

## Executive Summary

As the economic development of the Greater Bay Area (GBA) accelerates, a growing number of Hong Kong's young people are starting to realise the growth potential of the Mainland cities in this region and how it can positively impact their careers. However, differences in the respective social systems between Hong Kong, Macao and the nine other cities pose an array of challenges for those Hong Kong young people who decide on the GBA for their career development. The HKFYG Youth I.D.E.A.S. poll in 2019 showed that half of the young respondents were willing to start a business in the GBA, with more than one-third of them indicating a readiness to commute to, or be based in, the GBA.<sup>1</sup> It showed that a substantial number of Hong Kong young people were prepared for the opportunities in the GBA.

Enhancing the GBA is a key goal and the availability of talent will increasingly play a significant role in realising future opportunities. Demand from GBA enterprises for highly educated talent is rising, particularly for highly-skilled, professional workers and management specialists, as highlighted by a Mainland-based study.<sup>2</sup> An international study<sup>3</sup> also suggested that a major change in the job market will occur as employers raise the standards for talents and develop new job profiles.

Talent is an increasingly important asset for economic development and labour market competitiveness. Shortage of talent is also not a problem limited to the GBA and can be seen in countries around the world. While it is certainly a personal decision whether young people stay in Hong Kong or go to the GBA to develop their careers, the focus needs to be ensuring those interested in relocating are equipped with the essential skills needed to capture the opportunities and cope with the challenges ahead.

The purpose of this study is to examine the competitiveness of Hong Kong young people in the GBA job market, their challenges they are facing and to

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<sup>1</sup> The HKFYG Youth I.D.E.A.S.. February 2019. *Overcoming Career Challenges of Hong Kong Young People in the Greater Bay Area*. Retrieved from: <https://yrc.hkfyg.org.hk/en/2019/02/26/overcoming-career-challenges-of-hong-kong-young-people-in-the-greater-bay-area/>

<sup>2</sup> Web: [http://hrss.gd.gov.cn/gkmlpt/content/3/3490/mpost\\_3490754.html#1274](http://hrss.gd.gov.cn/gkmlpt/content/3/3490/mpost_3490754.html#1274)

<sup>3</sup> World Economic Forum. October 2020. *The Future of Jobs Report 2020*. Retrieved from: <https://www.weforum.org/reports/the-future-of-jobs-report-2020/digest>

recommend feasible solutions for those looking for a career in the region to improve competitiveness.

This study was conducted between March and December 2021, with data collected from three sources: an online poll of 720 university students who expressed an interest in a career in the GBA; case studies of 26 young people aged 18-34 who had started a business, worked or studied in the GBA or in Mainland China over the past year; interviews with 16 Mainland and GBA recruiters, startup experts, scholars and employers.

<b>Key findings</b>
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Here is the summary of the findings from each source:

	<b>Online poll</b>	<b>Youth case studies</b>	<b>Experts, scholars and employers</b>
<b>Demand for talent in the GBA</b>	<p>Three favourite industries in the GBA:            cultural &amp; creative (17.9%);            financial services (17.6%);            technology &amp; innovation (17.2%).</p> <p>Most sought-after city for career: Shenzhen (52.5%).</p>		<p>Industries in high demand for Hong Kong talent in the GBA included:</p> <p>professional service industry; financial industry; technology and innovation; sustainable development; cultural and creative; and emerging industries.</p> <p>Multinational enterprises tended to headhunt talent from around the world; Hong Kong youth was only one of their targets.</p>
<b>Opinion on GBA development</b>	<p>The most attractive factors are:            career prospects (84.1%);            market size (84.0%);</p>	<p>Larger market size, lower startup capital requirements; greater number of experienced talent; and</p>	<p>(1) Hong Kong business environment is mature and efficient, making it a base for development</p>

