

## **Executive Summary**

### **Research Background**

In view of the fast changing social environment and the ever-increasing expectation on the teaching profession and school education, the Hong Kong Association of the Heads of Secondary Schools (HKAHSS) has been making strenuous effort to promote secondary school teachers' professional status and social recognition. Furthering the insights and findings gained from HKAHSS's self-initiated pilot study amongst Native English Teachers (NET) in Hong Kong to explore the professional status of educators and their social recognition in other parts of the world in 2017, HKAHSS has commissioned the current research project to Hong Kong Policy Research Institute (HKPRI). The four research objectives are as follows:

- (1) To promote the professional status of secondary school teachers in Hong Kong;
- (2) To promote the social recognition of the professional status of the secondary school teachers in Hong Kong;
- (3) To explore the expectations of prospective secondary school teachers on the social recognition of the professional status of the secondary school teachers in Hong Kong; and
- (4) To explore how HKAHSS can assist to enhance secondary school teachers' professional status and its social recognition.

### **Methodology**

Upon examination of several international and local frameworks on teachers' professional status and social recognition, a conceptual framework that captures the interrelatedness of the concepts of "professional status" and "social recognition" for the purpose of this research was designed. The concept of "professional status" consists of teachers' professional competencies and professional values and conducts. The Advisory Committee on Teacher Education and Qualifications' framework of teachers' professional competencies (2003) was chosen for its comprehensiveness and measurable descriptions. The four domains of professional competencies are: Teaching and Learning (TLD), Student Development (STD), School Development (SDD), and Professional Relationships and Services (PRS). Hoyle's (2001) perception-based notion of "social recognition" was adopted for research design.

Mixed research methods were designed and used in this research to assess the different facets of teachers' professional status and social recognition with different target subjects. They include surveys distributed to principals, serving teachers, parents, and prospective teachers; focus group interviews with principals, teachers, professionals, and parents; media count, and documentary search, such as policy data and publications. Triangulation of data was carried out to ensure reliability and validity of the research findings.

## Major Research Findings

This section summarises the major findings on “professional status” and “social recognition” with reference to our conceptual framework.

### *Professional status*

1. Over 80% of secondary school principal and teacher respondents saw their fellow colleagues as professional across the four domains of professional competencies.
2. Parent and professional respondents generally had confidence and trust in teachers’ competencies and advice in the domain of Teaching and Learning.
3. In the survey distributed to principals, serving teachers and parents, the teaching profession and parents showed similarities in their views on statements related to teachers’ Professional Values and Conducts.
4. Close to 40% of principal and teacher respondents saw that there was still room for them to further strengthen their professional competencies in the domains of School Development and Professional Relationships and Services. The qualitative responses from teacher and professional focus groups reflected that more space and time were needed for teachers to reach out to other sectors or the community.
5. Over 70% of the parent respondents of the survey showed confidence in teachers’ professional competencies in the domain of Student Development, including the provision of whole-person development support and career planning support. Enriching teachers’ exposure, knowledge and understanding of different occupations would further enhance their professional support on career planning for students.

### *Social recognition*

6. It was noted that over 70% of the parent and professional respondents had high regard for and placed trust in Hong Kong secondary school teachers.
7. At the same time, most professional focus group interviewees observed that unlike other sectors, the qualitative aspects of teacher-student relationship and long-term impacts could not be easily quantified.
8. Most of the professional focus group interviewees commented that despite Hong Kong secondary school teachers’ rather attractive salary package, the occupation’s attractiveness to graduates was seen to be affected by teachers’ rather heavy workload and difficulty in securing a stable teaching position. In the survey for prospective teachers, respondents who would consider other careers stated that they were concerned mostly with teachers’ great working pressure and difficulty in getting a teaching post after graduation, which was similar to the views held by professional focus group interviewees.
9. All parent and professional focus group interviewees agreed that teachers were one of the key stakeholders in education policy discussion. Yet, teacher focus group interviewees remarked that teachers’ participation in education policy discussion was often limited by their heavy workload, largely school-focused job nature, and their worries over the potential reputation risks their free expression may incur on their serving schools and sponsoring bodies.
10. The social recognition of secondary school teachers was undermined by the lack of their voices in public discussions on education policies.

