

Research Assessment Exercise 2020
Impact Overview Statement

University: The Hong Kong Polytechnic University |
Unit of Assessment (UoA): 28 Social Work and Social Policy |
Total number of eligible staff of the university in the UoA: 38 |

(1) Context

The Department of Applied Social Sciences (APSS) at The Hong Kong Polytechnic University is an **interdisciplinary** hub for rigorous **policy and practice-oriented research**. Our key achievements and contributions rest in advancing the interdisciplinary collaboration and capacity on: **a) social work research and practice with children, youth, families, and the elderly; and b) social policy and social development in Hong Kong, Mainland China, and the global context**. Colleagues with different disciplinary backgrounds provide a range of substantive findings and methodological approaches, which are applied to various policies and practice areas. The type of research conducted by our colleagues requires the involvement of practitioners, service users, and local and national stakeholders, who act as co-developers, co-designers, co-applicants, co-evaluators, and co-disseminators in all stages of our research. We also provide training to practitioners, service users, and stakeholders on how to engage in research activities through classroom teaching, training workshops, and action research projects. The three impact case studies we submitted for assessment represent the department's key areas of strength and development of research impact in the past two decades: **positive youth development, post-disaster intervention, and rural social development**.

(2) Approach to impact

The department has redesigned its strategies to ensure research excellence and optimal community impact since the last RAE in 2014. Our colleagues are now able to extend the reach of their research, which has led to significant results locally, nationally, and internationally.

Promoting practice and impact-oriented research: Practice and impact-oriented objectives are incorporated into the methodology or output of many research projects of our colleagues. In addition to academic publications, our colleagues are encouraged to develop curricula, handbooks, manuals, interventions, and training programs for practitioners based on their research findings. Examples of the practical products of our research include “Post-disaster Psychosocial Needs Assessment Tools,” “COPE – How to Be Ready for Natural Disasters,” and “Making Hong Kong a Resilient City: Preliminary Assessment.” In 2017, the department hosted the fourth International Conference on Practice Research. Of the 314 registered participants, 42% came from non-academic fields. We organized training workshops for staff and research students, including a workshop delivered by an impact consultant from the UK.

Informing public debate and professional practice: Through our specialty centres, we host training workshops, consultancy projects, and symposia. From 2014 to 2019, 590 courses and 121 talks were organized by the Institute of Active Aging, attracting a total of 24,583 participants. Such events inform public debates on social policy issues, enhance the efficacy of policies and practices that address pressing societal needs, and improve the well-being of children, families, and disadvantaged groups in Hong Kong and Asia. The department's China Research and Development Network also provides a common platform for social work students, teachers, practitioners, NGO staff, and government officials in Mainland China. Since RAE 2014, the network has undertaken 112 events, including international conferences, training workshops, seminars, colloquia, and practicums, with 5,288 participants to promote our research, teaching, and practice activities. As a result of the Belt and Road Initiative, this platform has been able to extend its impact to other regions and countries.

Nurturing long-term research investment strategies and partnerships with charitable donors: The department's strong focus on the impact of its research has encouraged major funders to make

long-term investment commitments. We have established a track record of stable funding relationships that help sustain our research and its impact. For example, the positive youth development program led by Prof. Daniel Shek has been supported by the Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust (HK\$772.4 million since 2005). The post-disaster intervention research program led by Dr. Timothy Sim has received funding from major donors, including the MINDSET Foundation, the Zeshan Foundation, and the Chinese government (HK\$11.6 million since 2008). The funding that the Chinese Research and Development Network has secured since 2014 from the Victor and William Fund Foundation (HK\$12.4 million), the Keswick Foundation (HK\$13.7 million), and the MISEREOR Foundation (EUR505,000) has been used to enhance the development of innovative social work practice and social development strategies in Mainland China.

Engaging with the public: Our staff are encouraged to serve on advisory boards and committees in Hong Kong (e.g., the Food and Health Bureau, Family Council, Tung Wah Group of Hospitals, Caritas Hong Kong) and to undertake national and international leadership roles. Many faculty have readily accepted these posts (e.g., Dr. Ku Hok Bun, who co-founded the Guangdong Lvgeng Social Work Development Center in Mainland China; Dr. Yan Hairong, who serves on the International Panel of Experts for Sustainable Food Systems in Europe; and Prof. Daniel Lai, who serves as Board of Director of the American Society on Aging), which give them an opportunity to engage with practitioners, service users, stakeholders, and the public. The university's marketing and communication teams promote research events and showcase our activities on a wide variety of media and social media platforms. The department disseminates its research findings to the public by means of workshops, summer/winter schools, press conferences, and public events. |

(3) Strategy and plans

| In keeping with our strategic research goals to conduct rigorous policy and practice-oriented research and embarking on our strengths in interdisciplinary approaches, our aim for the next few years is to effect social change in three areas: 1) strengthening individuals, families, and society's capacity to detect, intervene, and prevent domestic violence; 2) improving quality care for the ageing population through building age-friendly communities; and 3) enhancing the skills of policy-makers and community groups so they can best utilize Internet-based social media platforms to effect social, economic, and political changes. These specific strategic impact goals will be achieved through connecting the department's endeavors in forming university–community research alliances with relevant local and national government departments (e.g., the Social Welfare Department, Education Bureau, Elderly Commission, Equal Opportunities Commission, and Hospital Authority), NGOs, and social enterprises. The engagement of government in the research development and implementation process is necessary to ensure that positive social change is undertaken. The department will also establish a means of knowledge transfer that will communicate research findings to end-users in understandable and applicable formats. In particular, we will develop tactful approaches to connect social media platforms with our knowledge transfer efforts to reach service users and stakeholders in practice and policy communities. Meanwhile, the Faculty of Health and Social Sciences is building an impact library to collect and document the impact of our research on people and communities. |

(4) Relationship to case studies

| The department nurtures an open, supportive, and collaborative research environment by offering administrative and logistical support, soliciting funds, and providing a research support infrastructure. The specific impact cases demonstrate how our department has influenced rural social work practice and government policy development in Mainland China, created new social work roles in the post-disaster recovery in Mainland China, and changed intervention approaches to enhance positive youth development in Hong Kong, Mainland China, and nearby Asian countries. All these impacts were enabled by the department's efforts to accommodate faculty members: academic workloads were adjusted so that faculty could undertake expert, advisory, and collaborative roles in the government, in NGOs, and in community boards and committees. Such partnerships are vital to effective research programs. |