

Research Assessment Exercise 2020
Impact Overview Statement

University: Lingnan University

Unit of Assessment (UoA): 36 – Philosophy

Total number of eligible staff of the university in the UoA: 11

(1) Context

The Department of Philosophy produces high-quality research in many key areas of philosophy, including aesthetics, epistemology, ethics, logic, metaphysics, philosophy of language, philosophy of mind and psychology, and philosophy of science.

Research in these areas impacts the education of the general public from secondary school onwards. Several of the specific topics we engage with also have a bearing on professional and policy issues. For example, recent research in the Department has tackled practical questions such as ‘How should probability statements be understood, and hence acted on, in medical contexts?’ and ‘How does our understanding of personal identity bear on ethical concerns about abortion and organ transplantation?’ Beneficiaries have been engaged through a number of outreach modalities, including textbooks, lectures and media appearances. We provide concrete examples below.

(2) Approach to impact

The main non-academic beneficiaries of the Department’s research are: (i) secondary school students and teachers; (ii) non-academic professionals (especially in healthcare); (iii) students and academics in other universities; (iv) the domestic helper community in Hong Kong; and (v) other members of the general public.

We use several different methods to disseminate our research results. First, we publish books for students (at secondary and tertiary levels) and general readers; for example, Rowbottom’s *Probability* (Polity Press, 2015), Sauchelli’s *Personal Identity and Applied Ethics: A Historical and Philosophical Introduction* (Routledge, 2017), and Wong’s *The Path to Heal: You Don’t Need to Grieve Alone* (Kam Pui, 2015). Rowbottom’s book has also been translated into Simplified Chinese (Shanghai People’s Publishing House) and Japanese (Iwanami Shoten). These books not only present the results of prior research by their authors, but also constitute research in their own right under the Carnegie definition for scholarship adopted for the RAE.

Second, we use other media outlets. For example, Matthias discussed his published work on artificial intelligence on two RTHK3 Backchat Programmes in 2017 (‘Robot rights and responsibilities’ and ‘Rise of the robots’) and Rowbottom presented material from his book *Probability* on ‘The Philosopher’s Zone’ on ABC Radio National (Australia) and on NZ National Radio (New Zealand) in 2014. Links to these programmes can be found via Google.

Finally, we organize events. For instance, we have organized multiple lectures for International Baccalaureate (IB) students taking courses with substantial philosophical content. These lectures were designed to introduce students to our cutting-edge philosophical research and allow in-depth discussion of selected portions of their curriculum.

Key to our present approach has been:

- (a) to foster an environment in which impact-generating work is supported,
- (b) to generate revenue in order to support impact-generation activities, and
- (c) to encourage impact-directed interdisciplinary research.

To achieve (a), we ensure that faculty members are encouraged to undertake, and are rewarded appropriately for, impact-related activities. This is achieved by awarding teaching relief from departmental funds, and by ensuring that success in generating impact is given credit in personnel review exercises.

To achieve (b), we regularly apply for internal and external funding. For example, Rice and Wong recently won internal grants to support knowledge transfer. Rice's work involved education for the helper community in Hong Kong, especially concerning their legal issues (including their rights). Wong's work involved educating the general public and counsellors (and other mental healthcare workers) about handling bereavement. Recently, a team in the department – Rowbottom (PI), Baker, Chiu, and Sauchelli – also collaborated with a secondary school teacher (Jordan West-Pratt at ISF Academy) in applying for a QEF (Quality Education Fund) grant in order to create an online resource for learning and teaching Ethics at secondary schools (in both English and Traditional Chinese).

To achieve (c), we support colleagues' collaborations with researchers in other fields. For example, Zhang's work on causation has led to collaborative work with computer scientists on automated causal reasoning. This research recently attracted the attention of industry and he was invited to lecture at Huawei Technologies Co. in May 2019. In September 2019, he was appointed as a Consultant to their AI laboratory.

(3) Strategy and plans

Our future efforts will be in two primary areas:

First, in line with our outreach activities at schools (led by Baker), we aim to improve further the teaching of philosophy, and philosophy-related subject matter, at secondary schools (and to a lesser extent, at other universities). Our initial efforts will be focused on local schools, both state-run and private. The online and print resources we intend to create will have a wider reach.

Second, in line with Sauchelli's and Wong's research on applied ethics and Rowbottom's work on probability statements in medical contexts – as well as the workshops already hosted (via Wong) – we will engage further with healthcare professionals and the general public on a variety of health-related issues (with a special focus on mental health issues).

We will continue to provide support for impact activities through teaching relief and appropriate credit mechanisms, by pursuing internal and external funding, and by supporting our researchers in interdisciplinary collaborations.

(4) Relationship to case studies

Of the examples mentioned above, we chose one of education outreach, involving a number of faculty members and reflecting our collective devotion to knowledge transfer, as our case study. The activities reported in the case study were supported by an internal grant awarded to Baker, who is the Coordinator of the Department's concerted effort to translate research into improved philosophy education at secondary schools. The beneficiaries were both the students and the teachers. We chose to present this case in more detail also because there is a consensus in the Department that outreach to secondary schools will remain one of our long-term focuses.