

Draft Charter for Youth



1. Background

(a) Central Committee on Youth and the Working Party on Youth Policy

"With the rapid expansion of youth services and activities in the 1970's and early 1980's, there were repeated comments from various quarters on the sporadic and departmentalised approach towards youth services provision and calls for the implementation of a youth policy in Hong Kong".

In May 1986, on the recommendation of the government's Community Building Policy Committee, the Central Committee on Youth (CCY) was established to examine the need for a comprehensive youth policy and to promote youth activities.

A Working Party on Youth Policy was then set up by the CCY to study existing policies, to examine youth policies of other countries and to recommend to the CCY on the need for a comprehensive youth policy.

A Report on Youth Policy was completed in January 1988 and after public consultation the Report on the Need for a Youth Policy in Hong Kong was endorsed by the CCY in January 1989.

The recommendations to the government included a set of principles for youth development as the framework for a Youth Policy; and that statements spelling out the rights of the young people of Hong Kong should be included in the Youth Policy, and the setting up of a Commission on Youth to replace the CCY to advise the government on youth matters and to review and update the Youth Policy.

(Source : Report on the Need for a Youth Policy in Hong Kong, Central Committee on Youth, January 1989)

(b) Commission on Youth

The Commission on Youth was established in February 1990. The Commission comprises both government and non-government members appointed by the Governor. The non-government members, including the Chairman, are drawn from the community.

The role of the Commission is to advise the Governor on youth matters. Its terms of reference are:

- to exchange ideas and information with other government advisory bodies on youth matters;
- to encourage better cooperation between government departments, voluntary agencies and other organizations involved in youth service provision;
- to gather information and initiate research on youth matters;
- to liaise with international youth organizations;



- to enhance young people's civic awareness and community participation; and
- to promote leadership training for young people.

The Commission's working definition of "youth" are those between 15 and 24, with a 5 year flexible range at each end where it is appropriate.

However, instead of a Youth Policy, the Commission has produced a draft Charter for Youth.

But before we go into the content of the Charter for Youth, let us look at some recent facts and figures about Hong Kong youth, youth crimes and the demand, provisions and shortfall of services for children and youth provided by non-government organisations and the Social Welfare Department.

2. Hong Kong Youth : Population and Other Characteristics

(a) Youth Population

According to figures available from the 1991 Census and overall population of young people 10 to 24 years of age including marine population but excluding refugees and visitors totalled 1,250,059, some 22.6% of the total population. The detailed breakdown is as follows:

Age	1991 No.	(%)	
0 - 4	338,511	(6.1)	} - 1,991,757 (36.1)
5 - 9	403,187	(7.3)	
10 - 14	410,218	(7.4)	
15 - 19	409,642	(7.4)	
20 - 24	430,199	(7.8)	
			} - 1,250,059 (22.6)

Total Population 5,522,281
of all ages

Comparing with the 1986 By-census figures we see a decline in the proportion of young people to the total population:

Age	1986 No.	(%)		1991 No.	(%)	
10 - 14	437,000	(8.1)	} - 1,449,000 (26.9)	410,218	(7.4)	} - 1,250,059 (22.6)
15 - 19	451,000	(8.4)		409,642	(7.4)	
20 - 24	561,000	(10.4)		430,199	(7.8)	
	5,395,997			5,522,281		

(b) Geographical Distribution

According to the 1991 Census, the New Territories have a significant increase in population since 1986. The distribution of youth population reflected this trend to an even more significant extent: nearly half of the youth now live in the New Territories.

Population Distribution

Area	1981		1986		1991		
	All Ages	All Ages	Youth (10-24)	All Ages	Youth (10-24)		
Hong Kong Island	24%	22%	19%	1,214,253	22%	201,284	17%
Kowloon and New Kowloon	49%	43%	44%	1,975,265	36%	436,314	37%
New Territories	26%	35%	35%	2,321,661	42%	541,643	46%
Enumerated Resident Population				5,511,179	1,179,241		

The following is a breakdown of population growth in the different districts in the New Territories. The biggest growth in population in recent years were in Sai Kung, Tai Po, Shatin and the Tuen Mun districts.

