

Hostels in the City Scheme

To consolidate Hong Kong's status as an international hub for post-secondary education, the Government has launched the Hostels in the City Scheme ("the Scheme") to encourage the market to convert existing commercial buildings and hotels into student hostels. Under the Scheme, eligible student hostels converted from commercial buildings and hotels may enjoy certain facilitation measures under the building regime. This practice note sets out the details of these facilitation measures, including the factors that the Building Authority (BA) will take into consideration for the purpose of granting modifications under the Buildings Ordinance (BO) to effect such facilitation.

Facilitation Measures for Conversion of Existing Buildings under the BO

2. In handling alteration and addition (A&A) proposals for the conversion of existing commercial buildings or hotels into student hostels which are supported by the Government's policy (i.e. eligible student hostels under the Scheme meeting the eligibility criteria which have been confirmed by the Education Bureau (EDB)), the BA would adopt a pragmatic approach when considering applications for modification of or exemption from the relevant building regulations.

Site coverage (SC), plot ratio (PR), open space, service lane and kitchen

3. While student hostels for habitation are domestic use, for eligible student hostels under the Scheme, the BA is prepared to grant modifications/exemptions to:

- (a) treat a building or part of a building that is converted for use as a student hostel as a non-domestic building or a non-domestic part of a building for the purposes of SC and PR calculations under regulations 19, 20, 21 and 22 of the Building (Planning) Regulations (B(P)R);
- (b) allow the non-provision of open space and service lane¹ under regulations 25 and 28 of the B(P)R; and
- (c) permit the non-provision of kitchens² in individual hostel units under regulation 45 of the B(P)R.

4. For the avoidance of doubt, other requirements for domestic buildings (such as natural lighting and ventilation) and the fire safety requirements applicable to hostels/dormitories should be complied with.

/Exemption ...

¹ Modification of regulation 28 of B(P)R for non-provision of service lane will be considered on case merits, e.g. no lane is provided for the existing building and the servicing strategy of the converted student hostel is acceptable.

² Subject to the provision of a communal canteen/kitchen/pantry.

Exemption of supporting facilities for student hostels from gross floor area (GFA) calculation

5. The BA will favourably consider exempting supporting facilities that are conducive to a better living environment for tenants of the eligible student hostels under the Scheme (“hostel facilities”) from GFA calculation. Such hostel facilities which may enjoy GFA exemption are set out in **Appendix**.

Retaining previously exempted/disregarded GFA

6. Facilities in an existing commercial building or a hotel which had been exempted/disregarded from GFA calculation can be retained and continue to be exempted/disregarded from GFA calculation after conversion into a student hostel eligible under the Scheme. The spirit of this arrangement is to ensure that eligible student hostels under the Scheme need not reduce their existing bulk for conversion from the original buildings due to GFA calculation issue. In cases where the proposed conversion would result in certain facilities shown on the approved building plans of the original commercial building or hotel becoming redundant and such facilities had previously been exempted/disregarded from GFA calculation, any application for modification of regulation 23(3)(a) of the B(P)R to convert such facilities to other mandatory features, essential/non-essential plant rooms, green/amenity features and hostel facilities will be favourably considered according to its special circumstance³.

7. For the avoidance of doubt, for eligible student hostels converted from former licensed hotels which are no longer holding valid hotel licences under the Hotel and Guesthouse Accommodation Ordinance (Cap. 349), the picking up and setting down areas and back-of-house facilities, which had previously been disregarded from GFA calculation under regulation 23A(3) of the B(P)R, could be converted into hostel facilities. The BA is prepared to grant exemption of such facilities from GFA calculation upon application for modification of regulation 23(3)(a) of the B(P)R.

8. For projects with redundant facilities of less than 5% of the total GFA of the student hostel, it can have hostel facilities up to 5% of the total GFA of the student hostel. For projects with redundant facilities more than 5% of the total GFA of the student hostel, it may be allowed to convert all the redundant facilities into hostel facilities. Exemption of hostel facilities exceeding 5% of the total GFA of an eligible student hostel from GFA calculation would be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Eligibility Criteria

9. As aforementioned, for student hostels to qualify for the facilitation measures above, they must be supported by the Government’s policy (i.e. eligible student hostels under the Scheme). For details of the Scheme, please refer to the dedicated website of the Scheme (www.studenthostel.gov.hk).