## **Recommendations**

*Research objective (1): To promote professional status of Hong Kong secondary school teachers*

1. Teachers' training regime can be further strengthened, on top of the existing Continuing Professional Development (CPD) training, to reinforce holistic promotion of professional competencies. This may entail refinement of the existing model of sabbatical leave, and extension of the support for and infrastructure of Professional Learning Circles scheme to encourage teachers' creative initiatives.
2. More opportunities and engagement in broader school policy discussions and reforms could be created to engage all teachers to promote competencies of School Development domain. Initiatives include carrying out studies of recent education-related topics and impacts of trends on school's development planning, and revamping junior teachers' training and overall school succession ladder with restructured mentorship programme.
3. Structured encouragement and sufficient space for engagement in external activities in the Professional Relationships and Services domain should be created, such as more external seminars and exchanges with the community while balancing teachers' workload.
4. A wider range of collaborative efforts should be designed to commend teachers' innovative initiatives and facilitate interdisciplinary engagements to promote teachers' career advice and support of Student Development domain. One possible way is to refine the secondment system to allow teachers to collaborate with more stakeholders, such as non-profit organisations, universities and non-education sectors.

*Research objective (2): To promote social recognition of the professional status of Hong Kong secondary school teachers*

5. Greater community engagement with education stakeholders is needed to facilitate public's thorough understanding of the teaching profession's job nature and its technicalities beyond teaching and learning. This may take the form of wider publicity campaigns by the Education Bureau (EDB) and greater media coverage of more successful or positive teacher-student stories. Teachers are also encouraged to open up and present their teaching initiatives and achievements in the public arena.
6. Greater respect and empowerment of professional bodies would greatly promote the teaching profession's social recognition, such as more frequent exchange between the EDB and the education sector to understand stakeholders' needs.
7. As one of the key stakeholders in education policy, secondary school teachers' authority in education policy discussion could be buttressed by greater advocacy by the teaching profession.
8. The setting up of a self-governing professional body for the teaching profession could significantly promote social recognition of secondary school teachers, as reflected by a majority of principal and teacher focus group interviewees. Over 80% of parent respondents in the survey and the majority of professional focus group interviewees concurred with this recommendation.

9. Alternatively, the EDB may grant the Council on Professional Conduct in Education (CPC) with statutory power to become a self-regulatory body to maintain the professional standard and practices of the teaching profession.

*Research objective (3): To explore the expectations of prospective secondary school teachers on the social recognition of the professional status of the secondary school teachers in Hong Kong*

10. The distribution of survey to prospective teachers was severely affected by the serious situation of COVID-19 with a less than ideal sample size. The validity of the findings from prospective teachers' survey should be read against such restraints. It is thus strongly recommended that though the data cited in this research may be treated as a reference, future research on prospective teachers should be carried out.
11. One area for further research is on prospective teachers' career choice. Close to 70% of respondents chose to become a teacher because of their passion for education, and teacher's occupational stability and high-income level. Those who consider other careers stated that they were concerned mostly with teachers' great working pressure and difficulty in getting a teaching post after graduation, which was similar to the views held by professional focus group interviewees.
12. Prospective teachers' views on key competencies of teachers may also be further explored. More prospective teachers rated subjects relating to teaching and learning as very important than on subjects of broader education policies. Such perception could explain why half of the teacher focus group interviewees observed that some of their colleagues were hesitant to comment on education policy.

*Research objective (4): How HKAHSS can assist to enhance secondary school teachers' professional status and its social recognition*

13. While it may not be entirely realistic at this stage for HKAHSS to list any future plans, the Executive Committee has already embarked on the journey towards the direction highlighted by the research and throughout the deliberation process. They have also made a bold attempt to share their thinking aloud in Chapter 6 of this report to solicit comments and alternative thoughts. With these inputs, the Executive Committee will have further discussion to map out short, medium and long term plans to put thoughts into action.
14. In spite of recent social and political atmosphere, HKAHSS would remain steadfast and persist in their efforts in promoting good and quality education, such as continuing their previous attempts of organising education colloquia and professional gatherings for professional dialogues.
15. HKAHSS could play a proactive role in the enhancement of CPD regime to broaden members' horizon on the global trend and development in education. HKAHSS's potential arrangement of cross-sector collaboration would undoubtedly improve the quality and depth of CPD programmes for principals and teachers alike.
16. To facilitate greater enhancement in teachers' professional status and social recognition, HKAHSS would continue its role as the government's longtime critical friend and work

partner to urge the EDB to take the lead to collaborate with various institutions and professions. This may take the form of promotion of teachers' good practices and life changing stories to the public on top of existing recognition campaigns and structured plans to free up teachers' space to engage in professional development.

17. If it is not possible for the CPC to become a statutory body to fulfil the function of enhancing professionalism of the teaching profession, HKAHSS believed that the establishment of a General Teaching Council (GTC) or a similar self-governing professional body would maintain the profession's integrity and enhance teachers' professional development, which is also consistent with the recommendation made in the Education Commission Report No. 7 back in 1999. HKAHSS would advocate strongly for such proposal, as the setting up of a statutory, self-governing professional body could better enhance the professional status of educators in Hong Kong.