

Project Title : Strengthening the Alignment of Residential Education and University Educational Aims

Leading University : The University of Hong Kong

Participating UGC-funded University(ies) : City University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong Baptist University, The Education University of Hong Kong

Project Leader(s) : Dr Samuel K W CHU, Warden of Swire Hall, Faculty of Education, The University of Hong Kong

### **Summary of Proposal**

University graduates in Hong Kong are often criticised for their lack of interpersonal skills and other much needed problem-solving capabilities. Such soft skills are non-academic and best developed experientially, outside the context of a classroom. Residential education aims to nurture personal development and student-centred learning beyond academic studies. In a well-designed residential education experience, students are encouraged to take up leadership roles within their residence and engage in team sports, cultural activities and social services to broaden their learning environment. Placed in close proximity with one's peers, residential halls offer the perfect environment for students to develop the highly sought-after skills and abilities, to the purpose of enriching personal growth and in preparation for the workplace.

There is however limited evidence about the residential educational aims across universities, as well as a lack of explicit set of guidance on how residential education is best conducted. While goals and objectives exist and may be understood by some, they are seldom commonly-shared knowledge among those involved, nor are they designed to align with university's educational aims. A clear and defined set of residential educational aims that is complementary to university's educational aims is hence needed to maximise students' gain from residential education – and the proposed project sets out to address this need. The project begins with gaining an understanding of current residential educational aims. Then they will be articulated and aligned with university's educational aims. This is carried out by examining aims of local participating universities, supplemented by a comparison and contrast with residential/university's educational aims of overseas participating universities.

By the end of the project, the team expects to 1) offer a clearly articulated set of residential educational aims that is better aligned with the university's educational aims, 2) improve students' perception and fulfilment of residential and/or university's educational aims, and 3) develop a set of measuring instrument to evaluate students' perception and fulfilment of the aims.

### **Summary of Final Report**

Residential life is a crucial part of university education. However, the alignment of residential educational aims and university educational aims, particularly in the context of Hong Kong, remained unclear for decades. In light of this knowledge gap, a research team comprising members from The University of Hong Kong (HKU), The Education University of Hong Kong (EdUHK), City University of Hong Kong (CityU) and Hong Kong Baptist University (HKBU) conducted a research project called “Strengthening the Alignment of Residential Education and University Educational Aims”, the first in Hong Kong on the aims of university residential education. The research reveals that residential experience has positive impact on students' academic, social, and individual development, confirming that residential experience is beneficial to students' whole person development.

The research team was led by Dr Samuel Chu, Associate Professor, Academic Unit of Teacher Education and Learning Leadership, Faculty of Education, HKU, and joined by Professor Christina Yu, Professor (Practice), Social Sciences Department, EdUHK, Dr Elaine Au Liu, Associate Professor, Department of Social and Behavioural Sciences, CityU and Dr Kevin Yue, Associate Director and Associate Professor, Teaching and Research Division, School of Chinese Medicine, HKBU as co-investigators. The project is funded by the University Grants Committee, and its findings were announced in the press conference 2021.

This research used mixed methods, namely quantitative (online self-report questionnaire) and qualitative (focus group interview) approaches to find out how to strengthen the alignment of residential education and university educational aims of local universities. This is to help students acquire various non-cognitive skills, include self-control and social skills. This study started in 2017 with a duration of over three years. On average, around 1 700 students and alumni from the four above mentioned universities participated in the study each year.

The research team provided several suggestions based on the findings. These include increasing human resources and appropriating more funds for residential education development, strengthening the training of personnel in the residential education field, and organising more hall activities that reflect the universities' campus cultures and residential educational aims. It is hoped that through these measures, students' perceived value of residential education could be enhanced, which in turn will help them achieve residential and university educational aims.

To promote knowledge exchange on residential education, the research team also organised several overseas trips to visit top universities in the USA, UK, and Singapore, such as Harvard University, The University of Cambridge, and Nanyang Technological University. Participants consisted of student residents, wardens, resident tutors, and hall affair officers from the four local universities. The trips facilitated the participants' learning good practices from the visited universities and the reflection on the visions and systems of residential education in local universities. The trips also inspired the student residents to acquire non-formal learning and self-learning through their residential life.