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³ Subject to the compliance with the pre-requisites stipulated in PNAP APP-151 on Building Design to Foster a Quality and Sustainable Built Environment for A&A works resulting in a new building.

10. In addition, A&A proposals for conversion under the Scheme should comply with all other applicable requirements under the building regime as well as the requirements from all relevant government departments including but not limited to the Lands Department, Planning Department, Fire Services Department, Transport Department, etc. Facilitation measures under the building regime conferred under this practice note would not prejudice control of other regulatory regimes.

Partial Conversion

11. Partial conversion of a building into an eligible student hostel is allowed under the Scheme as long as the conditions set out in the Application Guidelines of the Scheme are duly met. EDB assisted by the Development Projects Facilitation Office under the Development Bureau will determine if such conditions are met for A&A proposals involving partial conversion.

12. For partial conversion cases, the “total GFA of the student hostel” mentioned in paragraph 8 above should refer to the total GFA of the student hostel portion of the building (i.e. areas exclusively operated as student hostel under the Scheme).

Facilitation Measures for Newly Built Student Hostels under the BO

13. Pursuant to the 2025 Policy Address, the Scheme has been expanded to cover newly built student hostels. Subject to satisfying the eligibility criteria as mentioned in paragraph 9 above, the BA is also prepared to grant the following modifications/exemptions to:

- (a) treat a newly built student hostel as a non-domestic building for the purposes of SC and PR calculations under regulations 19, 20, 21 and 22 of the B(P)R;
- (b) allow the non-provision of open space and service lane⁴ under regulations 25 and 28 of the B(P)R;
- (c) permit the non-provision of kitchens² in individual hostel units under regulation 45 of the B(P)R; and
- (d) exempt the hostel facilities set out in **Appendix** up to 5% of the total GFA of the student hostel from GFA calculation. The granting of GFA concessions for hostel facilities under the Scheme is subject to compliance with the pre-requisites stipulated in PNAP APP-151 but not subject to the overall cap on GFA concessions.

14. As student hostels under the Scheme would be treated as non-domestic buildings for the purposes of SC and PR calculations under regulations 19, 20, 21 and 22 of the B(P)R, they would be considered as non-residential developments for the purposes of Joint Practice Note (JPN) No.1, JPN No.2, Practice Note for Authorized Persons, Registered Structural Engineers, Registered Geotechnical Engineers (PNAP) APP-42 and PNAP APP-104.

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⁴ Modification of regulation 28 of B(P)R for non-provision of service lane will be considered on case merits, e.g. no existing lane pattern and the servicing strategy of the student hostel is acceptable.

15. The facilitation measures for newly built student hostels under the Scheme as set out in paragraphs 13 and 14 above are applicable to all new building plans or major revision of building plans for development proposals submitted to the BA for approval on or after the issuance of this practice note.

Loss of Status for Facilitation

16. In case the building/premises is no longer operated as a student hostel under the Scheme, the exemptions granted under the BO as mentioned above will be revoked. The owner of the building has to appoint an authorized person to submit for the BA's approval any subsequent change in use demonstrating compliance with the provisions under the BO. Otherwise, the Buildings Department may consider taking enforcement action under the BO.



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Building Authority

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Hostel Facilities that May be Exempted from GFA Calculation

The following supporting facilities that are essential/conducive to a suitable living environment for the exclusive use of a student hostel may be exempted from GFA calculation:

- (a) Linen store;
- (b) Laundry room;
- (c) Study room/collaboration room¹/leisure room;
- (d) Gymnasium/sports room;
- (e) Communal kitchen/pantry/canteen;
- (f) Staff rest room;
- (g) Staff toilet; and
- (h) Other facilities in support of the operation of a student hostel that may be accepted by the EDB and the BA.

(7/2025)

¹ Rooms intended for students to self-study and/or collaborate with other students for schoolwork.