

Challenges Faced by Mainland Chinese Students of an Associate Degree (AD) Programme: A Case Study of College of International Education, Hong Kong Baptist University

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Sub-degree Mainland students in Hong Kong had received relatively little attention both in terms of media coverage or academic studies. Research and studies on Mainland students had been focused mainly on the undergraduate and postgraduate sectors. Yet, at the same time, the number of Mainland students coming to Hong Kong for AD programmes has been steadily increasing. One main reason for the increase in number is that the Associate Degree is slowly gaining public recognition and acceptance since its birth in 2000, under the “Education Blueprint for the 21st Century” initiated by the Education Commission. To many Mainland students and their parents, the concept of an Associate Degree which has transfer-function to degree programmes is very attractive, especially for those students who are unable to gain entry to universities of their choice.

CIE began admitting its first batch of Mainland students in 2004. The intake of Mainland students in the first few years remained very small. Each intake made up no more than 1% of the total student intake of the year. 2007 saw a relatively more significant increase in the intake of Mainland students. The 2007 Mainland student intake took up 4.4% of total intake of the year. This increase was in response to the Government’s plan to develop Hong Kong into a regional education hub. As at September 2013, the intake of Mainland students was 10.3% of the student intake of the year. The number of Mainland students in September 2013 (Yr 1 and Yr 2) in CIE was 5.5% of the total student population. With more Mainland students coming to the College, CIE has identified some of the challenges and difficulties faced by Mainland students at the Associate Degree level.

In our preliminary studies on CIE Mainland students, it has been found that major challenges faced by this group of students include, inter alia, the use of English as medium of teaching and learning, the emphasis on creative and critical thinking, the lack of certain essential study skills, the adaptation to a Cantonese speaking environment, as well as the cultural barriers separating them from local students. Being away from home and switching from a very rigid and exam-centric secondary school system, some Mainland students are

having difficulties in acclimatizing to their new found independence in Hong Kong higher education. Another major issue of concern amongst Mainland students is articulation opportunities, in view of the limited quota for senior places and their inability to enroll in any foreign collaborated degree programme under the existing regulation.

This study looks into the different measures adopted by the College to help Mainland students in their adjustment to the new academic environment and to the Hong Kong cultural and social milieu away from home.