

Celebrating the 70th Anniversary of Social Work Education in HKU

From Pioneering to Social Impact



1950-2020





HKU
SWSA

Department of Social Work and Social Administration
The University of Hong Kong
香港大學社會工作及社會行政學系



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Introduction

The year 2020 marks the 70th anniversary of social work education at The University of Hong Kong. It is my honour to write a record of this spectacular history.¹ Witnessing the rapidly changing landscape of Hong Kong society and university education, our seventy year journey is a reminder of the significant contribution and impact that HKU has made in the transformation of the social work profession and the social welfare sector in Hong Kong. Looking back, we find a proud record of achievements, including distinguished alumni, quality teaching, and excellent research output and impact. Key questions are:

What did we do during those years? What can we celebrate? Where are we going?



Joe Leung, PhD Honorary Professor

¹ For a more detailed earlier history of the development of social work education in HKU, please refer to my earlier publications: *Celebrating our Achievements, Stepping Up to the Challenge (2010)* and *Building For Excellence Together, The 50th Anniversary of Social Work Education in HKU (2000)*. I have to thank Stephen Cheung, the former Department Secretary for compiling the relevant supportive information and documents, and Professor Veronica Pearson for English editing. There may be factual mistakes and differences in interpretation. Views expressed represent my analysis, and I am responsible for mistakes.

Founding Programmes and Early Pioneers

At the request of the Hong Kong government, social work education programmes, notably the Certificate of Social Work (post-secondary programme) (1950-1967) and Diploma of Social Work (postgraduate programme) (1950-1972), were established at the University of Hong Kong in 1950. Initially they were taught within the Department of Economics and Political Science, in the Faculty of Arts. These two programmes were originally two years long. The Diploma programme was shortened to one year in 1957, and then extended back to two years at a later date. Before the establishment of these programmes, the Hong Kong Government had to send civil servants to the United Kingdom for social work training. Ms. Dorothy Lee was seconded from the government to take charge of the HKU programmes. In 1952, she was replaced by the programme's first lecturer, Ms. Louise She, an MSW graduate from the United States. In 1959 she was joined by Mrs. Peter Choy, an assistant lecturer. This enabled Ms. She to be released for further study. In short, the two early social work education programmes in the 1950s were mainly operated by a single lecturer.

In 1953, the two programmes were transferred to the Department of Social Medicine (from 1960 the Department of

Preventive and Social Medicine), Faculty of Medicine. Programme content and structure mainly adopted the United States model. During this period, social work teachers were responsible for teaching only one course, the Principles and Methods of Social Work. This course covered the history of social work, social welfare services in family and child care, medical social work, and correctional settings. Social work practice was limited to casework, without group and community work. The two fieldwork placements included observational visits and placements in agencies, such as the Child Welfare Unit of the Social Welfare Department, the Family Welfare Society, Caritas, the International Social Service, the Po Leung Kuk, the Lutheran World Services, the Medical Social Work Department, and the Housing Society. There were a number of social science electives, such as social economics, psychology, political science, sociology, and statistics. They were all taught by teachers from other departments and units. For example, social policy was taught by a political scientist, and Human Growth and Development by a psychologist.

Despite the growing demand for professionally trained social workers, the enrolment in these two programmes was disappointing. The major reason was the relatively poor remuneration and career prospects for social work graduates. In the first ten years, the total number of social work graduates each year was less than ten.² Hence, the programmes could not fulfil the mounting need for trained social workers to staff Hong Kong's rapidly expanding social welfare services. Because of the influx of refugees from Mainland China, social welfare services were pre-occupied with material relief and child protection.

◀ The Hong Kong government consultant reports by Dr. Eileen Younghusband (1960, 1972) and Chaisson, Klein and Moscrop (1962) on Training for Social Work in Hong Kong indicated that one of the main obstacles to the rapid development of social welfare services was the shortage of trained staff. One of their recommendations was to strengthen social work training at HKU. In acknowledging the contribution of Dr. Younghusband to social work education in Hong Kong, HKU awarded her the degree of Doctor of Social Sciences in 1972. She may be the only social worker to receive such recognition from HKU.

In summary, the formative and pioneering years of social work education in HKU were marked by inadequate quality and

quantity of teaching, fieldwork supervision and localized teaching material. With the establishment of the Faculty of Social Sciences in 1967, the Department of Social Work was formed, and graduates majoring in social work were awarded the degree of Bachelor of Social Science. The Certificate in Social Studies (1950-1967) which had produced 106 graduates, was then terminated. The Diploma was re-structured and became a two-year programme.



Prof Jean Robertson, the first Head of The Department

Initiating New Social Work Education Programmes

In 1967, Professor Jean Robertson was invited to become the Chair Professor and Head of the new Department within the Faculty of Social Science. She was assisted by Ms. She, together with Mr. Graham

² From 1952 to 1967, the Certificate programme had a total of 91 graduates (an average of 5.7 graduates a year), and from 1952 to 1972, the Diploma programme had a total 123 graduates (an average of 5.9 graduates a year).

Riches from England. Mr. Peter Hodge joined the Department as a senior lecturer in 1969, together with Mrs. Kathy Young as the full-time fieldwork supervisor.



Prof J Robertson and students of class 1972 met VC designate Prof R Huang

Because of the small number of teaching staff, and increased number of social work courses, the Department had to recruit part-time teachers to teach courses such as Human Growth and Development. The setting up of a Department required major input from overseas teachers and supervisors, supported by a small group of early social work graduates from HKU.



The Department was located in the West Lodge when it was established under the Faculty of Social Sciences in 1967.

Originally, the Department was located in the West Lodge (at the entrance of the now Haking Wong Building) moving to the fourth floor of the Library Building (Extension) in 1969.

In the early years of the new Faculty, the enrolment of social science students was 120 each year. Half were counted as "non-business" students (group A) taking a major or double major in political science, sociology, psychology, social work, or economics. The "business" students (group B) could take economics, business management and accounting as their major or double major. After taking introductory courses in social sciences in the first year, students could choose to have a major in social work in their second or third years. Students applying to major in social work were required to be interviewed to ensure their suitability in motivation and social awareness. Among the eight papers taken by social work students in their second and third year of study, four were on social work. They included Theory and Practice of Social Work, Human Growth and Development, Social Policy and Administration, and Fieldwork Placements (three concurrent and one block placements).

In the early years, social work was a popular major among social science students. In 1967-70, 38 out of 60 "group A" non-business students chose social work as their major; and in 1968-71, 24 students. In 1971, the Social Welfare Department of the HK Government began to recruit only trained social work degree graduates as assistant social work officers. Together with the rapid expansion of social welfare services

in non-governmental organizations (NGOs) a career in social work became more foreseeable and promising.



Prof Peter Hodge, Head of Department 1972-1984

With the retirement of Professor Robertson in 1972, Mr. Hodge became the Head and Chair Professor of the Department. To consolidate the quality of the curriculum in the early 1970s, Ms. Hei Man Lee was invited to join the Department as senior lecturer (1972), together with Mr. David Malchow, Mrs. Maggie Carter, and Mr. Kenneth Chau as lecturers Mr. Hoi Kwok Wong, and Mrs. Celeste Torrens were appointed full-time field instructors. Additional social work



Prof Robertson and Prof Hodge with staff and students

courses, such as Social Aspects of Health and Disease and Social Work Research, and

in the late 1970s, Psychosocial Pathology and Mental Health, Social Service Agency Administration, Comparative Social Administration, and Law for Social Work Students were added. In essence, the Department pioneered the widening of the knowledge and practice base for social work students with the introduction of this wide range of new courses. This consolidation and expansion of the social work curriculum allowed for its integration into the Faculty curriculum structure. A first year elective open to all social science students, Introduction to Social Service in Hong Kong was introduced. The annual intake of students majoring in social work was around 30 to 40 students. In 1973, the Department moved to the 7th floor of the newly completed Knowles Building.



