

Research Assessment Exercise 2020

Impact Overview Statement

University: The University of Hong Kong (HKU)

Unit of Assessment (UoA): 25 – Political Science (incl. Public Policy & Administration & International Relations)

Total number of eligible staff of the university in the UoA: 13

(1) Context

The Department has a long-standing tradition of research excellence with a commitment to engaging with and influencing non-academic individuals and groups. Its research has stimulated and informed policy debates and public discourses on a wide range of global and local issues, including the ethics of war and terrorism, nuclear disarmament, UN Peacekeeping and China's participation, social cohesion in Africa, Asia, and Europe, energy policies in Asia, election predictions in US Presidential Elections, anticorruption and nationalism in China, and sustainability and public engagement in HK.

The Department achieves research impacts through (a) collaborative and advisory relationships with non-academic groups, and (b) its networks of engagement with practitioners, especially through its Centre for Civil Society and Governance. These engagement mechanisms have enabled its researchers to reach a wide range of audiences and beneficiaries, including:

- Governments – various HKSAR government bureaus, UK Ministry of Defence/Foreign and Commonwealth Office;
- Consuls in HK – Australia, Portugal, UK, US;
- International organizations and representatives – Special Representative of Secretary-General of UN for Timor-Leste, UN Office for Disarmament Affairs, UNDP Regional Bureau for Arab States;
- Policy institutes and think-tanks – American National Elections Study, German-Southeast Asian Centre of Excellence for Public Policy and Governance (Bangkok), Sarawak Development Institute (Malaysia), US Institute of Peace, Center for Strategic and International Studies (US), Smithsonian Institution (US), Bertelsmann Stiftung (German), German Development Institute;
- Civil society organizations and foundations – Quaker United Nations Office, American Friends Service Committee, Hongkong Bank Foundation, Hong Kong Countryside Foundation, Business Environment Council (HK); and
- Media – The Economist, NY Times, Financial Times, Der Standard (Austria), CNN, BBC, Bloomberg, Spanish News Agency, De Groene Amsterdammer & Knack, Swiss TV, BBC 4 Radio.

(2) Approach to impact

Approaches: The Department pursues two broad approaches to achieving impact through its research.

- Direct work with and for specific non-academic groups: The Department's research activities are in part guided by the needs of the non-academic groups and organizations that it works with. For example, *Enze Han* has acted as a consultant for the Smithsonian Institute (US) for a project on land-use policies and armed conflict in Myanmar; *Courtney Fung* has worked on a book, funded by the Department of Foreign Affairs, Government of Switzerland, on Swiss-Chinese views on conflict prevention executed through the Quaker United Nations Office; *Danny Lam* has been commissioned by the Environment Bureau of HKSAR government to study public engagement processes in relation to HK's long-term climate mitigation strategy; *Norbert Chan* has worked with local advocacy group "We Care Bill" to produce a white paper on medication supply for cancer patients in Hong Kong; *Joseph Chan* has advised the German

Development Institute on developing a framework for the study of social cohesion in Africa; *Uwe Steinhoff* works with the International Team for the Evaluation of Radicalization Prevention (ITERP), and *Peter Cheung* has conducted many civil service training sessions for administrative officers in HKSAR government.

- **Dissemination:** The Department places and publicizes research findings in high-impact or prominent venues, to which media and policymakers are known to pay attention. For example, *Uwe Steinhoff* presented his research results to military officers and members of the international intelligence community at the International Society for Military Ethics; *Kai Quek*'s large-scale national experiment was featured in *The Economist* as a part of their cover story; *Joseph Chan* and *Danny Lam* presented their studies on the employment of the intellectually disabled (ID) in Hong Kong on two occasions: a public seminar targeting parents and employers of ID, NGOs, and charitable foundations; and a private meeting with the Commissioner for Rehabilitation, Labour and Welfare Bureau of HKSAR government.

Institutional support: The Department, the Faculty of Social Sciences, and the University provide financial and administrative support to encourage staff to achieve impact from their research. The Department provides all researchers with research funding on a yearly basis; it provides administrative and financial support to the Centre for Civil Society and Governance, which conducts research that aims at impact; colleagues take full advantage of the Faculty's support for impact by leading and participating in its EXCEL3 programme, which tries to enhance the capacity of civil society organizations in HK; Knowledge Exchange awards at Faculty and University levels are available to recognize and reward excellence in research impact – *Uwe Steinhoff* received one for his research of the ethics of war and violence. *Jiangnan Zhu* was awarded the University KE Impact Project for her anticorruption book project.

(3) Strategy and plans

Over the next RAE period, the Department will strengthen its support for impact-oriented research by adopting the following measures:

- Creation of new targeted funding to support impact-oriented research and to encourage the mainstreaming of impact in new projects;
- Strengthening support for the Centre for Civil Society and Governance, which is key to the Department's efforts to enhance research impact. Under the new directorship of *Danny Lam*, the Centre is going through a significant reorganization and expansion of its impact-oriented research to include studies on sustainability, philanthropy, and nonprofit management, in addition to its ongoing work on civil society and governance. Major new research commissions are under discussion with philanthropic foundations and civil society organizations; and
- Incorporation of impact activity into the criteria for the granting of sabbaticals, professional leave, and outside practice.

(4) Relationship to case studies

- The case study on social cohesion originated from a commissioned project undertaken by the Centre for Civil Society and Governance for the then Central Policy Unit of HKSAR government. It is an example of how the development of a rigorous conceptualization and framework for the study of a major social phenomenon can lead to impact beyond academia. The beneficiaries include foreign think-tanks such as the Bertelsmann Stiftung (German), German Development Institute, UNDP Regional Bureau for Arab States, and many other research institutes that work on social cohesion.