

# The Early Advantage

International Case Studies of Early Childhood Education and Care Systems



Responsive Policymaking and Implementation:  
From Equality to Equity

# Hong Kong

# Responsive Policymaking and Implementation: From Equality to Equity

A Case Study of the Hong Kong Early Childhood Education and Care System

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## Executive Summary

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*Responsive Policymaking and Implementation: From Equality to Equity: A Case Study of the Hong Kong Early Childhood Education and Care System*, an analysis of early childhood education and care (ECEC) in Hong Kong, is part of an international comparative analysis of ECEC systems in six countries/jurisdictions (Australia, England, Finland, Hong Kong, the Republic of Korea, and Singapore). Groundbreaking in intent, scope, and findings, the overall study, entitled *Early Advantage: Early Childhood Systems that Lead by Example*, tells the story of each system, probing the nature of services provided to young children and their families from the prenatal period through age 8, as well as the jurisdictions' unique approaches to the burgeoning field of ECEC. In so doing, each country story is unique, revealing, and contributes to the global understanding of promising and innovative policy, practice, and service delivery. This is the story of Hong Kong, one that focuses on the implementation of responsive policies to further support ECEC.

We use the term ECEC to denote holistic and converging services in health, family care, education, and social protection for children from birth to 6 years of age. In keeping with the terminology used by the Hong Kong government, the term *child care* refers to services for children from birth to 3 years, and the terms *kindergarten*, *preschool*, and *pre-primary education (PPE)* are used to refer to services for children ranging in age from 3 to 6 years. This case study considers ECEC policy and services for children from birth to the start of primary school at age 6, as well as the governance and financing of those services. Our analysis of the ECEC system is based on a detailed consideration of government documents, a review of relevant research, and interviews with 12 key stakeholders (e.g., senior government officials, influential community members, heads of service, academics).

### Policy

In any context, policy priorities reflect the condition of children, societal factors, and the availability of resources. As a relatively high-income jurisdiction, Hong Kong's ECEC

policies and provisions reflect the initiatives of a financially strong government that is keen to promote equal access to services for all children, irrespective of their socioeconomic status or ethnicity. Policies reflect beliefs that: (i) the primary responsibility for children under 3 rests with the family; (ii) adequate child care provisions can encourage mothers of young children to engage in paid employment; and (iii) children should be provided with quality education from kindergarten to fulfill their maximum potential.

There has been both continuity and change in ECEC policy in Hong Kong. On one hand, continuity is reflected in the persistence of traditional Chinese values, the fact that Hong Kong is a meritocracy, and the stress on quality education that emanated in the 1990s. On the other hand, change is reflected in the government's shifting stance on pre-primary services, its increasingly hands-on approach to policymaking, and its increasing responsiveness in the policymaking process.

Like many governments worldwide, the Hong Kong government has been responsive to characteristics of the local population, civil society demands, and global trends in early childhood policy and practice, which has led to significant improvements in the quality of early childhood education. Responsive policymaking is manifest in several important ways. First, the government has exerted considerable effort to ensure that stakeholders have numerous channels to provide feedback on proposed initiatives and ongoing programs. For example, the government has put forward reviews and modified policies in response to criticisms from parents and kindergartens. It should be noted, however, that some stakeholders argue that views not entirely in line with the government's desires are not given adequate attention. Second, policymaking has been especially responsive to the considerable income inequality that exists in Hong Kong, as demonstrated by the many initiatives to finance preschool education to bridge gaps that exist between the privileged and the disadvantaged.

Several decades ago, pre-primary education policy in Hong Kong focused on ensuring that disadvantaged children aged 3-6 could access early childhood education regardless of their families' financial status, by providing financial support to low-income families. This changed in 2007, when a universal, demand-side policy scheme was introduced to provide the families of all 3- to 6-year-olds—regardless of income—with vouchers to subsidize the cost of preschool education. A decade later, in September 2017, the government replaced this with the supply side-oriented Free Quality Kindergarten Educational Policy (FQKEP), which enables all children to receive free pre-primary education through funding offered directly to kindergartens/centers. These policy reforms reflect the government's marked increase of its financial investment in pre-primary education to promote high-quality education and social justice.

While not explicitly stated in any state-issued document, the government seems to be veering towards a doctrine of proportionate universalism, shifting the focus from **equality** to **equity** in its financing and support of early childhood services. Under the FQKEP, children with special learning needs and those from ethnic minority backgrounds are given an increased amount of specialized learning support. Hence, targeted services are provided to support equitable early childhood services to all children, including those from economically disadvantaged and/or ethnic minority groups, or those with special learning needs.

### Health Services

Hong Kong has a comprehensive and efficient public health service. The jurisdiction boasts one of the lowest infant mortality rates in the world, high immunization rates, and a universal developmental surveillance service that monitors children's development. Yet there are concerns about the early physical development of children due to low breastfeeding rates, inadequate nutrition, low levels of physical activity, and poor sleeping habits.

### Education and Care Services

All center-based ECEC in Hong Kong is provided by private organizations in a variety of settings. These include child care centers (ages 0-3), special child care centers (0-6), kindergartens (ages 3-6), kindergarten-cum-child care centers (ages 2-6), and kindergarten-cum-mixed child care centers (ages 0-6). The focus of the Hong Kong government thus far has been on children in the latter years of early childhood, i.e., 3- to 6-year-olds. There is nearly universal attendance of pre-primary education for this age group, with high demand due in part to Chinese cultural values that emphasize education and academic achievement. Access to kindergarten education has been high for several decades because of government funding and Hong Kong's small geographical size and excellent transport links. A free market economy wherein operating early childhood services is profitable ensures the supply meets the demand.

### Governance

The government regulates center-based ECE by setting and monitoring operating standards. The size of the system is relatively small and relevant government units monitor about 1,000 pre-primary institutions. Importantly, although the government has outsourced early childhood education to the private sector, it has powerful, well-structured policies that have progressively enhanced the pedagogical quality of center-based early childhood education over the last two decades by increasing the stringency of requirements to operate preschools. For example, the government has mandated more stringent teacher-child ratios and a higher level of teacher qualifications to improve pedagogical quality.

Hong Kong's split-phase and split-governance ECEC system has many initiatives to improve coordination of ECEC services across different government departments. For example, an inter-ministerial and interdisciplinary comprehensive child development service for children involves four different government departments/units. This

combined service promotes early identification of children with special needs, and the provision of timely support to these children and their families.

Some of our respondents identified concerns with the governance of Hong Kong's early childhood education system. These included issues with: (i) the government's vision and strategy for the development of early childhood education; (ii) the mode of funding for the FQKEP, including issues related to rents and premises; (iii) weak governmental guidance on salary scales for kindergarten teachers, which raises problems related to the attraction and retention of teachers; and (iv) lack of strong government intervention to educate parents on early years' development and education. Indeed, the government may not be doing enough at the system level to prevent some entrepreneurs in this free market economy from providing developmentally inappropriate educational services to young children in unregulated playgroups, nor to prevent the "hot housing" of preschool children.

In order to support effective governance of all ECEC services, the government regularly collects adequate, relevant, and reliable information on demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of the population. Population data are used for public policy formulation and to monitor the effectiveness of existing policies and programs. At the same time, there is a need for more data on the participation of children below 3 in ECEC and on children's outcomes as a result of ECEC. Such data may be used to evaluate program effectiveness, drive program improvement, and formulate evidence-informed policy.

### **Paradoxes**

Our analyses suggest that paradoxes lurk within Hong Kong's early childhood education system. First, the jurisdiction's small size, high population density, and efficient transport system make kindergarten education easily accessible. However, this high density simultaneously works against effective educational provision: space is at a premium, and many centers do not have outdoor play areas. Second, the government

places a high value on teacher preparation and continuous professional development, yet existing plans do not include elevating the status of pre-primary teachers to be equal to that of their primary school counterparts.

### Overcoming Challenges

While all respondents were positive about increased governmental involvement and expenditure in pre-primary education, some were less enthusiastic about the government's policies for children below the age of 3. Several respondents felt that not enough is being done to support the development of children in this age group, as the government generally considers the care and education of children under 3 as primarily the responsibility of the family. A notable development, however, is the government's recent commissioning of a consultancy to advise on the long-term development of child care services. Depending on the findings, the government may provide universal free child care for children aged 2 to 3, which would represent an important advancement in Hong Kong ECEC.

The government offers dedicated resources for children with special learning needs, but there are long waiting lists for centers that provide these specialized services. To address this, the Pilot Scheme on On-Site Pre-School Rehabilitation Services was initiated in 2015 to provide early intervention to children who are on the waiting list for government-funded services.

Another challenge is the lack of policy-relevant ECEC research currently being conducted in Hong Kong. Developing a central databank on child development and increasing funding for research should be future priorities in order to inform policy planning and evaluate program effectiveness.

The challenges mentioned above are in large extent due to: (i) the Hong Kong government's strategy of providing good infrastructure, allowing policy debate, and ensuring proper implementation of policy, but at the same time allowing market forces

to prevail; (ii) Hong Kong's limited natural resources; and (iii) its relatively high poverty rate and high levels of income inequality. Despite these challenges, Hong Kong has a high-performing and effective early education system. To continue to be a highly responsive system, government benchmarks for high quality should continue to become more stringent with time. Moreover, the government needs to give adequate consideration to stakeholders' concerns. A virtuous cycle of responsive policymaking and implementation and increased investment will ensure that all children in Hong Kong can benefit from high-quality early education.



**Part 1**  
**Introduction**

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## Chapter 1: Study Overview

### Rationale and Goals

#### *Rationale*

The Hong Kong Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) story could not come at a more opportune time. Globally, the world is casting its eyes and hopes on young children, matching these expectations with unprecedented global policy attention coupled with increased services and supports. In part, global attention might be attributed to the scores of policy documents emanating from the United Nations and other international bodies that extol the importance and benefits of serving young children. Moreover, abundant scientific research fuels this interest, emanating from domains as diverse as the neuro-, biological, evaluation, econometric, implementation, and systems sciences. But this focus on young children is not limited to the academy; rather, profound shifts in global demographics—exemplified by unprecedented rising rates of migration, diversification, and automation—are handmaidens to the paramount global realization that the early years matter. Similarly, there is a near-universal realization that what countries do during these all-important and non-retrievable years has the potential, *when done well*, to promote social cohesion, advance economic productivity, and prepare societies for the future. More than “babysitting” and “preparation for school,” ECEC is now considered the social elixir of positive change that the research has proven it to be; it has become the sine qua non of effective policy on a global scale.

Moreover, in Hong Kong, the time to examine ECEC has never been more ripe. Since the implementation of the Free Quality Kindergarten Education Policy (FQKEP) in September 2017, government has increased funding to enhancing the overall quality of ECEC. As a result, the ECEC sector may face dramatic change and evolution in the coming years.

The term ECEC is used throughout this case study to denote holistic and converging services in health, family care, education, and social protection for children from birth to 6 years of age. In the Hong Kong context, *child care* refers to services for children from birth to 3 years, while the terms *kindergarten education* and *pre-primary education* (PPE) are used interchangeably to refer to educational services for children ranging from 3 to 6 years. These terms are in keeping with the terminology used by the Hong Kong government.

### *Gaps and Goals*

With all this attention accorded to young children, it is somewhat surprising that only limited comparative analyses of ECEC services and their outcomes have been carried out. When conducted, such studies tend to: (i) provide league-table overviews of available services; (ii) focus on program evaluations that provide a glimpse into specific aspects of ECEC (e.g., parenting education); or (iii) examine specific aspects of children's performance in certain contexts. It is noteworthy that fewer than 10 studies, many conducted fairly recently, seek to understand ECEC from a comprehensive systems perspective, with many of these relying on data from a single source. Few tell complete country stories that explicate why and how exemplary services come to be, how they change and mature, and how they seek to alter the quality, equitable distribution, sustainability, and efficiency of services for young children. Few acknowledge the intimate roles that culture and context play in contouring the nature, amount, and quality of services for young children. Few adopt a systems and/or a systems-change approach to considerations of early childhood services, embracing the disciplines of education, health, and social welfare as they affect children from the prenatal period through the early years of formal schooling. And few use a systematic methodology that permits this kind of detailed analysis. These are the contributions of this study generally, and the intention of this narrative is to present how Hong Kong has systematically enhanced the quality, equitable distribution, and sustainability of services for young children over the last two decades.

### *Considerations*

Two important considerations contour this narrative. First, and unlike other studies, this analysis does not make causal claims regarding the potency of ECEC as a panacea for improving child outcomes, nor does it intend to endorse any one mode or strategy associated with ECEC. Stated simply, this study considers why, how, and with what effects ECEC systems have emerged in six high-performing jurisdictions, Hong Kong among them.

The second consideration relates to the focus on high-performing countries, coming at a time when so much attention is both lodged in, and aims to advance, ECEC in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). Pertinent questions regarding the transportability of lessons across contexts should and do prevail, as do equally potent questions surrounding the construct of “high-performing,” notably who defines it, and what it is. Fueled by concerns regarding the comparatively low performance of American students on international benchmarking assessments, the National Center on Education and the Economy (NCEE), the study’s funder, is interested in understanding elements of jurisdictional policies, practices, and reforms in countries that score well on PISA (The Programme for International Student Assessment). The goal is to discern variables that may account for discrepant country performances on PISA, with the intent of elevating the somewhat lackluster performance of the United States and other nations. Given that ECEC has been one of the most prominent educational reforms of the last two decades and is convincingly associated with producing significant long-term gains in students’ academic and life performance, NCEE was interested in supporting the development of a comparative study to discern the nature, scope, and promising practices associated with ECEC systems implementation in high-performing PISA countries that perform well on PISA. Precisely, how high-performing is defined and how participating countries were selected for the study is discussed below.

## Study Architecture

ECEC systems work is complicated, yet inescapable. A scholarly commitment to unmasking this complex territory using a systems lens distinguishes this study from others and provides the groundwork for its contributions. Those who understand ECEC readily acknowledge that it must be examined in its totality (Bruner, Wright, Gebhard, & Hibbard, 2004; Gallagher, Clifford, & Maxwell, 2004; Kagan & Cohen, 1996; Sugarman, 1991; Vargas-Barón, 2013). No one program or intervention can be a proxy for ECEC. No single approach to pedagogy can begin to explicate the complicated and fascinating panoply of policies that converge to create services for young children. But understanding the totality of ECEC is difficult because no country consolidates all the pre-primary services accorded to young children in a single ministry or at a single level of government. In addition to organizational chaos, ECEC policies face temporal changes; they often emerge during one year, only to disappear in the next, typically with changes in political leadership. Service access varies dramatically among countries (OECD, 2012), as does children's well-being (UNICEF, 2013), even in rich countries. With ECEC not yet deemed a right in most countries, inconsistent and sporadic practices and policies are gamed on ideological playgrounds amidst changing rules, funds, and governance structures. To make sense of systems, both in general and ECEC in particular, conceptual or analytic frameworks are necessary, as is a set of clearly delineated research questions.

## *Conceptual Framework*

There are an emerging number of conceptual frameworks, building blocks, organizational theories, and explanatory tools available to ease the challenge of untangling complex, highly-interactive phenomena. NCEE's Building Blocks for a World-Class State Education System (NCEE, 2015) is one extremely helpful tool, as is the World Bank's Systems Approach for Better Education Results (SABER), and its early childhood iteration, SABER-ECE (Neuman & Devercelli, 2013). These and other

frameworks underscore the salience of systems thinking, including the importance of policy goals and levers, human variables (e.g., leadership, professional development), and accountability factors (e.g., standards, data, compliance).

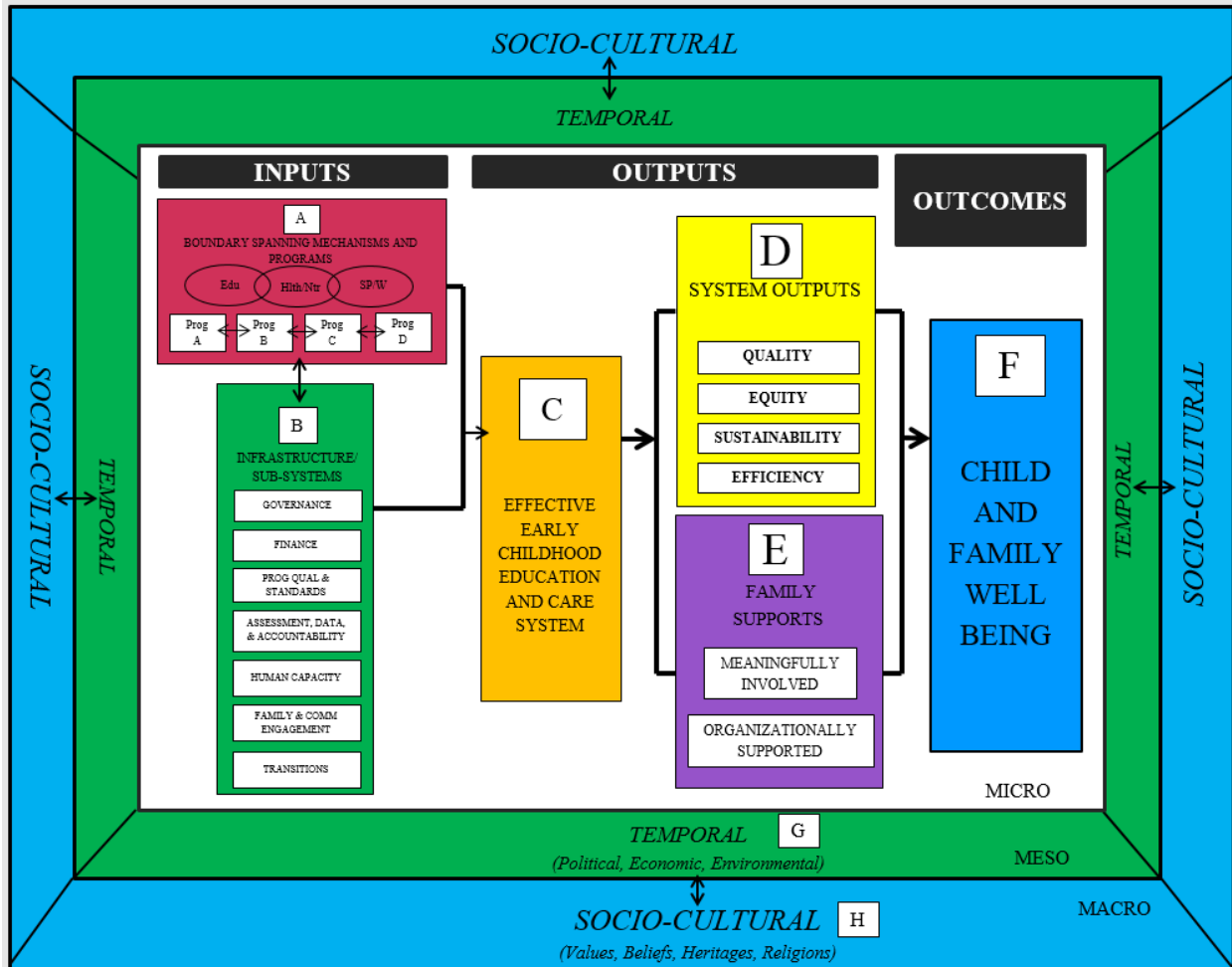
Considering the holistic nature of early development, the modal lack of consistent and durable ECEC policies, and the need for systems analyses, this study builds on prior conceptual grounding (Kagan, Araujo, Jaimovich, & Aguayo, 2016). The analysis provisionally suggests that positive child and family well-being (F)<sup>1</sup> are predicated on systemic (high-quality, equitably distributed, sustainable, and efficient services) (D) and family goals (E), which are achieved only in the presence of an effective system (C). Such a system is based on a clearly delineated infrastructure (B) that supports diverse programs (A), sometimes linked by a boundary-spanning mechanisms (BSM) that integrate programs and services across ministerial boundaries. All malleable, these factors are encased in both temporal (political, economic, environmental) (G) and socio-cultural (values, beliefs, heritages, religions) contexts (H).

With the goal of understanding each element of the analytic framework, the proposed analysis will focus on the programs/services (A), the infrastructure (B), and the way these conspire to yield an integrated system (C) that is capable of producing systemic outputs, within temporal (G) and socio-cultural (H) contexts.

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<sup>1</sup> Letters correspond to Figure 1.1.

Figure 1.1 Conceptual Framework



### Research Questions

Using the framework above, this analysis addressed a series of research questions that describe, compare, and analyze ECEC systems in the six study jurisdictions. Guided by an effectiveness standard that privileges high-quality, equitably distributed, sustainable, and efficient services, three sets of research questions were posed. Largely descriptive, the first set seeks to discern *what* understandings about each country's ECEC system actually exist, as well as the current status of the ECEC system. Comparative in nature, the second set of research questions seeks to understand *how*

differences in ECEC systems have evolved, are structured, and produce their intended outcomes. Analytic in nature, the final set of research questions seeks to explain or conjecture *why* the systems have evolved and function as they do. All of the research questions are designed to understand the nature and contributions of ECEC systems to high-quality, equitably districted, sustainable, and efficient service provision. Sample research questions are provided below; the full set of research questions is provided in volume *The Early Advantage: Early Childhood Systems That Lead by Example*.

### *Descriptive Questions – The What*

- What does the country perceive its commitment to young children to be, and what contextual variables evoked this stance?
- What are the major ECEC policies, frameworks, programs, and services in place (e.g., parental leave, perinatal services, home visiting, child care, preschool, transition, health and mental health services, and services for developmentally and economically at-risk children)?
- What does the country perceive as the need for, and elements of, an ECEC system, and to what extent are coordinating mechanisms (e.g., boundary-spanning mechanisms, coordinating bodies, mediating structures) and elements of the infrastructure (e.g., standards and monitoring, durable and sufficient financing, data systems, governance mechanisms, family and public engagement, pre- and in-service professional and leadership development) in place?

### *Comparative Questions – The How*

- How does the country value or “hold” young children, and how do these values frame policies and practices? Are there certain values that more heavily contour policies and practices, and how have they become instantiated in policy and practice?

- How do country policies vary over time as a result of changes in economic, political, and governmental (centralized / decentralized) conditions and structures? How do these changes affect patterns of implementation, and in the evolution of the ECEC system?
- How effective is the country in terms of the effectiveness of its ECEC system, as measured by its quality, equitable distribution, sustainability, and efficiency?

### *Explanatory Questions – The Why*

- Why, and for what reasons, does the evolving ECEC system reflect durable country values and more transient country economics and politics? Why, and under what conditions, do ECEC systems evolve?
- Why, and under what conditions, can mediating structures have more potency, without centralizing government engagement?
- Why, and under what conditions, can a country focus on outcomes to improve services to young children? Can, and under what conditions, the contemporary support for young children be mobilized to yield greater effectiveness in quality, equitable distribution, sustainability, and efficiency?

## **Methodology**

### *Country Selection*

Comprehensive comparative efforts always force tough decision-making regarding participant selection, be it at the geographic level (e.g., country, region, district, city, school), the individual level (e.g., governor, mayor, high-, mid-, or low-level bureaucrats, parents representing which children), or the analytic level (e.g., systems, program, school, or classroom). Different theoretical frameworks guide such selections, with policy-borrowing frameworks encouraging global south-north analyses (Steiner-Khamsi & Chisholm, 2009). Other selections are guided by funding source(s), which



may have interest in a particular region (Berlinski & Schady, 2015). Still others are interested in improving systems and developing appropriate metrics for that analysis (Mourshed, Chijoke, & Barber, 2010).

In this study, two diverse constructs guided the jurisdictional selection: (i) PISA performance rankings for mathematics and (ii) high-quality rankings on measures of ECEC quality. For the purposes of this analysis, the top 30 PISA 2012 countries were broken into three groups (high, 1-10; medium, 11-20; and lower, 21-30), ranked according to their mathematics results. Three corresponding vertical columns were created: countries ranking 1-10 were grouped in the far left vertical column; countries ranking 11-20 were placed in the middle column; and countries performing 21-30 were placed in the far right column. To discern the quality of ECEC programs, the Economist Intelligence Unit (2012) report for the same year was used to rank the countries' ECEC efforts. Looking at countries from around the world, the report examined four criteria: (i) social context; (ii) availability; (iii) affordability; and (iv) quality. Using a composite score based on these four criteria, this analysis divided the top 30 countries into three groups (high, 1-10; medium, 11-20; and lower, 21-30), similar to the groupings used for the PISA rankings. Three corresponding horizontal rows were created for the Economist results: countries ranking 1-10 were grouped in the top horizontal row; countries ranking 11-20 were placed in the middle horizontal row; and countries performing 21-30 were placed in the bottom horizontal row. Next, the two grids were combined to create nine cells (three by three). For each cell, the overlapping countries were listed, as reflected in Table 1 below.

Two countries (Netherlands and South Korea) performed in the highest third on both PISA and the Economist ranking, whereas five countries (Denmark, New Zealand, Norway, UK, France) performed in the lower third on PISA and the upper third on the Economist rankings. Given these different performance profiles, and given that only five to six countries could be involved in this study due to fiscal and temporal constraints, one country from each cell of the three PISA high-performing countries (the

left column) and one country from each cell of the three Economist high-performing countries (the top row) was selected. These countries are highlighted in yellow. This approach yielded five jurisdictions: South Korea, Hong Kong, Singapore, Finland, and the UK.<sup>2</sup> One additional country, Australia, was added for three reasons: first, it represented a totally different profile (medium PISA and low Economist rankings); second, unprecedented high-quality work is being undertaken in the country; and third, its mixed market and highly differentiated state approaches to early childhood remarkably parallel the United States.

**Table 1.1 Selected Countries**

	PISA HIGH	PISA MEDIUM	PISA LOWER
ECONOMIST HIGH	Netherlands <b>South Korea</b>	<b>Finland</b> Belgium	Denmark New Zealand Norway <b>UK - England</b> France
ECONOMIST MEDIUM	<b>Hong Kong</b> Switzerland	Germany Austria	Czech Republic
ECONOMIST LOWER	Japan <b>Singapore</b> Taiwan	Canada <b>Australia</b>	

*Data Sources*

The conceptual framework and the research questions presented above guided two distinct, yet related, reviews of the literature. The first is an analysis of multi-country studies that have been conducted on ECEC systems, and the second is a review of Hong

<sup>2</sup> Ultimately, it was decided to study England as it is the largest of the countries in the UK.

Kong-specific research, as well as pertinent policies and documents. Taken together, the two bodies of research represent the most recent data on ECEC systems available. In addition, interviews were conducted with key informants within the country.

### *Literature Reviews*

**Multi-Country Studies.** The purpose of the multi-country study analysis (later converted into a Compendium) was to identify key lessons from previous studies and analyses of ECEC systems around the world to inform the study of Hong Kong ECEC. By reviewing and analyzing multi-country studies focused on ECEC systems, which include significant attention to one or more elements of the infrastructure, the Compendium contributed to both the development of this country analysis and to the scholarship on comparative ECEC policy more generally. This is the first attempt to collate and synthesize global ECEC research using a systems lens. The review focused on discerning diverse methodologies, tools, and results of the limited number of similar studies that exist. Data from this review were helpful in reconsidering the provisional research questions and the methodological approach to this study. Information was gleaned from 16 research studies, most of which were conducted after 2010, and represent all regions of the world. These data have been analyzed and compiled into a compendium (Neuman, Roth, & Kagan, 2017).

**Hong Kong-Specific Documents.** To obtain a detailed overview of the evolution and contemporary status of ECEC in Hong Kong, numerous documents were reviewed. Policy documents, including those associated with the Pre-Primary Education Voucher and Free Quality Kindergarten Education schemes were reviewed, as were frameworks, including the Guides to Pre-Primary / Kindergarten Curriculum, List of Dos and Don'ts for Kindergartens, and The Operation Manual for Pre-Primary Institutions. Empirical research conducted in or about Hong Kong ECEC was also reviewed. Additionally, while many of the documents were well known, in order to capture failed and visionary efforts, additional unpublished literatures were also reviewed.

### *Key Informant Interviews*

In order to garner the most recent information regarding the status of the ECEC system in Hong Kong, a series of key informant interviews was conducted. Given that this analysis is the first comprehensive examination of the full ECEC system in Hong Kong, it needed to include a diverse set of key informants. Guiding the sample selection was a commitment to including diverse voices so that even a comparatively small sample could deliberately capture contrasting perspectives and, in some cases, disconfirming evidence. For all countries involved, the sampling frame included individuals from the government, heads of services of organizations that operated numerous kindergartens, influential community members, and the academic community. In Hong Kong, diverse ministerial personnel were interviewed including representatives from the Education, Labour and Welfare, and Food and Health Bureaus. In addition, an elected official was interviewed. Finally, scholars and representatives from The University of Hong Kong, the Education University of Hong Kong, and Hong Kong Baptist University were included. In total, 12 individuals were interviewed; they are listed in Appendix 3. Taken together, these individuals provided diverse perspectives on ECEC history, policies, services, and trends in Hong Kong.

### *Data Collection, Analysis, and Validation*

*Data Collection:* Document review preceded the key informant interviews and served as the basis for the development of interview protocols. Each document was reviewed for its salience to the research questions and key data from each document was summarized. The twelve interviews were conducted over a four-month period (October 2016 to January 2017), with each interview lasting approximately 60 minutes. In all cases, notes were taken during the interview. Typically, the interviews were conducted by the principal investigator, co-principal investigator, and an assistant.

*Data Analysis:* With the goal of producing an accurate and revealing story, a systematic process was used to analyze the data. Since the data are both quantitative and qualitative in nature, the Hong Kong team used different strategies to analyze each data set and then integrated the key lessons. The quantitative data were reported as they were extracted from primary sources; all quantitative data are attributed. The qualitative data were summarized into field notes that were then reviewed for policy and practice trends, concrete examples, and major areas of agreement and conflict. Data were integrated to discern key convergent and divergent themes that were expanded as the analysis was written. Primary source documents were consulted as the report was written. Once key themes were identified and substantiated, a draft document was prepared and reviewed by the internal Hong Kong team.

*Data Validation:* Committed to the highest standard of research, this analysis was validated at several points in its evolution. First, lead investigators from each of the six jurisdictions and the study's principal investigator (the international team) co-developed the data collection instruments. Developed for a prior study, these instruments were adapted for use in the present analysis and piloted in some of the counties to assure their validity for the current study. Second, categories of interview respondents were reviewed and confirmed by the international team with the goal of fostering a breadth of diverse, yet informed, interviewees. Agreed upon by the full team, the interviewee categories were content validated by the team. Third, the final draft of each of the six case studies was subjected to an internal review by a knowledgeable Hong Kong ECEC expert who was not affiliated with the study. Finally, the study was reviewed by external experts from the staff and board of the National Center on Education and the Economy.

### *Limitations*

Three major limitations characterize this study. First, the ECEC system in Hong Kong is in a state of flux. The FQKEP was implemented in September 2017, the same year that a

revised edition to the Guide to the Pre-Primary Curriculum, *Kindergarten Education Curriculum Guide: Joyful Learning through Play, Balanced Development All the Way*, was released. This Guide must be followed by all government-supported ECEC programs. These changes suggest that this analysis, although broadly reflective of the overall portrait of Hong Kong, simultaneously presents a snapshot in time. The field of ECEC systems, however embryonic, is rapidly changing and this study must be understood within its dynamic contextual realities.

Second, as is the case for any qualitative research, the positionality of the lead investigator influences the interpretation of the data. While efforts have been made to validate the accuracy of the information provided, some of the content of this analysis is subjected to the interpretation of the authors, most of whom are research scholars. Such positionality is somewhat mitigated by the reality that the authors have conducted cross-national work and by the fact that numerous international and external reviewers have examined the content of this study.

Finally, this study captures the nature and evolutionary process associated with the development of an ECEC system in Hong Kong. As such, it is based on a conceptual framework that specifies the outputs of systemic work in four areas: quality, equitable distribution, sustainability, and efficiency of services. The efficacy of the systems is, therefore, predicated on achievements in these outputs. Unlike many other ECEC studies, this study cannot and does not make any attributional claims or suggest correlations with, much less causality for, specific *child* outcomes, either in the short or long term. In this analysis, however, the four areas are conjectured to be both an output of the system and, along with families, as an input to child outcomes. Although this lack of direct focus on child outcomes may be regarded as a limitation of the study, the authors see the study as a groundbreaking contribution to discerning key systemic variables that may help account for the accomplishment, or lack, of such outcomes.

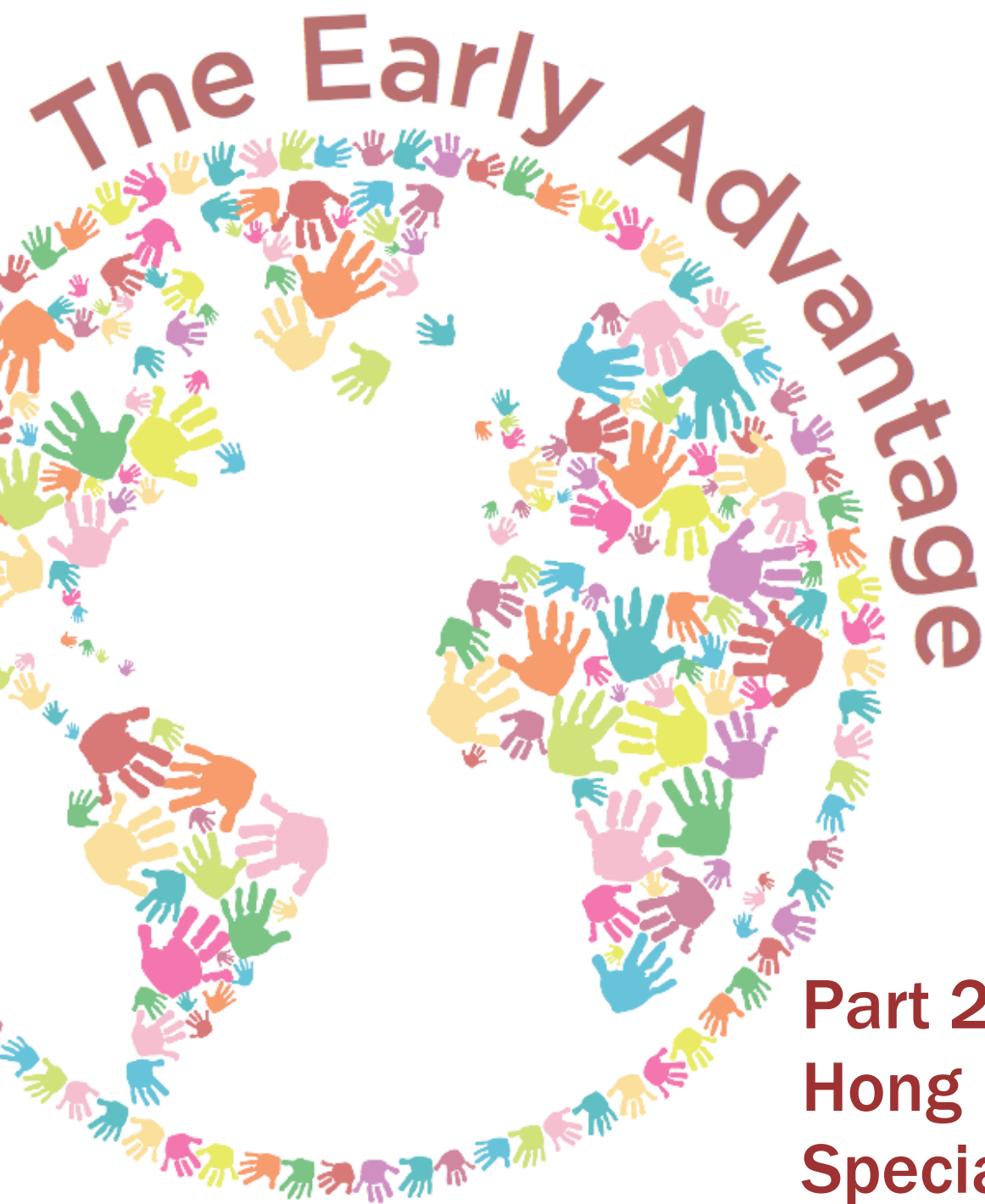
## Definitions and Abbreviations

CAC	Child Assessment Centers
CAS	Child Assessment Services
CCCAI	Child Care Centers Advisory Inspectorate
CDCS	Comprehensive Child Development Service
CE	Certificate of Education
COTAP	Committee on Professional Development of Teachers and Principals
DH	Department of Health
ECE	Early Childhood Education
ECEC	Early Childhood Education and Care
EDB	Education Bureau
FKQEP	Free Quality Kindergarten Education Policy
HA	Hospital Authority
HKSAR	Hong Kong Special Administrative Region
IFSC	Integrated Family Service Centers
ISC	Integrated Service Centers
KCFRS	Kindergarten and Child Care Center Fee Remission Scheme
MCHCs	Maternal and Child Health Centres
NCS	Non-Chinese Speaking
NGO	Non-Governmental organization
PCIT	Parent-Child Interaction Therapy
PEVS	Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme
PTA	Parent Teacher Association
PRC	People's Republic of China
SWD	Social Welfare Department

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**Part 2**  
**Hong Kong**  
**Special**  
**Administrative**  
**Region**

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## Chapter 2: Country Background

Hong Kong has come a long way toward its goal of providing equitable access to high-quality ECEC for children over the age of 3. This chapter explains how contextual factors have influenced the development of Hong Kong's ECEC policies and provisions, with a focus on the past 20 years.

### Key Points

- Societal beliefs in Hong Kong reflect the Confucian view that values education highly. In addition, the zeitgeist is framed by the belief in the utilitarian value of education, the notion of education for selection, stress on the exertion of effort, and the government's responsiveness to current and future societal needs.
- ECEC in Hong Kong became a priority in the 1990s, and expanded rapidly after the Chinese government regained sovereignty in 1997.
- Hong Kong is compact geographically and close to Mainland China. About 7,500 kindergarten students are permanent residents of China who travel to Hong Kong to attend school each day.
- Only about 60 percent of residents were born in Hong Kong. Chinese and English are the official languages; most residents speak Cantonese and many also speak Putonghua (Mandarin).
- As part of its social welfare system, the government until 2016-17 provided vouchers to families to use attend any non-profit preschool of their choice that met quality standards and followed the government's curriculum guidelines.

## Historical Context

### *Framing Values of the Territory*

Hong Kong is essentially an ethnic Chinese, Confucian-heritage society, and several societal beliefs about education reflect this heritage. These include the Confucian beliefs that: (i) learning requires effort and hard work; (ii) teachers should be revered as well-informed transmitters of knowledge; and (iii) students should show their respect and obedience to teachers (Lee, Zhang, Song & Huang, 2013). In addition, there are several aspects about education in a Chinese society (such as Hong Kong) that are of particular note and that frame the zeitgeist of its education system. These include the utilitarian value of education, the notion of education for selection, stress on the exertion of effort, and the government's responsiveness to current and future societal needs.

First, education in Hong Kong is valued highly, and seen as the step to upward social mobility. Therefore, even though pre-primary education is not compulsory, there is nearly universal attendance.

Second, education is regarded as being important for selection purposes, namely for administrative and government positions. Historically, the jobs performed by the majority of the Hong Kong population did not require high levels of literacy, numeracy, or common 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills (Biggs, 1996). During colonial rule in Hong Kong, those who went to universities often did so for the purpose of being selected to serve as civil servants. Today, even at the early childhood stage of development, parents in Hong Kong want their children to get selected for admission into elite kindergartens, as this starts the chain of admission to elite schools and universities that continues throughout their formal education.

Third, there is an emphasis on the "exertion of effort" for high academic achievement. The fact that Hong Kong strives to be a true meritocracy has without doubt contributed to the continued stress of effort in academic work. Being bright and working hard has

the potential to bring benefits, which may not be the case all over the world. That stated, problems do arise from the combination of Hong Kong's meritocratic nature, emphasis on effort, and market forces. For example, there has been a proliferation of academic extracurricular programs for preschool children who present portfolios with certification of their skills in languages and the arts in order to gain admission to the best kindergartens; lower-income families may struggle to afford these same opportunities for their children. Due to the Chinese valuing of education, parents push their children from a very early age so they can get into the "right" kindergartens, schools, and then universities.

Fourth, the government is responsive to the needs and values of the community. For example, when it was found that the emphasis on examinations as a means to access the best schools and universities was placing too much pressure on students (Education Commission, 2000), the government responded by removing the public examinations at Years 11 and Year 13 and having just one public examination at Year 12 (Education and Manpower Bureau, 2005), and by replacing the traditional British O- and A-level system with the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education. There has also been an intentional increase in the number of places in tertiary education. More relevant to ECEC, the government responded to the pressure of the examination system by removing the primary school entrance examination. This erstwhile examination had created a negative backwash effect on the pre-primary curriculum as it forced kindergartens to emphasize the 3Rs (Reading, wRiting, and aRithmetic) in place of more holistic and play-based pedagogy (Education Commission, 2000). Further, there are several ways in which the government has responded to demographic characteristics and global developments in early childhood education. These will be discussed in more detail in later chapters.

### *Historical Milestones*

Originally a fishing village, a salt production site, and later a trading post and a military port, Hong Kong became a British Crown Colony in 1841. Significant growth came in the 1940s and 1950s, when an influx of refugees from Mainland China was accompanied by a growing demand for labor. By the end of the 1970s, Hong Kong had developed into a major financial center. It was designated a British Dependent Territory in 1981, but less than two decades later, on July 1, 1997, the United Kingdom ceded sovereignty of the territory to the People's Republic of China (PRC), and the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) was established. Each of these milestones, in different ways, has had either direct or indirect impact on the development of ECEC in Hong Kong, as illustrated by the following discussion of their historical legacies.

### *Historical Legacies*

During the years of British colonial rule, Hong Kong's formal school system emerged from schools initially established by Christian religious missionaries. Girls' schools were established in the 1860s, 20 years after boys' schools. This was a first step towards gender parity, which is reflected in today's equal kindergarten enrollment rates for girls and boys. Ultimately, the first kindergartens evolved as a legacy of the "infant classes" in the missionary schools. In the decades that followed, kindergarten education continued to be limited, and was only provided by charitable and religious organizations without any government support (Lau & Rao, 2017).

The influx of refugees fleeing political instability in Mainland China in the 1940s and 1950s led to the establishment of the first child care centers as a welfare service for the poor (Ng, Sun, Lau, & Rao, 2017). With this immigrant-driven population increase, combined with an increased demand for labor, came a growing competition for primary school places, which in turn led to a corresponding demand for more kindergartens to prepare children for places in the best primary schools. Between 1953 and 1979, the

number of kindergartens increased from 156 to 801, and enrollments from 13,415 to 198,351 (Lau & Rao, 2017). However, these emerging early childhood education services were left mostly to free market forces (Rao & Li, 2009). Over the years, early childhood education continued to be undervalued and excluded from the compulsory education system. Thus, no public kindergartens were established in Hong Kong, even following its return to China in 1997 (Rao & Li, 2009). Little government control further resulted in deterioration in the structural and pedagogical quality of kindergartens. For example, between the 1950s and 1970s, the adult-to-child ratio changed from 1:25 to 1:35 and the percentages of qualified teachers dropped from 35 to 20 percent (Lau & Rao, 2017).

By the 1980s, there was pressure from parents and other stakeholders for improved conditions in kindergarten education. As one of the first examples of the government's responsiveness to local needs in ECEC, some standards for space, furniture, equipment, and minimum teacher qualification requirements were established. However, at this time, the government still did not consider kindergarten education to be a priority, because of seeming irrelevance to later academic development. This changed in the 1990s, when, in response to global evidence that early childhood education *does* have long-term influences, the government began to introduce financial assistance for pre-primary services (i.e., education for children aged 3 to 6) for children from lower-income families. The last British governor's administration allocated \$20.9 million (HK\$163 million) in total for kindergarten teacher education over the span of four years, and implemented the Kindergarten Subsidy Scheme to provide financial assistance to non-profit kindergartens (Lau & Rao, 2017).

In 2000, after the return of sovereignty to China, the new government introduced a reform of the education system. As part of this reform, ECEC was given status for the first time, and recognized as the foundation for lifelong learning. This has led to its incremental and continuing evolution into a true ECEC *system* that values the early years, teachers' professional development, and robust quality assurance mechanisms. The view of ECEC contained within the reform documents is a holistic one, with five

broad curriculum areas for pre-primary education specified: social and emotional development, intellectual development, linguistic competence, aesthetic awareness and appreciation, and physical development and coordination (Curriculum Development Council, 2006).

Today it is clear that the government's policymaking in response to the societal belief in the importance of kindergarten education is bringing about encouraging changes. In the 2017-18 school year, the government's annual expenditure on kindergarten education was expected to increase by about \$346 million (HK\$2.7 billion), and about 80 percent of subsidized half-day kindergarten places are fully free of charge (Government of the HKSAR, 2017a). While exact figures on expenditure on kindergarten education in the 2017-18 school year were not available at the end of 2017, indicators suggest that the government met its financial pledge to kindergarten education.

To explain how Hong Kong has demonstrated such rapid growth in its ECEC system, it is important to note some historical facts that illustrate the background to governmental policy stances, and Hong Kong society's ability to bounce back from adversity. Hong Kong has had to respond to numerous difficult situations over the past 80 years. During the Second World War, the population of Hong Kong fell by over a million, to about 600,000 people, due to deaths and emigration. Just four years later, the erstwhile colony had to deal with an influx of immigrants following the Chinese Communist revolution in 1949. This would be followed by another wave of immigration to Hong Kong from China during the Cultural Revolution (1958 to 1962). These influxes led to large squatter camps and to political tensions among permanent residents of Hong Kong and immigrants from Mainland China.

The government and the citizenry had to respond, and respond well. They did this by building high-rises to boost the housing supply, building up manufacturing capacity, improving the health care system, and enforcing law and order. By the 1970s, the government had made women's pay on par with that of men, extended subsidized

education to nine years, and set up a commission to curb corruption. Yet challenges continued to arise: The 1980s saw renewed uncertainty with the looming prospect of the handover of the colony to the People's Republic of China, and the 1990s saw the effects of the Asian financial crisis. Difficulties continued in the first decade of the second millennium with health scares such as the SARS outbreak and the Avian Flu Pandemic.

All of the above-mentioned events caused significant shocks to the system, and the bureaucracy and the citizenry responded well to each one, to emerge even stronger than before. As is clear from the above, the government had to be both reactive and proactive to situations to succeed, prioritizing law and order, town planning, and equal rights; phasing-in levels of subsidized education; and enhancing governance. It also had to rely on its citizens to succeed, encouraging meritocracy and self-reliance. To do this effectively and build a sense of collaboration between the government and the citizens, it had to be seen not only as fair but also as responsive.

### **Geographic/Demographic Context**

#### *Country Size/Location*

The HKSAR lies just off the southeast coast of the PRC, in the South China Sea. Of its 1,106 square kilometer area, only 40 percent is land. Hong Kong Island, Lantau Island, the Kowloon Peninsula, and the New Territories (which shares a boundary with the PRC), constitute the bulk of the inhabited area. Hong Kong SAR also includes 262 islands. A small geographical region, Hong Kong has a highly efficient public transport system that moves up to 75,000 people per hour in each direction, on each line (Mass Transit Railway, 2017). With such an efficient public transport system, kindergartens are easily accessible for all children, which is one of the key factors contributing to universal enrollment. Figure 2.1 shows a map of Hong Kong and Figure 2.2 provides a map of the Mass Transit Railway (system). This is done to illustrate that despite Hong Kong's unique topography (i.e., many islands), there is an efficient public transport system that covers most of the urban population.



Figure 2.1 Map of Hong Kong

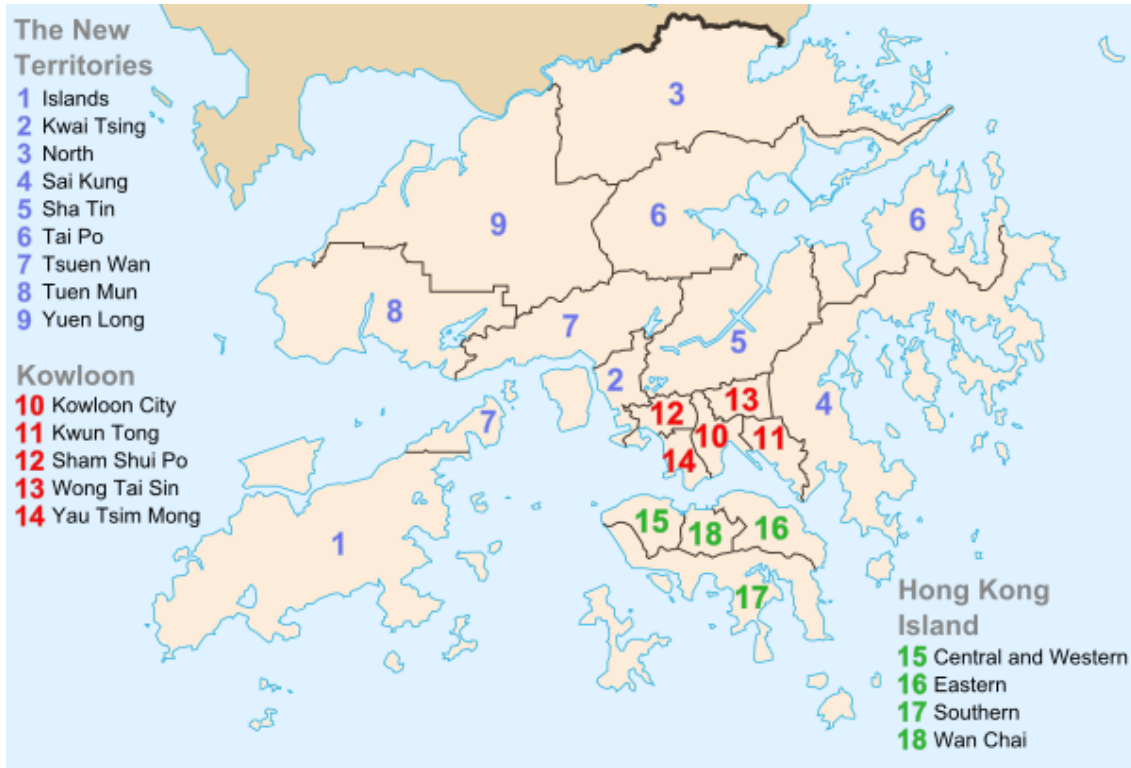
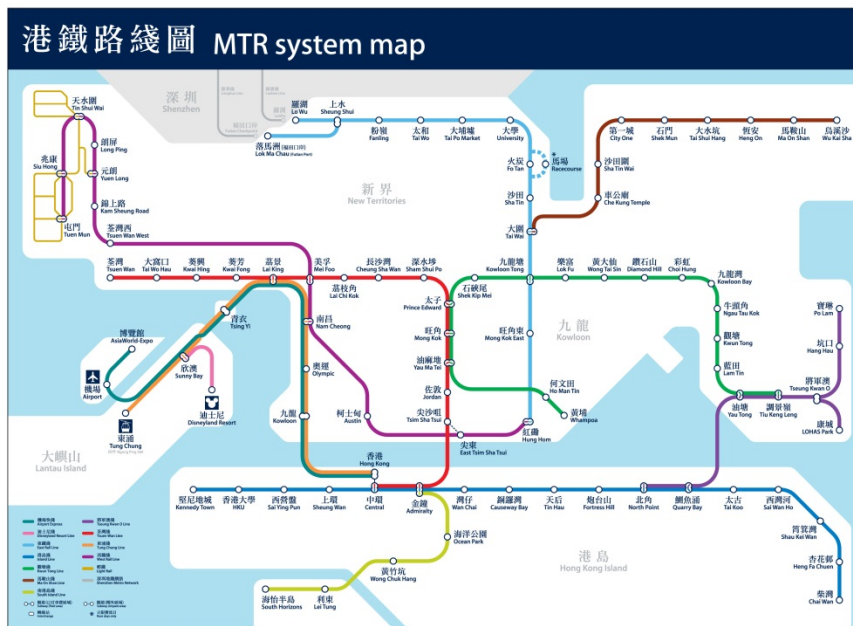


Figure 2.2 Mass Transit Railway Map



Source: MTR (2017)

Hong Kong has a unique demographic situation that arose from its close proximity to Mainland China. Between 2001 and 2012, there was an influx of Mainland mothers to Hong Kong to give birth in order for their children to become Hong Kong permanent residents who are entitled to right of abode in Hong Kong. This has now been stopped by the Hong Kong government, but more than 200,000 children were born in these circumstances. While many of these children now live in Shenzhen, across the border, these children are not registered, and hence are not entitled to attend public schools in China, but as Hong Kong permanent residents they are permitted to enroll in Hong Kong schools. Thus, around 7,500 kindergarten children travel, sometimes for up to five hours daily through border control checkpoints, to attend schools in the outlying regions of Hong Kong. This has led to intense competition between Mainland Chinese and local students for kindergarten places, and contention because local parents feel that Mainland Chinese children, whose parents are not paying Hong Kong taxes, should not be entitled to compete for places with local children. In response to complaints from local Hong Kong parents, efforts have been made to impose quotas on kindergarten spots for children from Mainland China, as well as to open more spots in schools further from the border checkpoints (Government of the HKSAR, 2016). From September 2017, the Shenzhen Education Bureau has allowed Hong Kong-born children without a Mainland Chinese registration to attend publicly funded primary school schools in Shenzhen, China, but at the time of writing, there are no indications that they will be allowed to attend public kindergartens in Shenzhen.

