Research Assessment Exercise 2020
Impact Overview Statement[1]

University: City University of Hong Kong
Unit of Assessment (UoA): 31 English language and literature
Total number of eligible staff of the university in the UoA: 14

(1) Context

The English Department at City University of Hong Kong has a long and distinguished history of research into applied linguistics, an inherently impactful discipline which applies linguistic knowledge to real-world issues. This focus on applied results has coloured the work of the newly established English Literature group. The department's historical focus on language learning underpins impacts in the community, given the history and role of English within multilingual, multicultural Hong Kong. The Department's research investigates communication in academic, business and professional contexts, including the creative industries; English language and literacy education; and literary studies, including drama. The key stakeholders and end users of our research are educators and educational policy makers, NGOs and professionals, particularly early-career professionals, learning about the discourse of their field.

(2) Approach to impact

The principal route to impact for our research lies in the development of tools and approaches for using and understanding the English language, its literary heritage and its cultural traditions. To insure that our research is impactful, the department has adopted strategies for building relationships with education practitioners and policy makers; supporting the work of non-governmental organisations; conducting collaborative projects with specific groups of professions; and public engagement and performance. The work conducted through these approaches can be grouped into the following broad categories.

Enhancing language and literature education: A significant area of research in the department is the study of how language is used in academic/professional contexts or for creative/literary purposes. To deliver the outcomes of this work to the end user, we work with schools, local and international institutions and government organisations such as the Education Bureau. For example, one of our researchers, Pun, has designed and is currently (as of 2019) managing a large-scale language of science education programme for local teachers, and a separate intervention to train nurses in HK hospitals in effective communication. Lee created (from 2014-2016) an online resource comprising Hong Kong language learning narratives which is used for language learning at a wide range of levels. Pecorari's longstanding research into plagiarism continues to feed into publications, workshops and seminars (e.g., Stockholm University, Lingnan University in 2018) and other interventions for tertiary teachers. For example, her contribution to a Stockholm University MOOC on higher education pedagogy has been viewed over 1,000 times in its first year.

Governmental and non-governmental organisations: We collaborate with NGOs to promote English language education, e.g. through an ongoing agreement with Just Volunteers, under the direction of one of our researchers, Ng, to provide English language education for underprivileged school pupils via a supervised internship for our students. Miller conducts ongoing teacher education for the Chatteris Educational Foundation every year. As noted above, Pun has been commissioned to provide language training by two governmental agencies, the Quality Education Fund (QEF) and Professional Services Advancement Support Scheme (PASS).

Promoting effective professional communication: We work collaboratively with members of targeted professions, and our research findings inform the development of training materials and policy in our collaborators' communities. The case study is one example of this, and there are others. Three of our researchers, Hafner, Pun and Pecorari have produced and are currently (as of

2019) releasing similar resources for clinical communication in veterinary medicine and in the liberal arts. Peirson-Smith has conducted an ethnographic investigation of the creative industries in Hong Kong, the findings of which have been presented to policy makers. This body of work is the direct outcome of our research into professional discourse and communication.

Engaging with the community through popularisation and outreach: To broaden the audience for the department's research, we engage with the community through popularisation and outreach. A historical drama written by Jordan, which was based on a historical event immediately after the Second World War, highlighted issues concerning Hong Kong's identity of great relevance today, within the city and elsewhere. The play was performed for the public at the University (2016 & 2018) and in local schools (2018), and a public reading was organized by English Speaking Union Hong Kong. Through such initiatives, the study of dramatic form reveals issues of historical and contemporary importance, enriching the lived experiences of HK residents.

(3) Strategy and plans

The CityU strategic plan places emphasis on knowledge transfer, and this is reflected both in the Department's own strategic plan and in our practices, which address the impact journey from beginning to end, e.g., through an internal review of grant proposals scrutinising not only the project per se but also plans for delivering impacts from the findings. The CityU Knowledge Transfer Committee has as its mission to 'enlarge capacity for knowledge transfer and entrepreneurship', and delivers this in part by providing funding through the UGC's Knowledge Transfer Earmarked Fund, which four faculty members in the department received during the review period. The College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences was the first at CityU to issue a Statement on Knowledge Transfer, and through its College Research Impact Committee, strategically promotes impact through the Excellence in Knowledge Transfer Awards (EKTA) and the Research Impact Awards.

We promote a culture of collaboration to foster the development of impact activities. Regular sharing of research through departmental seminars allows the colleagues responsible for outreach activities to be aware of ongoing research and incorporate it into school workshops, etc. A CityU objective is alignment between strategic objectives and the performance-based assessment criteria. The department's criteria reward researchers who see the journey through and deliver impact from their research.

To promote ongoing impact, we develop and maintain relationships with stakeholders and encourage faculty to bid for training programmes in government departments and make training materials accessible broad audiences. This approach led to Pun's success with QEF and PASS, mentioned above. When such opportunities are identified, our strategy is to take a long-term view and invest in ongoing engagement by providing an administrative structure and budget for the relevant activities. For example, in the service-learning project planned and conducted by Troeung, students from the Department visited Cambodian schools to teach English. This initiative has been incorporated into the department's international internship programme with funding (HK$340,000) to allow this to be a regular activity.

(4) Relationship to case studies

Dr Hafner's research, as described in the case study, is an example of the strategy, described above, of direct engagement with a specific group of professionals. The underpinning research was the outcome of a funded project. To insure the sustainability of this impact, when the project concluded, the Department committed the resources necessary to maintain the dissemination channels (e.g., the project website) and the production of new content. In keeping with the collaborative ethos, Hafner has subsequently worked with two other researchers on a project which borrowed this earlier methodology and applied it to a different area, veterinary medicine, thus developing impacts in a new area, as well as contributing to the development of his colleagues' skills in making research impactful.