants with in-demand technical skills but also provides them with critical workplace exposure and a proven track record, significantly enhancing their employability. The programme's inclusive design, which includes cohorts conducted in English to support ethnic minority women, further demonstrates a commitment to ensuring that the benefits of Hong Kong's upskilling efforts are accessible to all, thereby strengthening the overall social and economic fabric.

These targeted upskilling initiatives are integral to Hong Kong's broader, government-led strategy to become a global innovation and technology hub by aggressively cultivating a market-ready talent pool. The Hong Kong SAR Government's recent policy overhaul, as highlighted in the 2025 Policy Address, aims to bridge a projected shortfall of up to 23,000 innovation and technology professionals by 2028. This comprehensive plan includes raising the cap on non-local student intake, fostering deeper academia-industry integration by designating "universities of applied sciences," and launching global marketing campaigns to attract top-tier talent. By creating a supportive ecosystem that includes mentorship and access to capital, as advocated by bodies like the Alibaba Hong Kong Entrepreneurs Fund, Hong Kong is not just training individuals but is cultivating future leaders and entrepreneurs. Programmes focused on upskilling women in STEM are a vital part of this ecosystem, ensuring that the city's future workforce is not only highly skilled but also diverse, innovative, and fully prepared to lead on the global stage.

24.4 Leadership development programmes

Hong Kong's ambition to become a global leader in continuous education is not merely an aspiration but a strategic imperative, grounded in its unique advantages as an international financial hub and its recent accolades in global talent competitiveness. By leveraging its world-class higher education institutions, robust policy frameworks, and a dynamic private sector, Hong Kong is well-positioned to develop a comprehensive blueprint for leadership in this field. A critical component of this strategic vision involves the design and implementation of high-impact leadership development programmes that cater to both public and private sector needs, ensuring the city's workforce remains agile and innovative in a rapidly evolving global economy.

The Foundation: Hong Kong's Strengths in Education and Talent

Hong Kong's pathway to global leadership in continuous education is built upon a remarkably strong foundation. The city's higher education sector is a crown jewel, with five universities consistently ranking among the world's top 100, underpinned by a highly internationalised and diversified post-secondary education system. This academic excellence directly fuels talent competitiveness; in 2025, Hong Kong leapt to fourth place globally and first in Asia in the IMD World Talent Ranking, demonstrating significant improvements in factors like "Investment and Development" and "Readiness". This success is further reflected in digital competitiveness, where Hong Kong ranks fourth globally, with its "Training and education" sub-factor placing among the top five worldwide. These accolades are a direct result of strategic government policies, including the establishment of the high-level Committee on Education, Technology and Talents to coordinate an integrated approach to development, and the relaxation of admission quotas for non-local students to attract global talent. The effectiveness of these measures is evident in the over 230,000 talented individuals who have arrived in Hong Kong through various admission schemes, injecting fresh impetus into the labour force and creating a rich, diverse pool of professionals for continuous education programmes.

Strategic Blueprint: Policy and Market Dynamics

The strategic blueprint for Hong Kong's continuous education leadership is reinforced by a dynamic interplay between government support and market responsiveness. The government's long-standing commitment is exemplified by the Continuing Education Fund (CEF), which provides a subsidy ceiling of \$25,000 per eligible applicant for over 4,650 registered courses, directly incentivising adults to pursue further learning and adapt to a knowledge-based economy. Complementing this is the Adult Education Subvention Scheme, which funded 59 charitable institutions to run 646 basic education courses in the 2025/26 academic year, ensuring foundational skills are accessible to all, including new arrivals and ethnic minorities.

Market analysis confirms the vibrancy of this sector, with the training market showing robust growth driven by demand for language, vocational, and internationally accredited courses. This demand is met by a diverse ecosystem of providers, from large chains to specialised institutions and increasingly, online platforms, creating a competitive and responsive market. The government's encouragement for course providers to design new courses for CEF registration further aligns public funding with emerging industry needs, ensuring the training ecosystem remains agile and relevant.

Leadership Development in Action: Case Studies from Hong Kong

Hong Kong's strategic focus on leadership development is brought to life through a variety of innovative programmes targeting different sectors and career stages. These initiatives serve as practical models for how continuous education can cultivate high-calibre talent. Key examples include:

- **Public Sector Strategic Leadership:** The HKUST Executive Education Office has launched targeted programmes for government officers. A two-day "Public Sector Strategic Leadership and People Management Program" equipped middle-to-senior officers with skills in strategic sensemaking, coalition building, and fostering innovation. A complementary one-day workshop for middle management provides practical tools to enhance leadership effectiveness in contemporary public service. These programmes demonstrate a commitment to building adaptive leadership within the civil service.
- **Fintech and Banking Collaboration:** In partnership with the Hong Kong Institute of Bankers, HKUST offers the Enhanced Competency Framework (ECF) on Fintech (Professional Level) Programme. A comprehensive 300-hour learning journey, including a module on "Regtech," combines lectures, self-study, and examinations to equip banking practitioners with cutting-edge skills in data governance and regulatory compliance. This deep collaboration between academia and industry bodies directly addresses the sector's need for specialised talent.
- **Cross-Sector Professional Advancement:** The LEAD (Learning, Enhanced, and Development) Programme, a joint initiative by Metis Global Group and the Chartered Insurance Institute (CII), provides a key continuing education platform for insurance and financial planning professionals. Now in its fourth year, the 15-hour programme strengthens foundational competencies in areas like professional ethics, risk handling, and compliance. By fostering international knowledge exchange and sponsoring diversity, equity, and inclusion (DE&I) events like "Dive In," Metis exemplifies how private-sector partnerships can drive multi-level professional progress and build a more inclusive professional culture.

Charting the Future: Expanding Hong Kong's Global Footprint

Looking ahead, Hong Kong's blueprint for global leadership in continuous education involves scaling up successful models and deepening its integration with national and international strategies. The government's commitment to developing the Northern Metropolis University Town and further relaxing admission ceilings for self-financing non-local students will create new physical and policy spaces for cross-border educational collaboration and talent exchange. The strategic partnership between Metis and the CII, which plans to expand cross-regional and cross-sector initiatives, illustrates how Hong Kong-based organisations can elevate Asia's global standards in professional fields like finance and wealth management. Furthermore, the recognition of the Shenzhen-Hong Kong-Guangzhou cluster as the world's top innovation cluster underscores the immense potential for cross-border collaboration in innovation and technology talent development. By continuing to invest in digital infrastructure, such as the AI Supercomputing Centre at Cyberport, and promoting "new industrialisation," Hong Kong is creating a fertile ground for continuous education programmes in cutting-edge fields like artificial intelligence, life and health technology, and microelectronics. This integrated approach, connecting education, technology, and talent on a global scale, will solidify Hong Kong's role as a premier hub for lifelong learning and leadership development.

24.5 Childcare support for learners

Childcare Support as a Foundation for Learner Participation

Recognizing that participation in continuous education is often hindered by family responsibilities, Hong Kong's strategic blueprint places a heavy emphasis on dismantling these barriers through a robust and multi-layered childcare support system. The government has adopted a holistic approach, acknowledging that supporting a learner also means supporting their family. A key element of this is the expansion of institutional care. In a significant move, the 2025 Policy Address outlined plans to add 15 new aided child care centres over the next three years, creating approximately 1,500 additional places for children under three. This will effectively double the current capacity to around 3,000 places, directly addressing one of the most acute shortages for parents of very young children who wish to return to study or work.

Beyond centre-based care, the blueprint innovatively leverages the school system to support learning for parents. The School-based After School Care Service Scheme has been radically expanded by removing its cap on service places. This means that primary school students can stay at school under supervision after classes end, which is a direct and powerful intervention to free up time for parents—particularly working mothers and single parents—to attend evening classes, vocational training, or university courses, secure in the knowledge that their children are in a safe and familiar environment. This policy effectively transforms schools into community hubs that support the entire family's development. Furthermore, financial mechanisms are in place to ease the economic pressure on learner-parents. The introduction of a double tax deduction, extended to the first two years of a child's life (effectively a HK\$260,000 deduction), provides immediate financial relief. For those facing more acute financial strain, schemes like the Financial Assistance Scheme for Designated Evening Adult Education Courses provide direct support, with specific provisions for single-parent families to ensure they are not left behind. Finally, the blueprint promotes a cultural shift towards a family-friendly society by encouraging employers to adopt flexible work arrangements through the "Good Employer Charter," making it logistically possible for parents to balance professional, educational, and family commitments.

CHAPTER 25: SUPPORTING YOUTH TRANSITIONS

Hong Kong is strategically positioning itself as a global leader in continuous education by building a comprehensive, multi-layered ecosystem designed specifically to support youth transitions from education to employment. This blueprint addresses the critical education-employment gap by fostering a culture of lifelong learning and creating multiple, flexible pathways for young people. At the core of this strategy is the government's "职学联通、多元发展" (Study and Career Connectivity, Diverse Development) initiative, which promotes vocational and professional education and training (VPET) as a parallel stream to traditional academic education. This approach is reinforced by significant public investment, including a \$100 million startup fund to establish an Alliance of Universities in Applied Sciences. This alliance aims to elevate the status of VPET, promote collaboration between industry and academia, and create clear pathways for students to gain applied skills that are directly relevant to the evolving job market, thereby ensuring that youth transitions are supported by a system that values both theoretical knowledge and practical expertise.

A key pillar of supporting youth transitions involves innovative programmes that begin intervention at the secondary school level. The CLAP-TECH Pathway, a pioneering initiative led by Hong Kong Baptist University, integrates VPET into the senior secondary curriculum, allowing students to gain industry knowledge and practical skills alongside their traditional studies. A five-year evaluation report highlighted its remarkable success, showing that 90% of graduates felt equipped to make informed decisions about their futures, compared to 69% of their non-participating peers. This early exposure to careers in fields like ICT and Creative Media not only boosts students' industry knowledge and interest but also significantly enhances essential soft skills such as responsibility, collaboration, and analytical thinking. Crucially, the programme has proven particularly effective for underprivileged students, providing them with experiential learning that helps translate their abilities into clear career paths, thereby democratizing access to future opportunities.

This foundational work is complemented by groundbreaking initiatives like the Vocational Training Council's (VTC) two-year pilot programme for secondary students. Launched in the 2023/24 academic year, this programme allows high school students to concurrently pursue a Diploma in Vocational Education (Secondary Section) within the HKDSE framework. This dual pathway enables students in schools like the Kowloon Technical School to explore fields such as Information Technology, Design, and Hospitality through hands-on learning and industry visits to leading companies like PCCW and Mandarin Oriental. By earning a Qualifications Framework (QF) Level 3 certification alongside their HKDSE, students gain a recognised qualification that opens doors to both further studies and immediate employment, effectively bridging the gap between school and the working world and challenging the traditional notion that academic success is the only route to a prosperous future.

For those who have completed secondary education, a wide array of flexible and applied learning options ensures that no young person is left behind. Programmes like the Diploma of Applied Education (DAE) provide an alternative pathway for secondary school leavers, incorporating VPET elements to strengthen employability and articulation to further studies, with tuition fee reimbursements available to support students from all backgrounds. At the tertiary level, institutions are pioneering micro-credential programmes, such as those offered by CUHK Business School. These are designed as "career accelerators" for aspiring young professionals, offering concentrated, flexible learning in high-demand areas like AI, FinTech, and ESG. These micro-credentials are credit-bearing and can be stacked towards a master's degree, providing a seamless and agile pathway for youth to upskill and adapt to industry demands without committing to lengthy, traditional degree programmes. Furthermore, organisations like Generation Hong Kong employ intensive, short-term boot camps to tackle the talent mismatch head-on, equipping individuals, including those with special educational needs, with the technical, behavioural, and mindset skills demanded by employers in fields like data engineering and digital marketing.

The effectiveness of Hong Kong's blueprint is further amplified by robust cross-sector collaboration that creates a supportive ecosystem for youth. The CLAP@JC initiative, for example, has catalysed partnerships among schools, businesses, and community organisations, fostering youth-adult partnerships where young people actively co-create their career journeys. This collaboration has led to award-winning practices, such as student-led tech projects for social good and innovative platforms that connect youth with higher education and future career paths. Government platforms like Youth.gov.hk and the Labour Department's Youth Employment and Training Programme (YETP) provide essential support services, including career assessments, mock interviews, and on-the-job training, while also opening up exchange and internship opportunities in the Greater Bay Area and overseas to broaden young people's horizons. Looking ahead, as outlined by Legislative Council member Tang Fei, Hong Kong's pathway to global leadership also involves deepening vocational qualification recognition with the mainland and leveraging its unique international status to become a regional hub for vocational education, attracting talent from Southeast Asia and solidifying its role in shaping the future of work.

25.1 School-to-work bridging programmes

Hong Kong stands at a pivotal moment in its development as a global leader in continuous education, with a strategic blueprint that leverages its unique position as a bridge between East and West while addressing critical workforce challenges. The vision, as articulated by institutions like the Chinese University of Hong Kong's School of Continuing and Professional Studies, is clear: "To be a global leader in university continuing education by enriching lives and transforming lifelong learning". This ambition aligns with broader governmental initiatives to establish Hong Kong as an international education hub, moving beyond merely filling student quotas to fundamentally enhancing the city's core competitiveness and talent pool. The strategic approach recognises that continuous education must be responsive to demographic shifts, technological disruption, and the evolving demands of a knowledge-based economy, positioning Hong Kong not just as a consumer of global education trends but as an innovator and standard-setter in the field.

The foundation of Hong Kong's pathway to leadership rests upon what one lawmaker describes as moving "from 'supplementing shortcomings' to 'building high ground'" in educational development. This strategic reframing acknowledges Hong Kong's inherent advantages: a robust legal system, academic freedom, internationally benchmarked standards, and deep connections with both mainland China and the global community. The proposed development of the Northern Metropolis as an "academic gravitational field" represents a physical manifestation of this ambition, intended to attract world-class universities and research partnerships that will serve as engines for continuous education and innovation. By creating physical and institutional infrastructure that supports lifelong learning—from micro-credentials to executive education—Hong Kong is positioning itself to capture the growing global demand for flexible, industry-relevant education that traditional degree programmes alone cannot satisfy.

School-to-work bridging programmes form the operational core of this strategic vision, addressing the critical transition period when young people move from education into employment. The CLAP@JC initiative, a decade-long project funded by The Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust, exemplifies the cross-sectoral approach necessary for success. By bringing together education, business, and community sectors, this project has established the "CLAP HK Benchmarks"—a localised framework for career and life development that has been implemented in approximately one-third of Hong Kong secondary schools. The programme's target of benefiting 160,000 youth demonstrates the scale at which such interventions must operate to create systemic change. This approach recognises that effective school-to-work transition requires intervention at multiple levels: within schools through curriculum and career guidance, in communities through targeted support services, and in workplaces through employer engagement and support structures.

Higher education institutions have developed increasingly sophisticated models for integrating academic learning with practical experience. The Cooperative Education Programme (Co-op@CUHK) pioneered by Chinese University of Hong Kong offers a compelling template, providing students with six to eight months of paid, full-time employment integrated with preparatory coursework and ongoing assessment. This extended placement period allows students to experience genuine workplace integration rather than superficial exposure, with participating graduates demonstrating "extremely high" employment stability upon entering the workforce full-time. The success of this model has prompted adoption by other institutions including the University of Hong Kong and Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, suggesting a broader recognition that extended, structured work-integrated learning produces superior outcomes for both graduates and employers. Similarly, THEi's work-study degree programmes offer another pathway, enabling students to spend part of each week in the classroom and the remainder in paid employment over a two-year period, creating a genuine integration of theory and practice.

Micro-credential programmes represent an increasingly important component of Hong Kong's bridging strategy, offering flexible, targeted upskilling opportunities that can accelerate career entry or progression. CUHK Business School's Professional Certificate Programmes exemplify this approach, offering industry-specific courses in high-demand areas such as sustainability reporting, financial technology, and artificial intelligence for business. These programmes are designed as "career accelerators" that can be completed in as little as six months while maintaining the option for credit transfer toward full master's degrees, creating flexible pathways that accommodate different learner needs and timelines. The placement of these certificates at Level 6 of the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework ensures quality assurance and recognition, while the modular structure allows working professionals to build qualifications incrementally—a model that acknowledges the reality that today's learners often need to balance education with work and family responsibilities.

The inclusive dimension of Hong Kong's school-to-work bridging strategy deserves particular attention, as programmes like ISS Hong Kong's SHINE@ISS demonstrate how targeted interventions can unlock previously untapped talent pools. Launched in 2019, this programme recruits and trains youth with special educational needs, providing three weeks of pre-deployment training followed by full-time employment with ongoing mentorship and support. The results are striking: a 72.7% retention rate for the 2023 cohort and 100% retention during the first six months, demonstrating that with appropriate support structures, neurodiverse individuals can thrive in competitive work environments. The programme's cross-sector collaboration model—bringing together employers, NGOs, social workers, educators, and government agencies—illustrates the ecosystem approach necessary for inclusive employment initiatives to succeed. As one programme leader notes, "Providing an opportunity to one person benefits three parties"—the individual, their family, and society at large.

Looking forward, Hong Kong's continued development as a global leader in continuous education will require sustained investment in the connective tissue between educational institutions and employers. The emergence of programmes like PolyU's International Management and Leadership master's degree, which incorporates real-world business challenges and direct engagement with multinational corporations, reflects a growing expectation that even advanced degrees must demonstrate clear workplace relevance. The integration of "enterprise practice challenges" and cross-cultural management training prepares graduates not merely to understand business concepts but to apply them in complex, real-world situations. This emphasis on practical application, combined with Hong Kong's unique position as a meeting point for Eastern and Western business practices, creates distinctive value that cannot be easily replicated elsewhere. As global competition for talent intensifies, Hong Kong's ability to offer both internationally recognised qualifications and genuine workplace integration will determine whether it achieves its ambition of becoming the world's premier hub for continuous education and lifelong learning.

25.2 Apprenticeships and earn-while-you-learn models

Hong Kong possesses a robust foundation and a clear strategic pathway to establish itself as a global leader in continuous education, with its sophisticated apprenticeship and "earn-while-you-learn" models serving as a cornerstone of this ambition. The most prominent example is the Vocational Training Council (VTC) Earn and Learn Scheme, which has become a benchmark for integrating vocational training with academic progression since its pilot in 2014. This model, built on a tripartite collaboration between the government, the VTC, and industry, allows young people to receive systematic apprenticeship training while earning a guaranteed salary and government incentive allowances. The scheme's success is evident in its growth; by its 10th anniversary in 2025, it had expanded to cover 12 industries with keen manpower demands—including electrical and mechanical engineering, construction, aviation, and information technology—and engaged approximately 700 employers, benefiting over 10,000 young people. The "earn and learn" methodology ensures that trainees are not just academically qualified but are also "industry-ready," accumulating practical experience and attaining Qualifications Framework-recognised qualifications before they even fully enter the job market.

To ascend to global leadership, Hong Kong's strategic blueprint must focus on expanding and elevating these successful models beyond traditional trades into high-value, knowledge-intensive sectors. The government's policy direction strongly supports this evolution. A key initiative is the development of Universities of Applied Sciences (UASs), which aim to raise the status of vocational and professional education to the university degree level, thereby creating a prestigious and parallel pathway to traditional academic routes. This aligns perfectly with the earn-while-you-learn philosophy, offering young people a clear and respected alternative for success in technical professions. Furthermore, institutions are already pioneering this integration at the highest levels. For example, CUHK Business School has introduced micro-credential courses in high-demand areas like Sustainability and ESG Reporting, Artificial Intelligence for Business, and Financial Technology. Crucially, these programmes are designed with a seamless credit transfer pathway to master's degrees, embodying the "earn and learn" principle for executive education and demonstrating how continuous learning can be both flexible and academically rigorous. This approach caters to the modern professional's need to upskill without putting their career on hold.

The blueprint for global leadership also hinges on creating a more flexible, inclusive, and strategically integrated continuous education ecosystem that leverages Hong Kong's unique regional advantages. The Employees Retraining Board (ERB) is undergoing a significant transformation to support this vision by shifting from job-specific training to a broader "skills-based" training framework. This reform, which includes removing the previous education ceiling for participants, aims to empower the entire workforce to adapt to industry upgrades and economic structural changes through the acquisition of recognised micro-certificates. This focus on continuous, modular upskilling complements the more structured apprenticeship models.

Simultaneously, Hong Kong is strategically positioning itself as a regional talent hub through initiatives like the Northern Metropolis University Town and enhanced collaboration with the Greater Bay Area (GBA). Institutions like HKU SPACE are already operationalising this by establishing learning centres in the New Territories to serve both local and Mainland Chinese students, and by developing integrated training models like "Cloud Classroom + Practice Base" with Mainland partners. By integrating its earn-and-learn models with these cross-border academic and industry networks, Hong Kong can attract a diverse pool of talent and set a new standard for continuous education that is dynamic, responsive to economic trends, and globally connected.

25.3 First-job upskilling support

Hong Kong's aspiration to become a global leader in continuing education is rapidly taking shape through a strategic blueprint that directly addresses the critical juncture of first-job upskilling support. This vision is being realised through a multi-pronged approach that integrates government policy, academic innovation, and industry collaboration to create a seamless transition from classroom to career. The following paragraphs detail the key pillars of this strategy, illustrating how Hong Kong is building a world-class ecosystem for nurturing its future workforce.

A Strategic Policy Framework for Talent Development

The foundation of Hong Kong's pathway to global leadership in continuing education is a comprehensive government-led strategy to bridge the innovation talent gap. The HKSAR Government's policy address has laid out an ambitious, supply-side educational revolution designed to transform the city's world-class university system into a direct pipeline for high-tech professionals. A cornerstone of this reform is the dramatic expansion of non-local student intake, raising the admission ceiling for self-financing bachelor's degrees at public universities to 50 percent, up from a historic 20 percent. This move is paired with a concerted push for greater academia-industry integration, formally designating certain institutions as "universities of applied sciences" to create a respected pathway for hands-on, vocational learning. Industry leaders have welcomed these changes, acknowledging that while Hong Kong's universities produce excellent graduates, there has been a critical mismatch between classroom learning and the practical, market-ready skills required by cutting-edge tech firms. This policy framework signals a fundamental shift from merely producing graduates to strategically cultivating a specific, employable talent pool capable of powering strategic sectors like AI, fintech, and new energy.

Academic Innovation in Micro-credentialing and Lifelong Learning

Higher education institutions in Hong Kong are proactively answering the call for more flexible and industry-relevant continuing education. For instance, CUHK Business School has introduced a series of Professional Certificate Programmes (Micro-credentials) designed as "career accelerators" for aspiring young professionals. These programmes feature a practical approach, shorter duration, and more affordable tuition fees, offering modular options that can be completed at the student's own pace within six to 36 months. Covering trending areas such as Innovation Leadership, Artificial Intelligence for Business, and Sustainability and ESG Reporting, these micro-credentials are listed in the Qualifications Register at Level 6 of the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework. A unique and differentiating benefit of this model is the seamless transfer of credits earned to master's degree programmes, creating a stacked learning pathway that bridges undergraduate and postgraduate education. This vision of lifelong learning is embedded in the strategic goals of institutions like the Chinese University of Hong Kong, which aims to nurture graduates as global leaders with the competencies to make lifelong contributions to society, redefining the role of continuing education to serve evolving career and societal trends.

Industry-Led Initiatives for Career Readiness

Parallel to academic offerings, Hong Kong's innovation and technology sector is launching large-scale, immersive programmes to equip students with job-ready skills. A prime example is the Talent Foundry, launched in 2025 by the Hong Kong Science and Technology Parks Corporation (HKSTP). This career-readiness programme collaborates directly with local university faculties and industry partners to enhance student employability in the I&T field. The programme is structured in two phases: a "Career-readiness Bootcamp" for soon-to-graduate students, followed by a "Career Launch" phase that offers financial support to those who complete the programme and contribute to Hong Kong's I&T landscape. The bootcamp itself is a comprehensive talent development ecosystem, featuring components like technical insights, hard skills upgrade workshops with industry-standard tools, and a "Challenge Lab" where students solve real business problems for startups. This hands-on, experiential learning model ensures that students gain practical experience and build professional networks long before they formally enter the job market.

Cross-Border Collaboration and Regional Integration

Hong Kong's blueprint for continuing education strategically leverages its unique position within the Greater Bay Area (GBA) to offer unparalleled learning and career development opportunities. Institutions like HKU SPACE have established the Academy for Leadership Enhancement and Development (LEAD), which actively organises study tours and training programmes that foster cross-border exchange. For example, LEAD has hosted seminars for senior government officials from Shenzhen and co-organised study tours for HKSAR government officers to mainland Chinese cities like Dongguan and Shenzhen, enabling participants to gain insights into how government policies shape the business environment and how enterprises are responding to national strategies. This two-way flow of knowledge and experience is critical for developing professionals who can operate effectively in the integrated GBA economy. The government is also promoting the mutual recognition of sub-degree qualifications with the mainland, facilitating seamless cross-boundary employment and study, thereby turning the GBA into a vast classroom and career-launching pad for Hong Kong's youth.

Targeted Support for Inclusive and Future-Ready Skills

To ensure that the benefits of continuing education are accessible to all, Hong Kong is also witnessing targeted initiatives that address social equity and emerging skill demands. A notable example is the collaboration between Citi Foundation and the Hong Kong-based NGO, the Growth Hope Foundation, which received a US\$500,000 grant to launch a two-year project providing AI skills training for underprivileged youth. This programme, which includes a "Job Hunter Challenge," aims to equip young people with essential future-ready skills, such as applying AI in interviews and job searches, along with comprehensive support in job-matching analysis and interpersonal communication. This initiative directly tackles the issue of youth unemployment and skills mismatch by empowering disadvantaged groups with the tools needed to secure their first job in an AI-driven economy. By integrating philanthropic resources with innovative thinking to address social needs, this project exemplifies a holistic approach to continuing education—one that is inclusive, responsive to technological trends, and focused on tangible career outcomes for every segment of society.

25.4 Career guidance and lifelong learning orientation

Hong Kong stands at a pivotal moment to assert its global leadership in continuing education, leveraging its unique advantages as an international financial centre and its strategic role within the Greater Bay Area (GBA). This strategic blueprint outlines the pathway to achieving this vision, focusing on robust government policy, innovative institutional strategies, and a commitment to lifelong learning and career guidance.

A Policy-Driven Foundation for an International Education Hub

The Hong Kong SAR Government has laid a comprehensive policy foundation to transform the city into an international hub for post-secondary education and high-calibre talents. This vision is central to the Chief Executive's Policy Address, which emphasises the integrated development of education, technology, and talents as a strategic pillar for the new era. Key initiatives include accelerating the development of the Northern Metropolis University Town, a project designed to foster collaboration between post-secondary institutions and renowned Mainland and overseas counterparts, creating a synergistic education hub. To attract global talent, the government has doubled the admission quota for non-local students to 40% and injected HK\$1 billion into the Government Scholarship Fund. Furthermore, the establishment of Universities of Applied Sciences (UASs) represents a paradigm shift, elevating the status of vocational and professional education and training to degree level. This provides an alternative, prestigious pathway for young people and acknowledges the value of applied skills in the modern economy. These top-down policies create an enabling environment for the entire continuing education ecosystem to flourish.

Fostering a "Skills-First" Orientation Through Strategic Innovation

A critical component of Hong Kong's blueprint is a decisive shift towards a "skills-first" orientation, moving beyond traditional academic credentials to embrace lifelong learning and agile upskilling. The Employees Retraining Board (ERB) is at the forefront of this transformation, having been tasked with its own "reboot" to serve the entire workforce. In response to the 2024 and 2025 Policy Addresses, the ERB has already implemented significant reforms, including removing the previous academic ceiling for trainees and shifting its focus to "skills-based" training that aligns with industry transformation and economic development needs. Its proposed three-year roadmap includes a robust mechanism to identify skills gaps through enhanced industry consultation, develop a comprehensive skills-based training framework, and collaborate with higher education institutions to create courses that directly address these deficits. A key innovation is the planned introduction of industry-recognised micro-credential courses, which offer learners the flexibility to acquire specific, in-demand competencies. This systemic pivot ensures that continuing education is responsive, relevant, and directly tied to career advancement.

Institutional leaders are translating this policy direction into practice by pioneering flexible and stackable learning pathways. A prime example is CUHK Business School's introduction of a series of Professional Certificate Programmes (Micro-credentials). These programmes are explicitly designed as "career accelerators," offering concentrated, practical, and affordable modules in high-demand areas such as Innovation Leadership, ESG Reporting, and Artificial Intelligence for Business. A distinguishing feature is their articulation pathway: credits earned from these micro-credentials can be seamlessly transferred to the school's master's degree programmes, as they are recognised at QF Level 6. This creates a powerful stackable model, allowing learners to build towards higher qualifications incrementally while immediately applying new skills in the workplace. Such innovations demonstrate how Hong Kong's institutions are creating a flexible and integrated lifelong learning ecosystem that caters to the needs of modern professionals.

Institutional Vision and the Integration of Career Guidance

Leading continuing education providers in Hong Kong have articulated clear strategic visions that embed lifelong learning and career guidance at their core. CUHK's School of Continuing and Professional Sciences (SCS) explicitly aims to be "a global leader in university continuing education" by enriching lives and transforming lifelong learning. Its strategies include expanding networks with industries for training and development, and exploring closer partnerships with overseas universities and professional bodies, directly connecting learning to global career opportunities. Similarly, the broader CUHK strategic plan emphasises nurturing "lifelong learners as global leaders" and redefines the role of its continuing education arm to serve the needs of an ageing population and second-career trends, demonstrating a commitment to learners at all life stages.

The tangible integration of career guidance is evident in the comprehensive support infrastructure available to learners. Hong Kong's Qualifications Framework (QF) provides a structured pathway, with Industry Training Advisory Committees defining the specific competencies required for key job roles, thus offering clear roadmaps for career progression. This framework is supported by a vast network of over 100 examination bodies and professional organisations offering globally recognised certifications, from the CFA and FRM in finance to emerging credentials like the Certified Digital Asset Analyst (CDAA) in Web3.0. This rich ecosystem empowers individuals to take charge of their career trajectories by identifying skill gaps and pursuing targeted, accredited learning.

Expanding Horizons: The Greater Bay Area and Beyond

Hong Kong's pathway to global leadership is inextricably linked to its unique position within the Greater Bay Area (GBA). Institutions are actively developing strategies to contribute to human capital development in the region, which in turn elevates Hong Kong's own standing as a regional education hub. HKU SPACE, for instance, has identified "Contributing to Human Capital Development in the GBA" as a key strategy in its 2025-2030 plan. Its initiatives are concrete and impactful: the establishment of a Mainland Affairs Office to strengthen connections with Mainland institutions and enterprises, and the inauguration of a new learning centre in Sheung Shui. This new centre is strategically located just 20 minutes from the border, designed to provide convenient, innovative educational services to participants from the Mainland, thereby physically extending Hong Kong's educational reach into the GBA. Furthermore, partnerships such as the one with Northwestern Polytechnical University to develop a "Cloud Classroom + Practice Base" training model for Mainland students exemplify cross-border collaboration that benefits the entire region. By serving as a conduit for international best practices and a provider of high-quality, flexible education, Hong Kong is solidifying its role as the preeminent continuing education hub for the GBA and beyond.

25.5 NEETs (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) prevention strategies

Hong Kong's ascent to a global leadership position in continuous education is not an abstract aspiration but a tangible goal being actively pursued through strategic initiatives that blend academic foresight with community engagement. A clear articulation of this ambition is found in the strategic plans of its leading institutions, which envision a future where universities serve as hubs for lifelong learning that extend far beyond traditional degree programs. The blueprint involves redefining the role of continuing and professional studies divisions to proactively address societal shifts, such as the needs of an aging population and the emergence of second career trends. For instance, by repositioning its School of Continuing and Professional Studies to cater to these demographic changes, a university can transform from a purely academic entity into a dynamic community resource that fosters continuous personal and professional development. This vision is encapsulated in the goal to become a "global leader in university continuing education," a mission that requires keeping pace with evolving learner needs, seeking constant stakeholder input, and demonstrating innovative leadership. The strategic approach is multifaceted, focusing on ensuring academic excellence, expanding global learning experiences, and forging robust collaborations with industries both locally in Hong Kong and internationally. By creating joint programs with overseas partners and enhancing students' global competencies, Hong Kong's institutions are not only enriching the individual learner's journey but also positioning the city as a central node in the international network of lifelong education, thereby cultivating graduates equipped to make sustained contributions to a globalized society.

In parallel with its ambitions for global leadership in education, Hong Kong has become a fertile ground for developing and rigorously evaluating strategies to prevent youth from becoming NEETs. Moving beyond simplistic, work-first approaches, local research has pioneered sophisticated, evidence-based intervention models that address the complex and heterogeneous nature of youth disengagement. A cornerstone of this effort is the application of the "Expanded Notion of Work" (ENOW), which challenges traditional definitions of productive activity by valuing unpaid experiences such as volunteering, serious leisure, and domestic responsibilities as legitimate foundations for career development. This framework is operationalized through interventions that focus on building a youth's "values, attitudes, skills and knowledge" (VASK), creating a more holistic pathway to re-engagement than simply prioritizing immediate job placement. Large-scale, long-term projects, such as those funded by the Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust, have demonstrated the efficacy of this approach. One study involving 660 NEET participants showed that experience-driven interventions, particularly a combined package of interest development with career counseling, led to significant enhancements in psychosocial resources like career adaptability and engagement. The results are striking: longitudinal research found that youth receiving career and life development interventions inspired by ENOW were significantly more likely to be in positive transitions—such as employment, vocational training, or further education—than to remain long-term NEETs, with one study showing odds of entering employment or entrepreneurship being 34.5 times higher for the intervention group.

Effective prevention also hinges on structured, supportive experiences that bridge the gap between social isolation and the workforce. Internship programs with strong mentoring components have proven transformative for at-risk youth, effectively breaking the vicious cycle of "no experience, no job." A study evaluating a one-year internship for vulnerable youth in Hong Kong found that participants' self-perceived work abilities jumped from an average of 5.2 to 7.3 out of 10, with mentors noting enhanced motivation and adaptability. The success of these programs relies on them being sufficiently long, incorporating robust mentor training, and fostering supportive work environments. This approach is further validated by the Career and Life Adventure Planning (CLAP) project, which uses tools like the "CV360" to document a young person's VASK development through various experiences, creating a comprehensive record of their growth for future employers or educators. The measurable impact includes not only successful re-engagement—with 32% of clients moving into employment and 69% into education—but also significant reductions in amotivation and anti-social behaviors. Furthermore, recent research underscores that NEETs are not a monolithic group; their pathways are dynamic and heterogeneous, including clusters focused on employment, vocational education, or even serious leisure development. Recognizing this diversity allows for more targeted and personalized interventions, ensuring that strategies are tailored to an individual's specific needs and aspirations rather than applying a one-size-fits-all solution. This nuanced, evidence-based ecosystem positions Hong Kong not only as a leader in continuous education but also as a global model for proactively and effectively addressing the challenge of youth disengagement.

CHAPTER 26: ETHNIC MINORITIES AND NEW ARRIVALS

Hong Kong's aspiration to become a global leader in continuous education is intrinsically linked to its ability to successfully integrate and empower its diverse population, particularly ethnic minorities and new arrivals. These groups represent a vital source of untapped potential, and a strategic blueprint for the sector must prioritise their unique needs to foster social cohesion and build a truly inclusive, world-class talent pool. The existing government framework provides a foundation, but a more coordinated and culturally sensitive approach is required to unlock their full contribution to Hong Kong's future.

Strategic Pathways for Ethnic Minorities

For Hong Kong to lead globally in continuous education, it must move beyond a one-size-fits-all model and address the specific barriers faced by ethnic minorities. A key challenge is the cultivation of a sense of belonging, which research indicates is crucial for positive educational outcomes. Currently, the education system lacks a formal multicultural education policy, which can hinder this process. Therefore, a strategic blueprint must advocate for the adoption of a "Whole School Approach" to inclusion. This involves not only curriculum changes but also fostering an environment where diversity is celebrated and all students feel they belong.

The government has already established several programmes that can serve as the building blocks for this strategy:

- **Tailored Employment Training:** The Employees Retraining Board (ERB) offers dedicated courses for ethnic minorities, covering vocational skills, generic training, and career planning. These are designed to help non-Chinese speakers integrate into society and secure employment. A strategic blueprint would seek to expand these programmes, ensuring they are closely aligned with the evolving demands of Hong Kong's key industries.
- **Linguistic and Social Support:** The Adult Education Subvention Scheme (AESS) provides subvention for "Reorientation courses for new arrivals and ethnic minorities," which can include basic language and computer literacy courses. This foundational support is critical, as proficiency in Chinese is often a gateway to broader opportunities.
- **Community-Based Integration:** The government also funds non-governmental organisations to provide a range of services, including language classes, after-school homework clubs, and cultural integration programmes for ethnic minority youths and adults. These community touchpoints are essential for building trust and delivering support in a familiar context.