### *Country Population*

Hong Kong has a total population of 7.3 million people (Census and Statistics Department, 2017a). The table below shows the breakdown of the population by age and gender. It is interesting to note that, due to decreasing birthrates, the numbers of children are trailing off compared with the 30-59 age groups. This clearly illustrates one of the issues of concern to the Hong Kong government—the rapidly aging workforce means that there will be fewer people in the future workforce to support the larger

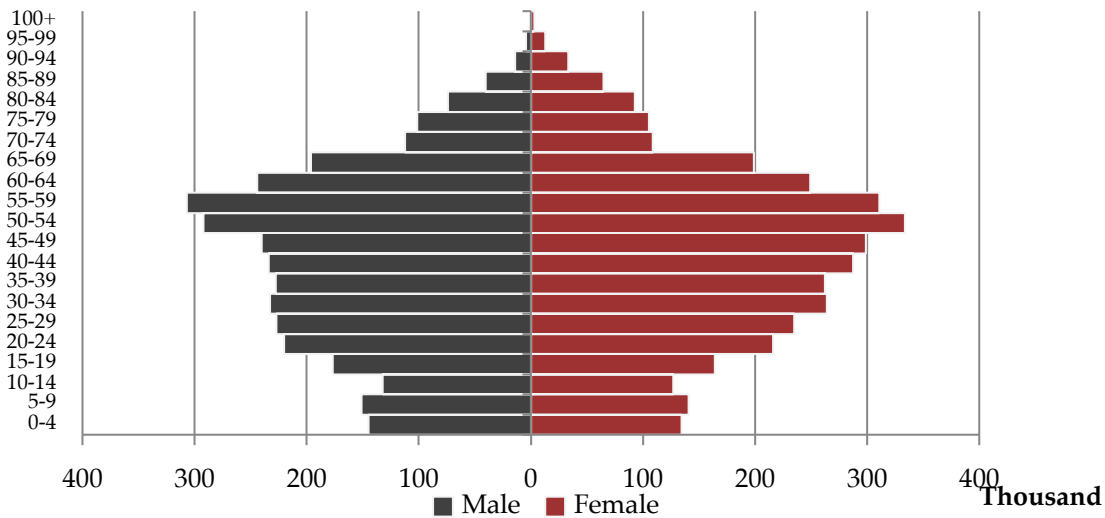
population groups as they retire. It also explains the recent emphasis on ECEC as the important first step in improving equality of opportunities so that every child can reach his/her full potential and become able to make an optimum contribution to society in the future.

**s 2.1 Population data by age and gender for 2016**

Age group	Male	Female	Total
<b>0-14</b>			
0-4	144,823	134,647	279,470
5-9	151,175	140,592	291,767
10-14	132,291	136,927	259,218
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>428,289</b>	<b>402,166</b>	<b>830,455</b>
15 – 29	624,525	671,692	1,296,217
30 – 59	1,535,396	2,016,085	3,551,481
≥ 60	787,152	871,280	1,658,432
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,375,362</b>	<b>3,961,223</b>	<b>7,336,585</b>

Source: Census and Statistic Department (2017)

**Figure 2.3 Population Pyramid for 2016**



Source: Census and Statistic Department (2017)

### *Population Dispersion (Urban, Rural)*

About 98 percent of the Hong Kong population can be termed urban, as only 2 percent live on the smaller islands. About 18 percent of the population lives on Hong Kong Island and 30 percent in Kowloon, with the majority (about 52 percent) in the New Territories. The population density is especially high in Kowloon (about 44,000 people per square kilometer), followed by Hong Kong Island (16,000 people per square kilometer); it is lower in the New Territories (about 6,500 people per square kilometer) (Census and Statistics Department, 2012a). As mentioned earlier, it is due to the overall high density that there is a large concentration of kindergartens in a small geographic space. In the 2015-16 school year, there were 1,000 kindergartens in Hong Kong (Education Bureau, 2017a), with all children living in reasonable proximity to at least one kindergarten facility. There are no geographical restrictions on which kindergartens children attend.

### **Socio-Cultural Context**

#### *Major Religions*

Hong Kong's Basic Law guarantees religious freedom, allowing a diversity of faiths to coexist harmoniously. Of these, Buddhism and Taoism have the most followers, with a reported one million followers of each in the population. Confucianism and Christianity are not far behind, with about 900,000 followers each (Government of the HKSAR, 2015). In 2001, about 50 percent of kindergartens in Hong Kong were run by faith-based organizations (Central Policy Unit, 2013).

Though more recent figures are not available, there is no evidence to suggest that the figures have changed markedly.

#### *Major Cultural Groups*

The data presented below are from the Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department of the Government of Hong Kong. Starting from 1961, a population census has been conducted every 10 years, and a by-census is conducted in between the decennial censuses. When available, the data from the 2016 Population By-Census are presented below. If the required information was not available from the 2016 By-Census, information is provided from the 2011 Population census. These data are believed to be the most reliable estimates of Hong Kong's demographic and socioeconomic characteristics available.

According to the 2016 By-Census, the major cultural group in Hong Kong is Chinese, accounting for approximately 92 percent of the population (Census and Statistics Department, 2017a). Approximately 7.8 percent of the population, or about 584,383 residents, are from ethnic minorities. According to the most recent data available, about 58 percent of the ethnic minority residents are either Indonesian or Filipino, with the majority working as foreign domestic helpers. In 2015, there were 340,380 foreign domestic helpers in Hong Kong (Census and Statistics Department, 2016a). These helpers live with their employers and provide child care, enabling women from middle-class families to engage in paid employment.

It should be noted that South Asians make up a small part of the population. The table below shows the breakdown of South Asian households with children, based on the *2014 Hong Kong Poverty Situation Report on Ethnic Minorities* (Census and Statistics Department, 2015a). South Asian children form the majority of the non-native-Chinese speaking student population in government-supported kindergartens. The government has funded a number of programs and implemented policies from September 2017 to enable South Asian children who attend kindergartens to learn Chinese, which is the language of instruction in government-funded primary schools (See Major Languages below).

**Table 2.2 Ethnic distribution of the population in Hong Kong: 2011 Census and 2016 By-Census**

Year	2011		2016	
	Population		Population	
Ethnicity	Number of Persons	Percentage	Number of Persons	Percentage
Chinese	6,620,393	93.6%	6,752,202	92.0%
Filipino	133,018	1.9%	184,081	2.5%
Indonesian	133,377	1.9%	153,299	2.1%
White	55,236	0.8%	58,209	0.8%
Indian	28,616	0.4%	36,462	0.5%
Nepalese	16,518	0.2%	25,472	0.3%
Pakistani	18,042	0.3%	18,094	0.2%
Thai	11,213	0.2%	10,215	0.1%
Japanese	12,580	0.2%	9,976	0.1%
Other Asian	12,247	0.2%	19,589	0.3%
Others <sup>(a)</sup>	30,336	0.4%	68,986	0.9%
<i>Total</i>	7,071,576	100%	7,336,585	100%

Source: Census and Statistic Department (2017)

**Table 2.3** Number of South Asian households in Hong Kong

Household ethnic group	Number of households	Percentage of total households
Pakistani	2,000	39.1%
Nepalese	1,700	33.1%
Indian	1,100	21.7%
Multiple ethnicities	200	4.3%
Other	90	1.8%

Source: Census and Statistics Department (2015a)

A fusion of both Chinese and British ideologies has had a strong influence on the education system in Hong Kong, including ECEC. Because of the predominance of ethnic Chinese in the jurisdiction, traditional family values have undoubtedly been influenced by Chinese belief systems such as Confucianism and Taoism. The resulting belief in the importance in education has the positive consequence of ensuring high rates of school attendance and low dropout rates in schools. There is also almost universal attendance of pre-primary education (Wong & Rao, 2015). Further, Confucian values of conformity, discipline, behavioral control, and academic achievement are reflected strongly in Hong Kong kindergartens, and these have been found to have positive effects on children’s behavioral and emotional self-regulation (Rao, Sun & Zhang, 2014). However, one challenge is that parents put pressure on kindergarten teachers to teach formal literacy and numeracy, with the aim of having their children gain entry to the best primary schools (Fung & Lam, 2008). Although the entrance examination for primary school has now been abandoned (as noted above), a tendency toward didactic teaching methods that stress rote learning still remains (Chan & Chan, 2003). The high value placed by the predominantly Chinese society on education may also have implications for the quality of ECEC teachers and principals, as there is an expectation that teachers will be held to high standards. The government has gradually increased the academic and professional certification requirements for newly appointed

teachers and principals and for serving principals (Education Bureau, 2017b) (see Chapter 4).

At the same time, Western influences from 150 years of British rule have permeated many facets of everyday life—from law and politics to education, language, the arts, and administration. The influences include the encouragement of teaching principles such as creating a safe, happy, stimulating environment and adopting a thematic approach to pedagogy. Such encouragement is reflected in the various editions of the *Guide to the Pre-Primary Curriculum* that have been setting the scene for child-centered learning, meaningful learning, play and experience, and continuity in primary education (Rao et al., 2016). Thus, British influences, as well as deeply rooted Chinese culture, have contributed to unique and sometimes challenging features of pre-primary education in Hong Kong.

### *Disposition Toward Migrants*

Hong Kong is a city of migrants, with much of the population having emigrated from the PRC, having returned to Hong Kong after emigrating abroad, or residing in Hong Kong for the purpose of employment (from highly skilled workers to domestic helpers) (Brownlee & Mitchell, 1997). In total, only about 60 percent of Hong Kong's population was born in Hong Kong (Census and Statistics Department, 2016b). This can bring about challenges: some migrants, particularly low-skilled workers, are unable to function effectively in Hong Kong society if they are unable to speak or read Chinese. For example, they can miss out on employment opportunities because they are unable to read notices in the Chinese language about vacancies. A *Survey of Households with School Children of South Asian Ethnicities* found that, among the 20 percent of working adults who encountered difficulties in the workplace, 84.8 percent reported that these problems were due to lack of Chinese proficiency (Government of the HKSAR, 2015). Hence, the government has introduced policies to provide language support for



children of immigrants, to ensure that they experience optimal inclusion in society (as described in detail in the following section).

### *Major Languages*

The Basic Law of Hong Kong stipulates that both Chinese (Cantonese) and English are the official languages of Hong Kong. Although about 90 percent of the population speaks Cantonese, English is a major commercial and legal language and is widely used, with approximately half of the population being conversant in English, and an equal number in Putonghua (Mandarin) (Pang, 2016). Policies of “biliteracy” (written Chinese and English), “trilingualism” (spoken Cantonese, English, and Putonghua), and “mother-tongue teaching” guide the curriculum design in Hong Kong education (Wang & Kirkpatrick, 2015). With citizens expected to be trilingual (Cantonese, English, and Putonghua) and biliterate (Chinese and English), both Putonghua and English are taught from the first year of kindergarten.

Another issue arising from language diversity and the relatively large groups of ethnic minorities is the potential problem of some children being excluded from full participation in kindergarten because they are unable to speak Cantonese, the medium of instruction, and some parents are likewise excluded. To address this problem and to maintain the goal of equal access, the government has prioritized that these groups learn Chinese in order to integrate into the society (Government of the HKSAR, 2017a). To this end, beginning in the 2017-18 school year, the government has allocated additional resources to eligible kindergartens with eight or more non-Chinese-speaking students to help the kindergartens lay the foundation for teaching the Chinese language (Government of the HKSAR, 2017a). Chinese- and English-language professional development courses will also be provided to prepare teachers for this purpose.

### Political Context

Under the “One Country, Two Systems” model, Hong Kong is governed within the constructs of the Basic Law that allows for a high degree of autonomy from the PRC (Government of the HKSAR, 2015). Since its return to China in 1997, the Hong Kong SAR remains a free port, a separate customs territory, and an international financial center. It can maintain and develop relations, and conclude and implement agreements, with foreign states/regions and relevant international organizations in almost all aspects.

The political system is a quasi-democratic multi-party system. Seventy seats of the Legislative Council are filled through direct elections, and the remaining 35 are elected by smaller, closed elections within business sectors (Government of the HKSAR, 2015). The Chief Executive heads the Hong Kong SAR Government, and is elected by an 800-member electoral college that, in turn, is elected by business and professional sectors. The Executive Council (half of which comprises key government officials), functions as a sounding board and advisory board, while the Legislative Council and various committees (e.g., Finance, Public Accounts), serve as a check-and-balance in the system. The implication of the government’s autonomy for ECEC is that it is relatively simple for new policies to be developed and implemented.

### *Centralized/Decentralized Governance*

The Hong Kong SAR is divided into 18 districts, each of which is headed by a District Officer who represents the government at the local level in overseeing district administration. The Secretary of Justice and all the 13 policy bureaus (Civil Service, Constitutional and Mainland Affairs, Education, Environment, Food and Health, Home Affairs, Labour and Welfare, Security, Transport and Housing, Commerce and Economic Development, Financial Services and the Treasury, and Innovation and Technology) report to the Chief Executive, and (except in the case of Justice), also report to either the Chief Secretary for Administration or the Financial Secretary. An

organization chart of the HKSAR government is provided in Appendix 1. To provide checks and balances, the Public Service Commission, the Office of the Ombudsman, the Independent Commission against Corruption, and the Audit Commission are independent offices that report directly into the Chief Executive. The Civil Service in Hong Kong is widely considered to be honest, meritocratic, professional, and politically neutral.

### *Government Stability*

The government of the HKSAR is stable, and elections and protests are largely peaceful. There is no doubt that the policies and incentives of a stable government have improved the quality of preschool education (Rao & Li, 2009). Since the 1990s, the stable Hong Kong government has steadily increased its support for kindergarten and child care—including funding for teacher training and kindergarten-based educational research, as well as a voucher scheme and quality assurance monitoring (Pearson & Rao, 2006). While the goals of providing a quality education for children are unlikely to change—as is evident from the implementation of the Free Quality Kindergarten Education Policy—the election pledges of chief executive hopefuls can have an important impact on funding to the ECEC sector and, in turn, the quality of kindergarten education.

### *Welfare and Social Policy Context*

Social welfare services in Hong Kong include provisions for families, ranging from prevention to supportive and remedial family services, to specialized services (e.g., crisis intervention, handling domestic violence). There are also services to support children with family, behavioral, or emotional problems. A range of provisions for young people covers the spectrum from general developmental needs to juvenile delinquents, to drug treatment and rehabilitation. Other services support the elderly, children and adults with disabilities, and offenders. Medical, social, and clinical

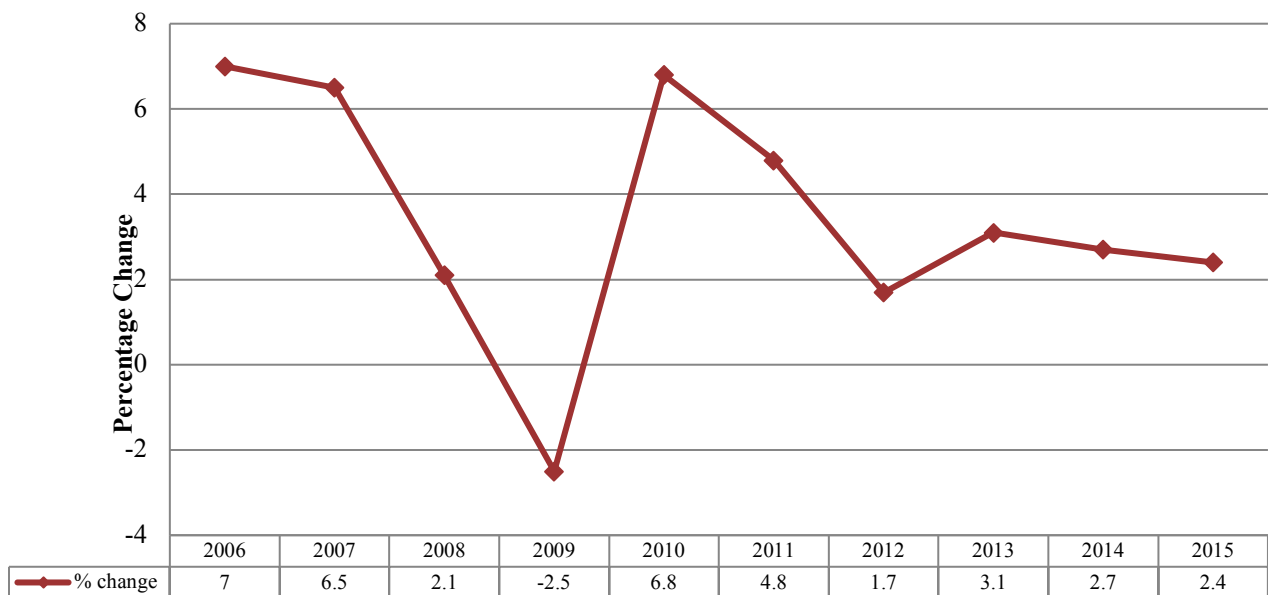
psychological services are also available as needed (Government of the HKSAR, 2015). Social Welfare Financial Assistance is provided to low-income working families, students, people suffering from financial hardship, and those affected by accidents. Emergency relief is also available (Government of the HKSAR, 2015).

## Socio-Economic Context

### GDP

The figure below illustrates that Hong Kong has recovered from the Global Financial Crisis and the SARS outbreak in 2003, and that the real gross domestic product (GDP) has grown approximately 2.5 percent per annum in 2014 and 2015. The government is financially strong and stable and this suggests that funding to ECEC will be recurrent.

**Figure 2.4** Year-to-year percentage change in GDP in real terms



Source: Census and Statistics Department (2016c)

### *Levels of Employment/Labor Force Participation*

In 2015, the labor force totaled 3.91 million people, with almost equal proportions of men and women. The vast majority—88.4 percent--of the labor force was employed in the service sector, and just 2.7 percent in manufacturing. The 2015 unemployment rate was 3.3 percent. The median monthly salary for higher skilled workers was \$3,462 (HK\$27,000), while that for lower skilled workers was \$1,410 (HK\$11,000) (Legislative Council Secretariat, 2016). The poverty rate in Hong Kong (half the median household income, as defined by the HKSAR) is 19.6 percent (Census and Statistics Department, 2015b).

As discussed in more depth later, there are two key aims that have arisen in the government's attempts to address inequities brought about by poverty. One is to ensure that no children are disadvantaged in accessing high-quality education because of their families' low socio-economic status. The other is to encourage women to contribute to the workforce, which accounts for the almost equal representation of woman and men in the labor force. Both of these have been key factors in the evolution of Hong Kong's ECEC policy.

### *GINI Coefficient*

Hong Kong had a very high GINI coefficient of 0.54 in 2011 (Hong Kong Council of Social Service, 2017). The coefficient has been increasing gradually over the past 20 years (Hong Kong Council of Social Service, 2017), and signals the considerable income inequality in Hong Kong.

### *Economic Disparities*

Based on the most recent full census data in 2011, the lowest four decile groups accounted for about 10 percent of total income, while the highest four decile groups accounted for 77.6 percent of the total income. The top decile group accounted for 41

percent of the total income (Education Bureau, 2015a). Since then, the rich in Hong Kong have continued to grow richer (Chen, 2014). For example, in 2013 it was reported that 80 percent of the GDP was distributed across Hong Kong's 45 billionaires. One of the reasons for economic disparities is the very high cost of housing in Hong Kong, accompanied by a steady worsening of the real rent index (Chen, 2014). Another is disparities caused by differences in educational qualifications, which further reinforces the Chinese cultural belief that education, beginning in kindergarten, is the key to upward mobility.

### *Major Imports/Exports and Industries*

In 2015, Hong Kong ranked seventh in the Global Competitive Index, fifth in the Ease of Doing Business Index, and third in the Global Financial Centers Index, thanks to its first-class infrastructure, sound legal system, and the ability for capital, information, and goods to move freely (Legislative Council Secretariat, 2016). Hong Kong's services industry (primarily travel and transport) contributed 92.7 percent to the GDP in 2014, accounted for 88.4 percent of total employment in 2015, and ranked 16<sup>th</sup> globally. Domestic manufacturing contributed just 1.3 percent to the GDP in 2015, and employed 2.7 percent of the labor force, as the bulk of Hong Kong's imports accounted for the territory's exports (i.e., re-exports) (Government of the HKSAR, 2015).

### *Level of Taxation*

Hong Kong enjoys a low level of taxation. Individuals are taxed under different income categories. Income from employment, office, or pension is taxed under the salaries tax (PriceWaterhouseCoopers, 2016a), with rates on a scale from 2 percent for the first \$5,128 (HK\$40,000) to 17 percent for amounts earned over \$15,384 (HK\$120,000). Assessable profits of corporations are taxed at the corporate tax rate of 16.5 percent (PriceWaterhouseCoopers, 2016b). Corporate and income taxes provide some 45

percent of government revenue, with the remaining approximately 55 percent of government revenue coming from consumption and transaction taxes.

### *Nature of Cash Benefits to the Population*

The Hong Kong government has a number of priorities that determine the nature of cash benefits to the population, the key one being poverty alleviation (Census and Statistics Department, 2015b). Efforts to address this include enhancement of education and training to create quality employment opportunities that facilitate upward mobility. Assistance is provided to families in need, particularly working families, with a focus on encouraging employment and on enhancing assistance to address the educational needs of school-age children. Again, this is done to promote self-reliance and upward mobility. Financial support is provided to poor elderly households, single-parent households, and households with persons with disabilities, with a wide range of benefits available through the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance scheme, other recurrent cash assistance and support, and programs funded by the Community Care Fund (Census and Statistics Department, 2015b).

Allowances provided by the Hong Kong government include the following schemes (Social Welfare Department, 2016a). The financial assistance provided by these schemes may have a positive impact on the family circumstances of some young children, particularly those from low-income backgrounds or those who live in extended families with grandparents.

*The Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) Scheme* provides cash assistance to bring incomes of needy households up to prescribed levels to meet basic livelihood needs. Payments can include different standard rates to meet the basic needs of broad categories of recipients. Special grants are dispersed to meet particular needs of individual recipients, such as rent, essential traveling expenses, school fees, and special

diets. Long-term, single-parent, community living, transport, and residential care supplements are also provided for specific categories of recipients.

*The Social Security Allowance (SSA) Scheme* is comprised of the Old Age Allowance and Disability Allowance. The former is a flat-rate allowance to Hong Kong residents who are 70 years of age or above. The latter is for those who are too severely disabled to meet their needs because of their disability. In addition, there is an Old Age Living Allowance for Hong Kong residents aged 65 or above who are in need of financial support to meet living expenses.

*The Criminal and Law Enforcement Injuries Compensation Scheme* is in place for individuals injured, or for dependents of those killed, in crimes of violence or through the action of a law enforcement officer using a weapon in the execution of duty.

*The Traffic Accident Victims Assistance Scheme* is for people injured in road traffic accidents, or for dependents of those killed in road traffic accidents.

*Emergency Relief* provides cooked meals (or cash grant in lieu of cooked meals) and other essential articles for victims of natural and other disasters.

In the realm of ECEC, a key example of a cash benefit to the population was the Pre-Primary Education Voucher Scheme (PEVS). Through this, from the 2007-08 to the 2016-17 school year, a direct fee subsidy was provided to all parents (Education Bureau, 2017b) to enable them to send their children to non-profit kindergartens of their choice to support young children's learning needs. This was a significant move because, prior to that, funding for ECEC was only available to families with very low income levels. This scheme helped to strike a balance between the free market, parental choice, and government control. In order to control quality, participating schools were required to be non-profit and meet quality benchmarks in order to be able to receive the vouchers. This strategy—linking vouchers to quality—represented a unique and innovative feature of Hong Kong's voucher system (Rao, 2010).



## Educational Context (Primary, Secondary, and Tertiary)

### *Participation Rates*

The 2016 Population By-Census in Hong Kong reported the following school attendance rates by age group: between 3 to 5 years of age, 92.5 percent<sup>3</sup>; between 6 to 11 years of age, 100 percent; and between 12 and 17 years of age, 97.8 percent (Census and Statistics Department, 2017a). According to the 2011 census, over 50 percent of the population aged 18 to 24 is enrolled in tertiary education (Census and Statistics Department, 2012a). The participation rates were almost equal by gender, with female participation marginally more (Census and Statistics Department, 2012a).

### *Graduation Rates*

Secondary education (high school) graduation rates in Hong Kong are considered to be close to 100 percent. School dropout rates are quite low, at 0.3 percent (Hong Kong Council of Social Service, 2017). The 2016 Population By-Census reported that just 5.7 percent of the population did not have any form of schooling, with two-thirds of these being female (Census and Statistics Department, 2017a). Together, these participation and graduation rates are a clear reflection of the above-mentioned importance of education for upward social mobility.

### *Literacy Rates*

Hong Kong has made marked gains in its literacy rates over the past 50 years. This can perhaps be most poignantly illustrated by the change in design of public facilities. When the Mass Transit Railway system opened in the 1970s, it was necessary to

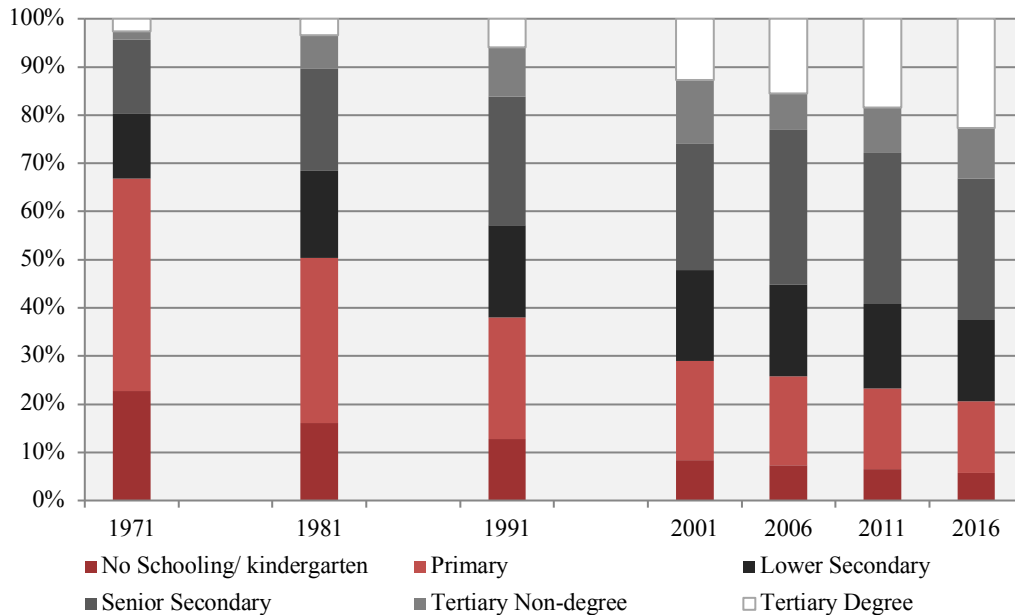
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<sup>3</sup> Data on attendance refer to the first half of the year. The figure for children 3-5 years is below 100%, as 3-year-olds may not receive pre-primary education in the first half of the year if they have not yet reached the minimum age for entrance in September of the previous year. The school year starts in September.

introduce a specific design feature to address the fact that many of its users were illiterate and thus unable to read the station names. Hence different colors were deployed to differentiate the stations for easy identification (Pang, 2016). Today, with free compulsory education having been in existence since 1971, nearly all people are able to read station names and there is no need to take mass illiteracy into account when designing public facilities.

Figure 2.5 demonstrates the increase in educational levels of the population over 15 years of age in Hong Kong, with the proportion of the population that has not completed primary education declining since 1971. Notably, the proportion of the population that had tertiary education in 2016 (22.7 percent) is markedly more than that in 1971 (2.6 percent).

**Figure 2.5** Distribution of population aged 15 and above, by highest level of educational attainment



Source: Census and Statistics Department (2003) & Census and Statistics Department (2017a)

### *Educational Structure/Organization*

As shown in Table 2.4, the Hong Kong government provides 15 years of free education, nine of which are compulsory. The system is comprised of three years of non-mandatory kindergarten (ages 3-6), six years of primary school (ages 6-12), three years of junior secondary school (ages 12-15), and three years of non-mandatory senior secondary (ages 15-18). Primary and secondary education is provided in public-sector schools, which have long formed the bulk of the local school system. In contrast, the addition of three free years of kindergarten education is a recent development, introduced in September of 2017. Every child between 3 and 6 is now entitled to 15 hours a week of free kindergarten education, which, unlike primary and secondary education, may take place in private kindergartens or child care centers. For low-income families that require full-day child care services for their children aged 0-6, a means-tested Kindergarten and Child Care Center Fee Remission Scheme and other financial assistance schemes are available.

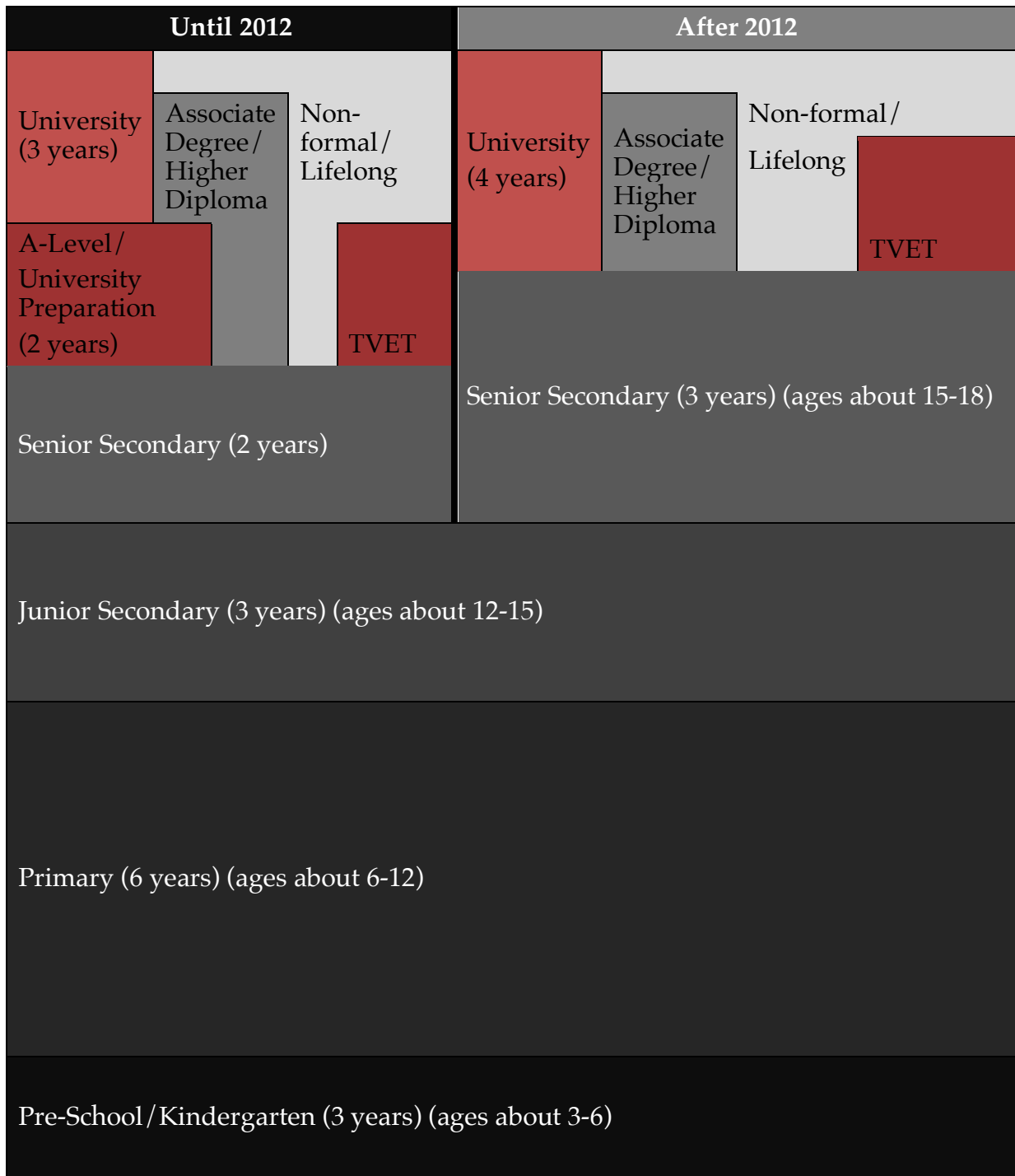
The structure of Hong Kong's educational system underwent a change in 2012, as illustrated in Figure 2.6. Importantly, however, the change in structure did not affect pre-primary education. Before 2009, Hong Kong had seven years of secondary school education, and a Bachelor's degree took three years to complete. This was referred to as a 3+2+2+3 system, or 3 (Years 7-9) + 2 (Years 10-11) + 2 (Years 12-13) + 3 (tertiary education/Bachelor's Degree). Students took public examinations at the end of Years 11 and 13. To reduce the pressure resulting from two public examinations and the selective school system, a new system of 3+3+4 (the last referring to four years of tertiary education) was introduced in 2009. This was accompanied by a new core curriculum aimed at personal development as well as academic success (Government of the HKSAR, 2015).

**Table 2.4 Overview of Hong Kong Educational System**

Age	Length	Education Type	Additional Names	Nature (Attendance rate)	Until 2016	From September 2017
3 – 5	3 years	Kindergarten education provided in kindergartens and child care centers	Pre-primary education	Voluntary (100%)	Vouchers provided	Free
6 – 11	6 years	Primary education	Primary 1 – 6	Compulsory (100%)	Free	Free
12 – 14	3 years	Junior Secondary Education	Junior Secondary 1 - 3 (Forms 1 - 3)	Compulsory (100%)	Free	Free
15 – 17	3 years	Senior Secondary Education*	Senior Secondary 1 to 3 (Forms 4 - 6)	Voluntary / Selective	Free	Free
>17	Varies across disciplines	Tertiary education		Voluntary / Selective / specialized		

\* leads to the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education

Figure 2.6 Changes in the structure of Hong Kong's Education System



\* Technical and Vocational Education and Training

There are 51 international schools catering to expatriate and local families in Hong Kong. These schools offer education from kindergarten to senior secondary school. At the post-secondary level, both publicly funded and self-financing (i.e., private) programs offer sub-degree, undergraduate, and postgraduate programs. Among these are eight government-funded universities. The Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts and the Hong Kong Vocational Training Council (VTC) are also publicly funded. Self-financing post-secondary programs offer choices of study pathways, and offer multiple entry and exit points (Government of the HKSAR, 2015).

The Secretary for Education oversees the Education Bureau, including educational policies, funding from the government budget, and the implementation of educational programs. The Education Commission advises the government on education objectives and policies.

### **Policy Process**

#### *Policy Formulation*

The policymaking process is executive-led. Under the colonial system, business and professional elites were co-opted as advisors to the government, and this has continued after the return of Hong Kong to China in 1997. However, there is now flexibility for policy advisors to be drawn from all sectors of the community, and to have a stronger voice.

#### *Policy Planning*

A key feature of policy planning and policymaking in Hong Kong is that it is, to a certain extent, responsive to global and local needs. The policy planning process for education, social welfare, and health involves statutory and advisory bodies and selected public consultation exercises (approximately 20 per year). Statutory and advisory bodies comprise advisory boards and committees, public bodies, appeal

boards, regulatory boards, the universities and vocational bodies, and the management boards of trust funds and funding schemes. Public consultation exercises usually involve the publication of a consultation document, a publicity campaign, public announcements in print and electronic media, phone-in programs, the publication and dissemination of leaflets and the organization of public forums.

A key turning point in the government's responsive policymaking agenda was a public protest, in July 2003, against the government's proposed national security legislation. This compelled the government to introduce new mechanisms for fostering more engagement with civil society. One initiative to address this was the establishment of an internet-based Public Affairs Forum comprising 600 participants from business, professional, and academic backgrounds. Another was the revision of the main advisory body, the Commission for Strategic Development, to incorporate prominent academic, business, professional, and political figures (Cheung, 2011).

The ECEC sector has enjoyed the benefits of this responsive policymaking. For example, public dissatisfaction with the PEVS led to its replacement with the Free Quality Kindergarten Education Policy (FQKEP; see Chapter 12). Another example is the government's responsiveness to parental demands to provide longer hours of service under the FQKEP.

Different governmental units (Education Bureau [EDB], Social Welfare Department [SWD], and Department of Health) provide or oversee ECEC services and collect data for policy formulation and program implementation. They also commission research and consultancies. So, to a significant extent, evidence-based policymaking with reference to ECEC is occurring in Hong Kong. For instance, the PEVS may have been informed by observational studies of preschool quality in Hong Kong (Rao, Koong, Kwong, & Wong, 2003). That stated, much of the evidence that has influenced ECEC policy in Hong Kong is based on research conducted overseas, as there is a dearth of policy-relevant, Hong Kong-based ECEC research. A more in-depth discussion of

contextual factors that have impacted on policy formulation and implementation is provided in Chapter 15.

### *Policy Implementation*

With regards to ECEC implementation, the government is committed to ensuring programs meet required standards (Education Bureau, 2017c). For example, to encourage kindergartens to conduct self-evaluations continuously and promote the development of quality kindergarten education, the Education Bureau (EDB) enhanced the Quality Assurance Framework in the 2012-13 school year with a set of performance indicators for assessing the quality of kindergartens. The government also has a robust school inspection system that provides evidence on the extent of policy implementation.



## Chapter 3: Conditions of Young Children

This chapter describes the conditions of young children in Hong Kong, including those from diverse backgrounds in terms of race, ethnicity, income, and language.

### Key Points

- The majority of Hong Kong's population is ethnic Chinese and speaks Cantonese, but a relatively large minority (about 12%) reports not speaking the dominant language.
- There is great variability in household income, with about 180,000 children aged 18 and below living in poverty.
- The conditions of three groups of young children are of particular concern. They are: (i) children from non-Chinese speaking families, who attend local kindergartens that use Chinese as the language of instruction; (ii) those who travel across the border with mainland China to attend kindergartens in Hong Kong on a daily basis; and (iii) those with special educational needs, who are awaiting appropriate placement in pre-primary education institutions.

### Demographic Data on Young Children

#### *Racial Diversity*

Hong Kong has a predominantly homogeneous population of 92.3 percent Chinese and 7.7 percent other nationalities, including Filipino, American, and Nepalese (Census and Statistics Department, 2017a).

#### *Ethnic Diversity*

As in the previous Chapter, we rely on data from the 2011 Population Census and the 2016 By-Census (Census and Statistics Department, 2012a; 2017a). There are no data

available specifically pertaining to numbers of young children by race/ethnicity. Table 2.1 provides information about the diversity in Hong Kong's population. As noted in Chapter 2, the population is predominantly made up of Hong Kong Chinese, and the percentage of other nationalities is small. There are relatively large percentages of Filipinos and Indonesians, as these two nationalities make up the majority of the foreign domestic helpers employed in Hong Kong. South Asians (Indian, Nepalese, and Pakistani) represent the next largest group. They are among the most disadvantaged when it comes to participation in Hong Kong society. Children from ethnic minority families experience language barriers that make it difficult for them to participate fully in the education system in Hong Kong, where Chinese is used as the language of instruction in pre-primary and primary schools. Children from ethnic minorities in Hong Kong tend to have a better command of the English language than of Chinese; however, many of their parents are in low-paying jobs, and are not able to afford to send them to international schools in Hong Kong, where English is the medium of instruction (Census and Statistics Department, 2015a).

### *Economic Diversity*

Table 3.1 shows the level of income diversity in Hong Kong. The data in the table below refer to the general situation because disaggregated data for families with young children are not available. There is a wide variation in domestic household incomes, with a small percentage of households (6.5 percent) having an income above \$12,831 (HK\$100,000) per month. The income of the majority of households is between \$1,283 (HK\$10,000) and \$12,831 (HK\$100,000). Over 19 percent of population has a household income of less than \$12,831 (HK\$100,000)—quite a low income for one of the world's most expensive cities.

**Table 3.1 Monthly Domestic Household Income**

Year 2016	
Monthly Domestic Household Income (HK\$)	Percentage
< 2,000	4%
2,000 – 3,999	1.50%
4,000 – 5,999	4.80%
6,000 – 7,999	4.80%
8,000 – 9,999	4.10%
10,000 – 14,999	11.80%
15,000 – 19,999	10%
20,000 – 24,999	8.80%
25,000 – 29,999	7%
30,000 – 39,999	12%
40,000 – 59,999	14.40%
60,000 – 79,999	6.70%
80,000 – 99,999	3.60%
≥100,000	6.50%

Source: Census and Statistics Department (2017a)

### *Regional Diversity*

Hong Kong is a relatively small special administration region, and so regional diversity is not really an issue. While there are differences in income levels and population composition in the 18 districts, there are no significant urban/rural or regional differences to consider in policymaking and implementation.

### *Language Diversity*

There are no data available regarding the language diversity of young children in Hong Kong. The majority of the population is Hong Kong Chinese, and Cantonese is the most common mother tongue (89 percent). Other Chinese dialects are spoken by about 3.1

percent of the population. Putonghua (i.e., Mandarin, the language of education and business in mainland China) and English are the primary languages of 1.9 percent and 4.3 percent of the population, respectively. As explained in Part 2, Hong Kong children are expected to become trilingual (Cantonese, English, and Putonghua) and biliterate (Chinese and English) in the course of their schooling.

**Table 3.2 Usual Language Spoken in Hong Kong**

Usual Language	Year 2016	
	Number of Persons	Percentage
Cantonese	6,264,700	88.9%
Putonghua	131,406	1.9%
Other Chinese dialects	221,247	3.1%
English	300,417	4.3%
Other languages	131,199	1.9%
Total	7,048,969	100%

Source: Census and Statistics Department (2017a).

### Percentages of Children Who Are:

#### *Orphaned or Requiring Foster Care*

Statistics are not available for the number of children orphaned in Hong Kong. In 2014, there were 919 children under foster care across Hong Kong (Li, 2014). This is discussed in below.

#### *Stunted*

Statistics are not available for the number of stunted children in Hong Kong

### *Abused*

There were a total of 874 reported cases of child abuse for the calendar year 2015, with physical abuse accounting for 48.5 percent and sexual abuse accounting for 31.2 percent of the cases (Social Welfare Department, 2016b).

### *Identified with Disabilities*

According to the Special Topic Enquiry on “*Persons with disabilities and chronic diseases*” conducted via the General Household Survey in 2013, the number of disabled persons aged under 18 residing in domestic households was 24,000 (4.8 percent of the total population) (Census and Statistics Department, 2014). To provide for the education of some of this population, there are 60 local special schools, which serve more than 7,500 children of primary and secondary school age; some of these schools offer a preschool class as well. Information on the different types of special schools is available, but no information is available on the number of preschool children with identified disabilities (Education Bureau, 2016a; 2016b).

Children below 18 with disabilities comprised 4.8 percent of the population in Hong Kong. The table below shows the breakdown of this group by type of disability, with mental disabilities, particularly autism, constituting the majority.

In 2013, there were around 5,000 Hong Kong children who were living with disabilities *and* in poverty; 20 percent of them were reported to face difficulties performing daily living activities.

**Table 3.3 Children aged 18 and with a disability and living in poverty**

Year	Age below 18
Type of disability	('000)
<i>Physical disabilities</i>	1.9
Restriction in body movement	-
Seeing difficulty	0.3
Hearing difficulty	0.6
Speech difficulty	1.1
<i>Mental disabilities</i>	4.1
Mental illness/ mood disorder	1.3
Autism	1.0
<i>Specific learning difficulties</i>	1.9
Attention deficit/ hyperactivity disorder	1.7

Source: Census and Statistics Department (2014)

Note. Some children have both physical and mental disabilities; hence the chart totals to more than 5,000.

### *Not Speaking Dominant Language of the Country*

Based on the 2015 household survey (Census and Statistics Department, 2016a), 88.1 percent of the population aged 6 to 65 spoke the dominant language, Cantonese, with 85.5 percent of this group reporting that their competence levels were good or very good. Hence, the remaining 12 percent of the population does not speak the dominant language. As has been mentioned throughout this report, this is one of the concerns of the Hong Kong government, as non-Cantonese speakers and non-Chinese readers can be precluded from full participation in society, and resultantly may not be able to find blue collar jobs, because they are unable to read advertisements in Chinese media (See Chapter 2.).

### *Populations Requiring Special Attention and Services*

Hong Kong has three groups of young children that require special policy attention and services. One group is children from poor ethnic minority families who are deemed “non-Chinese-speaking” (NCS) children. Kindergarten education in local schools is in Cantonese, and children from ethnic minority families often initially struggle with the language, and continue to struggle with Chinese literacy (Li, 2017). The second group is pre-primary-aged children who were born in Hong Kong and live across the border in mainland China. These children travel to Hong Kong from China every day to receive pre-primary education in Hong Kong. They are referred to as “cross-border” or “cross-boundary” children. There are particular issues with their early development and learning, given long commute times and the fact that they typically live with only one parent (Legislative Council, 2013). The third group is children with special education needs who are on the waitlist for places in integrated kindergartens or in special child care centers (Social Welfare Department, 2017a).

In April 2012, Hong Kong Unison, a Hong Kong NGO set up to serve ethnic minority permanent residents of Hong Kong, surveyed 102 kindergartens and noted two key aspects in the education of children from ethnic minority families (Hong Kong Unison, 2012). The survey revealed that only 7 percent of the kindergartens reported *not* encountering difficulties in teaching ethnic minority children, with the primary causes of these difficulties being students’ varying Chinese abilities, and language barriers between parents and teachers. Many schools only had limited measures for supporting ethnic minority students, and wished that the government would provide more support in hiring and training teachers (Hong Kong Unison, 2012).

Hong Kong Unison (2015) investigated kindergartens’ support and attitudes toward ethnic minority students. Based on a telephone survey of 239 kindergartens in five districts in Hong Kong, they drew the following conclusions. First, ethnic minority students were concentrated in a few kindergartens, with some having more than 90

percent ethnic minority student population; by default, this segregation limits students' opportunities to interact in Cantonese and with the local culture. Second, over 60 percent of kindergartens surveyed conducted admission interviews in Chinese, and only 45 percent of the 60 percent expressed willingness to make adjustments or conduct interviews in English for ethnic minority children. Notably, kindergartens that joined the PEVS were less likely to take ethnic minority children's language competency into account in the admission process. Third, more than 60 percent of surveyed kindergartens dispensed school notices only in Chinese, and 80 percent of surveyed kindergartens said they did not provide any information in the language that ethnic minority parents understood. Moreover, more than 60 percent of the surveyed kindergartens did not have support measures for ethnic minority students to learn Chinese. Kindergartens that joined the erstwhile PEVS were also less likely to have language support for ethnic minority parents and children. Fourth, although Chinese and English are the official languages of Hong Kong, information on kindergartens that is published by the Educational Bureau is often only in Chinese. This means important information is not accessible to most ethnic minority families who do not speak Chinese. While some ethnic minority mothers may not speak English, the majority of fathers would understand English as they engage in paid employment in Hong Kong.

### **Percentage of Children Living in/with:**

#### *Poverty*

Two different sources of information are available for the number of children living in poverty: the government, which provides information on children under the age of 18, and Oxfam, which provides statistics for children 15 years and below. According to government figures, about 18.2 percent of children were living below the poverty line in 2014. As a result, in 2015, the government implemented a number of measures, including recurrent cash interventions, to alleviate poverty. Both government and Oxfam figures show a slight decrease in the poverty rate from 2014 to 2015, after the



implementation of poverty alleviation strategies. Government figures indicate that in 2015, about 180,000 children under the age of 18 (18 percent) were living below the poverty line (Census and Statistics Department, 2016d). Similarly, Oxfam found 190,800 children aged 15 and below (21.7 percent), living in poverty in 2015, a decrease of 0.8 percent (Oxfam Hong Kong, 2016).