The Department was moved to 7/F of Knowles Building in 1973.

In 1972, to align with international practice, the Department converted the 1972 Diploma programme into the two-year Master of Social Work (MSW). Diploma students thus graduated with an MSW degree in 1974. The Diploma programme served two purposes. First, it offered an opportunity for non-social work degree graduates to shift their career to social work. Second it offered an in-service professional qualification for those already working in the field. From time to time, the Social Welfare Department seconded their non-social work trained civil servants to HKU for professional training. From 1950 to 1972, the Diploma programme nurtured a total of 123 graduates. Most of them soon became senior executives within the Government and NGOs. They were the backbone of the rapidly developing social welfare services, replacing missionaries, clergymen, expatriate volunteers, and non-trained government bureaucrats. More importantly, the first local graduates to receive an M.Phil. (1975) M.Soc.Sc. in Social



Distinguished Alumni

Deviance (1977) and Social Work (1981), and PhD (1978) were from our Department.

To be sure, the early days of social work practice were preoccupied with material needs and poverty relief. Yet by the late 1960s and into the 1970s, the Department had committed to explore and extend fieldwork placements to non-traditional placement units. The Department had placed students in pilot social work projects with the Social Welfare Department in community development; Our Lady of Maryknoll Hospital in hospital administration; the Education Department in school based social work; the Federation of Youth Groups in outreaching youth work; the Labour Department in labour relations; the Home Affairs Department in district affairs; the Correctional Services Department in the rehabilitation of ex-prisoners; the Consumer Council in complaint management, and the Society for Community Organization in the organization of social action. In 1975, the Department, with assistance from Professor Mildred Sikkema of the University of Hawaii, launched a cross-cultural experiential field learning project in a fishing village in Tai O (1975), and the Philippines (1976, 1977).

Mr. Joe Leung replaced Mr. Hoi Kwok Wong in 1975 as the fieldwork coordinator, and later as lecturer (1980). New lecturers included Mr. Ken Huang (1976) Mr. Tony Tam and Dr. David Race (1979) Mrs. Hoi Yee Lau (1981) Ms. Veronica Pearson (1981) and Mr. Sum Yeung (1985). The 'Blister' programmes of the late 1980s, led to the rapid expansion of the Department in terms of BSW and MSW enrolment, requiring increased recruitment of teachers; Dr. Iris Chi (1987) Ms. Mary Ho (1987) Ms. Cecilia Chan (1987) Mr. Howard Raiten (1988) Mr. Ernest Chui (1989) Mrs. Debbie Lam (1989) and Mrs. Sandra Ho (1990) joined the Department as lecturers, as well as Dr. Nelson Chow (1983) and Dr. Kam Weng Boey (1989) as senior lecturers. Meanwhile, more of our former social work graduates, after working in the field for some years, had begun to return to the Department as full time or part-time field instructors. Some were intending to develop their academic career by pursuing postgraduate education at HKU or overseas.



Teachers of late 80s

By the early 1980s, teaching staff comprised a chair professor, senior lecturers, lecturers, full-time field instructors (later called fieldwork supervisors and currently called practice consultants) part-time field instructors, and demonstrators. When the Social Welfare Department terminated its funding support to NGOs for the provision of fieldwork placements and supervision, the HKU Department had to employ more field instructors from its own budget.

In the 1980s there was a greatly increased demand for social workers to meet the phenomenal expansion of social welfare services. The Government was compelled to recruit non-trained university graduates as assistant social work officers. Meanwhile, the University and Polytechnic Grants Committee requested the Department to increase its annual enrolment of social work students by 50 per cent between 1984-88. This led to the Department introducing a part-time MSW programme in 1984. To provide non-social work students with opportunities to understand social and welfare policy, the social administration stream in the B.Soc.Sc. degree was introduced in 1982. Summing up, the 1980s was marked by a phenomenal expansion of the Department in terms of teacher and student numbers, as well as educational programmes.

Consolidating Our Programmes

With the expansion in the enrolment in both undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, more staff appointments were made. With the sudden death of Professor Hodge in 1984, Professor Richard Nann was recruited in 1985 (Miss Lee was the Head from 1984-1985). To consolidate the student enrolment and integration with the Faculty, Professor Nann initiated the Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) programme admitting 60 students directly each year starting from 1986. Reflecting the vision of Professor Hodge, Professor Nann renamed the Department the Department of Social Work and Social Administration in 1988. From 1982 the Faculty had been in the process of re-structuring. To align with those changes the BSW curriculum was re-structured in 1986 to comprise 12 compulsory core social work courses taught by the Department plus six electives that could be chosen from either the Department or from other social sciences departments. After an experimental project in 1982, a field laboratory was formally introduced in 1987 to replace the first concurrent fieldwork placement in the second year of the BSW programme. In 1988, the Department moved to the 13th floor of the K.K. Leung Building.

To support the growing interest within Mainland China in developing social work education, the Department, in 1986, collaborated with the Sun Yat Sen University, Guangzhou, to set up a social work programme taught by teachers



The Department was moved to the K.K. Leung Building from 2008.

from our Department. This was the first re-appearance of social work education programme in Mainland China after it was banned in 1953. In the same year, the Department began offering its MSW students the opportunity to have their block fieldwork placements in work units in Guangzhou. In addition, a course on Social Welfare in China was introduced to the MSW and BSW programmes. This was a world first! Increasing numbers of our colleagues began to carry out research and publish

in the area of social welfare development in China. They acted as a bridge between emerging social work academics in China and the international community. Through conferences, exchanges, and publications, we actively facilitated the better understanding and interest of the international academic and professional community in social development in China.



Staff trip to Guangzhou

There was an acute shortage of social workers in Hong Kong in the late 1980s. At the request of the Hong Kong government, the Department implemented the 'Blister' programmes involving a substantial expansion of enrolment in both BSW and MSW students. In 1989 our annual BSW enrolment had expanded to 90 students. During this period, the Advanced Diplomas in Mental Health and Family (1989) Youth Work (1991) Family, Marriage and Child Care

(1992) and Aging and Health (1994) Social Work with Contemporary Families (1995) and Resource Development and Service Management (1995) Youth and Health/ Youth and Delinquency (1996) Gerontology (1997) and Family Social Work (1998) were launched. Advanced Diploma holders were allowed to apply for the final year study of the MSocSc (Social Work) in order to get the MSocSc degree qualification. By 2000, Advanced Diplomas had been incorporated into the M.Soc.Sc. degree restructuring which into three main streams; Mental Health, Social Service Administration, and Gerontology. These pioneering programmes provided opportunities for experienced professionals to take their careers to the next level.

Furthermore, the number of students enrolled for research degrees in the Department expanded considerably. In 1995, our Department had 12 MPhil and 26 PhD students, the largest number of research students in the Faculty. Many of them later became teachers, both in our Department and in other social work institutions, including those from Mainland China. During this decade, the Department's expansion was rapid both in terms of student enrolment, and numbers of teachers and field instructors. The number of teachers in the Department soared from 14 in 1997 to 19 in 1999. In response to the University's initiative, our

MSW programme adopted a problem and small-group-based learning mode in 1999. Problem-based Learning had already been implemented in the Faculties of Medicine, Dentistry, and Business and Economics. This learning mode presented course material via case-based material requiring the integration of social science, policy and intervention knowledge and skills. The Problem-based Learning mode was later introduced into the BSW programme.

