## **LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL BRIEF**

### APPROVAL FOR CHANGE OF NAME OF CARITAS INSTITUTE OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND POST SECONDARY COLLEGES TO AWARD DEGREES

#### **INTRODUCTION**

At the meeting of the Executive Council on 9 January 2024, the Executive Council ADVISED and the Chief Executive ORDERED that approval should be granted to –

- (a) Caritas Institute of Higher Education (CIHE) to be awarded the university title and change its English and Chinese names to "Saint Francis University" and "聖方濟各大學" respectively;
- (b) CIHE to award degrees for the following programmes
  - (i) Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Language and Culture;
  - (ii) Bachelor of Business Administration (Honours) in Applied Hotel and Tourism Management; and
  - (iii) Master in Nursing and Allied Health;
- (c) The Hang Seng University of Hong Kong (HSUHK) to award degrees for the following programmes
  - (i) Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Arts and Culture Communication; and
  - (ii) Master of Science in Insurance;
- (d) Hong Kong Chu Hai College (HKCHC) to award degrees for the following programmes
  - (i) Master of Arts in Cultural Heritage;
  - (ii) Master of Arts in Teaching Chinese as a Second Language;
  - (iii) Master of Business Administration; and
  - (iv) Master of Science in Applied Artificial Intelligence;
- (e) Tung Wah College (TWC) to award degrees for the Bachelor of Science (Honours) in Medical Imaging programme; and

(f) UOW College Hong Kong (UOWCHK) to award degrees for the Bachelor of Social Science (Honours) in Social Work programme.

## JUSTIFICATIONS

## **University Title for CIHE**

2. At present, the usage of the word "university" in their names by self-financing post-secondary education institutions in Hong Kong offering local degree programmes and registered under the Post Secondary Colleges Ordinance (Cap. 320) (the Ordinance) is restricted and the decision to award a university title rests with the Chief Executive-in-Council (CE-in-Council)<sup>1</sup>. In 2015, the CE-in-Council approved that self-financing post-secondary education institutions registered under the Ordinance should meet the following criteria before making an application for a university title for consideration by the CE-in-Council –

- (a) have obtained a Programme Area Accreditation (PAA) status in at least three areas, which could be sub-areas under the programme areas but must be located among different programme areas;
- (b) have demonstrated a certain level of research capability by having successful applications under publicly-funded research-related schemes;
- (c) have a minimum student enrolment of 1 500 (full-time equivalent (FTE)) at degree level for the past two consecutive academic years (AYs) immediately preceding an application for university title; and
- (d) have obtained an Institutional Review (IR) status from the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) to demonstrate its fundamental ability to meet the standards expected of a university in terms of governance and management, financial sustainability, academic environment, quality assurance (QA) and research capability.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Section 8(1) of the Ordinance provides that the Permanent Secretary for Education "shall not without the prior sanction of the CE-in-Council approve any name containing the word 'University'" to be used by institutions registered under the Ordinance. Two universities, namely the Hong Kong Shue Yan University (HKSYU) and HSUHK, were awarded university title in 2006 and 2018 respectively in accordance with the provision.

The relevant criteria are set out in the "Roadmap for Becoming a Private University" (Roadmap) promulgated by the Education Bureau (EDB) in 2015<sup>2</sup>.

3. In September 2023, CIHE submitted an application for a university title to EDB in accordance with the Roadmap. Its fulfillment of the four criteria is set out as follows –

# (a) <u>Have obtained a PAA status in at least three areas</u>

4. CIHE has obtained a PAA status for degree programmes at undergraduate level in the following three areas and fulfilled the requirement in paragraph 2(a) above –

- (a) General Business Administration;
- (b) Social Work; and
- (c) Information and Communication Technology.

# *(b) Have demonstrated a certain level of research capability by having* <u>successful applications under publicly-funded research-related</u> <u>schemes</u>

5. Over the past five AYs, CIHE has received funding for research projects from various public funding sources, including the Competitive Research Funding Schemes for the Local Self-financing Degree Sector by the Research Grants Council (RGC) under University Grants Committee (UGC) and the Research Matching Grants of RGC. In total, CIHE has secured about \$412 million for a total of 77 research projects from both public and private funding sources. As part of the IR accreditation exercise, HKCAAVQ confirms that CIHE has demonstrated research capability as fulfilling the requirement under paragraph 2(b) above.

