

Research Assessment Exercise 2020

Impact Overview Statement

University: The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology

Unit of Assessment (UoA): 25-Political Science

Total number of eligible staff of the university in the UoA: 12

1. Context

This UoA's faculty and research students are centered on research excellence in political economy and applied public policy within the Division of Social Science under the School of Humanities and Social Science (SHSS) and Division of Public Policy (PPOL, est.2017, led by WU) under the Interdisciplinary Programs Office. In keeping with SHSS/PPOL's strategic positioning, our focus is on political/policy development in China in a global setting as well as the Greater Bay Area, with our *main non-academic users* being *industry* and *government agencies* in Hong Kong and mainland China seeking new strategies and understanding related to innovation, technology, and sustainability in economic development and policy-making. Types of impact and beneficiaries include:

■ **Industry:** Collaborative research and consultancy delivering *economic impact* through innovation-related strategies to help *manufacturers* in southern China and beyond to upgrade production, handle rising costs and regulation, and *employees* to retain jobs (SHARIF).

■ **Government:** *Public policy impact* via innovation-related policy projects (e.g. WU) that inform *Hong Kong and mainland policy-makers and planners*; global studies on sustainable innovation policy-making and social goods, contributing to local and regional policy-making (MATUS).

■ **Environment:** Hong Kong and mainland China-supported projects *on air pollution control and governance*, including a State Key Project (2017-20), funded by the Ministry of Education (WU), seeking to *inform policy-makers, policy design, and benefit the public*.

■ **Professional services sector and general public:** Wide dissemination of our research through local and international media, publications targeted at non-academic audiences, and talks and presentations, *impacting practitioners, and raising awareness and general understanding* of such issues as they relate to Hong Kong, the Greater Bay Area, and mainland China in particular.

2. Approach to impact

Over RAE2020, the Unit moved toward a long-term commitment to societal impact, alongside our drive for academic research excellence. Our focus on the economy and on policy decision-making in relation to innovation, jobs, and sustainability addressed key areas of concern to local and regional governments and business sectors and reflected HKUST's mission to advance Hong Kong's economic and social development. We implemented our strengthened approach to impact through:

■ **Close relationships with University platforms translating research to external stakeholders:** in particular through engagement with HKUST Institute for Emerging Markets (IEMS, est.2013) and the Institute for Public Policy (est.2014), supported by mechanisms such as joint appointments (e.g. Division of Social Science and Division of Public Policy) as well as faculty affiliate status. For example, nine UoA faculty are affiliated with IEMS, which was set up in 2013 with support from professional services multinational EY. The Institute's focus on China's Belt and Road initiative, innovation, entrepreneurship, jobs, and human capital closely aligns with the Unit's impact areas. It also has dedicated staff to help faculty with knowledge transfer and dissemination by organizing conferences and talks, and through print and online publications such as IEMS Thought Leadership Briefs, working papers, and a newsletter, circulated to regional and institutional stakeholders. From 2014-19, SHARIF and TSAI contributed a total of seven IEMS Thought Leadership Briefs on Chinese innovation, automation, shadow banking, financial inclusion and fintech, among others, while MATUS, SHARIF, and TSAI wrote or co-authored IEMS working papers.

■ **Policies and mechanisms** at the Division and School level have *incentivized faculty and initiated a culture change* toward research impact. Measures include direct recognition for societal impact and public engagement in Unit faculty's year-end appraisal and annual merit salary review.

■ **Internal funding and support:** These include School-based research allowances and project funding, financial support for publication in leading open access journals, administrative support for non-RGC and/or applied policy grant applications, and a generous public service consultancy policy.

■ The School-level **appointment of a new Associate Dean** in 2018, **focused on research and impact** (GIETEL-BASTEN, UoA 27), to lead and promote contact with research users and beneficiaries. Around 20 meetings were held in 2019 to identify areas for research, facilitate knowledge transfer and promote co-creation of knowledge.

■ **Encouragement to engage with external stakeholders** through participation in events such as the HKUST Science-for-Lunch presentation series and regular consultation with stakeholders via UoA-related advisory boards, including the University's Institutional Advancement and Outreach Committee and local NGOs (e.g. TSAI with Oxfam Hong Kong). This fosters two-way understanding of the best means to enhance our research impact and delivery as well as ideas for future projects.

These measures have successfully assisted Unit members to generate: i) **More than 10 applied policy research projects in three years** from non-RGC sources, including WU's comparative study of innovation policies, supported by the Guangzhou Science, Technology and Innovation Commission; ii) **collaborative strategic and public policy research** funded by the Hong Kong government, including two projects led by WU and WU's participation in research on improving Hong Kong's urban "walkability" (PI LO: UoA 16); iii) **internal SHSS impact research funding** for SHARIF's "Future of Work in East Asia" project (2017-18), which involved working with Strategic Sports Limited, a major Chinese manufacturer on mapping the process and challenge of upgrading, leading to improvement in their processes.

3. Strategy and plans

An enhanced impact strategy has been put in place for the next six years, created in consultation with the public and private sector and mediated through the Institute for Public Policy and SHSS Associate Dean. It is closely associated with UoA27, and involves:

i) **Training and development:** The SHSS Associate Dean's role includes developing a training program for faculty on delivering high-impact research for launch in 2020. These sessions, informed by stakeholder feedback, cover themes such as what is impact (and how it is measured), identification of stakeholders and beneficiaries, co-creation of knowledge, and differentiation of knowledge exchange and transfer. All new faculty and research postgraduate students will receive a one-to-one impact briefing. Impact statements for all successful UoA research applications will be collated as a reference. The training will be supported by the SHSS research budget, and externally evaluated.

ii) **Facilitating impactful research:** Researchers will be supported to apply for both RGC and non-RGC sources of funding (e.g. from government agencies or charities) and engage in public service consulting. SHSS will continue to ring-fence funds for open access publishing and impact-related activities, through simplified procedures.

iii) **Institutional development:** The capacity of the Institute for Public Policy will be enhanced by increasing its staffing and budget, including funds for impact-related activities, and plans to develop a branch in the new HKUST Guangzhou campus to maximize impact in the Greater Bay Area.

iv) **Auditing and reporting:** Relevant units will audit our impact activities at mid-term and at the end of the six-year period. All internally funded projects within the Division of Social Science will be expected to submit an impact statement at the start and a report on impact at project end.

4. Relationship to case studies

The case study encapsulates both our diverse approach to impact and core research characteristics. SHARIF's applied public policy research on innovation and technology – supported with both internal and external funds and published in a leading journal – was disseminated widely through an *IEMS Thought Leadership Brief* as well as in news media and presented at an outreach event for stakeholders. This led to a close collaboration with a user/beneficiary and impact on the company's subsequent business decision-making, employees, and other businesses in and beyond China.