

Research Assessment Exercise 2020
Impact Overview Statement

University: The University of Hong Kong (HKU)

Unit of Assessment (UoA): 26 – Geography

Total number of eligible staff of the university in the UoA: 8

(1) Context

The UoA treasures its ability to achieve compelling impact through geographical inquiry. The distinctive nature of that impact arises from three thematic research groups: **(i) China**, **(ii) Environment**, and **(iii) Urban & Transport**. The quest for impact is embedded in the University's and the Faculty's mission. The UoA's success in that mission is reflected in public policies, industry practices and the activities of various stakeholder groups. Key **non-academic users** of the UoA's work include the **Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government** (Development Bureau (DB), Education Bureau (EdB), Environment Bureau, and Transport and Housing Bureau); **industry** (CLP Power Hong Kong Limited and MTR Corporation Limited (MTRC)); **NGOs** (Friends of the Earth, Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust and UNICEF); and the **general public**. To these user groups the UoA delivers diverse types of impact, including **(a)** the transfer of knowledge and expert advice; **(b)** the development of guidelines and tools for use by practitioners; and **(c)** greater public awareness and engagement.

(2) Approach to impact

The UoA has a long tradition of pursuing innovation and impact through interdisciplinarity and the internationalization of research initiatives. In relation, the UoA has adopted the following proactive and enhanced mechanism and activities since RAE 2014:

- (a) **Guiding and advising strategic public policies:** Faculty members have been appointed to more than 40 high-level governmental advisory boards and committees to share their well-recognized research expertise for policy formulation. **(i)** The HKSAR Government has identified Lantau as a strategic location in the development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, and appointed Loo & Wang as the members of the *Lantau Development Advisory Committee* to provide suggestions for the Sustainable Lantau Blueprint. **(ii)** Serving as appointed members of the *Harbourfront Commission*, Loo & Ng supervise the development of Victoria Harbour, an important natural asset and part of the city's heritage. **(iii)** To address the land shortage in Hong Kong, the Chief Executive has appointed Ng as a member of the *Task Force on Land Supply*. **(iv)** Ng is also serving on the *Council on Sustainable Development* to help improve the city's overall environment. **(v)** Loo & Ng are members of the *Transport Advisory Committee*, through which they advise the Chief Executive-in-Council on all transport matters related to the city. **(vi)** Loo is a member of the *Road Safety Council* which is headed by the Hong Kong Police Force to coordinate citywide road safety initiatives. **(vii)** Jim delivered his professional advice as a member of the *Tree Management Expert Panel* to foster a greener cityscape in Hong Kong.
- (b) **Leadership in University's interdisciplinary centres and institutions:** Faculty members take on leadership roles to facilitate translations into practical research activities. **(i)** Lee (executive director), Ng (co-director), Loo (executive board), Chen and Ran (investigators) coordinate the Centre for Water Technology and Policy and advise it on water technology knowledge transfer and on framing policy recommendations to benefit Hong Kong's urban water systems. **(ii)** Loo has taken up the directorship of the Institute of Transport Studies, with 25 Institute Fellows from seven out of 10 faculties. In October 2018, the Institute co-organized *The International Conference on Smart Mobility and Logistics in Future Cities* with The Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport (CILT) in Hong Kong and the Transport Department (TD). Mrs. Carrie Lam, the Chief Executive of the HKSAR Government, was the Guest of Honor. **(iii)** The upcoming *Joint Laboratory for Future Cities* (Loo, founding co-director) with the Department of Civil Engineering and the Department of Electrical and Electronic Engineering will advance technological solutions for smart cities.

- (c) **Reaching out to the community:** Faculty members achieve impact through knowledge exchange activities beyond academia. (i) With a total funding of HK\$14.7 million supported by the Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust and the Faculty of Social Sciences, faculty members (Lee & Ng, project co-investigators) promote a *Water Friendly Culture* through the first Hong Kong water footprint calculator application and a GIS-based river database (River@HK Database). They also collaborated with the Friends of the Earth to deliver professional training on Environmental Impact Assessment to NGOs and civil society groups. (ii) European Union Research and Innovation Funding (€7.2 million) supported a faculty member's collaborative research project (Lafortezza, co-PI) on raising public awareness of the benefits of urban green spaces in Bari, Italy. Both projects have shown the success of bottom-up approaches within communities. (iii) Jim collaborated with MTRC on Forbes Street Masonry Wall Trees preservation and developed a tree guideline for the West Island Line. He also partnered with CLP on the largest Sky Woodland project to provide a rooftop greening blueprint for Hong Kong, and monitored 46,000 trees in public housing estates for the Hong Kong Housing Authority. (iv) Lai partnered with the Hong Kong Committee for UNICEF, the first community scholarship project in HKU, to assess quality play space for disabled children and their families, which also benefitted the local community. She also worked with EdB to develop bilingual geography e-textbooks. (v) Faculty members have served on professional bodies as Chartered Fellows of CILT (Loo & Wang), President of CILTHK (Loo) and Vice-President of CILT International (Loo). (vi) Strategic consultancy services on water tariff structure (Lee) and road safety and walkability (Loo – see *Impact Case Study*) were both adopted and endorsed by the HKSAR Government.

(3) Strategy and plans

The UoA's goals and strategies for the next RAE period are:

- (a) **Informing high-level government policies:** The UoA aims to have an even wider representation of faculty members on the **government's highest-level advisory committees**. New research talents have been recruited specifically to increase the UoA's ability to help achieve a more liveable city. All faculty members will be encouraged to actively advise on public policies. The UoA also aims to extend its influence and impact globally.
- (b) **Leading and actively engaging non-academic users:** The UoA endeavours to utilize faculty members' interdisciplinary backgrounds to lead **new collaborative projects with NGOs and industry** for wider societal impact. It also encourages them to take up **leadership roles in professional bodies** for the betterment of society through a workload model that allows them to reschedule their teaching and administrative duties. Furthermore, the UoA intends to make better use of **social media** to increase its impact among key non-academic users.
- (c) **Pursuing a multi-pronged approach to capture and support impactful research:** The UoA plans to strengthen its impact culture by encouraging faculty members to apply for **strategic funding** for research projects **with positive societal impact**. Within the assessment period, the UoA has been awarded Public Policy Research (Loo & Wang) and Strategic Public Policy Research (Lin) projects, which will generate publicly accessible reports and will involve public engagement. The UoA aims to secure more internal funding (e.g., from the HKU Knowledge Exchange Funding Scheme) and to tap into more external funding sources (e.g., the RGC's new Research Impact Fund and other regional and international funding schemes, as well as industry and the public sector), to boost its research impact. UoA members will discuss at forthcoming meetings a financial incentive mechanism to inject even greater energy into researchers' drive for impact.

(4) Relationship to case studies

The *Impact Case Study* exemplifies the UoA's approach. It involves changing government policies, gathering stakeholders' inputs and gaining community support to enhance walkability and traffic safety and thereby making the city more accessible and much more interesting. It demonstrates the ability of collaborative, interdisciplinary and innovative research to achieve profound and extensive impact in Hong Kong.