

**Research Findings: Attributes of a University**

In most jurisdictions, including Hong Kong, usage of the title ‘university’ is restricted or regulated to reflect guidelines and standards. Such controls exist in order to protect the community, in particular students, and to provide assurances to employers of university graduates. It is highly desirable to ensure that the institutions which call themselves universities offer programmes that are of a recognised quality and standard, and have the attributes widely associated with the university title – both in Hong Kong and worldwide.

2. Regulation of the university title protects the standing and reputation of a higher education system as a whole. If an institution becomes a university but does not possess the qualities and characteristics commonly expected of a university, other universities in the same system may also lose standing. In supporting the granting of a university title to any higher education institution, the UGC is bound to consider whether the new institution will strengthen the higher education sector as a whole.

3. Currently, decisions on institutional nomenclature in Hong Kong rest with the Government. The UGC’s review of the Blueprint is a critical part of fulfilling the Committee’s role of providing expert advice to Government on its funded institutions. In approaching the task, the Review Group has examined the experience of institutional development in Hong Kong and in other relevant higher education systems. The processes leading to the formation or upgrading of six local universities have been discussed in **Annex E**. In fact, the upgrading of Teacher Education institutions has been a prominent feature of education reforms throughout the world over at least the past 30 years. There are clearly visible trends across very diverse systems and countries which are pertinent to our evaluation of HKIED’s proposals.

4. Looking beyond Hong Kong, the Review Group has identified the attributes of a university by drawing on policy definitions or legislative requirements from different parts of the world. In some jurisdictions the criteria are developed by accreditation bodies recognised by governments, rather than the government itself.

5. The following table sets out the common criteria that apply to a higher education institution to achieve university title in the United Kingdom, Australia, New York State in the United States, Canada, the People's Republic of China, and Japan.

<b>United Kingdom - England and Wales</b>
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**Source:**

Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education

**Requirements for university title:**

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education provides advice to the Privy Council, which then decides whether to award the university title. In general, an institution should –

- have been granted powers to award taught degrees;
- normally have at least 4,000 full-time equivalent higher education students, of whom at least 3,000 are registered on degree level courses (including foundation degree programmes); and
- be able to demonstrate that it has regard to the principles of good governance as are relevant to its sector.

**Other criteria:**

Qualitative criteria on governance, administration, quality, *etc.*

**Note:**

The UK changed its criteria in 2004 so that it is now possible for an organisation to be granted university title in England and Wales without first having its own research degrees. We understand that in the report published by the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education in 1997, commonly referred to as the *Dearing Report*, it was recommended that less emphasis should be placed on the numerical criteria. The current criteria for England and Wales from 2004 have reflected the recommendations of the *Dearing Report*.

<b>United Kingdom - Scotland and Northern Ireland</b>
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**Source:**

Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education

**Requirements for university title:**

A university should normally have –

- at least 300 full-time equivalent higher education students in each of the five subject areas listed below –
  - Clinical and Pre-Clinical Subjects;
  - Subjects and Professions Allied to Medicine;
  - Science;
  - Engineering and Technology;
  - Built Environment ;
  - Mathematical Sciences, Information Technology and Computing;
  - Business and Management;
  - Social Sciences;
  - Humanities;
  - Art, Design and the Performing Arts;
  - Education, Initial Teacher Training and Qualified Teacher Status.
- a higher education enrolment of at least 4,000 full-time equivalent students; and
- at least 3,000 full-time equivalent students on degree level courses; at least 60 current research degree registrations and more than 30 Doctor of Philosophy (or direct equivalent) conferment.

**Other criteria:**

Qualitative criteria on governance, administration, quality, *etc.*

<b>Australia</b>
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**Source:**

National Protocols for Higher Education Approval Process  
Ministerial Council on Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs  
(October 2007)

**Requirements for university title:**

An Australian university is an institution which meets nationally agreed criteria and is established or recognised as a university under State, Territory or Commonwealth legislation.

