

Research Assessment Exercise 2020 Impact Overview Statement

University: The University of Hong Kong (HKU)

Unit of Assessment (UoA): 21. Economics and Finance

Total number of eligible staff of the university in the UoA: 40

(1) Context

HKU's research mission is 'To engage in innovative, high-impact and leading edge research within and across disciplines' (<http://hku.hk/about/vision.html>). Building on high-quality research on Hong Kong economic policy, China business and economics, and FinTech, the UoA aims to inform government policies and improve social well-being; sustain and enhance Hong Kong as an international financial centre; and contribute to economic development of the Greater Bay Area. UoA staff work with partners in policy research, consultancy and executive education through Faculty research centres: the *Hong Kong Institute of Economics and Business Strategy* (HIEBS), the *Centre for Financial Innovation and Development* (CFID), the *Institute for China and Global Development* (ICGD) and the *Asia Case Research Centre* (ACRC). Users and audiences for the UoA's research include:

- **Local government agencies:** such as the *Housing Authority*, *Policy Innovation and Co-ordination Office*, *Minimum Wage Commission*, *Competition Commission*.
- **International financial institutions:** such as *Hong Kong Monetary Authority*, *Asian Development Bank*, the *Bank of International Settlements*, *China Banking Regulatory Commission*, *China Security Regulatory Commission*, *International Monetary Fund*, the *Federal Reserve Bank*, *National Bureau of Economic Research* and the *World Bank*.
- **Companies:** such as *China Construction Bank* (CCB), *Alibaba Group*, as well as small and medium enterprises (SMEs), especially Hong Kong-invested firms in the Greater Bay Area.
- **Think tanks/advocacy groups:** such as *Our Hong Kong Foundation* (public policy think tank founded by a former HKSAR Chief Executive), *Federation of Hong Kong Industries* (statutory business chamber in Hong Kong), the *Qianhai Institute for Innovative Research*, mainland China.

The UoA's research creates impact on

- **Public Policy.** For example, UoA's economic research has informed government policymaking (**Wong** on public housing policy reform and land development, **Lau** and **Suen** on the minimum wage, **Lin** on monetary policy and financial regulations), enriching public discourse.
- **Economy.** UoA research has shown how financial innovation can increase financial inclusiveness. **Lin**'s project with *CCB* created a new approach to risk assessment and lending practices, benefiting 800 million individual customers and 70 million SMEs.
- **Firms and Organisations.** UoA staff develop Asia-based research-driven business cases through the ACRC for executive training: strengthening managers' skills and ability to adapt.

(2) Approach to impact

HKU's Knowledge Exchange (KE) Office provides funding for Faculties and staff to undertake capacity building and impact projects. The Faculty provides seed funding for research centres, incentive awards for impact projects, event management and publicity support for KE activities, funding for producing user versions of research articles, skills audits in appraisal and focused staff development and training. The UoA promotes co-production of impactful research through its research centres, which adopt an 'open architecture' and operate across disciplinary areas. Co-directed by senior members of the UoA, centres are well-resourced and structured to support thematic and impactful research. For example, CFID's multi-disciplinary team of researchers collaborate with the *Alibaba Group* and its affiliates. CFID's collaboration with international and local legal and engineering scholars investigating FinTech's risks and opportunities was awarded HK\$3 million by the Research Grants Council's (RGC) *Research Impact Fund* in 2018-19. HIEBS brings researchers and external members together in monthly meetings to exchange ideas on current

and relevant economic issues, generating insights for newspaper columns and economic policy research. An *Economic Data Centre* linked to the *Hospital Authority* makes economic data accessible to facilitate health policy research. The ICGD conducts strategic public policy research for the Hong Kong government with cooperation with the *Federation of Hong Kong Industries*. A study of HK-invested firms in the Greater Bay Area sheds light on the region's future economic cooperation model, crucial to Hong Kong's development. Through the ACRC, UoA staff work with companies to develop context-rich cases underpinned by the UoA's research which are used around the world in delivering executive education.

Significant collaborative activity develops reach and impact. Routes involve (i) Engagement. The UoA engages the community in policy discourse, hosting KE activities (public lectures, forums and conferences) bringing faculty, policymakers, practitioners and the general public together. By presence on government advisory committees, statutory bodies and in the private sector, UoA staff contribute to evaluation of public policy and organisational practice; **(ii) Dissemination.** The *Hong Kong Macroeconomic Forecasts* are released quarterly and covered widely by the media, providing timely information on short-term economic fluctuations. The Faculty produces lay versions of UoA research articles for newsletters and social media, promoting knowledge exchange and making research accessible. In 2017 the UoA began to introduce research findings to the general public through newspaper columns (*Hong Kong Economic Journal*). UoA research is often presented at international meetings (such as the *International Monetary Fund*) and covered by international media such as *Reuters*, *Financial Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, and *Bloomberg*. Blogs and social media channels attract millions of followers gaining insights into current affairs (**Chen, Wong, Ching**).

(3) Strategy and plans

To advance the achievement of the UoA's strategic aims for impact as described in section (1), the UoA will focus on **(i) Embedding impact in the Faculty's policy and practices.** Emphasis will be placed on recruiting seasoned and senior academics who can stimulate and foster an environment in which younger faculties aspire and are enabled to pursue the impact agenda. **(ii) Empowering staff to develop and maximise research impact.** The Faculty has designated new administrative positions and is building a team of communications and external relations professionals to support the development of research impact, identifying potential impact from new and ongoing research projects and seeking further funds from the University, RGC and the government, preparing marketing materials and press releases, maintaining media contacts, developing webpages, and collecting data enabling the UoA to collate, monitor and review its impact activity. A Customer Relationship Management system will be deployed to improve relationship management with non-academic partners, including the UoA's wide network of alumni around the world; **(iii) Fostering strategic collaboration.** The Faculty is actively pursuing strategic relationships for deeper and longer engagement. New agreements have been signed with large corporations such as *CCB FinTech* and *China Resources Group*. These long-term relationships enshrine collaboration in research, teaching and executive education, and will bring in new resources (financial support, proprietary data, industry connections) to yield sustained impact.

(4) Relationship to case studies

The three selected case studies demonstrate the UoA's reach and significant impact on regionally-significant issues, exemplifying the UoA's strategic aims for impact. **Wong's** case demonstrates the UoA's sustained impact on government advisory bodies on housing policy issues, one of the most important and long-standing policy issues in Hong Kong. **Lin's** case study on advancing FinTech research and applications is an example of success in capitalising on one of the research centre's academic and collaborative strengths, with international reach and significant impact on lending practices. **Tao's** case describes another of the research centre's development of research-based material enhancing organizational learning and enriching higher education teaching and learning around the world.