



D-GEN

**IMPACT
EVALUATION
REPORT**



by Dr Hannah Griffin-James



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Impact Novice Programme

02

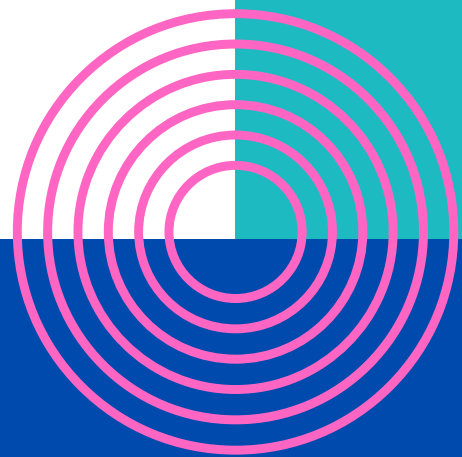
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IMPACT NOVICE PROGRAMME

Supporting 1st Gen Students to Career Success in Hong Kong

Run by DGEN, the Impact Novice Programme is a targeted programme designed to address the significant barriers faced by non-Chinese speaking first-generation (1st gen) students in Hong Kong as they navigate the path towards top-tier careers.

These students often lack the social connections and insider knowledge that are key to securing valuable internships and building strong CVs. The programme aims to create more equal opportunities for them.

Through a structured approach, the Impact Novice Programme provides 1st gen students with access to a training-focused social placement, offering 50–80 hours of skilled volunteer experience with community-focused initiatives (participants receive a stipend of up to HKD 1500).

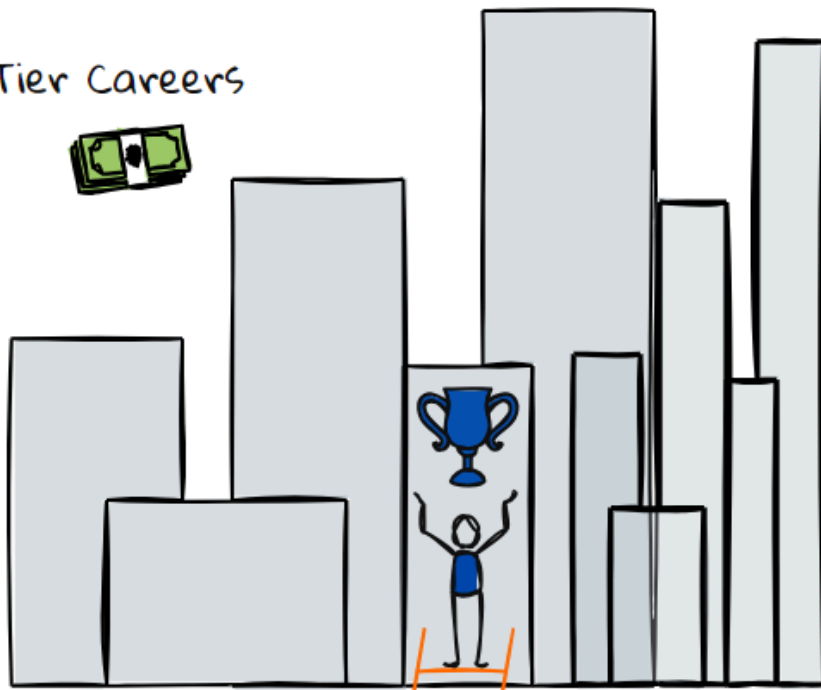
The practical experience is complemented by the Impact Novice Training Programme, which equips students with essential skills for internship success, including communication, employability, and workplace readiness, through workshops and one-on-one support.

Support continues after the initial placement through opportunities to build professional connections and showcase their experiences. By directly addressing the obstacles these students encounter, the Impact Novice Programme equips them with the necessary skills, resources, and networks to confidently pursue top-tier careers in Hong Kong.