District	1981-91	Percentage Change		No. 1991	
		All Ages	1986-91	All Ages	Youth (10-24)
Kwai Tsing			+ 4.9	430,852	95,730
Tsuen Wan	+ 14.5		+ 10.7	264,448	64,921
Tuen Mun	+215.5		+ 32.4	373,366	93,637
Yuen Long	+ 21.3		+ 8.6	225,278	51,460
North	+ 43.6		+ 12.8	162,067	34,931
Tai Po	+171.8		+ 43.9	197,721	43,746
Shatin	+327.9		+ 39.9	494,270	120,437
Sai Kung	+206.6		+183.1	127,027	25,458
Island	+ 3.2		+ 0.5	46,632	11,323
Enumerated Resident Population				2,321,661	541,643

(c) Educational Attainment

The school attendance rates of children and young people have continued to increase in recent years. The 1991 Census shows that more children and young people are attending school and probably are staying longer in school.

School Attendance Rate

Age	1981	1986	1991
3 - 5	93%	92%	95%
6 - 11	98%	99%	100%
12 - 16	84%	93%	94%
17 - 18	45%	56%	58%

In recent years more Hong Kong young people are achieving higher educational attainment. The proportion of population aged 15 and over attaining secondary or above educational levels have been on the increase.

Population Aged 15 and over Education Attainment

	1981		1986		1991	
	No.	(%)	No.	(%)	No.	(%)
No Schooling/KG	604,623	(16.1)	585,891	(14.1)	557,297	(12.8)
Primary	1,283,393	(34.2)	1,212,914	(29.2)	1,100,599	(25.2)
Secondary	1,475,934	(39.4)	1,779,178	(43.0)	2,007,001	(45.8)
Matriculation	135,556	(3.6)	194,530	(4.7)	214,577	(4.9)
Tertiary :						
Non-degree course	123,753	(3.3)	196,392	(4.7)	234,912	(5.4)
Degree course	125,794	(3.4)	180,145	(4.3)	255,979	(5.9)
	3,749,053		4,149,050		4,370,365	

(d) Labour Force Participation

The above trends are also reflected in the decreasing proportion of those economically active among young people between 15 to 24 years of age, and in particular among the young male population.

Economically Active Population Aged 15 & over

	1981		1986		1991	
	No.	(%)	No.	(%)	No.	(%)
Male 15-24	411,787	(25.4)	340,782	(19.9)	258,560	(14.8)
Female 15-24	335,854	(37.9)	304,059	(29.3)	233,518	(21.8)
Both sexes						
15-24	747,641	(30.0)	644,801	(23.4)	492,075	(17.5)
Total both sexes 15-24	2,503,804		2,573,848		2,811,002	

The labour force participation rates show a similar trend especially among the young male population. A decreasing number of young people between 15 to 29 years of age are participating in the labour force.

Labour Force Participation Rate

Age	1986		1991	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
15 - 19	39%	35%	36%	29%
20 - 24	89%	84%	85%	83%
25 - 29	97%	70%	96%	77%

However we see an increase in the labour force participation rate among the female population between 25-29 years of age. The reason behind this is probably because young women are attaining higher educational levels thus enabling more of them to participate in the labour force.

(e) Marital Status

The 1991 Census also found young people to be getting married later. This trend was particularly noticeable among female population between 20 to 29 years of age. The fact that more young women are participating in the labour force would have partly contributed to these postponement of marriage to a later age.

Proportion of Never Married Population

	1981	1986	(change 81-86)	1991	(change 86-91)
Male 15 - 19	98.7	99.4	(+0.7)	99.4	(0)
20 - 24	89.4	92.2	(+2.8)	93.5	(+1.3)
25 - 29	57.5	61.9	(+4.4)	67.0	(+5.1)
Female 15 - 19	96.6	97.9	(+1.3)	98.4	(+0.5)
20 - 24	71.3	78.7	(+7.4)	82.9	(+4.2)
25 - 29	30.3	37.5	(+7.2)	45.5	(+8.0)

(f) Youth Crime

The following information were extracted from the Crime and Enforcement Report 1990.

i). Juvenile Offenders

There were 6,583 juvenile offenders aged below 16 arrested for crime in 1990, a drop of 854 persons over 1989. Among the 6,583 arrested 4,394 (66.7%) were students.