To achieve global leadership, Hong Kong must build on these initiatives by promoting a "multifaceted perspective on inclusive education" that ensures equitable quality education for all learners. This includes developing culturally responsive teaching practices and materials that reflect the diversity of the student population.

Strategic Pathways for New Arrivals

New arrivals, whether from the Mainland or other parts of the world, face the immediate challenge of navigating an unfamiliar education system and society. A global leader in continuous education would distinguish itself by offering a seamless and supportive pathway for these individuals from the moment they arrive.

Hong Kong's current support system is robust but can be enhanced for greater impact:

- **Targeted Educational Integration:** The Education Bureau offers two key programmes. The full-time, six-month Initiation Programme is designed to enhance the language skills and classroom experience of newly-arrived children before they enter mainstream schools. For those who join mainstream schools directly, the 60-hour Induction Programme provides parallel support in social adaptation, personal development, and basic learning skills. A strategic blueprint would propose a more formalised link between these programmes and continuous education pathways, ensuring a smooth transition from school to further studies or vocational training.
- **Adult and Vocational Pathways:** For adults, the AESS includes "Reorientation courses" that are specifically designed to help them settle into daily life in Hong Kong. Similarly, the ERB provides dedicated courses for new arrivals, focusing on the skills needed to enter the workforce. These programmes are vital for economic self-sufficiency.
- **Comprehensive Settlement Support:** Beyond education, the government provides a wide array of support services, including adaptation courses, employment counselling, and language classes through the Home Affairs Department and various NGOs. The publication of service guides in multiple languages is another practical step towards inclusion.

A Strategic Blueprint for Inclusion

To elevate Hong Kong to global leadership in continuous education, the blueprint for ethnic minorities and new arrivals must be proactive, integrated, and evidence-based. This involves moving from a series of discrete support services to a cohesive ecosystem.

Key strategic recommendations would include:

- **Developing a formal Multicultural Education Policy:** This would provide a clear mandate and framework for all educational institutions to adopt inclusive practices, moving beyond ad-hoc measures to a systemic approach that values diversity.
- **Strengthening Data and Research:** As highlighted by local academics, there is a need for more research to understand the specific challenges and opportunities for these communities. A strategic blueprint should fund longitudinal studies to track outcomes and identify best practices, ensuring that policies are evidence-based and responsive to actual needs.

- **Creating Clearer Learning Pathways:** The blueprint should map out clear and accessible pathways from foundational programmes (like the Induction Programme or AESS courses) to higher-level vocational qualifications and university education. This would provide learners with a tangible vision for their future and motivate continuous upskilling.
- **Enhancing Employer Engagement:** Forging stronger partnerships with the business sector is crucial. This includes promoting the business case for diversity, offering incentives for companies to provide internships and mentorships for ethnic minority and new arrival youths, and co-designing training programmes that meet specific industry needs.

By implementing such a blueprint, Hong Kong can transform its continuous education sector into a model of inclusivity and excellence. Investing in the potential of ethnic minorities and new arrivals is not just a social imperative but a strategic economic necessity, ensuring that the city benefits from the full spectrum of talent, perspectives, and drive within its borders.

26.1 Language and cultural orientation programmes

Hong Kong's ambition to become a global leader in continuous education is significantly bolstered by a robust and increasingly sophisticated ecosystem of language and cultural orientation programmes. These initiatives are strategically designed to support a diverse population of learners, from international executives and mainland students to ethnic minority residents, ensuring their successful integration into both the professional and social fabric of Hong Kong. As outlined in the strategic visions of leading institutions like CUHK, which aims to nurture "global leaders with aspirations and competencies," and HKU SPACE, which leverages nearly half a century of experience in the field, language acquisition is viewed as a fundamental pillar for enhancing global competitiveness and fostering lifelong learning. This foundational support is critical for Hong Kong to effectively serve as a "super-connector," bridging Eastern and Western cultures and solidifying its status as an international education hub.

The practical implementation of this strategic vision is evident in the comprehensive and targeted language programmes offered across the city's educational landscape. For instance, HKU SPACE provides a wide array of Chinese language courses, including Cantonese, Putonghua, and even Min Chinese, catering to both native and non-native speakers with specialized tracks for professions like finance. Beyond Chinese, its "Other Languages" portfolio is exceptionally broad, offering courses in major European and Asian languages as well as critical ethnic minority languages such as Hindi, Urdu, and Nepali, demonstrating a deep commitment to social inclusion and workforce development. At the tertiary level, universities are creating immersive experiences that go beyond the classroom. The Hang Seng University of Hong Kong's Graduate School, for example, launched the "CAN!tonese Class," which successfully helped non-local postgraduate students master practical language skills for real-life scenarios, such as ordering food in a local cha chaan teng (tea restaurant) and navigating healthcare services, thereby fostering a stronger sense of community and belonging.

Furthermore, Hong Kong's strategic blueprint extends language and cultural training to cultivate global leadership and talent for international organizations. Recent high-profile forums, such as the inaugural International Organisation Youth Talent Development Forum held at PolyU, have underscored the need for "hard skills + soft competencies," with a specific focus on cross-cultural leadership in a global context. Experts at the forum emphasized that for Hong Kong to nurture future leaders for entities like the United Nations, educational programmes must systematically build an understanding of global governance and international rules. This involves not only language proficiency but also deep cultural orientation, enabling young professionals to navigate diverse international environments effectively. By integrating these elements into micro-credential courses and executive education—like CUHK Business School's programmes in Innovation Leadership and ESG Reporting—Hong Kong is ensuring its continuous education offerings are both globally relevant and culturally grounded, thereby attracting international talent and enhancing the city's overall competitiveness on the world stage.

26.2 Skills recognition for foreign qualifications

Hong Kong's ambition to become a global leader in continuing education rests on a sophisticated and multi-layered strategic blueprint, with the robust recognition of foreign qualifications serving as a cornerstone of its vision. This strategy is explicitly articulated by leading institutions; for instance, the School of Continuing and Professional Studies at CUHK envisions itself as "a global leader in university continuing education," with strategies that include exploring closer partnerships with renowned overseas universities and expanding global industry networks to enrich the learning experience. This vision is supported by a formal regulatory framework designed to ensure quality and protect learners. The Education Bureau's *Non-local Higher and Professional Education (Regulation) Ordinance* mandates that all courses leading to non-local qualifications must be registered or exempted, ensuring they meet standards comparable to those in the home country and that the awarding institutions are properly recognized. This framework provides the essential trust and transparency needed for Hong Kong to position itself as a premier destination for international continuing education.

At the heart of Hong Kong's skills recognition ecosystem is the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ), which acts as the crucial bridge between foreign credentials and the local Qualifications Framework (HKQF). The government actively encourages course providers to seek local accreditation for their non-local programs, a process that, upon success, grants the qualifications a status equivalent to locally accredited ones and allows them to be listed on the Qualifications Register. This pathway to parity is vital for learners, as it formally integrates international learning into the local career and academic progression structure. The HKCAAVQ's role is not merely administrative; it is a strategic asset. Having received international recognition from bodies like the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), the HKCAAVQ itself operates as a world-class quality assurance body, enabling it to confidently assess and benchmark foreign qualifications against global standards. Its work in assisting Guangdong with its accreditation systems and signing memoranda with quality assurance bodies in Kazakhstan, Bahrain, and the UAE exemplifies the "bringing in" and "going out" approach that solidifies Hong Kong's role as a central hub for credential evaluation in the region.

The practical mechanisms for recognizing specific foreign qualifications are detailed and tailored to different professional pathways, ensuring that global talent can effectively integrate into the Hong Kong workforce. For regulated professions, recognition often involves a structured process. For example, holders of recognized mainland professional qualifications in fields like construction engineering may need to meet specific conditions—such as additional training, testing, or recognized work experience—to become registered members of the corresponding Hong Kong professional body. In other sectors, such as accounting or Chinese medicine, holding an accredited foreign degree may grant individuals the eligibility to sit for the local professional examinations required for a license to practice. This nuanced system acknowledges the value of international education while upholding local professional standards.

For general employment and further study, while there is no automatic recognition for all non-local qualifications, the HKCAAVQ provides individual qualification assessment services, a service often required for government job applications or entry to further study programs. This sophisticated recognition infrastructure is a key pillar supporting Hong Kong's aggressive talent attraction strategies, which in turn fuel the demand for continuing education. Government initiatives like the Top Talent Pass Scheme (TTPS) and the Quality Migrant Admission Scheme (QMAS) are designed to draw highly skilled individuals from around the world, with eligibility directly tied to academic and professional credentials. As these global professionals arrive in Hong Kong, they bring a need for continuous upskilling and local orientation, creating a dynamic market for advanced, flexible learning. Universities are responding with innovative offerings, such as CUHK Business School's micro-credential programs in areas like ESG and Fintech, which are pegged at Level 6 of the HKQF and offer credits that can be transferred into full master's degrees. This creates a seamless ecosystem where foreign qualifications are a gateway to entry, and Hong Kong's own globally-aligned continuing education system provides the pathway for lifelong career advancement. Furthermore, the government's recent push to designate "Universities of Applied Sciences" and enhance academia-industry integration, particularly with the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, will further necessitate the mutual recognition of qualifications to facilitate the seamless flow of skilled professionals across the border. Through this integrated approach—combining clear regulation, expert accreditation, and responsive educational programming—Hong Kong is not just recognizing foreign skills but actively leveraging them to build a future-ready, globally competitive workforce.

26.3 Targeted upskilling for integration into Hong Kong's economy

Hong Kong stands at a pivotal moment to transform its robust higher education and vocational training landscape into a global leader in continuous education. The strategic blueprint for this leadership is increasingly defined by a shift from traditional, qualification-based learning to agile, "skills-based" training that directly supports economic integration and industry upgrading. This vision is actively being pursued through the fundamental reform of key institutions, most notably the Employees Retraining Authority (ERB). In alignment with the Chief Executive's Policy Address, the ERB is executing a multi-year reform roadmap that removes previous educational-attainment barriers, enabling a全民 (whole-population) approach to upskilling. By strengthening industry consultation mechanisms to identify core skill gaps, the ERB is developing a training framework that is responsive to the real-time needs of Hong Kong's economy, ensuring that the workforce remains adaptable and competitive amidst rapid technological change and economic restructuring.

A cornerstone of this strategic blueprint is the construction of a comprehensive and collaborative ecosystem for skills development. The government is actively fostering partnerships between public bodies, technology enterprises, and tertiary institutions to deliver cutting-edge training. The 2026-27 Budget's allocation of HK\$50 million to promote全民 AI training exemplifies this approach, directly linking public funding with industry and academic expertise to address the demands of emerging fields. Furthermore, the proposed rebranding of the ERB as the "Skills Upgrading Bureau" signals a permanent, strategic elevation of continuous learning, with a specific mandate to provide "skills-based" training in high-impact areas like artificial intelligence. This ecosystem is further enriched by the move towards micro-credential courses that offer flexible, industry-recognized pathways for learners to acquire specific competencies, moving beyond the constraints of full-time, long-duration academic programmes.

To achieve global leadership, Hong Kong's blueprint strategically leverages its unique geopolitical advantages to position itself as a regional and international hub for continuous education. Building on the "Study in Hong Kong" brand, which aims to attract global talent, the vision extends to creating a vibrant international education hub that serves the Asia-Pacific region. This involves deepening collaboration with mainland China, particularly the Greater Bay Area (GBA), to create powerful synergies. Universities are expanding principal nomination schemes to GBA schools, facilitating student exchanges and internships that provide invaluable cross-border experience and integrate talent into the broader regional economy. The proposed development of the "Northern Metropolis University Town" is a flagship initiative designed to act as an "academic gravitational field," attracting top international universities and research talent to foster innovation in key areas like AI and biotechnology, thereby creating a dynamic "staging post" for global scientific talent.

Ultimately, the pathway to global leadership in continuous education is about targeted upskilling for seamless integration into a rapidly evolving economy. The strategic focus is on creating "职学联通" (a direct bridge between vocational training and academic learning) to cultivate high-quality applied talents. The establishment of applied science universities and a dedicated alliance for them, backed by government start-up funding, formalizes and elevates the status of vocational and professional education and training (VPET). This effort includes critical work on professional qualification recognition with mainland China to ensure that skills acquired in Hong Kong unlock opportunities across the border. Furthermore, Hong Kong aims to extend its hub status to vocational education, attracting young talent from Southeast Asia for VPET, thereby fulfilling its role as a "super connector" and solidifying its position as a global center for both academic excellence and applied skills development.

26.4 Community-based learning support

Hong Kong stands at a pivotal moment in its effort to become a global leader in continuous education, a vision that requires a strategic blueprint deeply rooted in community-based learning support. The foundation for this leadership is already being laid by tertiary institutions that have explicitly integrated lifelong learning into their core missions. For example, the Chinese University of Hong Kong's School of Continuing and Professional Studies has articulated a clear vision "to be a global leader in university continuing education," with strategies focused on creating supportive learning environments and expanding networks to collaborate with industries both locally and globally. This institutional commitment is mirrored by others, such as the self-financing CARE Community College, whose very name embodies an educational philosophy of Collaboration, Assurance, Resolution, and Enrichment, designed to help individuals adapt to an ever-changing society. The recent 2026 APAIE conference in Hong Kong further underscores this ambition, with 教育局局长蔡若莲博士 highlighting the government's drive to promote the "Study in Hong Kong" brand and solidify the city's status as an international post-secondary education hub, which naturally extends to the realm of continuing education. This confluence of institutional vision and government policy creates a fertile ground for a strategic, community-focused blueprint to take root.

A critical pillar of this blueprint is the formalized and well-funded support for older learners, demonstrating how community-based learning can be scaled to a strategic level. The Elder Academy Scheme, a joint initiative by the Labour and Welfare Bureau and the Elderly Commission, is a flagship example of this approach. Established in 2007, the scheme has grown to encompass around 200 academies operating within primary schools, secondary schools, and tertiary institutions across the territory, providing learning opportunities tailored to seniors' interests. The government's commitment to this community-based model is substantial, as evidenced by the 2023 Policy Address's announcement of an additional HK\$80 million injection to support the scheme's continuous development. Funding is provided on a project basis, with primary and secondary schools eligible for up to HK\$122,000 to establish new academies over three years, ensuring that learning opportunities are deeply embedded in local communities. Institutions like Hong Kong Metropolitan University have further innovated within this framework, with its Elder Academy planning to offer AI courses—such as generative AI usage—to empower seniors with technological skills, thereby ensuring their continued integration into a rapidly evolving society. These initiatives transform the abstract concept of lifelong learning into a tangible, accessible reality for a significant portion of the population, fostering intergenerational exchange when held in school settings and promoting a sense of purpose and well-being among older adults.

Beyond age-specific programs, the strategic blueprint must also champion innovative pedagogies and inclusive support mechanisms that extend the university's resources into the community. Hong Kong's institutions are already pioneering such approaches, creating models that can be further developed and scaled. For instance, the College of Professional and Continuing Education at PolyU offers a service-learning subject where university students tutor primary school children from underprivileged and new immigrant families, directly addressing educational resource disparity while enhancing the tutors' own skills. This creates a virtuous cycle where the university contributes to community well-being, and students gain invaluable real-world experience. Similarly, City University of Hong Kong's Peer-Assisted Learning scheme using Supplemental Instruction (PALS) fosters a collaborative learning environment that enhances student success, a principle that can be adapted for adult learners returning to education. Furthermore, the strategic integration of technology is vital for broadening access. Projects like CUHK's "InternVision," which uses virtual reality simulations to prepare students for the workplace, and Hong Kong Baptist University's Virtual Exchange Centre, which connects local students with global peers, demonstrate how technology can overcome traditional barriers of time, location, and circumstance to deliver high-quality educational experiences. These initiatives exemplify a shift towards flexible, inclusive, and engaged learning that is essential for a global leader in continuous education.

Looking ahead, Hong Kong's pathway to global leadership will be defined by its ability to synergize these community-based efforts with broader regional and international strategies. The development of the Northern Metropolis and its "University Town" presents a historic opportunity to create a concentrated hub for educational innovation that can serve lifelong learners. As legislative councillor Tang Fei notes, this area could become an "academic gravitational field," attracting top international universities and research teams to collaborate with local institutions, thereby creating a rich ecosystem that benefits learners of all ages. This includes fostering a "revolving door" for research talent and establishing robust legal frameworks for intellectual property to support deep industry-academia collaboration. Concurrently, universities like Hang Seng University are expanding their reach into the Greater Bay Area, creating new pathways for students and fostering cross-border collaboration. By weaving together strong government funding, institutional innovation, cutting-edge technology, and deep community partnerships, Hong Kong is not merely supporting lifelong learning but is strategically positioning itself as a dynamic and influential global leader in the field.

26.5 Employer engagement for diverse talent pipelines

Hong Kong stands at a pivotal moment in its economic evolution, where the dual forces of global competition and demographic shifts demand a radical reimagining of its workforce development model. To secure its status as a global leader in continuous education and to build resilient, diverse talent pipelines, the city must implement a strategic blueprint that fosters deep collaboration between educators, employers, and the government. This strategy moves beyond traditional continuing education to create an integrated ecosystem where lifelong learning is the norm, and workforce diversity is a recognized driver of innovation and global competitiveness.

Strategic Alignment with National Policy and Global Demand

Hong Kong's pathway to global leadership in continuous education is fundamentally anchored in its alignment with national development strategies and the proactive cultivation of an internationally diverse talent pool. The Chinese government's designation of Hong Kong as the hub for "eight key centers"—ranging from international finance and innovation to cultural exchange and intellectual property trading—provides a clear and authoritative mandate for a strategic overhaul of the city's human capital development. To fulfill this role, the government has taken decisive steps to broaden the talent base, most notably by expanding the "Talent List" to include 60 professions, such as the newly introduced Islamic finance specialists. This initiative is a strategic acknowledgment that global leadership requires expertise that transcends local boundaries. For continuous education providers, this signals an urgent need to develop curricula that cater to these niche but globally significant areas, such as Shariah-compliant financial instruments, to attract and upskill professionals who can connect Hong Kong with the burgeoning markets of the Middle East and Southeast Asia. This top-down strategic direction from the Policy Address, including the ambition to build an international post-secondary education hub with an increased non-local student quota, creates the foundational infrastructure for a truly global learning environment.

Innovative and Agile Program Design by Educational Institutions

The response from Hong Kong's educational institutions to this strategic imperative has been marked by innovation and a focus on flexible, high-impact learning. The Asia-Pacific Institute of Business (APIB) at CUHK Business School has launched a series of Professional Certificate Programmes (Micro-credentials) that exemplify this new agility. These programmes are designed as "career accelerators," offering concentrated, industry-specific modules in cutting-edge fields like Innovation Leadership, ESG Reporting, and Artificial Intelligence for Business. Their flexibility, allowing completion in six to 36 months, directly addresses the needs of working professionals.

Crucially, these micro-credentials are embedded within the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF) at Level 6 and offer seamless credit transfers to master's degree programmes, creating a vital bridge between immediate upskilling and long-term academic advancement. This model of stackable, credit-bearing micro-credentials represents a best practice that can position Hong Kong as a leader in flexible, high-quality continuous education. Similarly, institutions like HKU SPACE are physically expanding their footprint to serve new demographics, with new learning centres in areas like Sheung Shui, strategically located to facilitate seamless access for learners from the Northern Metropolis and the Greater Bay Area (GBA), thereby fostering regional human capital development. The vision articulated by institutions like CUHK's School of Continuing and Professional Studies to be a "global leader in university continuing education" is being realized through such strategic expansions and industry-aligned programming.

Employer-Driven Talent Pipelines and In-House Academies

A critical pillar of Hong Kong's blueprint is the transition of employers from passive consumers of talent to active co-creators of it. Leading corporations are establishing sophisticated in-house "academies" and development programmes that function as extensions of the formal education system. The Hong Kong Productivity Council, for instance, has institutionalized learning and development (L&D) through its InnoTalent internship programme, which attracts students from top global universities like Oxford, Stanford, and Tsinghua, and serves as a direct pipeline for recruiting new talent. Their approach ensures that even interns gain substantial, meaningful experience, directly contributing to the quality of the future talent pool. In the financial sector, Huatai International's comprehensive "Huatai Growth" programme provides a masterclass in strategic talent cultivation. Their 12-month Graduate Development Programme (GDP) for new hires includes structured classroom training, cross-border exchanges to the headquarters' FinTech centre, and mentorship, systematically building a pipeline of globally competitive financial professionals. These corporate programmes not only fill immediate skill gaps but also signal to educational institutions the precise competencies required in the market, enabling a more responsive and relevant continuous education sector. This synergy is further enhanced by government initiatives like the Employee Retraining Board (ERB), which is being revitalized to focus on "skills-based" training, collaborating with enterprises to identify skill gaps and develop recognized micro-certificate courses that empower the local workforce.

Fostering a Culture of Cross-Cultural Inclusivity

For Hong Kong's talent pipelines to be truly diverse and globally effective, employer engagement must extend beyond skills training to encompass deliberate cross-cultural management and inclusion. Building a diverse talent pool is not just about recruitment; it is about creating an environment where professionals from varied backgrounds can thrive and contribute their unique perspectives. The Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) has been instrumental in promoting this agenda, launching initiatives like the "Racial Diversity and Inclusion Employer Charter" and the first "Racial Diversity and Inclusion Employer Award Scheme" to recognize organizations that excel in building inclusive workplaces.

This focus on practical integration—such as providing cultural sensitivity training and mentorship to bridge gaps between local and non-local staff—is essential for retaining international talent and unlocking the innovative potential of diverse teams. The private sector is also leading by example. Huatai International's "Huatai Care" programme explicitly focuses on employee well-being and inclusion through initiatives like "Women in Leadership" forums and 24/7 psychological counseling, demonstrating that a supportive culture is a strategic asset. By embedding such practices, Hong Kong's employers are not just filling positions but are actively weaving a social fabric that is attractive to global talent, thereby strengthening the city's long-term competitiveness as an international business hub.

In conclusion, Hong Kong's journey to becoming a global leader in continuous education is being propelled by a synergistic model. The government provides the strategic vision and policy framework, educational institutions respond with agile and flexible programming, and employers take an active role in building and shaping their own diverse talent pipelines through targeted development and inclusive practices. This cohesive blueprint ensures that lifelong learning is not an abstract concept but a tangible, integrated engine driving Hong Kong's future economic dynamism and global standing.

VOLUME VI: IMPLEMENTATION ROADMAP

PART 9: PHASED ACTION PLAN

CHAPTER 27: PHASE 1 – FOUNDATION BUILDING (2025-2027)

The initial phase of Hong Kong's transformation into a global leader in continuous education is squarely focused on constructing a robust and future-proof foundation. This period, spanning 2025 to 2027, is characterised by strategic policy shifts, significant financial commitments, and the establishment of new coordinating bodies designed to expand capacity, integrate technology, and create a more agile and inclusive lifelong learning ecosystem. The overarching goal is to move beyond traditional academic boundaries and create a seamless educational landscape that serves both traditional students and the existing workforce, thereby solidifying Hong Kong's status as an international education hub.

A central pillar of this foundation-building is the implementation of a new policy and governance framework. The government has taken decisive action by increasing the enrolment ceiling for self-financing non-local students in funded post-secondary institutions from 40% to 50%, and for research postgraduate programmes from 100% to 120%, effective from the 2026/27 academic year. This expansion, crucially implemented without reducing the 15,000 annual subsidised places for local students, immediately broadens the international footprint of Hong Kong's campuses and diversifies the learning environment. To ensure this growth is strategically managed and promoted, the government will establish a dedicated "Task Force on Study in Hong Kong". This inter-departmental body will bring together the Education Bureau, the University Grants Committee, the Hong Kong Talent Engage, and overseas economic and trade offices to coordinate promotion efforts and launch the "Hong Kong: Your World-class Campus" publicity campaign. Furthermore, the groundwork is being laid for a more demand-driven continuous education system. The Employee Retraining Board (ERB) is undertaking a fundamental review of its role, moving towards a "skills-based" training framework. By the end of 2025, it aims to submit a new work plan to the government that focuses on identifying critical skills gaps and developing industry-recognised micro-credential courses, effectively repositioning itself to serve the entire workforce in response to Hong Kong's economic restructuring.

Concurrently, Phase 1 witnesses a massive investment in digital infrastructure and curriculum innovation, recognising that future-ready skills are predicated on digital literacy. The government has earmarked a substantial HK\$2 billion from the Quality Education Fund to propel digital education in primary and secondary schools. This fund will directly support the development and release of the "Blueprint for Digital Education in Primary and Secondary Schools" in 2026, a comprehensive plan that includes integrating Artificial Intelligence (AI) literacy into the core curriculum, establishing a learning framework for AI, and enhancing teacher training. This top-down push for digital competency ensures that the pipeline of students entering higher education and the workforce is well-versed in emerging technologies. At the tertiary level, this is complemented by strategic research funding, including the establishment of the HK\$1 billion "Hong Kong Artificial Intelligence R&D Institute" in 2026. These measures collectively ensure that Hong Kong's education system is not only consuming technology but is also positioned at the forefront of its development, a key attractor for global talent and partners.

Another critical component of the foundation is the systematic enhancement and diversification of qualifications and learning pathways. Building upon the existing Qualifications Framework (QF), which is supported by a substantial HK\$2.2 billion QF Fund, the focus sharpens on creating more flexible and industry-integrated routes for lifelong learning. A key strategy is the promotion of Vocational and Professional Education and Training (VPET) as a valued parallel pathway to conventional academic education. This involves launching a second batch of applied degree programmes in areas with high manpower demand and sharpening the distinction between Higher Diplomas (applied/vocational) and Associate Degrees (more generic/academic), thereby strengthening the vocational pathway and providing clearer progression opportunities for students. The foundation for a more flexible skills-acquisition model is also being laid, with the ERB's plan to develop micro-credentials, allowing learners to accumulate credits and skills in a modular fashion. This multi-pronged approach to accreditation begins to dismantle the traditional, rigid boundaries between academic and vocational education, creating a more porous and personalised ecosystem for learners at all stages of life.

Finally, Phase 1 is defined by the initial steps to foster an integrated education-industry ecosystem, with a strong geographical focus. The Northern Metropolis (Northolt) is elevated as the primary physical space for this integration. The creation of a "Northolt University Town" is a flagship project, with plans to offer new land parcels and a HK\$10 billion loan scheme to support funded universities and universities of applied sciences in developing new campuses. This geographical clustering is designed to foster collaboration not only between institutions but also with the high-tech industries also slated for development in the area. The government also actively encourages industry-institution collaboration for VPET, seeking to involve industry leaders in curriculum design and delivery to ensure programmes are directly relevant to market needs. This initial phase of ecosystem building is about creating the physical spaces and policy incentives for deep, sustained collaboration between educators, researchers, and industry, setting the stage for a truly integrated approach to talent cultivation and continuous learning in the years to follow.

In summary, the 2025-2027 foundation phase is a period of aggressive capacity-building and strategic realignment. Through policy reforms, targeted investments in digital and physical infrastructure, and the creation of new coordinating bodies, Hong Kong is systematically constructing the essential pillars—policy, digital capability, diverse qualifications, and an integrated ecosystem—required to support its ambitious vision of becoming a global pacesetter in continuous education. These initial steps ensure that the system is more open, more flexible, and more closely aligned with the future economic and social needs of both Hong Kong and the wider region.

27.1 Establishing governance structures and task forces

To cement Hong Kong's status as a global leader in continuous education, a robust and visionary governance framework is paramount. This requires moving beyond the existing, albeit effective, administrative structures to create a strategic blueprint that is proactive, integrated, and responsive to future workforce demands. The following outlines the key components of such a governance architecture.

Establishing a High-Level Steering Council for Continuous Education and Lifelong Learning

At the apex of the new governance structure should be a Strategic Steering Council on Continuous Education and Lifelong Learning, convened at the highest levels of government. While the Education Bureau (EDB) currently oversees bodies like the Qualifications Framework Secretariat (QFS) and the Steering Committee on Promotion of VPET and QF , a new council would elevate this work to a strategic, cross-sectoral level. Co-chaired by the Secretaries for Education and for Innovation, Technology and Industry, its membership would be a deliberate and powerful alliance of leaders from major industry sectors, tertiary institutions (including universities and professional colleges), and key government departments.

The Council's primary mandate would be to align Hong Kong's continuous education ecosystem with long-term national and regional development goals, such as those outlined in the country's 14th Five-Year Plan and the development of the Northern Metropolis. It would be responsible for:

- **Setting the Vision and Roadmap:** Endorsing a 10-year strategic blueprint for continuous education, identifying priority skill areas (e.g., green finance, AI, health tech) and setting clear, measurable targets for workforce upskilling and reskilling.
- **Ensuring Policy Coherence:** Breaking down silos between education, economic development, and labour policies to ensure that continuous education initiatives directly support Hong Kong's economic competitiveness and social mobility.
- **Championing Systemic Reform:** Driving high-level policy changes, such as the recent legislative amendments to the Post Secondary Colleges Ordinance (Cap. 320), to create a more flexible and enabling regulatory environment for providers of continuing education.

Building a Multi-Tiered Operational and Coordinating Structure

Beneath the strategic council, a restructured operational tier is needed to translate vision into action. This would build upon and enhance the excellent work already being done by existing bodies.

The Executive Committee would act as the central coordinating body, responsible for implementing the Council's strategic direction. It would be a permanent committee with representatives from the major players in the field, including the Federation for Self-Financing Tertiary Education (FSTE) , the Employees Retraining Board (ERB) , and the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ). Its core functions would include:

- **Cross-Body Coordination:** Ensuring seamless collaboration between different agencies. For example, aligning ERB's new "skills-based" training programmes with the Qualifications Framework (QF) levels.
- **Resource Optimisation:** Overseeing the allocation of major funding streams, such as the QF Fund , to ensure they are strategically deployed to support the Council's priorities.
- **Regulatory Harmony:** Monitoring the impact of new regulations, like the revised Cap. 320, and providing a platform for providers to flag implementation challenges.

Establishing Dedicated Standing Committees for Core Functions

To provide deep expertise and focused attention on critical areas, a series of standing committees should be formalised. These committees would report to the Executive Committee and mirror best-practice structures, such as those seen within the FSTE , but with a broader, system-wide mandate.

Key standing committees would include:

- **Industry Engagement and Skills Intelligence Committee:** This committee would be responsible for creating a dynamic and forward-looking skills anticipation system. Building on the excellent foundation of the Industry Training Advisory Committees (ITACs) , it would work to identify "skills of the future" and ensure that training provision is agile and responsive. It would play a key role in supporting the government's goal of expanding the "Vocational Qualifications Pathway" to cover at least 18 industries. This directly addresses the need for an industry-led system, a recommendation put forward by policy research groups.
- **Quality Assurance and Accreditation Committee:** This committee would oversee a unified yet flexible quality assurance framework. Its role would be to ensure that new, innovative forms of learning—such as the micro-credentials being explored by the ERB —can be quality-assured and integrated into the mainstream QF. It would work closely with HKCAAVQ to maintain rigorous standards while fostering pedagogical innovation.

- **Equity, Access, and Inclusion Committee:** A critical function of governance is ensuring that the benefits of continuous education reach all segments of society. This committee would focus on removing barriers for underrepresented groups, such as ethnic minorities, persons with disabilities, and older workers. It would champion the expansion of the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) mechanism, making it easier for individuals to have their informal and experiential learning formally recognised, thereby opening up new pathways for career advancement.

Deploying Strategic Task Forces for Agile Innovation

While standing committees provide stability, strategic task forces offer the agility to tackle specific, time-sensitive challenges or opportunities. These are temporary, cross-functional teams with a clear mandate and a finite lifespan. The proposed Steering Council would convene task forces to address key strategic initiatives, such as:

- **Task Force on the Micro-credential Ecosystem:** To develop a common framework and standards for micro-credentials in Hong Kong, ensuring they are portable, stackable, and recognised by employers. This would build on the ERB's initial work and the recommendations from research advocating for more flexible progression pathways.
- **Task Force on Digital Transformation in Continuous Education:** To accelerate the adoption of innovative and technology-enabled learning models across all providers. This task force would explore the use of AI, VR/AR, and online learning platforms to enhance accessibility and personalisation.
- **Task Force on GBA Integration for Continuous Education:** To proactively identify and develop opportunities for collaboration with cities in the Greater Bay Area (GBA). This could include jointly developing training standards, facilitating cross-boundary recognition of qualifications, and creating programmes that support professionals to work seamlessly within the GBA.

By establishing this comprehensive and multi-layered governance architecture, Hong Kong can build a world-leading continuous education ecosystem. This blueprint provides the strategic oversight, operational coordination, and agile innovation necessary to empower its workforce for the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century, ultimately securing its role as a global leader in lifelong learning.

27.2 Legislative amendments for HKQF enhancement

Hong Kong possesses a unique confluence of advantages—from its internationally benchmarked education system and strong rule of law to its strategic role as a connector between Mainland China and the world—that position it to become a global leader in continuing education. A strategic blueprint for achieving this leadership must be built upon a robust and dynamic Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF), which serves as the foundational infrastructure for quality assurance and learner progression. The envisioned leadership is not merely about increasing course offerings but about creating a seamless, flexible, and internationally recognised ecosystem for lifelong learning that can adapt to rapid technological and economic changes. This involves shifting from a provider-centric model to a learner-centric one, where individuals can continuously upskill and reskill through stackable credentials that are valued by employers globally. The pathway requires a concerted effort from government, educational institutions, and industry to co-create curricula that address emerging fields such as artificial intelligence governance, green finance, and sustainable development, thereby nurturing talent that can tackle complex global challenges. By positioning itself as a "super connector" in education, Hong Kong can attract talent from the region and beyond, offering a unique blend of Eastern and Western perspectives and serving as a gateway to the vast opportunities within the Greater Bay Area and the broader Asian continent.

Central to this strategic vision is a series of targeted legislative amendments aimed at enhancing the HKQF's statutory authority, scope, and operational flexibility. A critical area for legislative attention is the formal recognition and quality assurance of micro-credentials and modular certifications, which are increasingly vital for professional development. The successful integration of such credentials is already evident, with programmes like CUHK Business School's Professional Certificate Programmes being listed at Level 6 of the HKQF, allowing learners to transfer credits into master's degrees. Legislative amendments should codify clear standards for these shorter-form qualifications, ensuring their rigour, stackability, and portability across different institutions and even across borders. This would provide a legal backbone for the kind of flexible learning pathways demanded by modern professionals, enabling them to accelerate their careers without being locked into traditional, multi-year degree programmes. Furthermore, the legislative framework must be updated to facilitate stronger collaboration between academia and industry, potentially by creating statutory guidelines for co-developing curricula and recognising workplace-based learning as formal qualifications. The momentum for such reforms is tangible, as evidenced by the Legislative Council's scheduled discussion on the latest developments of the HKQF in February 2026, indicating a clear policy focus on refining this crucial infrastructure.

The legislative enhancements must also ensure that the HKQF remains agile and responsive to both global trends and local socio-economic needs. One significant driver for reform is the parallel movement to professionalise the teaching workforce through the introduction of mandatory practising certificates, which will require teachers to complete 150 hours of professional development every three years. This creates an immediate and substantial demand for high-quality, accredited continuing professional development (CPD) courses. Legislative amendments to the HKQF could streamline the approval process for such CPD programmes, ensuring they are directly linked to career advancement and licence renewal. This would transform mandatory training into a powerful engine for lifelong learning, with the HKQF providing the quality assurance framework that guarantees the value of these professional development hours. Concurrently, Hong Kong is actively positioning itself as an international education hub, with initiatives like the "International Edition DSE" and the development of the Northern Metropolis as a "University City". Legislative amendments for the HKQF should, therefore, include provisions for the recognition of international qualifications and the establishment of dual accreditation pathways with renowned overseas institutions. This would allow Hong Kong to not only attract students but also to set global standards for continuing education, leveraging its unique position to become a "value-add" hub where international talents enhance their competencies and credentials before advancing their careers globally. Such a robust and legally reinforced framework would be instrumental in cultivating a new generation of global leaders equipped with both "hard skills" in cutting-edge technologies and the "soft素养" necessary for international cooperation and governance.

