Hong Kong is an international hub for world-class higher education

Hong Kong’s higher education sector is more attractive than ever to international students seeking world-class education and a life-changing learning experience.

Derek Collins, convener of the Heads of Universities Committee’s Standing Committee on Internationalisation (HUCOMSCI), guarantees students an elite education if they study in Hong Kong. The eight UGC-funded universities have their unique strengths, differentiated roles and distinctive legacies, thereby offering a diverse and comprehensive learning experience for international students. “Different faculties in Hong Kong universities – such as business, engineering, arts and law – attract leading scholars and experts from all over the world, including roughly 70 per cent non-local academic staff from outside of Hong Kong,” Collins says. “World-leading professors lead to the kind of educational experience that is essential for young people today.”

Collins is also associate vice-president of cultural and external affairs at the University of Hong Kong (HKU). He says Hong Kong’s universities have always had an international outlook and valued international students. As the sector rebounds from the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, there has been a concerted effort to showcase this global focus. “Countries involved in China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) make natural partners in HUCOMSCI’s efforts in internationalisation. Students from BRI countries who wish to study in Hong Kong can apply for the Government’s Belt and Road Scholarship, which covers tuition fees, accommodation and living expenses. “There are a lot of young people who need to be exposed to different parts of the world and need to be exposed to Asia,” Collins says. “We are giving students an international education with a strong emphasis on Asian perspectives and an Asian outlook.”

“The upcoming 50 per cent increase in the quota for the Belt and Road Scholarship speaks to the city’s ambition to expand its connection with the BRI countries,” he said. “In October 2023, the Hong Kong government unveiled a bold initiative to double the number of non-local students at the eight UGC-funded universities. Some 13,900 hostel units are being built to meet the rising demand for student housing. Postgraduate students are allowed to take on part-time employment to help finance their studies and the application process has been streamlined, with admissions offices now managing scholarships for international students.”

“The idea is to make it easier than ever for young people to find opportunities, funding and, ultimately, stay and work,” Collins says. “It used to be that if you were a postgraduate student from abroad you couldn’t work. The government has relaxed that.”

International students in Hong Kong also benefit from exposure to one of the most influential economies and richest cultures in the world. “Undergraduate students from anywhere in the world need to understand something about China,” Collins says. “They need to appreciate first-hand what’s developed here and what it is like to be here.”

Three of the UGC-funded universities have opened campuses in Mainland China, all of which are situated within the one-hour living circle of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macau Greater Bay Area. The rest of the UGC-funded universities also offer numerous opportunities for internships, study trips and service learning on the mainland.

Collins says Hong Kong’s international students are offered a “front row” perspective on life and business in Asia, allowing students to build networks that will help grow their careers. “It supercharges your experience to have an internship in Hong Kong, to have work experience here and to have built a network,” he says. “Having those connections in Hong Kong will be crucial to their career advancement.”

International students can stay in Hong Kong for a full degree programme, an academic year or just a semester as the UGC and HUCOMSCI’S internationalisation strategy accommodates exchange students. Over 2,600 student exchange agreements have been signed between UGC-funded universities and institutions across the globe.

A vibrant, open and diverse cosmopolitan city, Hong Kong is thriving as an ideal study destination for students from around the world. It is the place where East meets West culturally but also in terms of employment opportunities, internships and networking. What makes the city unique is the presence of a strong and world-class publicly funded higher education sector. Among the eight universities receiving public funding through the University Grants Committee (UGC), five were ranked in the top 100 in the Times Higher Education World University Rankings 2024.

Thanks to Hong Kong’s international outlook and its higher education sector’s excellent reputation, the city embraces students from around the world. To further raise Hong Kong’s profile in the international higher education landscape, the Heads of Universities Committee’s Standing Committee on Internationalisation (HUCOMSCI), jointly formed by the eight UGC-funded universities, is spearheading the study in Hong Kong, the Association for Thai Students in Hong Kong, says support from the association for Thai students is one of the highlights of their experience in Hong Kong. “You can make friends with people from all over the world,” he says. “It helps me to grow as an individual.”

Hong Kong isn’t just open for global higher education, it was made for it,” says Collins. “You are surrounded by students in the city. “Hong Kong isn’t just open for global higher education, it was made for it,” says Collins. “You are surrounded by students in the city. "Hong Kong isn’t just open for global higher education, it was made for it,” says Collins. “You are surrounded by students in the city. "Hong Kong isn’t just open for global higher education, it was made for it,” says Collins. “You are surrounded by students in the city. "Hong Kong isn’t just open for global higher education, it was made for it,” says Collins. “You are surrounded by students in the city. "Hong Kong isn’t just open for global higher education, it was made for it,” says Collins. “You are surrounded by students in the city."