

COMMUNITY TRANSFER STUDENTS IN ASIAN HIGHER EDUCATION CONTEXT

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Background

In Hong Kong, high school students can enter university immediately after graduation as direct entrants; they normally complete their university study in four years. The other possible pathway to university study is through community college transfer (CCT) as vertical CCT students, who normally complete their university study in two or three years. Nontraditional students, who are older with family and work responsibilities (1), are not common in Hong Kong. That is, when graduating from university study, both groups are about the same age (2). However, their university learning experiences might be different because the CCT students spend less time in the university. However, limited studies have been conducted to examine their differences in learning experiences, particularly in an Asian context.

Study Design and Findings

Our study has adopted a mixed methods approach, with an online survey and focus group interviews conducted in four universities in Hong Kong. The online survey involved 2,157 CCT students and 1,056 direct entrants; while the focus group interviews consisted of 285 CCT students. Our preliminary quantitative and qualitative study results found that CCT students had *heavier study loads, less social support, lower self-efficacy, poorer adjustment, lower satisfaction with the university, and more mental health concerns*.

Discussion

Our study results are consistent with those found in the United States. "Transfer shock" (3,4,5), "campus culture shock" (3), and "feeling of [being] a freshman again" (6) are some of the terms used to describe the transition issues of CCT students when they commence university study. These differences found between the two groups of students might be due to the unequal resource allocation. Most literature has found that more university resources are allocated for direct entrants than for CCT students (7). Furthermore, the needs of CCT students might be different from those of direct entrants. For instance, CCT students with more credit transfers tend to have positive learning experiences (7). Thus, *the need to facilitate credit transfer from community college to degree studies is of paramount importance*, as this can reduce the study load. In return, CCT students can have more time for university life.

Implications

Our study results suggest a need to improve CCT students' credit transfer and transition between community college and university studies. *Collaborative work with different stakeholders such as the government, community colleges and universities, is essential*. Although the pathway for CCT students to enter university has been established for more than ten years in Hong Kong, the transparency of credit transfer from community college to university programmes is limited.

Our project team is working with the local accreditation body to establish an online credit transfer platform to allow open access for potential CCT students to know which subjects can be considered for credit transfer to degree programmes. In addition, our project is also working with university supporting departments to develop a resource website which serves as an information center to address CCT students' needs. Furthermore, a student ambassador scheme has been formed to provide peer support to CCT students.

Local Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT) Centralised Database

The Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF) was established by the Hong Kong Government in 2008 to encourage and facilitate lifelong learning, with a view to enhancing the capability and competitiveness of the workforce in Hong Kong. The CAT database is an initiative under HKQF to facilitate the recognition and transfer of credits, to minimise repeated learning, and to effectively support lifelong learning. It enhances not only the transparency and dissemination of credit transfer information and articulation arrangements between institutions and programmes, but also the availability of CAT arrangements on the quality assured qualifications contained in the Hong Kong Qualifications Register (HKQR). HKQR is an online database of qualifications recognised under the HKQF, with the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ), the local statutory accreditation body, as the QR Authority for developing and maintaining the QR. Currently, about 40% of the qualifications in the QR carry CAT information, indicating the positive support and participation of institutions. The CAT database can be accessed at www.hkqr.gov.hk.

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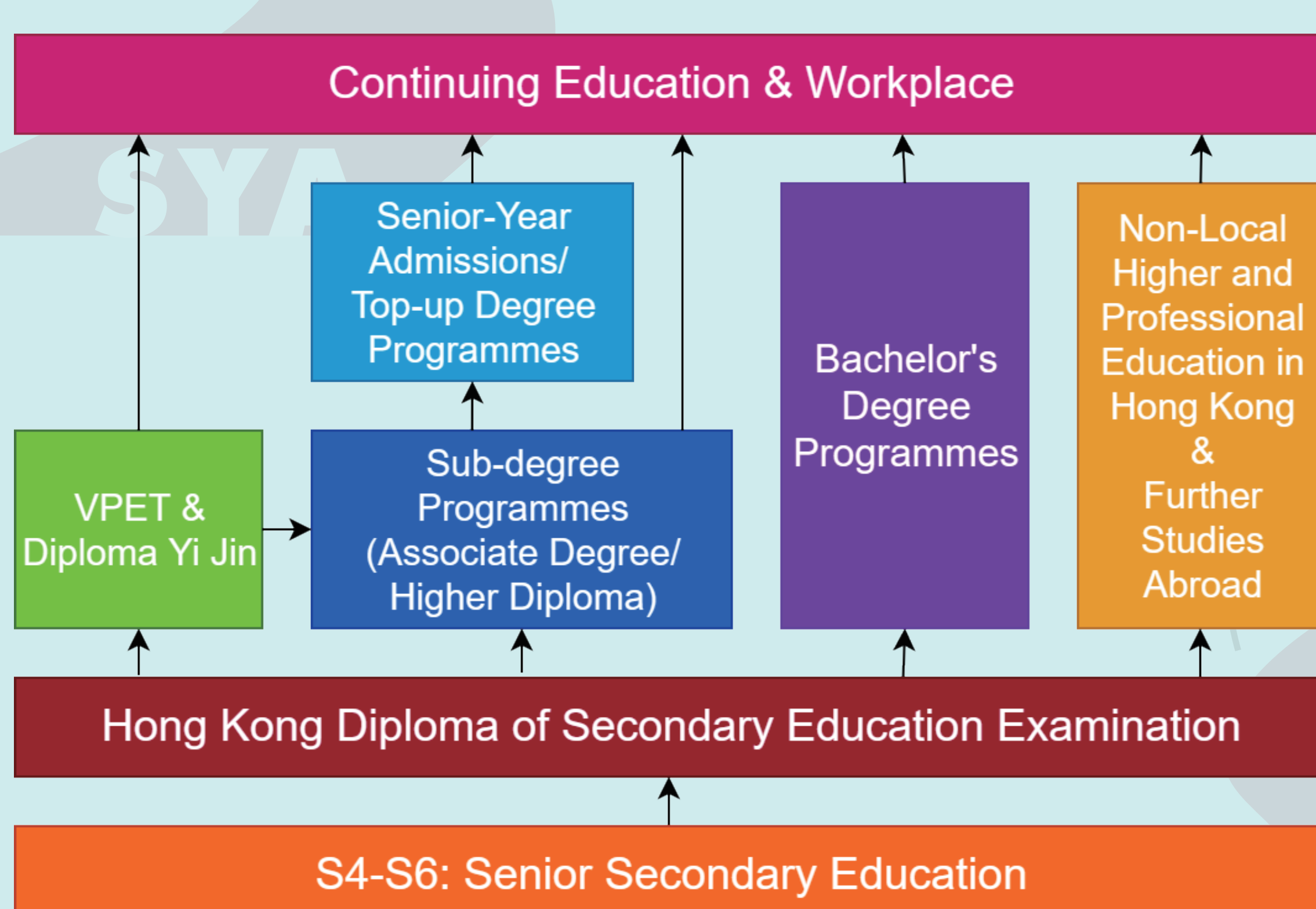