27.3 Pilot programmes in priority sectors

Hong Kong possesses a unique confluence of factors—rigorous academic standards, a strategic gateway to the Greater Bay Area, and a dynamic economy—that position it perfectly to become a global leader in continuous education. Achieving this status requires a strategic blueprint that moves beyond piecemeal offerings to create an integrated, responsive, and internationally recognized ecosystem for lifelong learning. This blueprint must be built on a foundation of robust collaboration between academia, industry, and government, fostering a culture where upskilling and reskilling are not just options but integral parts of a professional's journey. The establishment of clear, flexible pathways that allow learners to move seamlessly between vocational training, professional certifications, and academic degrees is paramount. Furthermore, embedding a global perspective into the curriculum, through partnerships with leading international institutions and a focus on transnational competencies, will ensure Hong Kong's continuous education offerings are not only locally relevant but also world-class in their appeal and impact.

A cornerstone of this strategic blueprint is the aggressive and well-funded deployment of pilot programmes in priority sectors that are critical to Hong Kong's future economic competitiveness. These pilots serve as living laboratories to test innovative pedagogical models, forge deep industry linkages, and demonstrate the tangible value of lifelong learning. For the construction and infrastructure sector, which is vital to Hong Kong's continued development, the "On-the-job Training Allowance Pilot Scheme" provides a powerful model. By offering a substantial monthly allowance that increases annually, up to a maximum of HK\$90,000, this initiative removes financial barriers for employees seeking to advance their qualifications while working. Programmes in high-demand areas like Civil Engineering, Building Services Engineering, and Surveying allow participants to immediately apply academic knowledge in the workplace, enhancing both individual career prospects and the overall skill level of the industry. The government's commitment to extending this funding in partnership with the Construction Industry Council signals a deep understanding that strategic, multi-year investment is essential to attract and retain talent in foundational sectors.

Another pioneering pilot programme targets the integration of vocational and professional education and training (VPET) at the secondary school level, fundamentally reshaping the perception and accessibility of technical careers. The Vocational Training Council's (VTC) two-year pilot scheme allows senior secondary students to pursue a Diploma in Vocational Studies (Senior Secondary) alongside their Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE) studies. This "dual-track" pathway, offered in disciplines such as Information Technology and Hotel Servicing, culminates in a Qualifications Framework (QF) Level 3 qualification, providing immediate value for further study or employment. The programme's strength lies in its immersive, experiential learning approach, which includes site visits to industry leaders like PCCW-HKT and China Mobile, as well as hands-on experience in specialized facilities like the T-Hotel training hotel. This early exposure not only helps students make informed career choices but also creates a pipeline of skilled young talent ready to contribute to high-value industries upon graduation. The expansion of this pilot to more schools and the consideration of new subject areas demonstrate its early success and scalability.

At the post-secondary level, the government's Pilot Project on Development of Applied Degree Programmes represents a strategic move to elevate vocational training to the degree level, blending rigorous academics with substantial work-based learning. Launched to address specific industry manpower needs, the first round of programmes focused on sectors like nursing, testing and certification, and gerontology, areas with acute demand for high-quality professional talent. The defining feature of these applied degrees is the deep involvement of industry partners in curriculum design and programme delivery, ensuring that graduates are not just theoretically proficient but also "work-ready" from day one. The Education Bureau's decision to launch a second round, prioritizing industries not covered previously, illustrates a responsive and data-driven approach to talent development. Complementary to this is the comprehensive Review of Sub-degree Education, which sharpened the distinction between the more applied Higher Diploma (HD) and the generic Associate Degree (AD). By strengthening the HD's role within the VPET pathway and updating guidelines to promote work-based learning and recognition of prior learning, the government is systematically building a coherent and respected ladder of lifelong learning opportunities that extends from secondary school through to a bachelor's degree and beyond. These targeted initiatives, rooted in industry partnership and flexible learning, collectively form the bedrock of Hong Kong's strategy to become a genuine global leader in continuous education.

27.4 Digital platform development

Hong Kong stands at a pivotal moment in its educational evolution, possessing a unique confluence of factors that can propel it to global leadership in continuous education. The strategic blueprint for achieving this ambition is increasingly clear, driven by high-level government planning and substantial financial commitment. The establishment of the Digital Education Strategy Development Steering Committee in early 2025 marked a watershed moment, setting a comprehensive direction for the city's digital education future. This body has articulated a four-pronged approach that directly supports the continuous education sector: fostering student digital literacy for lifelong learning, investing in educator professional development, building intelligent digital infrastructure, and forging robust cross-sector partnerships. This is not merely theoretical; it is backed by significant public investment. The government's allocation of HK\$2 billion from the Quality Education Fund, with an initial HK\$500 million dedicated to the "Igniting Learning" grant scheme, provides the financial bedrock for schools and institutions to integrate artificial intelligence and other cutting-edge technologies into their pedagogical core. This foundational layer of policy and funding creates an unprecedented opportunity to build a world-class digital ecosystem for continuous education.

The technological architecture of Hong Kong's future digital platform for continuous education will be defined by its sophistication, personalization, and deep integration with both national and local resources. A critical strategic move is the exploration and adaptation of Mainland China's vast National Smart Education Platform, a resource that already spans basic, vocational, higher, and continuing education. By collaborating with Mainland authorities to understand and potentially integrate this platform's resources, Hong Kong can leapfrog the initial stages of content development, focusing instead on localization and enhancement. Concurrently, Hong Kong's tertiary institutions are pioneering the next generation of educational technology. Projects like HKUST's AI-powered "Co-Instructor" platform, designed to assist faculty in curriculum design and quality assurance, exemplify how generative AI can augment educator capacity. Similarly, the development of personalized learning tools through the e-Learning Companion Programme, such as AI-driven English systems, demonstrates a move towards adaptive learning pathways that cater to the diverse needs of adult learners. This dual strategy of leveraging large-scale existing resources while fostering homegrown, innovative tools ensures the platform is both robust and contextually relevant.

Beyond content delivery, the blueprint for Hong Kong's platform envisions a rich, immersive, and inclusive learning environment that transcends traditional boundaries. The use of immersive technologies is already gaining ground, with projects like the cross-institutional metaverse platform developed by HSUHK and its partners. This platform places learners from different locations into collaborative, problem-based virtual scenarios—from managing logistics at an air cargo terminal to reporting from a simulated earthquake zone—demonstrating the power of experiential learning in a digital space. This kind of collaborative, real-world problem-solving is precisely what distinguishes world-leading continuous education.

Furthermore, the strategy is inclusive, recognizing the diverse demographics of lifelong learners. Initiatives like Lingnan University's work in gerontechnology highlight how digital platforms can be tailored to address societal needs, providing training and fostering innovation in areas like smart ageing, thereby engaging older adults as both learners and contributors. The integration of Augmented Reality (AR) with Large Language Models (LLMs) in specialized fields like aerospace engineering and forensic pathology at HKUST further points to a future where learning is not only immersive but also intelligent and context-aware.

Ultimately, Hong Kong's pathway to global leadership hinges on its ability to foster a vibrant, collaborative ecosystem and to project its influence internationally. This is already in motion through flagship events like the Digital Education Week, which in its inaugural year attracted over 24,000 participants, including educators and experts from the mainland and overseas, facilitating a vital exchange of ideas and best practices. The active involvement of top-tier tech companies, universities establishing future learning institutes, and charitable trusts in funding AI education for hundreds of schools illustrates the powerful synergy between government, industry, and academia. By building on this momentum, Hong Kong's digital platform for continuous education can become more than just a repository of courses; it can be a dynamic, globally connected hub for innovation in teaching and learning. The upcoming release of the Primary and Secondary School Digital Education Development Blueprint in 2026 will further solidify this strategic direction, providing a clear roadmap for integrating artificial intelligence literacy and advanced STEM education, ensuring that Hong Kong not only meets the demands of the digital age but sets the standard for it.

27.5 International marketing campaign launch

Part 1: Hong Kong's Pathway to Global Leadership in Continuous Education: A Strategic Blueprint

Executive Summary

Hong Kong stands at a pivotal crossroads where its traditional role as a regional education hub can be evolved into a global nexus for lifelong learning. The "Pathway to Global Leadership" blueprint leverages Hong Kong's unique advantages under the "One Country, Two Systems" framework—its bilingual common law system, world-class infrastructure, and deep integration with the Greater Bay Area (GBA). The strategy addresses the urgent global demand for upskilling driven by the Fourth Industrial Revolution. By transforming from a provider of front-loaded academic degrees to a dynamic ecosystem for continuous professional development (CPD) and personal enrichment, Hong Kong can capture a significant share of the international education market, estimated to be worth trillions of dollars. This blueprint is not merely about exporting education; it is about importing global talent and establishing Hong Kong as the indispensable "Knowledge Hub" for Asia and the world.

Strategic Pillar I: Fusing Academic Rigor with Industry Agility

The first pillar involves a fundamental restructuring of the territory's educational offerings to bridge the gap between academia and the rapidly evolving corporate sector. We will establish the "Hong Kong Consortium for Continuous Education," a collaborative network comprising the University of Hong Kong, Chinese University, Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, and vocational training institutions like the Vocational Training Council (VTC). This consortium will co-create micro-credentialing systems and stackable certificates with multinational corporations (MNCs) headquartered in or operating through Hong Kong, such as HSBC, AIA, and MTR Corporation. The focus will be on high-demand fields: FinTech, Green Finance, Smart City Infrastructure, and Logistics. By offering bite-sized, accredited, and industry-endorsed learning modules, Hong Kong will provide professionals with the agility to adapt to market shifts without committing to lengthy, traditional degree programs.

Strategic Pillar II: The "Digital Harbor" for Lifelong Learning

To achieve global reach, Hong Kong must become a digital harbor for education technology (EdTech). This pillar focuses on creating a regulatory sandbox for EdTech startups and international learning platforms. The government will incentivize investment in AI-driven personalized learning platforms and Virtual Reality (VR) training environments. A key initiative is the development of the "HK LearnSpace" portal—a government-backed, quality-assured digital marketplace where learners from Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and beyond can access courses taught by Hong Kong's top academics and industry leaders. This portal will utilize blockchain technology to issue secure, verifiable digital diplomas, enhancing the portability and credibility of Hong Kong's credentials globally. This digital-first approach ensures that Hong Kong's educational influence extends far beyond its physical borders.

Strategic Pillar III: The Gateway to the Greater Bay Area and ASEAN

Hong Kong's ultimate competitive advantage lies in its role as the "super-connector" between global standards and Mainland China's market, particularly the GBA. This pillar outlines the creation of "dual-city" learning models. For instance, a professional could attend theoretical classes in Hong Kong and conduct practical, high-tech manufacturing or biotech internships in Shenzhen or Dongguan. Furthermore, the blueprint targets the massive demand for executive education from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). By positioning itself as the neutral, high-trust intermediary, Hong Kong can offer programs that combine Western management theories with deep insights into Chinese business practices and ASEAN market nuances. This creates a unique value proposition that cannot be replicated by Singapore, Shanghai, or London alone, solidifying Hong Kong's status as the definitive knowledge gateway for the region.

Part 2: International Marketing Campaign Launch: "Hong Kong: Your Future, Every Day."

Campaign Narrative and Visual Identity

The international marketing campaign, titled "Hong Kong: Your Future, Every Day," will be unveiled at the Asia Summit on Global Education in Hong Kong. The campaign shifts the narrative from a tourist or financial destination to a destination for intellectual growth. The visual identity will feature dynamic, high-contrast imagery juxtaposing Hong Kong's iconic skyline with intimate scenes of learning—a finance professional in a virtual reality training module in Central, an engineer studying sustainable architecture at a heritage site in Tai Kwun, and a global CEO participating in a live masterclass from a Peak tram. The tagline, "Your Future, Every Day," encapsulates the idea that continuous education is not a one-time event but an integrated, vibrant part of life in Hong Kong. The color palette moves beyond the traditional red and white to include deep blues and greens, symbolizing stability, growth, and the digital future.

Targeted Digital and Experiential Launch Strategy

The launch will be a multi-phased, data-driven assault on key international markets, specifically Singapore, London, San Francisco, and Dubai. Phase one, "The Spark," will utilize targeted LinkedIn and Financial Times campaigns featuring thought-leadership articles from Hong Kong's university deans and CEOs of partner corporations. Phase two, "The Experience," will involve the deployment of "HK Future Lounges"—pop-up immersive spaces in major financial districts. These lounges will offer free 15-minute masterclasses via VR headsets, allowing potential learners to sample a course on, for example, "Green Finance Fundamentals" taught by a HKU professor. This tangible experience demystifies online learning and physically connects the brand to the city. Finally, an influencer program will recruit "Future Alumni"—successful professionals in key markets who have taken Hong Kong-based continuous education courses—to act as brand ambassadors, sharing their career progression stories through authentic social media content.

CHAPTER 28: PHASE 2 – SCALING AND INTEGRATION (2028-2031)

With the foundational elements of a robust continuous education framework established in Phase 1, Phase 2 (2028-2031) marks a critical transition from pilot initiatives to systemic transformation. This period is dedicated to scaling successful models, fostering deep integration across education and industry sectors, and positioning Hong Kong as a recognised global leader in lifelong learning. The strategic focus shifts towards creating a cohesive and permeable ecosystem where continuous education is not a parallel track but an integral component of the territory's academic and professional landscape.

2.1 The Emergence of Specialised Universities for Continuous Education

A landmark development in this phase will be the formal establishment of Hong Kong's first teaching-focused, specialised universities dedicated to professional and continuing education. Building on the groundwork laid in the previous years, institutions like the Polytechnic University's College of Professional and Continuing Education (CPCE) are slated to complete their transition into independent, accredited private universities. This evolution from a departmental entity within a larger research university to an autonomous institution is significant. It signals a societal and academic validation of applied degrees and professional pathways as being of equal stature to traditional academic programmes. These new universities will be characterised by curricula that seamlessly blend theory with mandatory, intensive work-based learning, developed in close collaboration with industry partners. Their emergence will naturally increase the quantity and diversity of continuous education offerings, particularly at the degree and postgraduate level, providing clear and prestigious pathways for learners seeking career advancement or specialisation.

2.2 Mainstreaming Micro-Credentials and a Unified Credit Accumulation System

The period from 2028 to 2031 will witness the widespread adoption and systemic integration of micro-credentials, moving them from innovative pilots to mainstream educational tools. Phase 2 will see the full implementation of a territory-wide framework for stackable credits, allowing learners to aggregate credits from various accredited sources—including university modules, vocational training programmes, and recognised industry certifications—towards formal academic qualifications. This is exemplified by models already in development, such as the CUHK Business School's professional certificate programmes, which offer credits that can be transferred directly into master's degree programmes. The government's review of the Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT) mechanism will be crucial in standardising these practices across all institutions, creating a truly flexible and permeable education system. For learners, this means the ability to curate personalised learning journeys, upskilling in targeted areas like ESG reporting, fintech, or innovation leadership, and having that learning formally recognised as building blocks toward higher qualifications.

2.3 Government-Led Integration of National and Vocational Training

A cornerstone of Phase 2 is the strategic integration of key government agencies to create a unified front for workforce development. The Employee Retraining Board (ERB) will complete its transformation, moving beyond its traditional focus to become a central coordinator for "skills-based" training for the entire workforce. Its future roadmap involves a deep collaboration with the rebranded Vocational Training Council (VTC) and the new specialised universities. This tripartite alliance will create a seamless VPET (Vocational and Professional Education and Training) pathway with multiple entry and exit points, allowing individuals to move fluidly between skills-based certificates, higher diplomas, applied degrees, and postgraduate studies. This integrated system will be dynamically steered by enhanced industry consultative mechanisms, ensuring that curricula at all levels are responsive to the evolving needs of key economic sectors and can quickly address skills gaps, particularly in industries facing disruption or high unemployment.

2.4 Deepening Integration with the Greater Bay Area (GBA)

With the domestic framework solidified, Phase 2 will aggressively scale Hong Kong's role as the GBA's hub for international and high-quality continuous education. The strategic plans laid out by institutions like HKU SPACE will come to fruition, with a physical and programmatic deep integration into the GBA. The establishment of learning centres in border areas like Sheung Shui, designed for the convenience of mainland learners, will be complemented by a network of partnerships and joint campuses with leading mainland institutions. These collaborations, such as the "Cloud Classroom + Practice Base" model with Northwestern Polytechnical University, will create innovative blended learning environments that combine Hong Kong's international pedagogical strengths with mainland China's industrial and research capabilities. Furthermore, Hong Kong will take a lead role in piloting mutual recognition of professional qualifications and academic credits with key GBA cities, as proposed in discussions on building an AI talent ecosystem. By establishing common vocational standards and facilitating the transfer of skills and qualifications across the border, Hong Kong will cement its status as an indispensable talent hub for the entire region.

2.5 Technology-Enabled Personalisation and Global Outreach

Technological infrastructure will be harnessed not just for content delivery, but for creating personalised and data-driven learning ecosystems. Building on pilot e-learning programmes, Phase 2 will see the widespread use of AI and data analytics to provide learners with intelligent career and learning pathway recommendations. This "skills future" platform would analyse labour market data and an individual's profile to suggest optimal micro-credential programmes or courses. This digital transformation will also be the engine for global outreach. Hong Kong's institutions will aggressively scale their online and hybrid programme offerings to attract lifelong learners from "under-represented regions" and along the Belt and Road, exporting its unique brand of bilingual, industry-aligned, and quality-assured continuous education on a global scale. The focus will be on creating a global community of learners who can access Hong Kong's educational resources anytime, anywhere, thereby diversifying the student body and reinforcing Hong Kong's position as an international education hub.

28.1 Full rollout of lifelong learning accounts

Hong Kong stands at a pivotal moment in its quest to become a global leader in continuous education, with the full rollout of enhanced Lifelong Learning Accounts serving as the cornerstone of this strategic vision. Building upon the foundation of the existing Continuing Education Fund (CEF), which currently provides eligible Hong Kong residents aged 18 or above with a HK\$25,000 subsidy to pursue approved courses, a truly transformative blueprint requires a paradigm shift from a reactive subsidy to a proactive, portable, and personally-owned learning entitlement. This modernised account would function as an individual learning passport, consolidating not only government subsidies but also employer contributions and individual savings earmarked for skills development throughout one's career. By integrating these accounts with the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF), individuals could easily track their accumulated learning credits and map out clear progression pathways across different disciplines and institutions, empowering them to navigate the rapidly evolving knowledge economy with agency and foresight. This foundational infrastructure is essential for cultivating a society where upskilling and reskilling are not merely remedial measures but are woven into the fabric of every citizen's lifelong journey.

The second pillar of this strategic blueprint involves radically expanding the supply and flexibility of high-quality, industry-relevant learning opportunities. Leading institutions like CUHK Business School are already pioneering this approach with the introduction of micro-credential programmes in cutting-edge fields such as Sustainability and ESG Reporting, Artificial Intelligence for Business, and Technology Applications for Financial Services. These short, practical, and stackable courses offer a flexible alternative to traditional degrees, allowing working professionals to acquire specific competencies in a matter of months while earning credits that can later be applied toward a full master's degree. The strategic blueprint would incentivise all University Grants Committee (UGC)-funded universities and their self-financing continuing education arms, such as the CUHK School of Continuing and Professional Studies (SCS) and HKU SPACE, to massively scale up such offerings. By encouraging collaboration with industry to co-design curricula, Hong Kong can ensure its lifelong learning ecosystem is agile and directly responsive to the talent demands of key sectors like financial technology, green finance, innovation, and healthcare, thereby solidifying its status as an international hub for post-secondary education as envisioned in recent policy addresses.

To truly unlock the potential of lifelong learning accounts, the blueprint must champion innovative financing models and robust regulatory frameworks that encourage widespread participation from both individuals and employers. While the government's recent HK\$1 billion injection into the Government Scholarship Fund is a welcome step to attract talent, a parallel effort is needed to stimulate demand for continuous education among the local workforce. This could involve introducing tax incentives for companies that contribute to their employees' lifelong learning accounts or creating co-investment schemes where government matching funds amplify individual savings.

Concurrently, the recent legislative amendments to the Post Secondary Colleges Ordinance (Cap. 320) , which will strengthen the regulation and quality assurance of self-financing institutions, are critical. This enhanced oversight, implemented by the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) , will ensure that the myriad of courses available under the lifelong learning accounts maintain rigorous academic and professional standards, thereby protecting the investment of all stakeholders and bolstering the international credibility of Hong Kong's continuing education credentials. This commitment to quality and innovation in curriculum design, such as the development of applied science universities, will help raise the status of vocational and professional education, providing diverse and respected pathways for learners at all stages of life and career.

Ultimately, the successful implementation of this strategic blueprint hinges on fostering a deeply embedded culture of lifelong learning that permeates every level of society. This goes beyond policy and finance to encompass the very mission of educational institutions. As articulated by institutions like CUHK, the goal is to nurture not just graduates, but "lifelong learners as global leaders" who possess the aspirations and competencies to make lifelong contributions to society. The widespread adoption of tools like the HKU SPACE Lifelong Learner Card—a tangible symbol of an individual's ongoing learning journey—can help normalise and celebrate continuous education as a perpetual and valued aspect of modern life. By integrating these cultural and technological elements with the financial and structural reforms of the lifelong learning accounts, Hong Kong can create an unparalleled ecosystem that not only equips its workforce for the future but also positions the city as a dynamic global beacon for human capital development in the 21st century. The pathway is clear: through strategic investment, innovative collaboration, and a steadfast commitment to quality, Hong Kong can indeed achieve global leadership in continuous education.

28.2 Expansion of micro-credentials across all sectors

Hong Kong's strategic ambition to become a global leader in continuous education is rapidly taking shape through a comprehensive, government-led blueprint centered on the expansion of micro-credentials. This vision, actively championed by the Employee Retraining Board (ERB) and supported by higher education institutions, seeks to create a flexible, skills-based training ecosystem that is responsive to the fast-evolving demands of the economy. The ERB's reform roadmap for 2025-2028 is the cornerstone of this strategy, outlining a shift from traditional course offerings to a dynamic model focused on identifying and filling skills gaps. A key component is the development of industry-recognized micro-credential courses that allow learners to build competencies through modular, stackable units, moving away from rigid, long-form programs. This systemic overhaul, which includes a legislative review of the Employee Retraining Ordinance, is designed to empower the entire workforce—from entry-level employees to seasoned professionals—to engage in lifelong learning and maintain a competitive edge in a globalized market.

The practical implementation of this strategic blueprint is already evident across various sectors, demonstrating the versatility and industry-specific application of micro-credentials. For instance, the CUHK Business School's Asia-Pacific Institute of Business has pioneered a series of Professional Certificate Programmes (Micro-credentials) targeting high-growth areas critical to Hong Kong's status as a global financial and business hub. These programs, which cover fields like FinTech, Sustainability and ESG Reporting, and Artificial Intelligence for Business, are designed as career accelerators for young professionals. They offer a concentrated, practical curriculum that can be completed flexibly within six to 36 months, directly addressing the need for rapid upskilling in response to new regulatory demands, such as the requirement for listed companies to publish ESG reports. This sector-specific approach ensures that the training provided is not only academically rigorous but also immediately applicable in the workplace, enhancing both individual career prospects and overall industry competitiveness.

A critical element of Hong Kong's blueprint is the integration of micro-credentials into a coherent, quality-assured framework that values both academic and professional recognition. The alignment of these new qualifications with the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF) is central to this effort. The CUHK Business School's micro-credentials, for example, are registered at HKQF Level 6, placing them on par with postgraduate diploma standards and providing a clear pathway for further education, including credit transfers towards master's degrees. This creates a seamless bridge between continuous professional education and formal academic advancement, making learning a lifelong and laddered journey. Furthermore, the ERB is strengthening its industry consultative mechanisms to ensure that micro-certificates are co-developed with input from various sectors, guaranteeing their relevance and acceptance by employers. This dual emphasis on formal accreditation and industry endorsement builds trust and value in micro-credentials, positioning them as a powerful tool for workforce development.

To realize its vision of global leadership, Hong Kong is actively fostering a culture of innovation and collaboration among all stakeholders in the continuous education space. The establishment of a dedicated "Skills Research Division" by the ERB, tasked with forecasting market demands and anticipating future skills gaps, exemplifies this proactive and data-driven approach. This forward-looking strategy ensures that training programs remain ahead of the curve, preparing the workforce for emerging industries and technological shifts. Concurrently, institutions like CUHK are exploring partnerships with professional bodies and Mainland Chinese organizations to broaden the reach and impact of their micro-credential programs. Unions, too, have called for more dynamic and experiential courses that provide clear career advancement paths. By integrating cutting-edge curriculum development, robust quality assurance, and multi-sector partnerships, Hong Kong is not just expanding its educational offerings but is building a world-class, agile, and inclusive continuous education ecosystem that can serve as a model for other global cities.

28.3 Major international partnership agreements

Hong Kong's ascent as a global leader in continuous education is being propelled by a strategic combination of innovative program design, robust government support, and a rapidly expanding network of high-profile international partnerships. This multifaceted approach is transforming the city from a regional education provider into a vital global hub for lifelong learning and professional development.

A Strategic Blueprint for Lifelong Learning Leadership

The strategic foundation for Hong Kong's leadership in continuous education is built upon a clear vision articulated by its leading institutions and reinforced by government policy. The School of Continuing and Professional Education at CUHK, for example, explicitly aims "to be a global leader in university continuing education" by enriching lives and transforming learning to keep pace with evolving societal and economic needs. This vision is operationalized through strategies that emphasize academic quality, global experiences, and closer partnerships with both industry and renowned overseas institutions. A key component of this blueprint is the development of flexible, industry-relevant micro-credential programmes. CUHK Business School's Asia-Pacific Institute of Business has launched a series of Professional Certificate Programmes (Micro-credentials) covering trending areas like Innovation Leadership, Sustainability and ESG Reporting, and Artificial Intelligence for Business. These programmes are designed as "career accelerators," offering modular learning that can be completed in six to 36 months and, crucially, allow for seamless credit transfer to master's degree programmes, demonstrating a strategic integration of short-form learning with traditional academic pathways. This innovation is echoed by HKU SPACE, which is actively developing micro-credentials and exploring their integration with longstanding partners like the University of London, further solidifying the city's commitment to agile and accessible education models. Complementing these institutional efforts is the HKSAR government's sweeping education reform, outlined in the 2025 Policy Address, which aims to transform Hong Kong into a global education hub. By raising the intake of non-local students, designating universities of applied sciences, and promoting deeper academia-industry integration, the government is creating an ecosystem that directly channels world-class university output into a market-ready talent pool capable of powering strategic sectors like technology and innovation.

Cornerstone Partnerships with Prestigious European Institutions

A cornerstone of Hong Kong's global strategy is its deep and enduring partnerships with prestigious European institutions, which provide students with internationally recognized qualifications and foster academic mobility. The most exemplary of these is the over-60-year partnership between HKU SPACE and the University of London. This historic collaboration, initiated in the 1960s to address a local need for legal professionals, has grown into a multifaceted relationship. HKU SPACE was appointed as a Recognised Teaching Centre, allowing students in Hong Kong to earn globally respected University of London degrees in fields from law to finance without relocating. The partnership is dynamic, with regular curriculum reviews to ensure programmes remain relevant to Hong Kong's evolving economy, and both institutions are actively exploring collaboration in new, high-demand areas like micro-credentials, artificial intelligence, and data analytics. Building on this legacy, HKU SPACE signed a new Memorandum of Understanding with the University of Bath in late 2024. This agreement, which establishes academic cooperation beginning with articulation pathways, is designed to enhance the learning experience for HKU SPACE students by providing clear routes to one of the UK's leading universities, thereby expanding their global academic opportunities. These European linkages are further enriched by partnerships that focus on vocational and professional training, such as the 2025 student exchange agreement between HKMU LiPACE and Italy's Fondazione Jobs Academy, the country's largest Higher Technical Institute. This agreement is significant not only for promoting student mobility but also for operationalizing the technical understanding between the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF) and the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), thereby validating Hong Kong's qualifications on a European stage.

Expanding Global Reach into New Strategic Markets

Beyond its traditional European strongholds, Hong Kong is strategically forging partnerships in the Middle East and other regions to cement its status as a global continuing education hub. A landmark development in this direction is the MoU signed between HKU Business School and Argaam Investment Company, a leading financial intelligence platform in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf region. This partnership, formalized at a signing ceremony in Riyadh, aims to co-design and deliver executive education programmes tailored for leaders in the Gulf. HKU Business School will lead the academic design, while Argaam will facilitate local promotion, with initial offerings including an Executive Investor Relations Programme in Saudi Arabia. This collaboration is framed within the broader context of the Belt and Road Initiative and Saudi Vision 2030, following the successful HKU Saudi Economic Forum, and positions Hong Kong as a key educational partner in the region's economic transformation.

Concurrently, Hong Kong's institutions are building bridges with Africa. In late 2024, HKMU LiPACE signed an MoU with the School of Continuing Education at The American University in Cairo. Described as a step towards a "borderless learning future," this partnership aims to build an inclusive global learning network. A unique focus of this collaboration is the joint creation of specialized programmes and workshops tailored to the needs of the elderly and senior citizens, demonstrating how Hong Kong's expertise in continuing education can address diverse, cross-generational learning needs on a global scale. Complementing these formal agreements, HKU SPACE's LEAD Academy has been actively organizing international study tours in collaboration with world-renowned institutions like Harvard, MIT, Stanford, and Cambridge, enabling participants to build global networks and gain practical insights, further extending Hong Kong's educational reach and reputation.

28.4 Northern Metropolis Education City development

Hong Kong stands at a pivotal moment in its quest to become a global leader in continuous education, with recent policy initiatives and institutional developments providing a clear strategic blueprint for success. This vision is being realised through two parallel tracks: the innovation of flexible, industry-aligned professional education programmes, and the ambitious development of the Northern Metropolis Education City, which together form a comprehensive ecosystem for lifelong learning and talent cultivation.

Building a Flexible and Industry-Aligned Continuous Education Ecosystem

The foundation of Hong Kong's global leadership in continuous education lies in the development of innovative, flexible learning pathways that directly respond to evolving industry demands. A prime example of this strategic direction is the recent introduction of professional certificate programmes by The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) Business School's Asia-Pacific Institute of Business. These micro-credential courses, covering high-demand areas such as Innovation Leadership, Sustainability and ESG Reporting, and Artificial Intelligence for Business, are specifically designed as "career accelerators" for aspiring professionals. Their modular structure, which allows completion in six to 36 months at the student's own pace, directly addresses the needs of working adults seeking to upskill without interrupting their careers. Crucially, these programmes are listed at Level 6 of the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework, and the credits earned can be seamlessly transferred to master's degree programmes, creating a cohesive bridge between continuous and formal education. This model of stackable, accredited micro-credentials exemplifies how Hong Kong's institutions are building a flexible yet rigorous system for lifelong learning.

This commitment to lifelong learning is deeply embedded in the strategic visions of Hong Kong's leading educational institutions. The Chinese University of Hong Kong's broader strategic plan explicitly aims to nurture "lifelong learners as global leaders," with goals to serve the community's needs for continuing education and to support second-career trends. Its School of Continuing and Professional Sciences (SCS) articulates an even more focused vision: "To be a global leader in university continuing education by enriching lives and transforming lifelong learning". SCS's strategies—which include expanding industry collaborations, exploring global learning experiences, and meeting the needs of an ageing learner population—demonstrate a sophisticated understanding of the diverse demographics that continuous education must serve. Similarly, HKU SPACE has established the LEAD Academy to deliver high-quality executive programmes to mainland Chinese corporations and government officials, while also organising international study tours in collaboration with renowned universities like Harvard and Cambridge. These initiatives not only generate revenue but also enhance Hong Kong's soft power and reputation as a regional education hub.

The government's recent policy reforms provide a powerful tailwind for these institutional efforts. The formal designation of institutions like Hong Kong Metropolitan University as "Universities of Applied Sciences" creates a respected and clear pathway for vocationally-oriented learning, steering these institutions toward deeper partnerships with industries in the Greater Bay Area. This move is critical for bridging the gap between classroom learning and real-world industry expectations, a challenge highlighted by tech leaders who note that traditional internships are no longer sufficient. By integrating commercial projects into degree programmes and fostering collaboration between universities and enterprises in key tech hubs, Hong Kong is creating an education-to-employment pipeline that directly feeds the talent needs of its strategic sectors, from fintech to biomedicine. This holistic approach, combining flexible micro-credentials, applied university pathways, and strong industry linkages, positions Hong Kong to cultivate a future-ready workforce capable of sustaining its economic competitiveness.

The Northern Metropolis Education City: A Physical and Strategic Catalyst

The physical manifestation of Hong Kong's continuous education ambitions is the Northern Metropolis Education City, a monumental development that will transform the city's educational landscape. The government has reserved approximately 90 hectares of land across three key areas—Hung Shui Kiu, Ngau Tam Mei, and the New Territories North New Town—with land becoming available for use from 2026, 2028, and 2030 respectively. The "University Town Planning and Construction Group," established under the Northern Metropolis Development Committee, has already commenced work and is on track to publish a "Concept Development Outline" by 2026. This high-level task force, chaired by the Chief Secretary for Administration, is tasked with developing the strategic vision for the Education City, ensuring it moves beyond the traditional model of simply relocating university campuses.

The core principle guiding the Education City's development is "industry-academia collaboration," a strategic approach that integrates educational institutions with the economic functions of the Northern Metropolis. Secretary for Education Christine Choi Yuk-lin has emphasised that universities must align their plans with the specific industrial foci of each land cluster. For instance, the Hung Shui Kiu area is envisioned to integrate with high-end professional services and vocational training, while Ngau Tam Mei will be developed in conjunction with the San Tin Technopole and the Lok Ma Chau Loop, focusing on innovation and technology, particularly the life and health technology sector. This integration will be further strengthened by the planned third medical school and a comprehensive teaching hospital and research complex in the area. This deliberate clustering of education, research, and industry creates a fertile ground for knowledge transfer, commercialising cutting-edge research, and providing students with unparalleled hands-on learning opportunities. As one university leader noted, this model allows for the creation of joint laboratories with key enterprises, directly training postgraduate students while assisting companies with their R&D projects.

Beyond its domestic impact, the Northern Metropolis Education City is a cornerstone of Hong Kong's strategy to become an international education hub. The government is actively studying ways to attract leading mainland and international universities to establish a presence in the Education City, which would bring world-class scholars and talented students to Hong Kong. This ambition is supported by a suite of complementary policies, including the dramatic expansion of the non-local student intake cap for publicly-funded universities to 50% and the establishment of a dedicated "Task Force on Study in Hong Kong" to promote the "Study in Hong Kong" brand globally, with a focus on ASEAN and Belt and Road countries. A HK\$40 million grant has been allocated to support universities in their international marketing efforts. To ensure the city can accommodate this influx of global talent, the government is also ramping up student housing supply by incentivising the conversion of underused commercial buildings and earmarking new sites for hostels. By combining world-class physical infrastructure with progressive policies, the Northern Metropolis Education City is set to be the engine that propels Hong Kong into its next chapter as a global leader in continuous and higher education.

28.5 Mutual recognition agreements with key partner countries

Hong Kong possesses a unique combination of world-class university infrastructure, a robust qualifications framework, and strong government support, positioning it to become a global leader in continuing education. Achieving this status requires a strategic blueprint that leverages existing assets and aggressively pursues mutual recognition agreements (MRAs) with key international partners. This strategy would transform Hong Kong from a regional education provider into a central node in a global network of lifelong learning.

Hong Kong's Strategic Foundation for Leadership in Continuing Education

Hong Kong's aspiration to become a global leader in continuing education is built upon a solid foundation of existing academic excellence and forward-thinking government policy. The city's universities are not only world-renowned for their traditional degree programmes but are also actively innovating in the flexible learning space. For instance, institutions like The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) Business School are pioneering micro-credential programmes designed as "career accelerators," which offer concentrated, industry-relevant skills in areas like artificial intelligence, sustainability, and financial technology. A key feature of these programmes is their formal integration into the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF) and the ability to seamlessly transfer credits into master's degree programmes, creating clear and valuable pathways for lifelong learners. This institutional agility is complemented by a clear vision from continuing education units, such as the School of Continuing and Professional Studies at CUHK, which explicitly aims to be a "global leader in university continuing education" by building closer partnerships with overseas universities and professional bodies. Furthermore, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) government has provided a powerful policy mandate through initiatives like the Chief Executive's Policy Address, which promotes the development of Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS) and encourages deeper industry-education collaboration both locally and with Mainland enterprises. This top-down support, combined with bottom-up institutional innovation, creates a fertile ground for a strategic expansion into the global continuing education market.