1ST GEN STUDENTS

A student whose
parents did not
complete a
university degree.

Top Tier Careers



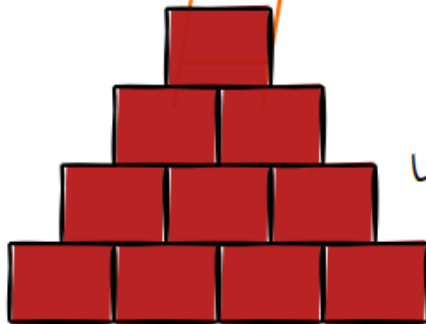
Skill building

Growing social capital



Placement

DGEN



Lack of networks

Inaccessible internships



1st gen

1

COMMUNITY PLACEMENT

Students undertake a 50-80 hour placement with community-focused initiatives. This hands-on experience allows them to contribute to meaningful social projects while gaining practical insights into a professional environment. A stipend of up to HKD 1500 is provided.

IMPACT NOVICE PROGRAMME

ELEMENTS

2

INTERNSHIP READINESS

Equips students with essential skills for internship success and workplace readiness. Including workshops focused on enhancing communication, improving employability, and understanding professional etiquette. Individual support is also offered.

3

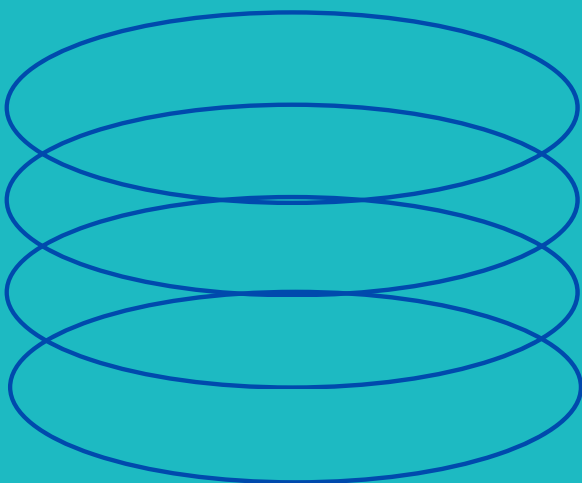
SOCIAL CAPITAL

Focuses on building students' professional networks. They gain skills in personal branding and learn how to effectively use platforms like LinkedIn to connect with professionals and effectively share their placement experiences, expanding their social capital.

4

FUTURE PATHWAYS

Support extends beyond the core programme through opportunities to build professional connections and showcase their experiences. This may include reference letters, participation in panel discussions or talks, and networking events designed to support their long-term career progression.



SINCE 2022



ACROSS 10 COHORTS

Demonstrating a consistent effort to address this critical need.

Looking ahead, the programme continues to build strong community partnerships, with 4 already confirmed for the next cohort, ensuring ongoing placement opportunities.



DESIRED IMPACT

ECONOMIC ADVANCEMENT

**ENHANCED REPRESENTATION IN
TOP-TIER CAREERS**

NARROWED OPPORTUNITY GAP

STRENGTHENED WORK READINESS SKILLS

IMPROVED INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE

ENHANCED SOCIAL COHESION AND CAPITAL

INTERNSHIP ACCESSIBILITY

SUSTAINABLE CHANGE THROUGH

ALUMNI SUPPORT

KEY FINDINGS FROM COHORT 7



SPRING 2025

PARADOX OF POTENTIAL

These are not students lacking in ability or drive; quite the contrary.

On the surface, a striking paradox emerges when we examine the 1st gen students participating in the Impact Novice Programme. These are not students lacking in ability or drive; quite the contrary. Their credentials paint a compelling picture of significant academic and extracurricular success.

Consider this: Almost all of these 1st gen students have earned not just one, but multiple scholarships, grants, or prizes. We're talking about achievements like the prestigious Harvard Prize Book Award, the distinction of "Best Debater" in the Joint-University Debate Competition on RTHK, and the Education University of HK's Award for Academic Excellence in Visual Arts.