After Professor Richard Nann moved on in 1990, Professor Nelson Chow became the Head (1991-1993) followed by Dr. C. K. Law (1993-1998)³ Professor Cecilia Chan (1998), and Professor Iris Chi (1999-2001). To enhance our connection with our graduates, our Alumni Association was inaugurated in 1999.



Social Work Alumni Association Exco.

The early decades of social work education at HKU were notable for their robust pioneering spirit and determination to establish world class professional and educational programmes. We took pride in



Social Work Alumni Association activity

the heritage of pioneering spirit and drive in introducing social work education (1950) and non-traditional fieldwork placements (1970s) and consolidating the core social work curriculum and widening elective choices (1980s and 1990s). In developing the postgraduate programmes, HKU took the lead in initiating locally-based advanced social work programmes, including the MSW, MSocSc, MPhil, PhD, and advanced diplomas. By 1999, around 60 to 70 percent of the Department's students were at the postgraduate level. In aspiring to become a world-class, multi-disciplinary, and full-fledged professional social work education institution, the Department had built up its leading position and public recognition. Many of our early graduates have become prominent social welfare leaders and executives, and renowned scholars. The evolution and transformation of social work education at HKU was shaped by the rapid modernization of Hong Kong society, the thriving development of social welfare

³ Between 1993 and 1999, HKU implemented the elected deanship and headship system. After 1999, department heads were appointed by the Dean.

services and the rigorous re-positioning of HKU for international academic excellence.

Finally, the solid foundation and reputation of social work education at HKU was built in its first four decades through the vision, devoted and competent leadership of Ms. Louise She, Professor Jean Robertson, Professor Peter Hodge, Miss Lee Hei Man, Professor Richard Nann, Professor Nelson Chow and Dr. Law Chi Kwong.

Head of Department since its establishment

Term	Name
1967 - 1972	Professor Jean Robertson
1972 - 1984	Professor Peter Hodge
1984 - 1985	Miss Heiman Lee
1985 - 1990	Professor Rich Nann
1990 - 1993	Professor Nelson W.S. Chow
1993 - 1997	Dr. C.K. Law
1998	Professor Cecilia L.W. Chan
1999 - 2001	Professor Iris Chi
2001 - 2007	Professor Joe C.B. Leung
2007 - 2013	Dr. Sandra K.M. Tsang
2013 - 2015	Professor Cecilia L.W. Chan
2015 - Present	Professor Terry Y.S. Lum

Note: The Department of Social Work was renamed The Department of Social Work and Social Administration

Building up Teaching and Research Excellence

As a result of the government’s comprehensive review of its policy on

higher education in the 1990s, higher education experienced a rapid wave of “managerial” and “regulating” reforms. These included rapid expansion in public and private universities, as well as self-financed programmes. According to the University Grants Committee (UGC) strengthening the role of higher education in the globalized world in general and in Mainland China specifically was emphasized.⁴ Moving towards a more “competitive funding regime”, funding was allocated to initiatives supporting international cooperation, improving competitiveness, and enhancing the quality of teaching and learning. The further strengthening of the linkage of funding allocations to performance outcomes by the General Research Fund (GRF), Research Assessment Exercise (RAE),⁵ Quality Audit⁶ and Research Postgraduate (RPG) students allocation implied the emergence of a more rigorous system of performance assessment and monitoring of academic performance.

Higher education reforms saw the beginning of a wave of university initiatives to reform university governance, funding allocation mechanisms, and promotion of international research publications and teaching quality. The University launched its first Five-year Strategic Development Plan in 2003 with a view to achieving its aim

of becoming an “internationally acclaimed institution.” and to be recognized as amongst the world’s top-tier universities. Faculties and departments were required to formulate annual and five-year development plans. According to the Times Higher Education–QS World University Rankings (2004 and 2009) this goal was achieved.⁷

University governance reforms centered on long-term visionary strategic planning, rigorous reviews of teaching and research quality and performance-driven resource allocation. In aligning with these strategic directions and priorities, faculties and departments were required to develop annual developmental plans to bid for budget allocations. To ensure the effective implementation of reforms, governance reforms included the centralization of funding allocations at the Faculty level. Elected Heads of Department and Deans were replaced by university senior management appointments. Meanwhile, economic recession in the early 2000s forced the University to initiate cutbacks. In addition to allocation cuts was the introduction of a voluntary departure scheme, a temporary freezing of recruitment and promotions, a fixed salary throughout a contract, and the abandonment of automatic salary increments.

As part of managerial reforms, the University introduced a more rigorous annual staff performance appraisal system for both academic (Performance Review and Development for Professoriate and Academic-Related Staff) and non-academic staff (Performance Review and Staff Development for Non-Academic Staff). Salary adjustments (rewards) became linked to merit. In line with international practice, the British system of chair professor-reader-lecturer-assistant lecturer was replaced by the American professorial system. This meant that more senior teaching staff were retitled as “professors”. Thereafter, academic staff with demonstrated academic competence could apply for promotion without the constraints of a departmental budget and staff quota.

⁴ University Grants Committee “firmly believe that the higher education system should help Hong Kong retain its uniqueness as an international city that is in harmony with the Mainland system.” University Grants Committee (December 2010). Aspirations for the Higher Education System in Hong Kong Report of the University Grants Committee. <https://www.ugc.edu.hk/doc/eng/ugc/publication/report/her2010/her2010-rpt.pdf>

⁵ In early 1993, the Government, through the University Grants Committee, initiated the Research Assessment Exercise. The Exercise is intended to assess the research performance of UGC-funded universities, encourage world-class research and drive excellence. The UGC has since conducted five RAEs in 1993, 1996, 1999, 2006 and 2014. A new round of RAE will begin in 2020.

⁶ The Quality Assurance Council, under the aegis of the UGC, was established in April 2007. To promote quality assurance, it carried out an institutional quality audit on HKU in 2009.

⁷ HKU was ranked 39th in 2004, then 18th in 2007, and 24th in 2009.

Entering into the new millennium, the Department made evidence-based and world-class research that achieved international benchmarks its most important developmental priority. Affected by the University's policy of austerity, the Department struggled to cope with one-line budget deficits with declining staff numbers and frozen student enrolments. By 2007-08, the Department's human resources budget had been integrated into the Faculty's one-line budget. Thereafter, any new staff recruitment or replacements had to be negotiated with the Faculty. Funding of the Department began to be diversified, including the one-line-Faculty allocations, tuition fees from self-financed programmes, competitive and consultation research grants and public donations (setting up of scholarships). Despite still heavily relying on the one-line budget, revenue from self-financed programmes has provided the Department with more discretion in recruiting additional staff members, supporting teaching innovations, facilitating staff research projects, and setting up scholarships and maintaining travel grants for students.

With increased integration into the University Strategic Development Plan and Faculty Developmental Plan, the Department was active in introducing new courses for both social work and non-social work students. For social work students,

innovative courses were in palliative care and bereavement, contemporary social issues, specific working targets (ethnic groups, older people) and arts therapy. For non-social work students, courses on gender issues and careers skills were popular. To promote inter-departmental and cross-disciplinary collaboration, the Department, together with other departments of the Faculty, introduced multi-disciplinary majors in Public and Social Administration, Family and Child Studies, Cognitive Science, Counselling, Culture, Heritage and Tourism, Social Policy and Community Building, and Urban Governance, and supported other multi-disciplinary minors such as Human Resource Management.

