



Research & Innovation

Transforming Youth Mobility with Research-Driven Insights

PolyU was commissioned by the Government of the HKSAR to evaluate the effectiveness of the “Strive and Rise Programme” (the Programme), which supports underprivileged children and helps them break the cycle of intergenerational poverty. The research team conducted a comprehensive evaluation of the first cohort of over 2,500 participants, focusing on developmental progress across eight key indicators, including goal setting, financial planning, interpersonal skills, confidence, self-esteem, sense of responsibility and empathy, resilience, and sense of community belonging.

Participants, together with their parents and mentors, were engaged through questionnaires and interviews to measure programme outcomes. The results were

highly encouraging: these grassroots teenagers reported significant improvements across all indicators, with most experiencing positive change in at least one area and around 70% showing progress in three or more, particularly in interpersonal skills, resilience, and sense of belonging. On average, participants rated themselves over 10% higher in financial planning ability, reflecting tangible growth in essential life skills. Mentors and parents also acknowledged positive changes of the youth.

These findings reaffirm the effectiveness of the Programme in empowering underprivileged youth, while also providing valuable insights to enhance its long-term impact and benefit.

Advancing Collaborative Research to Address Poverty in Central Asia

The Department of Applied Social Sciences has partnered with Al-Farabi Kazakh National University (KazNU) to launch a research initiative aimed at addressing the needs of children, youth, and families living in poverty in Kazakhstan and Central Asia. With a grant of HK\$2 million, the project adopts a collaborative practice research approach that actively engages educators, researchers, practitioners, service users, and policymakers. Grounded in lived experience, the study seeks to co-create a culturally appropriate model of social work practice.

The initiative aspires to mitigate the challenges faced by families in poverty by enabling improved access to education, healthcare, social services, and other

resources. In addition to benefitting over 1,000 underprivileged families, the project fosters academic and professional exchange among social work educators, practitioners, and policymakers across Hong Kong, Chinese Mainland, Kazakhstan, Central Asia, and the broader international community.

Through this collaboration, the project not only develops innovative practice models tailored to local contexts, but also deepens research and academic ties between PolyU and KazNU. Ultimately, it lays the foundation for a joint education and research centre dedicated to social work and social development in Central Asia and the Belt and Road region.

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Teaching & Learning

Understanding Poverty through a Comparative Lens

The Department of Applied Social Sciences led the Winter Institute 2023 in collaboration with the Crown Family School of Social Work, Policy, and Practice at the University of Chicago and the Department of Sociology at Peking University. Taking place in Hong Kong, Hanoi, and Ho Chi Minh City, the initiative exemplified the successful collaboration between the three universities in promoting academic exchange and fostering knowledge on pressing social challenges across diverse contexts.

In Hong Kong, PolyU academics facilitated engaging lectures and discussions, encouraging participants to share insights on topics such as social class, poverty and inequality drawn from their own policy environments; in Vietnam, lectures delivered by the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University, Hanoi (VNU Hanoi), and the University of Labour and Social Affairs explored social security systems, migration, and changing livelihoods. Besides, field visits to NGOs and social enterprises highlighted impactful community initiatives benefitting people with disabilities, rural women, farmers, and disadvantaged children.

Integrating classroom learning with real-world engagement, the Winter Institute broadened students' understanding of social welfare policy development and service delivery in varied socio-economic settings. It also strengthened analytical and cultural competence, equipping them to apply comparative perspectives in tackling poverty and inequality, and underscored the University's role in cultivating globally engaged professionals.



Cultivating Future-Ready Leaders for a More Equitable Society

"Service Leadership", offered as part of the General University Requirement subject, empowers students to develop the leadership mindset and values for tackling pressing societal issues, including poverty. Centred on the "3Cs" of leadership competence, moral character, and care, the subject combines conceptual learning with experiential activities, helping students translate leadership theories, including service leadership principles and Confucian virtues, into meaningful actions.

The curriculum challenges students to view leadership as a social responsibility to serve others, particularly in addressing poverty and promoting inclusive practices. Classroom learning is reinforced through group projects, reflective writing, and critical self-assessment, enabling students to identify personal

strengths, address gaps, and commit to lifelong growth. Moreover, they are well-equipped to drive positive change, contributing to the global effort to alleviate poverty, as they are encouraged to advocate for equitable resource distribution and to design solutions that improve the lives of marginalised individuals and communities.

This subject is a core component of PolyU's "Leadership and Intrapersonal Development Programme", which received the **Gold Award in the Nurturing Well-being & Purpose category at the Wharton-QS Stars Reimagine Education Awards 2021** for its impact in enhancing well-being, motivating self-improvement, and inspiring socially responsible leadership.