The relationship between poverty and ethnic minority status is noteworthy. The Hong Kong government classifies ethnic minorities into three groups: Southeast Asians (Indonesians, Filipinos, and Thais) who are mainly foreign domestic helpers—around 280,000 persons; South Asians (mainly Indians, Pakistanis, and Nepalese)—around 60,000 persons; and East Asians and other foreigners (Whites, Japanese, and Koreans) mainly from high-income countries—around 20,000 persons (Census and Statistics Department, 2015a). On the basis of applying the 2011 poverty lines to the 2011 Population Census data, the poverty rate of South Asians was high (23 percent) compared to that of the whole population (14.7 percent) and compared to that of ethnic minorities as a whole (17.6 percent) (Census and Statistics Department, 2018). Given the link between education and income (Abdullah, Doucouliagos, & Manning, 2015), the government has been particularly concerned about the education of children from low-income ethnic minority families. As noted several times, Chinese is the language of instruction in government-funded primary schools, and South Asian children often struggle with Chinese literacy proficiency and as a result do not do well in the education systems. Particular effort has been exerted to support the learning of Chinese by non-native Chinese speaking South Asian students.

### *Single-Parent Families*

The Census and Statistics Department (2013, 2018) of the HKSAR defines single parents as mothers or fathers who are not married, or who are widowed, divorced, or separated, and who have children under the age of 18 living with them. In 2016, there were 73,428 single parents (constituting about 5.9 percent of the parent population),

each with, on average, 1.3 dependent children. The number of dependent children of single parents was 93,943, 16.7 percent of whom were aged 0 to 5 (Census and Statistics Department, 2018). In 2015, the poverty rate for single-parent households was 35.8 percent (Census and Statistics Department, 2016b).

One unique characteristic related to Hong Kong's proximity to mainland China and its "one country, two systems" political structure is the existence of "pseudo-" single-parent families. These families consist of children living with their Hong Kong-resident fathers, while their mothers are still in mainland China because they are not permitted to live in Hong Kong. Some of these fathers work for long hours, and leave young children at home unattended. Hence, school children come home with no adult to receive them, and some young children are locked up during the day. Child neglect and the lack of supervision for children in these families are serious concerns (Law, n.d.).

### *Foster Care*

Foster care refers to residential family care provided to children whose parents are unable to take care of them (Social Welfare Department, 2016c). In 2014, there were 919 children in foster care across Hong Kong (Li, 2014), while the number of children waiting to enter foster care has remained close to 30 in recent years (Li, 2014). As of the end of December 2016, 68 children who were in foster care had been adopted within the year, and an additional 182 adoption applications were in the process of being handled (Social Welfare Department, 2017b). The government spent \$14.8 million (HK\$115.6 million) on foster care services in the 2012-13 fiscal year, and increased the budget to HK\$130.7 million in 2013-14.

### *Familial Parent Surrogates (e.g., Grandparents, Aunts/Uncles)*

There are no official data available on parent surrogates. However, a distinctive characteristic of Chinese society is the active role played by the extended family, particularly grandparents, in looking after young children. It is very common to see

young children cared for by, and even living with, their grandparents during the week while their parents are working.

### *Working Mothers/Fathers*

Hong Kong is an expensive city to live in, and welfare support, though available, is limited. Hence, the government encourages both mothers and fathers to work. As stated in Chapter 2, the availability of live-in foreign domestic helpers is an important factor that enables women from middle-class families to engage in paid employment outside home. A 2015 survey revealed that the percentage of women participating in the workforce trended upwards from 48.9 percent in 1986 to 54.8 percent in 2015, likely due to improved educational attainment and marriage postponement for women (Census and Statistics Department, 2016e). On the other hand, a smaller percentage of men participated in the workforce in 2015 (68.8 percent) than in 1986 (80.5 percent), which can be explained in part by the aging population.

## Chapter 4: Policies Related to Young Children and Their Families

### Key Points

- Legal ordinances provide official protection for children and a Child Policy Framework is in place.
- Health, family, social welfare and educational policies all aim to promote the development of young children and support their families.
- Current policies reflect a focus on addressing both poverty and the marginalization of under-represented groups.
- The new policies and ordinances reflect the government's responsiveness to emerging issues in Hong Kong society and an increased concern with protecting children and supporting children's diverse needs to bring about equality of opportunities.

### Legal Documents that Frame Service Delivery

#### *Policies Related to Population*

Due to the One-Child Policy in mainland China, and the fact that since 2001, children born in Hong Kong are entitled to right of abode, for over a decade there was a flood of pregnant women who came to Hong Kong from China to give birth (see Figure 5.2). This put immense pressure on the hospital system, which was often left with insufficient places available for local mothers to give birth, and led to a potential flood of young children entitled to education in Hong Kong (see Chapter 3 for earlier discussion on cross-border children attending kindergartens in Hong Kong). In 2013, in response to public outcry about this situation, the Hong Kong government established a policy that children born to Mainland Chinese mothers, and whose fathers are not permanent residents of Hong Kong, will not be granted right of abode (Government of the HKSAR, 2012).

### *Policies Related to Health*

Hong Kong currently has no child health policies, but proposals to formulate one have been advanced (The Hong Kong Paediatric Society & The Hong Kong Paediatric Foundation, 2015).

In 2008, a food adulteration tragedy in mainland China came to have significant implications for child health in Hong Kong. After local companies mixed melamine into baby milk powder, more than 300,000 Chinese toddlers became ill, and six died (Customs and Excise Department, 2013; Jacob, 2013). This caused residents of the PRC to buy milk powder in Hong Kong instead, where the products are safer, and as a result, there were insufficient supplies for Hong Kong. This had serious implications for the health and well-being of Hong Kong infants because despite government efforts to encourage breastfeeding (see Part III), there remains a heavy reliance on formula due to the high proportion of mothers returning to the workforce shortly after giving birth. The Hong Kong government responded to this supply problem with the Import and Export (General) (Amendment) Regulation 2013, which prohibits the export of powdered formula for infants and young children under 36 months, except with a license issued by the Director-General of Trade and Industry (Government of the HKSAR, February 2013). While there are no other policies related to child health per se, the government provides a comprehensive range of public medical services and educational resources to promote child health and address children's health and developmental needs.

### *Relevant Policies Related to Kindergarten Education*

An important terminological change has had an impact on the nomenclature of ECEC policy. Until 2015, the term *pre-primary education* was used to refer to services for 3- to 6-year-olds, regardless of whether they were being provided in child care centers or kindergartens. This is reflected in the titles of the *Guide to the Pre-Primary Curriculum*

pedagogical guidelines (Curriculum Development Council, 2006) and the 2007 *Pre-Primary Educational Voucher Scheme*. Since 2015, however, *pre-primary* been replaced with *kindergarten*, as seen in the *Free Quality Kindergarten Education Policy*, which applies to programs for 3- to 6-year-olds in both kindergartens and child care centers. The terminological shift in official documents suggests that there are no plans for the Education Department to be the lead ministry for all services for children from birth to school entry. Instead, under the government's new approach, the EDB will only take responsibility for overseeing educational and care services for children over 3 years. Responsibility for the under-3s will rest with the Social Welfare Department (SWD) and the Department of Health.

The *Pre-Primary Education Voucher Scheme* (PEVS) was implemented from the 2007-08 school year (Education Bureau, 2017b). The introduction of PEVS was significant because, for the first time, the Hong Kong government began providing significant funding for ECEC. Under the PEVS, public funding was given to parents (\$2,978, or HK\$23,230, per child, in the 2016-17 school year) to meet the costs of their 3- to 6-year-old children attending non-profit kindergartens. In order to drive quality, vouchers could only be cashed in non-profit child care centers or kindergartens that met government benchmarks for quality. This feature made Hong Kong's voucher scheme unique among countries (Wong & Rao, 2015), and was seen as a means to balance market forces and government control (Li, Wong & Wang, 2008). More details are provided in Chapter 12.

The *Free Quality Kindergarten Education Policy* (FQKEP; Education Bureau, 2016c), which was implemented in September 2017, is a revision of the PEVS that derived from the election pledge of the Chief Executive of Hong Kong to provide 15 years of free education. The objectives of the FQKEP are to provide good quality and highly affordable kindergarten (note the terminological change described above) education, and to enhance students' access to different modes of services that suit specific needs. Kindergartens that have joined the scheme receive a basic subsidy for the provision of a

half-day service for 3- to 6-year-olds. This basic subsidy, provided on a per-student basis, covers expenses for salaries for teaching and supporting staff, as well as other operating costs. More details are provided in Chapter 12.

### *Language Integration Policy*

Language integration policy is a part of the Hong Kong government's overall integration policy to promote immigrants' economic, social, political, and cultural participation in Hong Kong society in areas such as the labor market, education and language training, housing, social and health services, cultural environment, and citizenship (Central Policy Unit, 2013). In 2015, the government implemented the *Second Language Learning Framework for Chinese Language Curriculum* in primary and secondary schools. From the 2017-18 school year, additional resources will be allocated to eligible kindergartens (those with eight or more non-Chinese speaking students) to help them lay the foundation for the Chinese language for children from ethnic minorities (Leung, January 2017).

### *Laws*

There are a number of ordinances (legislation passed by the Legislative Council of Hong Kong) related to children (See Appendix 2). Beyond the Adoption, Child Care, and Education ordinances, the majority of ordinances are particularly relevant to the protection of children in Hong Kong (Hong Kong Legal Information Institute, 2017). These include: Employment of Children Regulations (to protect children against economic exploitation); Crimes Ordinance (to protect children under 16 years of age from consenting to unlawful acts); Offences Against the Person Ordinance; Protection of Children and Juveniles Ordinance (to address issues of custody and guardianship for children in need of care or protection); Criminal Procedure Ordinance (to separate younger offenders from older offenders, to promote long-term reform and rehabilitation, and to protect child victims when giving evidence as prosecution

witnesses); Child Abduction and Custody Ordinance; and the Prevention of Child Pornography Ordinance (Hong Kong Legal Information Institute, 2017). The number of ordinances shows the extent of legal protection for children, and reflects the fact that more and more ordinances are added to reflect changing times. For example, it has been argued that compulsory schooling was instituted in Hong Kong to defend against claims made about child labor in factories at a time when Hong Kong's economy relied on manufacturing (Sweeting, 2004).

### *Statutory Entitlements*

The Hong Kong government promotes family-friendly employment practices, including marriage leave when employees get married, paternity leave for male employees near the delivery of their child, compassionate leave following the death of an immediate family member, parental leave for child care, and special casual leave to deal with urgent personal issues (Labour Department, 2012). According to the Employment Ordinance 2014 on statutory leave, mothers are eligible for 10 weeks paid maternity leave, and from February 2015 onwards, male employees are entitled to three days of paternity leave (see more in Chapter 5).

### *Policy Frameworks*

The Department of Health, the SWD, and the EDB utilize a Child Policy Framework that encompasses the *context*, *prevention*, and *care* of children in Hong Kong (The Hong Kong Paediatric Society & The Hong Kong Paediatric Foundation, 2015). *Context* incorporates human rights, the legal landscape, socioeconomic profiles, and government strategy. *Prevention* pertains to family maintenance and support, through the establishments of services like family centers and area-based community services. *Care* refers to planning and access to information, flexible and integrated services, and provision for special needs. Child-related policies are governed by the four guiding principles suggested by the United Nations Convention on the Right of the Child,



which states that all children should be entitled to basic rights without discrimination; that the best interests of the child should be the primary goal of decision-making; that children have the right to life, survival, and development; and that the views of children must be taken into account in matters affecting them (The Hong Kong Paediatric Society & The Hong Kong Paediatric Foundation, 2012). Policies such as the PEVS (2007) and the FQKEP (2017) aim to provide good-quality and highly affordable kindergarten education and enhance families' access to different modes of services that suit their specific needs and the needs of their child. However, despite this policy framework and the recommendations of the Hong Kong Paediatric Society and the Hong Kong Paediatric Foundation (2012), the government does not have a specific child health policy.

### *Policy Vision Statements*

The most recent policy vision for ECEC is stated in the report of the Committee on Free Kindergarten Education, *Children First, Right Start for All* (Committee on Free Kindergarten Education, 2015). Key policy objectives over the years have been to improve teacher-pupil ratios; support the professional development of teachers and principals; continuously revise the *Guide to the Pre-Primary Curriculum* (Curriculum Development Council, 2002, 2006, 2017) based on current and future societal needs; increase monitoring and quality assurance of kindergarten education by the government (Education Bureau, 2012a); enhance support for children with special learning needs and those from socially disadvantaged backgrounds; strengthen parent engagement and education; and improve school premises and facilities (Education Bureau, 2015b).

## Major Policy Changes

### *Changes in Expenditure*

Since the 1990s, the Hong Kong government has steadily increased support for kindergarten and child care, including funding for teacher training and kindergarten-based educational research, as well as a voucher scheme and quality assurance monitoring (Pearson & Rao, 2006). In the 2017-18 school year, the government's recurrent expenditure on kindergarten education increased by about \$346 million (HK\$2.7 billion), and about 70 to 80 percent of subsidized half-day kindergarten places were free of charge. The government will also increase the foster care allowance, recruit more foster parents, and increase the number of foster care places by 240, in phases. Further, it will provide additional resources for day-care and residential child care services and preschool rehabilitation services, to enhance the remuneration of child care workers (Leung, 2017).

### *Changes in Staff:Child Ratios*

Starting in September 2012, pre-primary programs under the PEVS were required to employ a sufficient number of teachers possessing the Certificate in Early Childhood Education (C[ECE]) qualification, based on the teacher-to-pupil ratio of 1:15 (Education Bureau, 2017c).

### *Changes in ECEC Staff Requirements*

The high value placed by the predominantly Chinese society on education also has implications for the quality of ECEC teachers and principals, as there is an expectation that teachers meet high standards. This pressure from the community led to the government raising the minimum academic entry qualifications for kindergarten teachers to passes in five subjects, including both Chinese and English, in the erstwhile Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (HKCEE) or the Hong Kong Diploma

of Secondary Education Examination, in not more than two sittings. Since September 2003, all newly appointed kindergarten teachers are required to possess a Qualified Kindergarten Teacher (QKT) qualification, or its equivalent. All new principals beginning in the 2009-10 school year should have a degree in ECE (B.Ed. [ECE], one-year post-qualification experience, and should have completed a recognized certificate course in principalship before, or within, the first year of their appointment (Education Bureau, 2017c).

### *Changes in Policies for Children with Special Needs*

The government introduced a two-year pilot program for preschool rehabilitation services in 2015. At that time, there were about 2,900 children with special needs who were attending kindergartens or kindergartens-cum-child-care centers for normally developing children while on the waiting list for placement in special child care centers or integrated programs. The new pilot program enabled children on the wait-list to receive specialized services (e.g., speech therapy, occupational therapy) in their kindergartens or kindergarten-cum-child care centers. A total of \$59 million (HK\$460 million) a year has been earmarked for this program that will be scaled up (Leung, 2017).

### *Changes in Child Protection*

The Hong Kong Police Force established a Child Protection Policy Unit (CPPU) in 1997 that is primarily responsible for formulating policies involving child abuse and domestic violence. In 2006, the Panel on Welfare Services recommended amending child protection policies in Hong Kong, as the laws pertaining to child protection were outdated (Legislative Council, 2006). In the following years, the scope of responsibility of the CPPU has been expanded to also include matters related to sexual violence, elder abuse, juvenile crime, and child pornography (Hong Kong Police Force, 2017).

### *Changes in Health Policy*

The first Steering Committee on Child Health Policy was established in 2012, comprising pediatricians and public notaries from the Hong Kong Paediatric Society (HKPS) and the Hong Kong Paediatric Foundation (HKPF) (The Hong Kong Paediatric Society & The Hong Kong Paediatric Foundation, 2012). The committee developed a policy document for child health in Hong Kong, with the following five overarching objectives: (i) optimizing provision of care; (ii) eliminating equity disparities; (iii) enhancing the holistic health development of children; (iv) advocating for health literacy; and (v) increasing public understanding and respect of Children's Rights. Although Hong Kong's health care system has proven its effectiveness for the past 50 years, this Child Health Policy was developed because new diseases and medical advancements necessitated an updated policy on child health (Steering Group for Child Health Policy in Hong Kong, 2013). It should be noted that the document developed by the Steering Committee has not yet led to the legal implementation of a Child Health Policy in Hong Kong.



**Part 3**  
**Direct**  
**Services for**  
**Young**  
**Children**

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Part 2 described the aspects of the Hong Kong context that have impacted the development and growth of ECEC. These include historical, demographic, sociocultural, political, and socioeconomic factors; responsive policymaking; and Chinese cultural values that give a high priority to education. Part 3 now considers services provided to promote the development of children from birth to entry into formal primary school.

## Chapter 5: Nature of General Services Provided for Young Children

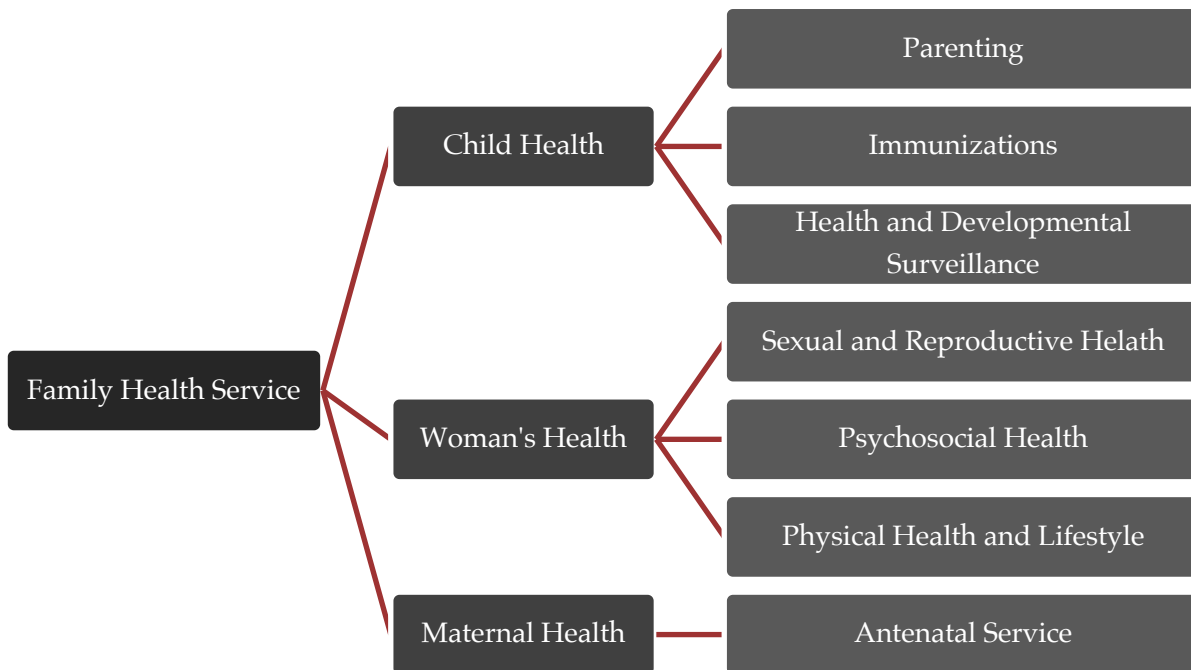
### Key Points

- As a relatively high-income country, Hong Kong provides adequate health, child protection, and educational services to all young children who need them. These provisions reflect initiatives of the financially strong government's keenness to promote equal access to services for all children, irrespective of socioeconomic status or ethnicity.
- Services reflect beliefs that: (i) the primary responsibility for children under 3 years rests with the family; (ii) adequate child care provisions (including permitting employment of foreign domestic helpers) can encourage mothers of young children to engage in paid employment; and (iii) children should be provided quality education from kindergarten, to fulfill their potential.
- Services and provisions are created to promote equality across socioeconomic and ethnic groups, and to contribute to bridging gaps that exist between the privileged and the disadvantaged.
- Access to services is universal, but in Hong Kong's free market economy, children from higher socioeconomic groups are more privileged than others. For example, parents of children from more socially advantaged groups are better able to afford private health care and pre-primary institutions with higher tuition fees. Hence, they have access to a wider range, and possibly higher quality, of choices.

### Nature of General Services Provided

The Family Health Service of the Department of Health provides services to promote women’s and children’s health. Figure 5.1 shows the organization of these services. The Women’s Health Service is a comprehensive health-promotion and disease-prevention provision, for all women below the age of 65. It covers sexual and reproductive health, psychosocial health and personal relationships, and physical health and lifestyle. The service typically includes education and, if needed, counseling and referral to specialists (Department of Health, 2017a). They are relevant for both pre- and post-natal health and well-being of mothers of young children.

**Figure 5.1 Services to promote Maternal and Child Health**



### *Prenatal*

Family planning services are provided to all women of child-bearing age. These services include education on contraceptive methods and, if needed, referrals for sterilization and termination of pregnancy. Counseling and referrals to specialists are also provided for those with fertility issues.

### *Parenting Education*

Formal parenting education is typically provided only after a woman gives birth; hence, there are not universal parenting education services for pregnant women. Instead, pregnant women are counseled about relevant issues only if they have expressed concerns to their health care providers during antenatal visits.

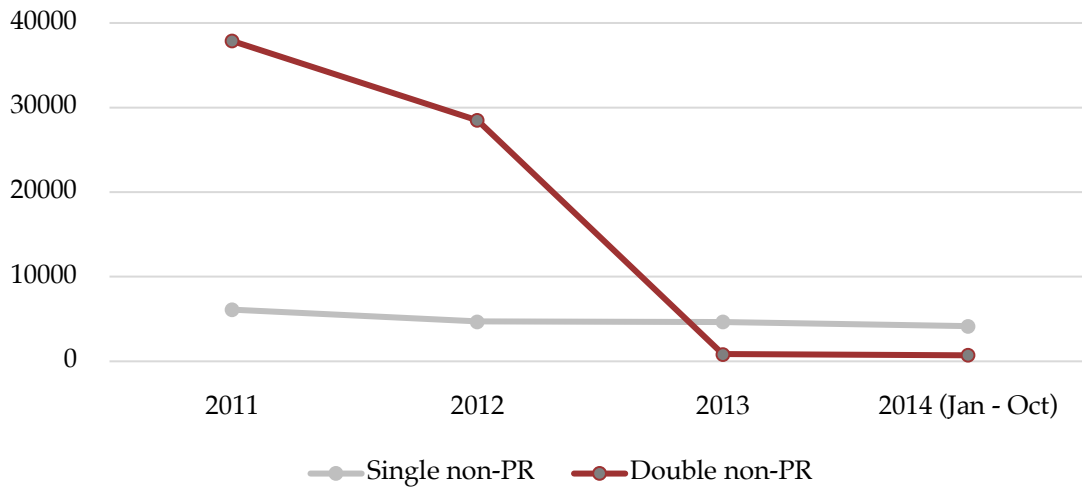
### *Health Screening for Pregnant Women*

In collaboration with the obstetric departments of public hospitals, the Women's Health Service provides an antenatal program that includes routine check-ups, blood tests, and health education relating to pregnancy care, throughout the whole pregnancy and delivery process.

As mentioned in Chapter 4 many women from mainland China who are not permanent residents of Hong Kong (about 44,000 in 2011) used to come to Hong Kong in the late stages of pregnancy to give birth. This caused significant problems for health services, as they used emergency services in Hong Kong's crowded public hospitals. These pregnant women did not receive antenatal services in Hong Kong. Their number has declined significantly since 2013, following a policy that banned mothers who are not Hong Kong permanent residents, or whose husbands are not permanent residents of Hong Kong, from giving birth in Hong Kong. They are referred to as Double Non-Permanent Residents in Figure 5.2.



**Figure 5.2** Number of women from mainland China who gave birth in Hong Kong from 2011 to 2014



Source: Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau (2016)

### *Perinatal*

*Parental Leave:* The Labour Department stipulates that women are eligible for 10 continuous weeks of paid maternity leave that can commence up to four weeks before the expected date of confinement. There is also the option of an extra four weeks of leave, if they suffer from an illness or disability arising from pregnancy or confinement.

According to the Labour Department (2014), a male employee is eligible for three days of paid (at 80 percent of the daily rate) paternity leave for each confinement of his spouse/partner. To be eligible for paternity leave, the man should: be the father/father-to-be of the child, be employed under a continuous (i.e., not part-time) contract for at least 40 weeks, and give the required notification to the employer. The three days of paternity leave can be taken together or separately at any time from four weeks before the delivery date to 10 weeks after the birth of the child.

In the cases of both maternity and paternity leave, employers who deny or fail to pay for the leave are liable for prosecution and, if convicted, a fine of \$6,410 (HK\$50,000). Further, two additional safeguards for women are in place. First, an employer is prohibited from dismissing a pregnant employee unless it is for reasons unrelated to the pregnancy. Second, an employer is required to not assign a pregnant woman to heavy, hazardous, or harmful work should she provide a medical certificate attesting to her not being fit for such work (Labour Department, 2014).

Hong Kong has a relatively short period of paid maternity leave, compared to European and other OECD countries (OECD, 2016b). To a certain extent, this reflects the Chinese culture of effort, with women generally expected to return to work relatively soon after giving birth. The short period of leave also underscores need for child care, which the government is proactive in supporting.

*Birth Registration:* Parents are obliged to register the birth of a child within 42 days of delivery (Immigration Department, 2017). Hospitals are also required to report births to the government. The information provided by the parents is compared to that received directly from the hospital in which the baby was born and the birth registration process is complete when the information from the two sources is consistent. In the case of unmarried parents, the father's name is included only if the parents individually or jointly elect to do so.

### *Health*

The Hospital Authority provides a wide range of post-natal services. As noted in Part 2, certain characteristics of Hong Kong impact the effectiveness of health services.

*“The high population density and small geographical size of Hong Kong also ensure high-quality services are delivered in the most efficient way. It is not surprising that Hong Kong has one of the lowest infant mortality rates in the world.”*

*(Senior Government Official respondent)*

The Women’s Health Service provides women with physical check-ups and advice on family planning, as well as individual counselling for new mothers to help them adapt to postnatal changes in their lives.

The Hong Kong government is keen to promote physical education and healthy lifestyles in young children due to concerns “that children are not eating enough vegetables and fruits, and often lack physical activity” (Senior Government Official respondent), thus exposing them to health risks such as obesity. In traditional Chinese culture, having a fat child is considered a sign of prosperity in that it suggests that the family can afford to give him or her the best food. The tendency of families to encourage obesity in young children can therefore be a very real concern.

Details of the government’s priorities and provisions for health care were described by one of the respondents:

*“The Comprehensive Child Development Service is an integrated, child-centered, family-focused, and community-based service model to offer early identification and timely intervention. This new initiative targets at-risk, disadvantaged families to reduce health inequalities, and to help them bring up healthy and well-adjusted children. Assessments are conducted on at-risk parents-to-be, and on parents of children between 0 and 3. Follow-up services are provided if needed.”*

*(Senior Government Official respondent)*

*Skilled Attendants at Delivery:* In Hong Kong, 100 percent of births occur with skilled attendants (World Health Organization, 2016). Hong Kong has one of the lowest infant mortality rates in the world (1.5 per 1,000 registered live births in 2015, down from 10.1 per 1,000 births in 1983).

*Childhood Immunizations:* The Family Health Service of the Department of Health runs Maternal and Child Health Centers (MCHCs) that provide immunization, health surveillance, and parenting programs (Department of Health, 2017b).

Hong Kong has an immunization program that includes the B.C.G. vaccine at birth, and the measles, mumps, and rubella vaccines. The program also includes three doses of the following vaccines: diphtheria, tetanus, whooping cough (pertussis), polio, hepatitis B, and pneumococcal. Over 95 percent of children receive all these vaccines in the public sector (Department of Health, 2016a). The other 5 percent may receive these through private providers or overseas. It should be noted that vaccinations recommended under the government's childhood immunization program are provided free of cost.

*Childhood Screenings for Hearing/Vision/Disabilities:* The Child Assessment Service's Health and Developmental Surveillance program is designed to identify problems in children in a timely manner. There is an initial physical examination of the newborn infant, followed by regular check-ups to monitor the child's growth, hearing, and vision. All children are also covered under the Developmental Surveillance Scheme (Department of Health, Family Health Service, 2011). This is a partnership between parents, teachers, and other caregivers, aimed at enabling parents and caregivers to promote and observe the development of the child. Should a problem be suspected, consultation with a doctor is made for a more detailed assessment, and a referral to a specialist given, as necessary.

Specific childhood screenings include:

- Prenatal screening for Down Syndrome (Department of Health, Family Health Service, 2010)
- Screening offered by the Child Assessment Service, Department of Health, for:
  - Hearing impairment
  - Visual impairment
  - Cerebral Palsy
  - Autistic Spectrum Disorders
  - Dyslexia
  - Mental retardation and developmental delays
  - Language delay
  - Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
  - Development Coordination Disorder
  - Anxiety disorders

In addition to developmental screening, the Child Assessment Service provides comprehensive diagnostic evaluation, rehabilitation, and child and family support to all children and their families (Department of Health, 2014). Preliminary screening is typically conducted by a public health nurse to identify physical, cognitive, and behavioral issues. If deemed necessary, multi-disciplinary teams conduct assessments and provide interim support and referrals. Children identified with special needs are also monitored at regular intervals.

*Child Well Visits:* The parenting program run by the MCHCs covers aspects such as nutrition, home safety, and parenting guidelines, typically in the form of information leaflets. Workshops and individual counseling are also provided, but only in Cantonese. This, of course, is likely to preclude women from ethnic minority groups who are unable to speak Cantonese, as noted in Part 2. This type of preclusion is one of

the issues being addressed by the Hong Kong government's policies to enhance Chinese learning in the long run, starting from kindergarten.

*National Health Insurance:* Health insurance in Hong Kong is private. However, the government has a comprehensive public health care system, under the Department of Health and the Hospitals Authority. The goals of this system are to protect and promote public health, provide lifelong holistic health care to every citizen of Hong Kong, and ensure that no one is denied adequate medical treatment due to lack of means. The Department of Health provides subsidized health care services through its centers and health clinics to Hong Kong citizens, while the Hospital Authority provides public hospitals and related subsidized services, including medical treatment and rehabilitation services in hospitals, specialist clinics and general out-patient clinics. It also provides Chinese medicine service and community outreach services (Government of the HKSAR, 2017b).

Thus, although excellent public health care is available to all residents at low cost, this system is plagued by long waiting times and a reduction in comfort and privacy. The other option for families, then, is to use private services, which afford high-quality equipment, choices of doctors, and a high standard of accommodation (Localiiz, 2107). However, these private services can be very expensive, which is why people who choose them almost always use them via private health insurance. This illustrates one of the major discrepancies in Hong Kong—while the government provides health care equally for all, those who can afford private insurance and the private system are able to have a wider choice of facilities and doctors and can receive treatment more quickly.

### *Nutrition*

*Breastfeeding Promotion/Support:* Due to concerns that too many children under the age of 2 are being fed milk formula (Senior Governmental Official interview), the Hong Kong government promotes and encourages breastfeeding (Department of Health, 2017c).

Initiatives to support this include encouraging breastfeeding in all MCHCs, not allowing advertising or promotion of breast milk substitutes, and supporting breastfeeding-friendly environments in all Department of Health facilities and in the workplace. The MCHCs serve about 90 percent of infants born in Hong Kong, and parent attendants are now surveyed biennially to discern breastfeeding practices. Encouragingly, the rate of exclusive breastfeeding rate at 12 months of age increased from 14 percent in 2012 to 25 percent in 2014. This reflects the effectiveness of government efforts to promote breastfeeding (Department of Health, 2015). Despite this, there are no laws that prevent employers from discriminating against breastfeeding mothers.

*Iron Fortification:* There is no specific iron fortification program for infants and young children. Instead, parents are counseled on balanced diets for children when they visit MCHCs, if necessary.

### *Child Protection Services*

*Services for Orphans:* The data about the numbers of orphans in Hong Kong are not straightforward. About 85 percent of those living in residential “orphan” institutions actually have at least one living parent who cannot look after them at home. It is estimated that there are more than 4,000 children living in residential care, and hundreds more on waiting lists (Govoni, 2016). Residential care is meant to be temporary, yet some children end up staying in care for years. This kind of care is provided in crèches for children under 3 and in residential child care centers for children between 3 and 6. NGOs, overseen by the SWD, provide these services in small group homes for children over the age of 6 (Social Welfare Department, 2017c).

Hong Kong also has a system for foster care. The Central Foster Care Unit of the SWD aims to place children in residential family care, if their parents cannot take care of them adequately for various reasons. This is done so that they can continue to enjoy family

life until they can reunite with their families, join an adoptive family, or live independently. Foster parents are provided with support, including regularly organized training workshops and talks that pay particular attention to training related to the care of foster children, as well as a non-taxable incentive payment (Social Welfare Department, 2016c).

Adoption is another option for children who are orphaned or whose parents are unable to care for them, and is overseen by the SWD's Adoption Service (Social Welfare Department, 2017b). Adoption rates are not high, however. For example, at the end of December 2016, there were a total of 182 children in the process of being adopted, with 68 children still waiting to be selected by potential parents for adoption (Social Welfare Department, 2017b).

*Services for Abused/Neglected Children:* As noted in Chapter 3, there were 874 reported cases of child abuse in the calendar year 2015.

There are specific procedures for reporting and following up on cases of child abuse (Social Welfare Department, 2015a), which are overseen by the Family and Child Protective Services Units of the SWD. They provide outreach services, conduct investigations, and provide crisis intervention and statutory protection. The Department also provides intensive individual and group treatment for victims. There are 11 centers in Hong Kong providing these services.

Suspected child abuse cases can be reported on the SWD hotline (Social Welfare Department, 2015b). After a suspected case has been reported, social workers from the Family and Child Services Units contact the child's family and assess the home environment and the child's condition, and conduct a risk assessment. If required, the social worker will send the child to a hospital for medical examination and treatment, or arrange a temporary living situation. Police are contacted if a criminal offense is



committed. A multi-disciplinary case conference with doctors, social workers, teachers, and psychologists is held after the intervention (Social Welfare Department, 2015a).

*Services for Vulnerable Children:* Most categories of “vulnerable” children have been or will be described elsewhere in this report. However, a further category that is relevant here is that of children with disabilities.

The Department of Health’s Child Assessment Service (CAS) assesses and identifies children with disabilities/special needs and provides the necessary medical service to ensure that they are properly catered for (Department of Health, 2016a). “Special” child care centers provide training and care for moderately and severely disabled children under the age of 6 to facilitate their growth and development, thereby helping them prepare to attend school (Social Welfare Department, 2016d). Parents of children with disabilities who attend these “special” child care centers pay a nominal fee of about \$50 (HK\$354) per month.

An example of an initiative to support families and teachers of kindergarten children with special needs is the Pilot Scheme on On-Site Pre-School Rehabilitation Services, which is funded from profits from the Lotteries Fund (Social Welfare Department, 2017a). Under this scheme, children who are enrolled in regular kindergartens or kindergarten-cum-child care centers but on the waiting list for preschool Rehabilitation Services receive services from multi-disciplinary teams from non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

Once children reach school age, the Education Bureau (EDB) largely takes over responsibility for educational services.

*Services for Children of Incarcerated Adults or Incarcerated Children:* Mothers who are incarcerated are permitted to keep their children with them up to the age of 9 months, with an option to extend this arrangement until the child reaches age 3. Special nursery provisions are made available. Alternatively, when the child reaches the age of 9

months, the Commissioner of Correctional Services may choose to place him/her under the care of a trusted relative, another person, or an institution. Mothers are allowed to have their children visit them for weekly half-day visits if they wish to do so, and play rooms equipped with toys are available for these visits (Library of Congress, 2017).

The services for children who have committed offenses vary according to the age of the child. According to the Juvenile Offenders Ordinance, children under the age of 10 cannot be found guilty of any offense, those aged between 10 and 13 cannot be incarcerated, and those between 14 and 15 can only be sentenced to imprisonment if there is no other suitable way of dealing with them. The government's focus is on helping young people get back on the right track (rehabilitation), rather than on punishment (Community Legal Information Centre, 2017).

### *Social Protection*

*Domestic Violence Reduction:* Hong Kong has a wide range of welfare services for victims of domestic violence and child abuse, provided by the SWD and NGOs (Social Welfare Department, 2015b). These are described below:

- Family and Child Protective Services Units provide services, including investigation, crisis intervention, statutory protection, and treatment for victims of domestic violence.
- Integrated Family Service Centers operated by NGOs provide counselling and assistance for victims of child abuse and domestic violence. They offer a range of services, including clinical psychological services, financial assistance, legal services, school placement and job placement, and housing assistance.
- Medical Social Services offered by the SWD may assist in cases of domestic abuse identified in public hospitals or out-patient clinics, and provide services similar to those described above.

- Clinical psychological services are provided in five Clinical Psychology Units of the SWD. They provide assessment and treatment for abusers and victims who present symptoms of psychopathology.
- Victim Support Programs offered by the SWD provide a range of services including information, emotional support, and escort services during legal proceedings.
- Refuge Centers for Women are operated by the SWD. There are five centers that provide temporary accommodation and support services for women and children facing domestic violence.

The Women's Commission produced a report entitled *Women's Safety in Hong Kong: Eliminating Domestic Violence* in January 2006 (Women's Commission, 2006) with the aim of eliminating domestic violence by prevention, timely intervention, empowerment of victims, and community education; and by advocating gender awareness, gender equality, and mutual respect. The legislature adopted amendments to implement some of these recommendations in the years following the release of the 2006 report (Women's Commission, 2009). In 2009, in consultation with relevant stakeholders, the Commission developed a multi-dimensional strategy to tackle domestic violence. It released a supplement to its 2006 report with 21 concrete recommendations (Women's Commission, 2009). These recommendations covered: law reform; services; publicity; professional knowledge-sharing; documentation and research; hospitals and the health and medical sectors; gender mainstreaming and gender-related training; early identification and intervention; and community networking. Many NGOs, community groups, and women's organizations also provide educational and supportive services at community and neighborhood levels for women who experience domestic violence.

### Enrollments in Above Services

There are no official data available about the numbers of people enrolled in the above services. However, some indications have been obtained through other channels. For

example, some information has been obtained about the On-site Pre-school Rehabilitation Services pilot project. This project provides 2,925 places in over 450 kindergartens or kindergarten-cum-child care centers. Recurrent funding has been reserved to extend this to 7,000 service places when the scheme becomes regulated (Senior Government Official interview).

### **Organization of Above Services**

Some of the services mentioned above are provided by the SWD. Others are overseen by the SWD and provided by NGOs. The authors believe that these services are well-monitored, and that they have robust quality assurance mechanisms.

### ***Ministerial Authority***

In general, the Department of Health takes care of health needs, the Department of Social Welfare is responsible for social protection and center-based ECEC for children under 3 years, and the EDB is responsible for center-based ECEC for children from 3 to 6 years. At the same time, there is cross-departmental collaboration and cooperation among the three departments, particularly in terms of meeting the needs of children with special medical or learning needs. Cross-departmental collaboration is facilitated by the territory's compact demographics, and its strong, supportive government structure.

## Chapter 6: Nature of ECEC Services

### Key Points

- Hong Kong's economic condition has allowed funds to be allocated for alleviating poverty. Therefore, conditions for the majority of young children are generally good.
- Hong Kong's small geographical footprint, efficient transport system, effective government, and educated workforce make it relatively easy to deliver and monitor services.
- There are significant concerns about the high rate of poverty among children and the wide disparity in income.

### Nature of ECEC Services Provided

#### *Home Visiting*

While there are no formal home visiting programs implemented or overseen by the government, there have been several trial initiatives that have been reported as having effective impact (Leung et al., 2015). For example, the Triple P and Parent-Child Interaction Therapy programs were implemented by the Department of Health to train staff from Maternal and Child Health Centers (MCHC) and Child Assessment Centers (CAC) to offer programs for parents of children with behavioral problems. Parent-Child Interaction Therapy was offered by the Tung Wah Group of Hospitals, with sponsorship from the Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities, for three years, from 2012 to 2015, serving over 600 parents with children aged 2 to 7 who had behavioral problems.

Leung et al. (2015) found that a home-visit program for disadvantaged Chinese parents, mostly single parents or new immigrants with preschool children, was effective in promoting parents' knowledge of how to support child development. Targeting 84 parent/child dyads in 12 preschools, the program involved 20 sessions addressing

physical health. It included topics such as nutrition, physical exercise, home safety, and oral health. Visits were made by a group of parents from the local area, who had undergone a 50-hour training course delivered by the program team (psychologists and social workers), and who had visited homes in pairs, under the supervision of social workers from the program team. The program was designed by psychologists and social workers, with input from specialists such as general practice doctors, pediatricians, dentists, physiotherapists, and nutritionists. For each session there was a mini-lecture, followed by role-play on homework activities, to ensure that participating parents could grasp micro-skills. Participating parents had to spend five minutes per day on homework activities with their children. A manual was produced to explain key points to parents. This is an interesting example of community groups' providing support for disadvantaged community members.

### *Parenting Education*

A novel parenting education initiative in Hong Kong is the government-initiated Grandparent Scheme, in which grandparents attend courses in child care (Social Welfare Department, 2016f). This is a two-year pilot project launched by the SWD in 2016, serving 540 trainees. The purpose is to support the grandparent to become a well-trained child caregiver in the home setting. This is an important initiative for Chinese society, where family structures are strong, and grandparents often play significant roles in caring for grandchildren.

### *In-Home Care and Education*

*Family Child Care Homes:* As described above, residential child care centers provide for children under the age of 6 who cannot be cared for adequately by their families for various reasons, such as behavioral, emotional, or relationship problems, or family crises. Children over 6 may be placed in children's homes (Social Welfare Department, 2017c).

The Neighborhood Support Child Care Project is an initiative designed to provide flexible child care for children under the age of 9. One component is a home-based child care service (Social Welfare Department, 2017d).

### *Center-Based Care and Education*

Center-based care and education is provided in child care centers, kindergartens, kindergartens-cum-child care centers, and special child care centers. Child care centers offer day care to children from birth to age 3, with a focus on providing stimulating environments to enhance their growth and development. Kindergarten-cum-child care centers provide care and education for children ranging in age from 2 to 6, while kindergartens provide services for children ranging in age from 3 to 6. Special child care centers provide services to moderately and severely disabled children under the age of 5 (Education Bureau, 2017c; Social Welfare Department, 2017d).

Occasional child care services are available on a full-day, half-day, or hourly basis at some child care centers and kindergartens-cum-child-care centers. These services are for situations when parents have an unexpected need for short-term care for their children. The provision of such services prevents young children from being left unattended at home. Mutual Help Child Care Centers and the Neighborhood Support Child Care Project provide center-based care for children in the neighborhoods where they live. All of the above types of centers are operated by trained staff.

*Relevant Types:* Figure 6.1 in the Appendix summarizes the child care services described in the previous section. Specifically, it illustrates the breakdown of the three years that children spend in kindergarten.

*Transition to School:* As noted in Part 2, one characteristic of Chinese society is the pressure on kindergartens to prepare children to enter the “best” primary schools. This has led to an emphasis on academic learning and drilling. Even though the entrance examination to Primary 1 has been removed, there is still a great amount of pressure on

children in kindergartens. In an attempt to improve the situation, the Committee on Free Kindergarten Education discussed important considerations in the transition from kindergarten to primary school (Legislation Council, 2015). The importance of handling the process of this transition was emphasized in their publication, the *Guidelines for Helping Primary 1 Pupils Adapt to a New School Life*. These Guidelines were developed to provide primary school teachers a basic understanding of the knowledge, skills, and attitudes children bring to primary school. In addition, there is one section in the *Guide to the Pre-Primary Curriculum* (Curriculum Development Council, 2006<sup>4</sup>) that sets guidelines for the transition to primary school.

One of the strategies in place is teacher training. Both kindergarten and early primary school teachers are made aware of the preceding and ensuing stages children experience, with respect to curriculum, pedagogy, and child psychology. In addition, the EDB offers seminars for parents, with transition to primary school as one of the themes. These seminars are supplemented by leaflets and booklets to give parents tips about guiding their child's transition. Close home-school collaboration is recommended to encourage parents and teachers to share and discuss transitional information. The *Report of the Committee on Free Kindergarten Education* (2015) stressed avoiding teaching the Primary 1 curriculum in kindergarten. It recommended instead that learning outcomes should be set for the end of kindergarten, so the Primary One teachers know what to expect of incoming students.

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4 At the time of writing, the English version of the 2017 Guide to the Kindergarten Curriculum had not yet been released.



## Enrollments in ECEC Services

### *By Socioeconomic Status*

Kindergarten is universally available to all children and all 3- to 6-year-olds attend center-based ECEC for at least 15 hours a week. While the government is working hard to enhance the quality of kindergarten received by all children, irrespective of family socioeconomic status, it is likely that there are some advantages for children from more well-off families, who can afford to attend the most sought-after kindergartens. The children with the best chance of getting into the top kindergartens are those who have been best prepared, in terms of private classes in languages and the arts, for the kindergarten application process. Clearly, children whose parents can afford to pay for this preparation will be advantaged in the application process. Furthermore, the best private schools require parents to purchase a school debenture (i.e., a fixed fee) at the time of application (Yan, 2010), which is returned to the parents when the child leaves kindergarten. Less well-off parents may struggle to afford this.

### **Service Delivery Organization**

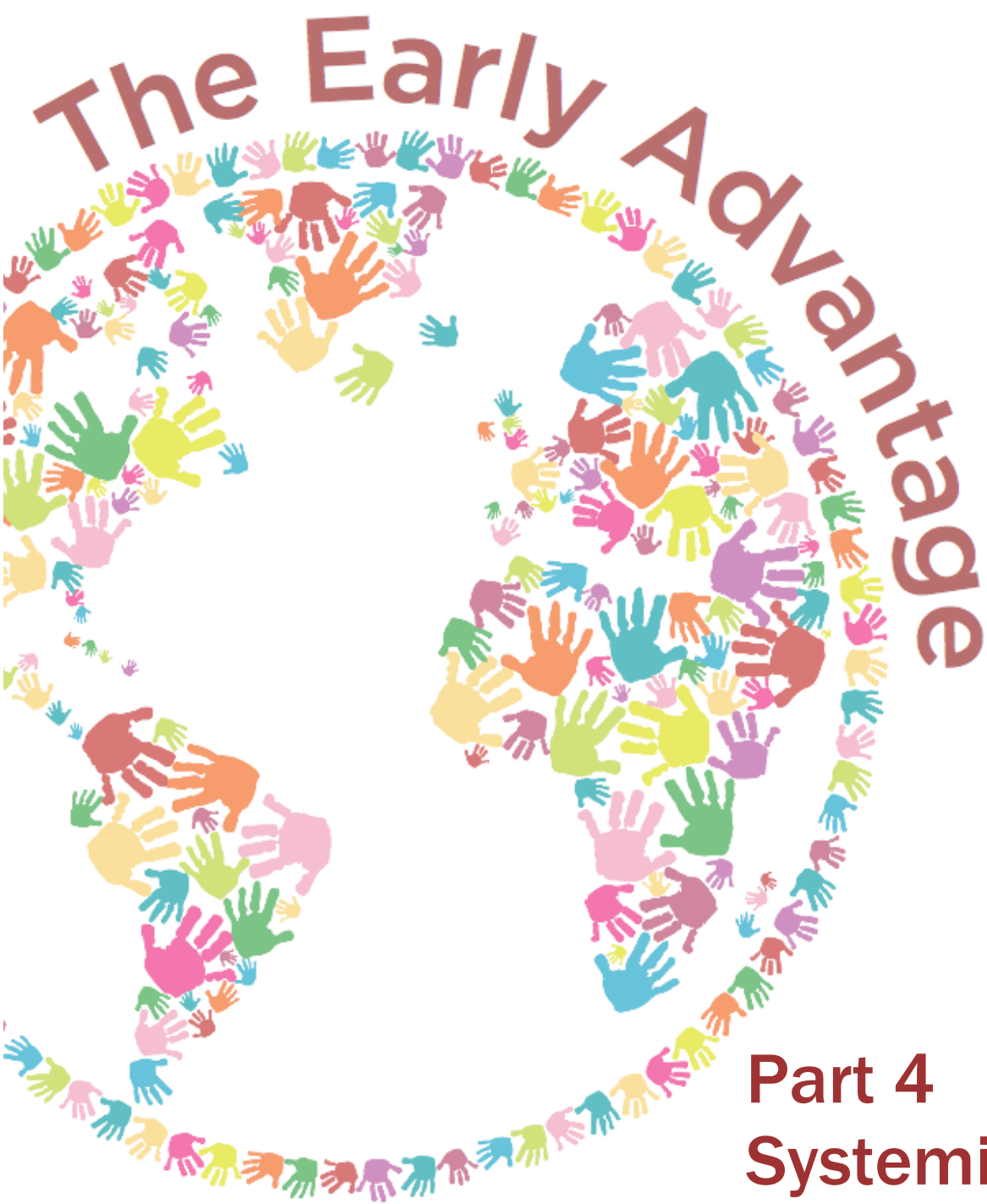
Hong Kong has a split-phase and split-system approach to service organization, with three main departments responsible for early childhood services. The Department of Health and the Hospital Authority are in charge of all health concerns and needs from birth to old age; the Department of Social Welfare oversees all matters pertaining to child welfare and protection; and the EDB manages education services for children aged 3 and above. There are cross-departmental collaborations dedicated to childhood services, however; for example, the Department of Health, the Department of Social Welfare, and the EDB collaborated together to prepare the *Pre-Primary Children Development and Behavior Management—Teacher Resource Kit* (Education Bureau, 2015c), and the EDB collaborated with the Labor Department to establish the Joint Office for Kindergartens and Child Care Centers. Each government department provides relevant

services within their responsibilities and goals, with the exception that the SWD, which is additionally in charge of special child care centers.

There are coordinating mechanisms in place for better coordination and support of childhood services. For example, the Department of Health’s Child Assessment Service (CAS) assesses children with disabilities, and if warranted, the children will then be referred to special centers governed by the SWD to further receive the appropriate training and care (see Chapter 5). Similarly, when schools suspect cases of child abuse, they will contact the SWD for more support. There are also regular inter-ministerial meetings among the various departments.