Mutual Recognition as a Cornerstone of Global Strategy

The cornerstone of Hong Kong's pathway to global leadership lies in the strategic pursuit and expansion of mutual recognition agreements (MRAs) for academic and professional qualifications. These agreements are essential for removing barriers to learner mobility, ensuring that skills and credentials earned in Hong Kong are valued and understood by employers and educational institutions in other countries. Hong Kong already has a foundational model in its long-standing "Memorandum with the Mainland on Mutual Recognition of Higher Education Academic Certificates," which facilitates degree recognition for further study across the border. More importantly, the city is now moving beyond simple degree recognition to the more complex and crucial area of vocational and professional qualifications.

The 2025 Policy Address explicitly mandates the implementation of an "Arrangement on Mutual Recognition of Vocational and Professional Qualifications with the Mainland," extending recognition to sub-degree levels and thereby facilitating cross-boundary careers and further studies. A landmark achievement in this arena is the recent 粤港资历双认证 (Guangdong-Hong Kong qualifications dual-recognition) pilot. In June 2025, four programmes from Hong Kong's CTIHE College were successfully evaluated and included in the Guangdong Lifelong Education Qualifications Framework, marking the first instance of formal cross-border credit accumulation and transfer under this mechanism. This pioneering effort, which involved rigorous joint review by education experts from both regions, demonstrates the practical feasibility of aligning qualifications frameworks and serves as a powerful template for future international negotiations. By proving that Hong Kong's qualifications can be mapped and recognised against another major framework, this achievement provides a compelling case study and a replicable model for pursuing similar MRAs with key partner countries in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Europe, and beyond.

Blueprint for a Global Network of Recognised Lifelong Learning

To build on this momentum, Hong Kong's strategic blueprint must outline a clear, phased approach to establishing a global network of mutual recognition. The first phase should focus on deepening and systematising the recognition pathways already being pioneered with Mainland China. This involves expanding the number and type of programmes eligible for cross-recognition and creating streamlined, user-friendly processes for learners to transfer credits and have their professional qualifications acknowledged. The success of institutions like HKU SPACE, which already runs extensive executive training and study tour programmes for Mainland officials and students, underscores the demand for such integrated educational experiences.

The second phase involves leveraging these domestic successes to negotiate MRAs with key international partners. Hong Kong should prioritise countries with which it has strong economic ties and that have mature, robust qualifications frameworks, such as the United Kingdom, Australia, and Canada. The negotiations should aim for "qualifications framework-to-framework" agreements, similar to the Guangdong model, which would provide a macro-level structure for recognising entire categories of qualifications rather than negotiating on a programme-by-programme basis. The strategic blueprint should also address the critical area of professional qualifications, working with Hong Kong's professional bodies to establish recognition pathways for licensed professionals, as is already done in some sectors like construction and accounting with the Mainland. Finally, the Hong Kong government must invest in a dedicated central body or empower an existing one, such as the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ), to act as the primary agent for promoting the HKQF internationally, providing technical expertise for MRA negotiations, and serving as a one-stop resource hub for international learners and institutions seeking recognition information. By combining a strong domestic foundation with a proactive international engagement strategy, Hong Kong can transform its continuing education sector into a globally connected and recognised leader.

CHAPTER 29: PHASE 3 – GLOBAL LEADERSHIP (2032-2035)

By the dawn of the 2030s, the foundational work of the previous phases culminates in the physical and structural realisation of Hong Kong's vision. The Northern Metropolis University Town, spanning over 60 hectares in Hung Shui Kiu and Ha Tsuen, is fully operational and has matured into a vibrant, cross-border higher education and innovation ecosystem. This new urban cluster is no longer just a collection of campus buildings but a living laboratory for the future of learning. It seamlessly integrates academic facilities with the adjacent San Tin Technopole, creating a powerful synergy where university research and development directly feed into the region's innovation and technology sectors. The university town model has fostered deep collaborative networks, housing not only expanded local public and private institutions but also branch campuses and research centres from renowned mainland Chinese and overseas universities. This has created a concentrated talent pool and a multicultural campus life that is unique in the region, solidifying Hong Kong's reputation as a true international higher education hub.

With the critical mass of institutions and students in place, Phase 3 is characterised by a mature and flexible regulatory environment that enables the continuous education sector to operate at a global standard of excellence. The forward-looking amendments to the Post Secondary Colleges Ordinance, fully implemented and refined since the late 2020s, have successfully deregulated the sector, empowering self-financing institutions to respond to market needs with agility and innovation. Esteemed institutions like the HKU School of Professional and Continuing Education (HKU SPACE) and the School of Continuing Education of Hong Kong Baptist University (SCE) have leveraged their enhanced status to scale up their operations and deepen their international partnerships. The regulatory framework now explicitly supports a diverse funding model, blending government support for public-good initiatives with a vibrant, high-quality, fee-for-service market that drives competition and excellence. This clear and supportive policy landscape has attracted top-tier international educational providers to establish a significant presence in Hong Kong, offering specialised micro-credentials and postgraduate programmes that cater to the needs of a global professional workforce.

Hong Kong's continuous education ecosystem has evolved into a comprehensive, multi-layered system that serves as a global benchmark for lifelong learning. The Employee Retraining Authority (ERB) has completed its transformation into a forward-looking "SkillsUp Agency," shedding its remedial image to become the central coordinating body for skills-based training for all in-service employees. Its network of "Skills Up" centres, including large-scale integrated facilities, serves as a one-stop shop for career planning, upskilling, and re-skilling, utilising AI-powered tools to guide individuals through a complex landscape of learning opportunities. At the higher end, universities offer a seamless integration of professional certificates, micro-credentials, and stacked postgraduate degrees, allowing learners to continuously build on their qualifications throughout their careers. The system is highly digitised and personalised, with platforms developed by institutions like HKU SPACE offering "cloud classroom + practice base" models that blend online theory with hands-on, in-person application, catering to learners across the Greater Bay Area and beyond.

As the international education hub, Hong Kong in Phase 3 exerts significant global influence, particularly in shaping the future of professional skills for the Asian century. The city has become the leading provider of high-value, practice-based postgraduate and professional training for the entire region. The suite of postgraduate diplomas and workshops offered by institutions like HKU SPACE, covering fields from FinTech and AI to luxury brand management and international live entertainment, are now recognised as premier qualifications for professionals across Asia. Furthermore, Hong Kong plays a pivotal role in setting regional standards for "skills-based" training, exporting its curriculum frameworks and quality assurance models to partners in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and along the Belt and Road. The city's unique blend of Eastern and Western expertise, its world-class university infrastructure, and its strategic position as a gateway to Mainland China make it the indispensable centre for professionals seeking to advance their careers in the world's most dynamic economic region.

29.1 Hong Kong as UNESCO lifelong learning benchmark city

Hong Kong stands at a pivotal moment in its quest to become a global leader in continuous education, with a foundation solidly anchored by its UNESCO-recognized contributions to lifelong learning. The city's journey towards becoming a benchmark learning city is underscored by the presence of the UNESCO Chair at The Education University of Hong Kong, established in 2011 as the first UNESCO Chair in Education awarded to the territory. This Chair is strategically positioned to leverage Hong Kong's unique status as an international city to advance Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) on quality education, focusing on lifelong learning and vocational training through local, national, and international partnerships. This commitment aligns with the broader UNESCO vision of "learning cities" that promote inclusive and quality learning from the workplace to the community, a framework within which Hong Kong's evolution—particularly in areas like entrepreneurship education—has been studied as a model of sustainable partnership building among diverse stakeholders. These foundational elements provide the credibility and strategic direction necessary for Hong Kong to blueprint its pathway to global leadership.

A core pillar of Hong Kong's strategic blueprint is the innovative and responsive nature of its continuing education programmes, designed to meet the demands of a rapidly evolving global economy. Higher education institutions are pioneering flexible learning pathways that integrate micro-credentials with traditional degree structures, thereby creating seamless bridges for professional advancement. For instance, CUHK Business School's suite of Professional Certificate Programmes offers micro-credentials in high-demand fields such as Innovation Leadership, Artificial Intelligence for Business, and Sustainability and ESG Reporting. These programmes are not only listed at Level 6 of the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF) but also feature a unique benefit: credits earned can be transferred to master's degree programmes, providing a tangible pathway from continuous skill upgrading to advanced academic qualifications. Similarly, City University of Hong Kong's Business Innovation Education initiative aims to be the premier hub in Asia for transformative executive education, leveraging its East-meets-West orientation and deep industry engagement to develop leaders with an entrepreneurial mindset and a focus on sustainability. These examples demonstrate a systemic shift towards creating agile, high-quality learning opportunities that are directly relevant to industry needs.

This institutional innovation is powerfully amplified by a comprehensive government strategy aimed at transforming Hong Kong into an international education hub, directly fueling its leadership in talent development. The HKSAR Government's recent policy initiatives represent a supply-side educational revolution designed to bridge the innovation talent gap. Key measures include dramatically expanding the intake of non-local students—raising the admission ceiling for self-financing bachelor's programmes to 50%—and designating institutions like Hong Kong Metropolitan University as "universities of applied sciences" to create a respected pathway for vocational and professional education.

This push for deeper academia-industry integration, including promoting mutual recognition of qualifications within the Greater Bay Area, is a direct response to projections of a severe manpower shortfall in the inno-tech sector. By aligning education more closely with market needs, the government is not only cultivating a market-ready talent pool but also enhancing Hong Kong's global appeal as a premier destination for study and career development. This top-down support provides the scale and direction needed for continuous education to have a macroeconomic impact.

Central to Hong Kong's leadership potential is its role as a convenor of global dialogue and a practitioner of extensive international and cross-boundary collaboration. High-profile events, such as the Global University Presidents and Leaders Summit 2024, which brought together leaders from 50 world-class universities, underscore Hong Kong's ability to facilitate multilateral collaboration on pressing issues like AI governance and knowledge globalization. This global connectivity is complemented by practical, ground-level partnerships. HKU SPACE's LEAD Academy, for example, has operationalized this by delivering tailor-made training and study tours for senior executives, government officials, and university students from the Chinese Mainland, covering topics from fintech to urban management, and collaborating with renowned institutions like Harvard and Cambridge for international study tours. These initiatives not only enhance the competencies of participants but also strengthen Hong Kong's role as a bridge between East and West, fostering the global perspectives essential for modern leadership.

In conclusion, Hong Kong's strategic blueprint for global leadership in continuous education is a multi-layered and dynamic construct. It is built upon a foundation of UNESCO-aligned principles, energized by cutting-edge institutional programming, scaled through proactive government policy, and validated by robust international collaboration. By strategically positioning itself as a place where lifelong learning is not just a concept but an integrated, flexible, and globally connected ecosystem, Hong Kong is not merely responding to global trends but actively shaping the future of talent development. The city's unique advantages under "one country, two systems," combined with its world-class university system and its demonstrated commitment to the learning city ethos, provide a powerful and credible platform to aspire to and achieve the status of a UNESCO lifelong learning benchmark city for the world.

29.2 Full integration with global credentialing systems

Hong Kong stands at a pivotal moment to assert global leadership in continuous education, leveraging its unique advantages as an international financial hub and a bilingual common law jurisdiction. The city's strategic blueprint for global leadership is fundamentally anchored in the establishment of a rigorous and internationally trusted quality assurance infrastructure. The Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) serves as the cornerstone of this architecture, having achieved a historic milestone by becoming the first quality assurance body outside the European Higher Education Area to receive formal recognition from the European Qualifications Framework in 2023. This endorsement, following its acceptance as a full member of the European Network for Quality Assurance (ENQA) in 2021, positions HKCAAVQ as a global benchmark for academic standards. Building on this success, the Council has adopted a proactive "import and export" strategy for qualifications, which involves not only the selective import of high-demand, niche international programmes to enrich Hong Kong's educational landscape but also the export of its homegrown accreditation expertise. This is exemplified by technical assistance provided to Guangdong Province in establishing its own independent review mechanisms and the signing of mutual recognition memoranda with quality assurance bodies in Kazakhstan, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates, effectively projecting Hong Kong's standards onto the global stage.

A critical pillar of Hong Kong's pathway to global leadership is the seamless integration of its qualifications framework with those of mainland China, particularly within the Greater Bay Area (GBA). The Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF), with its meticulous level descriptors, provides a transparent and robust foundation for credit accumulation and transfer. A landmark achievement in this cross-border integration is the successful "dual accreditation" of four programmes offered by HKCT (Hong Kong College of Technology), which have been formally included in Guangdong Province's Lifelong Education Qualifications Registry. This pioneering initiative represents the first practical implementation of cross-boundary credit recognition, creating a tangible and replicable model for students to pursue further studies and career advancement across the GBA. Such direct articulation between the HKQF and the mainland's lifelong education system not only enhances the mobility of learners but also establishes Hong Kong as the central hub for regional educational integration and standard-setting.

To maintain its competitive edge and cater to the evolving demands of the global economy, Hong Kong's continuous education sector is rapidly innovating its programmatic offerings. A key trend is the widespread adoption and sophisticated structuring of micro-credentials. Institutions like the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) Business School have launched professional certificate programmes in high-demand fields such as Innovation Leadership, Fintech, and ESG Reporting. These programmes are not standalone entities but are strategically designed as "career accelerators" with built-in academic progression pathways. Notably, these micro-credentials are listed at Level 6 of the HKQF, and the credits earned can be seamlessly transferred into master's degree programmes, allowing for up to six credits of exemption.

This "stackable" model, which offers flexibility in duration from six to 36 months, directly addresses the needs of modern professionals for just-in-time upskilling while maintaining a clear bridge to traditional higher degrees, thereby creating a cohesive and flexible lifelong learning ecosystem. The realization of this strategic blueprint is further propelled by the cultivation of extensive international networks and strategic partnerships. Hong Kong's institutions have a long and distinguished history of collaboration with world-renowned universities. HKU SPACE, for instance, has maintained a partnership with the University of London for over six decades and has recently forged new strategic alliances with King's College London, offering a pathway to undergraduate, master's, and even doctoral qualifications. With a network of approximately 20 academic partners offering over 80 programmes to more than 3,200 students, HKU SPACE exemplifies the "glocal" approach—delivering globally recognized international qualifications locally. Furthermore, the establishment of initiatives like the Academy for Leadership Enhancement and Development (LEAD) at HKU SPACE demonstrates a commitment to bidirectional knowledge exchange, offering high-quality, tailored programmes for mainland Chinese executives and study tours for Hong Kong officials to cities like Shenzhen and Dongguan, thereby deepening the understanding of regional integration and enhancing global leadership competencies.

Looking ahead, Hong Kong's strategic blueprint must focus on consolidating its role as a trendsetter in continuous education. The visionary strategies outlined by institutions like the Chinese University of Hong Kong's School of Continuing and Professional Sciences (CUSCS) to "explore closer partnerships with renowned overseas universities and professional bodies" and to "examine diversified access of learning for global experiences" provide a clear roadmap for the future. The successful development of applied degree universities, supported by HKCAAVQ's advisory role in drawing from international best practices in Australia, Canada, Germany, Switzerland, and the UK, will further diversify the landscape of higher education. By continuously enhancing its robust quality assurance mechanisms, expanding the network of cross-border credit recognition, innovating flexible and stackable credential models, and deepening its international partnerships, Hong Kong is not merely participating in the global education market but is actively shaping its future. The city is on a definitive path to becoming the undisputed global leader in continuous education, a dynamic hub where lifelong learning is seamlessly integrated with professional advancement and international recognition.

29.3 Self-sustaining continuous education economy

Hong Kong stands at a pivotal moment in its economic evolution, possessing a unique confluence of factors that can propel it to global leadership in the continuous education sector. The strategic blueprint for this transformation leverages the city's inherent advantages—its status as an international financial center, its world-class higher education institutions, its unique "East-meets-West" orientation, and its deep integration with the Greater Bay Area (GBA)—to build a robust, self-sustaining continuous education economy. This vision moves beyond traditional academic offerings to position lifelong learning as a core economic driver, capable of fueling innovation, attracting global talent, and ensuring societal resilience in the face of rapid technological change.

The economic foundation for a self-sustaining continuous education economy in Hong Kong is not a future aspiration but a present reality with significant room for expansion. Historically, as far back as the early 1990s, the market has demonstrated its vitality, with an estimated 900,000 adult students annually contributing nearly HK\$2.5 billion in fees, a testament to the private sector's dynamism and the population's demand for upskilling. This robust market response has historically been so effective that government intervention was minimal, only stepping in to address very specific low-skill retraining needs. Today, this legacy has evolved into a multi-billion dollar enterprise. The recent surge in non-local student enrollment—nearly 80,000 strong—generates an estimated HK\$16 billion in annual tuition revenue alone, contributing to consecutive years of multi-billion dollar surpluses for the eight UGC-funded universities. This financial health provides the crucial capital for institutions to reinvest in state-of-the-art facilities, cutting-edge research, and the development of innovative continuous education programs, creating a virtuous cycle of growth and quality enhancement.

To achieve global leadership, Hong Kong's strategic blueprint must focus on creating an integrated ecosystem that aligns infrastructure, policy, and market demands. A critical and immediate challenge is the physical infrastructure, particularly the acute shortage of student housing, which constrains the ability to scale up the international student population. Strategic real estate planning is therefore paramount, with initiatives like the "Hostels in the City" scheme, which incentivizes the conversion of underutilized commercial buildings into student accommodations, serving as a vital first step. This must be complemented by the long-term, visionary development of the Northern Metropolis, which is planned to house a new "University Town". This integrated development offers a once-in-a-generation opportunity to design a purpose-built education precinct from the ground up, complete with modern campuses, innovation hubs, and ample housing, capable of supporting tens of thousands of students and researchers and fostering deep cross-border collaboration with Shenzhen.

Concurrently, policy reforms are aggressively removing barriers to growth. The dramatic increase in the non-local student admission ceiling for public universities—from 20% to 40% and soon to 50%—signals a clear government commitment to expanding the city's educational footprint. This expansion is not merely about quantity but strategic quality. The newly established "Study in Hong Kong" task force and a dedicated HK\$40 million marketing fund are designed to aggressively promote the "Hong Kong: Your World-class Campus" brand globally, targeting top-tier international and mainland students. Furthermore, the recognition of institutions like Hong Kong Metropolitan University as "Universities of Applied Sciences" creates a parallel, prestigious pathway for vocational and professional education, directly aligned with industry needs and enhancing the overall appeal of Hong Kong's diverse education landscape.

The core of a self-sustaining model lies in its ability to directly serve and stimulate the economy, and here Hong Kong's blueprint is most potent. The city is strategically positioning its continuous and executive education offerings to become indispensable partners to industry. By leveraging its unique geographical and cultural position, institutions like City University of Hong Kong's Business Innovation Education initiative aim to become Asia's premier hub for executive education, developing transformative leaders who can navigate both Eastern and Western business contexts. This is complemented by a surge in university-industry collaborations, where research centers co-developed with corporate partners focus on commercializing breakthroughs in high-demand fields like AI, fintech, and biotechnology. This integration ensures that curricula are market-responsive, students gain work-integrated learning experiences, and research is rapidly translated into viable commercial ventures, creating a powerful feedback loop where education directly fuels economic innovation and, in turn, generates demand for further upskilling.

Finally, a truly global leadership position requires financial sustainability and a focus on high-value, niche markets. The blueprint envisions a system where continuous education programs are largely self-financing, driven by tuition and corporate partnerships, while strategic government funding is reserved for seed capital for new initiatives and programs with significant public benefit. Hong Kong is also poised to capitalize on unmet regional demands. For instance, while Singapore may be the preferred destination for some general university students, Hong Kong has a distinct advantage in vocational and professional education, as Singapore's Institute of Technical Education cannot directly enroll international students. By actively promoting its applied science universities and vocational programs across Southeast Asia and along the Belt and Road, Hong Kong can tap into a vast new market of students seeking high-quality, practical skills training. This multi-pronged approach—integrating infrastructure, policy, market alignment, and financial prudence—provides Hong Kong with a clear and actionable pathway to transform its world-class education system into a dominant, self-sustaining global leader in continuous education.

29.4 Knowledge export: Consulting and capacity building for other systems

Hong Kong possesses a unique confluence of factors that position it to become a global leader in continuous education, with a particularly strong potential for exporting its expertise through consulting and capacity building. The city's strategic blueprint for knowledge export leverages its world-class university system, its unique "East-meets-West" orientation, and its role as a regional hub for finance, technology, and trade. Institutions like the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) are already laying the groundwork for this leadership by developing innovative, flexible learning models. For instance, the CUHK Business School's Asia-Pacific Institute of Business (APIB) has launched a series of Professional Certificate Programmes (Micro-credentials) that are listed at Level 6 of the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF). These programmes, covering trending areas like Innovation Leadership, Fintech, and ESG Reporting, are not only designed for local upskilling but serve as a replicable template for other systems. They demonstrate how to create modular, industry-relevant curricula that offer clear pathways for credit transfer to master's degrees, providing a sophisticated model for quality-assured, stackable learning that can be adapted and exported to other jurisdictions looking to modernize their continuing education infrastructure.

A cornerstone of Hong Kong's knowledge export strategy is the formalized, government-supported framework for capacity building. The establishment of initiatives like the "Intellectual Property Academy" through a collaboration between the Intellectual Property Department and the Vocational Training Council, backed by a significant government allocation, exemplifies how Hong Kong can develop specialized training infrastructure for in-demand sectors. This model of creating professional academies tied to the Qualifications Framework can be packaged and offered as a consultancy service to other cities and nations. Furthermore, the University of Hong Kong's School of Professional and Continuing Education (HKU SPACE) provides a compelling case study in successful knowledge export through its LEAD Academy (Academy for Leadership Enhancement and Development). Since its establishment, LEAD has delivered high-quality, tailor-made training programmes to senior executives and government officials, notably from the Chinese Mainland. These programmes, which included thematic seminars and study tours for Shenzhen government officials on topics such as finance, law, and urban management, represent a direct form of capacity building for another system, sharing Hong Kong's expertise in governance, financial regulation, and urban development.

Hong Kong's unique positioning allows it to offer consulting services that help other systems navigate complex global trends while respecting local contexts. The city's higher education institutions are actively cultivating a global perspective that integrates insights from both the East and the West. For example, City University of Hong Kong's Business Innovation Education (BIE) initiative explicitly aims to be the premier hub in Asia for executive education, leveraging its location and deep industry engagement to develop leaders who can navigate across boundaries and cultures. This expertise in creating cross-cultural leadership programs is a highly valuable export. The recent Global University Presidents and Leaders Summit in Hong Kong, which brought together leaders from over 20 countries and regions, underscores the city's role as a convener and thought leader in higher education. By fostering these international dialogues and promoting joint programmes, Hong Kong is not just exporting its educational products but is actively shaping the future of global higher education collaboration, with its leaders emphasizing the importance of respecting differences while working together. This consultative approach, built on mutual respect and the sharing of proven models, positions Hong Kong as an indispensable partner for any system seeking to enhance its capacity for lifelong learning and professional development.

29.5 Legacy and next horizon planning

Hong Kong stands at a pivotal moment in its development as a global hub for continuous education, building upon a rich legacy of adaptability while charting a strategic course toward future leadership. This blueprint outlines the pathway from its historical foundations to its next horizon of innovation and global influence.

The Legacy Foundation: Adaptability and Economic Integration

Hong Kong's emergence as a leader in continuous education is deeply rooted in its historical response to rapid economic transformation. As early as the 1990s, Hong Kong demonstrated an extraordinary capacity for workforce adaptation, with approximately 900,000 adult students annually enrolling in continuing education programmes, generating nearly HK\$2.5 billion in tuition fees. This robust ecosystem evolved primarily through market-driven forces, with the University Grants Committee historically maintaining limited involvement in funding and planning, allowing continuing professional education to remain responsive to immediate economic needs. The CHL Report commissioned during this period identified a critical truth about Hong Kong's economy: as a small open economy competing internationally, its workforce required exceptional flexibility to upgrade services and shift between production sectors, resulting in a naturally high rate of skill obsolescence and labour turnover. This economic reality, coupled with Hong Kong's phase of rapid restructuring—where manufacturing shed 282,000 jobs while the service sector gained 681,000 in just over a decade—created an enormous demand for retraining that the continuing education sector remarkably well accommodated. The private market functioned so effectively that government intervention remained minimal until 1992, and even then focused only on lower-skill displaced workers.

Strategic Repositioning: The Greater Bay Area Integration

The contemporary strategic blueprint for Hong Kong's continuous education leadership hinges significantly on deeper integration with the Greater Bay Area (GBA). HKU SPACE has explicitly identified "Contributing to Human Capital Development in the GBA" as a cornerstone of its 2025-2030 Strategic Plan, recognising that elevating the quality and competitiveness of human resources throughout the region will catalyse economic growth and integration. The establishment of the Mainland Affairs Office in August 2024 and the formalisation of partnership agreements with institutions such as Northwestern Polytechnical University demonstrate concrete steps toward cross-border educational synergy. Particularly strategic is the opening of the Sheung Shui learning centre, positioned adjacent to the MTR station and merely twenty minutes from Lo Wu and Lok Ma Chau, embodying the philosophy of "bringing classes to the students" and creating unprecedented convenience for Mainland participants.

This physical infrastructure, combined with innovative "Cloud Classroom + Practice Base" training models, positions Hong Kong as the gateway for Mainland students seeking coherent pathways for further studies and robust talent development for national initiatives like the Belt and Road. The Academy for Leadership Enhancement and Development (LEAD) at HKU SPACE further exemplifies this strategic repositioning, having successfully delivered programmes to senior executives and government officials from the Chinese Mainland, including seminars for Shenzhen government officials that marked the first outbound programme after border clearance, covering critical areas such as artificial intelligence, financial technology, and innovation management.

Next Horizon: Micro-Credentials and Flexible Learning Pathways

The next horizon for Hong Kong's continuous education leadership embraces micro-credentials as a transformative force in professional development. The Asia-Pacific Institute of Business at CUHK Business School has pioneered this approach with its premier series of Professional Certificate Programmes, offering micro-credentials that feature practical approaches, shorter duration, and more affordable tuition fees compared to traditional degrees. These programmes cover trending business domains including Innovation Leadership, Technology Applications for Financial Services, Sustainability and ESG Reporting, Family Business and Wealth Succession, and Artificial Intelligence for Business—areas specifically selected to address contemporary industry demands. The strategic genius of this approach lies in the seamless credit transfer mechanism, where micro-credential courses listed at Level 6 of the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework allow graduates to apply for course and unit exemptions upon successful enrolment in master's degree programmes. This creates flexible learning pathways enabling professionals to achieve results in compressed timeframes, with modular options completable within six to thirty-six months entirely at the student's own pace. Such innovation positions Hong Kong at the forefront of the global trend toward bite-sized, stackable credentials that accommodate the reality of working professionals who cannot abandon careers for traditional multi-year programmes.

Institutional Evolution: From Continuing Education to Applied Universities

Hong Kong's strategic blueprint envisions fundamental institutional transformation through the establishment of Universities of Applied Sciences (UASs), representing a paradigm shift in how vocational and professional education is valued and delivered. The Government has committed to working with the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications to prescribe standards for UAS qualification, thereby raising the status of vocational and professional education and training to attain qualifications at university degree level. This initiative provides an alternative path to success for young people aspiring to careers in technical professions, addressing the long-standing bifurcation between academic and vocational pathways.

Concurrently, legislative developments such as the 2025專上學院修訂條例草案 mandate that institutions like HKBU's School of Continuing Education register as recognised post-secondary colleges by mid-2028, transforming into self-financing independent entities while remaining wholly owned by their parent universities. This institutional evolution enables greater focus on applied curricula and vocational training, with SCE already pioneering programmes in data science, arts technology design, and nursing education incorporating traditional Chinese medicine elements—innovations that respond precisely to societal and industry needs.

Demographic Responsiveness: Serving an Aging Population

A distinctive element of Hong Kong's strategic horizon planning involves responsive adaptation to demographic trends, particularly population aging. CUHK's strategic plan explicitly acknowledges the need to redefine the role of continuing and professional studies to serve the needs of the ageing population and second career trends. The University's School of Continuing and Professional Studies strategies include experiencing changes and challenges by keeping abreast of trends and meeting the needs of adult learners of today and tomorrow, especially the ageing population. This forward-looking orientation recognises that continuous education must extend beyond traditional career-focused provision to encompass enrichment, cultural engagement, and second-act careers. Historical evidence suggests that in affluent societies, continuing liberal education increasingly gains importance, with non-vocational distance learning courses expanding across Europe. Hong Kong's institutions are responding to this demographic reality by diversifying programme offerings that cater to older learners seeking personal development, cultural engagement, and continued social contribution—recognising that the half-life of knowledge continues shortening, necessitating continual updating and reinvestment even beyond traditional retirement ages.

Skills-Based Transformation: The ERB Reform Agenda

The Employee Retraining Board's comprehensive reform agenda represents a critical pillar of Hong Kong's next horizon planning for continuous education. Responding to the 2024 Policy Address mandate, ERB has implemented sweeping changes including removing the previous educational ceiling for participants, expanding skills-upgrading courses, and strengthening career planning services. The three-year reform roadmap emphasises strengthening industry consultation mechanisms to identify critical skill gaps, developing a "skills-based" training framework, collaborating with higher education institutions to develop courses across various levels corresponding to identified skill deficiencies, and providing specialised retraining support for industries experiencing higher unemployment rates. Particularly innovative is the planned introduction of industry-recognised micro-certificate courses enabling flexible elective study, combined with technology-enhanced多元灵活的学习模式. This systematic approach to identifying skill gaps and developing targeted interventions, backed by potential legislative amendments to the Employee Retraining Ordinance, positions Hong Kong to maintain workforce competitiveness amid rapid technological change and economic structural transformation.

Global Positioning: Internationalisation and Research Integration

Hong Kong's aspiration for global leadership in continuous education rests substantially on its internationalisation strategy and research integration. The Government has committed to doubling the admission quota of non-local students at government-funded post-secondary institutions to 40 percent from the 2024/25 academic year, alongside injecting HK\$1 billion into the Government Scholarship Fund to attract outstanding local and non-local students. These measures, combined with approximately 13,500 additional hostel places by 2027 and the development of the Northern Metropolis University Town, create infrastructure for significantly expanded international participation. At the institutional level, HKBU's School of Continuing Education has established a Research Office focusing on three strategic directions: Environment and Health, Education and Pedagogy, and Data Analytics and Artificial Intelligence, successfully securing Research Grants Council funding to establish interdisciplinary research centres. These centres organise international conferences, seminars, and workshops, systematically promoting cross-disciplinary collaboration and knowledge exchange while exploring artificial intelligence's impact on learning behaviour and interpersonal interaction. Such research integration elevates continuous education beyond mere skills transmission to knowledge creation, positioning Hong Kong as a thought leader in understanding how adults learn and how educational systems must evolve.

In conclusion, Hong Kong's pathway to global leadership in continuous education rests upon a strategic blueprint that honours its legacy of market responsiveness and economic integration while boldly embracing next horizon innovations in micro-credentials, applied university models, demographic responsiveness, skills-based training, and research-integrated internationalisation. The institutions that have historically equipped hundreds of thousands of adult workers with higher-level skills through a remarkably effective private market are now transforming into strategically positioned entities capable of serving not only Hong Kong's workforce but also contributing to regional human capital development and global educational innovation. The next decade will determine whether this strategic blueprint translates into realised leadership, but the foundations—rooted in adaptability, innovation, and strategic foresight—are firmly established.

PART 10: MONITORING, EVALUATION, AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

CHAPTER 30: MEASURING SUCCESS

Measuring the success of Hong Kong's strategic blueprint to become a global leader in continuous education requires a multi-dimensional framework that goes beyond traditional enrolment figures to assess impact on learners, the economy, and society at large. A primary indicator of success will be the tangible enhancement of learner satisfaction and the quality of the educational experience. Institutions are already demonstrating leadership in this area, with benchmarks showing that high-quality provision is not only achievable but can surpass global standards. For instance, the College of Professional and Continuing Education (CPCE) reported that its local student overall satisfaction reached 92.2% in 2024, a historic high that exceeded both the international benchmark of 88.9% and the Asian benchmark of 88.3%. This data, drawn from independent surveys, provides a powerful model for success, demonstrating excellence in specific areas such as "expert lecturers," "learning technology," and "academic support". A truly successful blueprint would see such high levels of learner satisfaction become the norm across Hong Kong's continuing education sector, validating the effectiveness of innovative pedagogies and supportive learning environments championed by institutions like CUHK's School of Continuing and Professional Studies (SCS).

Beyond immediate satisfaction, the ultimate measure of success lies in the sector's ability to directly contribute to Hong Kong's economic vitality and workforce resilience. This means moving beyond academic metrics to assess the impact of "skills-based" training on employability and industry alignment. The Government's recent initiative to revitalize the Employees Retraining Board (ERB) provides a clear strategic direction for this, with success to be gauged by its effectiveness in identifying skills gaps and delivering training that meets the evolving needs of the economy. A key performance indicator will be the successful implementation of the ERB's three-year roadmap, which includes establishing a robust industry consultation mechanism to pinpoint skills shortages and developing a comprehensive skills-based training framework. Success here would be reflected in high placement rates and positive career progression for learners in sectors targeted for growth, such as those supporting Hong Kong's "eight major centers" of development. This requires a paradigm shift where curricula are dynamically co-created with industries to ensure they are directly relevant to the workplace, a goal echoed by both institutional strategies and labor groups.

The effectiveness of policy reforms and the creation of flexible, inclusive learning pathways will also serve as critical success metrics. The government's commitment to revising the Employees Retraining Ordinance to underpin a universal, skills-based training system is a foundational step. Success will be measured by the seamless implementation of this new framework, including the removal of academic barriers to participation and the widespread adoption of innovative models like micro-credential courses. These micro-credentials, designed to be stackable and industry-recognized, represent a move towards a more agile and personalized lifelong learning ecosystem. The ability of the system to cater to diverse demographics—from young adults and working professionals to an ageing population seeking second careers—as envisioned by leading continuing education institutions, will be a true testament to its success. This involves not only offering courses but also integrating robust career planning and guidance services to help learners navigate their professional journeys.

Finally, Hong Kong's ascent to a global leadership position in this field hinges on its success in fostering deep, impactful collaborations and enhancing its international standing. Metrics here include the expansion of partnerships between local institutions, overseas universities, and professional bodies, as well as the development of joint and dual-degree programmes that offer students global exposure. Success would be evident in Hong Kong's ability to attract international students and faculty, positioning itself as a renowned "brand" for higher and continuing education, a key objective of the recent Policy Address supported by the Education Commission. This also involves examining new models of collaboration, such as those envisioned for the "Northern Metropolis University Town," to create a vibrant hub for educational exchange and innovation. Ultimately, by effectively implementing strategic enrolment management that balances institutional goals with high-quality learning experiences, Hong Kong's continuing education sector can demonstrate its capacity not just to serve local needs, but to operate as a world-class model for others to follow.

30.1 Key Performance Indicators: Participation rates by demographic

Hong Kong's aspiration to become a global leader in continuous education is both a strategic imperative and a significant challenge. While the government has made strides in funding and expanding opportunities, the territory's participation rates remain a critical Key Performance Indicator (KPI) that reveals a complex landscape of demographic disparities and systemic obstacles. A strategic blueprint for global leadership must therefore begin with a granular understanding of "who" is learning and "why" the overall numbers lag behind international competitors.

The most pressing KPI is Hong Kong's persistently low baseline participation rate. Official data and studies have consistently shown a participation rate hovering around the 20% mark, a figure that is substantially lower than the 49% recorded in Singapore and far behind rates exceeding 50% in Western nations like the United States and Canada. This "weak continuing education culture," as described in a legislative council question, is not for lack of funding alone. While the government has incrementally increased the Continuing Education Fund (CEF) subsidy ceiling from \$10,000 to \$25,000 per person, leading to a 150% surge in recipients from 23,000 in 2019-20 to 58,000 in 2021-22, the overall proportion of the adult population engaging in learning remains stagnant. This suggests that financial incentives, while necessary, are insufficient on their own to shift deep-seated cultural and structural barriers.

A demographic breakdown of participation reveals distinct challenges and opportunities for different age cohorts. The participation rate among young people, particularly those aged 18 to 34, has shown a troubling decline, dropping from 58.0% in 2009 to 39.1% in 2013. For this group, the primary obstacles are often financial, despite the CEF, and the difficulty of juggling work, study, and family commitments. In contrast, older demographics are showing signs of increased engagement. Data from the CEF shows that the number of recipients aged 50-59 rose significantly from 2,364 in 2017-18 to 8,575 in 2021-22, and those aged 60-70 saw an even more dramatic increase from 557 to 4,073 over the same period. This indicates a strong and growing appetite for learning among older adults, likely driven by the need to extend working lives and adapt to new economic demands. However, the needs of the "second category" of learners—those seeking basic vocational skills for employability, as opposed to high-level professional knowledge—are not always adequately met by a system that has historically been more focused on formal qualifications.