1st gen students are successful in obtaining relevant work experience without DGEN.

These are students who excel. They achieve **great grades** and undertake demanding undergraduate degrees here in Hong Kong.

Have **held multiple internships and placements**, as well as voluntary positions in their desired industry.

For example:

- Management Coordinator Intern, Business Consultant Intern.
- M&A Intern (law firm), Corporate Finance Intern (law), Real Estate Team Intern (law).
- New Media Operator, Assistant Product Manager, Operation Planner, Planner & Script Supervisor.

While the Impact Novice Programme includes skills development, many 1st gen students don't believe they need it – a view seemingly echoed by their strong CVs. Moreover, pre/post comparisons reveal the skills component benefits non-1st gen students more than 1st gen students. This prompts a stark question: **Does INP truly serve its intended purpose for 1st gen students?**

Given the undeniable talent and drive of these 1st gen students, evidenced by their impressive academic achievements and relevant work experience.

A key question arises...

WHY DO 1ST GEN STUDENTS NEED ANOTHER PLACEMENT?

For the students themselves, the answer is stark and simple:

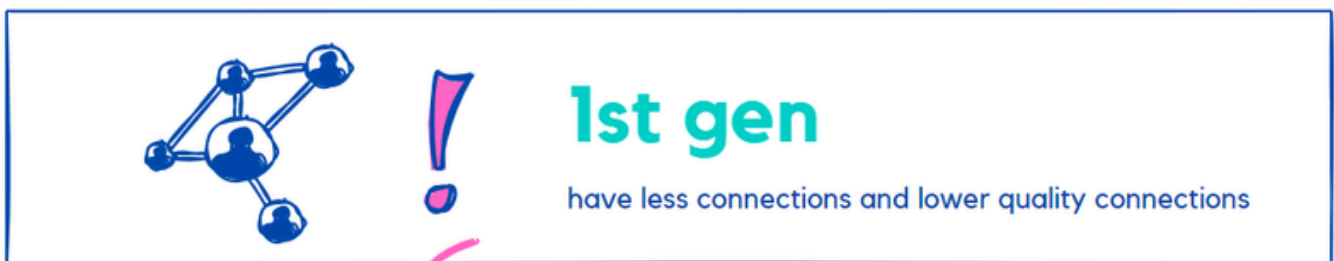
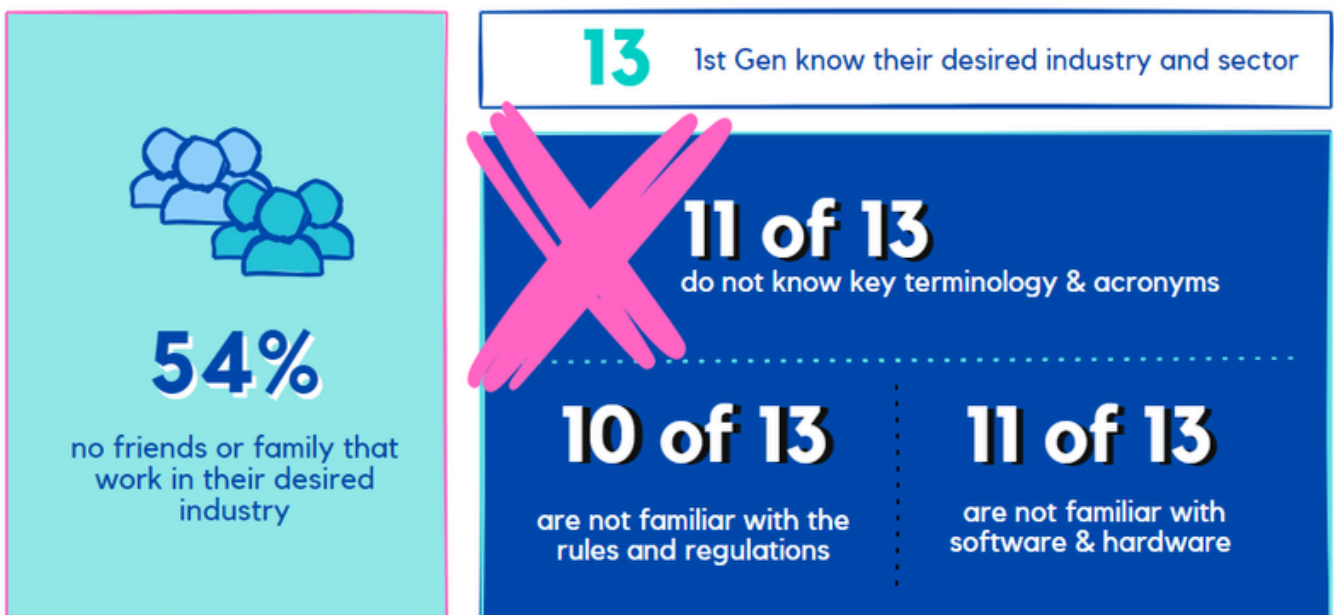
"Try to find a job"