**Figure 7.1 Center-based ECEC in Hong Kong**

Setting	Special Child Care Center (CCC)	Residential CCC	CCC	KG-cum-mixed CCC	KG-cum-CCC		KG
Ages of Children	0-6	0-6	0-3	0-6	2-3	3-6	3-6
No. of Centers	39	5	26	29	8	1,014	
No. of Children Served/ Places	1,841	341	2,154	Not available	Not available	184,032	
Overseen by	Social Welfare Department			Joint Office for KGs and Child Care Centers			Education Bureau
Legal Basis	Child Care Services Ordinance and Regulations			Child Care Services Ordinance Regulations & Education Ordinance and Regulations			Education Ordinance and Regulations
Curriculum	Operation Manual from Social Welfare Department			KG Education Curriculum Guide (from September 2017)			
Quality Monitoring	Service Performance Monitoring System (since 1999)			Quality Assurance Framework (since 2000)			
Teacher Training	Certificate/Diploma/Degree in Child Care or Equivalent			Qualified KG Teacher or Certificate/Diploma/Degree in Early Childhood Education or Equivalent			



**Part 4**  
**Systemic Outputs:**  
**Fostering Quality**  
**Services**

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## Chapter 7: Pedagogical Approaches and Curriculum

### Key Points

- Hong Kong's unique mixture of traditional Chinese and Western values has influenced pedagogical approaches and curricula. While both approaches have their advantages, they are quite distinct, which sometimes causes conflict.
- The Western focus on child-centered, inquiry-based, and activity-based learning is at odds with the traditional Chinese focus on academic learning and the transmission of knowledge from teacher to student. This creates a challenge for the government, which often must try to change parents' and other stakeholders' views to align with the most current research on early learning, while at the same time taking traditional views and beliefs into account.
- The Hong Kong government has developed manuals and guidelines to support and encourage this shift in mindset coupled with a respect for cultural context.
- The Hong Kong government has policies to ensure that all children meet their potential through support for non-Chinese speakers, for children with specific needs, and for children who are gifted.

### Describing Curriculum and Pedagogical Approaches

#### *Current Epistemological Beliefs and Values*

As explained in Chapter 2, education in Hong Kong has been influenced by the distinctive combination of Chinese and Western beliefs and values, due to its history of both Chinese and British rule. From Chinese heritage have come Confucian beliefs that learning requires effort and hard work and that knowledge is transferred by authority,

with teachers considered knowledgeable transmitters of knowledge; that students should show respect and obedience to teachers; and that knowledge is certain and unambiguous (see below.). The British influence is reflected in the promotion of child-centered pedagogies.

### *Defining Curriculum and Pedagogical Approaches*

It is recommended by the Hong Kong government that pedagogy in ECEC classrooms be child-centered and activity-based, with a strong emphasis on free exploration in play. An integrated, thematic approach is suggested to connect six key learning areas (see Content / Areas of Learning, below), through real-life themes that relate to children's everyday lives and that evoke interest.

Teaching strategies include whole-language approaches, teaching with picture books, project approaches, teaching with stories, and incorporating pleasurable, meaningful, and real-life language learning experiences (e.g., stories, singing, saying rhymes, daily conversations, picture books, drawing lines, learning names, and everyday vocabulary). The child-centered approach means that curriculum design should address development in the physical, moral, affective, social, cognitive, and language domains (Curriculum Development Council, 2006, 2017). Pre-primary curriculum documents aim to counter the stress inherent in teacher-led pedagogies, an emphasis in Chinese culture, by urging teachers to avoid over-teaching and drilling and to acknowledge individual differences in learning.

### **Historical Evolution of Curricular/Pedagogical Approaches**

The label "Chinese Learner" was first used by Watkins and Biggs (1996) to designate students in Confucian-heritage cultures influenced by Confucian values. Embedded in Confucian philosophy is the role of education in socialization—teaching children how to relate to others, and their place in the world, which manifests as respect for elders and authority, and obedience. This stems from the belief that the ultimate goal of

education is *Xin-gou-ren* or “becoming human,” albeit within a particular overarching social context.

Education is viewed as the vehicle of self-improvement and moral development (Lee, 1996; Rao & Chan, 2009) and the route to upward social mobility. This leads to an educational philosophy that emphasizes order, stability, hierarchy, self-discipline, and obedience. Children are required to behave appropriately both at home and at school. Academic achievement, exertion of effort, and memorization are also emphasized.

Chinese parents encourage young children to memorize poems and multiplication tables to better prepare for primary school. The approach is teacher-directed and focused on transmission of “correct” knowledge (Rao, Cheng & Narain, 2013). Teachers use drill-and-practice approaches and paper-and-pencil tests for teaching and learning. If children fail to learn, it is ascribed to their lack of effort rather than to aptitude. In contrast, from the West has come belief in student-centered pedagogy; the idea that authority can be questioned; and an emphasis of inquiry, individuality, and critical thinking. Clearly, such views can contradict Chinese beliefs.

### Framework Documents that Influence Curriculum

- The *Guide to the Pre-Primary Curriculum* (Curriculum Development Council, 2006) includes curriculum goals and frameworks, guidelines for whole-school curriculum planning, catering for diversity, interface between kindergarten and primary school, and teacher professional development. The guide was revised and renamed the *Kindergarten Education Curriculum Guide: Joyful Learning through Play, Balanced Development All the Way* in 2017.
- The 2017 *Guide* reflects the government’s belief that the curriculum for 2- to 6-year-olds should be holistic. The six learning areas specified in this new *Guide* are similar to those in the 2006 *Guide*. They are: Physical Fitness and Health,

Language, Early Childhood Mathematics, Nature and Living, Self and Society, and Arts and Creative Expression. The aim is to nurture children toward balanced development, as well as to foster interest in learning, inquisitive minds, interest in exploration, positive attitudes and values, self-confidence, and adaptability—overall, the development of good learning habits (Curriculum Development Council, 2017).

- The *List of Dos and Don'ts for Kindergartens* (Education Bureau, 2012b) is a one-page document that addresses compliance with ordinances and guidelines; curriculum issues, especially avoiding overload; teaching and learning (e.g., avoiding didactic teaching styles, and treating all children as being at the same level); assessment, particularly not to use dictation or examinations; and kindergartens' relationship with parents.
- *The Operation Manual for Pre-Primary Institutions* (Education Bureau & Social Welfare Department, 2006) provides direction and advice on:
  - Premises design, furniture and equipment specifications, and safety;
  - Health, sanitation, nutrition, and diet requirements;
  - Curriculum and activities, staffing, and fees to be charged;
  - How to formally and professionally engage with family and parents
  - Registration and regulation

### Nature/Content of Curriculum

The six learning areas specified in the *Kindergarten Education Curriculum Guide* are similar to those in the 2006 Guide. They are: Physical Fitness and Health, Language, Early Childhood Mathematics, Nature and Living, Self and Society, and Arts and Creative Expression. The aim is to nurture children towards balanced development, as well as to foster interest in learning, inquisitive minds, interest in exploration, positive attitudes and values, self-confidence, and adaptability—overall, the development of good learning habits (Curriculum Development Council, 2017).

Echoing and incorporating the deeply embedded Confucian belief that the ultimate goal of education is socialization, there is a strong emphasis on moral development as an educational objective. This is concerned with how children learn about themselves, how they develop the concept of right and wrong, how they express their emotions and feelings, and how they get along with others (Curriculum Development Council, 2016).

### Use of Time and Space

Most kindergartens offer both morning and afternoon sessions, each lasting three hours. With limited land space in Hong Kong, many kindergartens are housed in apartment complexes and buildings, with no outdoor play areas for children. As noted by one respondent:

*“Half-day kindergarten is way too compacted, and the schedule is too cramped and rushed. There are many corners for children to play, but it occurs in a flash, and then they are working on something else immediately. There is also no space/environment for children’s play. If the root cause cannot be identified, we cannot implement these ideas [from abroad] in the classroom.”*

*(Influential Community member respondent)*

### Diversity and Cultural Responsiveness

As has been explained in previous sections, one of the strengths of the Hong Kong government’s policy development is its willingness to address changes and challenges in society and, in the case of education, the concerns and needs of teachers and parents. The pre-primary curriculum guidelines stress that appropriate support strategies should be formulated to address these societal changes and challenges at school level (Curriculum Development Council, 2006).

Collaboration among school, family, and community is given particular emphasis. Schools and parents are encouraged to make good use of community resources, so as to enrich children’s learning and life experiences. For example, non-Chinese-speaking



students may enhance their learning of Chinese through use of community resources. The role of parents in early childhood education is stressed as being vital and irreplaceable, and kindergartens are required to make effective and practicable recommendations to promote good relationships with parents.

### **Provision for:**

#### *Children Identified with Disabilities*

Hong Kong has a policy of inclusiveness. When a child is found to have consistent and obvious problems and difficulties in one or more particular developmental areas, kindergartens are required to refer them for professional assessment, as early as possible, and where appropriate, invite relevant organizations to develop appropriate plans for individual students (Curriculum Development Council, 2016). Support is available from the Department of Social Welfare and the Department of Health.

Children identified as having special educational needs are enrolled in integrated programs in pre-primary institutions. Teachers are required to follow the government-issued guidelines, offer the children equal opportunities for education, and explore their ability and potential so that they can overcome, or reduce, any congenital restrictions. Teachers should help them achieve their optimal development through well-planned guidance and training.

### *Children Whose Home Language/Culture is not that of the Majority*

As noted in Chapter 2, Chinese is the medium of communication for most people in Hong Kong, and the language environment of most kindergartens is mainly Chinese. However, there are children from ethnic minority groups who enter kindergarten with no basic skills in Chinese, so it is essential for them to grasp these skills as soon as possible. There are measures and recommendations proposed to support this expectation in the new FQKEP, including professional development programs for teachers, and pedagogical guidelines for the teaching Chinese to ethnic minorities (Committee on Free Kindergarten Education, 2015).

### *Children who are Deemed Gifted*

There is no specific policy for gifted kindergarten children, but the EDB policy is that the needs of gifted students, like those of their classmates, should be met in their own schools (Education Bureau, 2016d). General guidelines affirm that:

- A broad definition using multiple intelligences should be adopted;
- Exploring students' thinking, creativity abilities, and social skills should be the focus of gifted education;
- Schools should provide sequential and multiple educational activities to gifted students at different levels;
- Schools should compile resources collected from educational parties/bodies as support to schools.

### **Transitions (Within Setting, Across Settings)**

To ensure appropriate transition both across kindergarten levels, and from kindergarten to primary school, teachers are required to design school-based curricula grounded in children's developmental needs (Curriculum Development Council, 2016). To facilitate the transition to primary school, a list of clear outcomes for children at the end of

kindergarten has been articulated in government-issued documents, with emphasis on necessary life skills to prepare them for the primary learning environment.

### *Curriculum and Pedagogy*

Several respondents repeatedly mentioned discontinuity between the curriculum and pedagogy of kindergartens and primary schools, with most teachers and parents considering this the cause of transition difficulties (Head of Service interview). More than a decade ago, Wong (2003) similarly concluded that difficulties are “predominantly [due to] discontinuity of pedagogy and rather less [to] discontinuity of socio-ecology context” (p. 92). Many parents and kindergarten teachers said they would like primary schools to adopt the activity approach, and to include less rote learning and fewer handwriting drills, which are believed to be developmentally inappropriate for young children.

The *Basic Education Curriculum Guide: Building on Strength (Primary 1-Secondary 3)* (Curriculum Development Council, 2002), which covers Primary 1 to Secondary 3, suggests that written assignments and tests be reduced and replaced with other assessments, such as oral presentations and group work. Many kindergarten teachers would like this curriculum to provide more opportunities for play and exploration.

### *Curricular and Pedagogical Adjustments*

There is interest in evaluating and modifying current practices and curricula for P1–P3 classes. The Curriculum Development Council (2002) states that learning environments that are “warm and stimulating” foster belonging in children and inspire them. Children’s learning motivation in the first year of school grows out of their interests, so it is recommended that teachers provide opportunities to establish and develop thinking ability, and skills necessary to become independent learners (Kitson, 2004). Dictation practice and homework lists are developmentally inappropriate for young children, particularly in the first semester of primary school.

## Innovations

The *Guide to the Pre-Primary Curriculum* (Curriculum Development Council, 1996; 2006) reflects and responds to changes in society and the skills that are required of children in changing times. The recommended guidelines mirror the values and priorities of Hong Kong Chinese society. This is evident in the Guide's emphasis on trilingual and moral development. The policy of inclusion is also reflected through the Guide's emphasis on children with special educational needs. The revised *Guide to the Kindergarten Curriculum*, released in February 2017, further includes children from ethnic minority backgrounds (Curriculum Development Council, 2017).

## Contributions to Quality

The kindergarten curriculum and pedagogical approaches cater to the diverse needs of Hong Kong's education system by developing various policies mentioned above. The curriculum *Guide* endeavors to be in line with current international trends and best practices and in tune with local needs and demands. At the same time, it promotes traditional Chinese values. Hence, the notion of kindergarten quality in Hong Kong is somewhat unique, in that it reflects a fusion of traditional Confucian and contemporary values and approaches.

## Challenges

### *Implementation Challenges Associated with a Blended Approach*

The unique mix of Western and Eastern values in Hong Kong poses a challenge for fostering quality services. There is a need to take into account the cultural context of pedagogical practices and not directly transplant or adopt pedagogies from the West. As one of the respondents pointed out, although Hong Kong often adopts the child-centered practices from the West, there may not be adequate knowledge and resources to execute them with fidelity (Influential Community member interview).

*“Our policies look like they have covered everything (e.g., teacher qualifications, the learning environment, long-term development of the field), but we do not have the support to match them. For instance, we know children’s play is important, but we do not take into account teacher attitudes, parent attitudes, or our environment (the local context) when implementing play.”*

*(Influential Community member respondent)*

### ***Market-Driven Practices***

The struggle between child-centered practices (and recommended practices from curriculum *Guides*) and demands from parents for more academic-oriented pedagogy continues to pose as an issue for Hong Kong education system. This is compounded by the fact that kindergartens are driven by market forces, due to the privatization of the kindergarten sector. One respondent indicated that the demand from parents to have a rigorous curriculum for their children overrides the developmental needs of the children.

*“There have been improvements in the field, moving from teacher-didactic approach to being more child-centered. However, we also have practices that may not be so beneficial. The school-sponsoring bodies of the kindergartens may be money-driven (as they need to pay rent, etc.), and they bend to market forces. For instance, having homework, doing writing in half-day sessions. The kindergartens say they do not want that, but then parents may ask for them. In terms of the curricula and operations, schools need to see the products/outcomes in order to survive, so they end up working for parents, and not for children.”*

*(Academic respondent)*

## Chapter 8: Children's Development: Goals, Standards, Assessment, and Accountability

### Key Points

- Hong Kong has not yet developed standards for young children's learning and development, but it is moving in this direction. For example, the trans-departmental Hong Kong Reference Framework for Preventive Care for Children in Primary Care Settings, updated periodically, lists steps being taken towards collecting data to inform policies and provisions.
- The Guide to the Kindergarten Curriculum provides guidelines for planning and implementation of the curriculum, and expectations of children's learning and development are reflected through promotion of six learning areas and of the knowledge, attitudes and skills to be achieved in kindergarten years.
- Generally, while there is still progress to be made in developing standards for what children should know and be able to do, existing provisions illustrate the Hong Kong government's commitment to policy- and provision-making, based on data that reflect community needs.

### Early Learning and Development Standards

#### *History/Evolution*

Hong Kong does not have early learning and development standards. However, the various iterations of the curriculum *Guide* (Curriculum Development Council, 1996, 2006, 2017) outline developmental objectives for children, as well as the learning areas and knowledge, attitudes, and skills to be achieved and developed throughout kindergarten. The *Guide* serves as a reference to understanding the domains of development that are promoted for young children in Hong Kong.

The original *Guide to the Pre-Primary Curriculum* (Curriculum Development Council, 1996) highlighted five developmental objectives: intellectual development, communicative development, social and moral development, personal and physical development, and aesthetics development. In the 2006 edition, this was reduced to four: physical development, cognitive and language development, affective and social development, and aesthetic development. The notable difference was that it did not highlight the importance of moral development. However, this was re-emphasized in the most recent revision, the 2017 edition of the *Guide*, as one of the five developmental objectives (Curriculum Development Council, 2017).

Recently, a specific instrument was developed to assess child development in Hong Kong, the Hong Kong Early Child Development Scale (Rao et al., 2013). The scale is aligned to the *Guide to the Pre-Primary Curriculum* (Curriculum Development Council, 2006). Findings indicate that socioeconomic gaps in early development were less pronounced among 3-year-olds than among 5-year-olds, suggesting that preschool education may decrease achievement gaps in Hong Kong.

### **Content**

The core goals of early learning in Hong Kong, as stated in the *Guide to the Pre-Primary Curriculum* and the *Kindergarten Education Guide*, include nurturing children to attain all-round development to prepare them for life, stimulate children's interest in learning, and cultivate positive learning attitudes, in order to lay the foundation for future learning (Curriculum Development Council, 2006, 2017).

The developmental objectives from the 2017 edition of the *Guide* encompass six learning areas: physical fitness and health, language and foreign language, early mathematics, nature and life, self and society, and arts and creativity (Curriculum Development Council, 2017).

- In developing the learning area of physical fitness and health, objectives are to master the basic movement of the body through fine and rough actions, to establish understanding of space and direction, and to build positive interest and habits in physical activity.
- In the learning area of language (Chinese and English), the three aims are: building interest in learning Chinese and English, developing a good language communication attitude, and gradually establishing the basis of language use.
- For early mathematics, aims are to build an interest in learning mathematics, to foster knowledge of the relationship between mathematics and life, and to cultivate active attitudes and concern about mathematics-related matters.
- In learning about nature and life, objectives are to foster curiosity in exploring nature; to learn to observe and ask questions; and to appreciate, respect, and love nature.
- For the learning area of self and society, objectives are to foster positive self-image and self-confidence, to learn to respect others, as well as to recognize different societal groups (family, school, society, country, etc.)
- When developing arts and creativity in curriculum, aims are to develop sensory ability and accumulate artistic experience, and to learn to express feelings through creative platforms.

### *Mandated/Not*

All kindergartens that were part of the erstwhile PEVS (about 80 percent) and are part of the FQKEP have to follow the *Guide* (Curriculum Development Council, 2006, 2017). For other pre-primary institutions, implementing the *Guide* is not mandatory.

### *Use*

Pre-primary institutions use the *Guide to the Kindergarten Curriculum* as they see fit, according to their own circumstances and needs. The EDB emphasizes that achieving



the *Guide's* pre-primary education objectives is the most important aim for pre-primary institutions (Curriculum Development Council, 2006). It is also recommended that parents, primary school practitioners, and other interested parties of the community refer to the *Guide* so that the community can work together to improve and enhance the quality of kindergarten education (Curriculum Development Council, 2017).

### ***Modifications***

The 2017 *Guide to the Kindergarten Curriculum* revised learning objectives, reasoning that kindergarten education should be comprehensive and balance all elements of learning, including the moral, intellectual, physical, communal, and aesthetic elements (Curriculum Development Council, 2017). As a result, the learning objective of “science and technology” from the 2006 *Guide to the Pre-Primary Curriculum* became “nature and life” in the 2017 version, to avoid confusion with the primary and secondary school subject of science, and to focus on cultivating curiosity through exploring nature and life. Similarly, the learning area of “arts” evolved to “arts and creativity,” to emphasize freedom of expression and creation.

### **Health Standards**

#### ***History/Evolution***

Hong Kong does not have child health standards, per se. However, the services and assessment foci for children’s health as provided by the Family Health Service, Maternal and Child Health Service, Centers for Assessment of Children with Special Needs, and Comprehensive Child Development Service reflect the expectations of children’s health and development in the early years.

The Family Health Service under the Department of Health is the division responsible for child health in Hong Kong, and covers all children 11 years of age and under who hold Hong Kong Identification Cards (Department of Health, 2016b). The Family Health

Service started with the establishment of the first Infant Welfare Centre in 1932 in the Wan Chai District (Department of Health, 2013). The Infant Welfare Centre continued to expand, and more centers were built in the following years. In the early to mid-1940s, due to the Imperial Japanese occupation of Hong Kong, all services were suspended. After the war, in 1946, the Infant Welfare Centre was renamed the Maternal and Child Health Centre. By the 1950s, the population started growing rapidly, and high demand for these centers led to new centers and maternity homes being built. The rest of the 1950s heralded a significant expansion of the Family Health Service in Hong Kong: the first post-natal clinic opened in 1952, the first Immunization Program was established in 1954, the first toddler clinic opened in 1957, and the first home visiting service began in 1958. In the 1960s, there was a rise in clinic attendance and a decrease in infant and maternal mortality rates. Technological advances in the 1970s led to the introduction of assessments for early detection of abnormalities, including screening tests for vision, hearing, and speech. The Maternal and Child Health Service expanded to include family planning services in 1974, and further expansion of the assessment processes occurred in the 1980s, with new technology such as cervical cytology and neonatal screening for G6PD deficiency and congenital hypothyroidism. Hong Kong experienced a decline in the birth rate in the 1990s, causing a number of maternity homes to close down. However, the scope of services provided continued to expand to include antenatal and postnatal assessments, as well as medical consultations for children in Social Welfare Centers. Further developments since 2000 have consisted of standardizing various medical assessments for children from birth to age 5, reorganizing existing services, adding new services and increasing research studies on parenting.

One further historical development of importance has been the evolution of Centres for Assessment of Children with Special Needs (Department of Health, 2016a). This provision began in 1973, when an overseas consultant recommended setting up a specialist team to provide assessment and remedial services for children with

developmental problems (as referred by doctors or psychologists). This was seen as a bid to increase the target group's chances of success in rehabilitation. Following this recommendation, the first center came into operation in 1977. In response to urgent need, an additional five centers were established in different regions of Hong Kong. Multi-disciplinary assessment teams consist of public health nurses, pediatricians, clinical psychologists, occupational therapists, medical social workers, audiologists, speech therapists, optometrists, and physiotherapists.

The EDB entered into the assessment of pre-primary children in 2005 with the establishment of the Hong Kong Head Start Program on Child Development, currently known as the Comprehensive Child Development Service. This also aims at early identification and provision of timely support to children and families with special needs. The distinctive feature of this program is its interdisciplinary and the cross-sectorial collaboration it fosters among the EDB, the Department of Health, the Hospital Authority and the SWD. A referral system, initiated by kindergarten teachers who detect physical, developmental, behavioral, or family issues in children, enhances the close collaboration with kindergartens/child care centers, Maternal and Child Health Centres, and Integrated Family Service Centres/Integrated Services Centres (Social Welfare Department, 2016g).

### *Content*

The Family Health Service caters to matters related to child health. Different services are provided for the following four age groups: infants from birth to one month; infants from one to 12 months; toddlers from 1 to 3 years; and preschool aged children from 3 to 6 years (Department of Health, 2013). Each group is provided with in-depth information on supporting child development based on the age of the child.

Extensive information on immunization is also provided to parents, including the service of the Hong Kong Childhood Immunization Program (Department of Health,

2017b). The immunization protocol is as follows: Newborns are to receive a B.C.G. Vaccine and the first dose of Hepatitis B Vaccine; one-month-old infants are to receive the second dose of Hepatitis B Vaccine; two-month-old infants are to receive the first dose of DTaP-IPV Vaccine, the Pneumococcal Vaccine, then the second dose of both vaccines at age four months, and the third dose of both vaccines, plus Hepatitis B, at six months; 1-year-olds are to be given the first dose of the MMRV Vaccine (measles, mumps, rubella, and varicella), as well as a booster dose of Pneumococcal Vaccine; six months after that, toddlers receive a booster dose of DTaP-IPV Vaccine. The next vaccine is not given until the child is in Primary 1 (around 6 years), when he or she receives the second dose of MMRV. The last recommended immunization shot is a booster dose of DTaP-IPV Vaccine when the child is in Primary 6.

### *Mandated/Not*

Although there are no health standards to follow, the Family Health Service provides recommendations for immunization at certain ages, and extensive information on topics from parenting to child development (Department of Health, 2017b).

### *Use*

There are no national child assessments for young children.

### *Modifications*

With help from rapid medical and technical advancements, Hong Kong's health care system has proven to be effective. Evidence for this include a low infant mortality rate and comprehensive screening and immunization programs (Steering Group for Child Health Policy in Hong Kong, 2013).

## Assessment, Data, and Accountability

### *Nature of Data Collected*

In a joint effort by the Department of Health and the SWD (Primary Care, 2012), vital statistics are collected and updated periodically to address multiple issues, of which the following pertain to early childhood:

- decline in infant mortality rate and birthrate
- percentage of children aged 2-5 who have been vaccinated
- proportion of babies who have been breastfed exclusively
- use of nutritional supplements given to kindergarten children (only collected from a sample of three kindergartens)
- new diagnosed cases of developmental issues, mental, and behavioral problems in children from birth to 12 years of age
- childhood obesity below the age of 6
- oral health and treatment for 5-year-olds
- progression of myopia, which is much more common in Chinese children than in those of European extraction and can begin by age 6
- causes of injury and death in young children
- common chronic health conditions
- family issues, including cross-border marriages (mostly Hong Kong-born males and mainland China-born females), divorces, child abuse cases

### *Accessibility of Data*

These data are available publicly in the *Hong Kong Reference Framework for Preventive Care for Children in Primary Care Settings* (Primary Care, 2012). This document is updated every three to five years.

*Assessment Data Uses*

The data from the *Hong Kong Reference Framework for Preventive Care for Children in Primary Care Settings* (Primary Care, 2012) are used by contributing departments in many ways. Birthrate/fertility indices are used to assess whether the current generation has enough children to “replace” itself. This occurs if the total fertility rate is more than 2.1, which has not been the case in Hong Kong for many years. This has led to the government’s desire to optimize the potential of every child to contribute fully to society, as well as possibly to its decision to support the provision of more subsidies for child care and free early childhood education.

The data have been used to develop an overarching conceptual model for preventive care and management strategies for children, especially in primary care settings. Extracts from this model that are relevant to early childhood are shown below.

**Table 8.1 Conceptual Models for Preventive Care for Children from Prenatal to Preschool in Primary Care Settings**

Stage	Determinants of Health		
	Family and Social Factors	Community and Environmental Factors	Service Provision
Prenatal	Family and Social Support	Physical Environment Housing Water Environmental risk factors Neighborhood environment Poverty and social status Injury prevention Discrimination	Health Service Preconception counselling service Genetic disease screening Congenital anomaly screening Congenital infection screening Metabolic diseases screening Antenatal care (e.g., education) Education and literacy Employment Social Support
Infancy (0-1)	Family relationship and positive responsive parenting, considering parent's Education, literacy culture/ethnicity socioeconomic status Mental well-being Detection of child abuse Detection of psychosocial trauma	Physical environment Housing Water Environmental risk factors Neighborhood environment Vision health education to parents Poverty and social status Injury prevention Discrimination	Health Service Congenital hypothyroidism and G6PD deficiency screening Newborn examination and hearing screening Developmental surveillance Vaccinations   Breastfeeding support Common diseases management Growth monitoring   Vision and hearing Parenting education   Education, literacy Income and socioeconomic status Culture   Housing Social Support
Pre-school (2-5)	Same as infancy	Use of information technology Influence of media/ TV Other community and environmental factors in Infancy	Health Service Developmental and growth surveillance Vaccinations Common diseases management Nutrition and feeding surveillance Vision and hearing Social Service   Education Services Recreation and sports

Source: Primary Care (2012)

The data from this document are also used to inform:

- preventative measures important to secure normal growth and development, especially at infancy and preschool age, to develop healthy lifestyles starting from school age, which hopefully contribute to restraint from future risky behaviors such as smoking, drug abuse, and unsafe sex in adolescence
- prenatal recommendations for physical and psychological well-being of the mother and baby, screening for ante-natal abnormalities, promotion of breastfeeding and maternal psycho-social and mental well-being, promotion of bonding between parents and children, vaccination, oral and dental care, health checks advised at different ages, recommendations for more activity, and less sedentary activity, for young children
- multi-disciplinary care, and inter-sectoral collaboration, to bring together various elements needed for full development of children, by partnership among government departments and relevant agencies
- information that can contribute to empowerment of parents, including recommendations about family life such as eating meals together, limiting screen time for young children, and positive parenting styles
- development of resources for breastfeeding and transitional feeding support services, healthy diet and nutrition for parents and children, physical activities for primary carers, parents and schools to use, oral health and promotion of visual health (targeting parents), assessment of developmental problems and problems relating to children with disabilities
- Fitness Programs for Children operated by the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (Primary Care, 2012)

Data collected from the Hong Kong Early Child Development Scale (Rao et al., 2013) and from the Chinese Early Development Index (Ip et al., 2013) are currently being used



in several studies to evaluate efficacy of both targeted interventions and broader child-related policies.

### *Nature of Integrated Data System*

There is no integrated data system, although the periodic compilations of cross-sectional data, as in the *Hong Kong Reference Framework for Preventive Care for Children in Primary Care Settings*, are made available. Recommendations based on these data typically have cross-sectoral implications.

### *Accountability Data and Uses*

Main accountability data include numbers of children and their families using various services (see Parts 2 and 3). The Hong Kong government has systems in place for ensuring accountability of health care, child care, and education provisions, and these are undoubtedly used to inform responsive policymaking, and to bring about need-based changes. However, there are no specific data published.

### **Innovations**

Due to the previously mentioned focus in Chinese society on the importance of education, even young children are faced with plenty of academic-related tasks. The adverse impact of the sedentary nature of these activities for young children is compounded further by Hong Kong's high-density living. Nearly everyone lives in high-rise apartments, and while there are outdoor areas and parks, the concept of the backyard is rare. Consequently, one significant innovation that has arisen from the *Hong Kong Reference Framework for Preventive Care for Children in Primary Care Settings* is the focus on recommendations for young children to have more outdoor activity and less indoor, sedentary activity. This innovation is significant for many reasons. Most importantly, it has led to the broadcast of public health messages, such as those that

state that high levels of obesity and myopia among young children can be reduced by more outdoor activity.

### Contributions to Quality

The *Hong Kong Reference Framework for Preventive Care for Children in Primary Care Settings* provides substantial contribution to the quality of preventive and developmental provisions in Hong Kong, such as those described above. It offers recommendations based on relevant data.

### Challenges

There are public health issues in Hong Kong, among them low breastfeeding rates, inadequate nutrition, poor oral hygiene, low levels of physical activity, and poor sleeping habits. It is therefore recommended that the health care system for children be continuously improved and enhanced with a special focus on these challenges.

## Chapter 9: Program Quality: Standards, Inspection, and Improvement

### Key Points

- Kindergartens and all non-residential child care centers are run privately, but the government is rigorous in monitoring quality. This is facilitated through both guidance and inspection.
- A number of manuals and guides that specify requirements for kindergartens are distributed to child care centers and kindergartens.
- The Service Performance Monitoring System and the Quality Assurance Framework allow for both self-evaluation and external reviews.
- The Hong Kong government is committed to maintaining and improving the quality of early childhood services.

### Program Regulations

#### *Regulatory Environment/Context (Comprehensive/Modest, Federal/Sub-Federal)*

There are comprehensive measures for ensuring and monitoring standards of programs, from the initial registration of child care centers or kindergartens to the quality assurance mechanism (which will be discussed in the next section). Child care centers are registered under the Child Care Services Ordinance (Cap 243) and Regulations (Cap 243A), while kindergartens are registered under the Education Ordinance (Cap. 279) and the Education Regulations (Cap. 279A). Child care centers and kindergartens are required to comply with the statutory provisions and requirements as set forth in the Ordinance and Regulations, and are subject to inspections by the Child Care Centers Advisory Inspectorate of the SWD at least once every three years or the Inspectorate of the EDB around once every five years, respectively. Operators of child care centers and kindergartens refer to the

recommendations in the *Guides* on school operations and curriculum as provided by the government, namely the *Operation Manual for Pre-Primary Institutions* (Education Bureau & Social Welfare Department, 2006) and the *Guide to the Kindergarten Curriculum* (Curriculum Development Council, 2017) to meet the requirements as laid out in the Ordinance and Regulations.

### *Responsibility for Developing the Regulations*

The statutory requirements and regulations for setting up a new school are stipulated in the Child Care Services/Education Ordinance and Regulations. The EDB and Social Welfare Department provide guidelines on the operations of schools through the issuance of government guides and ensure schools' compliance with legal requirements through inspections. The set of operational standards and requirements reflect the Hong Kong government's support and administration of pre-primary services and its quest for the provision of high-quality education and care, as evidenced by the relatively stringent registration process and monitoring system.

### *Content of the Regulations*

The requirements for the registration of a school (providing child care, kindergarten, primary, secondary, or post-secondary education), as outlined in the *Guidelines for Registration of a New School* (Education Bureau, 2016e), include specified class sizes, floor space of classrooms, maximum number of pupils in each classroom, school fees and registrations of teachers, school managers, and the school name. Specifically, the *Operation Manual for Pre-Primary Institutions* (Education Bureau & Social Welfare Department, 2006) serves as a guide for both child care center and kindergarten operators in meeting the statutory requirements as laid out in the Ordinance and Regulations as required by the Education Bureau and Social Welfare Department. The manual covers regulations on premises design (e.g., school location, indoor play area, minimum floor space requirement), furniture and equipment (e.g., kitchen, teaching

equipment), safety measures (e.g., fire, gas, and building safety), health (e.g., health inspection, records), sanitation (e.g., environmental, personal, and food hygiene), nutrition and diet (e.g., preparation of food), curriculum and activities (e.g., curriculum goals and planning), staffing (e.g., qualifications and training), fee charges, family-school partnership, registration, and regulation.

Regulations and requirements for compliance by mutual help child care centers (i.e., short-term care arrangements by adults who may be neighbors, volunteers, or parents that are operated by non-profit organizations) are separate from legal provisions under the Child Care Services Ordinance and Regulations. The *Code of Practice of Mutual Help Child Care Centers* (Social Welfare Department, 2008a) outlines requirements specifically for mutual help child care centers pertaining to design and construction, fire and gas safety, sanitation, space requirement, program of activities (e.g., play), and furniture and equipment.

### *Regulations Apply to Whom/Legal Exemptions from Regulations*

The regulations apply to all child care centers registered under the Child Care Services Ordinance and Regulations, and to all kindergartens registered under the Education Ordinance and Regulations. Mutual help child care centers are exempted from the registration requirements for regular child care centers, as they are operated by mutual help child care groups that are established by non-profit organizations and are not required to be registered under the Child Care Services Ordinance and Regulations.

### *Review Process for Changing Regulations*

Instigation of the process to change regulations is two-pronged, i.e., based on both public action and government data. Civil society concerns can lead to the government's setting up review committees or commissioning independent research. Data collected by the government, including stakeholder surveys, can lead the government to tweak

policies. Several examples have been provided in this report. However, documents that specified the process for changing regulations were not found.

### **External Inspection (Monitoring) Regulations**

Monitoring of child care centers (including aided day nurseries, for 2- to 6-year-olds, and day crèches, for 0- to 2-year-olds) falls under the Service Performance Monitoring system. The Service Performance Monitoring System was established in 1999, to ensure the provision of high-quality social welfare services. The system was enhanced in 2003. Since that time, the monitoring for child care centers has consisted of annual self-assessments and external inspections (i.e., review visits/surprise visits) by the SWD (Education Bureau, 2012a). This means that external inspections make up only part of the monitoring process for child care centers.

Quality assurance for kindergartens initially only consisted of external inspections. Since the introduction of the Quality Assurance Framework in 2000, kindergartens have been required to also undergo school self-evaluations. External inspection serves to complement school self-evaluation. School self-evaluations are conducted annually, and require schools to prepare and submit a School Report that outlines the effectiveness of current work plans, along with a development plan that specifies strategies for the next school year. Stakeholder surveys are also conducted to collect views of parents, teachers, and non-teaching staff on school performance (Education Bureau, 2017d).

In the 2007-08 school year, the external inspection for kindergartens was formalized as the Quality Review under the PEVS. All kindergartens joining the Scheme (approximately 80 percent of all kindergartens) were required to undergo the Quality Review. When the Enhanced Quality Assurance Framework started in the 2012-13 school year, kindergartens under the Scheme had to meet prescribed Quality Review standards to continue to be eligible for redemption of vouchers for students (Education Bureau, 2015d). This section mostly discusses the Quality Review for kindergartens joining the PEVS (later FQKEP), though references are also made to the school self-

evaluation mechanism. As in the case of child care centers, external inspections make up only one part of the quality assurance mechanism for kindergartens, since the annual school self-evaluation is conducted in addition to the external review/inspection.

### *Responsible Authority*

The performance of child care centers is assessed on the basis of the funding and service agreements and service documents, which are binding documents between the SWD and service operators. The SWD and service operators are to observe the terms of the agreements, which outline the role of the SWD in the monitoring of performance standards and in the provision of services. Child care centers are monitored by the Child Care Centers Advisory Inspectorate of the SWD. Inspectors from the SWD visit child care centers at least once every three years to ensure their compliance with legal requirements as laid out in the Ordinance and Regulations and with the requirements as set out in the Service Quality Standards within the Service Performance Monitoring System (Social Welfare Department, 2017e). The Quality Assurance Inspectorate of the EDB is responsible for monitoring and evaluation of kindergartens. Quality Reviews and follow-up inspections are conducted by the review team from the Education Bureau.

### *Intention of Monitoring (Program Improvement, Accountability)*

The Service Performance Monitoring System adopted by child care centers aims to improve the quality of services, such that services provided are more efficient and customer-focused, and to ensure accountability for public funds to service users, the SWD, and the community (Social Welfare Department, 2017e). The Quality Assurance Mechanism for kindergartens serves the dual purposes of accountability and school improvement and development. The Quality Review validates findings from school self-evaluations, and enhances the quality of kindergartens through dissemination of

effective practices, and identification of areas of improvement which, in turn, informs schools in devising development plans. Findings of the Quality Review and the school's development plan are included in the School Report, and are uploaded on the EDB's website for public access.

### *Focus of Monitoring*

The monitoring processes for ECEC reflect the split governance system. Although there is a Joint Office for Kindergartens and Child Care Centers, the standards developed by the SWD are used to evaluate the quality of services for children below age 3 and the Quality Assurance Framework of the EDB is used for the evaluation of the quality of services of children over age 3 who attend kindergartens.

The management and provision of child care services is monitored based on three components within the Service Performance Monitoring System: Essential Service Requirements, Service Quality Standards, and Output Standards (Social Welfare Department, 2012; 2017e). The Essential Service Requirements specify basic features of the infrastructure of services, which include staff qualifications, opening hours, availability of appropriate equipment, and compliance with the Operation Manual. The Service Quality Standards contain generic descriptions of the basic requirements to be met by service operators. There are 16 standards, which cover four main principles: (i) provision of information (i.e., clearly defined purpose and transparent mode of operations); (ii) service management (i.e., effective and flexible management of resources and the continuous improvement in the quality of service); (iii) service to users (i.e., response to service users' needs); and (iv) respect for service users' rights (i.e., respect for the rights of users in service operations and delivery) (Social Welfare Department, 2001). The Output Standards are quantitative measures of key activities of services, such as the average enrollment rate within one year, number of special activities organized to encourage parental participation within one year, and number of



reviews for individual child's developmental progress within a period of six months, etc. (Social Welfare Department, 2016e).

As part of the Quality Review procedures, kindergartens are required to submit the following documents: school calendar and timetables, a school report, a School Basic Information Form and Teacher Information Form, results from the stakeholder survey, an annual curriculum plan, school floor plan, and lists of teachers' function groups, if applicable. School performance in kindergartens is evaluated with Performance Indicators (pre-primary institutions) developed by the EDB in 2000, and later revised in 2001-03. The Performance Indicators consist of 16 areas under four domains, namely Management and Organization (e.g., planning and administration, leadership, staff management, utilization of resources, and self-evaluation), Learning and Teaching (e.g., curriculum planning, teaching and caring for children, children's learning, assessment of learning experiences), Support to Children and School Culture (e.g., caring and supporting services, links with parents and external organizations, school culture), and Children's Development (e.g., cognitive development, physical development, affective and social development, aesthetic and cultural development) (Education Bureau, 2017e). Quality Review is also school-specific, in that it considers kindergartens' areas of concern and takes into account recommendations from the previous Quality Review inspections and evaluations.

### *Frequency, Tools Used, and Scope of Monitoring*

Child care centers undergo review visits or surprise visits from the SWD at least once every three years, and are monitored based on 16 Service Quality Standards. The review / surprise visit is normally completed within the course of one day. One assessor from the SWD conducts the following activities during the visit: (i) observes the physical setting for service operation and delivery; (ii) reviews documents on the Service Quality Standard; (iii) interviews the manager and frontline staff; and (iv) interviews family members of enrolled children. Should there be any non-compliance

with performance standards as identified during the visit, the assessor explains their reasoning to service operators. The assessor also issues a report to the service operators within six weeks of the visit. Annual reporting on self-assessments of Essential Service Requirements, Service Quality Standards, and Output Standards are also required as a part of the service performance assessment methods (Social Welfare Department, 2012).

As noted earlier, since the 2007-08 school year, all kindergartens joining the PEVS (and now the FQKEP) have been required to undergo Quality Review. Thus far, two phases of the Quality Review have been held, because they are held once every five years. Seven hundred and three kindergartens under the Scheme underwent the first phase of Quality Review from the 2007-08 to 2011-12 school years. The second phase of Quality Review began in the 2012-13 school year. In either phase, the Quality Review for each kindergarten consists of three stages: Pre-Quality Review, On-Site Review, and Post-Quality Review.

In the Pre-Quality Review, kindergartens submit the following documents: school calendar and timetables, a school report, a School Basic Information Form and Teacher Information Form, results from the stakeholder survey, an annual curriculum plan, school floor plan, and lists of teachers' function groups, if applicable. The onsite visit typically lasts from 2.5 days to 3.5 days, depending on the size of the school. The review team conducts the following: (i) lesson observations; (ii) examination of children's work; (iii) interviews with principals, teachers, parents, and children; and (iv) review of school documents. The Performance Indicators (pre-primary institutions) is used for the Quality Review. In the Post-Quality Review stage, the review team from the EDB provides oral feedback to the kindergarten principals and teachers on the day of the on-site visit, followed by an issuance of a draft report six weeks later that is to be endorsed by the kindergarten. A final report, which includes the kindergarten's written response (if any), is issued to the kindergarten (Education Bureau, 2012a; Panel on Education, 2015). Annual school self-evaluation on their performance and the effectiveness of their

existing development with reference to the Performance Indicators (pre-primary institutions) is also required.

### **Professionalism and Adequacy of External Inspection Personnel**

The review /surprise visit of child care centers is typically conducted by one assessor from the SWD. At times, when necessary, more than one assessor may be assigned. To date, there has been limited information and discussion on inspection personnel for child care centers (Social Welfare Department, 2012). The review team for the Quality Review consists only of members from the EDB. In the review of the Quality Assurance Framework and the PEVS, it has been recommended that the inclusion of external inspectors (e.g., those who are experts in early childhood education and who possess an understanding of the Quality Assurance mechanism) in the Quality Review process may facilitate further professional development in the sector (Panel on Education, 2015). With the enhancement of the Quality Assurance Framework under the FQKEP, external observers will be included in the Quality Review (Panel on Education, 2015).

### **Uses of External Inspection Data**

#### *Use of Inspection Data (Public Availability, Sanctions)*

Review visit/surprise visit reports of child care centers are not available for public access through the SWD. Reports are issued only to service operators (i.e., child care centers) after the visit. In contrast, Quality Review reports of kindergartens are issued to schools, and are uploaded onto the EDB website and are then linked to the Profile of Kindergartens and Kindergartens-cum-Child Care Centers for easy access by parents and the public (Education Bureau, 2017e). Under the school self-evaluation mechanism of the Quality Assurance Framework, kindergartens are also strongly encouraged to

upload School Reports onto websites to enhance transparency, and to facilitate parental choice of kindergartens.

### *Use of Inspection Data to Improve Programs/Program Improvement Efforts*

As noted earlier, the assessor from the SWD provides feedback to service operators (i.e., child care centers) during the visit if non-compliance with performance standards is identified. Service operators who do not meet the performance standards are required to develop and submit an action plan to the SWD within four weeks of the visit. The completion and implementation of the action plan is monitored by the SWD. The Department may withhold or terminate funding to service operators should they fail to make improvements to reach prescribed standards of performance. Additionally, in using the Service Quality Standards as a basis for monitoring the performance of service operators, the assessor also identifies good practices and areas for further improvement. This information is provided to operators to facilitate their planning of appropriate measures for improvement.

The review team from the EDB provides oral feedback to the principal and teachers of kindergartens, upon completion of the on-site quality review. A final report is also issued to the kindergarten and this report incorporates the kindergarten's written response, if any, to the draft report sent to the kindergarten from the EDB. This allows kindergartens to identify strengths and weaknesses, and to prepare development plans with clear goals and success criteria in working towards recommendations, as set forth in the Quality Review. External inspections also validate data collected from school self-evaluation. Under the school self-evaluation process, the School Report template provided by the EDB provides a framework for kindergartens to evaluate performance, and to utilize findings generated from review of the school's existing development plan, and current state of performance, to devise development plans for the following school year. Kindergartens that fail to meet the monitoring standards may request a follow-up review. This request needs to be accompanied with an action plan that specifies how the

kindergarten will address the weaknesses identified during the on-site quality review. Should a kindergarten fail to meet prescribed Quality Review standards, government funding will be terminated and the government may terminate the kindergarten's operating license. Hence, these "inspections" are high-stakes events for kindergartens.

*Voluntary/Mandatory Accreditation (Description and Responsible Authorities):* As discussed earlier, all kindergartens under the PEVS were required to pass the Quality Assurance review. They had to meet prescribed standards to continue to be eligible to join the scheme and to redeem vouchers for students (Education Bureau, 2015d). Now, kindergartens that receive government funding under the FQKEP will also have to pass the Quality Assurance Review to continue to receive financial subsidies from the government.

*Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (Description and Responsible Authorities):* Performance of kindergartens is classified at four levels: excellent, good, acceptable, and unsatisfactory. In order to meet prescribed Quality Review standards, kindergartens that joined the former PEVS or currently receive financial subsidies under the FQKEP need to meet a minimum level of "acceptable" in all four domains (Management and Organization, Learning and Teaching, Support to Children and School Culture, and Children's Development).

### *Use of Monitoring Data to Inform Policy*

The Quality Review data is used for strategic planning and for support of pre-primary services by the EDB. School performance data is regularly collected, compiled, and analyzed by the Bureau. These data are used for planning professional support to kindergartens and to enhance the quality of services (Senior Government Official interview).

## Innovations

The Service Performance Monitoring System for child care centers and the Quality Assurance Framework for kindergartens allow for the balance between external and internal evaluations. External reviews by inspectors validate the self-assessments in child care centers and school self-evaluations in kindergartens. The quality assurance and monitoring system promotes school empowerment and considers school-based management and ownership in quality improvement.

There is transparency in quality assurance and monitoring of child care centers and kindergartens. Comparatively, there is greater transparency in kindergartens with respect to the release of information on the profiles and performances of schools for public access. As noted earlier, Quality Review reports of kindergartens under the PEVS are uploaded onto the EDB website and linked to the Profile of Kindergartens and Kindergarten-cum-Child Care Centers. Kindergartens are also encouraged to upload their School Report and development plan onto their school website. This serves as an important portal for parents to gain information on the operation of the kindergartens and can facilitate parental choice. At the same time, the release of the School Reports has brought about challenges and stress to kindergartens, as the information may affect parental choice and student admissions.

Compliance of child care centers and kindergartens to prescribed standards of quality was linked to continuation of subvention, and eligibility for redemption of vouchers under the erstwhile PEVS and will now be necessary to receive funding under the FQKEP. The SWD may withhold or terminate subvention to service operators should they fail to make improvements to reach prescribed standards of performance.

## Contributions to Quality

As discussed earlier, there are stringent procedures for registration of new schools, and for setting up child care centers under the Education Ordinance and Regulations and

the Child Care Services Ordinance and Regulations, respectively. External reviews and self-assessments in the quality assurance process of child care centers and kindergartens promote accountability of services and improvement of quality.

The quality assurance and monitoring system is an ongoing, iterative process that ensures that quality standards are met in child care centers and kindergartens. Feedback and recommendations are given on the day of review visits by inspectors, followed by the issuance of review reports from the SWD/Education Bureau. Child care centers and kindergartens that do not conform to prescribed standards are required to develop an action plan within four months, and are monitored closely by the SWD and the EDB, respectively. This allows child care centers and kindergartens to continuously improve their quality in accordance with prescribed standards.

Dissemination practices and professional support from the EDB further contribute to enhancement of quality in kindergartens. The EDB identifies and compiles good practices from the Quality Reviews and such information is disseminated to kindergartens. As reiterated by one respondent, school performance data is used to inform planning of professional support provided to kindergartens (Senior Government Official interview). Thus, monitoring and inspection data are used to inform practices and policies.

The Quality Assurance Framework for kindergartens is periodically fine-tuned to enhance the effectiveness of the School Self-Evaluation and the Quality Review. In the 2012-13 school year, the Enhanced Quality Assurance Framework further supported the School Self-Evaluation process through the refinement of the documentation for the School Report. Currently, the Performance Indicators are being reviewed by an advisory group that was set up in July 2014. As noted earlier, under the FQKEP, the Quality Review will now include external observers in addition to members from the EDB (Education Bureau, 2016c).

### Challenges

Monitoring quality control in kindergartens in Hong Kong poses challenges for kindergartens, parents, and the system itself. First, this is a high-stakes assessment for kindergartens. Low ratings will adversely influence parental choice of preschools, which in turn will affect student enrollment rates. If kindergartens fail the external inspection part of the monitoring process, they could lose their operating licenses. Second, as there are around 800 evaluation reports posted online, parents may face the challenge of having an overload of information. With the abundance of information accessible online, it is difficult for parents to hone in on criteria they should apply in selecting a preschool for their children. Third, monitoring kindergarten quality and disseminating the findings on the web poses challenges for the system, as there are relatively few inspectors for the rigorous and relatively vast system. The government has a limited amount of resources and time to cover the inspection of all schools, and therefore, the frequency of school visits is low. Also, the number of qualified experts to carry out these inspections is relatively small. A fourth problem for the system is the reactive effects of the school's knowledge of the planned visits. Upon knowing the time of the inspection, schools are able to prepare and display only the best of their examples during the inspection. Hence, it may not be an entirely accurate presentation of schools' structure and practice.



## Chapter 10: Professional Preparation and Development

### Key Points

- Driven by the belief that teacher quality influences early childhood program quality, the government has enacted incremental increases to professional requirements for all ECEC professionals over the past two decades.
- The government has provided financial support for training of early childhood professionals.
- Significant steps have been taken to eliminate the historical split between training for kindergarten staff and training for child care center staff. Professional training requirements for kindergartens and child care centers are now offered at the same tertiary institutions and are recognized for employment in both settings (with the exception of courses specifically for caring for children under 3, which are only recognized for child care center employees).
- As part of the new FQKEP, competency frameworks for the professional development of kindergarten teachers and principals will be further developed.