A strategic blueprint to elevate these KPIs must therefore be multi-pronged, addressing the specific frictions faced by each demographic. For younger workers, the solution lies in flexibility and direct employer engagement. The government should aggressively expand the CEF to include fully online and Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC), a step already advocated by educational experts and think tanks to remove scheduling barriers for those in shift work or with unstable hours. To date, the CEF has been slow to accredit such courses, citing quality assurance concerns, which limits options for the digitally native younger generation.

Concurrently, a blueprint for global leadership must adopt the successful elements of Singapore's "SkillsFuture" programme. This includes not only providing individuals with top-up credits but, more importantly, offering employers substantial subsidies (covering 50-95% of course fees) and "absentee payroll" funding to cover the cost of an employee's time away from work. Currently, Hong Kong relies on a less direct tax deduction model, which has not proven sufficient to create a strong corporate training culture. By creating a direct economic incentive for companies to invest in their staff, Hong Kong can transform workplaces into active learning environments, thereby boosting participation rates across all age groups and directly linking skills development to industry needs. Ultimately, moving from a 20% to a 50% participation rate requires a paradigm shift from viewing continuing education as an individual pursuit, subsidised by the state, to a shared responsibility between individuals, employers, and the government, with KPIs that reflect the health of this entire ecosystem.

30.2 Economic impact metrics: GDP contribution, productivity gains

Hong Kong stands at a critical juncture where its aspiration to become a global leader in continuous education aligns perfectly with the economic imperative to future-proof its workforce. The following analysis presents a strategic blueprint for this transformation, grounded in the territory's unique strengths and historical context, while detailing the substantial economic impact such a leadership position would entail.

The Economic Imperative: From Survival to Leadership in Continuous Education

Hong Kong's journey towards becoming a global leader in continuous professional education (CPE) is not merely an ambitious policy goal but an economic necessity rooted in the territory's rapid restructuring over recent decades. The half-life of knowledge and skills is shortening dramatically, and as a small open economy competing internationally for trade and investments, Hong Kong's labour force must demonstrate exceptional flexibility in upgrading services and shifting between economic sectors. This flexibility has historically been a hallmark of Hong Kong's success, with the private market for continuing education functioning so effectively that government intervention remained minimal until 1992, and even then only targeted displaced manufacturing workers at the lower skill end. The economic transformation has been breathtaking in its speed—since China opened to production investment in 1978, manufacturing employment has shed hundreds of thousands of jobs while the service sector has absorbed even more, fundamentally reshaping the occupational landscape. This context of constant economic flux creates the foundational rationale for positioning Hong Kong as a global CPE leader: the territory has already demonstrated its capacity for workforce adaptation, and now requires a strategic framework to systematise and export this capability.

The economic impact metrics of a globally competitive continuous education sector are substantial and multifaceted. Currently, Hong Kong's education services contribute only approximately 1.3% to local GDP, a figure that pales in comparison to established education hubs such as the United Kingdom at 6.0%, the United States at 5.2%, and Australia at 4.7%. This gap represents not merely a statistical discrepancy but a significant economic opportunity. Transforming Hong Kong into a global CPE leader could realistically target a doubling or tripling of education's GDP contribution over the medium term, aligning more closely with international benchmarks. Beyond direct contribution to GDP, the productivity gains from a highly skilled, continuously updated workforce are equally compelling. The historical evidence from Hong Kong's own experience demonstrates that CPE serves three primary functions in descending order of effectiveness: facilitating career change, enabling job change, and improving performance in current roles. Each of these functions directly translates into productivity enhancements.

When workers successfully transition to new careers through CPE, they fill critical skill gaps in growing industries. When they change jobs within their sector, they bring updated knowledge that diffuses best practices across firms. And when they improve performance in existing positions, they generate immediate returns on the educational investment. The challenge of talent mismatch—where skills learned in traditional education no longer align with employer needs—has been identified as a more significant problem than unemployment itself in Hong Kong. A globally competitive CPE ecosystem directly addresses this mismatch, generating productivity gains that compound across the entire economy.

Strategic Pillars for Global Leadership and Their Economic Multipliers

The pathway to global leadership in continuous education rests upon several strategic pillars, each designed to maximise economic impact while building international reputation and capability. The first pillar involves modernising and expanding the vocational training and lifelong learning infrastructure to meet the demands of emerging industries. Hong Kong's vocational training system, traditionally focused on manufacturing and construction, must evolve to address high-growth sectors including artificial intelligence, renewable energy, and healthcare. The economic rationale is compelling: over 60% of local companies have identified data analytics as a critical skill gap in their workforce, representing a direct productivity constraint that CPE can address. Strategic curriculum updates that integrate AI, data science, and sustainability practices into vocational programmes would not only serve local needs but position Hong Kong as a regional hub for specialised technical training. The green economy alone offers significant opportunities, with fields like renewable energy installation, energy-efficient construction, and waste management requiring new certification and training infrastructures. By developing these capabilities, Hong Kong can attract international students seeking cutting-edge technical education, generating export earnings while simultaneously building the skilled workforce needed for its own economic transformation.

The second strategic pillar centres on the development of flexible, modular learning pathways that integrate with formal qualifications and respond dynamically to market signals. The introduction of micro-credential programmes by institutions such as CUHK Business School exemplifies this approach, offering professionals the ability to acquire specific, industry-relevant skills in areas including Innovation Leadership, Technology Applications for Financial Services, Sustainability and ESG Reporting, and Artificial Intelligence for Business. These programmes, which can be completed in six to thirty-six months at the student's own pace, include the innovative feature of credit articulation into full master's degrees, creating seamless pathways between continuous and formal education. The economic impact of such flexibility is substantial: it lowers barriers to upskilling for working professionals, accelerates the diffusion of new capabilities into the workforce, and creates a model that can be exported to other Asian economies facing similar skill transformation challenges. The Hong Kong government's Continuing Education Fund, which provides subsidies of up to \$25,000 per eligible applicant across over 4,650 registered courses, already demonstrates the public sector's commitment to this vision. Scaling this infrastructure to serve international learners would transform a domestic support mechanism into an export platform, generating significant economic returns.

The third pillar involves deepening partnerships between educational institutions and employers to ensure that CPE provision directly addresses productivity constraints. Work-based learning models, including internships, cooperative education programmes, and modern apprenticeships, have proven particularly effective in bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application. In Hong Kong, 78% of employers offering internship programmes consider them effective in identifying future talent and addressing skills gaps. Expanding these models to serve international learners would create a distinctive value proposition: students could combine classroom instruction with hands-on experience in one of Asia's premier business and financial centres, gaining both credentials and practical exposure. The economic multiplier effects extend beyond tuition fees to include accommodation, living expenses, and the broader consumption patterns of international students, which globally generate substantial economic activity estimated at nearly US\$2 trillion annually. By 2030, international student expenditure is projected to reach US\$4.33 trillion, representing a massive opportunity for territories that successfully position themselves as CPE destinations.

The fourth strategic pillar addresses the pressing need to future-proof the workforce against technological disruption while building institutional capacity for continuous adaptation. The rapid advances in artificial intelligence and automation threaten to widen the gap between education and employment, as university curricula requiring years to develop may become outdated by the time students graduate. A globally leading CPE system must therefore incorporate digital delivery mechanisms that enable rapid updating of content and flexible access for learners across different career stages and geographical locations. The Hong Kong Baptist University's research initiative examining digital resources for continuing education and training across Asian tiger economies represents exactly the kind of comparative analysis needed to identify best practices and adapt them for local implementation. This research focus on digitally mediated programmes and their effectiveness in achieving reskilling, upskilling, and lifelong learning outcomes positions Hong Kong to lead in understanding how technology can scale and enhance CPE delivery. The economic impact of such digital transformation includes reduced delivery costs, expanded reach to international markets, and the development of educational technology intellectual property that can itself become an export product.

Measuring Success: GDP Contribution, Productivity Gains, and International Benchmarking

The economic impact of Hong Kong's emergence as a global CPE leader must be measured through multiple complementary metrics that capture both direct contributions and systemic effects. Direct GDP contribution from education services currently stands at 1.3%, significantly below the 4-6% range achieved by leading education exporters. Achieving a target of 3-4% within a decade would represent a doubling or tripling of this sector's economic weight, generating billions in additional economic activity and employment. This growth would derive from three primary sources: increased international student enrolment in CPE programmes, expanded export of online and blended learning products to regional markets, and the development of ancillary services including accommodation, student support, and educational technology. The experience of Australia, which has maintained education as a leading export sector for decades, demonstrates that sustained policy commitment and quality assurance can generate reliable long-term economic returns.

Productivity gains represent the second critical metric, though they are inherently more difficult to measure than direct GDP contributions. The historical evidence from Hong Kong's own experience demonstrates that CPE participants achieve significant career and job changes that reallocate labour to more productive uses. When half of CPE students who change jobs also change careers entirely, moving into different occupations with new employers, the productivity implications are substantial. These transitions help address the talent mismatch that constrains economic growth, ensuring that human capital flows to sectors where it generates the highest returns. Future measurement frameworks should track wage premia associated with CPE completion, rates of career transition into high-growth sectors, and employer assessments of productivity improvements following employee participation in certified programmes. The Qualifications Framework, which already provides a structured approach to recognising different levels of skill and knowledge, offers a foundation for tracking these outcomes systematically.

International benchmarking against competitor territories provides the third essential metric. Hong Kong currently holds a 0.7% share of the global international student market, significantly below its potential given its concentration of world-class universities and its position as an international business hub. Achieving a 2-3% market share over the next decade would represent substantial progress and generate proportionate economic returns. More importantly, benchmarking must extend beyond simple market share to include indicators of quality, innovation, and employer recognition of Hong Kong CPE credentials. The experience of Singapore, which has systematically developed its continuing education and training infrastructure as part of its response to the fourth industrial revolution, offers relevant lessons for policy design and implementation. Similarly, South Korea's investments in digital learning infrastructure and Taiwan's approach to integrating continuing education with industrial policy provide comparative insights that can inform Hong Kong's strategic positioning.

In conclusion, Hong Kong's pathway to global leadership in continuous education is both achievable and economically imperative. The territory already possesses foundational strengths: a historically responsive CPE market, world-class higher education institutions, government support mechanisms including the Continuing Education Fund, and demonstrated capacity for economic adaptation. Building upon these foundations through strategic investments in curriculum modernisation, flexible learning pathways, employer partnerships, and digital delivery capabilities would generate substantial economic returns. The doubling of education's GDP contribution from 1.3% towards international benchmarks of 4-6% would create thousands of jobs and billions in economic activity. The productivity gains from a more adaptable, continuously updated workforce would compound these direct effects, enhancing Hong Kong's competitiveness across all sectors. As the global economy becomes increasingly volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous, territories that master the art of continuous workforce development will enjoy sustained competitive advantages. Hong Kong, with its unique combination of international connectivity, institutional quality, and historical adaptability, is well-positioned to become not merely a participant in this transformation but a global leader defining its future direction.

30.3 Social impact metrics: Social mobility, income equality

Hong Kong stands at a pivotal moment where it can leverage its robust yet evolving continuing education sector to address deep-seated social challenges, transforming it into a strategic tool for enhancing social mobility. The pathway to global leadership in this field is intrinsically linked to its ability to democratize opportunity, moving beyond the traditional "university degree 光环" that has long dominated the local psyche. Historically, continuing and professional education (CPE) in Hong Kong has proven remarkably effective as an agent for career change, with studies showing that half of the students who changed jobs after a course also changed their occupation entirely. This demonstrates CPE's potent ability to reroute life trajectories. A strategic blueprint must build on this foundation by intentionally targeting under-represented groups. Current data reveals a significant disparity: participation in award-bearing CPE courses is heavily skewed towards the young (59.4% aged 21-29), the single (69.3%), and those already in professional or managerial roles. To truly enhance social mobility, the next generation of CPE must actively dismantle barriers for older workers, married individuals with family commitments, and those in lower-skilled occupations who are currently under-represented. This involves designing flexible, stackable micro-credentials that allow individuals to build qualifications incrementally, coupled with robust mentorship programs that guide learners from disadvantaged backgrounds—including new immigrants and ethnic minorities—through the educational landscape, thereby converting their optimism about education's value into tangible career advancement. The ultimate measure of success will be a discernible shift in mobility patterns, where CPE becomes a primary, accessible engine for individuals to transcend their socioeconomic starting points.

Concurrently, a globally leading continuing education system in Hong Kong must act as a powerful leveler of income inequality, a role it has only partially fulfilled. Public perception already aligns with this goal, as a significant majority of citizens view continuing education and the acquisition of professional qualifications as key drivers for upward mobility. The strategic imperative is to ensure that the economic returns from CPE are not just substantial, but equitably distributed. Evidence suggests that while CPE participation yields earnings premiums, these benefits are most pronounced when an individual's training aligns directly with their field of employment. Therefore, a key strategy for income equality is to strengthen the pathways that connect CPE directly to high-growth, high-value sectors of the economy. Currently, the financial and business services sector is over-represented among CPE students, while employees in manufacturing, construction, and sales are markedly under-represented. To counteract this, a strategic blueprint should incentivize CPE in emerging fields with high wealth-generating potential, such as technology, green energy, and advanced healthcare, making them accessible to workers from all industries. Furthermore, the blueprint must address the "mismatch of talents" by fostering deeper collaboration between CPE providers and employers to co-create curricula that directly respond to market needs, ensuring that upskilling translates into immediate income gains. By tracking and actively working to narrow the income gap between CPE participants from different socioeconomic backgrounds, Hong Kong can set a global standard for how lifelong learning serves as a direct countermeasure to systemic economic disparity, building a more resilient and inclusive workforce.

30.4 International benchmarks: Comparative rankings and attractiveness

Hong Kong's ambition to become a global leader in continuous education is increasingly supported by a robust strategic framework and validated by impressive international benchmarks. The city's pathway is defined by a comprehensive blueprint that leverages its unique advantages while addressing systemic challenges to enhance its global attractiveness as a premier education hub.

International Benchmarks: Comparative Rankings and Attractiveness

Hong Kong's higher education and talent development systems have achieved remarkable recognition in recent international benchmarks, underscoring the city's growing attractiveness as a global education destination. In the Times Higher Education (THE) World University Rankings 2026, Hong Kong made history as the "only city in the world with five universities ranked among the global top 100," with the University of Hong Kong climbing to 33rd, the Chinese University of Hong Kong to 41st, and the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology jumping eight places to 58th. This concentration of world-class institutions provides a strong foundation for continuous education and advanced study. Furthermore, the city's education system was ranked second globally in education competitiveness according to the International Institute for Management Development's World Competitiveness Yearbook 2025, demonstrating the system's overall strength and appeal.

In terms of talent attractiveness and development, Hong Kong achieved its highest-ever position in the IMD World Talent Ranking 2025, leaping to fourth place globally and first in Asia. This significant climb—from ninth place the previous year—reflects improvements across all three competitiveness factors: "appeal," "readiness," and "investment and development". The report highlighted Hong Kong's strengths in the percentage of graduates in science, the availability of finance skills, and the effectiveness of management education. Additionally, the city is becoming increasingly attractive to foreign highly skilled talent, with executives reporting greater availability of skilled labor. The Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE) has also gained international recognition, accepted by over 600 overseas post-secondary institutions, further enhancing the city's educational credentials and global connectivity.

Strategic Blueprint for Global Leadership

Policy Framework and Government Initiatives

The Hong Kong SAR Government has developed a comprehensive strategic blueprint to position the city as an international post-secondary education hub, with continuous education as a central pillar. Central to this vision is the "Study in Hong Kong" brand, launched with dedicated task forces and promotional campaigns to attract global talent. Key policy measures include progressively raising admission quotas for non-local students—from 20% to 40% for UGC-funded universities in 2024/25, and further increasing the ceiling for self-financing non-local students to 50% by 2026/27. The government has also enhanced scholarship schemes and established the cross-departmental Task Force on Study in Hong Kong to promote the city's higher education resources internationally. These initiatives are designed to create a more diverse and internationalized learning environment, essential for nurturing global leaders in continuous education.

Digital Transformation and Curriculum Innovation

A critical component of Hong Kong's strategic blueprint is the embrace of digital transformation to modernize education delivery and content. The government has established a Digital Education Strategy Development Steering Committee and plans to release a Digital Education Development Blueprint for Primary and Secondary Schools, integrating artificial intelligence (AI) literacy into core curricula and reserving HK\$2 billion for AI-related initiatives. This aligns with broader proposals to modernize curricula by including coding, AI, robotics, and data science as core subjects, while shifting from traditional rote learning to inquiry-driven, project-based models that foster creativity and critical thinking. The adoption of interdisciplinary STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics) education further prepares students for complex global challenges by combining technical expertise with creative problem-solving approaches. Such innovations are essential for developing a workforce capable of thriving in a rapidly evolving global innovation economy.

Infrastructure Development and Regional Integration

Long-term infrastructure investment forms another key pillar of Hong Kong's strategy. The development of the Northern Metropolis University Town represents a transformative project that will provide additional land for institutions to expand capacity and enhance quality through self-financing models. This initiative aims to support cross-institutional, cross-disciplinary, and cross-border collaborations, enabling the development of innovative undergraduate, postgraduate, and professional programs. The university town is expected to strengthen linkages with the Greater Bay Area, fostering industry-university-research effects that attract research talent and promote regional integration. By creating physical infrastructure that supports educational innovation and collaboration, Hong Kong is building the foundation for sustained global leadership in continuous education.

Institutional Commitment to Lifelong Learning

Hong Kong's universities and continuing education institutions have articulated clear visions aligned with the city's strategic direction. For instance, the Chinese University of Hong Kong's strategic plan explicitly aims to nurture "global leaders with aspirations and competencies to make lifelong contributions to society," with strategies including redefining the role of its School of Continuing and Professional Studies to serve aging populations and second career trends. Similarly, CUHK's School of Continuing and Professional Studies envisions becoming "a global leader in university continuing education" by keeping pace with learners' needs and collaborating with industries for training and development. These institutional commitments ensure that continuous education is embedded within the broader higher education ecosystem, providing flexible pathways for young adults, working professionals, and aging learners to advance their learning, careers, and life goals.

Addressing Challenges and Enhancing Global Competitiveness

Despite these strengths, Hong Kong's strategic blueprint acknowledges challenges that must be addressed to achieve global leadership. These include high living costs, limited student accommodation, and visa procedures that may deter international students. The city also faces intense regional competition from Singapore and rapidly advancing mainland Chinese universities. To maintain its competitive edge, stakeholders recommend expanding affordable housing, revising tuition and scholarship schemes, and empowering universities with greater discretion over program design and international partnerships. Additionally, there is recognition of the need to diversify sources of non-local students beyond mainland China, with targeted promotion strategies focusing on ASEAN and Belt and Road countries. By addressing these structural and perceptual issues while capitalizing on its unique bilingual culture, international networks, and hybrid global-Chinese identity, Hong Kong can solidify its position as a trusted, open, and globally compatible environment for continuous education and research.

30.5 Employer satisfaction and skills gap closure rates

Hong Kong's pursuit of global leadership in continuous education is increasingly defined by data-driven outcomes, particularly in the critical areas of employer satisfaction and skills gap closure. Recent government surveys and strategic initiatives provide a robust blueprint for how the city is transforming its continuing and professional education (CPE) landscape to meet the demands of a rapidly evolving economy. This strategic direction is not only about expanding access but fundamentally about ensuring that learning translates directly into workplace competence and economic value.

Employer Satisfaction as a Benchmark of Quality

A cornerstone of Hong Kong's strategic blueprint is the explicit use of employer feedback as a key performance indicator for its education and training programs. The latest findings reveal exceptionally high levels of employer contentment, validating the effectiveness of current policies. The教育局's (Education Bureau) most comprehensive survey to date, covering over 1,500 companies and more than 1,300 graduates from the 2022 cohort, found that approximately 98% of employers were satisfied with the performance of local bachelor's degree graduates. This satisfaction is particularly pronounced in the realm of work attitude, information technology knowledge, and language abilities. Furthermore, the overall performance rating for these graduates was the highest ever recorded in the survey's history, indicating a positive trend in the alignment of university education with workplace expectations.

This culture of satisfaction extends deeply into the vocational and professional training sector. The Vocational Training Council's (VTC) "Work-and-Study Employer Assessment Scheme" provides a compelling model for how direct industry involvement can build trust and verify competence. A 2023 survey revealed that approximately 90% of employers and 80% of apprentices found the workplace-based assessments to be effective. Employers value the ability to directly observe a trainee's progress and adjust training in real-time, ensuring that the skills being developed are precisely those needed on the job. This hands-on approach, supported by government subsidies of up to \$36,000 per trainee for participating employers, fosters a strong sense of co-ownership in the training process and directly contributes to closing the skills gap at the point of entry into specific industries.

Closing the Skills Gap: From Economic Restructuring to Strategic Foresight

The strategic blueprint for closing Hong Kong's skills gap is rooted in a profound understanding of the city's economic history and a forward-looking approach to future challenges. As far back as the 1990s, analyses commissioned by the University Grants Committee recognized that Hong Kong's rapid transition from a manufacturing to a service-based economy would render skills obsolete almost overnight, creating an "enormous demand for retraining". The private and public CPE sectors have historically been remarkably effective in responding to this need, equipping hundreds of thousands of workers with new, higher-level skills to facilitate career changes and support the economy's structural shifts. This historical agility provides a strong foundation for current and future strategies.

Today, the focus has sharpened from merely responding to economic shifts to proactively anticipating and bridging emerging talent mismatches. Organizations like Generation Hong Kong are tackling the "education-to-employment gap" head-on, identifying that a university degree alone is no longer a guarantee of employability in a world where curricula can lag behind real-world changes, particularly with the rapid advancement of AI. Their model focuses on intensive, short-term boot camps that blend technical, behavioral, and mindset training, directly addressing the specific needs of employers. This approach not only fills immediate vacancies in fields like data engineering and digital marketing but also provides a pathway for marginalized groups, including youth with special educational needs, demonstrating an inclusive strategy for closing the skills gap.

A Future-Proofed Strategic Blueprint

The government's strategic blueprint, as outlined in recent Policy Addresses and implemented by bodies like the Employees Retraining Board (ERB), is now evolving to create a more integrated and flexible system for lifelong learning. A pivotal element is the decision to revamp the ERB to focus on "skills-based" training for the entire workforce, removing previous caps on educational attainment and expanding its mandate beyond displaced workers. This reform, welcomed by the ERB, is accompanied by a three-year roadmap to develop a training framework centered on "skill gaps" identified through enhanced industry consultation. The goal is to offer a flexible suite of micro-credentials and shorter courses that allow individuals to continuously upgrade their capabilities in response to industry transformation.

Furthermore, the blueprint extends beyond Hong Kong's borders, positioning the city as a regional talent hub. The establishment of the Northern Metropolis University Town and the proactive development of the Greater Bay Area (GBA) talent pool are key strategic thrusts. Institutions like HKU SPACE are already operationalizing this vision by opening learning centres in the New Territories, strategically located for easy access by Mainland learners, and forming partnerships with universities in the GBA to create integrated "Cloud Classroom + Practice Base" models. This cross-border collaboration not only expands Hong Kong's educational influence but also creates a larger, more dynamic ecosystem for closing skills gaps across the entire region, solidifying Hong Kong's pathway to global leadership in continuous education.

CHAPTER 31: DATA INFRASTRUCTURE AND RESEARCH

Building a Robust Digital Foundation for Credentials

The cornerstone of Hong Kong's ambition to become a global leader in continuous education is the development of a world-class data infrastructure that ensures the transparency, security, and portability of learning achievements. A pivotal initiative in this realm is the forthcoming Digital Qualifications Platform, spearheaded by the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ). Scheduled for full launch by 2027, this platform is designed to function as a secure, student-centric digital repository for academic and vocational credentials. Its core innovation lies in its empowerment of learners, who will be able to grant time-limited access to prospective employers or educational institutions for the purpose of instant credential verification. This system is being architected with robust data security measures, including tamper-proof data uploads from institutions and a strict policy preventing employers from downloading or modifying the information, thereby safeguarding personal privacy while effectively combating qualifications fraud. This digital infrastructure directly enhances Hong Kong's value proposition as a regional talent hub by simplifying and securing the process of credential recognition for both local and international stakeholders.

Complementing this learner-focused platform is the government's commitment to open data, which provides the raw material for high-level research and policy innovation. The Education Bureau (EDB) actively participates in the government's open data initiative by publishing annual Consolidated Open Data Plans. These plans detail datasets already available on the public data.gov.hk portal, as well as those slated for release over the following three years. This initiative includes both general educational data and spatial data, which are made accessible through the Common Spatial Data Repository (CSDI) portal. By proactively releasing this information and establishing formal channels for public feedback on data needs, the EDB is fostering an environment where researchers, ed-tech startups, and policymakers can analyse trends, model future scenarios, and develop evidence-based solutions to meet the evolving demands of the continuous education market.

Fostering a Dedicated and Collaborative Research Ecosystem

The strategic vision for Hong Kong's continuous education sector is undergirded by a growing and specialised academic research base. Institutions are increasingly formalising their commitment to this field by establishing dedicated research centres and defining strategic research areas. For example, the Li Ka Shing School of Professional and Continuing Education (LiPACE) at Hong Kong Metropolitan University explicitly lists "Adult and Continuing Education," "Lifelong Education," and "Technical Vocational Education and Training" as core strategic research areas, supported by faculty with deep expertise in these domains. This academic specialisation is crucial for generating localised knowledge that addresses the specific needs of Hong Kong's learners, workforce, and economy, rather than relying solely on imported models.

Research conducted within these centres, such as studies on learning cultures, the demand for continuing education, and quality assurance, provides the empirical evidence base required to refine curricula, pedagogical approaches, and support services. Furthermore, the research landscape is characterised by a "versatile learning ecosystem" that thrives on cross-sectoral collaboration. As conceptualised in recent academic analysis, Hong Kong's success in education is partly attributable to the synergistic dynamics between the government, educational institutions, and non-public sectors. This middle-out dimension of collaboration is vital for ensuring that research is not conducted in an ivory tower but is instead directly relevant to real-world challenges. For instance, university continuing education units like HKU SPACE's LEAD Academy and CUHK's School of Continuing and Professional Studies (SCS) actively collaborate with industries and government bodies to design programmes and study tours that address specific skill gaps, such as in artificial intelligence, financial technology, and sustainability. This constant interplay between academic research and practical industry application creates a virtuous cycle: research informs practice, and the evolving needs of practitioners and learners generate new, relevant research questions, solidifying Hong Kong's position as a thought leader in the field of global lifelong learning.

31.1 Longitudinal studies of learner outcomes

Hong Kong possesses a unique combination of strategic advantages—robust policy frameworks, world-class higher education institutions, and a rich vein of longitudinal research data—that position it to become a global leader in continuous education. Forging this path requires a deliberate, evidence-based blueprint that leverages these assets to create a cohesive and impactful lifelong learning ecosystem. The foundation of this strategic vision is already being laid by key institutions. For instance, The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) has articulated a clear vision to "nurture graduates who will be global leaders with aspirations and competencies to make lifelong contributions to society," a goal intrinsically linked to the role of its School of Continuing and Professional Studies in serving community needs and second-career trends. This institutional strategy is mirrored at the unit level, with CUHK's School of Continuing and Professional Sciences ambitiously aiming "to be a global leader in university continuing education" by enriching lives and transforming lifelong learning. These strategic directions provide the essential top-down commitment required for global leadership, but they must be informed by a deep, empirical understanding of learner journeys.

The most powerful tool for informing this strategic blueprint is the systematic application of longitudinal studies that track learner outcomes over time. Hong Kong's academic community is already producing world-class research in this area, providing actionable insights. For example, a significant three-year longitudinal study at The Hong Kong Polytechnic University assessed student development under a new general education program. The research demonstrated that students showed significant improvements in desired generic competences, including lifelong learning, after two years of university study, thereby validating the effectiveness of the curriculum in promoting personal development. This type of evidence is crucial for continuous quality enhancement, allowing educators to see not just if students are learning, but how they are growing as learners over an extended period.

Further refining this understanding, other longitudinal studies delve into the specific drivers and long-term impacts of educational interventions. Research on the Government's Continuing Education Fund (CEF) has revealed its powerful role as a catalyst for lifelong learning. A detailed study found that CEF recipients not only outperformed their peers academically in the short term but were also significantly more likely to pursue further education after the program ended, with the economic incentive identified as a key motivational factor. This finding provides a strong evidence-based argument for policies that expand financial support for adult learners. Similarly, longitudinal tracking of alumni from a mandatory service-learning program showed that the benefits extend well beyond graduation. Graduates who reported higher gains in civic learning during their studies were more likely to engage in charitable donations and volunteering years later, underscoring the enduring value of pedagogies that explicitly foster civic outcomes. Such studies demonstrate that the impact of continuous education is not merely transactional (skill acquisition) but transformational, fostering engaged citizens and self-motivated, perpetual learners.

To build on this strong foundation and achieve global leadership, Hong Kong's strategic blueprint must focus on creating a more integrated and data-informed continuous education sector. This involves three key actions. First, institutions must broaden the application of longitudinal methodologies beyond traditional undergraduate programs to track diverse adult learners—from young working adults to an ageing population—through their various educational experiences. Second, a centralized, anonymized data consortium should be established to aggregate findings from these disparate studies, allowing researchers and policymakers to identify macro-level trends and best practices across the entire ecosystem. Finally, the insights from studies like those on the CEF and service-learning must be directly channeled into curriculum design and funding models, ensuring that programs are not only meeting immediate market needs but are also intentionally structured to cultivate the intrinsic motivation and competencies for lifelong learning that define true global leaders. By closing the loop between research, policy, and practice, Hong Kong can transform its already robust continuous education landscape into a globally recognized model of excellence.

31.2 Labour market information systems integration

Hong Kong stands at a pivotal moment in its economic evolution, where the imperative to cultivate a future-ready workforce converges with its ambition to become a global leader in continuous education. Achieving this leadership requires a strategic blueprint that is both comprehensive and adaptive, with the integration of sophisticated labour market information systems (LMIS) serving as its cornerstone. This strategic approach moves beyond traditional education models to create a dynamic, responsive ecosystem that benefits individuals, employers, and the broader economy.

A Strategic Blueprint for Continuous Education Excellence

The foundation of Hong Kong's pathway to global leadership in continuous education rests upon a comprehensive, multi-stakeholder talent development strategy. This strategy must transcend piecemeal initiatives to establish long-term policy frameworks that align educational outcomes with the rapidly shifting demands of the global economy. A critical component of this framework is the fostering of deep, symbiotic collaborations between the government, educational institutions, and private sector enterprises. By creating sector-specific councils composed of industry leaders, the government can facilitate a continuous dialogue to assess emerging trends and workforce gaps, ensuring that training curricula remain relevant and 前瞻性. This collaborative ethos is already taking root, as seen in the push for greater academia-industry integration highlighted in recent policy addresses, which aim to transform Hong Kong's universities into direct pipelines for high-tech professionals by making commercial projects a critical part of degree programs. Furthermore, the blueprint must champion inclusivity, ensuring that reskilling and upskilling opportunities are accessible to diverse groups—including women, ethnic minorities, and older workers—thereby broadening the talent pool and contributing to more equitable economic growth. The ongoing development of the Northern Metropolis as an "academic gravity field" exemplifies this strategic vision, aiming to 集聚 global top-tier universities and research teams in fields like AI and green technology, thus creating a concentrated hub for innovation and talent development that serves both Hong Kong and the Greater Bay Area.

The Architecture of an Integrated Labour Market Information System

The operational core of this strategic blueprint is a robust, integrated labour market information system that functions as the central nervous system for data-driven decision-making. Hong Kong has already taken foundational steps with the launch of the talent.gov.hk portal, a one-stop platform that consolidates manpower information from diverse sources. To achieve global leadership, this system must evolve into a more dynamic and predictive tool. This involves moving beyond simply reporting current vacancies to integrating advanced labor market forecasting, using predictive analytics to identify emerging skill demands in real-time, such as the growth of green jobs or the need for specific digital competencies in fintech and AI. A centralized agency responsible for labor market analytics could be established to provide regular, data-rich updates to policymakers, educators, and the public, enabling proactive adjustments to education and training programs. The ultimate vision is an LMIS that not only identifies skill shortages but also maps clear pathways to address them, linking directly to training opportunities and career progression routes. The development of tools like an AI-powered university programme and occupation selection system, which analyzes millions of data points to provide personalized recommendations, hints at the future potential of such systems to guide individual career planning on a massive scale.

Forging a Dynamic and Responsive Continuous Education Ecosystem

With a powerful LMIS providing real-time intelligence, Hong Kong can forge a continuous education ecosystem that is both agile and deeply aligned with market needs. The system's data would directly inform the design of micro-credential and modular learning programs, allowing institutions to rapidly develop targeted upskilling courses in response to identified industry gaps. Pioneering examples like CUHK Business School's Professional Certificate Programmes, which offer flexible, industry-specific micro-credentials in areas like ESG and AI that can be stacked toward master's degrees, illustrate the potential of this approach. Furthermore, an integrated LMIS can empower innovative platforms that connect learning directly with employment. For instance, Hong Kong Shue Yen University's development of a cloud-based platform to consolidate internship and employment resources with student e-portfolios demonstrates how technology can bridge the gap between academic training and work-readiness, creating a seamless transition from education to career. This data-rich environment also fosters stronger university-industry collaborations in research and innovation, as companies can more easily identify academic partners with the precise expertise needed to solve complex business challenges, thereby strengthening Hong Kong's position as a global innovation hub.

Enhancing Transparency and Trust through Technological Innovation

To solidify its global leadership, Hong Kong's continuous education framework must also embrace cutting-edge technologies like blockchain to enhance the transparency, security, and portability of learner achievements. The future of a responsive LMIS includes the concept of a "digital talent passport," where an individual's skills, qualifications, and experiences are securely stored as verifiable credentials on a blockchain. This would revolutionize how individuals manage and present their lifelong learning portfolios. Applying for a job or further education would become a seamless process of sharing tamper-proof digital credentials, eliminating the administrative burden of verifying physical documents and significantly reducing the risk of fraud. Such a system, potentially linked with Hong Kong's "iAM Smart" digital identity platform, would empower individuals with true data sovereignty over their educational and professional profiles. This not only streamlines administrative processes for educational institutions and employers but also creates a highly transparent and trustworthy record of a person's capabilities, which is invaluable in a fast-paced, skills-based global economy. This technological layer, built upon a solid LMIS foundation, would be a hallmark of Hong Kong's sophisticated approach to talent development, setting a new global standard for continuous education.

31.3 Provider performance dashboards

Hong Kong stands at a pivotal moment in its quest to become a global leader in continuous education, a vision that is actively being shaped by a combination of government strategy and institutional foresight. The government's blueprint, articulated by Secretary for Education Christine Choi, is to build a "digital age international education hub" that not only consolidates Hong Kong's international academic influence but also deepens its digital education transformation. This strategic direction is a direct response to the demands of a rapidly evolving global economy driven by digital transformation and artificial intelligence, aiming to create a future-ready education system. The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) government is backing this ambition with significant policy measures, including raising the non-local student intake for public universities to 50% and investing in large-scale promotional campaigns like "Hong Kong: Your World-class Campus" to attract global talent. This comprehensive approach signifies a fundamental shift from simply producing graduates to strategically cultivating a market-ready talent pool capable of powering strategic sectors and securing the city's future as a world innovation leader. At the institutional level, this ambition is mirrored by organizations like the School of Continuing and Professional Studies at CUHK, which explicitly aspires to be a "global leader in university continuing education" by keeping pace with learners' needs and staying passionate about innovative leadership.

A critical spatial and strategic component of this blueprint is the development of the Northern Metropolis University Town. This ambitious project is envisioned not merely as an expansion of academic space, but as a catalyst for creating a dynamic "academic gravity field" that attracts world-class universities and research teams. By clustering top-tier institutions and focusing on cutting-edge fields like artificial intelligence, biomedicine, and green technology, the University Town aims to solve research bottlenecks that are difficult to address within a single-institution system. This initiative is designed to foster robust industry-academia collaboration, enhance collaboration with top-tier institutions in the Mainland and abroad, and drive breakthroughs in key technological areas, thereby helping the nation achieve strategic breakthroughs in sensitive technologies. The Northern Metropolis is positioned to become a "transfer station" and "value-adding base" for research talent, leveraging innovative visa policies and legal mechanisms to ensure deep integration of industry, academia, and research. This forward-looking infrastructure investment is a tangible demonstration of Hong Kong's commitment to scaling up its educational capacity and quality to meet future challenges.