Following the footsteps of its cultural learning projects in the mid-1970s and the Guangzhou fieldwork placements in the late 1980s, the Department pioneered overseas fieldwork placements starting in 1998. From then until 2019, more than 350 students were placed in welfare organizations in Australia, Canada, the United States, Germany, the United Kingdom, Singapore, Taiwan and Mainland China. Student evaluation indicated that they learned new modes of intervention, cultural adaptation, value reflection, and creative problem-solving.

Another profound challenge to the Department was the government policy to

phase out all financial support for Taught Postgraduate Programmes, notably our MSW and MSocSc programmes. Now these programmes are self-financed, the Department has had to expand and market them so as to secure a more sustainable and balanced budget. New MSocSc specializations were introduced. Counselling (2002), Marriage and Family Therapy (2003), and Behavioral Health (2004) were launched. Consequently, our total number of MSocSc graduates increased significantly, from only 25 in 1980-89, to 66 in 1990-94, 75 in 1995-99, 179 in 2000-04, and 647 in 2005-09. In 2005-09, the average number of graduates each year was 129.

In addition, a self-financed part-time three-year top-up Bachelor degree programme in social work was initiated in 2004. The programme allowed social work sub-degree holders to acquire a Bachelor degree in social work. The number of graduates from the three cohorts (2007-2009) reached 144. Our Research Postgraduate Programmes also expanded substantially.⁸ The number of PhD graduates increased from 20 between 1991 and 1999 and to 87 between 2000-2009. In 2009, there was a total of 65 concurrent RPG students. The Department has the largest number of RPG students within the Faculty and remains the top social work institution offering RPG programmes in Hong Kong and Asia. Our RPG students

come from prestigious universities in Hong Kong, Mainland China, and overseas.

In Mainland China, two programmes, namely the Master of Social Work [MSW] and Master of Social Service Management [MSSM] a collaborative project with Fudan University were launched in Shanghai in 2001. These were the first overseas-operated social work professional programmes to be registered under the Ministry of Education of China. Between 2001 and 2008, there were a total of 52 graduates.



Fudan MSW-MSSM Term-start Ceremony

In response to the UGC's strategic priorities for implementing the Teaching and Learning Quality Performance Review in 1995-97 and 2001-03, and the Quality Assurance Audits in 2008-11, the Department carried out regular internal reviews and published self-evaluation reports. The Department's teaching excellence received recognition

⁸ From 1967 to 2009, the department produced a total of 41 MPhils and 111 PhD graduates.

when three of our colleagues, Dr. Sandra Tsang (1999) Professor Petula Ho (2000), and Dr. Ho Kit Mui (2003) were awarded the University Teaching Fellowship. Dr. Sandra Tsang (2001), Professor Amy Chow (2014) and Professor Daniel Wong (2018) were awarded University Outstanding Teaching Awards. In 2009, Professor Paul Yip received the Outstanding Researcher Award from the University. Professor Cecilia Chan (in 2010) and Professor Paul Yip (in 2011) received the University's Outstanding Research Student Supervisors Award. Furthermore, public donations for two endowed professorships were received. These are the Si Yuan Professorship in Health and Social Work (Professor Cecilia Chan) and the Professorship in Social Work and Social Administration (Professor Nelson Chow initially and Professor Terry Lum currently). Reflecting the Department's research excellence two staff members, Professor Daniel Wong and Professor Petula Ho were respectively awarded a Fulbright Scholarship and a Harvard-Yenching scholarship.

With the introduction of the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) and the Competitive Earmarked Research Grant (CERG), later renamed as General Research Fund (GRF) in the 1990s, performance in these two areas has become the key indicators of resource allocation and staff promotion. The Department's performance in the RAE and GRF allocation has always

been outstanding. After a review of our research publication portfolio, the Department's leadership was recognized in five research areas; family and children, ageing and gerontology, health and mental health, social policy and community building, and China studies. Specifically:

a) Family and children: key research areas include family policy, children with special needs, parenting, family violence, reconstituted families and step-parenthood, families with communication difficulties, families suffering from mental illness and psychosomatic illnesses, depression; bereavement in families with single parenthood and undergoing divorces, new migrants, demographic transition and family formation, gender, sexuality and sexual orientation.

b) Ageing and gerontology: key research areas include housing needs, pension reforms, long-term care in Hong Kong and China, abuse of older adults, dementia care, bereavement of older adults, empowerment of older adults with chronic illnesses, expressive art intervention for older adults with cognitive impairments, and pre-retirement programmes to foster the active engagement of post-retirement older adults.

c) Health and mental health: key research areas include holistic mental and physical health, palliative care, death and

bereavement, loss and infertility, suicide prevention, community rehabilitation for chronic patients, self-help and policy advocacy related to chronic illness and intellectual disabilities, trauma management, health care management, social inclusion for disadvantaged populations and ethnic minorities, gambling and mental health studies, and cognitive behavioral therapy.

d) Social policy planning and community building: key research areas include policy issues related to older people, family, urban renewal, and community building, public policy in Asia, elderly housing, migration, social capital and social inclusion for ethnic minorities and people with disabilities, domestic violence, population, youth behavioral problems and long-term care.



Centre on Ageing Opening

e) China studies: key research areas include social security, long-term care, rehabilitation of earthquake survivors, mental health of migrants; suicide, treatment and rehabilitation of people with schizophrenia; gender issues.



Centre on Behavioural Health Staff



CSRP Staff X'mas gathering

To integrate research, teaching and knowledge exchange, the Department pioneered the establishment of four teaching and research centres within the Faculty. They are the Sau Po Centre on Ageing (1999) the Centre on Behavioural Health (2002), the HK Jockey Club Centre for Suicide Research and Prevention (2002) and the HKU Family Institute (2003). Besides teaching, these centres have provided pivotal platforms for evidence-based research, public engagement, knowledge exchanges, professional consultations, international collaborations, securing public sponsorship and donations, and creating social impacts.

Capitalizing on Faculty initiatives, the Department has also become an active participant in the University's strategic

research themes of Contemporary China Studies and Healthy Ageing. Since 2007, the Faculty has increasingly identified China studies as a core area of research. The Department has engaged actively in two major sub-themes, notably Social Policy and Poverty in Contemporary China and China and the Globalizing World. In so doing, the Department has become fully integrated into the University and Faculty research priorities on China studies, working closely with the Faculty, University, and local and international partners.

Being recognized by the Government and the general public for our academic and professional competence, our teachers have been invited to provide consultancy studies on a number of social issues. They include programme evaluations of family, community development and elderly services; reforms of the District Boards and regionalization of the Social Welfare Department; studies of social issues, such as demographic changes, social security provisions, social assistance, domestic violence and social enterprises. For examples, under the leadership of Professor Iris Chi, the Standardized Long-term Care Need Assessment Mechanism for Elderly Services was formulated and adopted by the Government to ascertain the care needs of elders and match them with appropriate services. The consultancy review of the family services (2002, 2005,

2008) undertaken by the Department has re-structured the family services in Hong Kong, leading to the formation of integrative family services centres. Key research and practice social projects included the Cadenza project on active aging (supported by the Hong Kong Jockey Club) suicide prevention (the Hong Kong Jockey Club and Chief Executive Community Project) child protection in China (UBS Optimus Foundation) and housing for older people (Elderly Commission, Central Policy Unit, and Social Welfare Department).

During this decade of development, the Department has faced profound and unprecedented challenges from changing expectations in higher education and university performance as well as competitive-based reforms. Under the leadership of Professor Joe Leung (2001-07) and Dr. Sandra Tsang (2007-13) the Department aligned itself more closely with University and Faculty development directions showing increased commitment as a core member of the Faculty. Our primary objective was to build a world-class social work research and teaching institution. Priority was given to building research capacity and outputs of teachers, seeking outside competitive and consultative research grants, initiating international and Mainland China collaboration, developing departmental and cross departmental research teams,

introducing self-financed postgraduate programmes, ensuring teaching quality, innovating new courses for non-social work students, and having an impact on society through policy advocacy, knowledge exchange, community engagement, and consultancy.