Figure 1. Hong Kong: Route to Tertiary Education. Adapted from Home Affairs Bureau (2017). https://www.hab.gov.hk/en/policy_address/education.htm

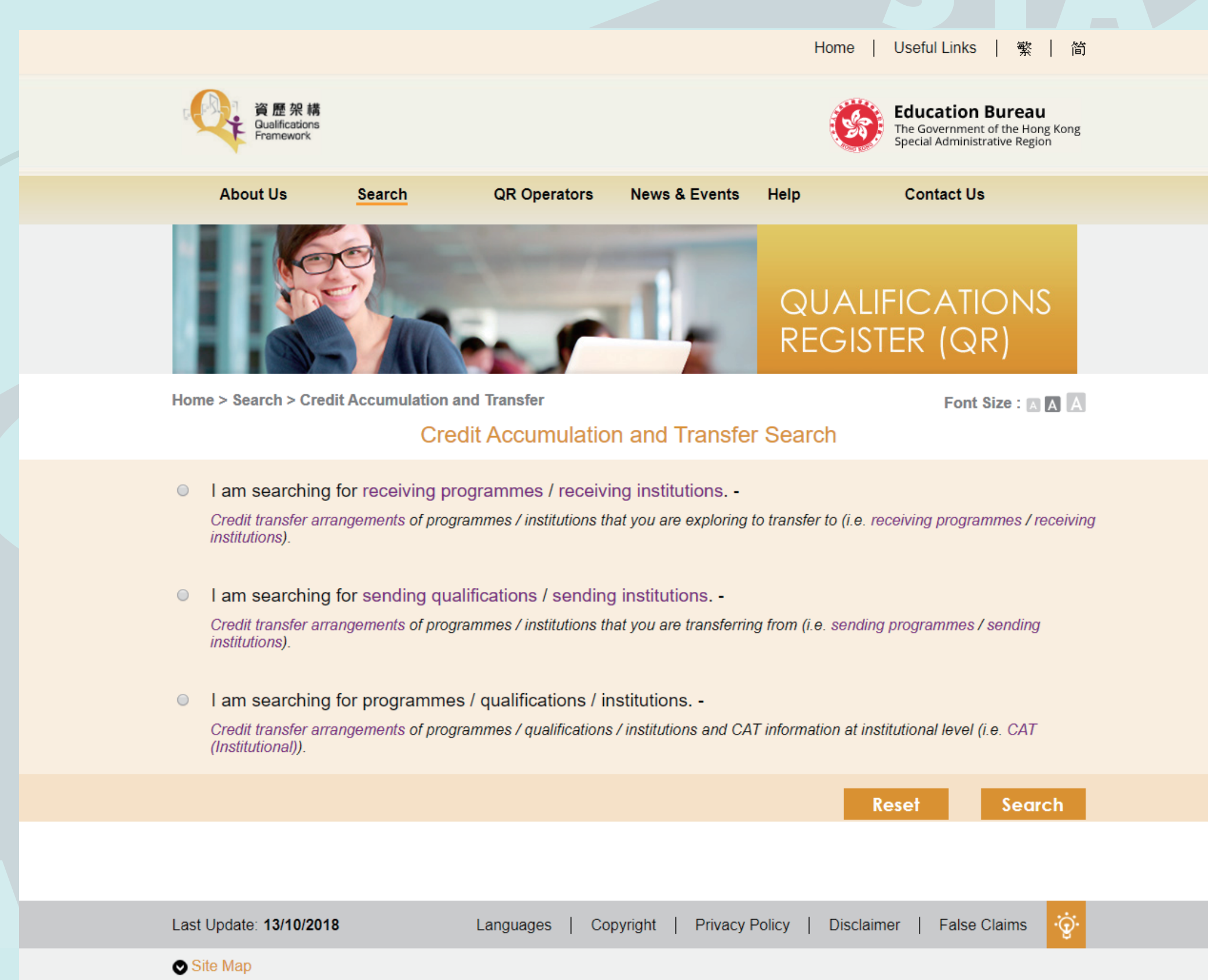


Figure 2. Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT) database (hkqr.gov.hk, 2020)