To ensure accountability and drive continuous improvement in this rapidly evolving landscape, the implementation of provider performance dashboards will be essential. These dashboards would serve as transparent, data-driven tools to monitor the effectiveness of continuing education providers against the strategic goals set by the government and institutions. Key performance indicators could include graduate employment rates in high-demand sectors like technology and finance, student satisfaction scores, the successful implementation of digital learning tools, and the number of cross-border or industry-collaborative programs offered.

For instance, the government's significant investment in digital learning, including a HK\$20 billion allocation from the Quality Education Fund for AI-related initiatives, would require robust monitoring to ensure that these funds translate into tangible improvements in student proficiency and teacher confidence, as seen in pilot programs. By making such data publicly available, dashboards would not only empower learners to make informed choices but also foster a healthy, competitive environment among providers, compelling them to continuously innovate and align their curricula with the evolving needs of the job market and the strategic vision of Hong Kong as a global education hub. This focus on measurable outcomes would reinforce the city's commitment to educational excellence and its role in nurturing lifelong learners who can make lifelong contributions to society.

31.4 International comparisons and policy learning

Hong Kong stands at a pivotal juncture where its historical strengths in continuing education must be strategically reimagined to secure global leadership. The foundation is substantial—as early as the 1990s, Hong Kong had nearly a million adult learners annually, demonstrating a deeply embedded culture of lifelong learning. However, the territory now faces the imperative to evolve from a provider of disparate courses to an integrated, future-ready ecosystem. This transformation requires a dual focus: modernizing the content and delivery of learning while simultaneously professionalizing the educators who facilitate it. The recent introduction of mandatory teacher professional development through a renewed licensing framework, requiring 150 hours of training every three years starting in the 2028/29 school year, signals a crucial shift from a "once-for-all" certification model to one of continuous growth. This move aligns Hong Kong with leading jurisdictions like Singapore, the UK, and Japan, recognizing that teaching quality is the linchpin of any world-class education system. By embedding this requirement, Hong Kong ensures its workforce is guided by professionals who are themselves perpetual learners, capable of navigating the demands of an AI-driven economy.

International comparisons offer a rich repository of policy instruments that Hong Kong can adapt to build a robust and inclusive continuous education framework. A landmark 2025 UNESCO comparative study of six developed nations—Australia, Canada, France, Ireland, South Korea, and Singapore—highlights the efficacy of tying learning entitlements directly to individuals. These nations have successfully deployed mechanisms such as personal learning accounts, vouchers, subsidies, and tax credits, making training more transferable and equitable. For Hong Kong, which has historically relied on a mix of subsidized and self-financed courses, adopting a similar model could democratize access and empower individuals to curate their own learning journeys. Furthermore, the UNESCO report underscores the necessity of robust quality assurance, centralized online platforms for managing benefits, and targeted support like training allowances to ensure no learner is left behind. These findings provide a clear roadmap for Hong Kong to move beyond ad-hoc funding towards a strategic, learner-centric investment model that can effectively support career transitions and address skills gaps in real-time.

A critical component of Hong Kong's strategic blueprint must be the systematic integration of micro-credentials and the establishment of a comprehensive credit accumulation and transfer system. As the digital economy accelerates skills obsolescence, the flexibility of micro-credentials—short, focused certifications—has made them a global priority. Hong Kong can learn from the European Union's efforts to build a unified micro-credentials ecosystem, Australia's National Microcredentials Framework, and Malaysia's progressive policies that allow micro-credentials to count towards university degrees. Concurrently, Hong Kong must develop its capacity for recognizing a wider array of learning outcomes. South Korea's mature Academic Credit Bank System, which has served over two million learners and awarded degrees to 1.4 million, demonstrates the power of a formal system that values diverse learning experiences.

Similarly, Shanghai's experience with its lifelong education credit bank, holding over 100 million learning records, offers insights into managing such a system at scale. For Hong Kong to become a global leader, it must move beyond traditional degree silos and construct a flexible, digitally-enabled architecture where learning from diverse sources—be it university modules, industry training, or workplace experience—can be accumulated, validated, and stacked towards recognized qualifications. This not only enhances individual employability but also creates a dynamic, responsive talent pool for the economy.

Finally, Hong Kong's pathway to global leadership is inextricably linked to its unique positioning as an international hub within China. The government's strategic direction, as articulated in recent policy addresses, aims to leverage this advantage by actively building the "Study in Hong Kong" brand and developing the Northern Metropolis University Town. This provides a unique opportunity to create a living laboratory for continuous education innovation, fostering deep collaboration between universities, industries, and international partners. By benchmarking against global exemplars like Finland's phenomenon-based learning and Singapore's national AI strategy, Hong Kong can embed future-ready skills—such as coding, data science, and interdisciplinary problem-solving—into its continuous education offerings. Furthermore, drawing on the successful experience of Guangdong Province in building a "trinity" lifelong learning system based on a qualifications framework, a credit bank, and learning outcomes recognition, Hong Kong can deepen integration within the Greater Bay Area. This would facilitate cross-border talent flow and create a massive, integrated market for continuous education. By harmonizing its frameworks with national strategies while maintaining its international standards and connectivity, Hong Kong can forge a distinctive path: a global leader in continuous education that is both deeply rooted in its regional context and influential on the world stage.

31.5 Annual State of Continuous Education in Hong Kong report

Executive Summary

The 2025-2026 period marks a watershed moment for continuous education in Hong Kong, characterised by a comprehensive overhaul of regulatory frameworks, a strategic pivot towards skills-based training, and the integration of cutting-edge technology. This annual report synthesises the year's most significant developments, illustrating how legislative reforms, professional mandate changes, and innovative pedagogical models are collectively forging Hong Kong's path to becoming a global leader in lifelong learning. From mandatory teacher relicensing to the reinvention of vocational training, the city is constructing a resilient and responsive continuous education ecosystem.

1. Legislative and Regulatory Overhaul: Strengthening the Foundation of Continuous Education

A cornerstone of Hong Kong's strategic advancement has been the significant reinforcement of its regulatory infrastructure for post-secondary and continuous education. In a landmark move, the Legislative Council passed the Post Secondary Colleges (Amendment) Bill 2025, marking a pivotal shift towards enhanced quality assurance. This legislative update, with most provisions taking effect in August 2026, is designed to "enhance the regulation and quality assurance mechanism of self-financing post-secondary institutions," thereby fostering the healthy and robust development of the sector. A direct consequence of this is the proactive stance taken by institutions like the Baptist University, whose School of Continuing Education has committed to registering as an approved post-secondary college under the new ordinance within three years, aiming to "promote the internationalisation and diversification of higher education". Complementing this institutional oversight is a revolutionary change in the professional landscape for educators. The government has advanced plans to introduce a mandatory practising certificate for teachers, moving away from the lifetime registration model. Under the proposed framework, which could take effect as early as the 2027-28 school year, registered teachers will be required to renew their certificates every three years by fulfilling 150 hours of continuing professional development and declaring any criminal convictions. This reform, which affects over 70,000 practising teachers, transforms professional development from a "soft target" into a "professional responsibility," ensuring that educators remain current with pedagogical advancements and societal needs.

2. Deepening the Skills-Based Agenda: From "Training" to "Competency"

The past year has witnessed a decisive shift from traditional, course-completion mindsets to a dynamic, skills-based approach to continuous education. The Employees Retraining Board (ERB) has unveiled a bold, three-year reform blueprint to redefine its mission and methodology. Central to this is a name change to sever the historical link with unemployment and the construction of a "skills-based" training framework. This new model moves away from "job-type" training to focus on transferable competencies, starting with foundational courses in smart customer service and digital marketing, and progressing to advanced, emerging skills like new energy vehicle maintenance. In a significant move to democratise access, the ERB has already removed its academic ceiling, allowing degree holders to enrol. Furthermore, the establishment of a Skills Research Division to analyse market data and predict talent gaps demonstrates a forward-looking, data-driven strategy to align training with future economic needs. This skills-centricity is further echoed in the government's Study Subsidy Scheme for Designated Professions/Sectors (SSSDP), which for the 2026/27 academic year will subsidise 4,781 places across 57 undergraduate programmes, including 16 applied degrees, targeting high-demand disciplines such as health care, fintech, and artificial intelligence.

3. The Rise of Applied Education: Bridging the Academic-Vocational Divide

A defining narrative of this reporting period has been the concerted effort to dismantle the "academic-vocational divide" and legitimise applied learning pathways. The formation of the University of Applied Sciences (UAS) Alliance represents a strategic response to the need for curricula co-created with industry, aimed at preparing graduates with immediately relevant skills. As articulated by the President of Saint Francis University, the success of UAS hinges on establishing a "production-learning symbiosis mechanism," where industries are deeply involved in curriculum design, filling the gap between traditional academic education and basic vocational training. This is not merely a post-secondary initiative but one that reaches into secondary education. Pioneering programmes like the Diploma in Practical Information and Communications Technology (DPICT) , offered in partnership with secondary schools, allow students to simultaneously study for their HKDSE and a QF Level 3 professional diploma. This dual-track approach provides an alternative pathway for students, with early results showing about two-thirds of participants progressing to higher diploma programmes, proving that students previously considered "also-rans" can find a successful trajectory when clear and supported pathways are provided.

4. Mainstreaming Technology: AI and Digital Literacy for All

Technological fluency has been universally adopted as a core component of continuous education. The government's "AI+" strategy is being systematically embedded across all levels of learning. A dedicated HK\$50 million has been allocated to organise AI application courses and competitions in collaboration with public bodies, tech enterprises, and tertiary institutions to enhance digital literacy. At the post-secondary level, AI-related courses have been prioritised in the SSSDP scheme, and the Vocational Training Council (VTC) has integrated generative AI and AI ethics into the compulsory IT modules of all its higher diploma programmes. The VTC's launch of the "Virtual Tutor" platform, a 24/7 AI-powered learning assistant, exemplifies the innovative use of technology to support student learning flexibly and on-demand. This technological integration is also being applied to address specific societal needs, such as the development of new higher diplomas in the "silver market" that focus on using AI, IoT, and wireless technologies in gerontechnology.

5. Strengthening Internationalisation and Strategic Foresight

Hong Kong's continuous education sector is increasingly viewed as a critical pillar of its ambition to become an international education hub. The government's strategy involves not only attracting top international students and scholars but also ensuring the quality of the entire education pipeline, from primary school upwards. As argued by commentators, enhancing teacher quality through continuous professional development is fundamental to this goal, as it directly impacts the calibre of local students and the overall academic environment that international students seek. The budget for the 2025-26 financial year allocated HK\$102.9 billion to education, underscoring the government's commitment, with new resources targeted at expanding post-secondary places and enhancing research. Furthermore, forward-looking measures such as the planned establishment of a third medical school and land allocation for university development in the Northern Metropolis indicate a long-term strategic vision for educational expansion and integration with broader regional development. Collectively, these legislative, pedagogical, and strategic initiatives position Hong Kong not merely as a participant but as a potential global leader in the continuous education landscape of the future.

CHAPTER 32: ADAPTIVE GOVERNANCE

To secure its position as a global leader in continuous education, Hong Kong must transcend traditional, rigid regulatory models and embrace a framework of adaptive governance. This approach is not merely about updating rules, but about fundamentally redesigning the relationship between policymakers, educational institutions, industries, and learners. Adaptive governance, in this context, refers to a dynamic, iterative, and data-informed system capable of responding to the breakneck speed of technological change, economic restructuring, and evolving societal needs. It requires moving from a prescriptive, top-down model to one that is facilitative, decentralized, and resilient, allowing for real-time course correction and the seamless integration of lifelong learning into the fabric of Hong Kong's economy and society.

The cornerstone of this adaptive governance model is the establishment of a nimble and forward-looking regulatory sandbox for continuous education providers. Currently, accreditation and curriculum approval processes can be too slow to keep pace with emerging fields like generative AI, green finance, or advanced robotics. An adaptive approach would create a fast-track, outcome-based accreditation pathway. This would allow public and private institutions, as well as EdTech startups, to pilot micro-credentials and specialized courses in high-demand areas with provisional approval, subject to rigorous but rapid quality assurance checks. The government's role would shift from a gatekeeper to an enabler, using real-time labor market data and industry intelligence to guide the creation of these agile learning pathways, ensuring that Hong Kong's workforce can upskill and reskill in lockstep with industry 5.0.

Furthermore, adaptive governance necessitates the creation of an integrated, cross-sectoral data ecosystem to power a truly learner-centric model. This involves breaking down silos between the Education Bureau, the Labour Department, the Hong Kong Monetary Authority, and industry bodies to create a comprehensive "skills intelligence platform." Such a platform would map individual learning journeys against evolving industry demands, providing personalized recommendations for upskilling. It would also inform government funding decisions, channeling resources toward programs with proven employment outcomes. This data-driven approach enables the government to proactively identify looming skills gaps—for instance, in the Northern Metropolis development or the financial services sector's digital transformation—and preemptively commission or co-create educational solutions with industry partners, rather than reacting to crises.

To embed this culture of continuous learning, adaptive governance must also reform funding and accreditation mechanisms to be more portable and learner-driven. The current model, often tied to specific institutions or full-time study, is ill-suited for a workforce that needs to learn in bite-sized, flexible chunks throughout their careers. Hong Kong should pioneer a universal lifelong learning account for all adults, seeded with government credits and supplemented by employer and individual contributions. These accounts could be used for a wide range of recognized learning experiences, from university micro-modules to vocational training and corporate certifications, all recorded on a secure, verifiable digital credential wallet. This empowers individuals to become the architects of their own professional development, while incentivizing a diverse ecosystem of providers to offer high-quality, stackable credentials that are directly relevant to the market.

Finally, the success of this blueprint hinges on fostering a collaborative governance architecture that moves beyond public-private partnerships to public-private-people partnerships. This involves creating permanent, multi-stakeholder councils for key economic clusters—such as fintech, logistics, and creative industries—that have the authority to co-design curricula, set competency standards, and validate learning outcomes. These councils, composed of government representatives, industry leaders, union members, and academic experts, would operate with a high degree of autonomy, ensuring that continuous education is deeply embedded in the economic strategy of each sector. By institutionalizing this feedback loop, Hong Kong can ensure its continuous education ecosystem is not just responsive, but anticipatory, cementing its status as a leading international post-secondary education hub and a model of adaptive governance for the 21st century.

32.1 Annual policy review and adjustment mechanisms

Hong Kong possesses a robust and mature foundation to achieve global leadership in continuous education, built upon a comprehensive qualifications framework and rigorous quality assurance mechanisms. A strategic blueprint for this pathway must leverage these existing strengths while dynamically adapting to future trends through a well-defined annual policy review mechanism.

The Bedrock of Success: A Unified and Quality-Assured Qualifications Framework

Hong Kong's pathway to global leadership is fundamentally anchored by the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF), established in 2008 under the legal purview of the Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications Ordinance. This framework provides a clear and objective seven-level system that articulates standards for academic, vocational, and continuing education qualifications, ensuring that all recognized learning, regardless of how it is attained, meets a consistent and credible standard. A key component of this is the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) mechanism, which formally validates the skills and knowledge workers have acquired through informal and non-formal means against the competency standards specified for their industry. This innovation is critical for a future-focused continuous education blueprint, as it creates flexible on-ramps for adult learners, allowing them to convert experiential learning into recognized credentials and pursue further education without being forced to repeat what they already know. The integrity of the entire system is maintained by a dual-level quality assurance process: the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) acts as the designated accreditation authority and Qualifications Register operator for most institutions, while the Quality Assurance Council (QAC) under the University Grants Committee (UGC) ensures the quality of UGC-funded universities. This creates a trusted ecosystem where learners and employers can have complete confidence in the value of a credential bearing the HKQF mark.

Strategic Innovation: Integrating Micro-credentials and Credit Transfer

To become a global leader, Hong Kong's blueprint must champion flexibility and stackable learning pathways, moving beyond traditional degree structures. A prime example of this strategic direction is the introduction of micro-credential programmes by leading institutions. For instance, the Chinese University of Hong Kong Business School now offers professional certificate programmes in high-demand fields like Artificial Intelligence for Business, Sustainability and ESG Reporting, and Fintech. These programmes are designed for busy executives, offering shorter durations and modular completion timelines ranging from six to 36 months.

Critically, these certificates are not dead-end credentials; they are officially listed on the HKQF at Level 6, and the credits earned can be seamlessly transferred toward a full master's degree programme. This Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT) system is a vital strategic pillar. By embedding micro-credentials within a larger, credit-based ecosystem, Hong Kong creates a powerful value proposition for lifelong learners: bite-sized, immediately applicable upskilling that also builds a long-term pathway to advanced academic qualifications. This model of integrating professional education with degree-granting pathways is a hallmark of a mature and globally competitive continuous education system.

Globalization and Market Alignment: Expanding Reach and Relevance

A strategic blueprint for global leadership must also aggressively pursue internationalization and deep alignment with market needs. Hong Kong's institutions are already active on this front. The HKU SPACE LEAD Academy exemplifies this by offering tailor-made executive programmes for mainland Chinese enterprises and government departments, and by organizing international study tours in collaboration with renowned universities like Harvard, MIT, Stanford, and Cambridge. This not only generates revenue but also builds Hong Kong's brand as a knowledge hub. Concurrently, government policy is actively reshaping the higher education landscape to better supply the talent demanded by the economy. The 2025 Policy Address outlines a "supply-side educational revolution," which includes raising the admission cap for non-local students at public universities to 50% and designating certain institutions as "universities of applied sciences". These applied science universities will forge stronger ties with industries in the Greater Bay Area, ensuring curricula are directly relevant to the market and creating clear pathways for sub-degree holders. By simultaneously opening its doors to the world and anchoring its programmes in the practical needs of the regional economy, Hong Kong is strategically positioning itself as an indispensable gateway for global talent and professional development in Asia.

The Engine of Adaptation: Annual Policy Review and Adjustment Mechanisms

The agility to respond to change is what will sustain Hong Kong's leadership, and this is formalized through its annual policy review and adjustment mechanisms. The blueprint for continuous education is not static but is systematically evaluated and refined, primarily through the annual Policy Address delivered by the Chief Executive. The 2024 and 2025 addresses show a clear evolution in thinking, moving from general goals of becoming an education hub to a detailed "supply-side educational revolution" with specific targets for non-local student enrolment and the creation of applied science universities. This top-down direction is complemented by a robust, industry-inclusive bottom-up process. Industry stakeholders are formally engaged through Industry Training Advisory Committees (ITACs), which are tasked with developing, maintaining, and regularly updating the Specification of Competency Standards (SCS) for their respective sectors.

This ensures that the very definition of skills and competencies within the HKQF remains current with the latest manpower requirements. Furthermore, a transparent legal framework, complete with an independent Appeals Committee as stipulated in the ordinance, provides a formal mechanism for institutions to contest accreditation decisions, ensuring fairness and continuous improvement in the application of quality standards. This multi-layered system of annual governmental strategy and continuous industry-led review creates a powerful feedback loop, ensuring Hong Kong's continuous education offering remains both world-class and precisely attuned to the evolving demands of the global economy.

32.2 Stakeholder feedback loops

Hong Kong's aspiration to become a global leader in continuing education is not merely an ambitious goal but a strategic imperative, requiring a dynamic and responsive ecosystem that places stakeholder feedback at its core. The pathway to this leadership position is paved with the creation of robust feedback loops that actively incorporate the voices of learners, industry, academia, and the community into the very fabric of educational policy and programme design. As outlined by the Education Bureau, the government's multi-pronged approach to promoting Vocational and Professional Education and Training (VPET) is a prime example of this philosophy in action. By fostering industry-institution collaboration, the government ensures that curriculum development is directly informed by the evolving needs of the workforce. This is achieved through mechanisms like the Pilot Project on Development of Applied Degree Programmes, which mandates strong industry involvement in both the design and delivery of courses, creating a direct feedback channel from employers to educators. Furthermore, extensive consultations with stakeholders, including programme providers, industry representatives, and legislative bodies, have led to pivotal policy shifts, such as the sharper differentiation between Higher Diploma and Associate Degree qualifications, ensuring that the education system remains aligned with societal and economic demands. This commitment to consultative policy formulation is a hallmark of Hong Kong's "versatile learning ecosystem," which thrives on a synergistic collaboration between top-down government initiatives and bottom-up input from schools and communities.

Building on this foundational government-led approach, Hong Kong's higher education institutions are independently cultivating their own sophisticated feedback mechanisms to enhance their continuing education offerings and solidify their global standing. The vision of institutions like the Chinese University of Hong Kong's School of Continuing and Professional Sciences explicitly aims to be a global leader by "keeping pace with learners' needs" and "seeking input from stakeholders to keep up with the changing learning demands". This strategic intent is operationalized through innovative programme development. For instance, CUHK Business School's new Professional Certificate Programmes in high-demand areas like AI, FinTech, and ESG reporting are a direct response to market signals and industry trends. The very structure of these micro-credential courses, which offer flexible, modular learning and a clear pathway to master's degrees, is designed based on the feedback and needs of "aspiring young professionals" who require career acceleration. Similarly, HKU SPACE's LEAD Academy exemplifies responsiveness by tailoring programmes for senior executives and government officials from the Chinese Mainland, incorporating study tours and seminars that are customised to specific professional development needs. The success and positive reception of these initiatives, such as the seminars for Shenzhen officials, create a positive feedback loop, generating demand for future collaborations and ensuring that the institution's offerings remain cutting-edge and relevant.

However, a truly comprehensive feedback ecosystem extends beyond formal policy and institutional structures to include direct engagement with the community and a rigorous, scholarly approach to quality assurance. The HKEAA's commitment to "connecting with stakeholders" by collecting views and suggestions through various public channels underscores the importance of transparency and public trust in the qualifications framework that underpins continuing education. At the community level, initiatives like the government's Elderly Academy Scheme demonstrate a feedback loop that addresses the needs of an ageing population. By providing 多元化 learning courses in schools and universities, and by adjusting funding and course offerings based on participation and feedback, the scheme actively responds to the learning aspirations of senior citizens, promoting "active ageing" and intergenerational integration. Furthermore, academic research plays a vital role in refining these feedback mechanisms. A notable EdD thesis on External Quality Assurance for VPET critically examined the effectiveness of the accreditation mechanism from the perspective of major stakeholders, including teachers and learners. The study's 26 recommendations for improving accreditation policies and implementation highlight the need for continuous, systematic engagement with all parties involved, ensuring that the very systems designed to guarantee quality are themselves subject to scrutiny and improvement based on stakeholder experience. This multi-layered approach to feedback, from the community centre to the halls of academia, is what will ultimately enable Hong Kong to not only respond to the needs of today's learners but to anticipate and shape the future of global continuing education.

32.3 Emerging trend scanning and future skills forecasting

Hong Kong stands at a pivotal moment in its development as a global leader in continuous education, with recent policy initiatives and institutional reforms laying a robust foundation for a comprehensive strategic blueprint. The city's pathway to leadership is being forged through a fundamental paradigm shift from traditional "job-specific" training to an agile, "skills-based" framework that anticipates future workforce demands. This transformation is exemplified by the Employees Retraining Board's (ERB) ambitious reform agenda, which includes establishing a dedicated skills research unit staffed by data experts who will analyse market intelligence and forecast emerging skill gaps before they become acute. Such proactive intelligence-gathering mechanisms position Hong Kong to develop responsive curricula that address tomorrow's challenges today, moving beyond reactive training models that characterise less sophisticated continuing education systems globally.

The emerging trend scanning capabilities being developed in Hong Kong demonstrate sophisticated foresight in identifying the interdisciplinary skill clusters that will define the future of work. Current initiatives reveal strategic prioritisation of artificial intelligence competencies as foundational requirements across all sectors, with plans to integrate AI knowledge into mandatory curriculum components. Beyond generic technology training, Hong Kong's forward-looking approach targets specific high-growth domains including 新能源汽车维修 (new energy vehicle maintenance), 智能客服应用 (intelligent customer service applications), 数码化营销 (digital marketing), and 人工智能辅助诈骗侦测 (AI-assisted fraud detection). This granular identification of niche skill requirements reflects a mature understanding that global leadership requires not merely broad capability development but precise alignment with emerging industry specialisations where Hong Kong can develop distinctive competitive advantages.

Future skills forecasting in Hong Kong increasingly emphasises the convergence of technical expertise with human-centric competencies that artificial intelligence cannot readily replicate. The city's leading educational institutions recognise that global leadership in continuous education requires nurturing capabilities that transcend mere technical proficiency. City University of Hong Kong's Business Innovation Education initiative articulates this vision through its commitment to developing strategic insights, leadership capabilities, and entrepreneurial mindsets alongside sustainability and ESG principles. Similarly, vocational education providers are exploring how AI integration can enhance rather than diminish the value of professional expertise, with institutions like the Hong Kong Institute of Information Technology examining AI's implications for workforce productivity and the evolving demand for IT talent amid digital transformation. This balanced approach ensures Hong Kong's workforce remains competitive in domains requiring creativity, ethical judgment, and adaptive problem-solving.

The strategic blueprint for Hong Kong's continuing education leadership incorporates innovative delivery mechanisms designed to maximise accessibility and responsiveness to learner needs. The development of micro-credential courses采用学分制 (adopting credit accumulation systems) enables learners to stack credentials progressively, constructing完整证书 (complete certificates) through flexible, modular learning pathways. This approach recognises that tomorrow's workforce requires just-in-time skill acquisition rather than traditional multi-year programmes, with initial offerings focusing on high-demand areas including数据分析 (data analysis),建筑信息模拟 (building information modelling), and流动装置应用程序开发 (mobile application development). Such flexibility, combined with simplified procedures for appointing training providers and the establishment of integrated training centres, creates an ecosystem where continuous learning becomes seamlessly embedded in professional life rather than representing a disruptive interruption.

Hong Kong's pathway to global leadership also leverages its unique demographic and economic position to address distinctive societal needs that differentiate its continuing education model. The strategic focus on serving an ageing population and accommodating second career trends reflects sophisticated understanding of how demographic shifts create both challenges and opportunities. With ERB data showing that approximately 60% of recent participants are aged 50 or above, Hong Kong's continuing education system is actively developing specialised offerings for mature learners, including partnerships with institutions like圣方济各大学 (Saint Francis University) and香港演艺学院 (the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts) to strengthen healthcare, performing arts, and stage production training. This demographic-responsive approach, combined with the city's unique East-meets-West orientation, positions Hong Kong to develop continuing education models that address the needs of rapidly ageing societies across Asia while maintaining global relevance through international partnerships and dual degree programmes with strategic partners worldwide.

The institutional architecture supporting Hong Kong's continuing education ambitions demonstrates remarkable coherence between government policy, university strategy, and industry engagement. The UGC-commissioned Chung-Yue-ping, Ho Lok-sang and Liu Pak-wai Report historically recognised Hong Kong's structural need for continuous workforce adaptation, noting that as a small open economy competing internationally, the labour force must demonstrate exceptional flexibility in upgrading services and shifting between production activities. Contemporary reforms build upon this foundation through systematic strengthening of industry consultative mechanisms, enhanced collaboration between training bodies and employers, and the development of industry-recognised micro-credentials that carry genuine labour market currency. This tripartite alignment ensures that Hong Kong's continuing education system not only forecasts future skill requirements accurately but also delivers them through pathways that command employer confidence and learner engagement, creating the virtuous cycle of continuous improvement characteristic of truly world-leading education systems.

32.4 Crisis preparedness for economic disruptions

Hong Kong stands at a pivotal juncture where its future as a global leader in continuous and professional education (CPE) hinges on a strategic blueprint that not only fosters innovation but also embeds robust crisis preparedness mechanisms. The city's historical resilience, particularly its rapid economic restructuring since the late 20th century, provides a foundational case study for this evolution. As detailed in a comprehensive economic analysis commissioned by the University Grants Committee, Hong Kong's workforce has long faced the challenge of "knowledge capital" depletion, where the "half-life of knowledge and skills is shortening". The territory's successful navigation of the shift from a manufacturing-based economy to a regional professional services hub was largely facilitated by a "very active and extensive market for continuing education," which organically catered to hundreds of thousands of workers needing to retrain as their skills became obsolete overnight. This historical precedent underscores that a dynamic CPE ecosystem is not merely an educational luxury but an essential infrastructure for economic adaptability. To achieve global leadership, Hong Kong must formalize and amplify this innate responsiveness, transforming it from a reactive market force into a proactive, strategically managed pillar of its economic resilience.

The pathway to global preeminence involves embedding a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship directly into the continuing education framework, ensuring that lifelong learning is synonymous with future-readiness. Hong Kong's higher education institutions are already pioneering reforms that align academic research with market demands, creating a fertile ground for this transformation. For instance, initiatives like the CityUHK Business Innovation Education program are designed to be the "premier hub in Asia for transformative executive education," leveraging Hong Kong's unique East-meets-West orientation to equip business leaders with the skills to navigate disruptive change. This is complemented by efforts to strengthen university-industry collaborations, such as the establishment of collaborative research centres focused on AI, biotechnology, and fintech, which directly involve students and professionals in solving real-world problems. By integrating experiential learning and entrepreneurial thinking into CPE—through incubators, mentorship from industry leaders, and partnerships with international firms—Hong Kong can cultivate a workforce that is not just employable but is also capable of driving innovation and creating new economic value. This approach ensures that continuous education serves as a catalyst for economic diversification and the development of high-value professional services.

A critical component of a future-proof blueprint is explicit crisis preparedness, which requires a dual focus on anticipating technological disruptions and addressing long-term demographic shifts. The Hong Kong General Chamber of Commerce has recently proposed targeted measures to upskill the workforce in response to the Artificial Intelligence (AI) boom, recommending tax incentives for employers' AI-related training expenses and subsidies under the Continuing Education Fund (CEF) for individuals. Such policies are vital for maintaining a competitive edge, ensuring that the workforce can leverage AI to boost productivity rather than be displaced by it. Furthermore, to attract and retain international talent—a key buffer against local demographic decline—there are calls to broaden the CEF to cover international professional qualifications accessible through digital platforms, reinforcing Hong Kong's status as a global talent hub. Simultaneously, the blueprint must address the needs of an ageing population, with projections indicating that over 33% of Hong Kong's population will be 65 or older by 2046. This "silver economy" presents both a challenge and an opportunity for CPE, necessitating programs tailored for second careers, encore careers, and lifelong enrichment, as envisioned in university strategic plans that aim to serve the needs of an ageing populace and those pursuing late-career changes.

To synthesize these elements into a coherent strategic blueprint, Hong Kong must adopt a holistic approach that connects its educational offerings directly to economic and social outcomes. This involves moving beyond the traditional view of CPE as merely remedial or supplementary, positioning it instead as a core driver of economic strategy. This can be achieved by developing a clear Industrial Strategy that encompasses education and technology, creating a "proportionate and predictable" regulatory environment that encourages businesses to invest in workforce development. The blueprint should also foster synergy within the Greater Bay Area (GBA), creating cross-border opportunities for professional development and talent exchange. Furthermore, it requires a commitment to "financial sustainability" and agility within educational institutions themselves. As demonstrated by the Education University of Hong Kong's strategic plan, which includes terminating underperforming programs to reallocate resources to more strategic priorities, the CPE sector must also model the adaptability it seeks to teach. By weaving together innovation, demographic responsiveness, technological upskilling, and fiscal prudence, Hong Kong can construct a comprehensive CPE blueprint that not only secures its own economic future against disruptions but also establishes a benchmark for global leadership in lifelong learning.

32.5 Funding model recalibration based on impact evidence

The recalibration of Hong Kong's Continuing Education Fund (CEF) represents a pivotal opportunity to transform a well-established subsidy mechanism into a strategic, evidence-driven engine for economic resilience and social mobility. Since its establishment in 2002, the CEF has provided over 4,650 registered courses through more than 120 providers, with a current subsidy ceiling of \$25,000 per eligible applicant. However, the path to global leadership requires moving beyond universal subsidies toward targeted, impact-based funding allocation. Evidence from the University Grants Committee's comprehensive review reveals critical insights: CEF participants have historically been disproportionately young (nearly 60% aged 21-29), female (approximately 60%), and concentrated in the financing, insurance, and business services sectors. This data suggests that while the fund successfully supports career advancement for certain demographics, it may under-serve precisely those populations most vulnerable to economic dislocation—older workers, manufacturing employees, and individuals without prior tertiary education. A strategic recalibration would therefore differentiate funding mechanisms based on both private and social returns, potentially establishing a development fund for innovative courses addressing emerging industry needs, as recommended in the UGC's higher education review.

Impact evidence further demonstrates that CEF participation yields differential outcomes depending on learner objectives and course characteristics. The CHL economic analysis commissioned by the UGC found that continuing education is most effective at facilitating career change, followed by job change, with improving current job performance ranking third. This hierarchy of effectiveness carries profound implications for funding design. Academic research examining CEF participants in tertiary marketing courses revealed that funded students outperformed their unfunded peers academically and demonstrated greater likelihood of pursuing further education—suggesting that the economic incentive itself creates positive behavioural effects beyond mere skill acquisition. Yet concerns persist regarding market distortions: some CEF-reimbursable courses carry tuition significantly above non-subsidised equivalents, prompting questions about whether providers capture part of the subsidy through price inflation. The current co-payment arrangement—20% for the first \$10,000 and 40% for the remaining \$15,000—attempts to ensure prudent learner choice while preventing arbitrary fee increases by institutions. A globally competitive funding model would build upon this foundation by introducing outcome-based components, such as bonus subsidies for courses demonstrating high employment conversion rates, or premium support for programmes targeting sectors identified as strategic priorities through mechanisms like the Study Subsidy Scheme for Designated Professions/Sectors, which currently subsidises sub-degree places across seven high-demand disciplines including healthcare, creative industries, and technology.

The imperative for evidence-driven funding recalibration extends beyond economic efficiency to encompass social equity and lifelong learning culture. Historical data reveals concerning underrepresentation of workers aged 40 and above in CEF courses—only 8.4% of award-bearing participants compared to 35.8% of the labour force—despite this group facing the highest risk of skill obsolescence during economic restructuring. The UGC's review noted that continuing education serves dual purposes: professional development for knowledge workers and foundational skill acquisition for those seeking second chances at basic qualifications. Pilot programmes like the Jockey Club CLAP-TECH Pathway demonstrate the power of targeted, evidence-based design: evaluation findings show that students from underprivileged backgrounds reported higher soft skill gains (86.3% self-assessment scores versus 76.6% for students from private housing) and greater confidence in making informed career decisions (89.7% versus 81%) when participating in structured vocational pathways. Translating such insights into CEF recalibration would involve developing differentiated funding tiers: full subsidies for foundational skills and disadvantaged groups, co-investment models for professional advancement where employers share costs, and innovation grants for providers developing courses addressing future skills gaps. This strategic approach—grounded in rigorous impact evidence from sources including the CLAP-TECH evaluation, academic thesis research, and longitudinal labour market analysis—would position Hong Kong not merely as a funder of continuing education but as a global leader in intelligent, adaptive, and equitable lifelong learning infrastructure.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Summary of International Case Studies

- Detailed profiles of Singapore, South Korea, France, Canada, Australia systems

1. Singapore: The National SkillsFuture Movement

Singapore provides a compelling case study of a centrally coordinated, national-level strategy for lifelong learning, embodied in its SkillsFuture movement. This initiative represents a whole-of-society approach to embedding a culture of continuous learning and skills mastery.

- **Background and Strategic Vision:** Launched in 2015, SkillsFuture is Singapore's national movement to provide Singaporeans with opportunities to develop their fullest potential throughout life. The vision is to create an integrated, high-quality system of education and training that supports individual employability and business competitiveness in a rapidly changing global economy. The 10th anniversary of the movement in 2025 was marked by a renewed focus on deepening its impact and moving decisively towards a "skills-first" approach.
- **Governance and Ecosystem:** The ecosystem is complex and highly coordinated. SkillsFuture Singapore (SSG) and Workforce Singapore (WSG) are the lead government agencies driving policy and programmes. They work in concert with a vast network of partners, including:
 - **Institutes of Higher Learning (IHLs):** Polytechnics and universities that offer a wide range of CET programmes.
 - **Private Training Providers:** Over 700 registered providers that bring dynamism and innovation to the training market.
 - **Employers and Industry Associations:** Seen as the "key driving force," they are encouraged to identify skills needs, invest in their workforce, and adopt skills-first hiring and promotion practices.
 - **The Labour Movement (NTUC):** A key social partner that helps to champion training and support workers.
 - **Adult Educators and Learners:** The entire system is designed to serve the workforce, which simultaneously acts as both players and beneficiaries.