Making an Impact

Since the onset of robust and ongoing higher education reforms, academic life on the contemporary stage has been transformed dramatically. The resource-linked intensified and rigorous implementation of RAE and GRF in the 2010s had profound implications for and effects on academic life. Performance-based and market-driven administration put pressures on academics to meet (and preferably exceed!) expectations, compete for resources, and excel in research. Following the global academic trend, a culture of intense competition began to emerge in Hong Kong. Described as “competitive accountability” academics and departments had to be accountable by demonstrating the public value of their outputs.⁹ Facing increasing job insecurity and reduced independence, academics also now have to compete for worldwide recognition, research grants, and publication opportunities, as well as demonstrating that their work has produced a social impact.

More importantly, universities were forced to move away from the “ivory tower” image, and engage with their communities while demonstrating their contribution to social and economic improvements. Since the 2010s, having a social and economic impact on society through knowledge exchange has emerged as a key dimension of measuring university performance. Since 2009-10, universities have been required to submit annual knowledge exchange reports to the UGC. Based on the results of the RAE in 2014, the UGC announced that the RAE in 2020 will include research impact as part of the assessment, “with a view to encouraging the conduct of research of broader social relevance with high economic and social benefits.”¹⁰ The Times Higher Education Supplement World University Rankings project now has also included knowledge transfer as one of their key indicators of performance.

The University of Hong Kong formulated its 2016-2025 vision which reiterates its commitment to being “Asia’s Global University”. The vision is marked by the “3+1 Is” - internationalization, innovation and interdisciplinary, plus impact. In

⁹ Richard Watermeyer (2019). *Competitive Accountability in Academic Life, The Struggle for Social Impact and Public Legitimacy*. Edward Elgar Publishing.

¹⁰ University Grants Committee. *Research Assessment Exercise*. <https://www.ugc.edu.hk/eng/ugc/activity/research/rae.html>



alignment with the University's strategic development, Faculties and Departments have developed matching strategies so that the University's entire strategic plan is integrated, focused and aligned. This vision becomes the signpost for reforms of faculties, departments and academic staff. Through excellence in the three pillars, notably teaching, research and knowledge exchange, HKU has pledged to create social, cultural and economic impact. These new dimensions of knowledge exchange, impactful research, and engagement with key community stakeholders have long been recognized as the prominent strength of our Department.

◀ In keeping abreast of a rapidly changing environment and meeting our challenges, the Department has witnessed and been shaped by the introduction of these envisioning reforms in the three pillars in the last decade:

Teaching and learning

In 2012, the Department moved into the 5th Floor of the Jockey Club Tower, the Centennial Campus. We were pleased to find more space, facilities, and well-equipped classrooms. However, with the increased number of teaching and research staff, shortage of staff offices has

again emerged as a critical administrative problem.

With the introduction of the four-year curriculum by the University in 2012, the Department programmes had to make a series of re-adjustments. Given the need to broaden the perspectives of students and develop their intellectual, social and innovative skills, all undergraduate students are now required to complete a combination of Common Core Courses (CCC). To show our support for the University's initiative in introducing such courses into the curriculum, the Department was commissioned to provide 11 CCCs. They were related to issues in China, young people, creative arts, disabilities, and social divisions.

In committing to the mission of improving teaching and learning, the Department allocated funds to support two projects; "Professional competent curriculum; developing a tool for assessing students' reflections on casework practice" and "Teaching and learning; social development and service learning." After a review of the future need for our part-time BSW programme, it was suspended in 2012. New MSocSc programmes in Expressive Arts Therapy (2013) and Non-Profit Management (2015) were introduced. Since there are no similar programmes in Hong Kong, these two non-traditional innovative

programmes have been popular with students. Within the BSocSc curriculum, the Department introduced a new major in Social Policy and Development Studies in 2015. Still under debate is whether the Department should abandon the direct entry into the BSW programme, and integrate a social work major within the BSocSc structure; or maintain the current status quo.

As part of the move towards the 4-year undergraduate curriculum, the University has adopted an outcome based approach to evaluate student learning. HKU has identified a set of educational aims and associated learning outcomes for its undergraduate curriculum. Students are expected to develop the capacity for critical intellectual inquiry and life-long learning; tackle novel situations and ill-defined problems; develop critical self-reflection and greater understanding of others; be able to communicate and collaborate effectively; acquire the capacity for intercultural communication; develop multicultural understanding and become global citizens; and develop leadership and advocacy skills aimed at the improvement of the human condition. Teachers are required to align teaching and learning activities in educational programmes and courses with these learning aims and outcomes, and develop valid assessment methods. Promoting quality assurance has

always been a core task of the Department. In alignment with the University's requirements, teachers are required to construct teaching portfolios that include the mapping of course learning outcomes with programme outcomes and University educational aims.

To seek feedback from students on the teaching and learning effectiveness of the courses taken, the HKU Teaching and Learning Quality Committee introduced refined sets of questionnaires for Student Evaluation of Teaching and Learning in 2009 and 2012. Student ratings of our Department's teachers' effectiveness have been uniformly positive. In 2018-2019 averages ranged from 79.5% for TPG courses, 80.3% for undergraduates courses, to 90.3% for RPG courses.

In this decade two programmes, the BSW and the MSocSc (Behavioural Health) operated by the Department, had to be prepared for audit by the Quality Review Council. In addition, the Department carried out an internal review of the TPG programme in 2018, and was subjected to an external review of our MSW and BSW programmes by the Hong Kong Social Workers Registration Board in 2018. Programme review feedback has been encouraging and positive, reaffirming the contributions of our programmes to high quality social work education and practice.

To award outstanding students, the Department, mainly through donations from the public and alumni, have provided the following scholarships: HSBC Social Work Scholarships and travel awards, the Madam Lo Ng Kiu Ying Anita Memorial Scholarship, the Lee Heiman Memorial Book Prize, the Tang Kwong Leung Social Work Thesis Prizes, HKU Social Work Student Bursaries, HKU Social Work Alumni Innovative Research Scholarships, HKU Social Work Alumni Scholarships for Undergraduate Students, the Madam Lui Chui Sau Chun Memorial Scholarships, and the Simatelex Charitable Foundation Scholarship.

In the last decade, seven of our RPG students have won competitive fellowships including two Hong Kong PhD Fellowships and four University Postgraduate Fellowships. Six PhD students received a Fulbright Award in the USA, and one was given the King's College/HKU Fellowship Award in the UK. In the last decade, 19 PhD students from the Department benefitted from attachments to the University of Pennsylvania and Smith College. Many of our early PhD graduates have already become deans, department heads, and professors of social work in local institutions, in the Mainland and internationally. Our recent PhD graduates are highly desirable employees. By the time they graduate, many have already published or had several papers accepted

by international journals, including Social Science Citation Index (SSCI) high-ranking journals.

From 2010 to 2019, 2,777 students graduated from our department. They included: 611 BSW students, 238 BSocSc students, 766 MSW students, 996 MSocSc students, and 166 RPG (146 PhD) students. In 2019-20, the Department offered three undergraduate programmes, 10 TPG programmes, and an RPG programme with a total enrolment of 903 students. They included 158 BSW, 12 BSocSc, 261 MSW, 411 MSocSc, and 61 RPG (60 PhD) students. Unlike many other HKU departments, around 80% of our students are postgraduates. This enrolment structure is similar to many prestigious social work schools in North America.