### Overview of the Teaching Workforce

A qualified individual employed in a kindergarten is referred to as a kindergarten teacher, but a distinction is made between a “permitted” and a “registered” teacher. The latter has a professional qualification in education (e.g., a teaching certificate), while the former does not. The head of a kindergarten is known as the principal. Meanwhile, a qualified individual employed in a child care center is known as a child care worker, and the head of the center is known as a supervisor. The professional qualifications required to be a principal and supervisor are higher than those required for a teacher and child care worker, respectively.

### Statutory Requirements for Working with Young Children

Table 10.1 shows the legal bases for child care centers and kindergartens. The Ordinances and Regulations (laws), which settings are required to comply with, have implications for the professional qualifications of early childhood teachers. Any person who wishes to serve in a child care center must be registered as a Child Care Worker or Child Care Supervisor through the SWD. Under Section 42 of the Education Ordinance, any person who teaches in a school (e.g., a kindergarten) must apply through the EDB to be a registered teacher (who holds a Certificate/Postgraduate diploma in Education) or as a permitted teacher (who holds an academic qualification but does not have a professional qualification for teaching such as a Certificate in Education) prior to assumption of duty (Education Bureau, 2017a).

In addition to academic and teacher professional qualifications, criminal background checks are conducted prior to registration of both child care workers and kindergarten teachers. To safeguard children, the EDB is stringent in monitoring applications for teacher registration, and has requested that kindergartens adopt the Sexual Conviction Records Check Scheme, implemented by the Hong Kong Police Force in December 2011, when appointing employees to engage in child-related work. Teachers are also required to report to employers if criminal proceedings are instituted against them, and schools are obligated to report to the EDB any serious incidents of misconduct committed by teachers, when such cases come to their notice (Education Commission, 2015).

**Table 10.1 ECEC training**

Setting	Special Child Care Center (CCC)	Residential CCC	CCC	KG-cum-mixed CCC	KG-cum-CCC	KG
Ages of Children	0-6	0-6	0-3	0-6	2-3      3-6	3-6
Overseen by	Social Welfare Department			Joint Office for KGs and Child Care Centers		Education Bureau
Legal Basis	Child Care Services Ordinance and Regulations			Child Care Services Ordinance Regulations and Education Ordinance and Regulations		Education Ordinance & Regulations
Curriculum	Operation Manual from Social Welfare Department			KG Education Curriculum Guide (from September 2017)		
Teacher Training	Certificate/Diploma/Degree in Child Care or Equivalent Training courses for child care workers offered by the SWD (birth to 3 years only)			Qualified KG Teacher or Certificate/Diploma/Degree in Early Childhood Education or Equivalent		

The academic and professional qualifications to be employed as a kindergarten teacher have increased over the years. At the same time there has been increased spending on teacher training.

Before 2003, individuals who had not completed high school could be employed in kindergartens and registered as kindergarten teachers by enrolling in the Qualified Assistant Kindergarten Teacher (120-hour, part-time) or Qualified Kindergarten Teacher (two-year, part-time) courses. Increased government spending on teacher training led to an increase in proportion of teachers with Qualified Kindergarten Teacher qualification, from 23.6 percent in 1994-95 to 93 percent in 2004-05.

After 2003, newly appointed kindergarten teachers had to be high school graduates. They were also encouraged to complete a Certificate of Education/Higher Diploma/Associate Degree in ECE when employed as kindergarten teachers. The

recognized professional qualifications for kindergarten teachers and child care workers are shown below.

**Table 10.2 Qualifications for Kindergarten Education**

	Bachelor's Degree in Early Childhood Education/Child Care (5 years)	Postgraduate Diploma in Early Childhood Education (1 year)
Associate Degree OR Higher Diploma OR Certificate of Education in ECE/Child Care (2 years)		Bachelor's Degree in Discipline related to Early Childhood (4 years)
Senior Secondary (3 years) (ages about 15-18)		

The Certificate of Education or equivalent is a two-year, full-time (or equivalent part-time course) for high school graduates.

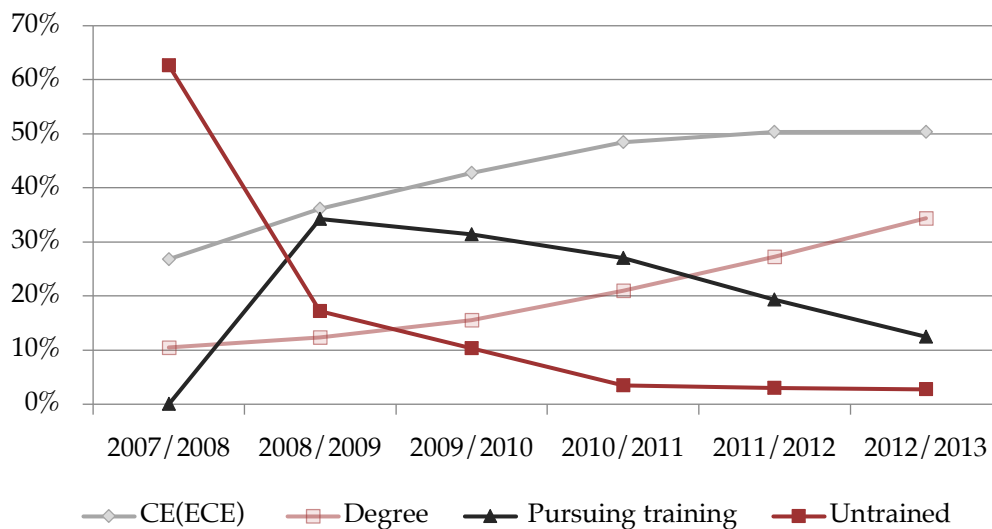
In September 2007, following the implementation of the PEVS, all teachers in the kindergartens that joined the Scheme were required to obtain a Certificate in Early Childhood Education, or its equivalent (Education Bureau, 2017b). The minimum requirement for newly appointed teachers/child care workers was also raised to the Certificate of Education (CE) for kindergarten teachers or child care workers who cared for children ranging in age from 3 to 6. From September 2007, all newly appointed principals had to obtain a Bachelor's Degree in early childhood education or its equivalent, and complete the Certificate Course in Principalship, before or within the

first year of appointment (Education Bureau, 2017f). The same professional training requirements for kindergarten teachers and principals have continued under the FQKEP.

As shown in Figure 10.2, there are different routes for high school graduates to gain professional qualifications in ECE. High school graduates can also undertake a Bachelor’s Degree in ECE or Child Care (five-year, full-time or equivalent). Another route is to do a post-graduate diploma in ECE after completing a bachelor’s degree in a relevant discipline (e.g., psychology, social work, or linguistics).

The increase in statutory requirements for working with young children has been accompanied by a significant growth in the proportion of teachers holding a Certificate of Education in Early Childhood Education or higher, from 69.5 percent in 2010-11 to 91.2 percent in 2015-16 (Education Bureau, 2017a). The increase in professional qualifications of kindergarten teachers is shown in Figure 10.1.

**Figure 10.1 Enhancement of professional qualifications from 2007/08 to 2012/13**



Source: Rao (2013)

### *Content of Initial Requirements*

Historically, the qualifications for employment as a child care worker were lower than those for kindergarten teachers, with child care workers only required to complete a Director of Social Welfare-recognized training course, including courses for nursery workers, crèche workers, and playgroup leaders.

Prior to 2005, kindergartens and child care centers were monitored separately by the former Education and Manpower Bureau and the SWD, respectively—a split that resulted in differing staffing requirements. Responding to the challenges that arose from this division, the Hong Kong government harmonized pre-primary services in September 2005 (see Chapter 11 for more details). As a result, kindergarten qualifications and child care qualifications are now recognized by both the EDB and the SWD (Education and Manpower Bureau, 2003). Teachers with kindergarten or child care qualifications are therefore eligible for employment in either setting, the only exception being that training courses for child care workers recognized by the Director of Social Welfare that focus on birth to age 3 are not recognized for employment in kindergartens that focus on children over age 3.

Separate lists of training courses approved by the Director of Social Welfare are available for child care workers and child care supervisors (Education Bureau, 2017g). All child care workers and child care supervisors are required to complete at least one training course from the corresponding list.

### *Content of Ongoing Requirements*

As a result of the steady rise in professional requirements for kindergarten teachers and principals (as discussed in above), many in-service kindergarten teachers and principals simultaneously study for the certificates, diplomas, or degrees on a part-time basis to meet professional certification requirements.

In addition, although there are no standardized requirements for ongoing professional development (PD), it is heavily emphasized by the EDB. The *Kindergarten Education Curriculum Guide* states that kindergartens should formulate professional development policies and encourage their teachers' participation in PD activities both inside and outside school (Curriculum Development Council, 2017b). Under the FQKEP, the teachers' professional competence upgrading measures include developing a continuous PD policy (Education Bureau, 2016c). As part of the policy, a Teacher Competencies Framework and a Principal Competencies Framework is currently being formulated and refined by the Committee on Professional Development of Teachers and Principals (COTAP; see below for details on its role). The framework lists the skills and knowledge recommended specifically for kindergarten teachers and principals. The Teacher Competencies Framework includes domains related to learning and teaching, child development, school development, and professional relationships and services, whereas the Principal Competencies Framework includes principals' leadership, management, and networking, in addition to those covered in the framework for teachers. Teachers and principals can plan their PD according to their needs with reference to these frameworks.

There are efforts to promote and ensure the ongoing professional conduct of ECEC professionals in the workplace. The Code for the Education Profession of Hong Kong Schools has been developed to uphold the quality of teachers' professional conduct. The Code promotes the commitment of the profession to students, colleagues, employers, parents/guardians, and the community (Council on Professional Conduct in Education, 2017). Schools are expected to remind teachers in their employ, on a regular basis, about the conduct and performance expected of them.

### *Distribution of Authority (Among Ministries and Levels of Government)*

The Joint Office for Kindergartens and Child Care Centers within the EDB oversees the registration of child care workers and child care supervisors (Education Bureau, 2017g).

The Teacher Registration Team within the EDB oversees registration of Permitted Teachers and Registered Teachers (Education Bureau, 2017h).

The Committee on Professional Development of Teachers and Principals (COTAP) is a non-statutory body under the EDB that advises on policies and measures related to professional development of teachers and principals. The COTAP plays a role in developing unified standards for the teaching profession, which includes attributes, values, and conduct expected of teachers and principals. The Teacher Competencies Framework, which is being formulated and refined, covers the kindergarten sector. The COTAP supports professional development and growth of teachers and principals. The Council on Professional Conduct in Education oversees disputes or cases of alleged misconduct that involves educators, and makes recommendations to the Permanent Secretary of Education.

### **Organization of Work Responsibilities**

#### *Distinctions among Responsibilities for Those Working in Programs*

Child care centers have a center supervisor who is responsible for the management of the center and for ensuring that there is a sufficient number of child care workers to meet the minimum adult-to-child ratio stipulated by the government. Government-subsidized kindergartens adopt a three-level teaching staff structure, consisting of a principal, senior teachers, and class teachers. In some kindergartens (e.g., larger kindergartens), a vice-principal may be needed. Vice-principals assist the principal in overseeing school administration, curriculum development, and operational matters. Senior teachers take up responsibilities such as curriculum development, and serve as mentors for class teachers (Education Bureau, 2016c).



### *Role Distribution and Incentives for Advancement*

All child care centers must have a registered supervisor who is responsible for ensuring that the center meets the Child Care Services Regulations. The requirements include maintaining staff and child records, and ensuring structural quality requirements are met and suitable activities are provided for children. In addition to the supervisor, child care centers employ child care workers and may hire special child care workers. The latter have specialist qualifications to work with children with special educational needs.

In appointing teachers of different ranks, kindergartens may take into account the scale of operations. As laid out in the FQKEP, one out of five class teachers in kindergartens may be upgraded to a senior teacher, and one senior teacher may be upgraded to vice principal, in kindergartens with three or more senior teachers (Education Bureau, 2016c). A career ladder, and competitive remuneration/salary ranges, are in place as incentives for advancement.

### *Supervisory Structure*

The structure of work responsibilities at a child care center typically involves a child care supervisor and child care workers, and may include special child care workers. As noted above, kindergartens typically have a principal, senior teachers, and class teachers. Since 1999, all government-funded kindergartens have been required to have a School Management Committee to oversee the implementation and execution of efficient and effective school management (Education Bureau, 2017f). The main responsibilities of this School Management Committee are to assist with setting school goals and performance targets, ensure smooth kindergarten operation, establish effective channels of communication, and evaluate kindergarten effectiveness.

## Professional Preparation (Pre-Service)

### *Who Delivers and the Capacity of Preparation Institutions*

Before 1970, all training courses for child care workers and kindergarten teachers were offered on a part-time basis, with individuals pursuing professional certification only after they were already employed in child care centers or kindergartens. Beginning in the 1970s, the Hong Kong Polytechnic University and the Institute of Vocational Education (Lee Wai Lee) were among the first institutions to offer full-time, pre-service courses for child care workers, and the Institute of Vocational Education (Lee Wai Lee) was among the first to offer Qualified Kindergarten Teacher courses to pre-service kindergarten teachers in the 1980s. In the 1990s, the Education University of Hong Kong played major role in providing teacher training in Hong Kong, including full-time pre-service courses (Wong & Rao, 2005). Approved pre-service training courses on Early Childhood Education for kindergarten teachers are offered in 10 institutions, including community colleges, schools of continuing education, and universities (Education Bureau, 2016c). Most institutions offer both part-time and full-time programs.

Approved training courses for child care workers that are recognized by the Director of Social Welfare are offered by the Training Section of the SWD, and in 12 institutions, including community colleges, schools of continuing education, and universities. Approved training courses for child care supervisors are offered in the same twelve institutions (Education Bureau, 2017g).

### *Nature, Frequency, Distribution, and Evaluation of Preparation Efforts*

As shown in Table 10.1, approved training courses for child care workers may apply to certificates, diplomas/higher diplomas, post-graduate diplomas, bachelor's degrees, and master's degrees in child care, education, or early childhood education. The duration and mode of courses vary, ranging from day/evening release mode, to part-time and full-time courses, which can range from one to five years depending on the

course undertaken. Pre-service training courses on early childhood education for kindergarten teachers are offered at certificate, diploma, post-graduate diploma, and degree level. Full-time programs range from one year (e.g., Postgraduate Diploma course) to four to five years (e.g., Bachelor of Education) in duration. While Diploma/Certificate level courses are offered in eight institutions, degree courses are only offered in two institutions (The Education University of Hong Kong and Hong Kong Baptist University, School of Continuing Education) and post-graduate diploma courses are offered in four institutions (The University of Hong Kong; The Chinese University of Hong Kong; Hong Kong Baptist University, School of Continuing Education; and The Education University of Hong Kong).

### *Incentives for Participation*

Newly appointed child care workers and kindergarten teachers are required to meet requirements stipulated in the Child Care Services Ordinance and Regulations and the Education Ordinance and Regulations, respectively. Completion of pre-service training is required for employment in child care centers and kindergartens, and may have implications for salary and advancement within schools. There is no course fee reimbursement of pre-service training, and aspiring teachers bear the cost of tuition fees. That stated, pre-service education that prepares individuals for employment in child care centers and kindergartens is heavily subsidized by the government and allows institutions to keep their fees at relatively low levels.

### *Innovations*

There have been more stringent entry requirements for the ECEC teaching profession over the years. New requirements for academic qualifications of pre-service and in-service teachers, tied in with implementation of the PEVS and FQKEP, further enhanced teacher quality in Hong Kong.

## Professional Development (In-Service Training for Upgrading Professional Qualifications)

### *Who Delivers and the Capacity of the Deliverers*

As discussed in X.3.b, the required qualifications for kindergarten teachers and principals have risen over the years. This means that many in-service teachers and principals must upgrade their qualifications, on a part-time basis, to meet the requirements, resulting in higher demand for in-service training.

The School-Based Support (Kindergarten) section within the EDB provides on-site school-based professional support services to cater to the needs of in-service teachers by providing learning and teaching strategies with the following foci: language development, cognitive development, affective and social development, physical development, curriculum planning and organization, assessment, learning environment, catering for diversity, the interface between kindergarten and primary education, and ethnic minority children (Education Bureau, 2017i). Kindergartens are supported through regular visits by School Development Officers from the EDB who conduct collaborative planning to address classroom observations and the needs of schools and teachers.

The Special Education Support Section of the Special Education and Kindergarten Education Division of the EDB also provides in-service training events through sharing sessions, seminars, and school-based programs in special educational settings. Its aim is to enhance teachers' professional knowledge in strategies for managing student diversity, and to discuss the latest developments in education and curriculum to cater for children with special educational needs (Education Bureau, 2017j).

*Nature, Frequency, Distribution, and Evaluation of In-Service Efforts for Professional Certification*

Employed teachers get certificates and degrees on a part-time basis, which is referred to as in-service education.

*Incentives for Participation*

For the first four years of the PEVS, kindergartens that joined the PEVS had to use part of the voucher value for professional upgrading of teachers and principals. This was mandated in order to meet qualification requirements by the 2011-12 school year (i.e., teachers to obtain a Certificate of Education and principals to obtain a Bachelor of Education) (see Table 10.6). Thus, in-service teachers and principals under the Scheme could apply for reimbursement of course fees. Kindergarten teachers and principals who were employed in kindergartens that were not under the Scheme (i.e., private independent kindergartens) could claim reimbursement from the EDB for up to 50 percent of the course fees for an approved certificate course or degree course in early childhood education or a certification course for kindergarten principals, capped at \$7,700 (HK\$60,000). This shows that the government financial support for upgrading professional qualifications was available for all teachers from 2007-08 to 2011-12, regardless of whether they were employed in government-funded programs or not.

**Table 10.3 Subsidy for teacher development from 2007-08 to 2011-12**

School Year	Voucher value per pupil per annum in HK\$ (US\$)	Subsidy for teacher development per pupil per annum in HK\$ (US\$)
2007-08	13,000 (US\$ 1,667)	3,000 (US\$ 385)
2008-09	14,000 (US\$ 1,795)	3,000 (US\$ 385)
2009-10	15,000 (US\$ 1,923)	2,000 (US\$ 256)
2010-11	16,000 (US\$ 2,051)	2,000 (US\$ 256)
2011-12	16,000 (US\$ 2,051)	--

Source: Education Bureau (2012c)

### *Innovations*

As noted earlier, the new requirements for the academic qualifications of pre-service and in-service teachers and funding subsidies for in-service training and professional development were linked to the implementation of the PEVS, and are now linked to implementation of the FQKEP. This should improve teacher quality and further contribute to the development of the ECEC in Hong Kong.

### **Compensation**

*Salary Ranges:* As noted earlier, all child care centers offer full-day programs. While most kindergartens offer half-day programs, some offer full-day and long whole-day programs. Thus, a given kindergarten may have both half-day and full-day classes. Many kindergartens are bi-sessional, i.e., they offer morning (9 am – 12 pm) and afternoon (1:30 pm – 4:30pm) sessions in the same premises. A kindergarten teacher may teach two half-day sessions (in the same kindergarten) and she would be deemed a full-time kindergarten teacher. The above-mentioned facts need to be taken into account in perusing the salary ranges for ECEC staff presented below.

The SWD has established a recommended monthly salary scale (as of April 1, 2017) for child care workers or special child care workers (\$2,334 [HK\$18,205] to \$4,084 [HK\$31,855]), child care supervisors (\$3,701 [HK\$28,865] to \$5,193 [HK\$40,505]), and senior special child care workers (\$4,285 [HK\$33,425] to \$5,437 [HK\$42,410]). The scales are adjusted regularly based on the Composite Consumer Price Index.

Kindergartens were previously required to pay teachers according to the Recommended Normative Salary Scale under the former Kindergarten and Child Care Center Subsidy Scheme. This was abolished after implementation of the PEVS, resulting in variations in salaries offered to kindergarten teachers. Some kindergartens followed the erstwhile Normative Salary Scale, while others offered remuneration and salary adjustments on school-based criteria such as staff performance, attainment of academic

qualifications, years of teaching experience, civil service pay adjustments, and Composite Consumer Price Index adjustments. Following the implementation of the FQKEP from September 2017, kindergartens follow the monthly salary scale for class teachers (\$2,663 [HK\$20,770] to \$4,735 [HK\$36,930]), senior teachers (\$3,551 [HK\$27,700] to \$5,623 [HK\$43,860]), and principals (\$5,031 [HK\$39,240] to \$7,842 [HK\$61,170]) in kindergartens (Education Bureau, 2016c). This is generally higher than the salary reported in the annual teacher survey: In September 2014 (Education Bureau, 2015b), the average monthly salary of full-time kindergarten teachers under the PEVS was \$18,800 (US\$2,410), and for half-day kindergarten teachers, about two-thirds of that. Monthly salary ranged from HK\$7,500 (US\$962) to HK\$34,200 (US\$ 4,385) for “whole-day” teachers, with a median of HK\$17,200 (US\$ 2,205).

*Benefit Ranges:* Child care centers and kindergartens may grant various types of paid or unpaid leave to teachers. These include school holidays, sick leave, vacation leave, maternity leave, endorsed study leave, and special leave (Education Bureau, 2013). The leave policy is determined by the individual child care centers and kindergartens.

*Who Determines:* There are no government regulations regarding benefits. Many organizations operate several kindergartens and/or child care centers, and are free to determine their own staff benefits. There is usually consistency in the benefits offered to all kindergarten/child care center staff under the auspices of the organization.

*Role of External Entities (e.g., Unions, Professional Associations):* The salary system under the PEVS promoted flexibility and diversity, such that kindergartens had the discretion to determine teachers’ salaries based on the operations and needs of individual schools. There have been calls for a mandatory salary scale for kindergarten teachers by the Professional Teachers Union. Responding to stakeholder pressure, the government issued a recommended salary scale for kindergarten staff. Recommended salary ranges for the post of principal, vice principal, senior teacher, class teacher, and other supporting staff were provided to kindergartens in 2017 as part of the new FQKEP.

Importantly, however, kindergartens do not have to follow the recommended salary scale.

## **Attracting, Promoting, and Retaining the Workforce**

### *Strategies/Processes for Attracting People into the Workforce*

Under the FQKEP, a career ladder has been developed to attract people into the early childhood workforce (Education Bureau, 2016c).

### *Opportunities for Advancement in the Field*

As mentioned above, under the FQKEP, a career ladder and competitive remuneration are suggested in the EDB Circular (Education Bureau, 2016c). Opportunities for advancement in the field are organized in a three-level teaching staff structure, wherein practitioners start as class teachers, then progress to senior teachers, and lastly, to the position of principal. There also may be the opportunity to become a vice-principal, depending on the size of the school.

### *Turnover Rates*

Information on the turnover rate for child care workers and supervisors is not available. The turnover rate for kindergarten teachers in half-day kindergartens in 2011-12 was 7.1 percent; for those in whole-day kindergartens, 6.7 percent; and for those in both, 7.1 percent (Education Bureau, 2015b).

### *Innovations*

Strategies for attracting and retaining educators under the FQKEP include improving the teacher-to-pupil ratio and enhancing the salary range. Interviewees also expressed the belief that enhancing the career ladder and providing competitive remuneration will improve kindergarten quality (Senior Government Official interview).



## Evaluating the Workforce

### *How is the Workforce Evaluated?*

In the move from self-regulation to government regulation, teachers are now accountable in three domains. One domain is administrative accountability. The teacher, as an employee of a kindergarten, is accountable to the EDB, the School Management Committee, and the principal. Another domain is consumer accountability. The kindergarten and its teachers are accountable to the students and their parents. Under the third domain, professional accountability, kindergarten teachers are evaluated by their senior professional peers (Education Commission, 2015). Kindergarten teachers/child care workers are typically evaluated on an annual basis by the principal or child care supervisor.

### *What are the Consequences of this Evaluation?*

Good performance by teachers may result in a promotion and they may receive increased compensation and/or more responsibilities. This is possible especially because kindergartens and organizations have some flexibility to determine staffing structure and teachers' salaries.

## Health Workers who Support ECEC

Within the Department of Health, the Maternal and Child Health Centres (MCHCs) and Child Assessment Centres (CACs) monitor the development of children from birth to 6 years under the Developmental Surveillance Scheme (The Hong Kong Paediatric Society & the Hong Kong Paediatric Foundation, 2012). Nursing staff and doctors at the centers provide referrals for further assessments or services.

## Mental Health Workers who Support ECEC

Under the same Developmental Surveillance Scheme mentioned in Chapter 5, children with identified mental health problems are referred to social workers from the SWD.

Early Education Training Centers, Special Child Care Centers, and Integrated Child Care Centers provide early mental health intervention to children. More severe cases are referred to professionals from the Hospital Authority, which provides child psychiatry services. Post-graduate training in child and adolescent psychiatry are offered at two universities: The University of Hong Kong and Chinese University of Hong Kong.

Under the auspices of the On-Site Pre-School Rehabilitation Services Pilot Scheme, which was initiated in 2015, multi-disciplinary service teams from NGOs provide early intervention for children waiting for SWD-supported specialist preschool rehabilitation services. The team includes qualified occupational therapists, physiotherapists, speech therapists, clinical and educational psychologists, social workers, and special child care workers. These workers are trained to provide early intervention for children with special needs, such as children with intellectual disabilities, children with behavioral and emotional problems, and children experiencing delay(s) in specific domains of development.

### **Contributions to Quality**

In response to reports of large numbers of untrained teachers in the early childhood sector in the 1980s, the government put forward important measures to improve the qualifications of teachers. These policies have led to a rise in the academic qualifications and professional standards of principals and teachers, an increase in funding to schools and teachers for in-service training and continuous professional development, and an increase in the number of training institutions and places for both pre-service and in-service training of child care workers, teachers, and principals. The PEVS requirement for principals and teachers to be qualified with a Certificate in Education or bachelor's degree has further encouraged professionalization of the ECEC sector in Hong Kong. This has resulted in a significant proportion of teachers who are now properly trained

and hence has contributed greatly to the enhancement of the quality of early childhood services in Hong Kong.

### Challenges

Despite the government's priorities for enhancing the professional qualifications of the ECEC workforce, there remain several challenges.

#### *Upgrading of Professional Qualifications to Degree Level*

Since 2000, upgrading the minimum academic qualifications of kindergarten teachers to degree level has been on the agenda for the development of ECEC in Hong Kong. This issue was revisited by the Committee on Free Kindergarten Education (2015) and was put forward as one of the recommendations for the new FQKEP. However, under the policy, the academic entry requirement for newly admitted and serving kindergarten teachers remains at the certificate level (CE (ECE)). As emphasized by one of the respondents:

*“We have now moved to talking about quality in [ECEC], but how long do we need to wait till we move towards degree level (i.e., teachers obtaining a B.Ed.)? It is not necessarily the best even with these academic degrees. However, if the teachers do not receive training, how can they interact with children and their parents? How do they work with children with special educational needs, or work on parental involvement or develop and implement the curriculum? What a bachelor's degree can do is instill correct mindset, not just improve their skills.”*

*(Academic respondent)*

#### *Investment and Resources for Professional Upgrading*

The government has incrementally increased the professional qualification requirements for kindergarten teachers, with in-service teachers required to satisfy

these requirements within a specified period of time. Therefore, there is much demand for in-service kindergarten teacher training. The government funds teacher training places in Hong Kong. Respondents indicated the need for the government to fund more places in training institutes and resources for continuous professional development for serving teachers (Influential Community member, Head of Service and Academic interviews).

### *Measures to Attract and Retain Teachers*

The salary of kindergarten teachers has remained a concern for the ECEC field in Hong Kong, as the median salary is substantially lower than those of primary and secondary school teachers. This is an important issue because it is closely related to the social status of kindergarten teachers, and affects whether the field can attract and retain high-quality teachers. Several respondents pointed to the need to further examine and address the salary range of kindergarten teachers (Influential Community member and Academic interviews). As expressed by one interviewee,

*“The salary for kindergarten teachers is low, and this cannot attract or retain teachers. It is all relative—it depends on the kind of teachers you want to attract. If the salary for kindergarten teachers is always lower than primary and secondary schools, we cannot attract teachers.”*

*(Influential Community member respondent)*

There were calls for a mandatory salary scale to be re-established for the kindergarten sector, since its abolishment upon the implementation of the PEVS. As noted earlier, a recommended salary scale was provided under the FQKEP in September 2017. One respondent discussed the need for a salary scale that is commensurate with teachers' performance:

*“Another issue is the salary system. It adopted the point-scale system, which was copied from civil servants (with master points). The level of competencies*

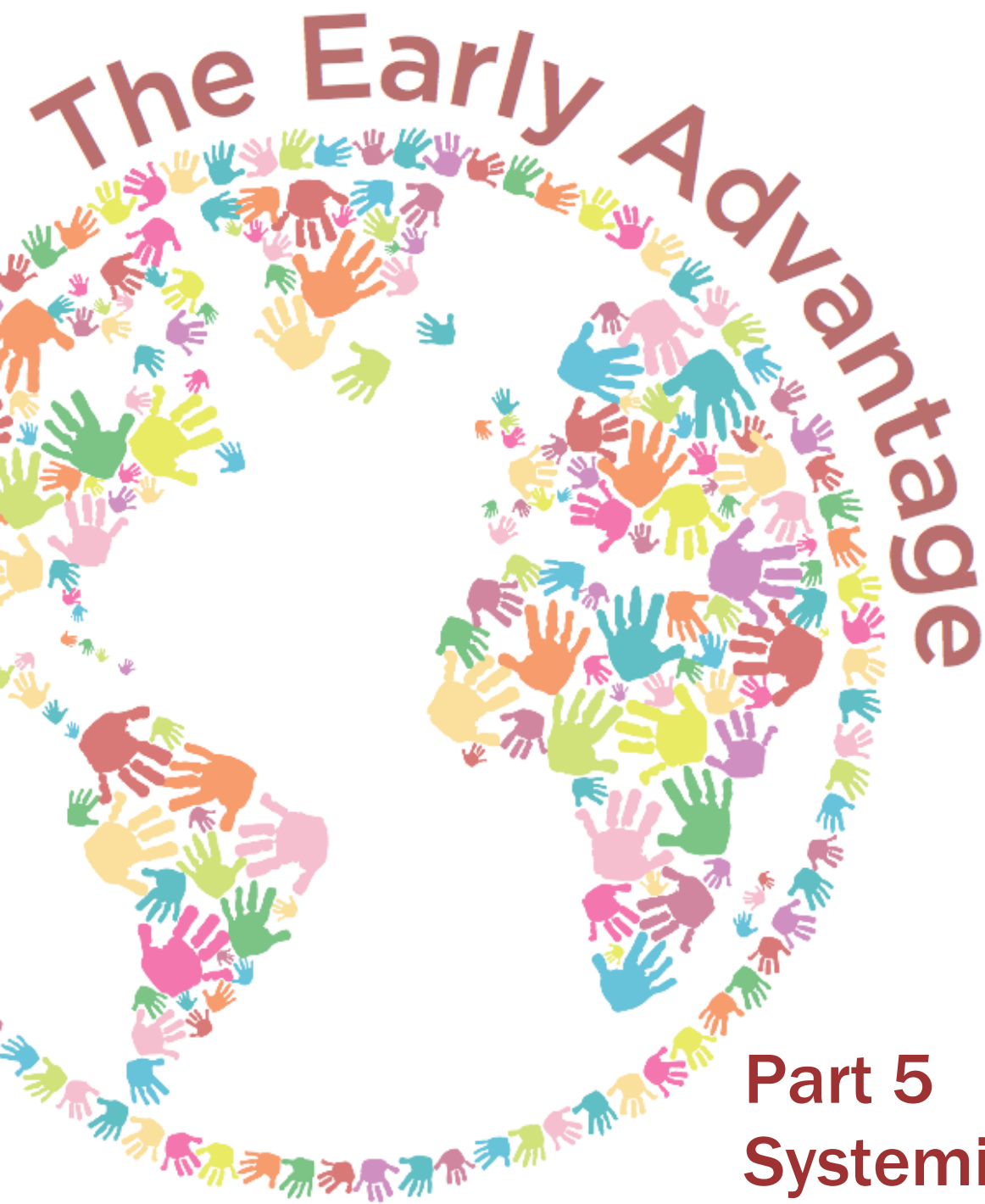
*and performance are not taken into consideration, but I think compensation should be based on competencies. If the salary scale is just on rank/points, managers cannot reward good performance and penalize bad performance. The scale will just be based on ranking.”*

*(Academic respondent)*

Further measures to attract and retain high-quality teachers are needed for the sustainability and long-term development of the early childhood sector in Hong Kong. The turnover rates for half-day and whole-day kindergarten teachers were 7.1 percent and 6.7 percent, respectively, for the school year 2011-12 (Legislative Council, 2012). The setting up of a career ladder, and competitive remuneration through the provision of recommended salaries for kindergarten principals and teachers under the new Scheme, reflect responsive policymaking and signifies the government’s commitment in attracting, promoting, and retaining the ECEC workforce. As one respondent noted,

*“I am pleased to see a salary rise in the recent policy paper, e.g., principal’s salary going up to \$61,000. The salary range is close to the primary sector.”*

*(Academic respondent)*



**Part 5**  
**Systemic Outputs:**  
**Fostering**  
**Equitable and**  
**Efficient Services**

## Chapter 11: Governance

### Key Points

- In Hong Kong, the administrative and policy responsibility for ECEC (birth to 6 years), including child care services (birth to 3 years) and pre-primary education (3 to 6 years) are split among various government departments. These include the EDB, the SWD, and the Department of Health.
- While there is no formal national coordinating strategy for ECEC governance, a number of policies and programs involve inter-ministerial coordination.
- While all ECEC services in Hong Kong are provided in the private sector, the government provides funding and regulates the centers.

### Level of Authority

As a special administrative region of the PRC, Hong Kong exercises a high degree of autonomy and enjoys executive, legislative, and independent judicial power within the purview of the Basic Law (see Chapter 2). Due to its small geographical size, the responsibility for ECEC is solely located at the national level.

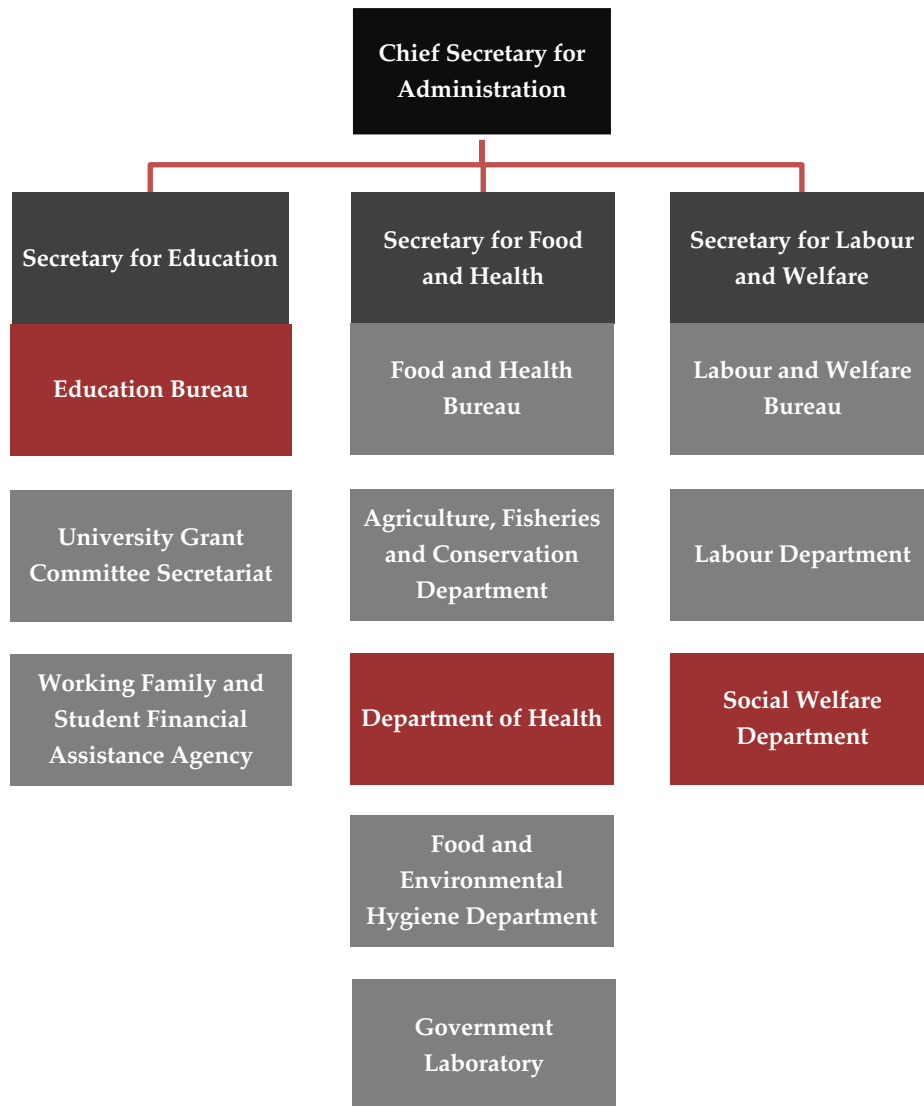
### Involved Ministries

#### *Listing of Involved Ministries*

One consequence of Hong Kong's small geographical size and stable government system is that multiple departments are able to collaborate to support a common goal, from their varying perspectives. As shown in Figure 11.1, the secretaries of Education, Food and Health, and Labour and Welfare share responsibility for ECEC. Notably, Hong Kong adopts a "split phase system" (Bertram et al., 2016), wherein "child care"

and “early education” are divided, with the early levels (birth to 3 years) being more care- and development-oriented and the later levels (3 to 6 years) being increasingly oriented towards education.

**Figure 11.1 Ministries involved in ECEC services**



Source: Government of the HKSAR (August, 2016)



*Roles/Responsibilities, Populations Served by Each Ministry*

The EDB governs ECEC services provided in kindergartens and kindergarten-cum-child care centers (which are collectively referred to as “kindergartens” in Hong Kong), for children aged 3-6 (see Chapter 6). The Bureau’s Joint Office for Kindergartens and Child Care Centers monitors and supports the co-located education and care services provided in kindergarten-cum-child care centers (for children aged 2 to 6) and kindergarten-cum-mixed child care centers (for children from birth to age 6). In the 2017-18 academic year, there were 181,147 kindergarten students in Hong Kong (Education Bureau, 2018).

The Department of Health (DH), which is located under the Food and Health Bureau, provides a comprehensive range of health promotion and disease prevention services for infants and young children from birth to age 5 in 31 Maternal and Child Health Centers (MCHCs) through an integrated child health and development program. As noted in Chapter 6, anticipatory guidance on child care and parenting are provided for parents and caregivers. Immunization as well as health and developmental surveillance, including physical examination, growth and developmental monitoring, and hearing and vision screening, are offered to babies and children at the centers.

The Social Welfare Department, under the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, has developed a comprehensive network of family and child welfare services. Its Child Care Centers Advisory Inspectorate (CCCAI) oversees care and welfare services for children below the age of 3 in day child care centers (see Chapter 6). It also regulates services for children with special educational or family needs below the age of 6 in special child care centers and residential child care centers. In 2015-16, there were a total of 91 child care centers, including special child care centers and residential child care centers, under the supervision of CCCAI, providing a total of 5,559 places (Census and Statistics Department, 2016b).

## National Coordinating Strategy

While there is no formal national coordinating strategy for ECEC governance, a number of policies and programs involve inter-ministerial coordination, which are discussed in the following section. Further, there are monthly meetings among representatives of the three government units responsible for ECEC governance. The focus of these meetings includes planning and dealing with problems that have arisen.

## Inter-Ministerial Articulation

### *Frequency*

Currently, Hong Kong does not have a national coordinating strategy for the delivery of ECEC services. Different units of the Bureaus (i.e., ministries), however, routinely meet to discuss policy, strategy, and implementation issues.

*“For instance, four Bureaus are working together to implement Comprehensive Child Development Service for students with special educational needs [CCDS, see below]. The EDB is also working with the Housing Authority and the Lands Department to explore means to increase rent-free kindergarten premises.”*

*(Senior Government Official respondent)*

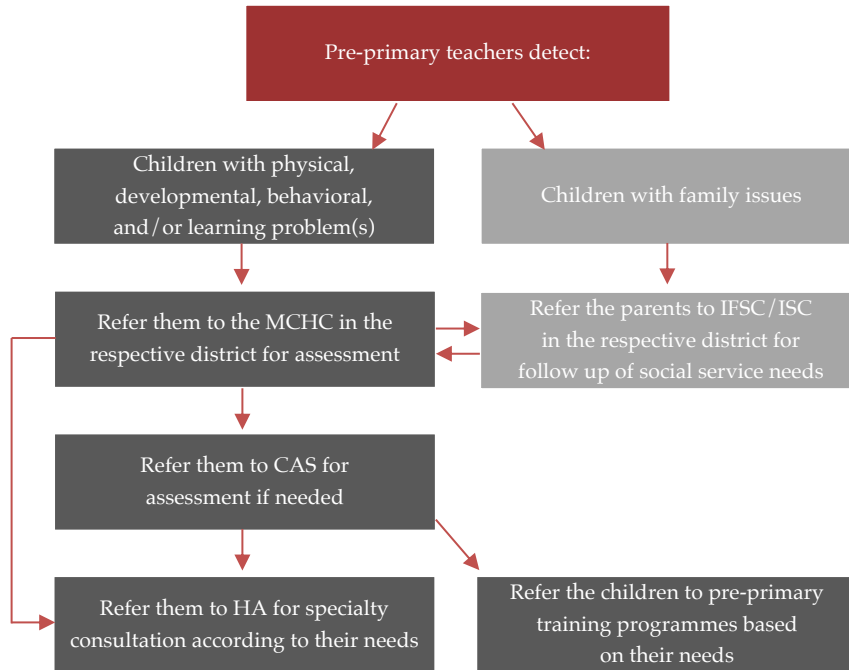
### *Formality and Purpose*

*Harmonization of Pre-Primary Services:* Until the implementation of the “harmonization” of pre-primary services in 2005, both child care centers (overseen by the SWD) and kindergartens (overseen by the erstwhile Education and Manpower Bureau) in Hong Kong served children aged 3 to 6. On the basis of recommendations made by the Working Party on Harmonization of Pre-Primary Services, unification of monitoring mechanisms for the 3- to 6-year-old age group started in September 2005. Today, services for children aged 0 to 3 are under the remit of the SWD’s Child Care Services Ordinance. On the other hand, all educare services for children aged 3 to 6 are regulated

by the Education Ordinance (see Chapter 5 for more details on the Ordinances). Day nurseries (serving children aged 2 to 6) and day nursery-cum-day crèches (serving children aged 0 to 6) have been converted into kindergarten-cum-child care centers. Though governed by different ordinances, they are now monitored by one authority, the Joint Office for Kindergartens and Child Care Centers, staffed by officers from both the SWD and EDB but under the monitoring of EDB (Education and Manpower Bureau, 2003).

*Comprehensive Child Development Service:* As services provided under the split system approach may not meet the many needs of children with special educational needs, an integrated approach is in place. In 2005, the Comprehensive Child Development Service (CCDS) scheme was announced. It offers early identification and timely intervention to reduce health inequalities and to help parents bring up healthy and well-adjusted children. The distinctive feature of the CCDS is that it involves interdisciplinary and cross-sectorial collaboration among the EDB, the SWD, the DH, and the Hospital Authority (HA). Under the CCDS, a referral and reply system has been developed to enhance close collaboration among kindergartens (overseen by the EDB), child care centers (overseen by the SWD), the MCHCs (overseen by the Department of Health) and Integrated Family Service Centers (IFSCs)/Integrated Service Centers (ISCs) (overseen by the Social Welfare Department). If pre-primary teachers detect any physical, developmental, behavioral, or family issues with children, they can refer them directly to the MCHC or IFSC/ISC in the respective districts for the Child Assessment Service (CAS) provided by the DH, and later followed up by the HA or other training programs (Department of Health, Education Bureau, & Social Welfare Department, 2008) (see Figure 11.1).

Figure 11.2 The referral and reply system of CCDS



Source: Department of Health, Education Bureau, & Social Welfare Department (2008)

### *Evidence of Effectiveness and Issues Encountered*

The clear establishment of cross-departmental provisions for different aspects of ECEC since 2005 appears to be developing effectively. However, there is no data available attesting to the effectiveness of the collaboration.

### *Issues Encountered by the Strategy*

Various respondents pointed out that collaboration among ministries may occur only on the surface level, and that there is room to improve communication between ministries in order to ensure that they have full understanding of one other's contributions. Even within the Joint Office for Kindergartens and Child Care Centers, support provided by SWD staff seems to be stronger than that provided by EDB staff

(Influential Community member interview). The EDB is now taking positive steps towards prioritizing quality pre-primary education, and regular communication between ministries will serve to improve this further.

### Intersectorality

#### *Role of Private Sector In ECEC*

From the early 20th century, the government of Hong Kong has employed a *laissez-faire* approach to pre-primary services (see Chapter 2). Therefore, the private sector has long played a significant part in the provision of ECEC in Hong Kong. Indeed, today all child care centers and kindergartens are still privately run. All are classified either as being *non-profit* or *private independent*, depending on their sponsoring bodies. Only non-profit institutions can receive government financial subsidies; private independent institutions do not receive any fiscal support from the government.

Currently 12 private independent centers and one non-profit daycare center in Hong Kong offer almost a third of all places (over 2,000 places) for children from birth to age 3 (Census and Statistics Department, 2016b). In the pre-primary realm, about 84 percent of kindergartens are classified as non-profit kindergartens, while the rest are private independent kindergartens (16 percent). The latter charge much higher fees than non-profit kindergartens. Kindergartens are further classified as local schools (86 percent), which follow the *Guide to the Pre-Primary Curriculum* (Curriculum Development Council, 2006), or as non-local schools (14 percent), which do not. All kindergartens that received government funding through the PEVS or currently receive it under the FQKEP must be classified as non-profit kindergartens and local schools, but private kindergartens and non-local schools may choose whether or not to follow the guide. The government plays a significant role in supporting and monitoring the quality of all kindergartens in Hong Kong, irrespective of their sponsoring body or designation as local or non-local.

In recent years, early childhood “playgroups” that offer “eduplay” classes for babies and toddlers of middle-class families have become popular in the city. All these playgroups are operated by private enterprises and are profit-making in nature. They are not regulated under the Child Care Services Ordinance because of a loophole in the legislation. The Child Care Services Ordinance requires any center that regularly receives more than five children at one time to be registered as a child care center and follow government regulations. However, playgroups provide play and learning classes because children are *accompanied* by a parent or a carer and are therefore exempt from being registered as a child care center. As playgroups do not provide educational courses, they are also not subject to the regulation of the Education Ordinance.

### *Relationship between Public and Private Sectors*

The relationship between the public and private sectors in the regulation and provision of ECEC is noteworthy. The private sector provides all ECEC services, including both child care and early education. Meanwhile, the government provides financial support (e.g., through the FQKEP) and also takes responsibility for monitoring and quality assurance. All child care centers in Hong Kong are governed by the SWD’s Child Care Services Ordinance (Cap 243) and Regulations (see Chapter 10). These specify various requirements for the physical environments of centers and for child care workers, who must complete the relevant in-service training courses within the first year of their service.

Government-directed quality assurance for kindergartens comes in the form of the 1971 Education Ordinance (Cap 279) and Regulations. Even though the legal guidelines are more applicable to primary and secondary institutions, kindergartens are included, albeit more by default than intention (Opper, 1992). However, as discussed in the previous chapters, in the past 15 years the government has been addressing kindergarten quality by raising the professional qualification requirements for teachers and principals. It has published three editions of the *Guide to the Pre-Primary*

*(Kindergarten) Curriculum* (Curriculum Development Council, 1996; 2006, 2017), to stress all-around child development in kindergartens.

The government also provides various subsidies to non-profit kindergartens that fulfill certain requirements. At the same time, the government allows a degree of autonomy in curriculum design, personnel decisions, and student admission. As noted many times earlier, all kindergartens that joined the PEVS (and now the FQKEP) have to follow the *Guide to the Pre-Primary/Kindergarten Curriculum* (Curriculum Development Council, 2006, 2017). That stated, as long as kindergartens fulfill requirements specified in the Education Ordinance and Regulations, they can determine curricula, pedagogical, and operational arrangements based on their own philosophies, objectives, and religious backgrounds (Wong & Rao, 2015). This is a nice illustration of the “give-and-take” relationship that exists in ECEC in Hong Kong between the private and government sectors.

The government also often subsidizes and regulates family and child services provided by NGOs. The exception to this is playgroups for babies and toddlers, which are not yet regulated by government (Academic interview).

### **Innovations and Recent Changes**

The implementation of the PEVS was one of the first signs of the government taking a more active role in ECEC governance. As noted previously, the PEVS was an annual, non-means-tested, and flat-rate subsidy that was provided by the government in the form of a voucher to parents of kindergarten-aged children to meet part of the school fees. In order to utilize the voucher, the kindergarten had to meet the quality benchmarks and accountability requirements set by the government; importantly, participating kindergartens needed to undergo the government’s Quality Review and inspections. The government thus “indirectly” strengthened its governance of the private kindergarten market by making use of the market force generated by the financial incentives for parents. This is clearly one positive step in the Hong Kong

government's commitment to providing equal access to high-quality kindergarten education for children from all socioeconomic levels.

The government took this one step further under the new FQKEP (see Part 2), by providing "full" subsidies directly to kindergartens. In return, kindergartens need to fulfill even more stringent requirements relating to tuition fees, professional qualifications, financial transparency, school accountability, and teachers' salaries. It is expected that the government's involvement in the private market will further intensify.

### **Contribution to Equity and Efficiency**

The ECEC system cannot function effectively without a clear, coherent and aligned governance system, which should be intentionally designed so that the various functions (e.g., health care, education, welfare) align and support one another. The harmonization of pre-primary services has helped resolve the problem of overlapping governance of services catering to children of the same age group. It has also, to a certain extent, helped improve the efficiency of the monitoring of services for children under age 3.