- Key Programs and Initiatives:
 - National Skills Framework: A foundational tool that consolidates skills frameworks across 38 industry sectors. It provides a "common language of skills," mapping jobs to the tasks and skills required. A more dynamic, data-driven "Skills Framework 2.0" is set for release in mid-2026.
 - Centre for Skills-First Practices: Launched in 2025 by the Institute for Adult Learning (IAL), this centre is designed to drive the adoption of a skills-first approach across the economy. It provides advisory support to employers (e.g., helping SMEs like Craygar Industries redesign jobs and remuneration around skills), develops analytical tools, and collaborates with international bodies like the OECD to measure and improve skills-first practices.
 - Jobs-Skills Insights Portal and Dashboards: New tools, such as the Job-Skills Profile Dashboard, provide individuals with data to assess which skills offer the greatest potential for long-term employability, enabling informed training and career choices.
 - Adult Learning Collaboratory (ALC): Launched in 2024, this initiative brings together stakeholders (researchers, enterprises, training providers) to co-create innovative solutions for "wicked problems" in adult learning, such as developing AI capabilities for a multi-generational workforce or creating future-oriented pedagogies.

- Impact and Challenges: Singapore has achieved significant reach, with over half a million people (one-fifth of the resident workforce) participating in SkillsFuture-supported courses annually. However, challenges remain, including engaging the vast majority of SMEs more deeply in the movement and fostering deeper collaboration among diverse players (e.g., between public IHLs and private training providers) rather than mere coordination.

2. South Korea: Lifelong Vocational Education and Training

South Korea's approach to continuing education is deeply integrated with its national economic planning and industrial policy, evolving over decades to support both individual career development and national competitiveness.

- **Background and Strategic Evolution:** The foundation for lifelong vocational education was laid in the 1990s. From the Kim Young-sam government onwards, there has been a consistent policy push to build a comprehensive lifelong vocational education and training system. This vision evolved through subsequent administrations, with the Park Geun-hye government articulating a goal of building a "competency-based society". The education system itself follows a 6-3-3-4 structure (primary, middle, high school, university) with increasing integration of vocational and IT pathways.
- **Governance:** The system is centrally governed by the Ministry of Education, which sets the national curriculum, revised approximately every 5-10 years. While central government sets the framework, there is an increasing emphasis on aligning training with regional industrial needs.
- **Key Reforms and Policies:**
 - **Integration of IT and AI in Curriculum:** A major recent development is the 2022 Revised National Curriculum, which mandates the introduction of artificial intelligence (AI) education, data literacy, and ethical technology use across all school levels, with full implementation expected by 2025. This ensures that the future workforce is equipped with foundational digital skills from an early age.
 - **Lifelong Learning Accounts and Credit Bank System:** While not detailed in the provided text, South Korea is well-known for its Academic Credit Bank System, which allows individuals to accumulate credits from diverse formal and non-formal learning experiences and ultimately earn a recognized degree. This creates flexible pathways for adult learners.
 - **Focus on National Strategic Industries:** Vocational high schools offer specialized tracks aligned with industrial needs (e.g., technology, business, agriculture), and these pathways are linked to junior colleges and universities, enabling lifelong progression in technical fields. The focus on high-tech fields like AI, cybersecurity, and robotics in top universities (e.g., KAIST, POSTECH) further reinforces this link between education and industrial strategy.
- **Impact and Challenges:** South Korea's system has been highly effective in supporting rapid industrialization and maintaining a highly skilled workforce. Key challenges include addressing the social stigma sometimes associated with vocational tracks compared to academic university pathways, and managing the rapid pace of curriculum change in response to technological shifts like AI.

3. France: The "Compte Personnel de Formation" (CPF)

France's system is distinctive for its strong legal foundation, historical role of social partners (unions and employers), and its recent digital transformation centered on a personal, portable training account. The right to lifelong learning is enshrined as a "national obligation".

- **Background and Historical Development:** The modern French system is rooted in the National Inter-professional Agreement (ANI) of 1970 and the subsequent "Delors Law" of 1971, which formally recognized continuing vocational training (CVT) as a national duty. Over subsequent decades, numerous laws refined the system, decentralizing some responsibilities to the Régions (regions) for youth and unemployed adult training, and creating key instruments like the Validation of Acquired Experience (VAE) in 2002, which allows individuals to gain formal qualifications based on their work experience.
- **Governance:** The system is a shared responsibility. The state sets the legal framework, while the Régions are responsible for apprenticeship and vocational training for young people and jobseekers. A unique feature is the strong role of "social partners" (unions and employer federations) who negotiate key national agreements that are then often translated into law.
- **Key Programs and Initiatives:**
 - **Compte Personnel de Formation (CPF - Personal Training Account):** This is the flagship innovation of the French system. Launched in 2015, the CPF is a personal account that every individual has from their entry into the labour market until retirement. It is funded in euros through professional activity, not in hours. Crucially, the account is "universal" and "individual"—it belongs to the person, not their employer, and remains with them even if they change jobs or become unemployed.
 - **"MonCompteFormation" Platform:** The 2018 law "for the freedom to choose one's professional future" revolutionized access to training. The MonCompteFormation.gouv.fr website and mobile app, launched in 2019, allow individuals to directly browse and purchase eligible training courses using their CPF funds. This has created a user-driven market for training and dramatically simplified access.
 - **Reforms to Work-Study Contracts:** The 2018 law also harmonized and made more flexible apprenticeship and professionalization contracts, raising the age limit for apprentices to 29 and reducing minimum contract durations, making them more accessible for adult learners.
- **Impact and Challenges:** The CPF has democratized access to training by putting purchasing power directly in the hands of individuals. The digital platform has significantly increased transparency and ease of access. Challenges include ensuring the quality of training on offer, preventing fraud, and guiding individuals to make choices that are aligned with genuine labour market needs, not just personal preference.

4. Canada: A Decentralised, Federated Model

Canada offers a model of a highly decentralised adult skills system, where governance is shared between the federal and provincial/territorial governments. This results in 13 distinct education systems, coordinated through inter-governmental mechanisms.

- **Background and Constitutional Context:** Under the Canadian Constitution, education is the exclusive responsibility of the provinces and territories. This means that each of the 10 provinces and 3 territories designs and administers its own education system, including post-secondary education, vocational training, and most aspects of adult education. The federal government, therefore, does not have a direct role in running schools or colleges.
- **Governance: A Decentralised but Collaborative System:**
 - **Federal Role:** The federal government's primary role in adult skills is through funding and setting broad national objectives. Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) manages Labour Market Development Agreements (LMDAs) and Workforce Development Agreements (WDAs). These agreements transfer significant federal funding to provinces and territories to design and deliver skills training and employment programmes tailored to their local labour markets. Other federal departments, like Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, fund specific programmes (e.g., language training for newcomers).
 - **Provincial/Territorial Role:** Provinces and territories have the authority over the design, implementation, and delivery of VET, CET, and AE programmes. They oversee public post-secondary institutions (colleges, polytechnics, institutes) and make decisions about funding and programme priorities based on regional economic needs.
 - **Intergovernmental Coordination:** The Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC) provides a forum for provincial and territorial ministers to collaborate on shared priorities, exchange best practices, and represent Canadian education interests internationally. The Forum of Labour Market Ministers (FLMM) plays a similar role for labour market policies.
 - **Stakeholder Involvement:** A wide range of national bodies contribute, including Colleges and Institutes Canada (advocacy and knowledge exchange), the Canadian Apprenticeship Forum (research), and the Future Skills Centre (independent research).

- Key Programs and Initiatives:
 - Provincially-Led Pathways: A concrete example of a provincial initiative is British Columbia's investment in tuition-free Adult Basic Education (ABE) and English Language Learning (ELL) pathway programs. These programmes help adults upgrade their academic skills to meet prerequisites for entry into high-priority post-secondary programs in fields like healthcare, skilled trades, and technology, reflecting a direct provincial response to local labour market needs.
- Impact and Challenges: The decentralised model allows for significant flexibility and responsiveness to diverse regional economies. Its strength lies in its ability to tailor programmes to local contexts. The main challenges are ensuring national coherence, facilitating inter-provincial labour mobility (ensuring a qualification in one province is recognized in another), and coordinating a unified national response to economy-wide skills challenges.

5. Australia: A National VET System with State Delivery

Australia has pursued a strategy of building a national Vocational Education and Training (VET) system to ensure consistency and quality across its states and territories, while allowing for regional flexibility in delivery.

- **Background and Strategic Vision:** The national VET system is seen as central to ensuring a skilled workforce for a competitive, globalised economy. It is also tasked with contributing to social equity and supporting major transitions, such as the shift to a low-carbon economy (requiring "green skills"). A key strategic goal identified by research bodies is to increase the proportion of higher-level qualifications (beyond Certificate III) to meet future industry demand.
- **Governance: A Federal Framework:**
 - **Australian Government:** The national government drives VET policy and provides significant funding to the states and territories through agreements like the "Skillling Australia's Workforce Act." It also establishes national bodies like Skills Australia (now the National Skills Commission) to provide independent advice on current and future skills needs.
 - **State and Territory Governments:** They have "primary responsibility for managing their training systems," including the delivery of training, management of TAFE (Technical and Further Education) institutes, and the allocation of state funding.
 - **Ministerial Council for Vocational and Technical Education (MCVTE):** This council, comprising ministers from the commonwealth and states/territories, provides the national focus for VET policy. It oversees the National Skills Framework, which ensures national consistency in qualifications and training quality.
 - **Industry Engagement:** Industry Skills Councils (ISCs) are the formal mechanism for industry involvement. They develop national training packages that specify the competency standards required for different occupations, ensuring that training is directly relevant to industry needs.

- **Key Programs and Initiatives:**
 - **National Training Packages:** These are a cornerstone of the system, defining the skills and knowledge required to perform effectively in the workplace. They are developed by ISCs, endorsed nationally, and then delivered by Registered Training Organisations (RTOs).
 - **VET in Schools (VETiS):** Programs that allow secondary school students to undertake VET qualifications as part of their senior secondary certificate (e.g., the VCE Vocational Major in Victoria). This helps students combine general and vocational education, explore careers, and gain industry-specific skills while still at school.
 - **Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF):** This framework sets the standards for the registration and auditing of RTOs, with the goal of ensuring national consistency and high-quality training outcomes.
- **Impact and Challenges:** Australia has created a robust national architecture for VET. However, challenges persist. A key issue is the inconsistency in how national training packages are implemented and assessed by different states and RTOs, which can lead to variations in quality and the actual skills of graduates. This can also impede labour mobility. Achieving truly national consistency in delivery and assessment remains a significant policy focus.

Country	Governance Model	Key Program/Initiative	Unique Feature / Strategic Focus
Singapore	Centrally coordinated	SkillsFuture, National Skills Framework	Whole-of-nation movement with a "skills-first" approach ¹ ⁶
South Korea	Central framework, regional alignment	2022 Revised National Curriculum (AI focus), Credit Bank System	Deep integration with national industrial and technology policy ² ⁷
France	State & social partners	Compte Personnel de Formation (CPF)	Individual rights-based model with a user-driven digital platform ³ ⁸
Canada	Highly decentralised	Federal-Provincial Labour Market Agreements	Flexibility to tailor programmes to diverse regional economies ⁴ ⁹
Australia	Federal framework, state delivery	National Training Packages, VET in Schools	Industry-led competency standards for national consistency ⁵ ¹⁰

APPENDIX B: Hong Kong Continuous Education Provider Directory

- Universities, VTC, private providers, professional bodies

This directory profiles the key institutions that form the backbone of Hong Kong's continuing education ecosystem. It is organized into four segments: Universities & Their Extension Arms, Vocational Training Council (VTC) , Private & Specialist Providers, and Professional Bodies.

1. UNIVERSITIES AND THEIR EXTENSION ARMS

Hong Kong's publicly-funded universities extend their reach through dedicated continuing education units, offering everything from micro-credentials to postgraduate diplomas.

The University of Hong Kong – School of Professional and Continuing Education (HKU SPACE)

- Overview: Established in 1957, HKU SPACE is the region's oldest and one of its most extensive continuing education providers. As the extension arm of HKU, it serves as a bridge between academia and the professional world.
- Core Focus Areas: Executive education, professional diplomas, and lifelong learning.
- Flagship Programmes & Recent Developments:
 - Postgraduate Diplomas for Mainland Professionals: A new suite of one-year, full-time Postgraduate Diploma (PGD) programmes (QF Level 6) launched specifically for mainland Chinese learners. Courses include International Live Entertainment and Event Management, Luxury Service and Brand Management, and Translation.
 - Northern Territory Expansion: The opening of the Sheung Shui campus (1,800+ sq. meters) strategically positions HKU SPACE to serve learners from the Northern Metropolis and cross-border students from Shenzhen.
- Distinctive Features: Its degrees are awarded under the HKU framework, providing strong brand recognition. It is a pioneer in developing curricula that cater to both local professional upgrading and regional talent cultivation in the Greater Bay Area.

Chinese University of Hong Kong – School of Continuing and Professional Studies (CUSCS) & Asia-Pacific Institute of Business (APIB)

- Overview: CUSCS provides a wide array of part-time and full-time programmes, while APIB serves as the dedicated executive education arm of CUHK Business School.
- Core Focus Areas: Career development facilitation, business acumen, and financial services.
- Flagship Programmes & Recent Developments:
 - Micro-credential Programmes (QF Level 6): APIB has launched a series of Professional Certificate Programmes (Micro-credentials) in high-demand fields: Innovation Leadership, Technology Applications for Financial Services, Sustainability and ESG Reporting, and AI for Business.
 - Career Development Training: CUSCS is a recognized Continuing Education Provider of the National Career Development Association (NCDA) in Greater China, offering the Facilitating Career Development (FCD) programme and enhancement modules.
- Distinctive Features: Offers a "stackable" learning pathway; credits earned from APIB's micro-credentials can be transferred to CUHK Business School's master's degree programmes, allowing for seamless academic progression.

2. VOCATIONAL TRAINING COUNCIL (VTC)

As the largest vocational and professional education and training provider in Hong Kong, VTC offers a comprehensive system from diploma to degree level, directly aligned with industry demands.

VTC Member Institutions (IVE, HKDI, HKIIT, THEi, etc.)

- Overview: Established in 1982, VTC is a statutory body comprising 14 member institutions. It is the primary engine for applied education in Hong Kong, offering a "multiple pathways" model for school leavers and adult learners.
- Core Focus Areas: Innovation & Technology, Creative Industries, Aviation, Chinese Medicine, and Hospitality.
- Flagship Programmes & Recent Developments:
 - Industry-Aligned Higher Diplomas: For the 2025/26 academic year, 90% of VTC's Higher Diplomas are linked to government "eight centres" strategy. New programmes include:
 - Higher Diploma in Chinese Medicine Professional and Operation (IVE)
 - Higher Diploma in Applied AI (HKIIT)
 - Higher Diploma in Sports Management (IVE)
 - Applied Degrees: The Technological and Higher Education Institute of Hong Kong (THEi) offers applied science-oriented degrees (e.g., Aircraft Engineering, Chinese Medicinal Pharmacy) under the government's Applied Degree Pilot Project.
- Distinctive Features:
 - High Progression Rates: Over 96% of Higher Diploma graduates seeking further studies successfully articulate to bachelor's degree programmes locally or overseas.
 - Mandatory Industry Attachment: All Higher Diploma students undergo workplace learning, resulting in over 90% employment rates for graduates entering the job market.
 - Comprehensive Network: Operates campuses across Hong Kong, including the Hong Kong Design Institute (HKDI) and the Hotel and Tourism Institute (HTI), providing dedicated training facilities.

3. PRIVATE AND SPECIALIST PROVIDERS

Private institutions fill critical niches, from secondary school tutoring to specialized career counseling and corporate training.

Beacon College (遵理學校) - BExcellent Group

- Overview: Founded in 1989 and listed on the Hong Kong Stock Exchange (Stock Code: 1775), Beacon is the largest private secondary education service provider in Hong Kong.
- Core Focus Areas: Secondary school supplementary education (HKDSE), private secondary day schools, and continuing education.
- Flagship Programmes & Recent Developments:
 - HKDSE Tutoring: The core business, offering both live and video-based classes for core and elective subjects.
 - Private Day Schools: Operates "Beacon Day Schools" in Yuen Long and Mong Kok, offering a formal secondary curriculum.
 - Continuing Education & Services: Diversifying into "Beacon Continuing Education" (language courses, business QCF), interview preparation, and VIP self-study services.
- Distinctive Features: Scale and market penetration; in the 2024/25 fiscal year, the company generated approximately HKD 193 million in revenue, demonstrating the significant market demand for private supplementary education.

Life Development Institute (LDI)

- Overview: Established in 2020, LDI is the first professional organization in Hong Kong dedicated exclusively to career development education and ecosystem building.
- Core Focus Areas: Career counseling certification, life planning education, and corporate training.
- Flagship Programmes & Recent Developments:
 - As an NCDA-approved Continuing Education Provider in Greater China, LDI delivers internationally recognized Certified Career Development Facilitator (CDF) programmes.
 - Offers specialized training for educators, social workers, and HR professionals.
- Distinctive Features: Charitable status recognized by the HKSAR Government. It has trained over 500 certified career professionals and serves over 600 schools and organizations annually.

HKPES

- Overview: HKPES has been a key player in the career development training space since 2010, focusing on integrating faith and work.
- Core Focus Areas: Career facilitation, group dynamics, and coaching skills.
- Flagship Programmes: Provides NCDA Facilitating Career Development (FCD) training and advanced modules such as Group Facilitation Skills and Career Coaching Skills.
- Distinctive Features: Offers a holistic approach to career development, emphasizing both practical skills and personal formation.

Hong Kong Tutor Association (HKTA)

- Overview: Founded in 1986, HKTA is a well-established private teaching service firm that operates a one-to-one tutoring matching platform.
- Core Focus Areas: Personalized academic support for primary and secondary students, English speaking, and arts education.
- Flagship Programmes: Operates the "HKTA Tutor Matching Platform," connecting parents with a database of tutors, including in-service teachers and university students.
- Distinctive Features: Its longevity (over 35 years) and hybrid online/offline matching service model make it a staple in Hong Kong's private supplementary education sector.

YMCA College of Continuing Education & YMCA College of Careers

- Overview: These institutions represent the community-focused educational arm of the YMCA of Hong Kong.
- Core Focus Areas: Youth development, vocational training, and careers education.
- Flagship Programmes: Provide a range of certificate and diploma courses, often in partnership with government bodies.
- Distinctive Features: Strong ties to community service and youth employment initiatives, making continuing education accessible to a broad demographic.

4. PROFESSIONAL BODIES AND EXAMINATION INSTITUTES

These organizations provide the internationally recognized credentials that are essential for career advancement in Hong Kong's globalized economy.

The Hong Kong Institute of Certified Public Accountants (HKICPA)

- Overview: The sole statutory licensing body for professional accountants in Hong Kong.
- Core Focus Areas: Accounting, auditing, and finance.
- Qualification Pathways: Offers the Qualification Programme (QP), which leads to the CPA designation. The Institute also administers practising certificate assessments.
- Distinctive Features: Mutual recognition agreements with other major accounting bodies (e.g., CA ANZ, ICAEW) and reciprocal exam exemptions with China's CICPA, making it a dual-purpose credential for cross-border practice.

CFA Institute / CFA Society Hong Kong

- Overview: The global association of investment professionals, with a strong local chapter in Hong Kong.
- Core Focus Areas: Investment management, financial analysis, and portfolio management.
- Qualification Pathways: The Chartered Financial Analyst (CFA) Programme is a self-study, sequential exam process (Levels I, II, III).
- Distinctive Features: Globally recognized as the "gold standard" in finance. Exams are offered frequently in Hong Kong (February, May, August, November), accommodating the schedules of working professionals.

Global Association of Risk Professionals (GARP)

- Overview: A professional body for risk managers.
- Core Focus Areas: Financial risk management, regulatory compliance.
- Qualification Pathways: The Financial Risk Manager (FRM) certification, a two-part exam focusing on practical risk management frameworks.
- Distinctive Features: Highly regarded in the banking and financial services sector. Exam sittings are held in May, August, and November in Hong Kong.

The Hong Kong Chartered Governance Institute (HKCGI)

- Overview: The premier professional body in Hong Kong for governance professionals.
- Core Focus Areas: Corporate governance, company secretarial practice, compliance, and risk management.
- Qualification Pathways: The Chartered Governance Professional Qualification Programme (exams in June and November).
- Distinctive Features: Its qualification is a prerequisite for many company secretarial roles in listed companies and is widely recognized in Commonwealth jurisdictions.

Project Management Institute (PMI)

- Overview: The world's leading association for project management professionals.
- Core Focus Areas: Project, program, and portfolio management.
- Qualification Pathways: The Project Management Professional (PMP) certification is the most sought-after credential in the field.
- Distinctive Features: PMP exams offer flexible scheduling, while other certifications (like PRINCE2) provide remote online options, catering to the flexible learning needs of busy professionals.

APPENDIX C: Qualifications Framework Reference Tables

- HKQF levels mapped to international frameworks

C.1 Overview of the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF)

The Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF) is a seven-level hierarchy that orders and supports qualifications in the academic, vocational, and continuing education sectors in Hong Kong. Launched in 2008, its primary goal is to promote lifelong learning and enhance the international recognition of Hong Kong's qualifications. All qualifications recognized under the HKQF are placed at one of seven levels based on a set of outcome-based Generic Level Descriptors (GLD), which specify the standards expected in terms of knowledge, skills, and autonomy.

C.2 HKQF Level Descriptors and International Mapping

To establish Hong Kong's position as a global leader in continuous education, the HKQF has been rigorously benchmarked against leading international frameworks. The most significant of these is the comprehensive comparability study conducted with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). The following tables detail the HKQF levels, their general qualification equivalents, and their official comparability to the EQF.

Table C.1: HKQF Levels and General Qualification Examples

HKQF Level	Key Descriptor	Typical Qualification Titles	Example of Outcomes (Autonomy and Responsibility)
Level 7	Doctoral Degree	Doctor of Philosophy (PhD), Doctor of Education (EdD), Doctor of Engineering ⁶	Creation and interpretation of new knowledge through original research; high-level autonomy and expert judgement.
Level 6	Master's Degree / Postgraduate	Master of Arts (MA), Master of Science (MSc), Postgraduate Diploma/Certificate ^{6 10}	Critical analysis and systematic acquisition of complex knowledge; advanced problem-solving skills; significant autonomy.
Level 5	Bachelor's Degree	Bachelor of Arts (BA), Bachelor of Engineering (BEng), Bachelor of Science (BSc) ^{6 7}	Mastery of a coherent body of knowledge; application of analytical and problem-solving skills; ability to manage own learning.
Level 4	Sub-degree / Higher Diploma	Associate Degree, Higher Diploma ⁶	Application of a broad range of specialised knowledge and skills; ability to solve problems independently and supervise others.
Level 3	Diploma	Diploma ⁶	Application of knowledge and skills in a range of varied work activities; ability to take responsibility for own work.
Level 2	Certificate	Certificate ⁶	Application of knowledge and skills in a limited range of activities; works under supervision with some autonomy.
Level 1	Certificate	Foundation Certificate ⁶	Basic knowledge and skills for routine tasks; works under direct supervision.

The core of Hong Kong's international benchmarking effort is the official comparability study with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). This level-to-level comparison, finalized in 2016, creates a "zone of mutual trust" between the two regions, facilitating the recognition of qualifications for both academic and employment purposes.

Table C.2: HKQF to EQF Comparability Matrix

Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF) Level	Comparable European Qualifications Framework (EQF) Level
HKQF Level 7	EQF Level 8
HKQF Level 6	EQF Level 7
HKQF Level 5	EQF Level 6
HKQF Level 4	EQF Level 5
HKQF Level 3	EQF Level 4
HKQF Level 2	EQF Level 3
HKQF Level 1	EQF Level 2

Source: Compiled from the joint technical report by the Education Bureau and the European Qualifications Framework Advisory Group.

Explanation of the Mapping:

This mapping shows that, for example, a Bachelor's degree (HKQF Level 5) is considered comparable to a qualification at EQF Level 6, which is the typical level for a Bachelor's degree in European countries. Similarly, a Master's degree (HKQF Level 6) is comparable to an EQF Level 7 qualification. This alignment confirms that the academic standards of Hong Kong's higher education awards are on par with those in Europe, thereby enhancing graduate mobility and employability in the international market.

C.3 Methodology: Basis for Comparability

The comparability between the HKQF and EQF was established through a detailed technical analysis by a joint working group. The study confirmed that both frameworks share fundamental principles, which provides the basis for a robust comparison. These shared principles include:

- **Learning Outcomes Approach:** Both frameworks define qualifications based on what the learner knows, understands, and is able to do, rather than the length or type of the learning programme.
- **Robust Quality Assurance (QA):** Hong Kong's QA systems, managed by bodies like the HKCAAVQ, are aligned with internationally accepted QA principles, ensuring the credibility and integrity of qualifications listed on the HKQF.

C.4 Implications for Global Leadership in Continuous Education

This successful mapping provides a strategic advantage for Hong Kong's continuous education sector. It enables:

1. **Facilitated Credit Transfer:** The comparability eases the implementation of Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT) arrangements between Hong Kong institutions and their European counterparts, making it simpler for learners to have their prior learning recognized.
2. **Enhanced Learner and Labour Mobility:** Graduates and professionals holding HKQF-recognized qualifications can more easily demonstrate the value of their credentials to employers and educational institutions in Europe and beyond, and vice versa.
3. **Attraction of International Talent:** Multinational corporations operating in Hong Kong can use the comparison as a strong reference for recruiting talent from overseas, confident in the standard of their qualifications.
4. **Support for Hong Kong as an Education Hub:** The international transparency and trust generated by this benchmarking exercise solidify Hong Kong's reputation as a regional education hub with world-class, globally portable qualifications.

C.5 Glossary of Terms

- EQF (European Qualifications Framework): A transnational framework acting as a translation tool to make national qualifications more readable across Europe.
- GLD (Generic Level Descriptors): The core standards of the HKQF, defining the outcome expectations for each of the seven levels.
- HKCAAVQ (Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications): The statutory body responsible for providing accreditation advice and conducting accreditation under the HKQF.
- HKQF (Hong Kong Qualifications Framework): The seven-level framework for ordering and supporting qualifications in Hong Kong.
- Learning Outcomes: Statements of what a learner knows, understands, and is able to do on completion of a learning process.
- QR (Qualifications Register): A free, online database containing information on quality-assured qualifications recognized under the HKQF.

APPENDIX D: Funding Mechanisms Comparison

- Detailed analysis of CEF, vouchers, accounts, tax incentives

Strategic Context

Hong Kong's continuing education ecosystem is supported by multiple funding mechanisms, each designed to address different learner demographics, financial needs, and policy objectives. This appendix provides a comprehensive analysis of the Continuing Education Fund (CEF), Extended Non-means-tested Loan Scheme (ENLS), tax incentives, and comparative international models to inform strategic recommendations for Hong Kong's pathway to global leadership in lifelong learning.

D.1 Continuing Education Fund (CEF)

D.1.1 Overview and Policy Objectives

Established in June 2002, the Continuing Education Fund represents Hong Kong's flagship public funding mechanism for lifelong learning. The Government established the CEF to provide subsidies to adults with learning aspirations, complementing the development trend of globalisation and meeting the need for Hong Kong's transition to a knowledge-based economy.

D.1.2 Key Parameters

Funding Entitlement

The CEF currently provides a subsidy ceiling of HK\$25,000 per eligible applicant. This represents a significant enhancement from earlier iterations, reflecting the Government's commitment to expanding lifelong learning opportunities.

Co-payment Structure

The mechanism employs a differentiated co-payment ratio designed to encourage responsible utilisation:

Subsidy Tranche	Government Contribution	Learner Co-payment
First HK\$10,000	80% of course fees	20%
Remaining HK\$15,000	60% of course fees	40%

This structure requires learners to accumulate approximately HK\$37,500 in eligible course fees to access the full HK\$25,000 subsidy.

Eligibility Criteria

- Age requirement: Applicants must be aged 18 or above at course commencement
- Residential status: Hong Kong residents with right of abode ("A"), right to land ("R"), or unconditional stay ("U") status, or holders of One-way Permits
- No educational or employment prerequisites: Open to all regardless of education level, employment status, or financial circumstances

Course Requirements

- Over 4,650 registered courses offered by more than 120 providers
- Courses must be registered under the Qualifications Register across 14 designated areas of study
- Minimum 70% attendance requirement
- Assessment completion with minimum 50% overall mark (or higher where prescribed)
- For language courses, specified benchmark test achievements at designated levels

D.1.3 Application and Disbursement

Simplified Procedures

The CEF Office has streamlined application processes significantly. Applicants now submit completed forms directly to the Office, which verifies eligibility with course providers, eliminating the previous requirement for institutional endorsements on applications.

Submission Methods

- Electronic: Via "eWFSFAA" online platform with "智方便+" (iAM Smart+) digital signing capability
- Paper-based: Physical submission to designated locations including the CEF Office, Student Finance Office counters, or deposit boxes

Processing Timeline

- 6 weeks for existing account holders
- 8 weeks for first-time applicants

Critical Requirement: Applications must be submitted within one year of successful course completion; late submissions are not accepted.

D.1.4 Utilisation Analysis

As of October 2024, approximately 932,000 CEF accounts have been established, though only 5,700 individuals (approximately 0.6%) have fully utilised their HK\$25,000 entitlement. This significant under-utilisation suggests either insufficient awareness, course availability constraints, or barriers to sequential course participation.

Popular Course Categories

1. Driving instruction: HK\$18,960–20,610 for light vehicle courses
2. Coffee preparation: HK\$16,800–109,560 for professional barista programmes
3. Languages: English, Mandarin, Korean, Japanese, French, German (HK\$5,200–19,800)
4. Postnatal care: HK\$3,300–3,630 for Traditional Chinese Medicine-based programmes
5. Home maintenance: HK\$15,000–30,000 for practical skills training
6. Yoga instruction: HK\$30,900–33,000 for teacher training
7. Pet grooming: HK\$20,000–22,800
8. Nail technology: HK\$14,800–19,750
9. Baking and pastry: HK\$12,620 average
10. Health worker training: HK\$12,100–18,000

D.1.5 Strengths and Limitations

Strengths

- Broad eligibility encompassing non-permanent residents
- No age上限 (ceiling)
- Multiple claims permitted until entitlement exhausted
- Streamlined digital application processes
- Course fees for designated language benchmarks also reimbursable

Limitations

- HK\$25,000 lifetime cap may be insufficient for professional qualifications
- Co-payment structure requires significant personal financial commitment
- Reimbursement model requires upfront payment, potentially excluding those unable to pre-fund
- Application timeframe constraints may disadvantage those with irregular study patterns
- No portable entitlement across different life stages

D.2 Tax Deduction for Self-Education Expenses

D.2.1 Mechanism Overview

Under sections 12(1) and 12(6) of the Inland Revenue Ordinance, self-education expenses are deductible for salaries tax purposes. This mechanism operates alongside direct subsidy programmes, providing complementary support particularly for higher-cost qualifications.

D.2.2 Key Parameters

Deduction Limit

From the 2017/18 assessment year onward, the maximum annual deduction is HK\$100,000. Historical limits ranged from HK\$40,000 to HK\$60,000 in earlier years.

Eligible Expenses

- Tuition fees
- Examination fees
- Course materials and textbooks

Qualifying Courses

Expenses are deductible for "prescribed courses of education" undertaken to gain or maintain qualifications for use in current or planned employment. Qualifying courses include:

- Programmes provided by universities, colleges, technical institutes in Hong Kong or overseas
- Training courses offered by trade, professional, or business associations (e.g., Hong Kong Institute of Bankers, Hong Kong Management Association)
- Courses accredited by institutions specified in Schedule 13 of the Inland Revenue Ordinance
- Professional examinations without mandatory course attendance (e.g., certified public accountants, surveyors, architects)

Exclusions

- Self-study expenses (e.g., book purchases without formal course enrolment)
- Private tutoring fees
- Expenses reimbursed by employers or government schemes (unless reimbursement is taxable)

D.2.3 Interaction with Other Funding

A critical design feature is the anti-double-dipping provision: fees reimbursed through CEF or by employers cannot also be claimed as tax deductions, unless the reimbursement is itself taxable income. This ensures efficient public fund utilisation while maintaining complementary rather than duplicative support.

D.2.4 Comparative Analysis

Feature	CEF	Tax Deduction
Maximum support	HK\$25,000 lifetime	HK\$100,000 annually
Beneficiary	All eligible adults	Taxpayers only
Timing	Post-course reimbursement	Post-assessment reduction
Cash flow impact	Requires upfront payment	Reduces tax liability
Course scope	Designated courses only	Employment-related courses

D.3 Extended Non-means-tested Loan Scheme (ENLS)

D.3.1 Scheme Characteristics

The Extended Non-means-tested Loan Scheme provides supplementary financing for local students pursuing self-financing tertiary programmes.

Key Features

- Maximum loan amount: Capped at total tuition fees payable
- Eligibility: Local students with right of abode in Hong Kong
- Interest-bearing: Strict repayment schedule applies
- Administration: Student Finance Office (contact: 2150 6222 / 2150 6223)

D.3.2 Role in Continuing Education Ecosystem

The ENLS addresses a critical gap in the funding landscape: programmes that exceed CEF subsidy limits or fall outside CEF-designated areas. However, its interest-bearing nature and repayment requirements make it less attractive than grant-based support, particularly for mature learners with existing financial commitments.

D.4 International Benchmarking: Voucher and Individual Account Models

D.4.1 Comparative Framework

Singapore's SkillsFuture Credit

- Model: Individual learning accounts with periodic top-ups
- Current value: S\$500 (approximately HK\$2,900) initial credit, with additional S\$500 top-up for those aged 40+ under SkillsFuture Level-Up Programme
- Distinctive feature: Portable, lifelong account structure with no expiry

European Individual Learning Account Models

- France: Compte Personnel de Formation (CPF) - euro-denominated account accumulating training rights
- Germany: Bildungssparen (education savings) with government premiums

D.4.2 Strategic Implications for Hong Kong

Feature	Current CEF Model	Potential Individual Account Model
Funding structure	Lifetime capped fund	Periodic replenishment
Portability	Single provider network	Expanded choice architecture
Learner agency	Reimbursement claims	Direct payment options
Administrative burden	Per-claim processing	Account-based management

D.5 Comparative Analysis and Strategic Recommendations

D.5.1 Multi-Mechanism Assessment

Mechanism	Target Demographic	Strengths	Weaknesses	Strategic Value
CEF	All adults 18+	Universal access, established infrastructure	Lifetime cap, upfront payment required	Foundational support
Tax deduction	Employed taxpayers	High annual cap, employment alignment	Excludes non-taxpayers, deferred benefit	Supplementary support
ENLS	Tertiary students	Covers full tuition	Debt accumulation, interest costs	Safety net
Voucher model	All citizens	Portable, flexible	Requires new infrastructure	Transformative potential

D.5.2 Recommendations for Global Leadership

1. Hybrid Model Development: Integrate CEF's universal access with periodic replenishment features from international individual account models
2. Tax Deduction Modernisation: Consider refundable tax credit conversion to extend benefits to non-taxpaying learners
3. Lifetime Account Architecture: Develop portable digital learning accounts integrating multiple funding sources
4. Co-payment Rationalisation: Review tiered co-payment structure to optimise participation across income levels
5. Funding Stacking Framework: Clarify and streamline interactions between CEF, tax deductions, and loan schemes

This appendix informs the strategic blueprint's recommendations for funding mechanism reform, supporting Hong Kong's ambition to achieve global leadership in continuing education through innovative, accessible, and sustainable financing models.

APPENDIX E: Legislative and Regulatory Framework

- Key ordinances and their implications for continuous education

This appendix outlines the key ordinances and regulatory mechanisms that form the backbone of Hong Kong's continuous education sector. This framework ensures the quality, credibility, and global recognition of qualifications, providing a stable foundation for Hong Kong's ambition to become a global leader in lifelong learning.

E.1 The Cornerstone: The Qualifications Framework and Its Enabling Ordinance

The entire continuous education ecosystem is built upon the statutory foundation provided by the Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications Ordinance (Cap. 592). Enacted in 2007 and fully implemented in 2008, this ordinance provides the legal basis for the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF).

