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Oxford to Expand Korean Studies

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Staff Reporter

The University of Oxford said it is eager to expand Korean studies, with an aim to create a full undergraduate degree later this year.

The most prestigious and oldest university in the United Kingdom currently has two degrees focused on Korea: a one-year masters in Korean studies and a three-year doctorate of philosophy in Oriental studies.



John Hood
Oxford University Vice Chancellor

In pursuit of more support from Korea, Oxford University Vice-Chancellor John Hood, 56, is visiting Seoul for the first time as a head of the oldest English-speaking university in the world. In an exclusive interview with The Korea Times, Wednesday, Hood said Oxford is positioning itself as a leader in the West in East Asian Studies and Korea is a key part of the East Asian region.

“At Oxford, we are anxious to expand Korean studies, and I have come to thank those who have supported us and to ask for further support to create a full undergraduate degree in Korean studies,” he said.

So far, the university has set up two instructorship or full-time professor posts in Korean language and Korean history with funding from the Korea Foundation and other Korean donors. If one more post in Korean literature can be added to the two posts, Oxford can offer bachelor degrees in Korean studies that will stand with Chinese, Japanese and other regional studies.

Oxford seeks to launch the three-year bachelors degree in Korean studies from October. Asked why Oxford is so keen on Korean studies, he said, “Korea is an old country, older than Japan and was often more important than Japan to China and the development of sinitic civilization, so how can we ignore it?”

To that extent, Hood is looking for matching funds for the permanent lectureship during his three-day visit here. He also seeks to further bolstering networking with Korean university presidents.

“We are now 66.6 percent the way towards creating an undergraduate degree in Korean studies. Now, we want to create a post in modern Korean literature,” he said. “We think that this is a strategic move that will draw attention to the Korean experience in the twentieth century as the human and personal challenges presented by the speed of change, the defeats, and the successes, are there in your literature.”

The vice-chancellor also shared his long-term plans for Korean studies. “Eventually, we want teachers and students who track and analyze the Korean economies, North and South; we want teachers and students who track and analyze the domestic and international politics of Korean unification,” he said.

While stressing the importance of Korean language for Korean studies, the vice-chancellor said any Korean students seeking to study at the school should cultivate a

certain level of competence in English.

“Academic potential includes the ability to excel in a chosen subject ‘within the Oxford system,’ so competence in English is important for any subject area. Discussion and collaboration are a vital part of academic life at Oxford, and all this goes on in the English language, so we do require a certain level of competence,” he said. He added the school has a well-equipped Language Center to support non-native English speakers.

Hood is the first person in the university’s 900 year history to be elected to the vice-chancellorship from outside the university’s current academic body.

There are almost 20,000 students at Oxford, including 12,106 undergraduates and 7,380 postgraduates. Oxford boasts one of the most extensive global alumni networks in the world, with 160 branches in over 60 countries.

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