There have been three Department Heads in the last decade. They include Dr. Sandra Tsang (2007-2013), Professor Cecilia Chan (2013-2015), and Professor Terry Lum (2015-2021). Currently, we have a total of 116 academic and administrative staff (82 in 2010). In comparing the staff profile between 2010 and 2019, the numbers of our professoriate and lecturer grade staff have enjoyed a modest increase: 25 (23 in 2010) and 25 (19 in 2010) respectively. However, there has been a substantial increase in the number of teaching assistants, Post-doctoral Fellows (PDFs)

and research assistants. Our PDF numbers have increased from only two in 2010 to 14 in 2019. With strategic investment, our research capacity has been further consolidated in the last decade.



Staff photo 2019

Our staff structure has changed substantially. There are now 9 professors (including two Chair professors) 8 associate professors and 9 assistant professors. To celebrate the success of our human resource strategy, 2 professors were awarded chair professorships; 7 of our new professors were promoted/ recruited; and 6 assistant professors were tenured to associate professors. During this period, 8 new assistant professors and 2 new associate professors were recruited mainly from overseas. To promote interdisciplinary collaboration, the Department has ventured to develop joint projects with the Faculty of Engineering (on big data analysis) (2016); the School of Public Health on mental health policy (2019); and the Faculty of Business and Economics on social entrepreneurship (2019). Furthermore, Professor Nelson Chow, after his retirement, was made an

Emeritus Professor; academic recognition of the highest order and much deserved for a lifetime of impactful contribution. On the one hand, the current staff structure provides a much stronger leadership in teaching and research. On the other hand, it signifies that our succession and transition planning have been smooth and fruitful.



Department outing 2010



Department outing 2019

The Department now has the largest number of professors in the Faculty. Since more than half (56%) of our professoriate staff are from outside Hong Kong, including Mainland China, we now have a more diversified and international workforce.

In this period, both Professor Amy Chow (2014) and Professor Daniel Wong (2018) received University Outstanding Teaching Awards; and Professor Cecilia Chan,



Staff Retreat 2019

Outstanding Research Student Supervisor Award (2010). Professor Rainbow Ho received the Outstanding Teaching Award, Faculty of Social Sciences, and HKU 2015 Research Award; Dr. Maosheng Ran, Social Sciences University Research Output Prize (2016) and Social Sciences Outstanding Research Output Awards for Applied Research (2015); and Dr. Paul Wong, Outstanding Research Output (Applied Research) (2013).

International staff awards included the King's College/HKU Fellowship, and the Universitas 21 Fellowship. Many of our staff members received honorary professorships, visiting scholarships, and research awards from internationally renowned universities; and have been invited as Fellows and advisors by distinguished international organizations and professional associations in social work practice and research in the areas of gerontology, dance therapy, death and dying, cognitive therapy, and suicide prevention.

To facilitate international collaboration, we have signed agreements for academic exchange with the National Singapore University, Case Western Reserve University, Renmin University, Beijing Normal University, Nanjing University, University of Pennsylvania, University of Michigan, Michigan State University, and National Taiwan University. Visiting scholars included: Professor Steven Sharlow (2011), Professor J. Conte (2012); Professor C. Jacobs (2012), Professor D. Lai (2012), etc.

We have been noticeably successful in securing public and alumni donations supporting our programmes and scholarships. The Government Matching Grant Scheme has granted a total amount of HK\$2.85 million from 2003 to 2010 (five rounds) to the Department. In addition, another HK\$1.27 million came from the Stanley Ho Alumni Challenge Scheme. For decades, our Alumni Association has played an active and supportive role in providing career talks, job seeking skills training, and study trips for our students.

Research:

Our long-standing research strategies include setting up international leading research clusters; supporting staff members in research projects and publications; recruiting new staff members in alignment with existing research strategies and

priorities; capacity building in quantitative and qualitative research methodologies; and promoting international research collaborations.

Based on some of the major global and local challenges, the Department has initiated strategic research clusters on population ageing, suicide prevention, mental wellness, evidence-based clinical intervention, population and migration, and 'big data' on health and mental health. Research grants have been allocated to these clusters to boost their collaborative pioneering projects. The Big Data on Health and Mental Health research cluster collaborated with the LKS Faculty of Medicine to initiate a project on the understanding of neurodegenerative (e.g. dementia) diseases using big data. With support from the Innovative Technology Fund, two collaborative projects with Computer Sciences on elderly health and mental health were launched. External experts have been invited to provide training in data analysis. In 2019, they included Professor D. G. Chen of the University of North Carolina on Statistical Meta-analysis and Quantitative Intervention Research and Professor Martin Knaps of the London School of Economics and Political Sciences on Mental Health Economics.

In facilitating research support, the Department set up research funds for capacity building in 2014, and a research

office, supported by PDFs/ assistant research officers. In facilitating staff commitment to research and publications, there have been readjustments in teaching workloads, offering of sabbatical leave opportunities, appointment of mentors to junior staff members, and a bi-weekly research seminar series for sharing research findings and experiences. Together with the University, the Department has provided seed research grants, professional editing fees, and conference travel grants. An internal review process has been arranged to strengthen GRF proposals.

Our international research partners in joint research projects are extensive, including the London School of Economics and Political Sciences, the University of Pennsylvania, Stanford University, Washington University, the University of Waterloo, Peking University, the University of California at Berkeley, the University of British Columbia, the Pontifical University of John Paul II, the University of Ottawa, Shanghai Jiao Tong University, Renmin University, the National University of Singapore, the University of St. Andrews, the University of Johannesburg, and the University of Southampton.

From 2013 to 2019, the Department received a total of HK\$199.3 million in research funds, an increase of 70.1% over the period of 2008-13. They have included

HK\$128.9 million from research grants and HK\$70.4 million from research contracts. Our sources of funding included: highly competitive UGC/RGC grants (HK\$22.1M) such as the Research Impact Fund (RIF), GRF, and Early Career Scheme (ECS); other competitive government schemes (HK\$10.7M) such as the Health and Medical Research Fund and the Public Policy Research Funding Schemes; charitable foundations (HK\$85.9M) such as the Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust and the Lee Hysan Foundation; and research contracts from the HKSAR Government (HK\$47.9M) such as the Social Welfare Department; NGOs and the private sector (HK\$19.6M). We also received \$10.2 million from overseas charities such as the Templeton World Charity Foundation and the UBS Optimus Foundation.

In terms of competitive grants, the scorecard of the Department is impressive. From 2010-2019, they have included one Research Impact Grant, one Strategic Public Policy Research (SPPR) grant, 34 GRF grants, 6 Early Career Scheme (ECS) grants, and 8 from the Public Policy Research Funding Scheme. The total amount of GRF/ECS funding received amounted to HK\$22.1M. Since the introduction of the ECS in 2013-14, 6 projects have been awarded, indicating that our newly recruited young staff have been successful in obtaining research funds. In essence, our GRF performance

has been the leader among social work institutions in Hong Kong and impressive within the Faculty.

To illustrate our research expertise, the majority of the GRF/ECS projects are related to clinical practice/ psychotherapy and mental health (17). Others include: ageing and elderly care (6) end of life care (3) poverty and social security in Asia (2) and issues related to young people (4) suicide (2) China (1) sexuality and domestic violence (2) and population (2). Based on the project nature of GRF application outcomes, our research strength has focused mainly on clinical practice and intervention research. The majority of the projects focused on the study of Hong Kong. Only seven projects were related to China (4) and Asia (3). Our current areas of excellence, namely in gerontology and mental health, reflect the vital contributions from our three research centres. In integrating social and health care research, more of our journal publications have been found in prestigious health care journals. This matters because these journals often have higher impact factors than social work journals.