1st Gen Student

Let's be clear: placements are not merely about adding another line to a CV. Their fundamental **value lies in unlocking access** – access to the professional networks, insider industry knowledge, and crucial cultural capital that can be the deciding factor in securing top-tier careers. And for 1st gen students, who often lack these inherent advantages, targeted placements like DGEN's become transformative, empowering them to fully leverage their considerable talents for lasting career success.

Data reveals a key challenge for many 1st gen students

THEY LACK CRUCIAL CONNECTIONS + INDUSTRY-SPECIFIC KNOWLEDGE



MISSED OPPORTUNITY

MISSED OPPORTUNITY

The Impact Novice Programme demonstrably enhances job knowledge for non-1st gen students, delivering a significant 21% increase in crucial areas like application skills and job search strategies. However, this same impact is strikingly absent for 1st gen students, who enter the programme already confident in their job knowledge. This raises a critical concern,

**ARE WE MISSING
AN OPPORTUNITY
TO FURTHER
EMPOWER 1ST GEN
STUDENTS?**



21%
increase for
non-1st gen

ALL STUDENTS EXPANDED THEIR NETWORK + SOCIAL CAPITAL

For many, this meant a tangible progression – from initial, superficial connections to meaningful relationships with the potential for ongoing support.

A fundamental truth:

Even the most capable individuals benefit immensely from strategic support and access to networks.

However, a critical disparity emerges. The data reveals that non-1st gen students experienced a significantly greater increase in social capital (20%) compared to 1st gen students (12%). This raises a crucial question:

WHY IS THE PROGRAMME'S IMPACT ON SOCIAL CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT NOT EQUITABLE ACROSS THESE TWO GROUPS?

The Impact Novice Programme undeniably provides vital support. It makes visible and accessible the very elements of social capital that students need to maximize their placement experience. By providing access to professional networks and opportunities to gain practical, industry-relevant skills and knowledge, the programme aims to level the playing field. Yet, the unequal gains in social capital suggest that further refinement may be needed to ensure that 1st gen students fully benefit from this crucial aspect of the programme.

WHO DOES THE INP TRULY SERVE?

INP aims to propel 1st gen students from underserved communities towards top-tier Hong Kong careers. However, **35% of the current cohort are not 1st gen**, prompting a look at programme fit and shared aspirations. Do all students align with the programme's core mission? Perhaps the term "1st gen" doesn't resonate with all who enroll. Examining their initial hopes offers insights.

"I hope to contribute to the local community"

1st Gen Student

Initial hopes reveal a key divergence. 1st gen students often focus on **securing stable careers**, particularly in sectors like finance and medicine: "Take part in the finance and banking industry..." (1st gen student). Their aspirations often link to societal contribution.