Although child care services for children below the age of 3 and pre-primary education for children between 3 and 6 are governed by relevant government ordinances, problems have arisen due to the fact that all kindergarten services are provided by the private sector. Specifically, it has been difficult for the government to persuade the providers to counteract strong parental pressure for a more academic-driven curriculum. The popular neo-liberal view stresses the benefits of decentralizing the government's role in education and allowing the market to produce its own order (Gewirtz, Ball & Bowe, 1995). However, given the nature of private provision, the Hong Kong kindergarten market by itself has not been able to produce the equity and efficiency needed for healthy and holistic development for young children. As noted by one of the respondents, "The field works hard, but we cannot depend on NGOs to sustain equity and equality of education" (Academic respondent). Hence the



government has significant role to play in this regard. The strengthened governance through the PEVS and the FQKEP has forced many private kindergartens to adopt more child-centered curricula and to adhere to more accountability mechanisms. This has helped to improve equity and the efficiency of service delivery.

### Challenges

In recent years, more and more countries around the world have moved toward an integrated ECEC system, where one lead department has responsibility for all ECEC services (Bertram et al., 2016). As reviewed above, however, Hong Kong continues to adopt a split system of early childhood services. Although inter-ministerial cooperation has gradually increased, there is still need for a more comprehensive coordinating strategy between health and education. Despite its benefits in bringing together the best of the private and public sectors, there are still issues with the existing governance model, as described in the following sections.

#### *Care vs. Education*

There are some challenges that have arisen from the separation of child care and kindergarten education in Hong Kong. These include the horizontal and vertical integration of services. As noted by two respondents:

*“The current model reflects that care and education are viewed as separate domains of early childhood development by the government”*

*(Influential Community member respondent)*

*“We need to change the internal fundamental thinking and outlook on education itself. We need to re-establish the roots of the idea of early childhood education.”*

*(Influential Community member respondent)*

The split-phase approach that exists in Hong Kong is not consistent with the view of many scholars and educators that children benefit from intertwined, comprehensive

services that address their education, health, and socio-emotional needs, starting from birth (Pearson & Rao, 2006). In addition, the separation of care and education has led to an uneven distribution of fiscal resources. Namely, more resources have been allocated to the early education of children aged 3 to 6 than to the care-oriented services for children under 3 (Influential Community member interview). Relatively little is being done by the government to provide for children under 3. Care for children in this age group is still seen as the responsibility of the extended family, and supported child care is only offered as a form of welfare for those in need, as reflected by the low number of places available for children under 3. Respondents reported that governmental support has been limited in the past 10 years, and that EDB, SWD, and DH do not consider educare for this age group their responsibility (Influential community member, Head of Service and Academic interviews). This belief has also discouraged the vertical integration of education and care services for children under 3 with services for children in the 3- to 6-year-old age group.

Further, several respondents expressed the belief that ECEC for children between 3 and 6 should not be seen as the responsibility of EDB only, and that there is need for other departments to complement each other to support children's development.

Kindergarten is an important resource for needy families, and some respondents suggested the need for cross-bureau policy framework to provide comprehensive support for children of different backgrounds (Head of Service and Academic interviews).

### *Long-Term Population Policy*

As has been explained in Parts 2 and 3, Hong Kong has a high population density and a small geographical size. One consequence of this is high rents for both residential and commercial premises. This in turn has an adverse impact on ECEC, as it means operators are often only able to rent smaller premises. Small spaces may result in

insufficient space for children to have essential learning experiences and may increase the rapidity with which infectious diseases can spread.

*“Because Hong Kong is very small, it has lack of space for kindergartens and other ECEC facilities. Play areas around the community in Hong Kong are not enough to nurture child education and care.... In the age group of 0-6 years there are many infectious diseases. If children are sick, they should not go to school. But if they do not go to school, parents have to plan for their care, if they have to go to work. It is not just about having children’s hospital – it is care for children who are too sick to go to school”*

*(Head of Service respondent)*

This description of lack of space and lack of appropriate care for children who are sick in a society where mothers are encouraged to participate in the workforce points to the need for a holistic ECEC policy that comes as part of the population policy. This policy should encompass not only the areas of education, care, welfare, and health, but also of town planning, labor and manpower, and technology. However, the current split model of ECEC governance allows different ministries only partial understanding of the situation, obscuring the “big picture” and precluding long-term solution to problems faced by families of young children (Head of Service and Academic interviews). Even though the government is responsive in its policymaking, at the moment, respondents felt it only implements policy to tackle problems when they arise, rather than having in place a comprehensive system to anticipate and proactively respond to societal needs (Influential Community member, Heads of Service, Academic interviews).

### ***Lack of Expertise in ECEC in Administration***

One strength of the ECEC policymaking process in Hong Kong is the fact that the government typically consults with overseas and local experts, and civil society, before initiating policy. But given Hong Kong’s small size, there are only a handful of ECEC experts. Further, there are not enough civil servants in Hong Kong who have

professional backgrounds in early education and child development, and existing experts may be posted to non-ECEC units. As a result, the policy-makers tasked with leading ECEC may not see the necessity of enhancing integration among departments. This has adverse impact on long-term planning. One respondent noted:

*“The administration’s professional background is very important. There need to be more experts in early childhood education in the administration, and those that have more in-depth knowledge of the field.”*

*(Influential Community member respondent)*

### ***High Turnover of Leaders and Senior Government Personnel***

Another challenge is high turnover of senior personnel in government and consultation committees. As noted by one respondent:

*“The turnover of committee members is frustrating.... It is hard to keep clear direction, with people changing. I am worried whether direction can be sustained.... It may be hard to keep long-term strategies. The Secretary of Education also changes every few years. We are changing leaders and senior people.”*

*(Academic respondent)*

Other respondents (Academic, Head of Service, and Influential Community member interviews) also mentioned that elections would result in a new chief executive and secretary of education and this has been the case. In fact, one of the unsuccessful chief executive candidates explicitly stated as part of his election platform that he would restructure the EDB and the Labor and Welfare Bureau (which houses the SWD) (John Tsang Election Office, 2017). The instability of government leaders and personnel greatly affect development of an integrated ECEC system, as planning for an integrated system typically requires long-term and sustained efforts.

## Chapter 12: Finance

### Key Points

- Hong Kong has a unique ECEC system, wherein educational services are provided entirely by private entities; marketization of kindergartens is therefore encouraged by the government.
- Hong Kong's financially strong and stable government provides substantial funding to subsidize ECEC for families.
- In 2017, the government changed the way it funds ECEC. Specifically, the system shifted from mainly demand-side to supply-side funding.
- Without doubt, the fiscal combination of private and government sectors has contributed to enhancing the equity and efficiency of ECEC service delivery. However, there remain challenges associated with subsidizing the high costs of rented kindergarten premises and with providing workforce compensation high enough to attract and retain well-qualified ECEC professionals.

### Description of Key Public Funding

#### *Revenue Amounts and Sources*

As was described in Part 2, Hong Kong continues to maintain a simple tax structure, with low tax rates intended to sustain incentives for employees and entrepreneurs to invest. The current corporate profits tax rate and standard tax rate, at 16 percent and 15 percent, respectively, are low by international standards. The overall government revenue for the fiscal year of 2015-16 was \$57.6 billion (HK\$450 billion), within which profit tax was the largest item, accounting for 31.2 percent of the total revenue. This was followed by stamp duties (13.9 percent), land premium (13.5 percent), salaries tax (12.9 percent), and general rates (5.1 percent) (Census and Statistics Department, 2016b).

With respect to pre-primary education (kindergartens and kindergarten-cum-child care centers), the Government allocated a budget of HK\$3.7 billion (0.72 percent of total budget) (US\$474.9 million) and HK\$5.2 billion (1.07 percent of total budget) (US\$677.2 million) for the fiscal years 2016-17 and 2017-18, respectively (Government of the HKSAR, 2017a). A total of HK\$3.1 billion (0.63 percent of total budget) (US\$392.7 million) and HK\$3.9 billion (0.70 percent of total budget) (US\$441.7 million) was allocated in the Government budget for family and child welfare (including the provision of day child care, foster care, and residential care services) in the fiscal years 2016-17 and 2017-18, respectively (Government of the HKSAR, 2017a).

### *Key Public Supply-Side Funding Streams*

Health and social welfare services for children are either fully paid for or subsidized by the government. As noted several times in this case study, free health services for children are provided by 31 public MCHCs (see Chapter 5). Day care for children below the age of 3 is mainly provided by 12 government-subsidized, private day child care centers and a few other non-profit and private day child care centers (Census and Statistics Department, 2016b). The Child Care Centre Subsidy Scheme is in place to provide financial assistance to these centers. The level of subsidy disbursed annually to each eligible center is calculated based either on the child's age or on the size of the group in the child care center. For example, since the implementation of PEVS, each center receives an annual subsidy of HK\$6,185 (US\$793) for each child below the age of 2 and HK\$3,093 (US\$396) for each child between 2 and 3. Alternately, centers can opt to receive subsidies based on group size. The annual subsidy for a group of eight children below the age of 2 or a group of 15 children between 2 and 3 is HK\$30,925 (US\$3,964) per group (Education Bureau, 2008).

As noted earlier (Chapters 2 and 11), all kindergartens are denoted as being non-profit or private independent (Lau & Rao, 2017). After the implementation of the PEVS in 2007, non-profit kindergartens were no longer subsidized by the Kindergarten and

Child Care Centre Subsidy Scheme. They did, however, continue to receive reimbursement for rents and rates, for a total of about HK\$200 million (US\$25.6 million) annually (Audit Commission, 2013). Further, one-off Capacity Enhancement and School Development Grants were provided in the 2007-08 to 2013-14 school years to help enhance school environments and facilities (Committee on Free Kindergarten Education, 2015; Education and Manpower Bureau, 2006). These grants ranged from HK\$150,000 to HK\$250,000 (US\$19,230 to US\$32,051), amounting to a total expenditure of HK\$157.65 million (US\$69.9 million) until August 2017. They benefited a total of 41,853 children from 2007 to 2014 (Committee on Free Kindergarten Education, 2015; Education Bureau, 2017k).

### *Key Demand-Side Strategies*

Until 2017, all families with children aged 3-6 were provided with demand-side funding under the PEVS. Every family, regardless of income, was entitled to a voucher that could be cashed in at 84 percent of kindergartens in Hong Kong. These PEVS-participating kindergartens were non-profit, offered local curricula, met quality benchmarks set by the government, and charged a tuition fee not exceeding the specified fee thresholds for half-day place or whole-day places [HK\$34,850 (US\$4,468) or HK\$69,700 (US\$8,936) per annum, respectively]. The voucher value for each 3- to 6-year-old was HK\$23,230 (US\$2,978) for the 2016-17 school year (Education Bureau, 2016f). The vouchers could not be used in private independent kindergartens.

Financing of kindergarten education turned a new page in September 2017 when the FQKEP replaced the PEVS. Like the PEVS, the FQKEP also provides a subsidy only for half-day services (15 hours a week). Parents employed on a full-time basis, however, may require full-day services for their children. Thus, additional demand-side funding for ECEC is provided to families that qualify for social assistance and have children under 6 through the Kindergarten and Child Care Center Fee Remission Scheme (FCFRS), and to families of children below the age of 3 who attend child care centers

(and receive full-day services) through fee remission. A total of 35,632 families were supported by the KCFRS in the 2014-15 fiscal year, with total government spending equaling approximately HK\$544.9 million (US\$69.9 million) (0.2 percent of the government expenditure) (Committee on Free Kindergarten Education, 2015).

### Description of Key Private Funding Sources

All kindergartens in Hong Kong are stand-alone institutions owned either by charitable organizations or private enterprises. Until the implementation of the PEVS, governmental financial input to the ECEC sector had been extremely limited (Li, Wong, & Wang, 2010). The operational costs of kindergartens, thus, had to be largely met by parental fees (Wong & Rao, 2015). The PEVS introduced specified limits to the amount that parents could be charged at participating kindergartens. Under the FQKEP, special approval has to be sought to charge any fees. For the 2017-18 academic year, 30 of 500 kindergartens under the FQKEP scheme received permission from the government to charge fees of up to \$512 (HK\$4,000) (Chiu, 2017). It is likely that these permissions have been granted because government subsidies are not enough to defray the schools' operating expenses or to finance improvement of the schools' educational facilities.

It is important to reiterate that the government only finances 15 hours a week of free kindergarten education; thus, parents who require full-day services have to pay fees. However, low-income families can apply for financial assistance to meet the costs of center-based care. Fiscal support for full-day services is provided under the auspices of the Kindergarten and Child Care Fee Remission Scheme.

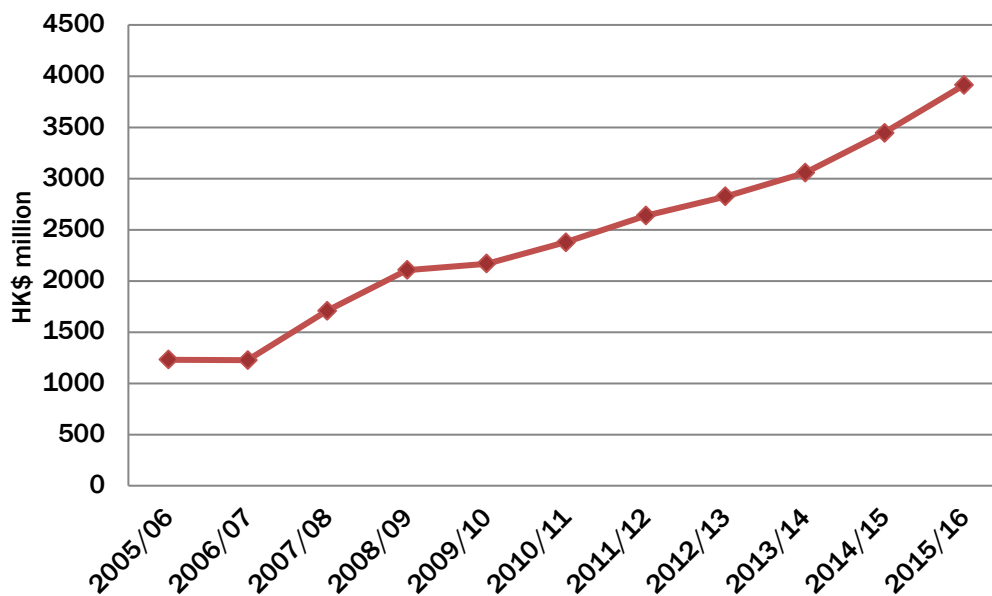
### Recent Changes in Funding

There has been a substantial increase in government funding on kindergarten education (aged 3 to 6) in the past 10 years (Figure 12.2). In 2005-06, just before the launch of the PEVS, government expenditure on pre-primary education was merely HK\$1.2 billion (US\$154 million), while that on primary and secondary education were HK\$10.3 billion



(\$US1.32 billion) and HK\$16 billion (US\$2.05 billion), respectively. By 2015-16, government expenditure on pre-primary education rose to HK\$3.9 billion (US\$487 million), representing a 225 percent increase from the 2005-06 figure. In contrast, increases in government expenditure on primary and secondary education were only 55.3 percent and 56.7 percent, respectively (Census and Statistics Department, 2016b).

**Figure 12.1 Recurrent government expenditure on pre-primary education 2005-06 to 2015-16**



Source: Census and Statistics Department (2012b, 2016b)

Pre-primary education policy in Hong Kong turned a new page in the 2017-18 school year. The long-anticipated FQKEP replaced the PEVS, which was in effect from the 2007-08 school year to the 2016-17 school year (see Chapter 4). Under the new policy, eligible local non-profit kindergartens joining the Scheme have been provided with an annual basic subsidy of \$4,255 (HK\$33,190) per student for the provision of a half-day early education service (three hours per school day). There are also basic subsidies provided per student per annum for whole-day (seven hours per school day) and long whole-day services (10 hours per school day), which are HK\$43,150 (US\$5,532) and

HK\$54,100 (US\$6,936), respectively. The basic subsidy, provided per student per school year, can be used to cover expenses for teacher and staff salaries (calculated based on the median of the recommended salary for kindergarten staff), and other operating costs for half-day services. Eligible kindergartens that have a large number of long-serving teachers who are receiving higher salaries may apply for a one-off time-limited tide-over grant for two years. Requests by kindergartens for grants to defray rental costs, maintain kindergarten premises maintenance, and/or provide Chinese language support to non-Chinese speaking students are considered by the EDB on a case-by-case basis.

Funding provided to kindergartens under the FKQEP is supposed to cover all expenditures in half-day programs, in addition to some expenditures in whole-day programs. Therefore, kindergartens need to have a strong justification to get permission from the EDB to charge any parent fees for half-day programming; if approved, the fee level cannot exceed ceilings determined by the EDB. For the 2017-18 academic year, 30 of 500 kindergartens under the FQKEP scheme received special approval from the government to charge fees of up to HK\$4,000 (US\$512) (Chiu, 2017). It is likely that these permissions have been granted because government subsidies are not enough to defray the schools' operating expenses or to finance improvement of the schools' educational facilities.

It should be noted that additional government subsidies are provided under the FQKEP to kindergartens that offer whole-day and long whole-day services. The cost of the extra hours is shared between the government and parents. As noted earlier, low-income families can apply for means-tested government subsidies if they require full-day center based ECEC for their children (Education Bureau, 2016c). It is estimated that about 70 percent to 80 percent of subsidized half-day kindergarten places will be free under the FQKEP. The government investment in pre-primary education is expected to increase from \$513 million (HK\$4 billion) in the 2016-17 school year to HK\$6.7 billion (US\$859 million) for the 2017-18 school year (Legislative Council Panel on Education, 2017).

Despite rising public investment, however, all kindergartens in Hong Kong will remain private entities.

### **Affordability of ECEC**

Until recently, ECEC in Hong Kong operated outside the boundaries of formal government policies, and was viewed as the responsibility of the family (Pearson & Rao, 2006; Rao and Li 2009). Among kindergartens, tuition fees were high and varied greatly (Li, Wong, & Wang, 2010). Hence, the government launched the PEVS in 2007 to ease “the financial burden of parents” as “an integral part of government support for the family” (Education and Manpower Bureau, 2006). By setting a cap on tuition and providing fee subsidies for parents in the form of a voucher, services provided by PEVS-participating kindergartens, which accounted for almost 80 percent of all kindergartens in Hong Kong, became more affordable. In 2007-08, on average, parents had to pay approximately 3.4 percent of their average annual household for a half-day program per student per annum, as compared with 7.4 percent in 2006-07, before the PEVS was introduced (Audit Commission, 2013; Census and Statistics Department, 2012b). The means-tested KCFRS, on top of the PEVS subsidy, was available for needy families to ensure that no child would be deprived of the opportunity to receive ECEC due to a lack of financial means. In the 2014-15 fiscal year, 35,632 families received fee subsidies under KCFRS (Committee on Free Kindergarten Education, 2015).

### **Parental Choice**

Parents in Hong Kong have long enjoyed a high level of freedom in choosing ECEC services for their children. Even though ECEC is not compulsory in Hong Kong, the strong socio-cultural emphasis on education, together with the availability of KCFRS and a highly efficient public transportation system, allowed almost all Hong Kong children between the ages of 3 and 6 to attend ECEC programs before implementation of the PEVS; however, some poorer families may not have been able to afford kindergarten fees. According to the 2011 population census, enrollment rates for 3- to 5-

year-olds from ethnic minority families (86.9 percent) were lower than those of the whole population (91.3 percent). As mentioned in Chapter 3, there is relatively high poverty among ethnic minority families.

The introduction of the PEVS, and subsequently FQKEP, are examples of the government's responsive policymaking to address financial inequities by enhancing the affordability of ECEC services. Nevertheless, some critics have argued that PEVS (and in turn, FQKEP) limited parent choice of kindergartens. This is because parents may only redeem vouchers in non-profit kindergartens, a restricted segment of the private sector. That stated, the vast majority of kindergartens in Hong Kong are non-profit (84 percent in 2016), (Lau & Rao, 2017) and parents still have autonomy in choosing programs they prefer (Academic interview).

### **Durability of Funding over Time**

As shown in Figure 12.1, the PEVS drove an upward trend in public funding for ECEC. Additional recurrent funding has been guaranteed for the FQKEP. This recurrent investment will help ensure the provision of a sustainable policy (Senior Government Official interview). Moreover, increasing governmental funding for kindergarten education was a focus in the election platforms for two out of three potential candidates for the 2017 chief executive election (John Tsang Election Office, 2017; Office for the HKSAR Chief Executive Election of Mr. Woo Kwok Hing, 2017). Thus, funding for ECEC is viewed as being durable over time.

### **Equitable Distribution of Funds**

The erstwhile PEVS was essentially a universal voucher. This demand-side funding strategy was "equitable" in the sense that it was an entitlement for all children in Hong Kong, regardless of family background. It was up to parents to decide where, or whether, to use vouchers. However, vouchers could only be redeemed in the non-profit sector of the private kindergarten market, and economists, including the pioneer of the

modern concept of the voucher, Milton Friedman, argued that the PEVS was “not properly structured” and “curtail[ed] the amount of competition” (Forestier & Clem, 2006). Nonetheless, Sandel (2009) pointed out that, unless sufficiently stringent regulatory conditions are in place, resources may be exploited by for-profit entrepreneurs, making money out of providing child care. Therefore, such criticism should take into account the context of marketization in Hong Kong (Penn, 2011). Restricting PEVS to non-profit kindergartens ensures that all funding is used on children, but not on the personal purposes of kindergarten operators.<sup>5</sup>

Another criticism came from kindergartens offering full-day programs, which found PEVS—due to its flat-rate nature—to be unfair. During the first four years of implementation, part of the voucher subsidy was earmarked for teachers’ professional development. Kindergartens offering whole-day programs actually received less funding than kindergartens that offered two half-day sessions per day.

The introduction of the FQKEP in the 2017-18 school year to replace the PEVS has turned the demand-side strategy to one that is supply-side. This is because funding is provided directly to kindergartens, instead of to parents, on per-capita basis. As noted earlier, additional funding is also available for kindergartens offering whole-day programs, or with special circumstances. One respondent stated that kindergarten principals were generally positive about the new policy and believed the new funding method would give kindergartens more control (Academic interview).

Though the government’s funding model gives parents a wide choice of kindergartens, the government controls the quality of private-sector kindergartens. This hybrid model of subsidization of center-based ECEC includes both demand-side funding (in the form of additional subsidies given to low-income families who require full-day services) and

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<sup>5</sup> Non-profit kindergartens could budget for a 5% reserve to meet cash flow requirements but this amount had to be fully re-invested in education.

supply-side funding (given directly to ECEC centers for services for 3- to 6-year olds. An advantage of supply-side funding is that more service providers may enter the market and competition among kindergartens may enhance quality of services. Further, the government has also increased quality standards for ECEC. For example, private kindergarten operators must follow government guidelines closely (e.g., implement more play-based learning) in ECEC and only employ staff that meet the professional qualification criteria. For example, the government stipulates that certain percent of kindergarten teachers should have professional qualification at least at the Certificate/ Associate Degree level (Education Bureau, 2017c)

### Innovations

The former PEVS was a “hybrid” educational voucher, between market and social engineering (Wong & Rao, 2015). It worked like other education vouchers for parents, and allowed them to choose schools for their children. Yet, unlike most voucher schemes, it did not decentralize authority to market forces; instead, it promoted direct involvement of the government in the private sector, tying financial assistance with official quality assessments (as discussed in Chapter 10).

The FQKEP is another innovative move from the government. That stated, this is not the first time that the Hong Kong government has subsidized the private sector in education with public funds (e.g., the PEVS and the Direct Subsidy Scheme for a few primary and secondary schools). As noted, the FQKEP fully subsidizes the operational costs of participating private institutions, which must meet particular regulations and accountability measures. However, kindergartens are still not confined by the stringent control measures that are in place for fully subsidized local primary and secondary schools (Education Bureau, 2016c).

### Contributions to Equity and Efficiency

The reasons behind the Hong Kong government's efforts to create equity in early childhood provisions have been expounded in Chapters 3, 4 and 5. This section revisits the main policies relating to equity. The idea behind the PEVS was to enhance the efficiency of service delivery in kindergartens, in terms of affordability, quality, and accountability. This was done by harnessing market forces generated by the voucher. The voucher came with stringent controls (Sandel, 2009), including restricting eligibility to non-profit kindergartens, capping fees, and imposing high-level competency requirements for staff. Statistics have shown that the PEVS was a worthy effort, bringing a substantial reduction in fees paid by parents, a significant increase in number of trained teachers, and enhancements to the transparency of kindergartens (Audit Commission, 2013).

Nonetheless, it appears that efficiency was valued over equity under the PEVS. Providing the voucher directly to parents gave rise to inequities, as some middle-class parents enrolled their children in two kindergartens (one half-day using the voucher, and the other half-day paying fees) in order to procure more hours of kindergarten education for their children. On the other hand, children from low- or low-middle-income families could only afford full-day services if they qualified for government financial assistance.

The government has since become more responsive to the needs of the ECEC sector, and is gradually moving towards a doctrine of "proportionate universalism" (Marmot & Bell, 2012) in terms of ECEC funding. For example, in principle, the new FQKEP funds services for all children and families, hence "universalism." But with the addition of the means-tested Kindergarten and Child Care Center Fee Remission Scheme and other financial assistance specifically for families in need, funding is actually provided proportionate to the level of disadvantage. The increased investment is one further step forward in promoting educational equity.

## Challenges

Despite the government's attention to ECEC, and responsive policymaking towards equity and efficiency, many funding challenges remain for Hong Kong's ECEC system.

### *School Premises and Accommodation*

Hong Kong has the most expensive housing market in the world (Li, 2016), with rental prices skyrocketing in the past 12 years (Figure 12.2). This has critical implications for the private ECEC market. Kindergartens are typically located on premises that are owned by kindergarten operators or school sponsoring bodies, or are privately leased premises. Fewer than 50 percent of kindergartens, including those on public housing estates, are located on premises owned by the government (Committee on Free Kindergarten Education, 2015). The high rental prices in Hong Kong thus affect the more than 50 percent of kindergartens operators who have to pay rent. There is a concern that much of public funding for kindergarten education will, in fact, be used to pay rising rent costs to private property owners. As noted by one respondent:

*"I think the challenge of the new policy is the rental issue. Rents of kindergartens are a challenge to sustainability of the scheme. If the kindergartens are established on commercial land, [and pay market rent], and the government does not address the rental issue, the policy cannot be sustained."*

*(Academic interview)*

Another respondent also commented on lack of suitable premises for kindergartens:

*"There are no facilities or campus or sites for kindergartens. Primary schools have beautiful campuses or sites but kindergartens strive to rent and buy premises."*

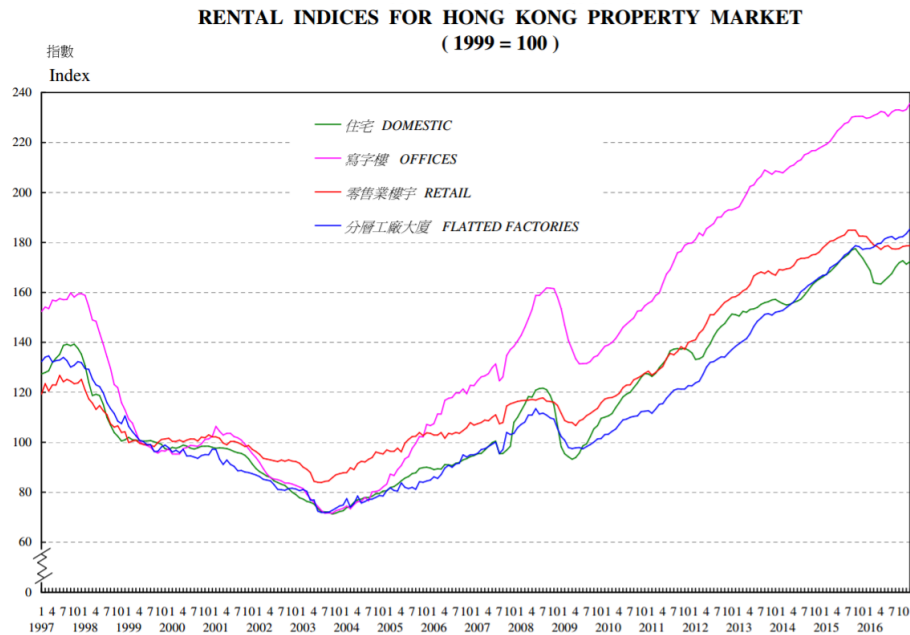
*(Academic respondent)*



Under the FQKEP, kindergartens operating on premises allocated by the government are eligible for a full rental subsidy. However, those operating in other rented premises will be subject to caps in rental subsidy and may need to charge school fees to cover part of the rental expenses, although the caps will be adjusted according to market rent (Education Bureau, 2016c; Senior Government Official interview).

The Government will try to provide “more rent-free premises for kindergartens,” (Senior Government Official respondent) meaning premises owned by the government for which operators will not have to pay rent for them. This, however, will take time, resource investment, and inter-ministerial collaboration within the government. It is unlikely that a significantly greater number of rent-free premises for kindergartens will be available in the near future.

**Figure 12.2 Rental indices for Hong Kong property market, 1997-2016**



Source: Rating and Valuation Department (2017)

### *Basic Unit Subsidy*

Another challenge is related to the calculation of the basic unit subsidy. Under the new policy, reimbursement is calculated at the median of the recommended salary ranges for teaching and supporting staff (Education Bureau, 2016c). Many worry that this could encourage kindergartens to employ junior teachers, which could affect quality. There are no safeguards in the policy to prevent this.

*“It may also bring problems to kindergartens, with teachers receiving salaries below median, as they might try to employ more teachers in the beginning, but would find it difficult to pay so many salaries over time and kindergartens may eventually have to sack teachers.”*

*(Influential Community member interview)*

The policy text does not indicate whether the basic unit subsidy will be adjusted (based on changes in cost of living) in the near future. As noted by an interviewee:

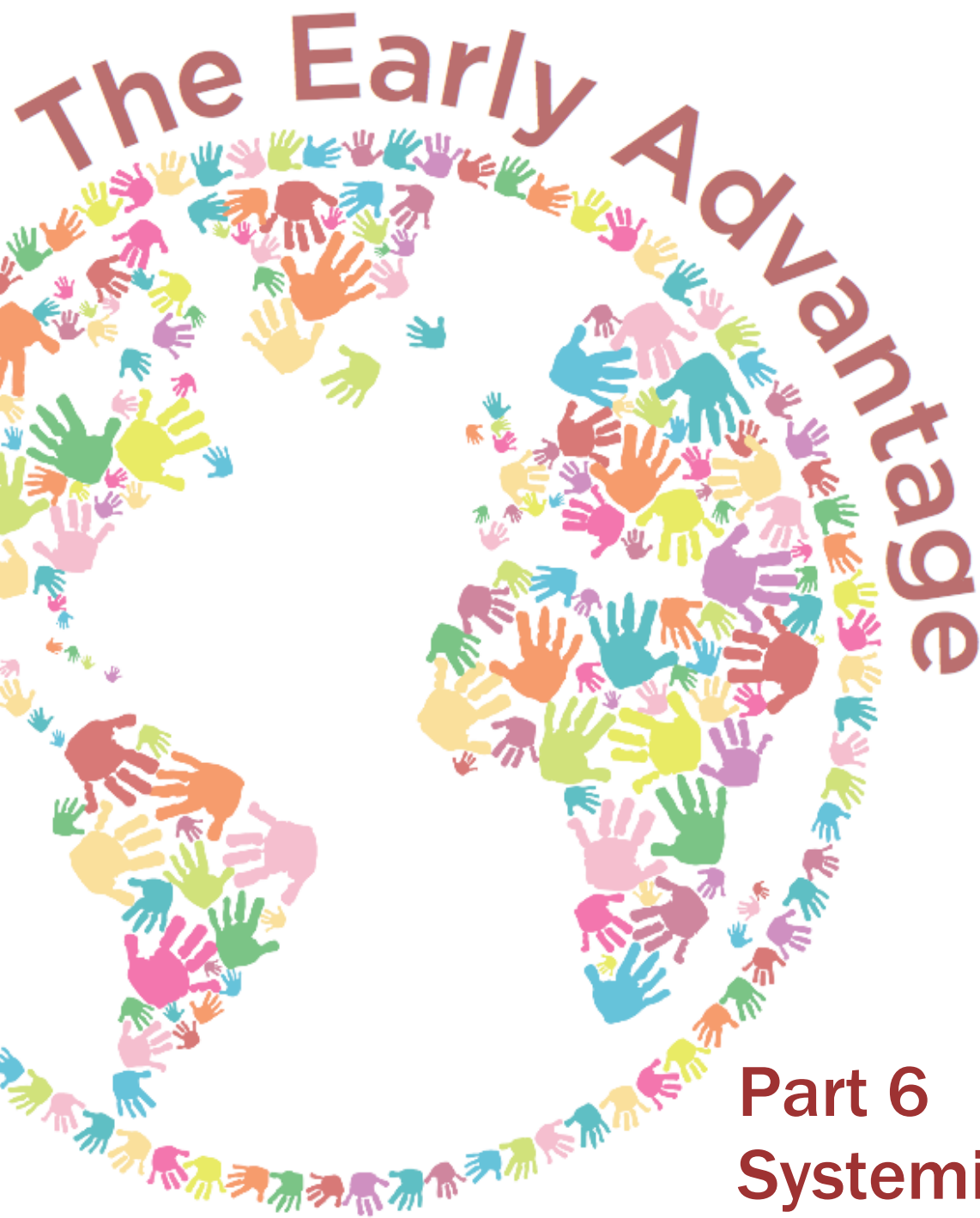
*“Stakeholders worry that the policy cannot be sustained if the government seldom makes adjustments according to current market situations.”*

*(Academic respondent)*

### *School Fees for Kindergarten*

Under the FQKEP, kindergartens are allowed to charge school fees (if they apply for special permission) but cannot exceed the fee ceiling determined by the EDB (see Chapter 12). The EDB will “rigorously vet individual kindergartens’ proposals for collecting school fees” to evaluate the necessity of collecting such fees (Education Bureau, 2016c). One interviewee gave an example of one kindergarten which recently had its fee proposal rejected. The kindergarten wished to charge fees of only HK\$400 (US\$52) a month, 60 percent below the ceiling set by the government. The school fees were to cover the schools’ expenditures because the government subsidy was

insufficient. The interviewee expressed concern about whether the government would promote coverage of “free” kindergarten education, at the expense of kindergartens, by not approving proposals of those with genuine reasons for collecting extra fees (Academic interview).



**Part 6**  
**Systemic Outputs:**  
**Sustaining**  
**Services**

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## Chapter 13: Family, Community, and School Linkages

### Key Points

- Family and education are valued in Chinese culture, and the government wants to support families to create opportunities for all children to fulfill their maximum potentials as contributors to future society.
- The SWD and EDB have introduced programs to support parents and other caregivers in promoting child development.
- It is assumed by the government that the availability of accessible and quality child care affects a woman's decision to have children.
- There has been a shift in government thinking away from the idea that ECEC is solely the family's responsibility. The government is beginning to regard it as an integral part of the whole school system and the community.
- It will take time and dedicated effort from the government to change the societal mindset that "more is better," even with regard to education at kindergarten level. This mindset often creates pressure for kindergartens to adopt traditional, academic approaches to learning, rather than child-centered and play-based approaches.

### Integrating Families

#### *Purposes and Intensity*

The aging population is changing the face of families in Hong Kong (Chief Secretary for Administration's Office, 2015; Senior Government Official interview). Projections indicate that one-third of Hong Kong's population will be aged 65 or above by 2041 (Census and Statistics Department, 2017b), with birth rates consistently falling below the replacement level of 2.1 (Census and Statistics Department, 2015a). The aging population is expected to lower Hong Kong's labor force participation rate and worsen

the dependency ratio from 4.7 working age persons per elderly person in 2014 to 1.8 in 2041 (Census and Statistics Department, 2015b). This is why the government sees it as a matter of prime importance to encourage optimum participation in the workforce, both by supporting parents of young children to work, and by supporting the young children themselves to develop to their full potential to enable them to participate fully in future.

In view of this demographic challenge, “every child is an asset” (Senior Government Official respondent). Families play an important role in children’s early lives and family empowerment, education, and support have thus been promoted in recent years, as ways to support development and education of young children.

*“As children are spending twice as much time at home as compared to kindergarten, parents [and other carers] are important partners of kindergartens, and are primary educators of their own children.”*

*(Senior Government Official respondent)*

### **Formality**

Hong Kong has a population policy that articulates the government’s desire to create a more family-friendly society (Government of the HKSAR, 2018). In his annual Policy Address in 2015, the former Chief Executive announced a series of measures that focused on strengthening child care support for working couples, offering more child care services, and ensuring implementation of statutory paternity and maternity leave (Chief Secretary for Administration’s Office, 2015). Statutory paternity leave has, in fact, been part of the Employment (Amendment) Ordinance 2014 (Labour Department, 2014).

In the policy document associated with the FQKEP, the government further notes the importance of parent engagement and parent education. It requires all kindergartens that participate in the Scheme to step up parent education regarding children’s

developmental needs and their role in supporting their children, and sharing of good practices for family support and for facilitating children's healthy growth. There are also expectations that kindergartens should promote parents' involvement in children's learning, and encourage parents' participation in school events, such as parents' day, parents' seminars, and workshops. It also encourages kindergartens to set up parent-teacher associations to provide more opportunities for parent participation in school activities, in order to enhance home-school communication in less formal settings (Education Bureau, 2016c).

### *Efforts and Strategies*

Parent education has been promoted collaboratively by different departments and bureaus, with foci/themes relevant to policy perspectives (Committee on Free Kindergarten Education, 2015). The EDB has been organizing seminars for parents with children at kindergarten age every year, aimed at helping parents understand developmental needs and the age-appropriate expectations of children aged 3 to 6, and understand what high-quality kindergarten education is. The EDB has also published and distributed booklets to all kindergarten parents with recommendations on providing children with pleasurable and diversified life experiences that meet developmental needs. In addition, it provides Home-School Cooperation Grants to encourage kindergartens to set up PTAs, and organizes home-school cooperation and parent education activities, such as parent seminars and voluntary work, to promote parent participation in school activities, and support of children's learning (Committee on Free Kindergarten Education, 2015). A video entitled "Quality Kindergarten Education" (Education Bureau, 2015e) has been produced to promote holistic child development, and to dissuade parents from putting too much pressure on children.

Parent education is also promoted by the Department of Health and the SWD. MCHCs organize parent education activities under their "Parenting Program," which aims at empowering parents by imparting knowledge and skills for child-rearing, working in

partnership with families, schools, and the community. The Family Health Service of MCHCs runs a 24-hour hotline, which provides information on common issues of concern, and also a consultation service during office hours (Committee on Free Kindergarten Education, 2015). The SWD's Family Life Education Units, IFSCs, ISCs, and Integrated Children and Youth Services Centers organize a wide range of educational and promotional programs such as seminars, talks, groups, family activities, and exhibitions to enhance family functioning (Committee on Free Kindergarten Education, 2015; Senior Government Official interview).

### *Evidence of Impact*

Empirical data about the effectiveness of strategies are not yet available. Our respondents felt that the government should take a more proactive role and allocate more resources to strengthen parent education (Academic and Head of Service interviews). Besides distributing leaflets and publications and organizing seminars for parents, other means of parent education (e.g., courses, workshops, support groups) should be used to reach out to more parents. As kindergartens are susceptible to market forces, and parents often prefer more academic training in the kindergarten curriculum (see Chapter 2 for discussion of this phenomenon in relation to Chinese cultural beliefs about education), some concerns were raised by two respondents about whether kindergartens themselves have the ability to train parents, and questioned the effectiveness of using PTAs as means to promote holistic child development (Academic interviews). Clearly, there are some challenges that will test the government's ongoing responsive policymaking.

### **Integrating/Linking with Communities**

#### *Purposes*

Although Hong Kong has a high percentage of dual-earner families, and although the labor force participation rate for women has risen continuously in the recent past, it is



still far below that for men (54.8 and 68.8 percent in 2015, respectively) (Census and Statistics Department, 2016e). It is felt that insufficient child care services are one of the major reasons why women do not want to have children (Chief Secretary for Administration's Office, 2015). Hence, engaging the community to support the development and education of young children has been seen as a way to empower families, boost birth rates, and promote women's participation in the labor force.

### *Formality*

The community has played a significant role in ECEC service delivery. As mentioned in earlier chapters, ECEC services are mostly provided by NGOs in Hong Kong. The government seeks to further strengthen community involvement in ECEC, and to help women balance family and work commitments, through its population policy (Chief Secretary for Administration's Office, 2015). Specific strategies are mentioned below.

### *Efforts and Strategies*

*Launching the Neighborhood Support Child Care Project:* The Neighborhood Support Child Care Project was launched in 2008 to provide low-income parents with child care services. Children under 6 whose parents are working long hours, have unstable and/or unconventional working hours, have emergency needs, or require child care for other various reasons but cannot afford alternative child care support are eligible for these services (Social Welfare Department, 2008b). This service is not a substitute for center-based ECEC but complements it. In the first phase (pilot) of the Neighborhood Support Child Care Project, care was provided only for children below the age of 6, but since 2011, parents with children below the age of 9 can avail themselves of the service (Social Welfare Department, 2016h). The project covers all 18 districts in Hong Kong (Social Welfare Department, 2016c) and promotes the spirit of mutual help at the neighborhood level.

Through the project, child care is provided by neighborhood “nannies” (who are volunteers but may receive an honorarium) either at the child’s or at the nanny’s own residence. Center-based care groups are also available for children over 3. Services are provided by NGOs and subsidized by the SWD. The project has been revised with a more structured program, and honorarium has been increased to attract more homemakers with child care experience to become neighborhood nannies (Senior Government Official interview).

*Supporting More Work-Based Child Care:* The government is actively inviting NGOs to establish work-based child care centers through the Special Scheme on Privately Owned Sites for Welfare Uses. Three NGOs have responded positively so far and will operate child care centers for children under 3 without government subsidies. The government will also explore the feasibility of introducing child care places offered by NGOs at the new government building for civil servants (Senior Government Official interview). Further, the government hopes to provide more child care services by establishing new subsidized, standalone child care centers, and by increasing places for after-school care services provided by NGOs in high-demand districts for children under 6 (Chief Secretary for Administration’s Office, 2015).

*Introducing the Pilot Scheme on On-Site Pre-School Rehabilitation Services:* Even with the Comprehensive Child Development Service (CCDS) in place, there are still long waiting lists for places in centers that provide specialized services. Therefore, in 2015, the SWD launched the two-year Pilot Scheme on On-Site Pre-School Rehabilitation Services through the Lotteries Fund. This is one distinctive characteristic of Hong Kong—unspent funds raised by lotteries are allocated to supporting social welfare projects (Government Information Centre, 2015).

Under the Pilot Scheme, multi-disciplinary service teams from NGOs offer on-site services to participating kindergartens to provide early intervention to children on the waiting list for SWD-subsvented special child care. The Scheme also provides

professional advice for kindergarten teachers/child care workers, to assist them in working with children with special needs, and renders support to parents whose children have special needs. It provides 2,925 places for over 450 kindergartens (Senior Government Official interview).

*Encouraging the Community to Establish Baby Care and Breastfeeding Facilities:* The government has also published the Advisory Guidelines on Baby Care Facilities and the Practice Note on the Provision of Baby Care Rooms in Commercial Buildings to encourage government departments and private developers respectively to provide baby care and breastfeeding facilities in their premises. The Committee on Promotion of Breastfeeding set up by the Food and Health Bureau will strengthen the promotion of breastfeeding through various means, including implementing the Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative in health care facilities, enhancing breastfeeding support in workplaces and public venues, and stepping up publicity and public education on infant and young child feeding (Chief Secretary for Administration's Office, 2015).

### *Evidence of Impact*

Most community projects are relatively small in scale, so it is difficult to assess whether a project which seems to be effective in one neighborhood could be applicable for others. The efforts and strategies stated above are still relatively new, thus there is a lack of evidence to show their impact. Even so, a review of available documents (e.g., Legislative Council meeting minutes) show there was a high demand for projects such as the Neighborhood Support Child Care Project, even though some organizations questioned the reliability of the child care services offered by the volunteer-based projects (Hong Kong Federation of Women's Centers, 2013).

## Integrating/Linking with Primary Schools

### *Purposes*

The successful transition from kindergarten to primary school lays a solid foundation for lifelong learning and fosters in children the ability and confidence to face the ever-changing world (Committee on Free Kindergarten Education, 2015). In Hong Kong, the play-based pedagogy encouraged in ECEC settings by the government are often at odds with the more academically driven pedagogy of primary schools.

### *Formality*

Hong Kong, like other parts of the world, has been working for some time to address the issue of the transition from kindergarten to primary school (Committee on Free Kindergarten Education, 2015). The *Guide to the Pre-Primary Curriculum* (Curriculum Development Council, 2006) and the *Basic Education Curriculum Guide—To Sustain, Deepen, and Focus on Learning to Learn (Primary 1 – 6)* (Curriculum Development Council, 2014) address the importance of a smooth transition from kindergarten to primary school. Teachers of both levels are encouraged to work collaboratively to share information about each child's knowledge and skills so that learning can build on prior knowledge and experiences. Enhancing the interface between kindergarten and primary education is also one focus in current review of the *Guide to the Pre-Primary Curriculum* (Senior Government Official interview).

### *Efforts and Strategies*

The primary school sector has worked with the kindergarten sector to implement various measures. Some good practices were identified by the Committee on Free Kindergarten Education (2015). For example, kindergarten and primary school teachers had paid visits to each other to have a better understanding of each other's school lives and curricula. Simulated Primary 1 classes had been organized by kindergartens with

the help of primary schools towards the end of Upper Kindergarten (K3) to familiarize children with some basic primary school routines. Sharing sessions were organized by primary schools and kindergartens for K3 students and parents. Many primary schools also offered on-site experiential days for their prospective students to familiarize them with the new environment, teachers, and classmates.

### *Evidence of Impact*

Despite the joint efforts of the government, and the kindergarten and primary school sectors, the Committee on Free Kindergarten Education (2015) reported that the interface between kindergarten and primary education remains an issue for different stakeholders. For example, parents consider the curriculum and modes of learning in primary school to be so different from those in kindergarten that the transition causes a great deal of stress for their children. Children may even develop negative attitudes towards learning. Kindergarten teachers, at the same time, are often pressured by parents and primary school teachers to introduce primary school curricula in K3, to “better prepare” children for primary school.

### **Innovations**

The government and Hong Kong society have paid increasing attention to the involvement of not only families, but also the primary schools and the broader community in the provision of ECEC. The government appears to view ECEC as a way to both nurture the holistic development of young children and enhance economic productivity. Contrary to the traditional way of looking at ECEC as the responsibility of families and ECEC providers only, the innovation here is the recognition that the community and the primary school system are also important gears of the ECEC system, and government involvement is vital to its success (Kagan & Kauerz, 2012). In fact, the Committee on Free Kindergarten Education (2015), after reviewing the current provision of kindergarten education, has suggested a revision of the United Nations Children’s Fund’s (UNICEF’s) *Ready Children, Ready Schools, and Ready Families* model of

school readiness for community and family mobilization. The “community” element has been added to the model for Hong Kong, which now consists of three domains—ready children, ready schools, and ready families/communities. The definition of family has also been extended beyond parents to include also grandparents as a social resource. Such a realization of different gears in the ECEC system is nascent.

### **Contributions to Sustainability**

The long-term effects of the above are yet to be seen and it will take time. But in all cases, a cohesive and comprehensive system will drive toward quality, equity, and sustainability in ECEC, if the following challenges can be resolved.

### **Challenges**

#### *Long Working Hours*

Hong Kong is one of the most expensive cities in the world and is infamous for long working hours. An average work week is 50.11 hours, the longest among 71 global cities studied in UBS’s (2015) annual “Prices and Earnings” study. Dual-income families are prevalent. Morgan McKinley Hong Kong (2016) conducted a survey of working parents in Hong Kong, and found that, on average, they spent only two hours and 51 minutes daily with their children, with the majority (89 percent) stating that “work” was the main reason they were prevented from spending time with their children. It can be very challenging for working parents to balance professional careers while spending sufficient time to bond with their children, let alone to support ECEC services.

#### *Sociocultural Values and Expectations*

As mentioned in Chapter 2 and other chapters, education in Hong Kong is valued highly, and parents often focus on academic training rather than holistic development of young children. To counter this, the notion of “happy childhood” has been promoted strongly in recently years. However, an emphasis on competition and “winning at the

starting line” are still deeply rooted in the culture. A respondent described the attitude of parents:

*“I see that there are three types of parents, in terms of their views on kindergarten education: 1) those who have the mentality of not losing at the starting line, and being prepared for the long run; 2) those who have a different mindset, and believe that children should learn and develop naturally; and 3) those who at first, believe in giving children a happy childhood, but eventually get influenced by others, and begin to follow the mentality of not losing at the starting line. There is strong peer and cultural influence. Parents think that they should do the same thing, as everyone around them is pushing children to not lose at the starting line.”*

*(Influential Community member interview)*

This mentality, together with increased affordability of kindergartens through the PEVS, led to some parents exploiting the subsidization scheme in order to get “more” schooling for their children, for example, by enrolling their child in two kindergartens—one in the morning with a voucher subsidy, and another in the afternoon paid for by themselves (Head of Service interview).

### ***Governmental Attitude towards the 0-3 Age Group***

While parental involvement with children between the ages of 0 and 3 is very important for child development, several respondents felt that the government does not see this as its responsibility (Heads of service interviews). As reviewed, services for this age group are mainly provided by the SWD as welfare for needy families, rather than as education. As a result, support and engagement for parents and communities involved with this age group are still very limited.

### *Kindergartens,' Primary Schools,' and Communities' Readiness*

Although the Ready Children, Ready Schools, Ready Families/Communities model has been proposed by the government, considering the sociocultural influence of the Hong Kong context, it is uncertain whether primary schools and the community in general are truly ready to support a smooth transition from kindergarten to primary schools. One respondent in this study commented:

*"It is not just about the transition to primary school in September. It is about the ripple effects from the curriculum, pedagogy, practices, attitudes, and qualifications from primary school. We need to rethink the curriculum and practices in primary school. Some parents are monster parents, and some choose alternative pathways in primary school, such as Direct Subsidy Scheme schools or international schools, but they may not be able to afford it. Early childhood teachers are generally looked down upon. There needs to be cross-sector collaboration that is enhanced by policies. This is also very much linked to professionalism."*

*(Head of Service interview)*

Kindergartens may also not be ready to be supported by other sectors. For instance, when talking about the Pilot Scheme on On-Site Pre-School Rehabilitation Services, one respondent commented that kindergarten teachers, who often have full work schedules, may not have opportunities to communicate and learn from the multi-disciplinary service team that visits kindergartens (Influential Community member interview).