*(c) Have a minimum student enrolment of 1 500 (FTE) at degree level for the past two consecutive AYs immediately preceding an application for university title* 

6. It is stipulated in the Roadmap that, upon acquiring a PAA status for degree programmes at undergraduate level in at least three areas, an institution shall seek EDB's confirmation that it has a minimum student

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> HSUHK was the first post-secondary institution that obtained a private university title in accordance with the Roadmap.

enrolment of 1 500 (FTE) at degree level for the preceding two consecutive AYs. After receiving EDB's confirmation, the institution may commission HKCAAVQ to carry out an IR.

7. In March 2022, CIHE wrote to EDB to confirm that the numbers of CIHE's full-time student enrolments at degree level in the 2019/20 and 2020/21 AYs were both over 1 500 (FTE). The actual enrolments of CIHE in the two AYs were 1 548 (full-time) plus 241 (part-time) and 1 902 (full-time) plus 319 (part-time) respectively, thereby fulfilling the enrolment requirement in paragraph 2(c) above. In the 2022/23 and 2023/24 AYs, CIHE's student enrolment at degree level continues to exceed 1 500.

# (d) <u>Have obtained an IR status from HKCAAVQ to demonstrate its</u> <u>fundamental ability to meet the standards expected of a university</u>

8. Any self-financing post-secondary education institutions registered under the Ordinance aspiring to become private universities shall have undertaken a successful IR with HKCAAVQ to demonstrate its fundamental ability to meet the standards expected of a university in terms of governance and management, financial sustainability, academic environment and QA, as well as research capability as mentioned in paragraph 5 above. The IR determines whether the institution concerned has put in place a well-managed academic community, embracing all members of staff, guided by carefully formulated academic development, staffing and resource plans with implemented systematic and transparent processes<sup>3</sup>.

9. With the approval of EDB, CIHE commissioned HKCAAVQ to carry out an IR to demonstrate its fundamental ability to meet the standards expected of a university. In September 2023, HKCAAVQ completed the IR and issued a report, confirming that CIHE meets the standards expected of a private university and fulfills the requirement in paragraph 2(d) above.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> The IR focuses on implemented institutional plans, policies and processes, the outcomes achieved, and whether performance was effectively managed over an extended period of time.

10. CIHE has demonstrated institutional effectiveness in achieving its mission and objectives and assuring the quality of its educational provision, and has put in place a well-managed academic environment with implemented systematic and transparent processes and successful outcomes. Observations made in the IR report, covering areas including governance and management, academic environment, financial sustainability, research capability, and QA, are highlighted at **Annex**.

11. To sum up, CIHE has fulfilled all the four criteria stipulated in paragraph 2 above for acquiring a university title. In line with the promulgated policy, we recommend and the CE-in-Council has approved that CIHE be awarded the university title and be allowed to change its English and Chinese names to "Saint Francis University" and "聖方濟各大學" respectively, which contain the words "University" and "大學".

# Award of degrees

12. Section 10(a) of the Ordinance provides that a post secondary college may, with the prior approval of the CE-in-Council, award degrees.

13. The proposed new degree programmes of CIHE, HUSHK, HKCHC, TWC, and UOWCHK have obtained an accreditation status from HKCAAVQ (in the form of Learning Programme Accreditation or Programme Area Accreditation) as part of the QA process. All programmes are intended to be launched in the 2024/25 AY.

# IMPLICATIONS OF THE PROPOSALS

14. The proposals are in conformity with the Basic Law, including the provisions concerning human rights. They have no significant family implications, and no financial and civil service, productivity, environmental, and gender implications. The proposals to grant the university title to CIHE and approve the five post secondary colleges to award degrees would have positive sustainability and economic implications in widening the institution and programme choices for students and possibly helping nurture more talent, including talent with applied skills that is needed by different industries, although the impact is not expected to be significant.

# PUBLIC CONSULTATION

15. Public consultation is unnecessary as the proposals involve no policy change.

# PUBLICITY

16. A press release on the granting of the university title has been issued. A spokesman of EDB will be available for answering public enquiries.