"flexibility or creativity"

Non-1st Gen student

Conversely, non-1st gen students express broader ambitions around personal fulfilment and diverse societal contributions, with less emphasis on specific "top-tier" sectors. They value "maximizing capability" (DG-ICP-032, Non-1st gen student) and exploring varied paths.

Briefly, while 1st gen students prioritize a secure career path, non-1st gen students lean towards broader fulfilment and diverse impact. This difference highlights the need to consider how the programme's design and messaging resonate with all enrolled students.

WHAT WORKS

One of the challenges of 1st gen students is that they **don't have the social capital and trust in their peers'** abilities that supports great group working experiences.

You'll often find a driven 1st gen student, doing all of the group work themselves – because they lack the confidence to rely on others and share responsibilities.

DGEN provides positive hands-on experiences and a space to practice soft-skills.

"When I make a group with others who I haven't met, but it was not too difficult to cooperate with them."

1st Gen Student



average % change **114%**

WORK READINESS

1st gen 121%

Non-1st gen 102%

Increased knowledge in the

- roles and responsibilities of my future workplace.
- rules and regulations of my future workplace.
- software/hardware/tools of my future workplace (e.g. Microsoft PowerPoint, SAGE, SPSS).
- can confidently use the acronyms and key terminology expected of me in my chosen industry.

ADDRESSING GAPS IN WORK READINESS

An analysis of CVs from six 1st gen students at the start of the programme revealed some common areas for improvement, highlighting the critical need for targeted support in developing work-readiness skills.

While the CVs generally included expected information such as contact details and work experience, several key elements were frequently missing or underdeveloped. Specifically:

- **Personal Statements:** Only two CVs included a personal statement, and both were significantly below the recommended length (50 words, compared to the 50-150 word guidance from HK recruiters). This suggests a lack of awareness regarding industry expectations for this crucial component of a CV.
- **Formatting:** Half of the CVs did not present work experience in reverse chronological order, a standard practice in professional CVs. This indicates a potential gap in understanding professional norms.
- **Skills Summaries and References:** Half of the CVs lacked a skills summary, and none provided details of referees or testimonials. These omissions limit the ability of potential employers to quickly assess the students' qualifications and verify their credentials.
- **Professional Language:** Although nearly all students indicated they knew their desired industry/sector, only a couple consistently used role-specific professional language (acronyms, jargon, and complex terminology) in their CVs. This suggests that while students may have career aspirations, they may not yet possess the language and communication skills expected in those fields. Notably, the one student who had worked in their desired sector demonstrated use of this technical language.

These findings highlight a pattern of "hidden knowledge" gaps that can disadvantage 1st gen students in the job market.

INP aims to strengthen work-readiness and increase employability. To achieve this, the programme's CV clinics and related support equip students to present themselves effectively, addressing structural barriers and promoting equal opportunity. This approach is validated by the finding that 1st gen students need to develop essential communication, employability, and workplace skills.

DGEN LEGACY IN ACTION

"When you've worked hard, and done well, and walked through that doorway of opportunity... you do not slam it shut behind you. You reach back and give other folks the same chances that helped you succeed."

Michelle Obama

This isn't just a sentiment; it's a **living principle embodied** by Impact Novice students.

Students are instantly acting on what they are learning, for example

"I have a project that I am currently planning on, and a friend of my cohort refers a person with expertise that I am looking for."

This is networking, yes, but it's networking with a purpose – a purpose of lifting others.

And this spirit of generosity? It's not an isolated case.

- DGEN alumni are actively sharing work and internship opportunities.
- They're sharing their knowledge, their understanding, and their experiences.
- They're sharing their skills.

IN THEIR WORDS...

"I told my classmates that TravelBar placement is quite flexible and is a good choice for those who loves writing."

"I have shared the experiences I had when conducting Cantonese lessons with my friends, encouraging them to participate in such activities..."