## Chapter 14: Research, Demonstration, and Evaluation

### Key Points

- Data on important indicators such as births, immunization, and use of government services are collected regularly, are reliable, and are open access.
- However, other information on conditions of children and enrollment in ECEC services are scattered. There is a need for more pooling of data collected across departments.
- With regards to research, research findings from government-funded program evaluations are taken seriously and inform strategic policy planning.
- Relatively sparse funding for ECEC research in Hong Kong, however, has led to a paucity of policy-relevant ECEC research, though the quantity has been increasing in recent years.

### Research

#### *Nature of Research Enterprise*

Hong Kong does not have a central unit for child-related research. However, the Census and Statistics Department provides adequate, relevant, reliable, and timely benchmark information on demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of the population for public policy formulation and academic research purposes. Different governmental bureaus, such as the EDB, the SWD, Department of Health, and the Central Policy Unit, also conduct research related to their own policy domains.

Universities and NGOs bear the major responsibility for conducting ECEC research. Major university research centers on child research include the Centre for Advancement in Special Education (CASE) of The University of Hong Kong, and the Center for Child and Family Science of the Education University of Hong Kong. NGOs such as the Hong Kong Council of Social Service, UNICEF Hong Kong, Caritas Hong Kong, Tung Wah

Group of Hospitals, and Po Leung Kuk also conduct local research on children and families.

### *Kinds of Research Supported*

ECEC did not gain prominence in local policymaking until recently; therefore, support for local research has been limited. ECEC was introduced in 2011 as a priority theme of the Quality Education Fund, which was established by the government in 1998 to finance projects for the promotion of quality education in Hong Kong. The theme strand in the Quality Education Fund, entitled “Promoting Whole Child Development in Pre-Primary Education,” aims to foster “children’s development in physical, cognitive, as well as personal, intellectual, social and aesthetic aspects,” develop “an integrated and balanced curriculum in promoting whole-child development,” and establish “a culture of mutual respect, sense of responsibility and independence within and across kindergartens” (Quality Education Fund, 2011).

After reviewing the current local kindergarten sector, and examining the feasibility of providing free and high-quality kindergarten education, the Committee on Free Kindergarten Education (2015) advised the government to support more research to keep the sector better informed about latest trends in child development, children’s learning needs, and development of kindergarten education all over the world. Five policy-oriented topics were suggested: (i) transition from kindergarten to primary school, (ii) teacher professionalism, (iii) children with diverse needs, (iv) longitudinal studies of children’s learning, and (v) effects/impacts of different modes of services on children.

### *Use of Research Findings*

Even though local research has been limited, as pointed out by one respondent, the strength of Hong Kong’s early childhood education is that there is an awareness of developments in early childhood education in different parts of the world (Academic

interview). Research findings from both local (albeit limited) and overseas settings are often referred to in policy planning. For instance, in making its recommendations to the government about the implementation of free kindergarten education, the Committee on Free Kindergarten Education (2015) set up the Sub-Committee for Objectives, Teacher Professionalism, and Research to study various issues of ECEC from the existing research. The committee also conducted more than 50 meetings with local stakeholders to collect valuable data to inform possible objectives and implementation strategies. With the five policy-oriented topics suggested (see previous section), it is expected that Hong Kong will advance the use of research findings for better ECEC policymaking.

### **Pilot (Demonstration) Efforts**

#### *Nature of Pilot Efforts*

Pilot efforts are used in Hong Kong as small-scale preliminary projects, conducted in order to evaluate feasibility, time, cost, and effect, before turning them into full-scale projects. Often, the government seeks good initiatives from NGOs (Senior Government Official interview). For instance, the Pilot Scheme on On-Site Pre-School Rehabilitation Services, described in Chapter 13, was conceptualized from trial on-site services by individual social welfare organizations, either through sponsorship of charitable trust funds, or from their own resources (Government Information Centre, 2015). According to one respondent:

*“We prefer to interact positively with NGOs, to come up with the next steps for action. The Government is humble and responsive to the community. We have resources, policy-makers, and administrators, and are ready to listen and interact constructively. We seek good initiatives from NGOs. If they have potential, with concerted efforts from stakeholders and users, we will help scale*

*up initiatives, and eventually shoulder responsibilities by taking over initiatives, and make sure the new policy is affordable and sustainable.”*

*(Senior government official respondent)*

### ***Kinds of Pilot Efforts Undertaken***

Pilot efforts in ECE can be divided into two kinds: efforts focusing on the care of young children, and efforts focusing on children with special educational needs.

***Efforts Focusing on the Care of Young Children:*** The Neighborhood Support Child Care Project, launched in 2008 as a pilot project, and the Pilot Project on Child Care Training for Grandparents, introduced in 2016, are both efforts focusing on the care of young children by utilizing existing community resources. The former encourages stay-at-home mothers in the neighborhood to be nannies for other children, while the latter mobilizes grandparents to take care of grandchildren. More information on the two projects can be found in Chapter 13.

***Efforts Focusing on Children with Special Educational Needs:*** Both the Comprehensive Child Development Service (CCDS), which was launched as pilot project in 2005, and the Pilot Scheme on On-Site Pre-School Rehabilitation Services, introduced in 2015, focus on providing timely and multi-disciplinary supportive services for young children with special educational needs.

### ***Use of Results from Pilot Efforts***

Results from the pilot efforts are used to refine the projects and eventually lead to the scaling-up of the projects. One example is the CCDS. The government first piloted it in four districts in phases, starting from July 2005. A review of the pilot service was completed in 2007, and the findings affirmed that the CCDS model was worth pursuing. The government decided to scale up the pilot services and extend it to five more districts between 2006 and 2009. In his *2010-11 Policy Address*, the Chief Executive announced that the CCDS would be extended to other districts to benefit more needy

families. Today, all the 31 MCHCs, 65 IFSCs, and 2 ISCs in Hong Kong are providing CCDS (Department of Health, Hospital Authority & Social Welfare Department, 2014).

## **Program Evaluations**

### *Nature of Program Evaluations*

Official program evaluations can be conducted by their respective government departments or bureaus, advisory and statutory bodies (such as the Education Commission), as well as independent committees, universities, or other reviewers commissioned by the government. Evaluations usually cover both formative and summative aspects. Formative evaluation focuses on whether the implementation of the new initiative has been proceeding according to plan and how this has impacted the service, as well as identifying the conditions necessary for the successful implementation of the initiative. The summative evaluation aims to examine whether there are changes in the services in terms of access, acceptability, equity, effectiveness, and efficiency. Data collected are used to inform improvement and refinement of programs.

### *Kinds of Program Evaluations*

Regular program evaluations or reviews are conducted to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of programs. They are usually conducted or commissioned by the relevant government departments or bureaus. Besides the regular program evaluations, the Audit Commission conducts independent audits of government programs and schemes to examine their economy, efficiency, and effectiveness.

### *Use of Program Evaluation Results*

Program evaluation results are used to inform the improvement and refinement of programs. For example, the EDB set up a working group under the Education Commission in 2009 to take forward a review of the PEVS, due to the controversy

generated by the scheme and opposition expressed by parents and teachers. The working group recommended 12 improvement measures, 10 of which were endorsed by the EDB in 2011. In 2013, a separate audit report was released by the Audit Commission (2013), noting further challenges in terms of fees, rentals, and participation rate, and it made seven more recommendations for follow-up action.

### **Innovations**

The Census and Statistics Department provides accurate and reliable information to evaluate the ECEC in Hong Kong. The government funds many research projects that are conducted by various universities and colleges of Hong Kong. The University of Hong Kong has contributed to the development of culturally and contextually relevant tools to measure learning outcomes and a system for reviewing and enhancing ECEC quality. Similarly, The Education University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong Baptist University, and the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology have also contributed to the development of ECEC quality and services in Hong Kong through various research projects. The different universities often collaborate on research projects to strive for improvement of the ECEC system.

### **Contributions to Sustainability**

International experience shows that government performance can be greatly enhanced by incorporating rigorous and relevant evidence into all stages of policy development, such as problem analysis, policy formulation, policy implementation, and program evaluation. The Hong Kong government has become more open-minded toward the increased generation and uptake of evidence in policymaking.

## Challenges

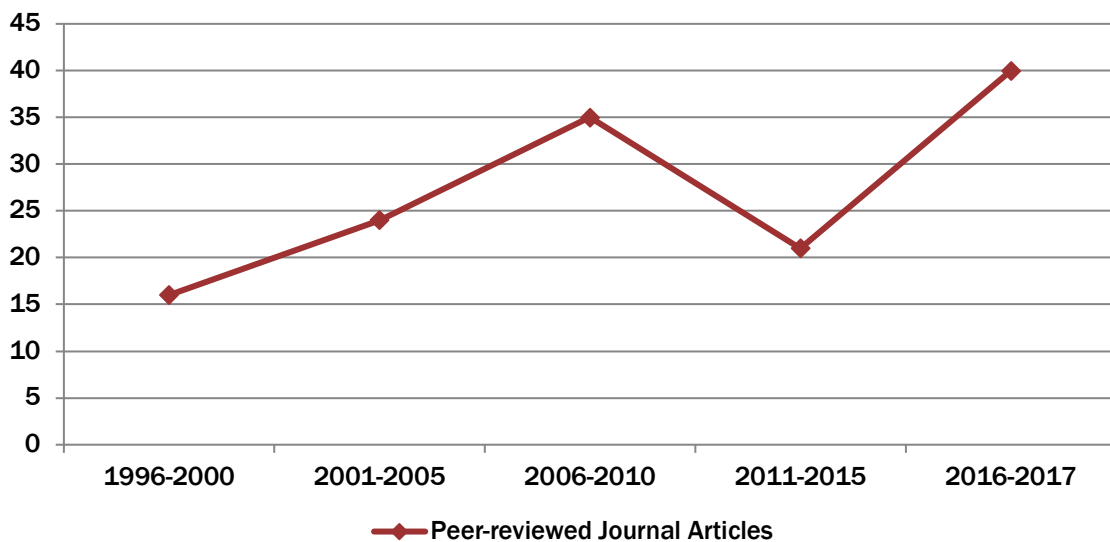
### *Limited Local Research*

Hong Kong has only recently begun to pay significant attention to ECEC, and the responsibility of conducting research still lies almost entirely with individual researchers at universities and NGOs. Thus, local, policy-relevant ECEC research is limited and fragmented (Committee on Free Kindergarten Education, 2015; Influential Community member and heads of service interviews). Instead, most policy formulation relies on evidence from overseas. For example, when deciding whether to subsidize half- or full-day kindergarten education, the Committee on Free Kindergarten Education (2015) relied on findings from international research (see Committee on Free Kindergarten Education, 2015, pp.8-9). Of course, problems arise from basing ECEC policy decisions in Hong Kong on the findings of research conducted in other cultural contexts, and there is a dire need for more local research to inform ECEC policy and service delivery in Hong Kong (Influential Community member, Heads of Service and Academic interviews).

In a preliminary search through Google Scholar with the keywords, *Hong Kong* and *Early Childhood* or *Kindergarten*, limited to the past 20 years (i.e., from 1996-2017), we found that there was a gradual increase in the amount of peer-reviewed journal articles published within the first three time periods: 1996-2000, 2001-2005, and 2006-2010. We screened abstracts and omitted those we thought were not relevant based on our criteria (available from authors as is the full list of titles). The numbers, shown in Figure 14.1, may be a reflection of key policy changes that were occurred in Hong Kong at those given times, including the Education Reform in 2000, the Harmonization of Pre-Primary Services in 2005, and the implementation of the PEVS in 2007. The significant drop in research output in the 2011-2015 period may be related to the new “3+3+4” academic structure implemented in 2012, whereby Hong Kong students now receive six years of secondary education (instead of seven) and four years of higher education (as opposed

to three). The change in the academic structure in tertiary institutions may have impacted the research output of individual researchers who are typically in tertiary institutions. The increase in research on early childhood education in 2016-17 may particularly reflect the rising importance of the field in anticipation of the FQKEP, implemented in September 2017, and respond to the Government's attention and support to the field. Of course, it should be noted that there are several limitations to this broad-brush approach, as many papers would not be reflected because of their titles. Further, we did not consider book chapters and books. Despite this limitation, we believe this approach provides some useful information about research.

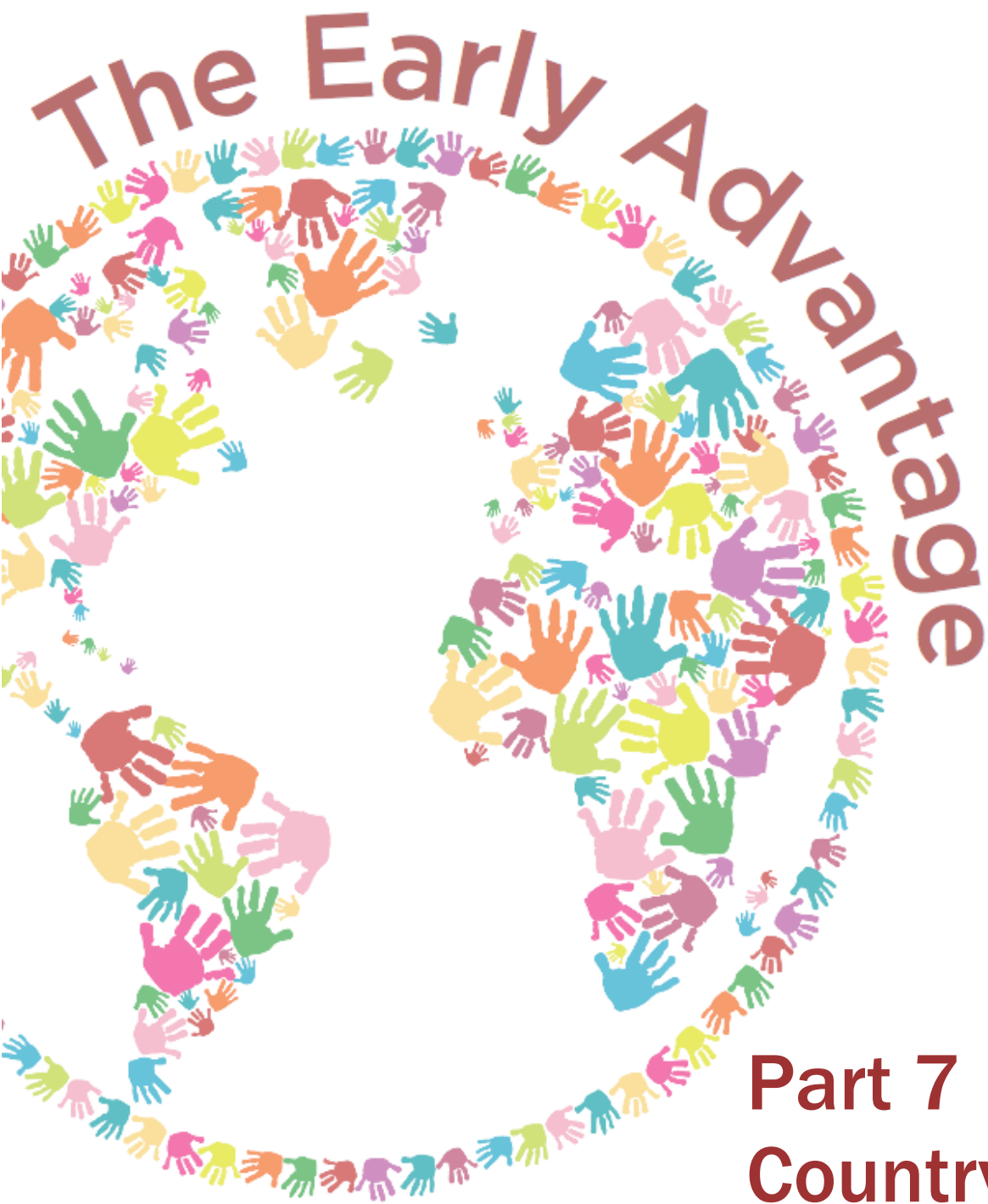
**Figure 14.1 Trends in Early Childhood Education Research in Hong Kong**



*Lack of Central Databank on Child Development Indicators:* Without a central database that contains all the local child development information, researchers find it time-consuming to obtain data from various sources. They often need to contact different departments, such as the Census and Statistics Department, the EDB, the SWD, the Department of Health, and others to get information that is generated by and specific to these respective departments, such as birth weight, gender, parental



qualification/occupations, and socioeconomic status. The fragmented nature of existing local data has meant that it has not been possible to aggregate findings and to provide the quality and strength of evidence required, to paint the whole picture of ECEC and child development in Hong Kong.



**Part 7**  
**Country**  
**Analysis**

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## Chapter 15—What’s Effective and Why?

The data presented in the previous chapters clearly indicate that Hong Kong has comprehensive medical services to promote good health in all young children and effective supports for the pre-primary education of children ranging in age from 3 to 6. It has been argued that this state of affairs has been brought about by the government’s commitment to supporting all children to become upwardly socially mobile and to contribute optimally to Hong Kong’s future workforce. Changes in government policy suggest that it is willing to take responsibility not only for providing high-quality school education, but also for ensuring that high-quality kindergarten education is available to all, regardless of parent income. There is now nearly universal enrollment in formal pre-primary programs (kindergartens, child-care centers and kindergarten-cum-child care centers), because government financial support has ensured that children of families from socio-economically or ethnically disadvantaged groups have equal access to early childhood services. Furthermore, significant milestones in government policies on ECEC have contributed to raising teacher-child ratios, instigating sound pre-service and in-service training policies for teachers, providing support for children from needy families or with diverse learning needs, enhancing parent engagement, and improving school premises and facilities. Cumulatively, these policies have brought about positive changes in early childhood policy and practice for children ranging in age from 3 to 6. While government funding is available to pay for child care for children below age 3 from low income families, subsidies for child care services for children below age 3 are not universal.

In this chapter we revisit earlier discussions of the unique and distinctive features of Hong Kong’s early childhood system. We substantiate our arguments with examples of the viewpoints presented by our respondents, who represent diverse perspectives on the ECEC system in Hong Kong. These include senior government officials, heads of service, influential community members, and academics. First, we reflect on the extent to which Hong Kong’s ECEC system is effective with regard to the quality of services,

the emphasis on equity, the efficiency of services, and the financial sustainability of early childhood services. Second, we consider how and why certain factors have contributed to the effectiveness of the system. Third, we present a number of paradoxes in the Hong Kong ECEC system that make it somewhat unique. Fourth, we articulate the challenges, some of which have been discussed in earlier chapters, for the ongoing success and development of the ECEC system in Hong Kong. Finally, we review opportunities for the further development of ECEC in Hong Kong.

### **Extent to Which ECEC System Is Effective Predicated on our Systemic Outputs**

#### *Defining the Effectiveness of an Early Childhood Education System*

Before we consider whether or not Hong Kong has an effective early childhood system, we need to articulate characteristics we believe are hallmarks of an effective system. We assume that an effective early childhood system has a clearly articulated vision and objectives that are monitored regularly. In this system, variables specifying input, output, outcome, and impact are measured regularly, and the system is dynamic and efficient. Changes in input in the form of newly implemented policies are rapidly amended if they cause unanticipated problems that compromise the attainment of the larger goals of early education. We also believe that an effective system has policies with associated implementation schedules that are implemented efficiently. Further, policies and processes in this system are clearly and regularly documented.

Additional specific criteria to define the effectiveness of an early childhood system include enrollment levels, the quality of services, equitable access to high-quality services, teacher certification, the quality of pre-service and in-service professional development, and adequate funding to provide a high standard of education. In addition, an effective system has either a lead ministry that coordinates services for young children or excellent collaboration among government departments, and between the government and non-governmental/voluntary organizations. In our view, an effective system is a dynamic one that has evolving policies that take account of the

needs of children, parents, society, and the economy, and gives adequate attention to the cultural context. Above all, an effective system needs to have the best interests of children in mind at all times.

### *Quality*

Notwithstanding the fact that the definition of preschool quality is contested, the professional literature discusses preschool quality in terms of structural and process dimensions (Rao & Li, 2009) and we do the same. The Hong Kong government's efforts to promote structural quality are evident in its policies. Over the years, there have been improvements in the recommended teacher-student ratio (from 1:20 to 1:15 and now, to 1:11) and the requirements for kindergarten teachers (from five passes in the public-school examination to a Qualified Kindergarten Teacher qualification to a Certificate in Early Childhood Education) and principals (from a Certificate in Early Childhood Education to a Bachelor's of Education in Early Childhood Education). These changes have greatly increased the percentage of qualified and trained kindergarten teachers and principals in Hong Kong. Nonetheless, the need to further upgrade the professional qualifications of kindergarten teachers from a certificate level to a bachelor's degree has continually been explored and discussed (Committee on Free Kindergarten Education, 2015). The implementation of the Quality Assurance Framework, which encompasses school self-evaluation and external review conducted by the EDB, has also ensured the stringent monitoring of the structural quality of kindergartens in Hong Kong.

In terms of process quality, several government documents have been issued to provide guidance on pedagogical practices and curriculum planning, including the *Operations Manual*, the *Dos and Don'ts*, and *Guide to the Pre-Primary Curriculum* (Curriculum Development Council 1996; 2006; 2017). The *Guide* promoted *child-centeredness* and *holistic development* as the core values of pre-primary education and promoted a play-based approach in the design of the curriculum, while covering the six learning areas (physical fitness and health, language, early mathematics, science and technology, self

and society, and arts). The government's emphasis on teaching and learning, assessment, transition, catering for diversity, and home-school cooperation is also reflected in the *Guide*.

### *Equity*

As noted several times in this case study, there is universal access to kindergarten education in Hong Kong. Equity in access is achieved as evidenced by the enrollment rate in kindergarten education in Hong Kong, with no child deprived of schooling because of abilities or financial background. The objectives of the FQKEP, which replaced the PEVS in September 2017, are to promote equal opportunities by providing high-quality and highly affordable pre-primary education for all children aged 3-6, regardless of socioeconomic background. Importantly, however, the policy provides only 15 hours a week of free kindergarten education, and some children require full-day center-based care and children attend the 14 percent of kindergartens that are not eligible for government funding. However, this is not perceived to be a major equity issue, as the latter typically enroll children from economically advantaged backgrounds.

Equity in participation is reflected in the government's support for children and families with diverse needs. Various targeted services and support are provided through the EDB and other government departments for children from needy families, children from ethnic minority backgrounds, and children with special educational needs or at risk of developmental delay. This is done to promote their inclusion in mainstream education and to facilitate their well-being, learning, and development. As outlined in previous chapters, such measures include: (i) the Fee Remission Scheme to defray school fees and school-related expenses for children from low-income families; (ii) school-based professional support; (iii) grants to schools to cater for the teaching and learning of Chinese among children from ethnic minority backgrounds; and (iv) assessment and rehabilitation services for children with special educational needs. Despite growing efforts from the government to cater to student diversity in

kindergartens, there remain long waiting lists for identification and assessment services and support services. There are also a limited number of places available in special child care centers or residential special child care centers.

While equity in the quality of education is generally ensured through the EDB's stringent monitoring and quality assurance mechanisms that are in place for kindergartens, large variations in quality exist between and within different types of kindergartens (Chan & Rao, 2014; Ng & Rao, 2013). This is often be linked to factors such as school funding and resources. For instance, the amount of subsidy calculated under the former PEVS favored schools that offered two half-day sessions over those that offered whole-day sessions. Today, under the FQKEP, the calculation of the subsidy on a per-student unit cost basis may place small-scale kindergartens at a disadvantage. Further, not all children may have access to high-quality services. Children from higher-income family backgrounds generally attend more well-resourced kindergartens that have more qualified and experienced teachers and better facilities than those from low-income families. This, in turn, has been found to be related to children's school readiness skills. Research indicates the children from socioeconomically disadvantaged districts have a higher risk of developmental vulnerability than those from socioeconomically advantaged districts (Ip et al., 2015). Further governmental support and targeted efforts aimed at children and families from disadvantaged backgrounds may need to be considered in response to initial differences in school readiness skills that may emerge from varying degrees of stimulation in home learning environments and kindergartens.

### *Efficiency*

The efficiency of an educational system can presumably be determined as a function of the inputs and the outcomes/outputs. However, these are hard to specify in the field of education. An input indicator could be the spending per child and an output indicator can be children's outcomes. If we consider children's readiness for school as the

outcome variable, Hong Kong has a very efficient early education system. All children receive three years of kindergarten education. Efforts are exerted by both kindergartens and primary schools to prepare children for the transition to school in the last year in kindergarten. In fact, some argue that children in Hong Kong are over-prepared for the academic demands of primary school, suggesting that kindergarten education is not as play-based as it should be.

### *Sustainability*

ECEC programs in Hong Kong are very sustainable primarily because of high demand and high supply. While early childhood provision for 3- to 6-year-olds is provided in the private sector, recurrent government funding enables sustainable services and supports durability.

### **Why Is ECEC Effective in Hong Kong and What Matters?**

How have Hong Kong's historical, demographic, sociocultural, political, socioeconomic, education, and policy contexts led to its current system of early childhood education? This section addresses this question and describes Hong Kong's distinguishing characteristics, particularly as they relate to young children. In doing so, it examines key historical, geographical, political, socioeconomic, and cultural characteristics that have contributed to shaping the attitudes, values, and circumstances of services provided for young children. Specifically, the section addresses the way in which the Hong Kong government's responsive policymaking and implementation have led to equity in its early childhood policy. It illustrates how the government has been responsive to demographic trends, to global trends in policy and practice, and to the demands and needs of civil society.



### *Context Matters*

*Return of Sovereignty to China in 1997:* As mentioned in Chapter 2, Hong Kong has a unique culture, formed by both Chinese heritage and 150 years of British rule. One of the first significant events in the development of ECEC in Hong Kong was an influx of refugees during the 1940s and 1950s, which led to the establishment of child care centers as a welfare service for needy families (Ng et al., 2015). The government's response to this influx also led to the development, by the 1990s, of financial assistance for pre-primary services and fee assistance for lower-income families. However, at this time, early childhood education was left mostly to the free market (Rao & Li, 2009). Over the years, it continued to be undervalued and excluded from the compulsory education system. Thus, no public kindergartens were established in Hong Kong, even following its return to China in 1997 (Rao & Li, 2009). In 2000, however, the new government introduced a reform of the education system (Chan & Chan, 2003). ECEC was given status for the first time, as part of this reform, as the foundation for lifelong learning, and this has led to its maturing towards a comprehensive, well-developed system in terms of provisions for 3- to 6-year olds.

*Demographic Characteristics:* As described in Chapter 2, Hong Kong is a small geographical region, with a high population density and a highly efficient public transport system. The Mass Transit Railway, for example, moves up to 75,000 people per hour in each direction on each line (Mass Transit Railway, 2017). With such an efficient public transport system, kindergartens are easily accessible for all 3- to 6-year-olds. This is one of the factors that contributes to universal enrollment in preschools in Hong Kong. The high number of kindergartens in Hong Kong also contributes to the high level of access. In 2017-18 school-year, there were 1,030 kindergartens in Hong Kong, of which 881 were local and the remainder were non-local (Education Bureau, 2018). As noted earlier, a local kindergarten follows the *Guide to the Kindergarten Curriculum* and uses Chinese as the primary language of instruction.

A number of changing demographic characteristics, including an aging population, decreased birth rate, and events including the outbreak of SARS in 2003 and the global financial crisis in the past decade had some negative consequences for kindergarten education in Hong Kong and led to the closure of many kindergartens (Yuen, 2008). But the declining number of children has inadvertently had a positive impact on the quality of ECEC provision, as the teacher-student ratio has decreased considerably.

### *Uniqueness of Culture*

Hong Kong's Confucian-heritage Chinese society stresses filial piety, respect for the teacher as the source of knowledge, and the valuing of education. At the same time, the territory has embraced Western views of education that prioritize child-centered, play-based learning for young children. This fusion of traditional Chinese and Western progressive ideas may have, in some ways, both benefited and challenged its ECEC system. While Western ideas are evident in the pedagogy, Chinese values play a significant role in the socialization of young children (Rao, Sun & Zhang, 2014). As noted earlier, Chinese families typically value education as a path to upward social mobility. This means that parents put pressure on kindergarten teachers because they want their children to gain entry to the best primary schools, so they insist on homework, formal literacy, and numeracy teaching (Fung & Lam, 2008). The system is highly competitive, with some children having portfolios of skills and certificates compiled in order to impress when applying for places in the best kindergartens. Up until the reforms of the 2000s, there was an entrance examination for primary school, which also contributed to a heavy emphasis on rote learning in kindergartens (Ng et al., 2015).

Although the entrance examination has now been abandoned, the tendency toward didactic teaching methods that stress rote learning has remained (Chan & Chan, 2003). One positive consequence of this belief in the importance of education, however, is the high rate of school attendance, and the low dropout rate. Confucian values of

conformity, discipline, behavioral control, and academic achievement are reflected strongly in Hong Kong kindergartens, and these have been found to have positive effects on children's behavioral and emotional self-regulation (Rao, Sun & Zhang, 2014).

An outcome of Hong Kong's unique blend of Chinese and British traditions is the emphasis on language teaching in kindergartens. With citizens expected to be trilingual (Cantonese, the mother tongue, and Putonghua and English, the two languages of business) and biliterate (Chinese and English), both Putonghua and English are taught from the first year of kindergarten. Hong Kong is a city of migrants, with a diverse population and relatively large groups of ethnic minorities, and the government has made it a priority for these groups to learn Chinese in order to integrate into the society (Leung, 2017). To this end, beginning in the 2017-18 school year, the government has allocated additional resources to eligible kindergartens with eight or more non-Chinese speaking students to help them lay the foundation for Chinese language learning (Leung, 2017). Chinese and English language professional development courses will be provided to prepare teachers for this purpose.

### *Values Matter*

*Government Beliefs about Young Children and Education:* As noted in earlier chapters, the Hong Kong government believes that primary responsibility for the upbringing of young children rests with the family, and it supports parents so that they can provide better care to their children. This is reflected in its policies for children under 3. The Hong Kong government's strategy of providing strong (legal) infrastructure, allowing policy debate, and ensuring proper implementation of policy but at the same allowing market forces to prevail is reflected in its outsourcing of early childhood education for 3- to 6-year-olds to the private sector. Another significant reason why ECEC is effective in Hong Kong is that the government prioritizes it as an investment in the future welfare of society and as a way to maximize the potential of the labor force. During the interviews, senior government officials and influential community members stressed

that investment in education and human capital development should start in the early years.

*A Focus on Equality and Equity:* The government's policies suggest a focus on equality and equity. For example, the government has made provisions to train teachers in skills to help children from ethnic minorities become fluent in Cantonese, the medium of instruction in most kindergartens. Further, through the above-mentioned financial subsidies for children from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds, the government is ensuring that no children will be left behind at the starting gate.

*Maintaining Hong Kong's Competitive Edge:* As noted in Chapter 2, Hong Kong is a renowned financial center, and does not want to be left behind in the education field. Hence, it keenly follows global trends. In fact, one of the strengths of Hong Kong's ECEC system lies in the fact that there is a strong awareness of global developments in ECEC (Academic interview).

### *Governance Matters*

*Strong Government Structure, Stability and Responsive Policymaking:* There is no doubt that the policies and incentives of a stable government, with sufficient funds to invest in ECE, have continually improved the quality of early childhood education in Hong Kong (Rao & Li, 2009). The government's structure and stability has also supported cross-sectoral collaboration that enhances services for young children. It enables responsibilities to be divided according to expertise. For example, as discussed in Chapter 11, the Department of Health takes responsibility for health promotion and disease prevention for the birth-to-5 age group and the Social Welfare oversees child care centers for children under 3 as well as special and residential child care centers for children under 6. Kindergartens and kindergartens-cum-child-care centers fall under the auspices of the EDB. Hence, Hong Kong has a "split" system (Bertram et al., 2016), as discussed in Chapter 11, with governance and management split among three

government entities (Department of Health, Department of Social Welfare and the EDB). It also has a split-phase structure (Bertram et al., 2016), as services for children under 3 and those above 3 are typically provided in different settings. It has been argued that having a lead ministry overseeing all prior-to-school services results in better-coordinated services (Bennett, 2008). On the other hand, many countries have split systems, and the split systems seem to work in Hong Kong. This may be because of its strong governance, good coordination across departments, and small geographical footprint. The close collaboration among the Department of Health, the SWD, the EDB, the Police, and the Comprehensive Child Development Service ensure timely identification of the special educational needs of young children and their families, and appropriate intervention (Senior Government Official interview). Nevertheless, some key stakeholders have suggested that there is not enough coordination and collaboration among government departments (Influential Community member interview).

### *Durable Financing Matters*

Hong Kong has a strong economy; hence the government has been able to invest heavily in policies related to ECEC, increasing its support for both kindergartens and child care centers since the 1990s. This includes funding for teacher training, kindergarten-based educational research, and a voucher scheme and quality assurance monitoring (Pearson & Rao, 2006). With the implementation of the PEVS from the 2007-08 school year, a direct fee subsidy to parents and parallel financial support for teachers' professional upgrading were provided (Government of the HKSAR, 2017a). This was a significant move because, prior to that, funding for ECEC was so minimal that the sector was once depicted as the Cinderella of the Hong Kong education system—ill-treated and neglected by the government (Rao & Li, 2009). The PEVS encouraged public funding to be used to support young children's learning needs in non-profit kindergartens (Li, Wong & Wang, 2008). This helped to strike a balance between the free market, parent choices, and government control. In order to control

quality, schools were required to meet quality benchmarks in order to cash in their vouchers—a unique feature of Hong Kong’s system was to link encashment to quality (Li, Wong & Wang, 2008). The voucher scheme is also an example of the government’s responsive policymaking, as is its successor, FQKEP, which came in response to the criticisms of the PEVS received from stakeholders and the general public.

*Increased Government Spending:* The government’s commitment to ECEC is illustrated by the new FQKEP, through which the government is providing additional resources in the form of recurrent expenditure to help to ensure its sustainability. As noted in Chapter 4, one of the goals of this new policy is to enhance teacher quality by providing funding to attract more qualified teachers and by providing ongoing professional development to improve professional competency (Senior Government Official and Influential Community member interviews).

As a guarantee of its commitment to this quality enhancement, the government plans ongoing reviews of the package and support of more local research in kindergarten education (Influential Community member interview). Similarly, the SWD is investing heavily in services to support young children. Welfare is the second largest area of government expenditure, and the amount of spending on family and child services has increased markedly (Senior Government Official interview).

In the 2017-18 school year, the government's recurrent expenditure on kindergarten education is expected to increase by about HK\$2.7 billion (US\$350 million) compared to the previous school year (Leung, 2017; Senior Government Official interview). One further indicator of the government’s commitment to investing for the future is to make grants equivalent to one teacher’s salary for kindergartens admitting eight or more non-Chinese speaking children (Senior Government Official interview). This is being done to make ECEC equally accessible to children from all ethnicities. One noteworthy and very positive trend is that the government has allocated progressively more funding into improving the teacher:child ratios as well as the quality of teachers, so that today, about

40 percent of teachers have degrees, and this number is still increasing (Senior Government Official interview).

It should be noted that, while listening to the stakeholders, the government does adopt a “no argument” philosophy, particularly when it comes to funding. As a result, despite the government’s commitment of an increase in spending on kindergarten education, it is still difficult to get it to commit the “more” that is always going to be needed (Influential Community member interview).

*Kindergarten Education is Outsourced to the Private Sector:* Hong Kong has a unique system of outsourcing kindergarten education to the private sector, meaning that private organizations provide all the early educational services, though they usually have government financial support. As one interviewee astutely commented, marketization of child care is aligned to the government’s vision of ECEC. That is, the fact that the government believes that responsibility for ECEC rests with the family has led to reliance on market forces to provide ECEC (Head of Service interview). Nevertheless, kindergarten education is affordable for all families regardless of their socioeconomic status, thanks to generous government subsidies through the erstwhile PEVS and now FQKEP. This distinctive funding model for kindergarten education helps to bring about a balance of the free market, parental choices, and government control of the quality of the private-sector kindergartens. Nevertheless, it has been opined that government should provide more subsidies for full-day services and that government control over the preschool sector is insufficient (Academic interview). This is because there is a loophole in that the law: playgroups that children attend with a caregiver are not regulated by the government. Hence, some entrepreneurs provide developmentally inappropriate academic learning activities to young children under the guise of being playgroups (Chapter 11).

### *Professional Capacity Matters*

The ECEC policy in Hong Kong has evolved around the development of high expectations and training requirements for pre-service and ongoing in-service professional development. That every teacher needs to be trained to cater for diversity illustrates that these policies have evolved in response to local and global needs, including those expressed by the members of the civil society. Evolving policy measures have implications for the quality of teacher training. Teachers must be well-trained and equipped to cope with ethnic diversity and English learning (Academic interview). Another positive development is increased support for non-Chinese speaking children (Head of Service interview). It is to the benefit of ECEC in Hong Kong that the government respects opinions of different stakeholders and gathers their input through focus groups for teachers, providers, and principals (Academic interview). Another example of the evolving policy is the trend to move away from the traditional teacher-led, didactic pedagogy, and as a result, ECEC has improved and is less “primary-school oriented” (Head of Service interview). Taking note of what the rest of the world is doing, the government is pushing for a smoother transition between kindergarten and primary school.

### *Timing Matters*

One criticism by stakeholders is that while the government appears to be supportive of ECEC, change still occurs slowly. Examples include the halting pace at which the introduction of degree-level training requirements for teachers (Influential Community member interview) and of new support measures for continuous professional development (Head of Service interview) have occurred.

One factor that is critical to the cycle of ECEC policy enhancements is the timing of the chief executive election in Hong Kong. The former chief executive made a pre-election promise to move toward 15 years of free education, from age 3 to 17. He fulfilled his



pledge, and at the end of his five-year term Hong Kong had free kindergarten services (Senior Government Official and Influential Community member interviews). His FQKEP clearly showcases responsiveness to the views of civil society on the shortcomings of the current PEVS. It also provides an example of responsiveness to the views of academics, senior EDB officials, and stakeholders on the importance of high-quality education, as the policy is referred to as the Free Quality Kindergarten Education Policy.

### *Innovation Matters*

One example of innovation in ECEC in Hong Kong is the hybrid model of subsidization for families of children with economic needs that acknowledges both market forces and social engineering. Another example is the way in which the government views ECEC as a significant stepping stone to Hong Kong's future welfare. With an aging population and declining birth rate, the government recognizes that the future lies in maximizing the potential of the local labor force (Senior Government officials' interviews).

One way to address this is to give every child the opportunity to develop his/her full potential starting from the critical early childhood years—hence the support given to ECEC. The other way is by encouraging women to participate fully in the workforce and providing affordable child care to facilitate this.

### *Policy Matters*

As mentioned above, ECEC policy in Hong Kong has evolved around responses to the needs and situations of the times and is moving towards a doctrine of proportionate universalism. Proportionate universalism refers to actions taken to reduce inequalities through making provisions such as health and education available universally, but also by providing financial assistance to families that is proportionate to their level of disadvantage. The doctrine of proportionate universalism is thought to promote fairness and social justice (Marmot & Bell, 2012).

This is particularly relevant to two groups of children who are especially socially disadvantaged in Hong Kong—those from poor, single-parent families, and those from poor, non-Chinese-speaking ethnic minorities. Lack of affordable full-day child care affects the ability of single parents to engage in paid employment. Children from non-Chinese-speaking ethnic minorities are disadvantaged in an educational system where Chinese is the main spoken and written language. The basic tenets of proportionate universalism are to give every child the best start in life as well as opportunities to maximize their potential and take control of their own lives, as well as to create opportunities for fair employment and good work for all (Marmot & Bell, 2012). In ECEC in Hong Kong, the PEVS and its successor, the FQKEP, have evolved in response to the need to give all children equal access to the same quality of education, regardless of socioeconomic status or ethnicity. As well as subsidizing fees for children from needy families, these schemes have created opportunities for these families to access a wider choice of kindergartens.

Another response to the needs of the disadvantaged is the increased support for non-Chinese speaking children (Head of Service interview). Policies have been introduced to train teachers to address ethnic diversity (Academic interview), and fiscal incentives are provided to kindergartens enrolling eight or more ethnic minority children. This is done in order to provide extra teaching support to help lay the foundations for strong Chinese language competence that will allow children to better integrate into school and society.

### **Paradoxes in Hong Kong's Early Childhood System**

Our analyses uncovered several paradoxes that exist within the ECEC system in Hong Kong. They relate to Hong Kong's small size, government policies including funding, and parental cultural beliefs.

*Small Size:* One characteristic of Hong Kong that contributes to effective policy implementation is its small size and high population density. This promotes easy access to kindergartens for all children.

However, high density can also work against effective kindergarten provision. Space is at premium, and it is difficult to find suitable premises with sufficient space for kindergartens (Head of Service and Academic interviews). Many kindergartens do not have outdoor play areas, and allocation of premises for kindergartens is important in town planning (Head of Service interview).

An issue related to space constraints is the increased demand for full-day kindergarten programs by working parents. Half-day kindergarten programs are the norm in Hong Kong, and bi-sessional programs allow more children to access kindergarten education, without doubling pressure on already limited space. However, this also means that the schedule is crammed and rushed, not allowing sufficient time for children's play (Influential Community member interview).

*Outsourcing of Kindergarten Education:* One paradox related to funding arises from the government's outsourcing of early childhood education to the private sector, which has been discussed throughout this document. The government regulates the kindergarten sector and does it well. Government control in terms of governance (policies and accountability), legal frameworks (registration and reporting requirements), and fiscal support complements the NGO sector's strengths of nurturing vulnerable groups and attuning to the needs of the public (Clark, 1995).

There is no doubt that there needs to be a balance of professional autonomy and diversity, with guidance from the government (Head of Service interview), and there are advantages accrued from not micro-managing the kindergarten sector (Influential Community member interview).

At the same time, it has been suggested that the government is leaving far too much to the private sector, and not doing enough to take the initiative to improve the sector (Academic interview). The right balance of government intervention and NGO services can be achieved if both parties share common objectives (Clark, 1995).

The Hong Kong government has a strong culture of quality assurance and inspection and has set high standards for quality. For example, the Department of Social Welfare monitors and evaluates programs based on a system of standards (Senior Government Official interview). As the stringency of operating standards for kindergartens has increased over the years, structural quality has also improved. But, paradoxically, the need for kindergartens to meet parental demands for their survival means that many of the attempts to improve pedagogical quality (or change the nature of pedagogy) are fraught with difficulties. As discussed earlier, Hong Kong parents have very definite ideas about how they think kindergarten education should be operated. Kindergartens that need to cater to market demands in order to survive are likely to end up giving parents what they want, rather than what is necessarily best for children (Academic interview). Hence, preschools are often preparatory schools for primary school.

Play-based pedagogical approaches are promoted in ECEC, but the primary school education system is very demanding, and this has led to kindergarten programs that promote drilling children in procedures, getting correct answers, and requiring pencil-and-paper tests. One reason suggested for this in interviews was lack of sufficient early childhood expertise in the EDB (Influential Community member interview). Another is the need for a broader theoretical base for teacher preparation (Academic interview).

*Distribution of Funding:* Another paradox is that the government provides resources to support ECEC, but these resources are not always distributed as they should be. For example, while there is support for identifying and assessing students with special needs, there are not enough resources to implement interventions, which add to schools' workloads (Head of Service and Influential Community member interviews).

The Pilot Scheme on On-Site Pre-School Rehabilitation Services, mentioned in Chapter 13, is ongoing (Senior Government Official interview), but there seems to be a passing of the baton from the EDB to the SWD when it comes to meeting the needs of children with special educational needs (Academic interview).

*Unintended Consequences of Government Funding:* The FQKEP has markedly increased funding to the sector to improve kindergarten quality, but unintended consequences may inhibit further quality enhancement. This paradox was illustrated by one respondent, who stated, “If there is free lunch, how can we ask for quality?” For example, under the new policy, some kindergartens may face deficits because they are unable to charge extra fees due to the government’s policy of free education (Academic interview). The inability to charge fees may adversely affect the educational resources available for the kindergartens. The increased funding may also inadvertently harm teacher quality. While greater funding may allow centers to pay kindergarten teachers higher salaries, principals may use their flexibility to hire cheaper, more junior, and less experienced teachers to avoid paying the increased salaries (Academic interview).

*Teacher Quality:* Another paradox also relates to teacher quality. The government places a high value on teacher preparation and continuous professional development, yet existing plans do not give priority to increasing the salaries of kindergarten teachers. Kindergarten teachers’ salaries are lower than their counterparts in primary and secondary schools, and this affects the quality of teachers who are attracted to this profession (Influential Community member interview). It should be noted that primary and secondary school teachers require a Bachelor’s degree, while kindergarten teachers only require the equivalent of an Associate degree (see Table 10.2).

*Paradoxes Related to Cultural Values:* While Chinese parents value education highly and send their children to kindergartens, their concept of “what is the best” may not necessarily be in the best interest of the child. Hong Kong parents’ mentality of “winning at the starting line” was mentioned by three respondents (Heads of Service

and Influential Community member interviews). Several respondents also mentioned the clear need for parent support and education (Heads of Service and Influential Community member interviews).

The PEVS backfired when parents placed too many demands on young children. For example, one inadvertent outcome that arose from the voucher system—which was intended to support low-income families—was that middle-class parents enrolled their children in two kindergartens (one half-day using the voucher, and the other half-day paying fees) in order to get more hours of kindergarten for their children (Head of Service interview). Respondents stressed the need for the government to engage in public education/communication efforts to change the mindsets of parents (Head of Service and Influential Community member interviews).

The paradoxes mentioned above are to a large extent a function of the Hong Kong government's strategy of providing strong infrastructure, allowing policy debate and ensuring proper implementation of policy, but ultimately allowing market forces to prevail (see Chapter 15). Hong Kong's limited natural resources, and relatively high poverty rate and Gini coefficient also contribute to the existence of these paradoxes.

### Challenges

Our respondents identified a number of concerns within Hong Kong's early childhood education system. These included issues related to (i) the government's vision and strategy for the development of early childhood education; (ii) the mode of the funding for the new Free Quality Kindergarten Educational Policy; (iii) the attraction and retention of teachers; (iv) the lack of strong government intervention to educate parents on early years development and education; and (v) the changing demographic structure of the population.

### *Vision and Strategy*

Respondents expressed concern that there was a lack of a coherent vision and a lack of clear and consistent strategy for children under 6 (Influential Community member and Heads of Service interviews). Problems were identified with the split-phase and split-governance system, and the separation of care and education (Influential Community member and Heads of Service interviews). While respondents were very positive about the high level of government commitment to support children from 3 to 6 years of age, they felt that not enough was being done to support the under-3s. The birth-to-3 age group was considered to be the responsibility of the family, and the government was faulted for not doing enough for children in this age group (Academic and Heads of Service interviews).

Key stakeholders claimed in interviews that the progress of ECEC in Hong Kong is very slow, seemingly “two steps forward and then we take one step back” (Head of Service interview). This has been attributed to the lack of a clear position on ECEC development; the lack of a forward-thinking plan for educating the stakeholders, especially teachers and parents; and a tendency to take a piecemeal view rather than look at the whole picture of population policies and the different departments’ roles in ECEC (Influential Community member and Head of Service interviews).

There were many challenges identified by ECEC leaders relating to cross-sectoral collaboration (Influential Community member and Heads of Service interviews). There is a need for collaboration between the Town Planning Board and the EDB so that every newly built government housing estate not only has a kindergarten but has adequate facilities for young children’s outdoor play (Head of Service interview). More collaboration is also needed between the Department of Health and the EDB on the medical needs of children up to the age of 6, including provisions for their care if they are sick and unable to attend school while their parents have to be at work (Head of Service interview).

One further challenge relates to support for research in ECEC in Hong Kong. It was felt that more local research was needed (Influential Community member and Head of Service interviews) and that research should be systematic and longitudinal (Head of Service interview), and ultimately used to inform policies (Head of Service interview).

### *Mode of Funding*

There are some challenges associated with the outsourcing of ECEC to the private sector, which means service providers must be responsive to market conditions. Since service providers are profit-driven, there are concerns about the instability brought about by supply and demand forces. Support from NGOs can enhance quality, but it is not feasible to depend on NGOs to sustain equity and equality in education (Academic interview). Further, only children enrolled in half-day programs are entitled to free kindergarten education; needy families may require additional subsidies to enroll in whole-day programs (Influential Community member interview).

### *High Rental Costs in Hong Kong*

Another challenge for the government's mode of funding is the high cost of property in Hong Kong. As a result of this problem, the costs associated with renting kindergarten premises can impact ECEC settings' sustainability (Academic interview). Many half-day kindergartens are located in non-government-owned premises, which mean that they have to pay rent and are susceptible to market conditions. The government has plans to address this issue to some extent, by increasing government-owned premises in order to reduce the need for kindergartens to pay rent in the open market (Senior Government Official interview). However, this promises to be a long-term initiative.

### *Attracting and Retaining Teachers*

There is insufficient funding to attract, retain, and develop good teachers (Influential Community member interview). As noted earlier, however, increasing the salary scales



might cause schools to employ less-qualified teachers or dismiss their more senior staff (Influential Community member interview). Teacher professional development is also a challenge. Currently this is left primarily to the kindergartens, which means either that teachers do not get sufficient opportunities for professional development and pick up bad practices, or they become fearful about their qualifications and try to juggle their work with top-up degree study. The latter may have an adverse impact upon the quality of their pedagogy (Academic interview). Further, the lack of a coordinated system for in-service professional development that will develop teachers' mindsets as well as their skills (Influential Community member and Head of Service interviews) was identified as a weakness. Clearly, this area of teacher support and development is a key challenge that needs to be addressed.

### *Parent Education*

Parent education has been described as a particular challenge in view of the paradox described above. Simply stated, parents want the best education for their children, but their traditional views and beliefs about what education should be may in fact be hampering the delivery of the best provisions. To some extent, the EDB is attempting to address the problem by offering seminars for parents to help them to understand the developmental needs and age-appropriate expectations for children aged 3 to 6. It is also producing and distributing booklets about appropriate experiences to meet children's developmental needs (Senior Government Official interview). It may be necessary to look at alternative ways of delivering parent education, such as in the schools, or even through liberal studies in secondary school (Academic interview).

While the government regulates registered kindergartens, some operators offer what may be considered developmentally inappropriate services for children under the guise of playgroups. The government introduced the PEVS to decrease the financial burden on parents, and perhaps hoped that their extra disposable income would be used for child-appropriate holistic development. But some parents used this extra income to

enroll their children in two kindergartens or to send them to academic institutions (which may be disguised as “playgroups”). Indeed, the government may not do enough at the system level to prevent some entrepreneurs in this free market economy from providing developmentally inappropriate “educational” services to young children and to stop the “hot-housing” of preschool children.