	<b>Online poll</b>	<b>Youth case studies</b>	<b>Experts, scholars and employers</b>
	<p>social networks (70.7%); training opportunities (70.4%)</p> <p>The issues of most concerning are: freedom of information (24.6%); housing (20.7%); public order (15.4%)</p>	<p>benefits of a favourable business-startup government policy</p> <p>Market environment and space for future development are considered ideal with good potential</p>	<p>among local young people;</p> <p>(2) Differences in work culture between Hong Kong and Mainland China in addition to pay gap;</p> <p>(3) Lack of interest in some of the traditional Mainland Chinese industries</p>
<b>Personal experience</b>	<p>87.2% had visited one of the nine GBA cities</p> <p>Findings suggest that respondents who had previously visited the GBA gave it a relatively positive evaluation</p> <p>70.9% agreed with the statement, "Hong Kong young people do not understand the development opportunities in the GBA"</p>	<p>(1) The differences between Hong Kong and the rest of the GBA are much smaller than imagined;</p> <p>(2) The pandemic provided an opportunity for exploring life in the GBA as plans for travelling back to Hong Kong are interrupted;</p> <p>(3) Open-mindedness helps integration into the local life.</p>	
<b>Competitiveness</b>	<p>The respondents overall tended to be satisfied with the 13 listed abilities. Each item had an average score above 5 (on a scale of 0-10), of which professional ethics scored higher (8.38), while digital literacy (6.17) scored relatively lower point</p>	<p>Advantages of Hong Kong young people: professionalism; sophisticated use of computer software; global perspective; flexibility and adaptability to change; higher standard of English-language proficiency as well as a</p>	<p>Hong Kong young people come with a global perspective, higher standards of proficiency in English; quality management experience; professional services up to international standards and a high self-learning ability</p>

	Online poll	Youth case studies	Experts, scholars and employers
		<p>sustainable development mindset</p> <p>Disadvantages of Hong Kong young people:  lack of understanding of Mainland affairs;  lack of Mainland social networks;  less ambitious;  lower standard of Chinese-language proficiency;  poorer understanding of factories and production lines;  less motivated to learn</p>	
<b>Challenges ahead</b>	<p>(1) Lack of Mainland social networks (52.6%)</p> <p>(2) Fierce competition from Mainland talent (49.3%)</p> <p>(3) Lack of understanding of the Mainland's legal system (48.9%).</p>		<p>(1) Lack of practical operational skills</p> <p>(2) Lack of understanding of Mainland systems</p> <p>(3) Concerns over development in Mainland China</p>
<b>Preparatory work</b>	<p>(1) Willingness to join GBA work-experience programmes or internships (63.9%)</p> <p>(2) Understanding of industry outlooks (51.4%).</p>		<p>(1) Embraced the development opportunities in the GBA with open-mindedness</p> <p>(2) Selected the right industry and city for personal career development</p>
<b>Practical measures</b>	An overwhelming majority supported the idea that providing "scholarship or	Establish mutual aid groups; provide internship programmes; organise career	Sharing session by pioneers of business startups; mentorship scheme; mutual aid

	Online poll	Youth case studies	Experts, scholars and employers
	seed funds” (90.1%); and “internship opportunities” (89.7%) could encourage Hong Kong young people to go to the GBA.	talks to better understand relevant systems; set up an all-in-one online platform giving information about studying/ working/ starting a business and living in the GBA.	groups; all-in-one information platform; internship programme; GBA job fair; strengthen the functions of the liaison units in the Mainland to provide practicable assistance to Hong Kong young people

**Main discussion**

- The polled University students in Hong Kong generally held the view that room for professional growth in the GBA was significant. However, 70% of respondents thought that young people did not see the GBA’s development opportunities, while those who had previously visited it, took a more positive view.**

The development of the GBA not only allows Hong Kong young people to study, work, start a business and live with ease but also gives them more career choices.

Results of this study’s online poll indicated that almost 80 percent (79.7%) of the 720 respondents who expressed an interest in a GBA-based career, agreed with the statement<sup>4</sup> “The outlook for business startups in the GBA remains bright for Hong Kong young people”. That said, over 70 percent (70.9%) of the respondents agreed that<sup>5</sup> “Hong Kong young people have no understanding of the development opportunities in the GBA”. Over 85 percent (87.2%) of the respondents had visited one of the nine cities of the GBA. The analysis of the data suggests that interviewees hold a relatively positive view towards the GBA.

<sup>4</sup> Agree (79.7%) = Strongly Agree (23.3%) + Somewhat Agree (56.4%)

<sup>5</sup> Agree (70.9%) = Strongly Agree (18.1%) + Somewhat Agree (52.8%)

The GBA is generally seen as have significant economic potential. Hong Kong young people who have considered a GBA-based career also maintained a positive attitude about the region. A significant number of respondents believed that they would have missed the opportunities in the GBA if they were not aware of how the region was developing. Therefore, having a prior understanding of the GBA and a sound career plan were invaluable in Hong Kong young people looking at the region for their career.