External Engagement

Inspiring Future Leaders to Tackle Social Challenges through Immersive Experiences

The Department of Applied Social Sciences organised the PolyU Igniting Social Innovation Competition to provide an impactful platform for secondary school students to engage with pressing social challenges in Hong Kong and beyond. Using advanced virtual reality and Cave Automatic Virtual Environment (CAVE)/ Hybrid Immersive Virtual Environment (HiVE) technologies, participants experienced issues such as poverty, youth mental health, housing shortages, high land prices, and ageing society in immersive and interactive ways, enabling them to develop deeper understanding and empathy.

The competition encouraged students to propose creative and viable solutions to these challenges, linking local realities with global frameworks for sustainable development. By connecting their

proposals with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, participants demonstrated how social innovation can contribute to tackling poverty (SDG1), improving health and well-being (SDG3), and fostering sustainable cities and communities (SDG11).

With **over 300 students from nearly 70 secondary schools** taking part, the initiative nurtured critical thinking, problem-solving, and leadership skills among the next generation of social innovators. More importantly, it inspired young people to see themselves as active change agents, capable of designing solutions that can improve the lives of individuals, families, and communities.



PolyU's "P.A.T.H.S." Project

Empowering Children and Youth through Education and Social Support

Supported by the Tin Ka Ping Foundation, PolyU's "P.A.T.H.S." Project has reached **over 145,000 primary, and secondary school students** and supported **nearly 1,900 teachers in rural Chinese Mainland** in embedding life-skills education into their classrooms. The students have developed emotional competence, resilience, and confidence, while teachers have transformed their pedagogy from traditional, teacher-centred methods to more student-focused approaches. Parents have also been engaged through workshops and joint activities, strengthening family relationships and positive parenting practices.

Also targeting rural Chinese Mainland, the PolyU-PKU-ChicagoU Tripartite Collaborative Project, co-organised with Peking University, and The University of Chicago, has enhanced social work for children in difficult situations. Through workshops

involving **around 100 social work scholars and practitioners**, the initiative offered trainings on child welfare, protection, disability support, and family resilience. By sharing localised case studies on the impact of poverty on child development and exchanging global perspectives, participants laid the foundation for a national platform to advance child welfare practices.

In Hong Kong, the English Language Centre has supported the Sprouts Foundation to provide after-school programmes for **over 1,000 underprivileged students** each week, nurturing the seeds of confidence and self-esteem that translate into better opportunities for their future. These efforts have tripled the number of primary pupils entering highly rated secondary schools and enabled nearly all secondary participants to access tertiary education. At the same time, PolyU teaching staff enriched their sense of purpose by contributing their expertise.

Governance & Operations

Enabling Academic Pursuits through Financial Support

To ensure that financial hardship does not stand in the way of students pursuing their education, the Student Affairs Office offers a combination of deferred tuition fee payment options and financial assistance schemes, administered by PolyU and the Government of the HKSAR. These measures help ease the burden of tuition and related expenses, creating the conditions for students to focus on their studies and personal development without being constrained by financial stress.

In addition to financial assistance schemes, PolyU partners with external organisations to provide scholarships that recognise academic achievement while addressing financial challenges. A notable example is the “Building Homes with Heart Scholarship Programme”, jointly launched with the SHKP-Kwoks’ Foundation. Under this initiative, awarded undergraduate and postgraduate students



Building Homes with Heart Scholarship Programme

from the Department of Building Environment and Energy Engineering, the Department of Building and Real Estate, and the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering each received scholarships of up to HK\$40,000.

Overall, **more than 4,900 students** have benefitted from financial support measures, while targeted

scholarships such as the SHKP-Kwoks’ Foundation awards have provided deserving students with additional resources to pursue studies in construction, real estate, and engineering disciplines, fostering an inclusive learning environment where students from all backgrounds can thrive and realise their potential.



iSpace at PolyU Library

Bridging Digital Gaps to Support Equitable Learning Opportunities

Ensuring equal access to information and technology is a cornerstone of academic success. To support students of all backgrounds, the University Library provides a wide range of resources that help level the playing field for learning and research. Among these, notebook PCs, MacBooks, iPads, and other essential digital equipment are available for loan, making sure that financially disadvantaged students are not left behind in their studies.

Beyond traditional learning resources, the Library extends opportunities for students to explore new frontiers in digital technology through its i-Space, a group work space where “i” stands for inspiration, ideation and implementation. This facility allows

students, regardless of discipline or financial background, to explore innovative tools such as the Internet of Things, virtual reality, 3D scanning and printing, laser cutting, vinyl cutting, and video production. By offering low-barrier access to these technologies, i-Space fosters creativity and practical skills that prepare students for a rapidly evolving digital world.

Concurrently, the Library also provides a range of study spaces, from quiet areas to collaborative rooms, assuring that students can study in environments suited to their needs. Overall, these efforts secure equitable access to resources, knowledge and emerging technologies, enabling students to achieve their full potential.