### *Demographic Factors*

One of the challenges facing Hong Kong is its population decline, due to the aging population and decreasing birth rates. This highlights the importance of developing every child’s full potential for contribution in the future (Senior Government Official interview). The falling population and the decline of cross-border children coming to kindergarten in Hong Kong as the result of a changed policy to restrict cross-border births may lead to the government considering providing more subsidies to encourage more whole-day kindergartens in the future (Academic interview).

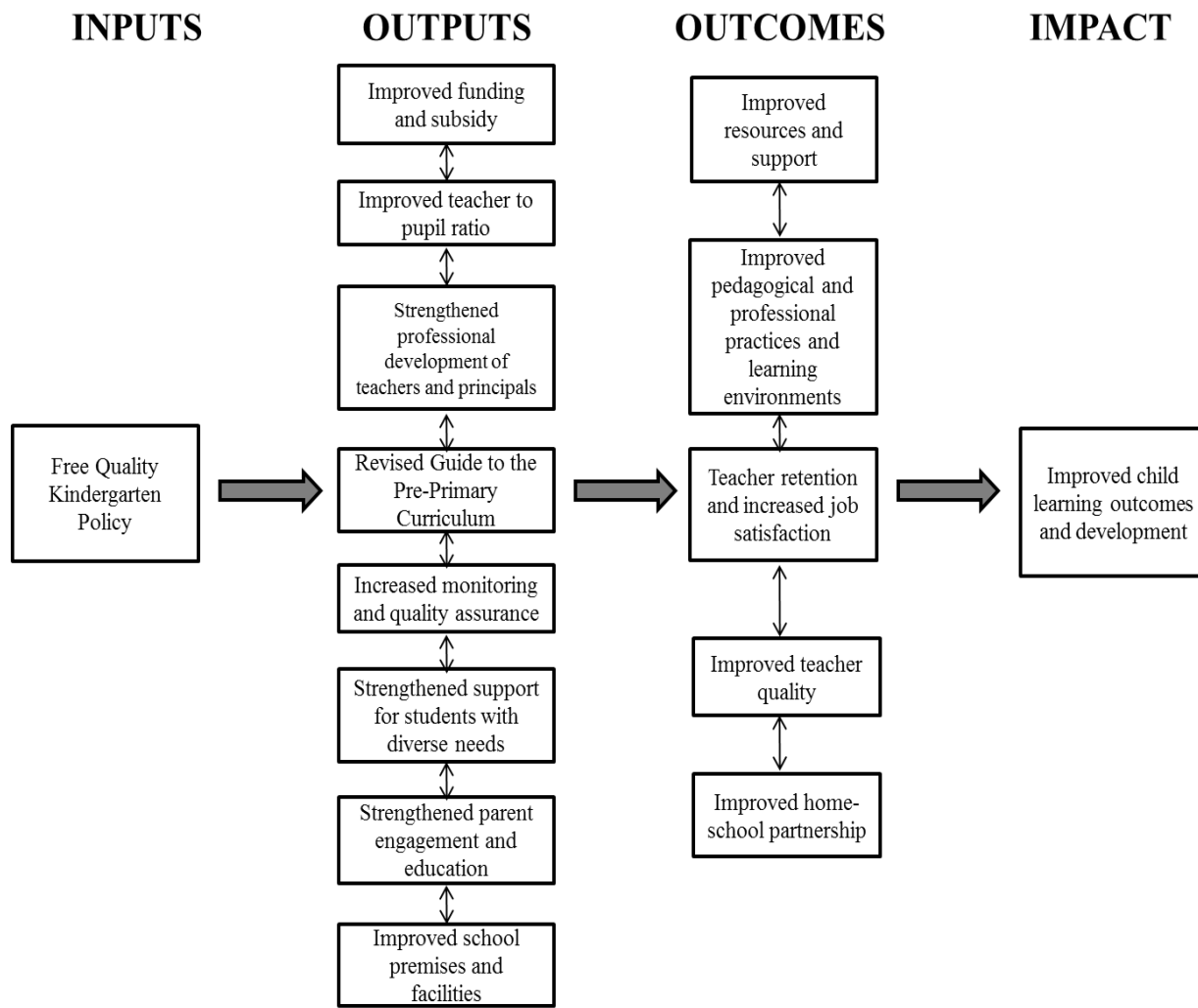
Cross-border marriages and relatively high divorce rates have led to large numbers of single-parent families. These families have been unable to find adequate accommodations due to Hong Kong’s high cost of housing. Efforts are being made to address the financial issues faced by single parents, but the families continue to face financial and accommodation challenges (Senior Governmental Official interview).

### **Opportunities**

The implementation of a new Free Quality Kindergarten Education Policy is a watershed moment in Hong Kong’s early education policy and has the potential to have a very positive impact on the center-based learning experiences of young children in Hong Kong. The specific strategies that will be used to drive kindergarten quality can be mapped as a Theory of Change. The government of the HKSAR will enhance funding to the kindergarten sector. This financial support will allow schools to improve the teacher-student ratio, improve school premises and facilities, and provide better

support for students with diverse needs. The funding will also allow principals and teachers to participate in more professional development activities. In turn, there will be an increased need for increased monitoring and quality assurance by the Kindergarten Inspectorate. It is ultimately believed that these outputs will lead to the following outcomes: improved resources and support for kindergartens, improved teacher quality and learning environments for children, increased job satisfaction for teachers, and better home-school cooperation. The impact of this policy is to ultimately have a positive impact on children’s development and learning outcomes.

**Figure 15.1 Mapping the new Free Quality Education Policy on Theory of Change**



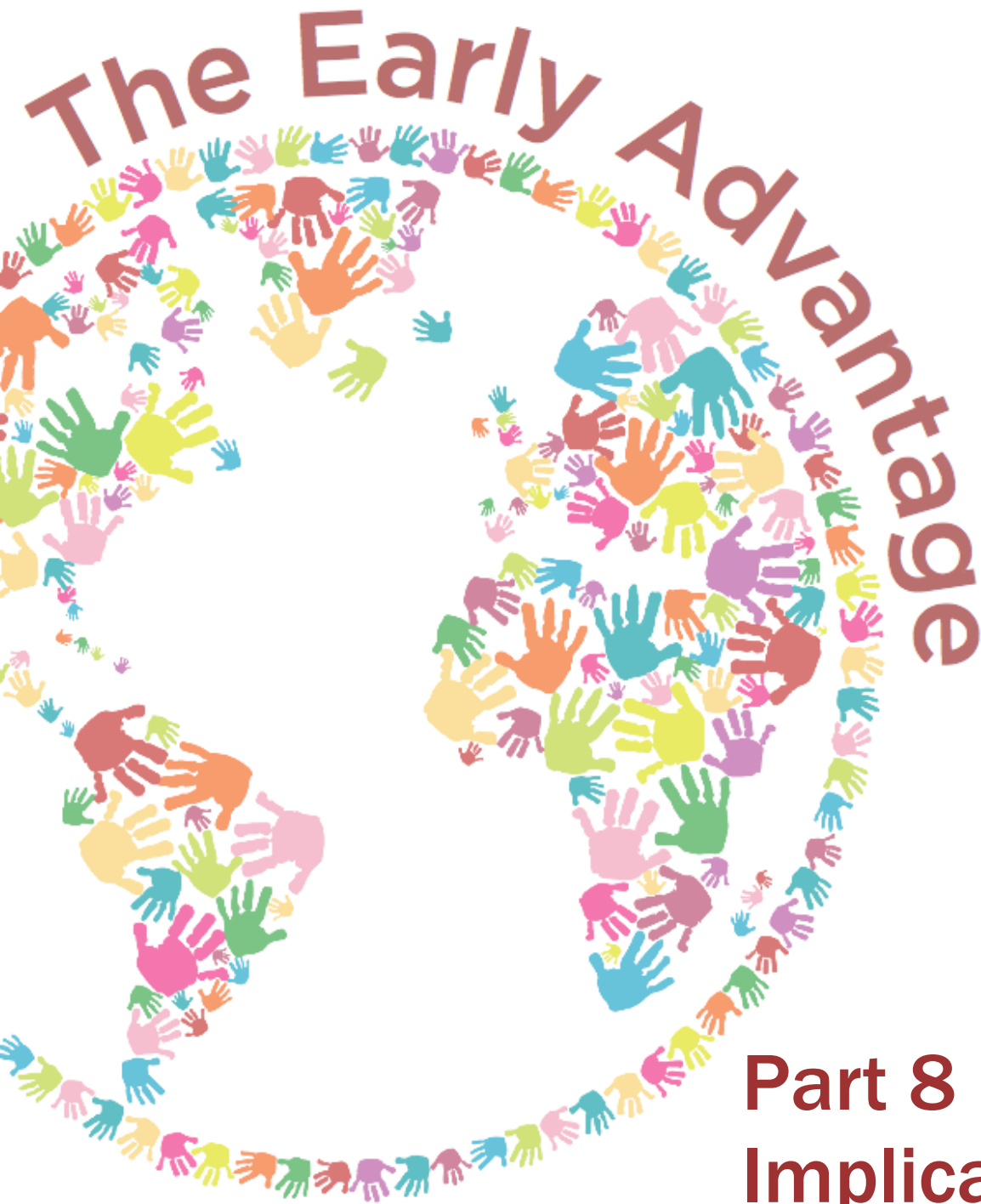
### Conclusions

This chapter has described “what matters” in contributing to the effectiveness of ECEC in Hong Kong, illustrating how governance, demographics, and the unique cultural context have combined to contribute to an effective ECEC system. Hong Kong’s ECEC system is effective in terms of strong government financial support, evolving policies and documents providing guidance on pedagogy and curriculum, support for professional development of teachers, and enhanced teacher:child ratios. Extra support is provided for children from low-income families and those from ethnic minority backgrounds. Children with special educational needs are also provided extra learning support.

While these distinctive characteristics pertaining to Hong Kong have undoubtedly contributed to an effective system, some have also led to paradoxes, which form further challenges for the ongoing development of ECEC. It is promising that the Hong Kong government has demonstrated the commitment to address these challenges in the future.

Earlier in this document, reference was made to the story of ECEC in Hong Kong having been compared to that of Cinderella (Rao, 2013; Wong & Rao, 2015). In response to the Education Commission Report No. 5 (Education Commission, 1992), Opper (1993) had written that kindergarten education was the Cinderella of the education system, neglected and living on scraps in the kitchen while the two sisters, the primary and secondary school sectors, enjoyed the riches handed to them by the Education Commission. In 2002, Rao (2002) continued this metaphor to indicate that there had been some improvements in the status, with Cinderella dressed and ready for the ball but still waiting to meet the prince. By 2009, the situation had become even more positive, with the evolution of policies to ensure that all children would have access to high-quality early education, which Rao and Li (2009) described as Cinderella now ready, hopefully soon, to meet the prince. By 2013 she had finally met the prince (the

Committee on Free Kindergarten Education) (Rao, 2013) and the stakeholders were all hoping for a positive outcome. Now the fairy tale has evolved even further; Cinderella has married the prince and is preparing, we hope, to live happily ever after. One of the respondents in this study used the analogy of another rags-to-riches story. “ECEC is turning from a frog to a prince; it is the heir to the country, the new generation, and the future of society” (Head of Service respondent). Clearly, thanks to the combination of factors described in this chapter, the time has arrived for ECEC in Hong Kong to take its place as royalty in its own right, and to flourish.



## Part 8 Implications

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## Chapter 16—Implications and Options

This chapter addresses the implications and options that may be considered to advance the quality, equity, efficiency, and sustainability of ECEC in Hong Kong. Consideration is accorded to the implications for practice, policy, research, and other contexts. Given competition from other world class cities and limited (to non-existent) natural resources, Hong Kong has had to exert considerable effort to maintain its position as Asia’s World City.

### Main Findings

The main findings from the systematic analysis of government documents, review of relevant research, and interviews with 12 key respondents are that (i) **responsive policymaking**; (ii) **good governance**; and (iii) **an educated and entrepreneurial population** have markedly influenced the landscape of Hong Kong’s ECEC system.

### *Challenges and Opportunities*

Some challenges that Hong Kong has faced over the last 80 years, including the influx of immigrants, SARS, and the Asian financial crises, were considered in Chapter 2. Hong Kong has not only weathered these difficulties, but has emerged stronger from dealing with them, because of responsive (both proactive and reactive) policymaking.

Further, some of these issues have had an important impact on the ECEC system. Nevertheless, Hong Kong still faces many challenges. These include maintaining its status as a world-class city; making the most of its small geographical footprint; and dealing with dissatisfaction among youth, issues related to promoting innovation, and inequity.

*Remaining Asia’s World City:* With increasing wealth has come—at least from a financial standpoint—an increasing amount to lose. The government is aware that for Hong Kong to remain “Asia’s World Class City” it must be proactive in policymaking. It has

also realized that strategic plans must include its youngest citizens. As discussed throughout the case study, the evolving policy development and the sharp increase in ECEC investment in recent years reflects the government's emphasis on investing in the early years to promote human capital formation and maximize the potential of the labor force. The government provides extra financial support for low-income families and children with special needs in order to promote equity and social justice, which are considered hallmarks of developed countries.

*Geographical Footprint:* Given Hong Kong's population density and small physical size, scale is not nearly as much an issue as innovation, given that supply has been meeting the demand. Rather, the challenge is that there are limited options given the physical constraints of ECEC facilities (e.g., in terms of play areas). Two possible methods of reducing such constraints are (i) to have fewer, larger ECEC facilities but use them more frequently; or (ii) to have large common facilities used by a larger number of children on a less regular (weekly) basis. The former is not feasible, as bi-sessional programs are the norm and there is a need and demand for full-day services. The latter is an option that, anecdotal evidence suggests, is being explored. For example, a large ECEC facility in a district can be frequented on different days of the week by children from different kindergartens in that district. It will continue to be of great challenge for the field to ensure that the quality of ECEC is not adversely influenced by the lack of physical space.

*Dissatisfaction Among Youth:* Hong Kong has provided a high-quality education for its youth, as shown by the territory's performance on cross-national studies of achievement (OECD, 2016b). One consequence of this is that well-educated youth need to be provided appropriate career opportunities and have some prospects of home ownership, or else they grow dissatisfied. One incident from 2015 that illustrates the dissatisfaction among youth is the "Occupy Central" protest. At its core, the protest had very much to do with the younger generation's feeling frustrated (in terms of job and earning prospects) and disenfranchised. There are already discussions and proposals as



to how to better prospects for youth in Hong Kong, and the Chief Executive of Hong Kong will have to address this very challenge. This issue is of relevance to ECEC because the government controls the school curriculum and the openness of Hong Kong. These two factors have been faulted for contributing to the “Occupy Central” protest.

*Intervention and Innovation in the Context of Capitalism:* Hong Kong has to manage the tension that exists between wanting to be an innovation hub for technology (Innovation and Technology Bureau, 2017) and a free market economy. Unlike the governments of South Korea, Taiwan, or Singapore, which take a more proactive role in promoting innovation, the Hong Kong government tries to set a level playing field, with clear boundaries, and lets the best win. Few governments in the world do this, and there is increasing pressure on the Hong Kong government to become more interventionist, because being interventionist clearly does not imply a lack of innovation, as is evident from the achievements of Korea, Taiwan, and Singapore. In the realm of ECEC, notably, Hong Kong government has clearly moved from laissez-faire to interventionist over the past decade (Lau & Rao, 2017). ECEC policy in Hong Kong has to strike the right balance between allowing market forces to prevail and exerting enough government control to promote quality and equity.

*Inequity and Innovation:* The extent of income inequity in Hong Kong has been discussed in Chapters 2 and 3. Some kindergartens and child care centers in Hong Kong, which are attended by about 20 percent of 3- to 6-year-olds, have not joined the FQKEP and as a result will be able to charge higher fees because they are better-resourced and have good reputations. But will allowing market forces to prevail contribute to inequity among the remaining kindergartens under the remit of the FQKEP? Parents will have a choice of kindergartens and they will possibly choose those that are innovative and have demonstrably better outcomes (as defined by the parents, and which may be at odds with ECEC objectives). In Hong Kong’s free market, competitive advantages tend to be temporary. This is because any innovations that are deemed to be profitable will

be adopted by the broader market. Not allowing higher comparative prices could well dampen innovation, and result in the government taking on the burden of the innovation.

The key is to make the base level of equity sufficiently high without dampening the reward aspects of the few that have a better product. It is important to bear in mind that the product that may be valued by the market (i.e., academically focused kindergarten education) may not be in consistent with what is recommended by the professional community (i.e., developmentally appropriate kindergarten education).

Given its history and the types of challenges described above, the HKSAR government has realized that Hong Kong needs an educated and adaptable workforce in order to continue to have unique advantages over cities in the PRC. This realization by Hong Kong perhaps helps explain why the US's National Center on Education and the Economy (NCEE) rated Hong Kong as having one of the top education systems in the world (Craw, 2017). While there is room for improvement, as noted throughout this report, Hong Kong also has in place what is considered to be the nine building blocks for a world-class education system (Tucker, 2016).

These nine building blocks are as follows:

1. "Provide strong supports for children and their families before students arrive at school
2. Provide more resources for at-risk students than for others
3. Develop world-class, highly coherent instructional systems
4. Create clear gateways for students through the system set to global standards, with no dead ends
5. Assure an abundant supply of highly qualified teachers

6. Redesign schools to be places in which teachers will be treated as professionals, with incentives and support to continuously improve their professional practice and the performance of their students
7. Create an effective system of career and technical education and training
8. Create a leadership development system that develops leaders at all levels to manage such systems effectively
9. Institute a governance system that has the authority and legitimacy to develop coherent, powerful policies and is capable of implementing them at scale”

(NCEE, 2015)

Hong Kong has to be “outward looking and inward correcting” to overcome stumbling blocks and maintain its competitive advantage. It must by extension have a population that can interact with multiple cultures and be educated to deal with the ever-increasing speed of change in the world. The government has realized that the foundation of this type of education must be laid at an early age, which may in part have motivated it to provide tuition-free ECEC beginning in 2017-18. As a result of this policy change, participating private kindergarten operators will have to follow government guidelines more closely (e.g., implement more play-based learning). It is possible that the increased government control over the ECEC curriculum may indeed result in a “globally relevant, but locally responsive” workforce. It appears that the government wants this workforce to contain the best administrators and the best entrepreneurs who, will in turn innovate to stay relevant in an increasingly competitive world.

### Implications for Practice

As noted earlier, documents including the *Operations Manual*, the *Dos and Don'ts*, and the *Guide to the Pre-Primary Curriculum* and its successor, *Guide to the Kindergarten Education Curriculum* (Curriculum Development Institute, 1996; Curriculum Development Institute, 2006, 2017) already promote child-centeredness and holistic development as the core value of pre-primary education. They endorse a play-based

approach in the design of the curriculum, while covering the six learning areas (physical fitness and health, language, early mathematics, science and technology, self and society, and arts). The government's emphases on teaching and learning, assessment, transition, catering for diversity, and home-school cooperation are also reflected in the *Guide*. Close monitoring of the implementation of the pedagogical approaches suggested in the *Guide* will be needed. Further, active communication of the benefits of the recommended approaches to learning to the general population is needed for all stakeholders to buy into these recommendations more whole-heartedly.

As noted earlier, one area that needs to be developed in order to ensure adequate facilities for young children's play is town planning. The government has plans to address this issue to some extent by increasing the number of government-owned large premises. This will reduce the need for kindergartens to pay rent on the open market. However, this will take a long time and feasible short term strategies should be considered.

Another implication of the findings is that more collaboration between the Department of Health and the EDB is needed to deal with the medical needs of a young child who is sick and unable to attend school and his/her parents have to be at work. An alternative to deal with this issue is to mandate employers to allow parental leave when children are too sick to go to school, though there are clearly other issues associated with implementing this.

### *Recommendations for Scaling Up*

It is recommended that parents' requests for extended hours of service are met and that early intervention services for children with special educational needs are scaled-up. One of the respondents pointed out the lack of resources in schools dedicated to helping children with special needs adds onto the school's administration work. It was also

noted that even though Special Educational Needs assessments are provided, the amount of support and services are not at all adequate (Head of Service interview).

*We need to take into account school space and needs. For instance, how many children are in need of such support? Would this add more pressure on schools? Is there an environment for extra support? How do we cater to individual learning? For the new policy, the different sectors need to work together. We will need senior officials to help guide and sustain these supports.” (Head of Service respondent)*

### ***Recommendations for Innovation***

Hong Kong as a city represents a unique blend not only of traditions of Confucianism and Western cultures but also of social welfare and capitalist traditions. This blend has provided an interesting platform for innovation, with a number of innovative schemes implemented in the ECEC sector specifically. The erstwhile PEVS (and now the FQKEP) are distinctive, as is the On-Site Pre-School Rehabilitation Services (Social Welfare Department, 2017a), discussed in Chapter 5. These unique schemes are context-sensitive, and the government needs to continue to foster the conditions that allow stakeholder-driven innovations to flourish.

### ***Implications for Policy***

To achieve equity, it is imperative that government financial support continues. This is needed to ensure that children of families from socioeconomically or ethnically disadvantaged groups have equal access to early childhood services. Policies to do so may include making parental education and kindergarten education more accessible for non-native Chinese speakers who at present may not fully participate in the ECEC system because of linguistic barriers.

*Teachers:* The government has enhanced structural quality through policies addressing issues such as teacher-student ratio, teacher qualifications, and professional development, and these must continue. In this realm, the government needs to upgrade the professional qualification requirements of kindergarten teachers to a degree level. At the same time, the government has the responsibility to raise the social status of ECEC professionals, by at least ensuring that the salary ranges of kindergarten teachers are on par with those in primary schools. This is necessary for attracting and retaining high-quality professionals, which in turn promotes the quality of ECEC services provided to the children.

*Quality Assurance:* The Quality Assurance Framework, which encompasses the school self-evaluation and the external review conducted by the EDB, has not only ensured the stringent monitoring of the structural quality of kindergartens in Hong Kong but also has promoted equitable access to high-quality education. This should be further strengthened by empowering kindergartens to be more reflective in their self-evaluations and increasing the number of external reviews/inspections conducted by the EDB. The latter will entail the employment of more staff in the Kindergarten Education Inspectorate of the EDB.

*Funding:* The amount of subsidy calculated under the erstwhile PEVS and the new FQKEP may favor schools that offer two half-day sessions rather than those that offer whole-day sessions. Further, under the FQKEP, the subsidy is calculated on a per-student unit cost basis. This may place kindergartens that have a relatively small number of students at a disadvantage. With substantially less funding available, the resources available for these small-scale kindergartens, particularly for those that do not have the support of affiliated organizations, may be greatly affected. These policy issues must be addressed by considering the number of students enrolled in the kindergarten in the funding formula.

*Lack of Coherent Vision:* Respondents expressed concerns that there was a lack of a coherent vision and consistent strategy for children under 6. Problems were identified with the split-phase and split-governance system and the separation of care and education. For example, despite the efforts to harmonize education and care services for children under 6, the new FQKEP only provide subsidies for children from 3 to 6. The government should revisit the split-phase / split-governance system and enhance the integration between the two phases (0-2 years old and 3-6 years old) and among the different governmental departments (EDB, Department of Health, and Social and Welfare Department).

*Give More Attention to the Under-3s:* While respondents were positive about the high level of government commitment to support children from 3 to 6 years of age, they felt that not enough was being done to support the under-3s. In the government's view, the birth to 3 group is still considered to be the responsibility of the family. This feedback also indicates need for further policy-relevant studies to address the issues noted.

### *Recommendations for Scaling Up*

First, it is recommended that the government increase funding for ECEC in order to promote its equity agenda. Particular attention should be given to enhancing professional development opportunities for teachers and providing high-quality services for children under 3.

Second, it is recommended that free full-day services be provided for parents who require them. Currently, Hong Kong lacks affordable whole-day child-care programs for needy families. More support for full-day programs would therefore help alleviate the financial burden and other difficulties faced by low-income families.

Third, the government should continue its efforts to enhance pedagogical quality. This not only includes improving teacher-pupil ratios and enhancing teacher qualification,

but also being able to sustain the quality of pedagogy and teaching while maintaining the demands of market forces.

The third sector (non-governmental organizations) also has an important role to play in the provision of early childhood services. The efforts of NGOs should be encouraged and the current partnership between the government and the third sector should be scaled up. That stated, the government should continue to monitor the quality of all services.

### *Recommendations for Innovation*

The government now funds kindergarten education and limits the fees that can be charged to parents. This financial restriction may dampen curriculum innovations from kindergartens, which is concerning as innovation is the cornerstone of producing effective systemic outcomes. The government, therefore, must take on the burden of fostering and scaling up innovation. It is recommended that the government provide incentives to kindergartens to develop noteworthy practices and take responsibility for scaling up innovations that have been shown to be effective.

### **Implications for Research**

In the era of evidence-based policy making, rigorous research should be conducted to evaluate the impact of policy on children. Further, as noted earlier, policy-relevant research to improve ECEC services, particularly for the under-3s, should be undertaken. The findings should be replicated by other, independent groups of researchers.

### *Recommendations for Scaling Up*

Similarly, the government's continued financial support for further research in early childhood services is very important. In order to make a durable commitment to equal access and quality education for children, basic research as well as longitudinal and large-scale research on early childhood development is needed.



### *Recommendations for Innovation*

The government has provided various guides, including the *Operations Manual*, the *Dos and Don'ts*, and the *Guide to the Kindergarten Curriculum*, to promote contextually relevant pedagogical practices. On top of the current existing research projects contributed by various universities in Hong Kong, the development of tools to measure learning outcomes, including direct assessments of child outcomes and teacher reports, should be addressed. Similarly, there also needs to be further development of a system for reviewing and enhancing ECEC quality.

### **Analysis of Hong Kong's ECEC System using the Building Blocks**

#### *Building Blocks*

Kagan (2017) has articulated 15 Building Blocks relevant to analyses of ECEC systems. These Building Blocks consider: (i) ECEC policy priorities, policy documents, and mechanisms to monitor adherence to policies; (ii) the comprehensiveness of ECEC services; (iii) the characteristics and support of the ECEC workforce; (iv) parent and community engagement; (v) the collection and use of data on the ECEC to drive improvement; and (vi) curriculum and pedagogical issues. Based on ratings from a Likert scale, a country's position on these Building Blocks can be determined and these ratings can be used to evaluate the effectiveness of a country's ECEC system. Although there may be variations in ratings reflecting the evaluators' biases, use of the Building Blocks may suggest policies and strategies to improve the country's ECEC system.

Hong Kong received a high ranking for building strong policy foundations, including supporting and aligning with the social context as well as incrementally implementing policy strategies and documents. The Hong Kong ECEC context also scored highly on comprehensive services and coordinating mechanisms, where there are diverse and comprehensive services as well as sufficient funding for baseline services. However, there are three main aspects which could be scaled up.

First, Hong Kong could improve on supporting teachers and families. Hong Kong is falling behind on engaging and enhancing knowledge to families and communities. It is recommended that the ECEC system support family and community engagement in multiple ways. This can be in the form of parental education and support, parental involvement in kindergarten program activities, and collaborative decision-making.

Second, Hong Kong lacks the pool of data to drive for further improvement of the system. Hong Kong scored rather low for effective production and use of child data, an effective monitoring system that collects and uses program data, and an effective production and use of research. It is recommended that more data are collected to drive program improvement and more funding is provided to enhance academic research to guide future policies and practices.

Third, Hong Kong ranks low on informed, individualized, and continuous pedagogy. This implies the need for clearer articulation and implementation of child-centered pedagogy and more continuity in children's experiences, which includes better support in transitioning from home to care environments and from pre-primary to primary settings.

### *Stumbling Blocks*

In addition to Building Blocks, it is necessary to be aware of stumbling blocks that may compromise the implementation and effectiveness of a well-intentioned new ECEC policy.

It is important to consider cultural beliefs and context and do beta testing before the formal launch of a policy that is relatively different from existing practices. The PEVS backfired when some middle-class parents sent their children to two half-day programs, and enrolled their children in more academic extracurricular activities. This was an unanticipated outcome. Another lesson from Hong Kong is that we should be careful about adopting, rather than adapting, pedagogical practices/approaches from

other systems, as these may have unintended consequences. For example, inquiry-based approaches are typically child-centered, but in a Hong Kong context they are often practiced as teacher-led approaches. Context is paramount and must be considered when implementing any new approach in the classroom.

### Conclusions

Set amid a small geographical footprint, Confucian-heritage beliefs, robust quality assurance processes, and hybrid models of subsidization, Hong Kong's ECEC policy is thriving. It is characterized by *continuity* in its sustained emphasis on quality, and *change* in its newfound focus on equity.

Accompanying this ethos, Hong Kong's dynamic ECEC system has supported a responsive policy strategy that takes account of the needs of children, parents, society, and the economy. With these efforts has come an increased, and still maturing, focus on the ECEC infrastructure. The government is aware that, for Hong Kong to remain "Asia's World Class City," strategic planning must include its youngest citizens. This explains the emphasis on ECEC and the move to Free Quality Kindergarten Education, which requires that private kindergarten operators follow government guidelines more closely (e.g., implement more play-based learning) in ECEC.

Hong Kong does not have an integrated ECEC system and formal mechanisms to coordinate services, as recommended by the pundits. Further, there are no plans for it to move in that direction. Findings from the case study suggest that an integrated system and formal coordinating mechanisms are not essential if the government has robust quality control mechanisms and if it is able to use market forces effectively.

Despite the universal enrollment of children aged 3-6 in pre-primary services, there remains a great need for subsidized care and education services for the birth-to-3 age group. Such services will enable mothers to engage in paid employment, aligning with both Hong Kong's historic values that emphasize work and its population policy. The

government has recently commissioned a consultancy to advise on the long-term development of child care services. Depending on the findings, the government may provide universal free child care for children ages 2 to 3, which would represent advancement in Hong Kong ECEC.

To remain a highly responsive system, government benchmarks for quality should grow increasingly stringent. Moreover, continuing responsive policymaking and policy implementation, coupled with increased investment, will ensure that all children in Hong Kong benefit from high-quality early education.

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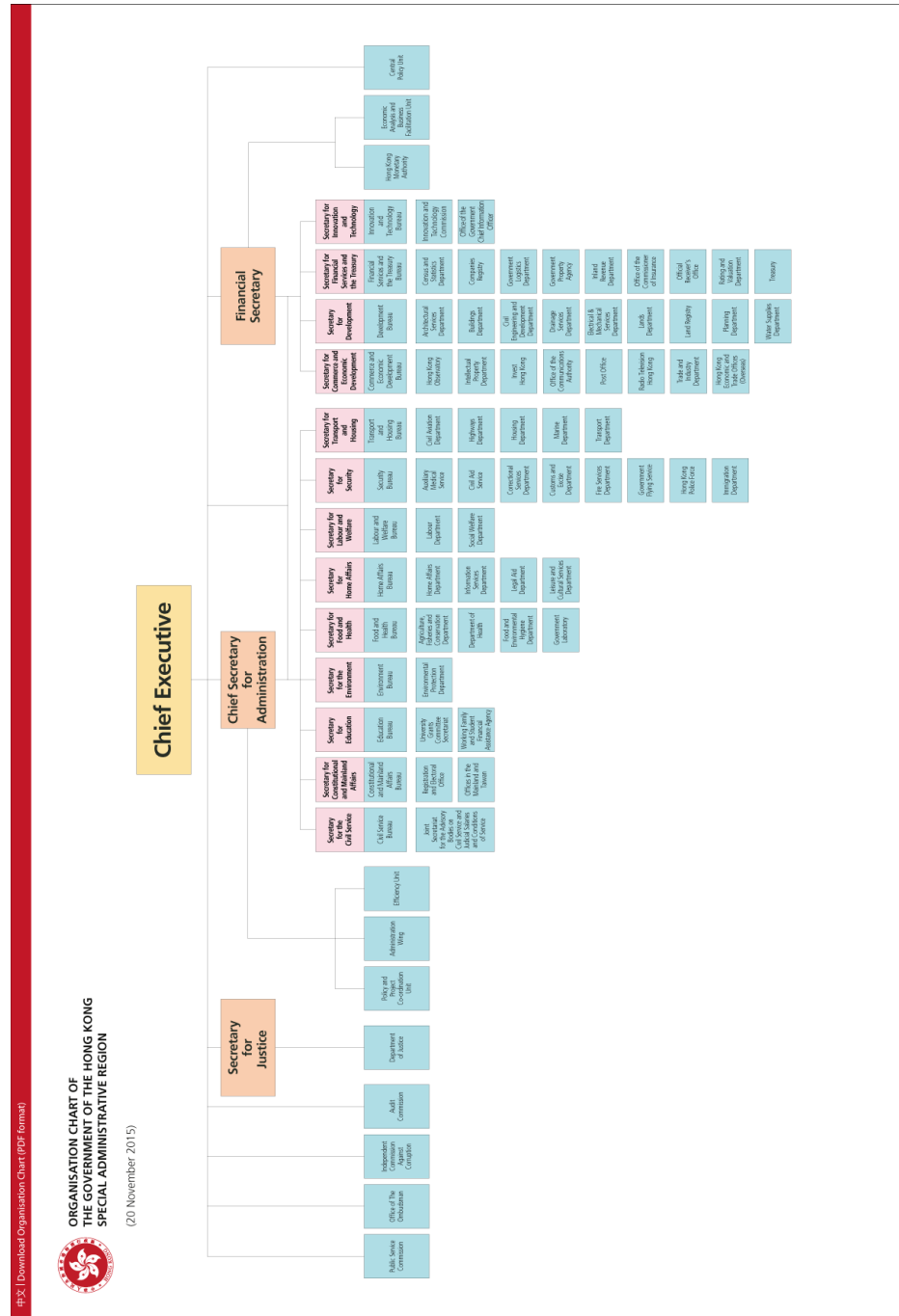
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# Appendix 1: Organization Chart of the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region



## Appendix 2: List of Laws and Ordinances Related to Children

Adoption Ordinance

Child Abduction and Custody Ordinance

Child Care Ordinance

Crimes Ordinance

Criminal Procedure Ordinance

Education Ordinance

Employment of Children Regulations

Offences Against the Person Ordinance

Prevention of Child Pornography Ordinance

Protection of Children and Juveniles Ordinance

### Appendix 3: List of Respondents

Name	Position	Organization	Quoted as
Professor Sophia CHAN, JP	Under Secretary for Food and Health	Government of HKSAR	Senior Government Official
Mr Matthew CHEUNG Kin-chung, GBS, JP	Secretary for Labour and Welfare Department	Government of HKSAR	Senior Government Official
Mrs CHU TANG Lai-kuen	Former Coordinator, (Retired)	Child Care Service and Preschool Education Service, Caritas – Hong Kong	Influential Community member
Hon. IP Kin Yuen	Legislative Council Member	(Education Sector)	Influential Community member
Dr. Sanly KAM	General Manager	Child Development & Education Core Business, Hong Kong Christian Service	Head of Service
Dr. Amelia LEE Nam-yuk	President, OMEP - Hong Kong Head, (Early Childhood and Elementary Education)	School of Continuing Education, Hong Kong Baptist University	Academic
Ms. Gloria LEUNG Chi-kin	Service Head	Preschool Education & Child Care Service, Caritas – Hong Kong	Head of Service
Dr. Hui LI	Associate Professor, Faculty of Education	The University of Hong Kong	Academic
Mr. Tim LUI Tim-leung, BBS, JP	Chairman of the Education Commission	Government of HKSAR	Senior Government Official
Ms. NG Yin-kam	Coordinator for Preschool Education	Salvation Army	Head of Service
Dr. Gail YUEN Wai-kwan	Assistant Professor	Department of Education Policy and Leadership, The Education University of Hong Kong	Academic

## Appendix 4 List of Policy Tables

**Table 1:** Stated policy aims for children aged 0-3 years (0.1) and children aged 3 to the start of primary school (0.2)

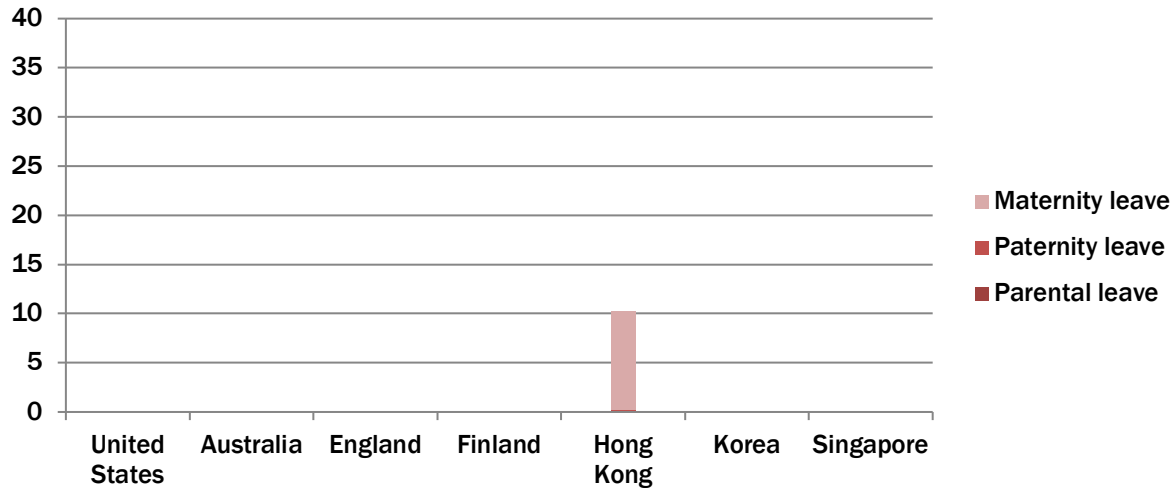
Policy aims	Level 0.1	Level 0.2
Support parental employment	○	○
Support parental education and training	●	●
Support parental work/life balance	○	○
Encourage the development of socioemotional skills	●	●
Develop positive attitudes and dispositions to learning	●	●
Introduce language and literacy skills	●	●
Introduce basic mathematical skills	●	●
Encourage healthy physical development	●	●
Prepare young children for school	●	●
Introduce young children to citizenship	-	-
Remediate special needs, e.g., language delay/physical disability	●	●
Support/safeguard vulnerable young children	●	●
Support young children where the language use at home is different from the national language	●	●
Reduce inequality and social disadvantage	●	●
Fosters health and mental health for children	●	●
Protect children from abuse and violence	●	●
Key:		
● Highly ranked policy aim		
○ Policy aim		
- No policy aim		

**Table 2: Key policy changes for services for children aged 0-3 years (0.1) and children aged 3 to the start of primary school (0.2)**

Policy changes	Level 0.1	Level 0.2
Policy changes in ECEC expenditure	●+	●+
Policy changes in statutory entitlements to ECEC	○	●
Policy changes in ECEC child: staff ratios	●+	●+
Policy changes in ECEC staff qualifications	○	●+
Policy changes in national ECEC curriculum	○	+
Policy changes in ECEC regulation and quality	○	●+
Policy changes in child assessment	○	●+
Policy changes in child protection	●	●+
Policy changes in health	●	●
Other	n/a	n/a
<b>Key:</b>		
○ No changes in the past five years, and none currently		
● Changes in the last five years that have taken place		
+ Planned changes in the next five years		
n/a Not applicable or no data supplied		



**Figure 1: Entitlement for Maternity and Paternity Leave in Hong Kong**



Source: Labor Department (2014)

**Table 3: Bodies or ministries responsible for children aged 0-3 years (0.1) and children aged 3 to the start of primary schooling (0.2)**

Responsible body or ministry	Perinatal	Level 0.1	Level 0.2
Education		•	•
Health	•	•	•
Work and Employment			
Social Protection/Welfare		•	•
Families and Children			
Integrated Body			
Cross-cutting departmental structures with specific responsibility to children		•	•
Other			
<b>Key:</b>			
• Responsible body			

Sources: Education Bureau (2012c); Social Welfare Department (2017e); Department of Health (2017b)

Figure 2: Overview of ISCED Level 0 in participating countries

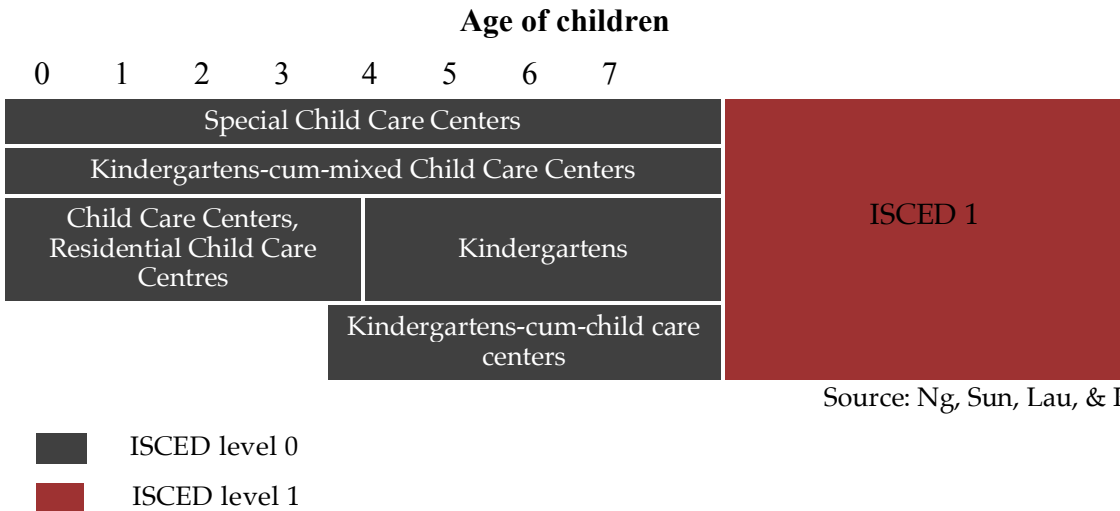


Table 4: Main setting types and characteristics of services for children aged 0-3 years (0.1) and children aged 3 to the start of primary school (0.2) in Hong Kong

	Setting type	Serving children aged...	Typical length of day (hours)	Funding type	
				Publicly subsidized	Privately funded
0.1	Center-based	0-3 years	10		•
	Home-based, non-relative day care (not child's own home)				•
0.2	Center-based	3 to 6 years	3 – 10 hours	•	•
	Home-based, non-relative (not child's own home)				•
	Kindergarten, public school	3 to 6 years	3 – 7 hours		
	Kindergarten, private school	3 to 6 years	3 – 10 hours		•

Key:

- Funding type exists

Source: Education Bureau (2017a); Social Welfare Department (2017e)

**Table 5: Percentage enrollment in formal care and preschool by age phase in study countries**

Enrollment in formal care and preschool by age phase (%)	
Under 3 years	3 to start of primary school
n/a	92.5*

\* This figure is for 3 to 5 year age group. As noted by the Census Department, data on attendance were collected with reference to the first six months of the calendar year. Children typically have to be 3 years at the beginning of the school year in September. Hence, those who turned 3 in the last few months of the calendar year may not have been in pre-primary education in the first half of the year. The enrollment rate for 6-year-olds is 100%.

Source: Census and Statistics Department (2017a)

**Table 6: Enrollment rates for children aged from 0-3 years (0.1) and from 3 years to the starting of primary schooling (0.2) at different ages**

Enrollment rates as a percent for age groups 0-7	Hong Kong
Enrollment rate as percent <1 years	n/a
Enrollment rate as percent 1 <2 years	
Enrollment rate as percent 2 <3 years	
Enrollment rate as percent 3 <4 years	92.5%
Enrollment rate as percent 4 <5 years	
Enrollment rate as percent 5 <6 years	
Enrollment rate as percent 6 <7 years	100%

Source: Census and Statistics Department (2017a)

**Table 7: Enrollment in Formal Care and Education by SES**

**Enrollment in formal care and education by socioeconomic status (%)**

Below federal poverty level (FPL)	100-199% of FPL	200% of FPL and above
Unavailable, but all children aged 3-6 attend kindergarten		

**Table 8: Areas of learning included in curriculum guidance for children aged 0-3 years (0.1) and children aged 3 to the start of primary school (0.2)**

Areas of learning in prescribed curriculum guidance	Level 0.1	Level 0.2
Personal and emotional development	●	●
Social development including citizenship, values	●	●
Attitudes and dispositions to learning	○	●
Physical development and health education	●	●
Language development and communication skills	○	●
Reading and literacy skills	○	●
Mathematical skills	○	●
Understanding the natural world	○	●
Science	○	●
Technology and the digital world	○	●
Expressive arts music, and creativity	○	●
Second / foreign language	○	●
Religious and spiritual	○	○

Key:

- Yes, national guidance includes this area of learning
- No, national guidance does not include this area of learning
- n/a Not applicable, as no national curriculum guidance exists

**Table 9: Expectations for child outcomes in different areas of learning and development for children aged 0-3 years (0.1) and children aged 3 to the start of primary school**

Explicit expectations for child outcomes in areas of learning	Level 0.1	Level 0.2
Personal and emotional development	●	●
Social development including citizenship, values	●	●
Attitudes and dispositions to learning	○	●
Physical development and health education	●	●
Language development and communication skills	●	●
Reading and literacy skills	○	●
Mathematical skills	○	●
Understanding the natural world	○	●
Science	○	●
Technology and the digital world	○	●
Expressive arts music, and creativity	○	●
Second / foreign language	○	●
Religious and spiritual	○	●

Key:

- Yes, there are expectations for child outcomes
- No, there are not expectations for child outcomes in this area
- n/a There are no stated expectations for child outcomes during this phase

**Table 10: Use of child outcomes data for children aged 0-3 years (0.1) and children aged 3 to the start of primary school (0.2)**

<b>Use of results of national or typical subnational child assessments to inform the development of ECEC policy and practice nationally</b>	<b>Level 0.1</b>	<b>Level 0.2</b>
For accountability and performance management of settings	n/a	n/a
For commissioning of providers	n/a	n/a
By central body to inform strategic planning of ECEC	n/a	n/a
By regional body to inform strategic planning of ECEC	n/a	n/a
By local body to inform strategic planning of ECEC	n/a	n/a
By providers to inform strategic planning of ECEC	n/a	n/a
By settings to inform planning of ECEC programs	n/a	n/a
By ECEC practitioner-groups to inform planning of ECEC programs	n/a	n/a
By parent bodies to inform parental choice of ECEC	n/a	n/a

Key:

- **Yes, outcomes data are used for this purpose**
- **No, outcomes data are not used for this purpose**

n/a There are no national child assessments during this phase

**Table 11: Regulated group size for children aged 0-3 years (0.1) and children aged 3 to the start of primary school (0.2)**

Maximum group size for children	Hong Kong
Under 1 year old	14
1 year old	14
2 years old	14
3 years old	30
4 years old	30
5 years old	30
6 years old	○

Key:

- Not applicable as there are not national or typical subnational regulated group sizes
- Age phase is not applicable, as children are enrolled in school

**Table 12: Regulated staff: child ratios for children aged 0-3 years (0.1) and children aged 3 to the start of primary school (0.2)**

Recommended staff: child ratio for children	Hong Kong
Under 1 year old	1:5
1 year old	1:5
2 years old	1:5
3 years old	1:11
4 years old	1:11
5 years old	1:11
6 years old	○

Key:

- Not applicable as there are not national or typical subnational regulated staff : child ratios

- Age phase is not applicable, as children are enrolled in school



**Table 13: Aspects of quality assurance processes covered by inspection for children aged 0-3 years (0.1) and children aged 3 to the start of primary school (0.2)**

Aspects of quality assurance covered by inspection	Level 0.1	Level 0.2
Regulation compliance	●	●
Staff performance	○	●
Leadership and management	○	●
Children's learning outcomes	●	●
Curriculum program	○	●
Children's well-being	●	●
Parental satisfaction	○	○
Financial stability	●	●
Value for money	○	○

Key:

- Yes, aspect covered
- No, aspect not covered
- n/a Not applicable, as no accreditation exists

**Table 14: Reporting of inspection results of settings for children aged 0-3 years (0.1) and children aged 3 to the start of primary school (0.2)**

Reporting process of inspection	Level 0.1	Level 0.2
Report to setting	●	●
Report to parents	●	●
Report to providers	●	●
Report to local body with responsibility for ECEC	●	●
Report to regional body with responsibility for ECEC	n/a	n/a
Report to national body with responsibility for ECEC	n/a	n/a
Report published in local media	○	○
Report published on internet	●	●

Key:

- Yes, reporting does occur
- No, reporting does not occur
- n/a Not applicable, as no inspection exists

**Table 15: Use of inspection results of settings to inform the development of policy and practice in settings for children aged 0-3 years (0.1) and children aged 3 to the start of primary school (0.2)**

Use of inspection reports	Level 0.1	Level 0.2
Reports used for accountability and performance management of ECEC providers and setting	●	●
Reports used for commissioning providers	○	○
Reports used by central body to inform strategic planning of ECEC	○	○
Reports used by regional body to inform strategic planning of ECEC	○	○
Reports used by local body to inform strategic planning of ECEC	○	○
Reports used by provider bodies to inform strategic planning of ECEC	○	●
Reports used by settings to inform planning of ECEC services	●	●
Reports used by ECEC practitioner groups to inform planning of ECEC services	○	●
Reports used by parent bodies to inform parental choice of ECEC	○	●

Key:

- Yes, results are used
- No, results are not used
- n/a Not applicable, as no inspection exists

**Table 16: Level of government responsible for setting ECEC policy for children aged 0-3 years (0.1) and children aged 3 to the start of primary schooling (0.2)**

Level at which responsibility for ECEC resides	Level 0.1	Level 0.2
Responsibility for ECEC policy lies mostly at national level	●	●
Responsibility for ECEC policy lies at national and subnational levels		

Key:

- Level at which responsibility for ECEC resides

**Table 17: Supply-side funding from central funds for children aged from 0-3 (0.1) and children aged from 3 to the start of primary schooling (0.2)**

Types of supply-side funding	Level 0.1	Level 0.2
Funded places subsidy		•
Staff salary subsidy		
Capital grants for acquisition and improvement physical plant	•	•
Resource grants	•	• (one-off)
Key:		
• Supply-side funding is available		
n/a Funding from central funds does not exist		

**Table 18: Demand-side funding from central funds for children aged from 0-3 (0.1) and children aged from 3 to the start of primary schooling (0.2)**

Types of demand-side funding	Level 0.1	Level 0.2
Tax credits/relief		
Vouchers		•
Reduced fees	•	•
Family allowances		
Key:		
• Demand-side funding is available		
n/a Demand-side funding does not exist		