An Australian university will demonstrate the following features:

- Is a legal entity which has been established or recognised by or under an Australian legislative instrument;
- Contributes to the goals of higher education in Australia as set out in the Introduction of the National Protocols;
- Has a clearly articulated higher education purpose that includes a commitment to and support for free intellectual inquiry in the institution's academic endeavours;
- Delivers Australian Qualifications Framework higher education qualifications across a range of broad fields of study (including Research Masters and PhDs or equivalent Research Doctorates in at least three broad fields of study) and sets standards for those qualifications which are equivalent to Australian and international standards.
- Delivers teaching and learning that engage with advanced knowledge and inquiry;
- Demonstrates a culture of sustained scholarship which informs teaching and learning in all fields in which courses are offered;
- Undertakes research that leads to the creation of new knowledge and original creative endeavour at least in those fields in which Research Masters and PhDs or equivalent Research Doctorates are offered
- Demonstrates commitment of teachers, researchers, course designers and assessors to free inquiry and the systematic advancement of knowledge;
- Demonstrates governance, procedural rules, organisation, admission policies, financial arrangements and quality assurance processes, which are underpinned by the values and goals outlined above, and which are sufficient to ensure the integrity of the institution's academic programs; and
- Has sound financial and business management practices and sufficient financial and other resources to sustain the delivery of the institution's programs into the future.

**Note:**

There are additional specific criteria for institutions to operate with the title 'university college', or with a specialised university title. In the latter case, the institution may offer one or two broad fields of study. The specialised title must not be shortened to 'University' in advertising or formal documentation. Conditions may include a

specific period after which renewal of the authority for use of the specialised university title must be sought.

## **New York State**

### **Source:**

Title 8 Chapter II Regulations of the Commissioner of the New York Board of Regents, New York State Education Department

### **Definition of University:**

‘University’ means a higher educational institution offering a range of registered undergraduate and graduate curricula in the liberal arts and sciences, degrees in two or more professional fields, and doctoral programmes in at least three academic fields.

### **Other criteria:**

Requires the registration of undergraduate and graduate curricula. Separate approvals are needed for off-campus instruction.

### **Note:**

In the United States, status and title are determined on a state-basis. New York State is representative of this process.

## **Canada**

### **Source:**

Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC)

### **Requirements for University title:**

Universities in Canada operate under provincial government charters. There is no formal system of university-wide institutional accreditation. Instead, membership of AUCC, in conjunction with the university's provincial government charter, is seen as serving in lieu of institutional accreditation, both in Canada and abroad.

### **Requirements for membership of AUCC:**

An AUCC member should –

- have the powers it purports to exercise pursuant to authority granted by the Crown or by Statute or by formal agreement with its affiliated or federated university, or the university of which it is a constituent portion;

- have as its core teaching mission the provision of education of university standard with the majority of its programs at that level;
- offer undergraduate degree programs characterized by breadth and depth in the traditional areas of the liberal arts and/or sciences, and first degrees of a professional nature – such as medicine, law, teacher education, engineering – have a significant liberal arts and/or sciences component;
- have a proven record of scholarship, academic inquiry and research.

**Other criteria:**

- Governance and an administrative structure appropriate to a university;
- An approved mission statement and academic goals that are appropriate to a university;
- Policies on academic freedom, intellectual integrity and property and others appropriate to a university;
- An atmosphere that promotes and protects academic freedom and other values.

<b>People’s Republic of China</b>
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**Source:**

Higher Education Law of the People’s Republic of China 1998  
Chapter III Establishment of Institutions of Higher Learning

**Requirements to be an institution of higher learning:**

- Align with the national development for the higher education sector, serve the best interest of the nation and the society, and not to be profiteering;
- Have strong teaching and scientific research staff;
- Have higher teaching and scientific research level and corresponding scale;
- Be in a position to impart undergraduate and above-undergraduate education; and
- Must also have more than three departments of disciplines prescribed by the state as major disciplines.