"I have shared the use of Canva and Instagram posting skills."

"I have talked with my friends about the photo-taking skills I learned in practice."



This is the DGEN legacy: a community where success isn't a solo journey, but a shared climb. It's alumni reaching back, ensuring that the door of opportunity remains wide open for those who follow. But they are now more focused on who they reach back to. They are less inclined to share resources and opportunities, and less likely to be active members of online communities. Their focus has shifted, and their **generosity is more focused on their community.**

FROM LOCAL VICTORY TO GLOBAL STAGE



TIFFANY ZHANG

Winning CUHK's Social Entrepreneurship competition marked a milestone for 1st gen student Tiffany, yet her vision for 'Francis,' an animal welfare NGO, required real-world experience.

DGEN's Impact Novice Programme became the crucial bridge. As she said, it helped her "learn how an NGO works" and offered "ideas about entrepreneurship, and direct community projects experience."

Partnering with Paws Hero, Tiffany gained vital hands-on experience. Plus DGEN's targeted skills training in marketing and personal branding directly broadened her career horizons, fuelling a bold ambition: the UN.

"The biggest NGO I saw in the world is the UN," she declared.

Leveraging the confidence and experience gained through the Impact Novice Programme, **Tiffany secured a prestigious UN Fellowship in Beijing**, focused on sustainable procurement.

We wish you all the best Tiffany!

RIPPLE EFFECT

Beyond her own achievement, Tiffany's journey is creating a powerful **ripple effect**. Her success has inspired two other students, who now share a clear vision for their future careers:



"UN internships"

Impact Novice Programme is not simply about another line on a CV, but about

**LEVELLING THE
PLAYING FIELD AND
EQUIPPING THEM WITH
THE SOCIAL CAPITAL &
SPECIFIC EXPERTISE
NECESSARY TO
TRANSLATE THEIR
POTENTIAL INTO
CAREER SUCCESS.**

INPs true value, lies in its transformative effect on students' lives

"helped me find out who I am and discover my inner self"

"taught us to be curious all the time, the easiest way to avoid feeling embarrassment and offending others with different culture. And that gives bravery as well."

"Starting to understand what I really want to achieve and figure out who I am"

ACTIONABLE

RECOMMENDATIONS



1. Refine Skills Development for 1st Gen Students:

Given that 1st gen students don't perceive a need for skills development and show less improvement in this area, reassess the content and delivery of this component.

Action 1: Review **skills training** to address the "hidden knowledge" gaps identified in the analysis (eg professional language, CV formatting, networking strategies).

2. Enhance Networking Support for 1st Gen Students:

Recognizing that 1st gen students have fewer connections and gain less social capital from the programme, provide more targeted networking opportunities and guidance.

Action 2: Implement a **mentorship programme** that pairs 1st gen students with industry professionals.

Action 3: Offer **workshops on how to build and leverage professional connections** within their desired industry to maximise the placement value.

3. Review Programme Targeting and Eligibility:

Given the disparities in outcomes between 1st gen and non-1st gen students, critically evaluate the programme's target audience and eligibility criteria.

Action 4: Conduct a **thorough review** to determine if the programme's structure and content are optimally designed to serve the specific needs of 1st gen students.



4. Implement Data Triangulation for Validation:

To strengthen the validity and reliability of the findings, implement data triangulation.

Action 5: Gather **feedback from placement supervisors** on students' work-readiness, networking skills, and overall performance during the placement.

Action 6: Conduct **interviews** with a sample of students to gain insights into their experiences, challenges, and perceived skill development.

5. Alumni Engagement:

Given the importance of alumni in the DGEN legacy, consider strategies to maintain and strengthen alumni engagement.

Action 7: Develop initiatives to **foster ongoing connections between alumni and current students**, promoting mentorship, networking, and knowledge sharing.



EXPERT EVALUATION

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Dr Hannah Griffin-James

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