- 2. Cultural and creative, financial services and technology and innovation were the industries in which respondents were most interested. Experts, scholars and employers highlighted that Hong Kong young people were among the potential candidates companies targeted. Their ability to enhance competencies was crucial to overcoming the challenges in the labour market.**

The findings of the online poll identified cultural and creative (17.9%), financial services (17.6%) and technology and innovation (17.2%) as being the most preferred industries in the GBA among young people. At the same time, 7.5% of the total respondents said that wanted to set up their own businesses. When asked about making a career in the GBA, the top issues of concern for respondents were: freedom of information (24.6%), followed by housing (20.7%) and public order (15.4%).

A summation of views from experts, scholars and employers concluded that industries with exceptional demand for Hong Kong talent in the GBA included: professional services, finance, technology and innovation, green and sustainable development, cultural and creative, and emerging industries. Expert opinion on recruitment trends found that multinational enterprises based in Mainland China tended to search for talented executives globally, and Hong Kong young people were only one of their targets. Given this, Hong Kong young people find it hard to stand out as they not only have to compete with Mainland talent but also against those from abroad.

3. **In the youth cases studies, interview subjects experienced firsthand local GBA life and culture. Not only did they gain an in-depth understanding, but they also kept themselves informed of new developments. By doing so, Hong Kong young people directly experienced life in the region.**

Of the 26 parallel-case interviews, some said that:

(1) The differences between Hong Kong and the rest of the GBA are less than imagined. As one of the entrepreneurs pointed out, the culture in both Hong Kong and the rest of the GBA is similar in the sense that Cantonese can be used as the medium of communication. After living in the GBA a short while, he had no difficulties adapting to the local culture – be it the, - food, leisure activities and so forth - as the distinction between the two places was not as apparent as he had expected.

(2) An attitude of open-mindedness determined how well someone could integrate into local life. An interviewee, currently studying in the GBA, said the present living conditions in Mainland China had improved considerably. Interviewees generally believed that the degree to which Hong Kong young people could assimilate into local life was, to a great extent, determined by personal attitudes.

(3) The pandemic provided an opportunity to explore life in the GBA. A working youth extended the length of her stay due to the pandemic's travel restrictions. She said it led to a new level of understanding as previously her view of China was filtered by the media. Comparing her life experience then and now, she now took a contrasting view of the GBA.

4. **The University students polled scored themselves highest in terms of professional ethics but relatively low in digital literacy. Competitive advantages in the GBA could still be seen in Hong Kong young people. By increasing their competitiveness, continuing to improve their skillsets and looking for new opportunities, they could expand their career horizons.**

The poll used a rating scale of 0-10 (where 10 indicated “strongly satisfied”). In general, the respondents felt satisfied with the 13 areas of ability listed in

the poll. Each of which scored above 5, where professional ethics was ranked first and digital literacy comparatively lower.

Experts, scholars and employers, on the other hand, stated that greater proficiency in English, coupled with a global perspective among Hong Kong young people, could help Mainland companies elevate the quality of their service and enter international markets. In addition, Hong Kong young people could utilise and share their management and professional service experience in the GBA. They also believed that Hong Kong young people were capable of acquiring new skills and knowledge as well as using their strong self-learning abilities to cope with all kinds of uncertainties, adapt to career changes and arrive at solutions to problems.

With China's rapid developments, Mainland youth have had more opportunities to connect with the rest of the world and expand their own horizons. Therefore, Hong Kong young people were no longer as well positioned when competing with Mainland Chinese. Comparatively in the case studies, Hong Kong young people admitted their inadequacies, including: limited knowledge of Mainland affairs; lack of Mainland social networks; lack of ambition; limited proficiency in Chinese; inadequate knowledge of factories and production lines; and a passive learning attitude. These findings brought into question whether Hong Kong young people could seize the opportunities in the GBA and beyond to enhance their competitiveness and take on new challenges.

