

Tuesday English News Report

*HKU head defends plans for **mandatory** student visits to mainland China amid **retraction***

Broadcast Date: 28th April

The University of Hong Kong's (HKU) vice chancellor has broken his silence on a **controversial** plan to make mainland China learning programmes compulsory for its students, insisting this would help them build up a "truly global perspective".

In an exclusive interview with the South China Morning Post, Professor Peter Mathieson, also the university's president, admitted for the first time that the proposal had been submitted to the University Grants Committee (UGC), but **emphasised** that the plan was not a requirement imposed by the body which controls government funds.

HKU drew **ire** from its student body after it announced the idea for students to go on compulsory immersion programmes – one in mainland China and one overseas – by 2022. Pro-vice-chancellor Professor Ian Holliday reportedly told students at a closed-door dinner last week: "If you don't want to go to mainland China, don't come to HKU."

But at a meeting with the student's union on Monday afternoon Holliday formally retracted the controversial statement he made on Friday.

"This formulation was **clumsy** and misleading and I now formally retract this statement. My intention of making it was to say something much more positive," Holliday said.

Critics have **speculated** that the controversial move could be a result of pressure from the UGC – a claim Mathieson denied.

"This is a matter of internal policy development and nothing to do with UGC requirements, although we have incorporated details in our recent academic development plan, which we have submitted to UGC," Mathieson said.

"We confidently believe that such opportunities will **enhance** the 'whole person development' which we aim to provide for all HKU students."

The UGC is currently made up of local and foreign academics, businessmen and an Executive Council member.

Asked about Holliday's remark, Mathieson said: "Opportunities for **immersion** in mainland China and elsewhere would allow students to spend "meaningful amounts of time outside Hong Kong", helping them to develop what Mathieson calls a "truly **global** perspective" in the modern global economy.

"These [developmental] opportunities [for students] may be anywhere in the world, but obviously in view of our geopolitical situation, mainland China will be one target area," Mathieson said.

HKU student union leader Billy Fung Jing-en said today he opposed the idea of making such visits mandatory for all students.

"Why make it compulsory? More specifically, why force students to visit a particular place, that is, the mainland?" Fung questioned during an RTHK radio programme.

The two other top universities in Hong Kong – Chinese University and the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology – have said they have no similar plans for mandatory learn abroad programmes.



1. What do you think?

2. Vocabulary

Fill in the blanks in the sentences below using words from the box.

mandatory	retraction	controversial	emphasised
ire	clumsy	speculated	enhance
immersion	global		

1. Wearing seat belts in cars is _____ (compulsory). You must do it.
2. He is very _____ in what he says (he always says the wrong thing) and what he does (he's always dropping things).
3. _____ is an old-fashioned word for anger.
4. People use makeup to _____ their looks and make themselves more attractive.
5. The best way to learn a language is by _____ - completely surrounding yourself / submerging yourself in the language and culture.
6. He _____ that property prices would rise so he bought two flats.
7. A _____ is when you take back what you said.
8. Some countries have passed _____ laws making drugs legal.
9. English is a _____ language. It is spoken everywhere.
10. When you do this you stress the importance of something. He _____ that in order to do well in the exams, students need to study.

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