**Source:**

Provisional Regulations on Higher Education Institutions 1986  
Chapter III, Article 12 (In translation)

**Requirements for university title:**

For an institution to be titled university, the following criteria should be met –

- The institution should mainly train specialized talents at undergraduate and above levels;
- The institution should offer three main academic disciplines, which may include humanities (including literature, history, philosophy and art), politics and law, finance, education (including physical education), science, engineering, agriculture and medicine;
- The institution should possess strong teaching and research capabilities and high standards in teaching and research; and
- The planned number of full-time on-campus students should be above 5,000. Subject to approval from the State Education Commission, institutions in remote areas or those who have special needs could be exempt from this requirement.

**Note:**

It is interesting to note that there are many universities on the Mainland which have a name reflecting a single discipline tradition but are in fact providing degrees in several or more academic disciplines. The “Normal Universities” are not (now) confined to teacher education and they are more akin to comprehensive universities.

Shanghai Normal University is an example of an institution that started as a monotechnic teacher education institution in China and eventually obtained a university title. The University was founded in 1954 as the Shanghai Teachers Training College. At present, it is a comprehensive university with over 22,000 full-time undergraduates in 76 specialties, including philosophy, economics, legal studies, education, arts, history, science, engineering, management and agriculture.

<b>Japan</b>
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**Source:**

School Education Law (Law No. 26 of 31 March 1947)

**Requirements for university title:**

A university shall have as its aim to conduct teaching and research in depth in specialised academic subjects as well as to provide broad knowledge as a centre of learning and to develop intellectual, moral and practical abilities.

The purpose of universities, as the centres of advanced learning, is to provide students with wide-ranging knowledge and to conduct in-depth teaching and research in specialized academic disciplines.

**Note:**

Establishment of universities requires approval by the Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology after deliberations by the Council for University Establishment and School Corporation, comprising people of learning and academic experience, and is a part of the overall quality assurance mechanism.

6. In summary, there are a number of most common criteria considered for the granting of the title of university. Some reasons with respect to each of them are as follows:

*A minimum spread of complementary disciplines, which:*

- Nurtures breadth of knowledge and understanding among students and staff within the institution;
- Exposes disciplinary cultures to the critical gaze of other disciplines;
- Allows transference of methods, techniques, approaches and values between and among disciplines;
- Supports interdisciplinary developments at all levels;
- Provides flexibility for students, including exposure to multiple fields of study and career options;
- Promotes growth of knowledge within and across discipline boundaries; and
- Supports institutional economies of scale.

*Research capability, which:*

- Makes experienced research staff available for research training;
- Provides the facilities necessary for research training;
- Provides a research environment to inform coursework teaching, from the undergraduate level;
- Encourages the development of new knowledge;
- Supports the application of knowledge to the community; and
- Informs the development of curricula within disciplines and in interdisciplinary fields.



*The significant majority of students enrolled in undergraduate and postgraduate programmes (as opposed to sub- and non-degree programmes) which:*

- Reflects the learning hierarchy of the education sector;
- Ensures that the institution remains ‘fit for purpose’ through focus on higher studies and advanced learning;
- Is fundamental to the distinctive culture of the institution, providing the basis for collegiality between staff and students and among student peers;
- Is able to benefit from the research environment in which teaching occurs; and
- Makes effective use of costly resources, including staff and facilities such as research libraries and laboratories.

*At least a minimum requirement of scale:*

- Ensures a certain breadth of approach within discipline areas;
- Ensures a critical mass of students for effective learning environments;
- Supports an efficient and effective use of resources, including research staff and libraries, laboratories and technology to support research and teaching.

*Self accreditation:*

- Demonstrates that the institution has undergone a peer assessment of the quality of its programmes;
- Attests to the adherence to standards within the higher education sector; and
- Recognises that internal developmental and review processes meet sector-wide standards.

7. In addition to these common criteria for the award of university status, many governments require/expect that universities have policies on intellectual property, conflict of interest and/or other matters of relevance. A requirement about the appropriate form of governance of a university is also common.

8. The Review Group believes that these criteria are consistent with the development of strong institutions. While the Review Group can contemplate supporting an approach to university status in Hong Kong based on different criteria, any institution that proposes an alternative approach needs to demonstrate the advantages to the Hong Kong community of foregoing the benefits the common criteria appear to provide.