

Research Assessment Exercise 2020

Impact Overview Statement

University: The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology

Unit of Assessment (UoA): 27 Sociology & Anthropology

Total number of eligible staff in the UoA: 7

1. Context

The UoA focuses on world-class research excellence and local and global impact in sociology, demography, and social psychology, encompassing demographic change, education, social stratification, and sustainability. Within the institutional framework of HKUST, it is closely linked to UoA 25. Since RAE2014, the Unit has delivered impacts on public policy and services, official statistics, the economy, and quality of life, among others, addressing global challenges (e.g. alternative demographic indicators for ageing populations: GIETEL-BASTEN), issues of national significance (e.g. Chinese social stratification over time: CAMPBELL) and improved local people's well-being (therapeutic gardens for seniors: TAM). Our non-academic users include Hong Kong and mainland China government bodies (e.g. HKSAR Commerce and Economic Development Bureau, National Bureau of Statistics); intergovernmental and civil society (e.g. UN Population Fund, World Wide Fund for Nature); for-profit and non-profit firms (e.g. ██████████), and the public. Major beneficiaries are local and international policymakers, retirement and pension-related organizations, businesses gauging demographic trends for resource planning, statisticians, the elderly care sector, Chinese individuals and families, and senior citizens in Hong Kong.

2. Approach to impact

Since RAE2014, Unit members have recognized and responded to greater internal and external emphasis on non-academic research impact. The UoA has moved from a largely dissemination-based approach to dynamic interactive relationships with diverse users and beneficiaries. These generate novel partnerships, co-created knowledge, and original solutions to local and global problems and are carried out in line with the Unit's focus on China in a global setting. Externally, this has led to:

i) *Leadership and participation in innovative interdisciplinary collaborations:* TAM (social psychology) and GIETEL-BASTEN's (demography) joint involvement in the Therapeutic Gardens for Hong Kong project for seniors, joining colleagues from Life Science (HERRUP – UoA 1, Alzheimer's disease expert), Nagasaki University and Hong Kong Institute of Landscape Architects, delivering capacity-building and a reorientation of elderly care in the community.

ii) *Engagement in private and public organization-funded projects:* in addition to UGC-funded schemes, fostering understanding of the Unit's research and, among the faculty, of users' needs, and generating deeper relationships. GIETEL-BASTEN has explored the demography of drug abuse in Hong Kong to deliver more targeted policies for government and NGOs, with Beat Drugs Fund (Security Bureau, HKSAR Government) support. Meanwhile, WU carried out applied research on population planning and life tables in a project supported by the Shenzhen Municipal Government, leading to the adoption of his projections, enhancing the utility of official data and citizens' welfare.

iii) *Growing impact and presence in the global community beyond academia:* including civil society, the business sector, and intergovernmental agencies. For example, GIETEL-BASTEN's collaborations, commissions, consultancies, and media dissemination related to his holistic indicators on population ageing have influenced public and policy debate in Hong Kong, the UK, and elsewhere, and were acknowledged as an alternative indicator in a major UN report (see case).

Internally, the strategic shift has been facilitated by:

i) *New support and incentive mechanisms* brought in by the Division of Social Science and School of Humanities and Social Science in which the UoA is based. In turn, the *increased internal recognition for research that leads to impact has initiated a cultural change in faculty perspectives* on applied research and knowledge transfer. Measures include a) a new senior management position at School level from 2018 (GIETEL-BASTEN), dedicated to research and impact and serving as

“point person” for liaison with external stakeholders (20 meetings in 2019, with feedback to faculty in internal fora); b) impact recognition in members’ year-end appraisal and annual Merit Salary Review; c) seed funding for social impact-related project development; d) administrative support for grant applications with impact potential; and e) teaching relief policy for public-service consultancy.

ii) University-led *restructuring to promote cross-disciplinary interaction* over the review period through *strategic hiring and opening of new positions*, such as joint appointments (Social Science and Public Policy/GIETEL-BASTEN); the setting-up of multidisciplinary-oriented departments and divisions, research institutes and centers (e.g. HKUST Institute for Emerging Market Studies [est. 2013], Institute of Public Policy [est. 2017]) that created platforms to support large and smaller multidisciplinary projects encompassing both social impact and academic excellence; and the expansion of faculty affiliate possibilities with such centers.

3. Strategy and plans

Over the next six years, we expect to continue and extend the Unit’s research impact by leveraging and contributing to the new knowledge exchange and impact activities being put in place at Division and School level, and in consultation with our external stakeholders. Key initiatives include:

i) Training and development: The new Associate Dean role encompasses the development of a comprehensive training program for the School’s faculty on delivering high-impact research, to be launched in 2020. These sessions, strongly informed by meetings with stakeholders, will cover themes such as definitions of impact and how is it measured; identification of key stakeholders and beneficiaries; co-creation of knowledge; and differentiation of knowledge exchange and knowledge transfer. All new faculty and research postgraduate students will be given a one-to-one briefing on impact in research by the Associate Dean to ensure basic understanding of impact issues and the School’s commitment to it. Impact statements of all successful research applications in the UoA will be collated as reference for all researchers. Impact training will be supported by the School’s research budget and evaluated by an external reviewer mid-way through the six-year period, and at the end.

ii) Facilitation of impact: Researchers will continue to be supported to apply for non-RGC funding (e.g. from government agencies or charities) and to engage in public service consulting. As these funding arrangements often deprioritize traditional academic outputs (e.g. journal articles), special consideration will continue to ensure faculty are recognized for impactful contribution in their annual appraisal (Merit Salary Review). The School will continue to ring-fence funds for both open access publishing and impact-related activities and will be available, through a simplified procedure, to researchers whose activities bear a demonstrable, positive impact on beneficiaries.

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

iv) Engaging stakeholders: We will maximise use of Division, School and University platforms for engaging stakeholders in meaningful research. For example, TAM and GIETEL-BASTEN (plus SHI – UoA 12, eye-tracking expert) will build on our research to quantify the beneficial effects of garden spaces for the elderly, collaborating with elderly care provider Haven of Hope Christian Service, which in 2018 signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the University to work together to address a range of challenges of ageing, for the individual and society.

4. Relationship to case studies

The Unit’s case study on reconceptualizing how we measure ageing (GIETEL-BASTEN) illustrates the effectiveness of the UoA’s enhanced mechanisms and drive to facilitate our research impact in non-academic arenas. It collectively highlights the many ways and different levels of academic and community engagement that Unit members engage in to optimize the impact of our research, demonstrates the extensive range of users and beneficiaries, and clearly shows the significance of our impact, through informing local and global policymaking, economic planning, and public understanding on one of the key local and global social challenges of our time. All of which is underpinned by rigorous quantitative social analysis and academic research excellence.