- 5. Career challenges facing Hong Kong young people in the GBA were threefold: lack of Mainland social networks & work experience; talent competition from the Mainland; limited knowledge of Chinese systems. Experts also pointed out that misconceptions about pursuing a career in Mainland China also limited the personal growth of Hong Kong young people.**

Despite more life and career choices as well as greater room for development, there are many challenges facing Hong Kong young people as they pursue a career in the GBA. The online poll revealed three particular challenges for Hong Kong young people to address when going to the GBA: (1) Lack of Mainland social networks (52.6%) and work experience (45.1%); (2) Talent competition from the Mainland (49.3%); (3) Limited



understanding of Chinese systems, inclusive of the judiciary (48.9), trading (43.9%) and taxation (40.1%) systems.

Furthermore, experts, scholars and employers commented that Hong Kong's relatively monotonous industrial structure is causing young people to lack practical operational skills. In addition to the misconceptions about pursuing a career in Mainland China, they felt that Hong Kong young people lacked a deep understanding of Chinese society and the GBA's urban planning, as well as its respective policies and industrial outlook. As a result, many had restricted their personal and professional development to Hong Kong.

**6. Hong Kong young people ought to have an open-minded attitude towards the GBA and see work experience in Mainland China as a way to enhance their careers and enrich their personal lives.**

The GBA can provide more paths to career success for Hong Kong young people. The question is how they should prepare themselves to capture the opportunities the GBA's development presents. The findings of the online poll showed that over 60 percent (63.9%) viewed joining a GBA work-experience programme or internship as the top way to do so; followed by understanding the industry outlook (51.4%) and participating in GBA-based activities, workshops or knowledge exchange programmes (41.3%).

Experts, scholars and employers who were interviewed came up with three recommendations for Hong Kong young people: (1) Remain open-minded to embrace the opportunities in the GBA; (2) Make the right choice of industry and city for career growth as well as considering Mainland work experience as part of the career development process; and (3) Take advantage of the GBA's potential and opportunities to enrich their personal lives and leverage that life experience to support their career development.

**7. Assistance to Hong Kong young people as part of the GBA's development.**

The online poll revealed that most young people found "scholarship and seed funding for Hong Kong young people to their development in the GBA" (90.1%) as the most helpful form of assistance, followed by

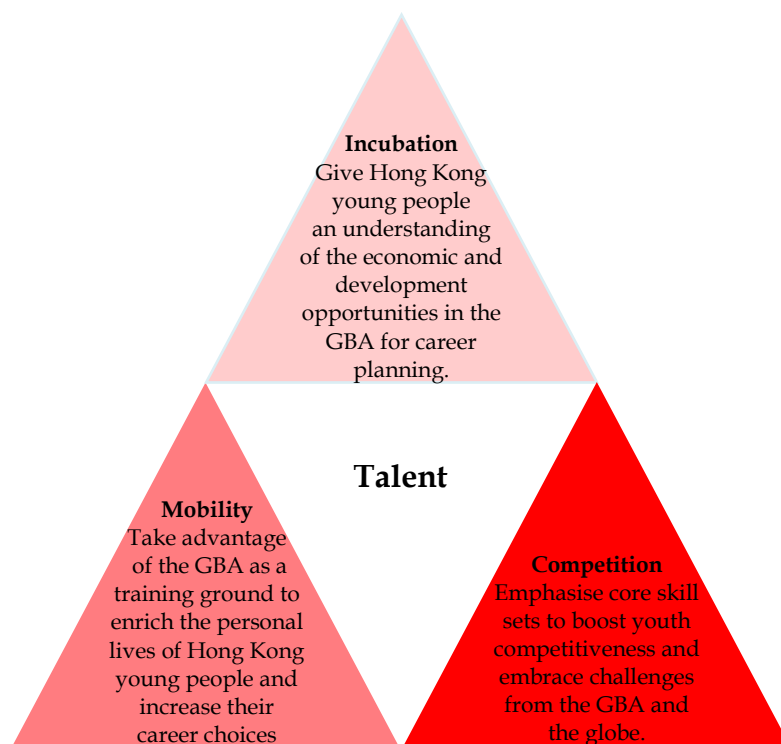
“internship opportunities in the GBA for Hong Kong young people” (89.7%) (both accounted for 90% of the total responses).