# BACKGROUND

17. The Caritas Francis Hsu College was founded in 1985. It became registered under the Ordinance in 2001 to operate sub-degree programmes, and, after acquiring an accreditation status for offering degree-level programmes in 2010, changed its name to CIHE in 2011. In 2023/24 AY, CIHE operates 13 self-financing locally-accredited post-secondary programmes, including 12 Bachelor's degree programmes and one Master's degree programme, with about 3 000 full-time and 500 part-time students in total.

18. At present, there are eleven institutions carrying a university title, including eight UGC-funded universities and three self-financing universities namely the Hong Kong Metropolitan University, HKSYU, and HSUHK. Of the eleven, three institutions<sup>4</sup> have been universities from inception, whereas the remaining five<sup>5</sup> UGC-funded universities and three self-financing universities have gone through a process of "upgrading" before they were granted university titles.

# ENQUIRIES

19. In case of enquiries, please contact Mr Kasper NG, Principal Assistant Secretary (Further Education), at 3509 8502.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> They are The University of Hong Kong, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, and The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> The five UGC-funded universities are The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, City University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong Baptist University, Lingnan University, and The Education University of Hong Kong.

Education Bureau January 2024

#### <u>Annex</u>

## OBSERVATIONS MADE IN THE INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW REPORT BY THE HONG KONG COUNCIL FOR ACCREDITATION OF ACADEMIC AND VOCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS ON CARITAS INSTITUTE OF HIGHER EDUCATION'S PRIVATE UNIVERSITY TITLE APPLICATION

This note highlights the key observations made in the Institutional Review (IR) report by the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications in respect of the Caritas Institute of Higher Education (CIHE), covering areas including governance and management, academic environment, financial sustainability, research capability, and quality assurance (QA).

#### (a) Governance and management

2. CIHE has demonstrated that its governance and management are effective in ensuring that it is operating sustainably towards accomplishing its mission, and accountable for the quality of its educational provision. CIHE has a formally constituted governing body (with independent external members) which is found to be unambiguously and collectively accountable for institutional activities. CIHE's governance and management structure is in line with the requirements of the Post Secondary Colleges Regulations (Cap. 320A), with a clear separation between the governance roles and the responsibilities of management, as well as significant efforts made to identify high quality candidates. CIHE formulates its strategic plans under a comprehensive review and planning process which involves extensive discussions across different groups within the institution. With appropriately delegated authorities and reporting mechanisms in place for effective implementation of the institutional plan, cohesion within the institution is observed and evidenced by the enthusiasm and commitment of representatives of the relevant stakeholder groups. And, the focus of CIHE's programme portfolio is considered to be in line with its aspiration to become a university of applied professions, and the support facilities and resources are both relevant and up-to-date.

## (b) Academic environment

3. CIHE has established an effective academic environment with sustainable academic leadership capable of translating institutional objectives into institutional and programme outcomes. CIHE develops a physical and digital teaching / learning environment supported by research

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and scholarship to promote or support a learning experience which fosters and improves learning and student success. CIHE's staff-student ratio in the past five years ranges from 14.9 to 16.7, which is expected to decrease further under the policy of continuous staff recruitment. For the formulation and implementation of academic plan, CIHE's colleagues at various levels are involved, and are well aware of the approaches, mechanisms, and relevant role differentiation in programme development In terms of staffing plan and structure, CIHE is and management. considered to have effective planning with regard to recruitment needs and targets, and be able to recruit the appropriate talent. Besides, CIHE has put in place an academic advising system to monitor student learning, identify students that are facing a higher degree of challenge, and provide the necessary support. CIHE's assessments compare well with other universities, and its graduates are regarded by industry advisors and employers as adequately prepared for the job market in general. CIHE has also formed good working relationships with relevant industries and employers to identify their expectations of graduate attributes and to allow academic staff and students more opportunities to engage with them. Also, CIHE has been making efforts to promote its international visibility by organising international conferences, supporting international collaboration in research, and organising joint activities with international professional bodies. Its existing physical infrastructure has met the standard and quality expected of a private university in Hong Kong<sup>1</sup>, with modern facilities and stimulating environment to prepare students for the workplace.