A comparatively larger proportion of juveniles were arrested for the offences of shoptheft, robbery and theft other than burglary and shoptheft.

<u>Selected Offences</u>	<u>No. of Juveniles</u>	<u>As a % of all offenders arrested in the corresponding offence group</u>
Shoptheft	1,689	31.9
Robbery	740	32.9
Unlawful Society	205	34.5
Theft other than burglary & shoptheft	1,399	22.0
Wounding & assault	492	11.3
Others	2,058	8.2
Total	6,583	15.0

Among offenders of all ages arrested in the corresponding offence group, there were also a higher proportion of juveniles arrested for the offences of shoptheft (31.9%), robbery (32.9%) and unlawful society (34.5%).

ii). Young Offenders

There were also a slight increase in the number of young offenders aged between 16 and 20 arrested, from 8,283 in 1989 to 8,306 in 1990. The common offences were wounding, serious assault, robbery and miscellaneous theft.

iii). Preventive Crime

Almost 58% of the persons arrested for preventive crimes were young people between 16 and 30 years of age. Preventive crimes refer to the offences of possession of firearm and ammunition, offensive weapon and unlawful instrument, going equipped for stealing, tampering with vehicles, unlawful possession, unlawful pawning and loitering. There were a total of 4,311 preventive crimes in 1990, an increase of 14.6% compared with 1989, of these, 50.3% unlawful possession and possession of offensive weapon.

The above facts and figures show that even though the proportion of young people to the total population is decreasing, and they are achieving higher educational attainment, the juvenile and youth crime rates are very much a matter of concern. Even more alarming is the high proportion of preventive crimes involving young people between 16 and 30 years of age.

3. A Summary of Planned Provision and Shortfall of Children & Youth Services

As the social welfare sector, non-government organisations and the Social Welfare Department are the major providers of youth services a brief review of their provisions and future commitments would give some indications as to what more needs to be done quantity wise. The following figures are extracted from the Five Year Plan for Social Welfare Development in Hong Kong - Review 1991.

Services for Children and Youth
(Demand, Provision and Shortfall)

Type of Service	Provision 31.3.1991	Demand/ Provision/ Shortfall	Projected				
			91/92	92/93	93/94	94/95	95/96
Children Centres	205	Demand	230	234	237	240	243
	(NGO 192)	Provision	206	212	221	226	230
	(SWD 13)	Shortfall	24	22	16	14	13
Youth Centres	209	Demand	230	234	237	240	243
	(NGO 194)	Provision	210	219	226	232	237
	(SWD 15)	Shortfall	20	15	11	8	6
Outreaching Social Work Teams	24	Demand	30	30	30	(Subject to Review)	
	(NGO 24)	Provision	26	28	30		
	(SWD 0)	Shortfall	4	2	0		

4. The Draft Youth Charter

According to the Consultative Note on the Draft Charter for Youth, the Charter is developed for the purpose of providing a set of "defined principles to which the different parties involved in youth development and young people themselves can refer when planning and conducting their activities". The Charter would be a statement proclaiming "the rights of young people, their needs and aspirations and the social goals for youth development".

The Charter "comprises three sections:

(a) The 'pledge' section stating the ideals and principles of the well-being of youth" contains 10 principles: including young peoples' various basic needs and their need for a free democratic and peaceful environment in which to grow and develop; that youth should be allowed to participate in decisions that affect their life and the development of the society; and that the family should be protected and assisted to provide care for youth; as well as Hong Kong's obligation to implement fully international conventions and agreements that concern youth.