Youth in the parallel-case interviews also suggested three options for helping Hong Kong young people pursue a career in the GBA: (1) Forming mutual-aid groups for stronger connections among Hong Kong young people in Mainland China; (2) Encouraging the business sector to open more internship positions in Mainland China; and (3) Building an all-in-one online platform providing information about studying/working/starting a business/living in the GBA.

Experts, scholars and employers suggested: (1) Sharing sessions by pioneers of business startups, mentorship schemes and; forming mutual-aid groups for new arrivals in the GBA; (2) Training courses about life and work in Mainland China for Hong Kong young people as well as, an all-in-one platform providing useful and accessible information; and (3) More comprehensive and timely support including internships, GBA job-fairs and strengthening the functions of the liaison units in the Mainland to provide practicable assistance to Hong Kong young people.

### **Major recommendations**

The GBA will be the place retaining and attracting world-class talent. Young people should improve their competitiveness in order to seize the emerging opportunities. The findings and discussion above concluded that Hong Kong young people had both strengths and weaknesses. In the following, we have based our recommendations around “talent incubation”, “talent competition” and “talent mobility”, to help Hong Kong young people who are willing to go to the GBA, see the opportunities and increase their competitiveness for long-term career development.



## 1. Talent incubation

### 1.1 Merging the concept of the GBA as career pathway with life planning education for secondary students.

We suggest that the Career Guidance Section under the Education Bureau plays the role of coordinator to integrate the concept of the GBA as a career pathway into existing life planning education and to arrange study tours for secondary students. This will provide students with an overview of the industry outlook in different cities so they can begin to plan their careers as early as possible.

### 1.2 Rolling out “GBA Career Exploration Scheme”.

We suggest that the government provides subsidies for Non-Governmental Organisations to enable a “GBA Career Exploration Scheme”, in which Hong Kong young people can visit Mainland companies and factories, particularly in industries that interest them, such as technology and innovation, cultural and creative, green and

sustainable development, among others. Job shadowing in companies in co-related industries will enable young people to understand the development of the GBA and allow for more possibilities to broaden their career horizons.

## 2. Talent competition

### 2.1 Building a GBA core-skills online learning platform.

We suggest to build an online all-in-one self-assessment and self-learning platform, covering the big five integrated skills and personality traits. Young people could then study quality-guaranteed and structured courses, according to their learning needs and timetable without geographical constraints. In the long run, these online courses can be certified to enhance their learning motivation and course quality standards.

Framework of The Big Five Skill Sets (GBA Skill Set - PILOT):

Professionalism	Innovation	Languages Ability	Openness	Team player
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Professional knowledge applicability</li> <li>- Professional ethics (e.g. Integrity, sense of responsibility)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Creativity</li> <li>- Digital literacy</li> <li>- Self-learning ability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Putonghua skills</li> <li>- English</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Cultural intelligence</li> <li>- Sustainable development mindset</li> <li>- Global perspective</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Emotional intelligence</li> <li>- Communication and coordination</li> <li>- Flexibility and adaptability to change</li> </ul>

### 2.2 Offering young people more internship opportunities in the GBA for professional skills training and gaining life experience.

We suggest that employers join together with tertiary institutions to offer internship opportunities in the GBA associated with specific, high-demand professions. Not only will this help prepare the career path for tertiary students, but also help businesses identify the right talent early. Hong Kong young people could be placed for internships in different cities to prompt talent mobility within the GBA area. This gives young people the chance to explore opportunities for career development and experience life in different cities.

### **3. Talent mobility**

- 3.1 Hong Kong young people could think through all the possibilities from a wider angle and embrace opportunities for career development in each city with an open mind. This could improve their career mobility.**

**Hong Kong young people should view exposure to the GBA as a way to enhance their personal resume and realise their career goals. Regardless of where they decide to develop their career (Hong Kong or overseas), this type of work experience could help young people improve their job mobility, make their career journey more exciting; and add valuable life experience.**

- 3.2 Forming mutual-aid groups to exchange information and life experience, job sharing and career guidance among Hong Kong young people and new arrivals.**

**The Commissioner for the Development of the GBA may consider initiating and coordinating the formation of mutual-aid groups to allow young people in the GBA to expand their social circles as well as; share information and life experience. Mutual-aid groups could also organise regular job-sharing or career-guidance meet-ups for young people. By doing so, talent based in the GBA could network with one another and move around the region.**