

Research Assessment Exercise 2020
Impact Overview Statement

University: Hong Kong Baptist University |

Unit of Assessment (UoA): 26 Geography |

Total number of eligible staff of the university in the UoA: 14

(1) Context

‘Environmental change’, ‘climate change’, ‘smart living’, ‘renewable energy’, ‘pollution’, and ‘ecosystems’ are some of the key words highlighting pressing challenges facing the contemporary world. Research at the HKBU Department of Geography addresses these prominent issues in ways that enhance societal knowledge and inform the basis for behavioral change. Our work often approaches global challenges through local and regional studies, showing the broad and integral significance of what happens in highly urbanized and connected places like Hong Kong and the Pearl River Delta. Our research culture emphasizes friendly competition amongst colleagues, reward for good research, knowledge advancement and the need to inform policy makers, local stakeholders and community engagement so that people may benefit directly from research. In an increasingly complex world, we also emphasize interdisciplinary investigations and international benchmarking as ways of improving research standards. |

(2) Approach to impact

Our approach to impact encompasses interdisciplinary research together with local and international collaboration, either directly with overseas colleagues or through multinational collaborative projects. We encourage engagement beyond the academy with community, government, NGOs and industry. Our interdisciplinary approach reflects the wide range of human and physical geography expertise in our department. This facilitates a research approach that acknowledges the multidimensional nature of environmental issues in a changing world, involving, for example, natural environment conservation, studies of the built environment, geo- and ecotourism, geological/environmental research, technological innovation and work on social equity. We actively collaborate with local and international partners and dialogue with interlocutors in other disciplines to develop new ways of approaching these complex issues. We emphasize international collaboration through support for conferences, the hosting of visiting researchers, and the pursuit of joint research grants, in order to tap into the latest state-of-the-art of research in relevant fields and to ensure that our work generates innovative and cutting-edge knowledge. Our policy recommendations follow from our research, but also commonly reflect close collaboration with government officials and NGOs, regionally and internationally. Taking advantage of our position in Hong Kong, our knowledge draws upon learning from different eastern and western traditions and reflects a diversity of socio-economic contexts derived from a variety of countries in which our researchers work, giving them experience of both rich-and poor-world economic conditions. Community engagement is also emphasized in order to identify potential societal impacts that our research may have and thus to help us provide socially informed policy recommendations. |

(3) Strategy and plans

Our strategy for supporting impact focuses on engagement with different stakeholders including the general public, the private sector, government and not-for-profit organizations. We use departmental resources to support all staff with flexible seed-funding, which they may use for new research initiatives or to facilitate new international collaborations. Senior staff provide

assistance with quality control for research grant applications and mentor younger colleagues on the need to have a broader impact with their research. We include discussion of impact in Annual Activity Reports, which have a bearing on promotion prospects. In doing so, we emphasize the need to raise public and governmental awareness and to effect changes in policy that have a positive benefit to communities. We encourage the dissemination of knowledge that has beneficial societal impacts, especially through partnership schemes involving industry, policy makers, NGOs and end users. Colleagues in the Department are encouraged to join international research groups that have the potential for significant international impacts. They are expected to provide scholarly input concerning their research findings to policy makers and to enhance the impact of their research by disseminating knowledge discoveries to the public through education-oriented books, media (TV, radio and digital formats) and through field trips linked to local societies in Hong Kong. Media coverage and field interactions allow the timely communication of key research findings that are accessible and of interest to the general public. By doing so, they build a broad platform for engagement around global issues that our research can help solve. We sit on many regional and international government advisory bodies in order to ensure that policy initiatives are productively informed by our specialized knowledge. Engagement with private companies has been and will continue to be an important additional endeavor to strengthen our connection with the business sector and broader enterprise community. |

(4) Relationship to case studies

|Our submitted case study (Driving Geo-education and the Development of Geoparks) demonstrates the academic excellence that we stress as a major departmental objective. The Earth Science research team has, for example, published their work in many high-quality journals (Science, Proceedings National Academy of Sciences, Nature Climate Change etc.). The case study follows our aims to 1) advance public awareness, 2) benefit communities, and 3) change government policies. The impacts from their research are wide-ranging and have resulted in positive changes in public awareness and governmental policies specifically towards geoconservation, both locally and internationally, which reflects our strategy to have impact both within and beyond Hong Kong. The research team has been closely involved with prominent individuals, local communities, policy makers and government advisory boards providing strategic information to support development of geoparks in both HK and Kenya. Their work has been pioneering and has led to changes in attitude towards geoconservation, particularly in Kenya. The team's efforts also fit well with our desire to have impacts that benefit communities since one of the central tenants of geopark development is to provide positive economic benefits for local populations through the provision of infrastructure and geotourism opportunities.

Members of the research team have also been very active in their outreach efforts and have disseminated knowledge through fieldtrips for local societies to the Hong Kong Global Geopark, through participation in geoconservation-related TV and radio programmes, newspaper interviews and social media. They have also been involved in supporting the development of short films about their work, one of which is widely available through online sources. In addition, they have been responsible for the first geo-guidebooks published in Hong Kong that were directed towards lay audiences. The esteem that our research team is held in is evident through the many invitations they receive to lecture, or be interviewed, on their research in Hong Kong and Kenya, both locally and internationally. |