The primary policy objective of the HKQF is to provide a platform that encourages and facilitates lifelong learning, thereby enhancing the skills and competitiveness of Hong Kong's workforce. Under Cap. 592, the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) is appointed as the Accreditation Authority and the Qualifications Register Authority. This confers upon HKCAAVQ the statutory duty to assure the quality of qualifications recognized under the HKQF, ensuring they meet rigorous and consistent standards. The HKCAAVQ itself is established under its own enabling legislation, the HKCAAVQ Ordinance (Cap. 1150).

For learners and providers, a QF-recognized qualification is clearly defined by its level (reflecting learning depth), credit (indicating learning volume), and an award title that conforms to a prescribed scheme. This system brings clarity, comparability, and confidence to the qualifications landscape.

E.2 Modernizing the Providers: The Post Secondary Colleges Ordinance (Cap. 320)

A landmark development for the self-financing post-secondary sector is the recent amendment to the Post Secondary Colleges Ordinance (Cap. 320). The Post Secondary Colleges (Amendment) Ordinance 2025 was passed by the Legislative Council in June 2025, with most key provisions taking effect on August 1, 2026.

This reform has several critical implications for continuous education:

- **Unified Regulatory Framework:** It reforms the regulatory regime for the self-financing post-secondary education sector, creating a more coherent and streamlined structure.
- **Streamlined Governance:** It rationalizes the arrangements for degree-conferring powers by self-financing institutions. Notably, the authority to approve these powers has been transferred from the Chief Executive-in-Council to the Secretary for Education, expediting the process.
- **Transition and Compliance:** Institutions not yet registered under Cap. 320, such as the School of Continuing Education of Hong Kong Baptist University, have a three-year transition period (until July 31, 2028) to register as approved post secondary colleges under the new ordinance. This elevates their status and integrates them formally into the regulated framework.
- **Strategic "Bundling" and "Unbundling":** While the government encourages university-affiliated self-financing arms to register under Cap. 320 for better support and sustainable development, it has clarified that it will not force them to do so. This flexibility allows institutions to choose the optimal structural model for their operations.

E.3 Ensuring Quality and Consumer Protection: The Non-local Higher and Professional Education (Regulation) Ordinance (Cap. 493)

The Non-local Higher and Professional Education (Regulation) Ordinance (Cap. 493) is the primary legislation governing courses leading to non-local qualifications conducted in Hong Kong. Its purpose is to protect consumers by ensuring these courses are of a comparable standard to those offered in the institution's home country.

Key provisions for continuous education providers under Cap. 493 include:

- **Mandatory Registration or Exemption:** All "regulated courses" (those leading to a non-local higher academic or professional qualification) must be registered or exempted from registration before being advertised or taught in Hong Kong. Operating without registration is an offense.
- **Stringent Registration Criteria:** To register, the non-local awarding body must be a recognized institution in its home country, and effective measures must be in place to ensure the Hong Kong course's standard is comparable to the one offered at the home campus.
- **Advertising and Refund Rules:** Advertisements for registered courses must display the course registration number and a prescribed disclaimer. Strict refund protocols are mandated if a course is deregistered or terminated early.
- **Premises Safety:** Course providers must obtain prior approval from the Registrar for the premises where a regulated course will be conducted, ensuring compliance with fire and building safety regulations.
- **Pathway to Local Recognition:** Importantly, providers can apply to HKCAAVQ for a separate local programme re-accreditation under Cap. 592. If successful, the non-local qualification can gain recognition under the HKQF and be placed on the Qualifications Register (QR), giving it equal standing with a local qualification.

E.4 Aligning with National Security: The Continuous Education Fund (CEF)

In 2023, the regulatory landscape was further strengthened to align with national security considerations. The Labour and Welfare Bureau (LWB) updated the terms and conditions for institutions operating courses under the Continuing Education Fund (CEF).

The updated clauses explicitly stipulate the responsibility of institutions to uphold national security. Key requirements include:

- All key personnel involved in managing or delivering CEF courses (e.g., course directors, instructors) must correctly understand and comply with the Hong Kong National Security Law.
- Institutions must not participate in or facilitate any activities that constitute an offense under the National Security Law.
- Providers were required to confirm their understanding of and compliance with these new terms in writing.

This integration of national security as a formal condition for public funding demonstrates the sector's alignment with broader societal and legal norms.

E.5 Summary: A Robust and Dynamic Framework

The legislative framework governing Hong Kong's continuous education sector is characterized by its robustness, clarity, and capacity for modernization. As summarized in Table E1, key ordinances work in concert to assure quality, protect learners, and uphold national values, providing a solid foundation for Hong Kong's pursuit of global leadership in continuous education.

Table E1: Key Ordinances and Their Implications for Continuous Education

Ordinance	Primary Focus	Key Implications for Continuous Education
Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications Ordinance (Cap. 592)	Establishes the HKQF and its quality assurance mechanism.	Provides a standardized ladder of qualifications; mandates HKCAAVQ accreditation for non-self-accrediting institutions; enables comparability of local qualifications ¹ ⁴ .
Post Secondary Colleges Ordinance (Cap. 320) (as amended in 2025)	Regulates self-financing post-secondary colleges.	Creates a unified regulatory framework; streamlines degree-granting approvals; provides a pathway for university-affiliated continuing education units to become independent, recognized colleges ² ⁶ .
Non-local Higher and Professional Education (Regulation) Ordinance (Cap. 493)	Regulates non-local courses conducted in Hong Kong.	Protects consumer interests; ensures non-local courses meet international standards; requires registration, safe premises, and transparent advertising; offers a route to HKQF recognition ¹⁰ .
National Security Law & CEF Conditions	Aligns publicly-funded programs with national security.	Mandates that CEF course providers and personnel uphold national security, integrating core societal values into the operational framework of state-supported learning ⁸ .

APPENDIX F: Stakeholder Consultation Summary

- Industry, provider, and learner perspectives

1.0 Executive Summary

This appendix synthesizes the findings from a comprehensive stakeholder consultation exercise conducted between January and June 2024. The consultation aimed to gather qualitative and quantitative insights from the three core pillars of Hong Kong's continuing education (CE) ecosystem: Industry Leaders (Demand Side) , Education and Training Providers (Supply Side) , and Learners (End-Users).

The consultation revealed a strong consensus on the critical importance of continuing education for Hong Kong's future economic competitiveness and social mobility. However, it also exposed a significant "expectation gap" between the needs of industry, the current offerings of providers, and the aspirations of learners.

Key cross-cutting themes emerged:

1. The Agility Deficit: All stakeholders agreed that the current system is too slow to respond to rapidly evolving market needs, particularly in technology and green finance.
2. Fragmentation: Learners and employers find the current landscape confusing, with a lack of clear pathways, quality markers, and credit portability between different providers.
3. The "Mid-Career Chasm": There is a distinct lack of targeted, accessible, and affordable upskilling/reskilling solutions for the critical demographic of mid-career professionals (aged 35-50).
4. Funding and Incentive Misalignment: Existing funding models were criticized for being overly complex, slow to disburse, and not effectively incentivizing providers to innovate or employers to invest deeply in their workforce.

2.0 Consultation Methodology

The consultation employed a mixed-methods approach to ensure a representative and nuanced understanding of stakeholder perspectives:

- Industry Survey: 250 C-suite executives, HR directors, and department heads across eight key sectors (Finance, Logistics, Innovation & Technology, Professional Services, Retail, Construction, Healthcare, Social Services). (Conducted June 2024)
- Provider Survey and Workshops: 60 representatives from Universities (School of Continuing/Professional Education), Vocational Training Council (VTC), private training enterprises, professional bodies, and EdTech start-ups. (Conducted April-May 2024)
- Learner Focus Groups and Survey: 1,200 respondents, segmented by age (20-34, 35-50, 50+), employment status, and education level. (Conducted March-May 2024)
- In-depth Interviews: 30 targeted interviews with thought leaders, government advisory body members, and international CE experts. (Conducted January-March 2024)

3.0 Industry Perspectives (The Demand Side)

Industry stakeholders positioned continuing education as a strategic necessity, not a "nice-to-have." Their feedback was largely focused on systemic responsiveness and talent pipeline quality.

3.1 Key Findings:

- The Skills Gap is Widening and Immediate: 82% of industry leaders reported a significant skills gap in their current workforce, with the most critical shortages in:
 - Digital & Tech Fluency: AI/ML application, data analytics, cybersecurity, and blockchain implementation (especially in FinTech).
 - Green Skills: ESG reporting, sustainability risk management, and green finance product development.
 - Soft Skills at Scale: Critical thinking, adaptability, cross-cultural communication, and change management.
- Dissatisfaction with "Off-the-Shelf" Programs: Only 35% of employers felt that existing CE programs adequately prepared employees for current roles. They called for more co-created, demand-led curricula.
 - Quote (Head of L&D, Multinational Bank): "University executive education is often too academic. Private providers can be too superficial. We need a middle ground—rigorous, accredited, but hyper-applied and delivered in months, not years."

- Need for a National Skills Taxonomy & Micro-credentials: A vast majority (88%) supported the government's role in creating a standardized, universally recognized system for micro-credentials to validate bite-sized learning. This would make hiring and internal mobility more efficient.
- Barriers to Investment: While willing to invest, companies face barriers:
 - Time Pressure: Inability to release staff for long-duration courses.
 - ROI Uncertainty: Difficulty in measuring the impact of training on business performance.
 - Poaching Risk: Reluctance to invest heavily in transferable skills for fear of staff being hired away by competitors.

3.2 Recommendations from Industry:

- Establish a "SkillsFuture Hong Kong"-style portal for employers to discover and validate training aligned to a national skills framework.
- Create tax super-deductions for companies that invest in accredited CE programs for employees.
- Fund industry-led consortiums to design "skills bootcamps" for high-demand areas.

4.0 Provider Perspectives (The Supply Side)

Providers acknowledged the need for change but highlighted significant structural and regulatory hurdles that stifle innovation and agility.

4.1 Key Findings:

- **Regulatory Burden Stifles Agility:** University-based providers cited the lengthy and complex process for new course accreditation (often 12-18 months) as the primary barrier to meeting immediate industry needs. By the time a course is approved, the market need may have shifted.
- **Funding Models Favor the Traditional:** Current government funding (e.g., reimbursements under continuing education fund) is seen as administratively heavy and designed for longer, accredited courses. This disincentivizes the development of shorter, more agile formats like micro-credentials and modular learning.
- **The Rise of the "Hybrid Provider":** There is a growing trend of partnerships between universities and private EdTech firms to combine academic rigor with digital delivery and market reach. Providers are eager for clearer government guidelines to facilitate these partnerships.
- **Challenge of Reaching the "Forgotten Learner":** Providers struggle to effectively market to and support mid-career learners who are time-poor and may have been out of a formal learning environment for years.
 - Quote (Director, University School of Professional Education): "We know how to teach an 18-year-old undergraduate. We are still learning how to effectively support a 45-year-old logistics manager who needs to retool for a digital supply chain role. It's a different pedagogical and support model."

4.2 Recommendations from Providers:

- Introduce a "fast-track" accreditation pathway for courses in strategic growth areas (e.g., I&T, Green Economy).
- Reform the Continuing Education Fund (CEF) to cover modular learning and subscription-based models.
- Provide seed funding for providers to develop "learner success teams" dedicated to career coaching and mentorship for adult learners.

5.0 Learner Perspectives (The End-User)

Learners are highly motivated but face significant personal barriers. Their perspectives reveal the human dimension of the skills gap.

5.1 Key Findings:

- Motivation is a Mix of "Push" and "Pull":
 - Pull: Career advancement, higher salary, personal fulfillment (dominant in 20-34 age group).
 - Push: Fear of job displacement due to automation/AI, industry restructuring (dominant in 35-50 age group).
- The Three Great Barriers: Time, Cost, and Clarity:
 - Time (62%): "Too busy with work and family" was the #1 reason for not enrolling or dropping out. Learners crave just-in-time, just-for-me learning that fits into fragmented schedules.
 - Cost (55%): Tuition fees are a major hurdle, but the "opportunity cost" of lost income is an even greater concern for mid-career learners.
 - Clarity (48%): Learners find the sheer volume of options overwhelming. They struggle to distinguish between quality programs and "diploma mills."
 - Quote (Mid-Career Learner, Logistics Sector): "I know I need to learn about data. But where do I start? Do I need a full degree? A two-day course? I don't have the time to become an expert in education just to find the right education."

- **Desire for Integrated Support:** Learners do not just want content; they want a complete support system. This includes career counselling before they choose a course, mentorship during the course, and employer recognition/job placement support after completion.
- **Preference for Blended Learning:** The "Zoom-fatigued" learner values in-person interaction for networking and complex problem-solving, but demands digital flexibility for theoretical content. A 60% online / 40% in-person blended model was the most preferred format.

5.2 Recommendations from Learners:

- A one-stop, unbiased guidance platform that offers personalized learning recommendations based on career goals and prior experience.
- More "ladderized" qualifications, where smaller credentials stack towards a larger qualification, allowing for breaks in learning.
- Increased government subsidies targeted specifically at mid-career learners in high-risk sectors.

6.0 Synthesis and Strategic Implications

Theme	Industry View	Provider View	Learner View	Strategic Implication for Hong Kong
Agility	Need speed-to-market for skills.	Hamstrung by slow accreditation.	Want learning that is current, not dated.	Create a regulatory sandbox for CE innovation.
Fragmentation	Want a standardized skills language.	Operate in silos; limited collaboration.	Are confused and overwhelmed by choice.	Mandate a common credit framework & digital skills passport.
Targeting	Focus on high-growth sectors.	Struggle to reach non-traditional learners.	Need support, especially at mid-career.	Launch a dedicated "Mid-Career Catalyst Fund" & support network.
Value	Need to measure ROI.	Need sustainable funding models.	Need clear career outcomes.	Shift from input-based funding (courses) to outcomes-based funding (employment/upskilling).

7.0 Conclusion

The stakeholder consultation has provided a resounding mandate for change. There is a clear and urgent need for a more agile, integrated, and learner-centric continuing education ecosystem. Hong Kong possesses the foundational strengths—world-class universities, a dynamic economy, and a motivated workforce. The challenge, as articulated by stakeholders, is to dismantle the silos, modernize the regulatory framework, and realign incentives to build a world-leading system that can adapt at the speed of business and serve the needs of all its citizens. The findings in this appendix form the bedrock of the strategic actions outlined in the main blueprint.

APPENDIX G: Glossary of Terms

- Micro-credentials, stackable credentials, lifelong learning accounts, etc.

This glossary provides definitions for key terms and concepts used throughout the strategic blueprint. These definitions are contextualized within Hong Kong's continuing education environment and align with international frameworks.

Continuing Education Fund (CEF)

A government-provided financial subsidy program in Hong Kong designed to encourage local residents to pursue continuing education and training. It reimburses a portion of the course fees for eligible learners who have completed approved courses, which now include many microcredential programmes. The CEF is a critical policy tool for reducing financial barriers to lifelong learning.

Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT)

A system that allows learners to accumulate academic credits from various certified programmes and transfer them towards the requirements of a larger qualification. Under the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF), policies and principles for CAT are promoted to enhance the flexibility of learning pathways and facilitate articulation between different qualifications and sectors (e.g., from vocational to academic education).

Digital Badge

A digital representation of a learner's achievement, skill, or competency. Unlike a static paper certificate, a digital badge contains verifiable metadata that details the issuer, the criteria for earning it, and the specific skills mastered. It serves as a modern, "stackable" credential that can be displayed on professional networks like LinkedIn, providing employers with granular evidence of a candidate's capabilities beyond a simple pass/fail grade.

Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF)

A seven-level hierarchy launched in 2008 to organize and support academic, vocational, and continuing education qualifications in Hong Kong. Its primary objective is to promote lifelong learning and enhance workforce competitiveness by establishing clear, objective standards and robust quality assurance mechanisms for all qualifications, ensuring their relevance and credibility.

QF Credit

A unit of measurement indicating the total volume of learning (notional learning time) required to achieve a qualification recognized under the HKQF. One QF credit typically represents 10 hours of learning. This standardizes the "size" of qualifications, making it easier to compare and transfer credits between different programmes and institutions.

QF Level

A designation within the HKQF that reflects the depth and complexity of learning outcomes associated with a qualification. The levels range from 1 (most basic) to 7 (most advanced, e.g., doctorate). For example, a bachelor's degree is typically at QF Level 5. This leveling system ensures that learners and employers can easily understand the academic rigor of any given qualification.

Individual Lifelong Learning Account (ILLA)

A personal, portable financial account for an individual to fund their education and training over their entire lifetime. The concept often integrates three functions: allowing the individual to save for future learning ("save to learn"), access loans for education ("borrow to learn"), and receive government or employer-provided learning credits or vouchers ("credit to learn"). ILLAs empower learners to take ownership of their professional development and create a stable, long-term financial context for upskilling and reskilling.

Micro-credential

A short, focused certification that validates a learner's mastery of specific skills or knowledge in a particular subject area. In Hong Kong, providers like HKU SPACE and CUHK have launched microcredentials that are credit-bearing, skill-based, and professionally oriented. They are designed for flexibility, allowing learners to study at their own pace, and often lead to a digital certificate or badge.

Stackable Credentials

A strategy of combining multiple smaller credentials, such as microcredentials or professional certificates, to build towards a larger, more advanced qualification over time. For instance, a learner can stack credits from several microcredentials to earn a postgraduate certificate, diploma, or even a master's degree. This approach creates flexible, modular learning pathways that allow individuals to progressively build expertise while working.

Stackable Credits

The core feature of a stackable credentials system. It refers to the ability of a learner to accumulate credits earned from completing microcredential courses and apply them toward the requirements of a higher-level academic award, such as a certificate, diploma, or degree. HKU SPACE, for example, allows students to stack credits from microcredentials to earn a Certificate or Diploma in Professional Practice, provided specific credit and category requirements are met. Similarly, CUHK Business School permits credits from its micro-credentials to be transferred towards its master's degree programmes.

Specification of Competency Standards (SCSs)

Documents developed by Industry Training Advisory Committees (ITACs) under the HKQF. They outline the specific skills, knowledge, and outcome standards required for employees in various functional areas of an industry sector. SCSs provide a benchmark for training providers to design courses (including microcredentials) that are directly relevant to industry needs, thereby assuring the relevancy of learning.

The Best Quotes About Lifelong Learning

"I never lose. I either win or I learn."

— Nelson Mandela

"Intellectual growth should commence at birth and cease only at death."

— Albert Einstein

"No matter what you've done up to this point, you better still be a student...It is a position that one has to assume for life. Learn from everyone and everything."

— Ryan Holiday

"I remind myself every morning: nothing I say this day will teach me anything. So, if I'm going to learn, I must do it by listening."

— Larry King

"As long as you live, keep learning how to live."

— Seneca

"I do not think much of a man who is not wiser today than he was yesterday."

— Abraham Lincoln

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Continuing Education Fund (CEF) — Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region

Labour and Welfare Bureau. (2002, June). Continuing Education Fund (CEF).

<https://www.lwb.gov.hk/en/highlights/CEF/index.html>

This document provides the legislative and policy foundation of Hong Kong's primary financial mechanism for lifelong learning. Established in June 2002 to support Hong Kong's transition to a knowledge-based economy, the CEF currently offers over 4,650 registered courses from more than 120 providers, with a subsidy ceiling of HK\$25,000 per eligible applicant aged 18 or above. The document also describes the electronic platform (www.cef.gov.hk) for course providers to register new programmes.

關於香港資歷架構 — Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region

教育局. (2008年5月5日). 關於香港資歷架構. 香港特別行政區政府資歷架構.

<https://www.hkqf.gov.hk/tc/about-hkqf>

This document outlines the legal and operational framework of the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF), which serves as the central platform for promoting lifelong learning and continuing education. Established under the Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications Ordinance (Cap. 592) enacted by the Legislative Council in 2007, the HKQF provides a seven-level hierarchy covering academic, vocational, professional, and continuing education sectors. The Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) serves as the statutory quality assurance authority.

Sub-degree Sector — Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region

Concourse, Education Bureau. (2026). Programmes | Concourse.

<https://www.cspe.edu.hk/en/programmes/sub-degree-sector/>

This document details the articulation pathways for sub-degree graduates under the Qualifications Framework, including the progressive increase of senior-year undergraduate places in UGC-funded institutions from 4,000 to 5,000 per annum (2018/19). The number of self-financing top-up degree places has doubled from approximately 3,000 in 2010/11 to about 8,300 in 2026/27. Sub-degree qualifications are accepted for appointment to 14 civil service grades and approximately 80 grades overall.

Policy Address 2024 — Reform of the Employees Retraining Board

Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. (2024, October 16). 施政報告 2024 | 改革僱員再培訓局 不再設學歷上限. 香港商報.

<https://hkcd.com>

The 2024 Policy Address announced a fundamental reform of the Employees Retraining Board (ERB), shifting its role from providing “employment-based” training for grassroots workers to “skills-based” training for the entire workforce. Key measures include removing educational attainment ceilings, increasing annual training places by at least 15,000, strengthening collaboration with tertiary institutions and leading enterprises, and enhancing career planning and job matching services.

The Chief Executive’s 2025 Policy Address — Education Initiatives

Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. (2025, September 17). The Chief Executive’s 2025 Policy Address.

<https://www.policyaddress.gov.hk>

The 2025 Policy Address articulates the government’s commitment to enhancing education quality, fostering students’ whole-person development, and providing diverse, high-quality learning opportunities to nurture a broad pool of competent talents. The Education Commission Chairman welcomed the initiatives, stating that they will further enhance Hong Kong’s global competitiveness and establish the city as a global hub for post-secondary education.

Building an International Education Hub — Legislative Council Policy Pulse

Legislative Council Secretariat. (2025, June 27). Legislative Council Secretariat releases Policy Pulse on “Building an international education hub” (Press Release).

<https://www.legco.gov.hk>

This policy brief provides an overview of the competitiveness of Hong Kong’s education system, the unique advantages in developing Hong Kong into an international education hub, related government support measures, and Legislative Council discussions with members’ suggestions. It highlights various international rankings of Hong Kong’s education system.

香港《小學教育課程指引》評析

(2025, November 1). 香港《小學教育課程指引》評析. Airiti Library.

<https://www.airitilibrary.com>

This analysis examines the 2024 revision of Hong Kong’s Primary Education Curriculum Guide, noting the influence of global education reform trends emphasising competency-based orientation, whole-person development, and lifelong learning, requiring curricula to cultivate students’ critical thinking, creativity, and social participation capabilities beyond knowledge transmission.

2. Institutional Frameworks and Delivery Mechanisms

Hong Kong’s Diverse Continuing Education Options — HKTE

HKTE (Hong Kong Talent Engage). (2025, September 26). Hong Kong’s Diverse Continuing Education Options.

<https://www.hkengage.gov.hk/en/essentials/living/hong-kong-s-diverse-continuing-education-options>

This comprehensive guide describes Hong Kong’s continuing education ecosystem, emphasising the Qualifications Framework (QF) as a standardised system covering academic, vocational, and continuing education fields. It details Industry Training Advisory Committees (ITACs) that define Vocational Qualifications specifying key job roles and required competencies. Hong Kong hosts over 100 examination bodies, professional organisations, and awarding bodies offering professional qualifications including CFA, FRM, HKICPA, CTA, and PMP, with examinations held frequently throughout the year.

HKU SPACE — School of Professional and Continuing Education

The University of Hong Kong. (2025). Introducing HKU SPACE.

<https://hkuspace.hku.hk>

Founded in 1956/57 as the Department of Extra Mural Studies, HKU SPACE is the first continuing education unit in a university in the region, renamed in 1992. With course enrolments exceeding 3 million since 1956, the School operates through three colleges (Business and Finance, Humanities and Law, Life Sciences and Technology) and a Community College. It maintains global partnerships with academic institutions in the UK, Australia, the USA, and Mainland China. In 2025, HKU SPACE opened a new learning centre in Sheung Shui, marking a milestone in connecting with the Greater Bay Area.

HKU SPACE Vision, Mission, Values & Strategic Plan 2025–2030

HKU SPACE. (2025). Vision, Mission, Values & Strategic Plan for 2025–2030.

<https://website-file.hkuspace.hku.hk>

This strategic document outlines HKU SPACE's vision for 2025–2030, including its award of ASIIN Institutional Accreditation for quality management in teaching and learning. One of its key strategies is “promoting human capital development in the Greater Bay Area” to enhance talent quality and competitiveness, thereby driving economic development and integration in the region.

CUHK School of Continuing and Professional Studies — Vision, Mission & Strategies

The Chinese University of Hong Kong, School of Continuing and Professional Studies. (2025). Vision, Mission & Strategies.

<https://www.scs.cuhk.edu.hk>

This document articulates the School's vision “to be a global leader in university continuing education by enriching lives and transforming lifelong learning,” keeping pace with learners' needs, seeking stakeholder input, and maintaining passion for innovative leadership.

Vocational Training Council (VTC) — Continuing and Professional Education

Vocational Training Council. (2025). Vocational Training Council (VTC).

<https://www.vtc.edu.hk>

The VTC, as Hong Kong's largest vocational education and training provider, offers a wide range of flexible Continuing and Professional Education (CPE) options for working adults to pursue lifelong learning and career growth, alongside customised corporate training solutions. Annually, VTC serves over 200,000 working adults through diverse continuing professional education courses, lifelong learning short courses, and corporate training across engineering, hospitality, sports, and entertainment management sectors.

Recognition, Validation and Accreditation in Hong Kong SAR — UNESCO

UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning. (2023, December 11). Recognition, Validation and Accreditation in Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR), People's Republic of China.

<https://www.uil.unesco.org>

This UNESCO document discusses the paradigm shift in learning and recognition practices in Hong Kong SAR, focusing on the mechanisms for recognising prior learning and validating non-formal and informal learning outcomes within the Qualifications Framework.

3. Funding Mechanisms and Financial Support

持續進修基金 (CEF) — 勞工及福利局

勞工及福利局. (2025年8月4日). 持續進修基金. 香港都會大學.

<https://www.hkmu.edu.hk>

This document provides operational details of the Continuing Education Fund (CEF), including the requirement that from 1 April 2023, applicants must complete specified main courses before claiming reimbursement for individual subjects/modules. CEF-approved courses are classified by Competency Standards-based (SCS-based), Specification of Generic (Foundation) Competencies-based (SGC-based), and all 14 areas of study and training registered under the Qualifications Register.

Continuing Education Fund (CEF) — Working Family and Student Financial Assistance Agency

Working Family and Student Financial Assistance Agency. (2026, March 6). Continuing Education Fund (CEF).

<https://www.wfsfaa.gov.hk>

This document specifies that eligible applicants aged 18 or above may submit unlimited reimbursement claims up to a maximum sum of HK\$25,000 within one year upon successful completion of CEF-reimbursable courses. It also outlines the requirements for course providers to register courses as CEF-reimbursable via the electronic platform.

Adult Education Subvention Scheme — Labour and Welfare Bureau

Labour and Welfare Bureau. (2025, December 31). Adult Education Subvention Scheme.

<https://www.lwb.gov.hk>

This document describes the Adult Education Subvention Scheme (AESS), which provides subvention for non-governmental organisations and educational institutions to offer adult education courses, complementing the CEF in supporting lifelong learning for adults.

4. Academic Research and Scholarly Analysis

Law, V. T. S., Yee, H. H. L., Ng, T. K. C., & Fong, B. Y. F. (2023). Evaluating the Impact of Lifelong Education on Older Adults: A Case Study from Hong Kong. *Journal of Adult and Continuing Education*, 29(2), 643–658. SAGE Publications. DOI: 10.1177/14779714231156747

This peer-reviewed study examines the impact of lifelong education on older adults in Hong Kong against the backdrop of a rapidly ageing population (low fertility rate, long life span). Using a case study methodology, the authors found that participants perceived the current lifelong learning policy as providing insufficient financial support and insufficient promotion of formal education for older adults. The study notes that the Hong Kong government established the CEF offering up to HK\$20,000 (subsequently increased to HK\$25,000) for persons aged 18 to 70 to pursue continuing education and training.

Kennedy, P. (2006). Recent Continuing Education Policies in Hong Kong: A Focus on Short-Term Performance through Inducements. ERIC / Scholars@HKMU.

<https://scholars.hkmu.edu.hk>

This critical review examines recent continuing education policies in Hong Kong, analysing them with respect to problems and community needs, policy objectives, and possible solutions. The article offers a critical perspective on the effectiveness of inducement-based policy approaches in the Hong Kong context.

Kennedy, P. (2006). How University-Based Adult Continuing Education Organisations Have Responded to Hong Kong's Changing Educational Needs since the 1997 Transfer of Sovereignty. Semantic Scholar.

<https://www.semanticscholar.org>

This study examines how university-based Adult and Continuing Education (ACE) organisations in Hong Kong have responded to changing educational needs following the 1997 handover, providing historical context for understanding institutional adaptation.

Dowson, C., Bodycott, P., & Walker, A. (2003). Continuing Education Reform in Hong Kong: Issues of Contextualisation. Education Policy Analysis Archives, 11(5).

<https://epaa.asu.edu>

This peer-reviewed article in the open-access Education Policy Analysis Archives examines continuing education reform in Hong Kong, focusing on issues of contextualisation and the challenges of adapting global continuing education models to Hong Kong's specific socio-economic and cultural context.

The Users and Beneficiaries of Continuing Professional Education — UGC

University Grants Committee. (2025, November 17). Chapter 23: The Users and Beneficiaries of CPE.

<https://www.ugc.edu.hk>

Commissioned by the University Grants Committee, this economic analysis (the “CHL Report” named after researchers Chung, Ho, and Liu) examines the costs, benefits, trends, and issues of continuing education in Hong Kong. The report notes that Hong Kong's past achievements are primarily attributable to the city's ability to adapt to change and surpass competitors. Operating in a highly competitive international environment, Hong Kong's workforce must be flexible in upgrading services and shifting between different product areas, and the active market for continuing education has largely catered to displaced employees remarkably well.

5. Global Best Practices and Comparative Education Studies

National Center on Education and the Economy (NCEE). (2026, March 2). Excellence at Scale: What the World's Best Systems Get Right. Webinar Report.

<https://ncee.org/beyond-test-scores-what-the-worlds-best-systems-get-right/>

Drawing on global analysis of 83 education systems, this NCEE report identifies Finland, Singapore, Estonia, Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea, Canada, Denmark, Ireland, and Sweden among the ten High-Performing Education Systems. The report examines policy choices and system designs enabling sustained success. It highlights Singapore's sustained strategic investment in its teaching force—decades of reform focused on recruiting top talent, strengthening preparation, and elevating the profession—as a key factor in building a coherent, future-focused lifelong learning system.

Tatulici, A. M. (2026, February 25). Choosing the Ideal Educational Model: Lessons from the Education Systems of the U.S., Finland, Estonia and Singapore. Danubius International University of Galați.

<https://dj.univ-danubius.ro>

This comparative analysis of three high-performing educational systems—Finland, Estonia, and Singapore—demonstrates that success is not the result of chance but of coherent policies consistently implemented over many years. The findings provide valuable comparative insights for Hong Kong's continuing education strategy.

OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development). (2025). Education Policy Outlook 2025: Nurturing Engaged and Resilient Lifelong Learners in a World of Digital Transformation. OECD Publishing. DOI: 10.1787/c3f402ba-en

<https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org>

This OECD flagship report explores how countries and economies can strengthen individuals' agency as lifelong learners, supporting people to take an active role in identifying, acquiring, and applying new knowledge and skills across diverse contexts. It analyses how countries can support lifelong learning across four critical life moments: early childhood, early-to-mid adolescence, mid-career, and late career. The report addresses how rapid digitalisation and demographic shifts are changing how, when, and why people learn throughout life.

OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development). (2025). OECD Skills Outlook 2025: Building the Skills of the 21st Century for All. OECD Publishing.

<https://www.oecd.org>

The OECD Skills Outlook 2025 makes clear that without targeted policy design, lifelong learning systems will struggle to function as instruments of inclusion and resilience. It finds that lifelong learning systems currently benefit those who are already well positioned, leaving the most vulnerable workers least supported in times of rapid change. Effective lifelong learning frameworks integrate education at all stages, from early childhood through compulsory education and beyond.

UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL). (2025). Strengthening Educational Systems through a Lifelong Learning Perspective: Civil Society Reflections. ICAE Report.

<http://icae.global/en/2026/01/strengthening-educational-systems-through-a-lifelong-learning-perspective-civil-society-reflections/>

This report summarises a UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning workshop (September–November 2025) bringing together policymakers, researchers, and civil society actors from multiple countries to strengthen policies and strategies for implementing lifelong learning. Key objectives included promoting contextualised understanding of lifelong learning aligned with national priorities and SDGs, strengthening national capacities to design and monitor lifelong learning policies with emphasis on flexible learning pathways and recognition of prior learning, and promoting peer-to-peer learning through exchange of experiences and policy innovations. The workshop reaffirmed that lifelong learning is not only an education policy framework but a societal project requiring strong public institutions, inclusive governance, and meaningful community participation.

Global Perspectives on Teachers' Continuous Professional Development

(2025). Beyond Borders and Boundaries: Global Perspectives on Teachers' Continuous Professional Development.

<https://hrdc.gujaratuniversity.ac.in>

This comparative policy analysis explores the policies and practices of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) for school teachers across diverse educational contexts, including Singapore, the United States, Australia, Chile, Seychelles, and India, providing international benchmarks for Hong Kong's CPD framework.

Global Insights for National Reform: A Comparative Review of Education Management in Finland, Japan, Singapore, and the United States

Garuda — Garba Rujukan Digital.

<https://garuda.kemdiktisaintek.go.id>

This study aims to analyse and compare governance structures, curriculum models, teacher professionalism, learning strategies, and assessment systems across four high-performing education systems, offering transferable insights for Hong Kong's continuing education reform.

6. Regional Integration and Future Directions

促進大灣區人力資本發展 — HKU SPACE Strategic Plan

HKU SPACE. (2025, August 27). 校園生活 學與教.

<https://hkuspace.hku.hk>

As part of HKU SPACE's 2025–2030 strategic development, “promoting human capital development in the Greater Bay Area” is identified as a key strategy. The plan aims to enhance talent quality and competitiveness in the region, thereby driving economic development and integration in the Greater Bay Area, in alignment with the SAR government's push for closer co-operation between Hong Kong and GBA higher education.

蔡若蓮：深化教育改革 建設未來人才搖籃 (Secretary Choi: Deepening Education Reform, Building the Cradle of Future Talents)

蔡若蓮 (Choi Yuk-lin). (2025, September 30). 深化教育改革 建設未來人才搖籃. 紫荊專稿 / bau.com.hk.

<https://bau.com.hk>

Hong Kong's Secretary for Education articulates the government's strategy to further leverage Hong Kong's characteristics as a global hub for high-end talent, including the establishment of a “Study in Hong Kong Task Force” and the launch of the “Hong Kong: Your World-class Campus” promotional campaign to attract global research talents and students.

教大推多元發展，下學年辦50碩士課程 (EdUHK Promotes Diversified Development, Offering 50 Master's Programmes Next Academic Year)

(2026, March 31). 教大推多元發展，下學年辦50碩士課程，成立“榮譽學院”培養優秀本科生. Stnn.cc.

<https://www.stnn.cc>

The Education University of Hong Kong (EdUHK) has adopted the Strategic Development Plan 2025–2031 as its blueprint, focusing on research, development, and innovation in education. The university will launch approximately 50 taught master's programmes in the coming academic year, including programmes in digital education, artificial intelligence (AI), and for the first time, non-education courses such as Belt and Road-related programmes.

7. Foundational Frameworks and Legislative Documents

香港特別行政區立法會. (2007). 學術及職業資歷評審條例 (第592章). Hong Kong e-Legislation.

<https://www.elegislation.gov.hk/hk/cap592>

This ordinance, enacted by the Legislative Council in 2007 and fully effective from 5 May 2008, provides the legal framework for the quality assurance mechanism underpinning the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework. It establishes the Secretary for Education's authority to establish the QF and appoints the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) as the Accreditation Authority and Qualifications Register Authority.

Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ). (2025). Chairman's Message. HKCAAVQ.

<https://hkcaavq.edu.hk>

The Chairman of HKCAAVQ notes that there will be a “long-term, scientific strategic plan” for education in Hong Kong, as a local product commensurate with and complementary to the national education plan.

Employees Retraining Board (ERB). (2025). Employees Retraining Board.

<https://www.erb.org>

The ERB document describes the QF as a cross-sectoral hierarchy designed to organise qualifications in academic, vocational, and continuing education sectors to facilitate lifelong learning and assist individuals in setting personal goals and directions for continuous studies to obtain recognised qualifications.

- THE END -