However, it also indicates that there has been a gradual shift away from our traditional strength in mainstream social policy focusing on social protection, poverty, comparative social administration and social welfare in China and a move

towards social intervention.¹¹ To align with the University and Faculty mission as Asia's global University, there is a need for more comparative international and Mainland China oriented research studies so as to increase our international status.

More importantly, the majority of these projects are methodologically based on quantitative and parallel randomized controlled trials (RCT), comparing the outcomes of interventions between experimental groups and control groups. This may reflect the growing popularity in the academic world of favoring the use of experimental design and RCTs in research studies in general and by GRF reviewers in particular¹² Evidence-based research to find out what works and what doesn't in social work intervention is paramount to inform practice, ensure effectiveness, and enhance professional status – thus increasing social impact.

RAE and GRF are increasingly significant research-based exercises with resource and career implications. As key indicators of individual staff performance linked to tenure and promotion and Department performance linked to resource allocation, these two exercises have put overwhelming pressure on our staff members to publish journal papers in top journals and submit outstanding quality research proposals. For the RAE exercises (2014 and 2020) and

annual GRF applications, the Department has provided academic staff members with enabling support, including mentorship from senior staff, English editing, subsidies for continuous professional development, conference expenses, mock review exercises, and sharing of best practice experiences.

Our staff members are currently involved in the editorship of the following academic journals: *Encyclopedia of Gerontology and Population Aging*, *Child Abuse & Neglect*, *BMC Psychology*, *Routledge Contemporary Social Work Studies*, *International Social Work*, *Ageing and Mental Health*, *Hong Kong Journal of Social Work*, *International Gambling Studies*, *Biometrics*, *Journal of Gender Studies*, *Urban Geography*, and *Frontiers in Psychology*. There are 49 journals with which our staff members have been involved. They include: *Ageing and Social Policy*, *Applied Gerontology*, *Child Abuse and Neglect*, *Clinical Social Work*

¹¹ With the departure of Professor M. Ramesh and Professor Ka Ho Mok, as well as the retirement of Professor Nelson Chow, the Department is still in need of a world class leader in international social policy.

¹² The popular use of RCT is marked by the basic approach of the 2019 Nobel Prize Economics winners to enhance the credibility of economists. See Banerjee, A. and E. Duflo (2012). *Poor Economics*, Penguin Books; (2019). *Good Economics for Hard Times*, Penguin Books. The popular applications of "Nudge Theory" in public policy, based on behavioral economics, through RCT is another example. See another Nobel Prize Economics winner, Tyler, R. and C. Sunstein (2008). *Nudge: Improving Decisions about Health, Wealth, and Happiness*. Yale University Press

Journal, CRISIS Journal, Death Studies, Social Development Issues, Journal for the Study of Spirituality, Journal of Cancer Policy, Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Diversity in Social Work, Journal of Gerontological Social Work, Journal of Loss and Trauma, Journal of Mental Health Systems (BMC), Journal of Psychosocial Oncology, Journal of Social Work in End of Life in Palliative Care, PLOS One, Research on Social Work Practice, Sexualities, Social Work in Health Care, Social Work in Mental Health, Suicide & Life Threatening Behavior, and Community Development Journal. Our staff members are regularly invited to review manuscripts by international journals and book publishers in relation to book proposals. Their assessments are also sought for matters of tenure and promotion applications from other universities, and for research grant proposals.

Knowledge Exchange and Social Impact:

Knowledge exchange (KE) is about taking a systematic approach to sharing knowledge acquired through evidence-based research. Described as the “third mission”, the UGC has recognized that knowledge transfer or knowledge exchange between universities and society can bring about “socio-economic impact and improvements to the community and businesses.” In return for the closer ties to the community, universities’ research mission can be enriched, and international competitiveness enhanced.

HKU defines KE as “engaging, for mutual benefit, with business, government or the public to generate, acquire, apply and make accessible the knowledge needed to enhance material, human, social, cultural and environmental well-being.”¹³ The HKU KE office has showcased the KE success stories of researchers under the headings ‘Impact’, ‘Innovation’, ‘Partnership’, ‘Global’, and ‘Engagement’. Key facilitating university-wide initiatives include the HKU Scholars Hub, the HKU 3MT Competition, the KE website, and the KE Awards.

In aligning itself with University priorities, the Faculty of Social Sciences has promoted KE through a number of initiatives, including self-financed taught postgraduate programmes, internships, KE Events, Faculty KE Awards, KE Funding Projects, and Community Projects. Among the 7 community projects sponsored by the Faculty, 4 are actively led by our Department staff members. They include: ExCEL3 - Excellence in Capacity-building on Entrepreneurship and Leadership for the Third-sector, JC A-Connect: Jockey Club Autism Support Network, JC JoyAge: Jockey Club Holistic Support Project for Elderly Mental Wellness, and Jockey Club End-of-Life Community Care Project.

Making a social impact through knowledge exchange has always been a central

¹³ HKU KE Strategy. www.ke.hku.hk

commitment of the Department. Through engaging with key community stakeholders, the Department has a strong track record of generating evidence-based, interdisciplinary and innovative knowledge informing policy and practice improvements. Strategically, in addition to the three research centres, in 2019-2020 the Department has set up new research clusters in strategic areas, notably on population migration and big data on health and mental health in. Financed by external funding projects and research grants, these research-based KE platforms serve as hubs for our researchers to forge partnerships with community stakeholders to explore and implement innovative and value-added initiatives to improve social well-being.

Impact creating channels include:

- Participation of staff members in key government advisory committees, NGO executive boards, and charity trust funds;
- Consultancy projects on policy and programme evaluation;
- Research, conferences, and training projects initiated by our three research centres on suicide prevention, behavioral health and gerontology;
- Engaging key community stakeholders through our Departmental Advisory Committee, whose members come from a variety of backgrounds, such as retired government officials, CEOs of NGOs, and family foundations.

Since 2013-14, impact case histories have been included in the HKU KE reports. Two of the projects from the Department on suicide prevention (2013-14 and 2017-18) and on Improving Livability in Aging (2017-18) were listed in the Reports submitted to UGC.¹⁴ Currently listed as one of the exceptional KE success stories from the Department in the KE website is “Changing Media Culture to Reduce Suicide Rates”. Through the research-based campaign to change the culture of media reporting about suicide, the HK Jockey Club Centre for Suicide Research and Prevention, led by Professor Paul Yip, has succeeded in reducing the suicide rate by 30%.

The Department has identified two key examples of the impact of our work on societal well-being. They are:

- The introduction of means-restriction as an evidence-based suicide prevention strategy in Hong Kong which has significantly reduced the suicide rate in pilot districts (led by Professor Paul Yip).
- The new paradigm shift in clinical social work practice through the Integrated Body Mind Spirit Intervention that integrates Eastern culture and philosophy in delivering psychosocial care to promote health and mental health (led by Professor Cecilia Chan).

¹⁴ UGC, Knowledge Transfer. <https://www.ugc.edu.hk/eng/ugc/activity/knowledge.html>

In terms of outside community and government funding support for practice and policy research projects, the Department has received more than HK\$98 million in the last five years. Funding sources include the HK Jockey Club Charities Trust, HKSAR Government, and major family foundations. More recent examples of research impact grants include RGC Research Impact Fund grant in 2019 for “Tools to Inform Policy: Chinese Communities’ Action in Response to Dementia” (HK\$4.3 million); and the second phase of the Jockey Club End of Life Community Care Project (HK\$29.8 million).