(c) <u>Financial sustainability</u>

4. CIHE has demonstrated that its financial planning and management is effective, and that its financial resources are sufficient to sustain the quality of its current and planned educational provisions and to support continuous institutional development in accordance with institutional academic planning. Its resource allocation is made according to its strategic priorities, with operational control mechanisms in place. A decentralised budget model is adopted to empower individual schools and support / administrative unites to manage and deploy their resources in a flexible manner. When projecting student enrolments and tuition income, sensitivity analysis is adopted to anticipate risks from the changing enrolment and plan mitigation. There are consistent annual surpluses and positive cash flow from 2014/15 to 2021/22, and donations and research

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> CIHE's campus has a total gross floor space of about 27 500 square metres. Its students generally also have access to the facilities in the neighbouring campus of its sister institution, Caritas Bianchi College of Careers, which has a gross floor space of about 17 000 square metres.

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matching grants are set aside for research. The net current assets as of 31 March 2022 represent a good cover ratio over the average annual operating expenditure planned for the five-year period from 2019 to 2024. Looking ahead, CIHE has been systematically strengthening the articulation pathways to its degree programmes by working closely with its sister feeder institutions and other partners schools / institutions, and following closely the Education Bureau's policy direction of fostering vocational and professional education and training as a pathway parallel to conventional academic education by developing more applied degree programmes, leveraging its strong network for placement and job opportunities offered by its sponsor, Caritas-Hong Kong. CIHE has demonstrated effective financial planning and management, as well as financial sustainability as an independent institution.

## (d) <u>Research Capability</u>

5. CIHE has demonstrated that it systematically develops and supports its academic staff in pursuing research and/or scholarly activities to ensure the staff is up-to-date with the theory, knowledge, skills, and pedagogy of the disciplines or professions. Its research and scholarship plans align with the institutional strategy and mission, and are supported by the necessary resources to achieve the planned outcomes. A provision comprising research matching grants and funding from other sources has been set aside for ongoing development of research and scholarly activities, and three institutional research grants are set up to provide support in 16 research areas. Sponsorship is also available to attract professors from local and overseas universities to nurture research capacity and enhance the research profile of CIHE, and in the past three years about 40% of the research projects were conducted by junior staff under the mentorship of senior staff. A system is in place to monitor the undertaking of research and scholarly activities, stipulating a high degree of integrity, accountability and responsibility, and the policy is clearly communicated to parties involved in these activities, reflecting CIHE's dedication in promoting research. CIHE has also been developing its repository, tracking systems, and an integrated information system to link all its relevant systems, and is progressing well in the keeping of research and scholarly activities records that contributes to the management and monitoring of research and scholarship productivity.

# (e) <u>QA</u>

6. CIHE has demonstrated that its QA mechanisms are robust and effective in reviewing its performance and in driving continuous improvement to meet institutional objectives. CIHE's QA system has been

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reviewed periodically and enriched continuously, and the QA processes and procedures has become increasingly integrated within CIHE's annual review, operational planning, and risk management. Mechanisms such as an Advisory Committee, an External Examiner system, a programme, and course evaluation system, and a graduate destination survey are in place to ensure that graduate outcomes are met and are relevant to the Hong Kong's community and context. And, regular reviews under Programme Area Accreditation and other academic accreditation and professional recognition exercises, as well as special reviews on programmes on a need basis are conducted. CIHE has maintained a close working relationship with its external stakeholders whose interactions with it have been fruitful, with its staff being receptive and responsive to comments for continuous improvement, and some of them complimented CIHE for its flexible, responsive culture, and good leadership. CIHE's teaching staff also participates actively in committees and finds plentiful opportunities in communicating informally with management, colleagues and students to ensure that the operation is smooth and efficient. CIHE benchmarks itself against a number of institutions in Hong Kong and overseas by making reference to various aspects of these institutions such as programme area curriculum, admission policy, tuition fee schedule, development, employment rate, further study rate, remuneration policy, research and scholarship funding, etc. Besides, CIHE has developed a set of key performance indicators and supplementary indicators to monitor performance and progress for academic units, non-academic units and programmes.