(b) The 'recognition' section stating the rights of youth contains 10 parts : including civil and political rights under the law without unreasonable restrictions and discrimination, irrespective of race, colour, sex, language, religion, political opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status, right to privacy, rights of youth offenders, protection from sexual abuse, and sexual & economic exploitation, protection from the illicit use, or being used in the illicit production and trafficking of narcotic drugs, and right for a decent life and full community participation.

(c) The 'consideration' section stating the social goals for development of young people contains 12 parts: including opportunities for youth to be brought up in their own homes with love, care and skills measures to enable youth to enjoy the highest standard of physical and mental health, education opportunities for all, access to vocational and other information from diverse local and international sources, guidance for personal, social and cultural development, opportunities for participation in cultural, artistic, sports, recreational and leisure activities, and opportunities for friendship and mutual understanding between Hong Kong youth and youth in other territories.

5. Proposed System for Operation

(a) Subscribers

The Commission proposed to operate the Charter on a system of voluntary subscription. The government is expected to be the key subscriber and all parties interested in youth development would be eligible to subscribe.

(b) Implementation

The principles set up in the Charter could be put into effect through :

i). educational programmes and publicity campaigns to promote the spirit and ideals of the Charter;

ii). administrative measures in policy formulation and developing working targets with reference to the principles set out in the Charter; and

iii). legislative means where appropriate.

(c) Biennial Review

The Commission proposed a biennial review system for subscribers to share their experience in fulfilling the Charter provisions. The review system would also help to refocus public awareness on the needs and aspirations of youth.

(d) Assessment of Achievements

Some yardsticks for assessing the implementation of the Charter provisions may need to be developed by the Commission in conjunction with interested parties.

6. Observation

(a) On Content of Youth Charter

i). There is no mention of the Bill of Rights in the Youth Charter.

ii). There is also no explicit statement on the right for physical health, mental health, productive employment and employment opportunities.

(b) On the Proposed Operation System

i). There is no linkage between the Charter and government policies. Then how could the guiding principles and ideals be translated into concrete programmes?

ii). There is no recommendation of a body or structure to be responsible for the promotion of the Charter. Would it be the Commission's responsibility then to promote the ideas of the Charter to potential subscribers, in particular, the government and its various policy branches?

iii). With a system of voluntary subscription, would a subscriber be expected to carry out all its pledges?

iv). What body or structure would be set up to monitor the drawing up of programme plans to implement Charter principles with reference to existing youth needs and problems? Could the Youth Commission be able to take up such a responsibility?

v). How to ensure continuous commitment from subscribers? Would "non performing" subscribers be "punished" or "penalized" in any way?

vi). How to ensure the appropriate and correct translation of "recognised rights" into policies or legislation? An example is the "civil and political rights under the law without unreasonable restrictions and discrimination of any kind, ...". How does this relate to the voting age for young people, whether it should be lowered from 21 to 18?

The Youth Charter contains a host of high-sounding statements and slogans most of which are indisputable principles for providing the best opportunity for development, not just for Hong Kong youth, but indeed, for all Hong Kong people.

However, the Charter contains very little substance. It offers no policy, no programme and no time-table for implementation. There is no recommendation for commitment of resources from the public sector as the government is only expected to be a voluntary subscriber, just like all other parties interested in youth development.

It seems essential that linkages should be provided for incorporating the Charter ideals and principles into policies like education, labour/employment, health and welfare in the various government branches such that concrete programmes to benefit youth could follow.

- Source :
- (1) A Consultative Note on the Draft Charter for Youth, Youth Division, City and New Territories Administration, December 1991
 - (2) Report on the Need for a Youth Policy in Hong Kong, Central Committee on Youth, January 1989
 - (3) Report on Youth Policy, Central Committee on Youth, February 1988
 - (4) Hong Kong 1991 Population Census Summary Results, Census and Statistics Department, Hong Kong
 - (5) Hong Kong 1991 Population Census Tabulations for District Board Districts and Constituency Areas: Population by Age and Sex, Census and Statistics Department, Hong Kong
 - (6) The Five Year Plan for Social Welfare Development in Hong Kong - Review 1991, Social Welfare Department, Hong Kong
 - (7) Omelco Paper No. 674/90-91

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