Our contribution to Hong Kong society is demonstrated by the number of staff members who chair or are members of government advisory committees and executive committees of non-governmental organizations. Two of our academic staff were elected legislative councilors. In honoring our contribution to community services, Department staff have received a total of 2 Gold Bauhinia Stars, 3 Silver Bauhinia Stars, 2 Bronze Bauhinia Stars, and 2 Medal of Honour awards from the Government. Seven have been made Justices of the Peace.

Our Unfinished Agenda

Dating back to 1950, HKU has a long and prestigious history of pioneering social work education, particularly in advanced

postgraduate programmes. Without doubt, HKU has provided the most extensive and outstanding quality of postgraduate social work education both in Hong Kong and Asia. Throughout the 70 years of social work education at HKU, the Department has grown in size (staff, programme and student numbers) sophistication, and global and local influences. We have nurtured many prominent social workers now working as senior executives in government and non-governmental organisations, as well as distinguished scholars employed in universities worldwide.

Strategically in human resources, we have built up a versatile, diversified, and devoted workforce. Many younger teachers have been promoted to Professorships or obtained tenure. In recruitment, new staff members need not necessarily be trained social workers. Being multi-disciplinary, particularly through joint appointments, we have specialists in demography, psychology, data analysis and statistics, sociology and social entrepreneurship. Our staff members have carried out pertinent research and published outstanding work in top tier international journals. Increasingly, our research publications and consultancy have a profound impact in and outside of Hong Kong. In so doing, we have earned a ‘brand name’ that is prestigious and trusted both locally and globally. Based on the achievements that we have outlined

above in teaching, research, and knowledge exchange, we would say HKU remains the leading social work department in Asia, comparable with the most renowned social work institutions in the world.

In an era of increasing competition, Asian universities, particularly universities from the Mainland have “continued to expand their influence and presence on the world stage”.¹⁵ According to the *Times Higher Education Supplement* 2020 rankings, HKU ranked 35th in the world behind Tsinghua (23th), Peking (24th) and the National University of Singapore (25th) in Asia. Ranking is based on calibrated performance indicators that measure an institution’s performance across teaching, research, knowledge transfer and international outlook. Inevitably, HKU will face challenges from Mainland China universities in relation to Asian and world status.¹⁶ There have been phenomenal increases in top level academic research and publications in Mainland China; increasingly international students would prefer to study in China. However, in social science, particularly in social work, HKU still has a comfortable edge in Asia.

The Department is already a world-class, leading social work institution in Asia. According to the QS University Rankings by subject for social policy and administration from 2016 to 2019, the rankings of HKU are

outstanding. In 2019, it ranked 20th in the world, higher than HKU Social Science (26th) and far above other social work institutions in Hong Kong.¹⁷

Maintaining our leadership is a formidable challenge. For decades, HKU aspired to be a research-led “Global Asian” university. In embracing and aligning ourselves with this vision, we have to increase our global teaching and research links, particularly with Asian and Mainland China partners. Underpinning university excellence are the requirements for performance in teaching, research and knowledge exchange. Our view is that these requirements are not mutually exclusive and they need to be well-integrated to achieve cross-dimensional synergy. Because of our uniqueness as both an academic discipline and a professionally-oriented department, we have to integrate differences in values, expectations and requirements, particularly between the University and the professional community. To capitalize on our strengths as the top research hub and teaching laboratory in Hong Kong, we need to harness our strong international and Mainland China

¹⁵ Times Higher Education, *World University Rankings 2020*. https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings/2020/world-ranking#!/page/0/length/25/sort_by/rank/sort_order/asc/cols/stats

¹⁶ According to THE, the top institutions in mainland China have higher scores for citation impact and research income in 2019.

¹⁷ The QS World University Rankings includes 39 subjects. Social Work is not considered as a key academic subject.

collaborative research network; maintain and increase local partnerships with government, charitable foundations and non-governmental organisations to expand opportunities for impactful research and consultancies; to encourage alumni to donate generously to specific research and practice projects; and consolidate our postgraduate teaching programmes.

To achieve internationalization, there is a need to increase the number of international students in our programmes. Our MSW, TPG and RPG programmes need to be marketed overseas, particularly to other Asian and “Belt and Road” countries. More of these students, perhaps with scholarship support, are beginning to enroll in social work programmes in Mainland China. Admittedly, the presence of international students is a key indicator of internationalization.

Due to the Occupy Central Movement (2014) the Anti-extradition Law Protest (2019) and Covid-19 epidemic (2020) the University, including the Department, were forced to explore alternative means of teaching and learning. The further development of communication technology and on-line teaching, supplementing traditional classroom teaching, will be a major and inevitable trend. Based on distance education technologies, the Department can actively prepare on-line teaching programmes and courses, particularly in our MSocSc programmes.

In research areas, we have identified a series of distinct research clusters in gerontology, suicide prevention, end-of-life care, mental health, and population and migration. Seemingly, our area of excellence has moved from traditional social protection and welfare systems to social care and intervention, particularly in integrating social and health care. Our research and other projects are becoming more multi-disciplinary and are helping to break down traditional barriers between health and social care. This is the key “shining or radiating point” of our research excellence. Supported by strategic funding and a pool of talented and capable staff, we have already built up a strong research-based platform in an enabling environment. Yet to improve our global presence, our research and interests have to be relevant to, comparable with and linked to international trends. Within this framework there is room to reactivate our traditional strengths in global social protection, social welfare systems, employment and the labour market, and social welfare in China.

In research methodology, a two-pronged approach has begun to emerge. On the one hand, we have already built up a strong capacity in the RCT approach to evaluating intervention effectiveness. As “the gold standard” for effectiveness particularly for medical research, these often small scale experimental design research projects can generate crucial information to improve practice and professional status.

In addition, we are beginning to build up our capacity in big data research. This is again a pivotal trend in academic research, particularly in demographic, health, business, crime, and ageing studies. Big data analytics enable us to better understand and predict social and economic trends. Some of the big data longitudinal studies on ageing care and household incomes, involving big sample size longitudinal surveys and international collaborations in Mainland China, have already generated hundreds of academic papers.¹⁸ Strengthening our research methodological competency in these two approaches is strategic to building up our local and international academic and professional expertise. However, this is not to suggest any intention to downplay the important contributions of qualitative research.

Our research-led consultancies in the 1970s included the implementation of the Standardized Care Need Assessment Mechanism for Elderly Services and the re-structuring of family services. We then moved on to the poverty and domestic violence studies, review of retirement schemes, social assistance, community care and residential care provisions, mental health, suicide prevention and end-of-life care which took us to the 2010s. Over this lengthy period our consultancies have identified needs and policy issues, offered solutions and provided evidence-based guidance on implementation.

This booklet has offered strategic insights into why we are, where we are, and where we are going, in the midst of the rapid transformation of the higher education landscape both globally and locally. Challenges will be increasingly formidable, and there is little room for complacency. Deep in our heart, we are fully committed to “creating a better world through promoting social justice and interdisciplinary collaboration, empowering vulnerable populations and improving the quality of life for all.” In embracing the University, Faculty, and Department vision, we need to be more proactive and strategic in charting our future and while keeping abreast of the ever-changing environment.

Finally, on the occasion of the 70th Anniversary of social work education at HKU, the Department would like to thank all the teachers, alumni, students, University administrators, faculties, social work communities, government bureaus and departments, and community and international partners for their support in helping us on the journey to fulfill our mission. Their continual support is pivotal in enabling us to realize and achieve our vision. We all take pride in the heritage and spirit of academic and professional excellence, innovation and visionary leadership that began with our early pioneers and continues today and will do into the future.

¹⁸ Examples are the China Health and Retirement Longitudinal Study (CHARLS) and Chinese Household Income Project (CHIP).