

Shanghai districts woo overseas college graduates with subsidized 'talent flats'

Yang Jian

Shanghai's Hongkou District has been welcoming professionals from abroad by providing housing and subsidies.

The "talent station" scheme streamlines the application process for graduates returning from international colleges to apply for "talent flats" and housing subsidies.

Applicants can avoid bureaucratic red tape by using mobile apps such as Government Online-Offline Shanghai and Suishenban.

"This user-friendly approach is a breath of fresh air in an era where cumbersome paperwork often discourages talented individuals from returning to their home country," remarked a graduate named Yang from Manchester University in the United Kingdom.

Furthermore, it does not require individuals to work in Hongkou, making it more accessible and versatile, Yang added.

Young professionals can obtain rent subsidies of up to 15,000 yuan (US\$2,090) for around six months.

Shanghai has been the top destination of choice for work for returning graduates in recent years, followed by Beijing and Shenzhen.

From roughly 200 people in 1997, the number of returning graduates settling in Shanghai had increased to around 22,000 by 2020. Currently, about 220,000 such graduates are working or launching businesses in the city.

In 2021, Hongkou District launched the program to address the housing issues encountered by returning graduates amid soaring rental prices.

The initiative provides eligible returnees with rental

subsidies during the transition phase, allowing them to find a residence before seeking job opportunities.

Fu Yongjin, a finance and investment major studying in the UK, came across this policy on the popular Chinese social networking platform Red.

The Hainan Province native chose Shanghai for his first career move in China.

Fu described the program in Hongkou as a "game changer." Graduates with a master's degree or higher from the world's top 100 universities are eligible for up to six months of rental subsidies. Importantly, it does not require employment within the district.

"I applied online while still abroad, and the approval process was quick," Fu said. "I had my own apartment in the city even before I flew back."

He moved into an apartment near the North Bund waterfront in late 2022 and later landed a job at a futures company not far from his home.

"I'm a beneficiary of this policy, which provides a great starting point for my future career plans," Fu added.

Sun Jia, deputy director of the Hongkou District Human Resources and Social Security Bureau, said that through this "talent station" program, the district hopes to attract excellent graduates from both China and abroad to stay in Hongkou.

"We provide all kinds of services, not just residence but also employment," Sun explained.

For example, the bureau's service personnel are assisting Fu with his application for a Shanghai *hukou*, or residence permit.

After the initial six-month transition period, if a professional obtains employment in



A "talent apartment" project for graduates returning from abroad in Hongkou District. — Ti Gong

Hongkou, they are eligible for an extra six months of housing subsidies.

Zhang Weiyu, who returned to China after studying in the UK, has benefited from this new "bonus."

In January, she moved into a 20-square-meter, one-bedroom flat with full amenities and convenient transportation.

She received a monthly rent subsidy of 2,000 yuan for the first three months and 1,500 yuan for the next three months under Hongkou's program.

She has applied for a second-phase subsidy of 1,500 yuan per month because she chose to work in Hongkou.

"This subsidy was a huge relief for me. It feels like home here; it's convenient and

secure," she said.

According to the bureau, Hongkou currently has nine projects that provide accommodation for returning graduates, with prices that are around 10 percent lower than the average market rates.

Hongkou has introduced "online virtual-reality apartment tours" to make reservations easier for overseas students.

They can apply for housing and rent subsidies even when they are abroad, thus alleviating their initial housing anxieties.

The approach has helped Youjian Apartment's Siping Road branch, one of the talent residential buildings in Hongkou, achieve a 90 percent occupancy rate.

According to the apartment's manager, Du Haojie, numerous overseas students have been attracted to the project.

Zang Tong, a returning student, said she wants a tiny but completely functional apartment where rent costs less than 30 percent of her monthly income. She has more options now that she is receiving a subsidy.

Since its inception in 2021, around 400 returning graduates have directly benefited from the program.

Hongkou is working on supplying more acceptable housing to encourage a varied range of talent to work and settle down in the district.

Pan Zheng, Party chief and director of Hongkou's housing management bureau, said another 2,566 "talent apartments" will be available by the end of 2023.

Other districts in Shanghai are following Hongkou's lead and offering similar subsidies. The aim is to ensure that Shanghai becomes a hub for global talent.

In Minhang, roughly 16,800 units of subsidized rental housing have been allocated to 22 developments. A total of 28,000 "talent apartments" will be delivered in the second half of 2023.

By the end of this year, Songjiang's well-equipped rental housing for talent is expected to total 17,000 units.

In downtown Changning, a complex has been unveiled within the nearly century-old Columbia Circle. La Qualité, also known as the Chenpin Apartment, spans more than 6,500 square meters and has 116 fully furnished apartments for professionals from both home and abroad, all of which are available for rent at subsidized rates.