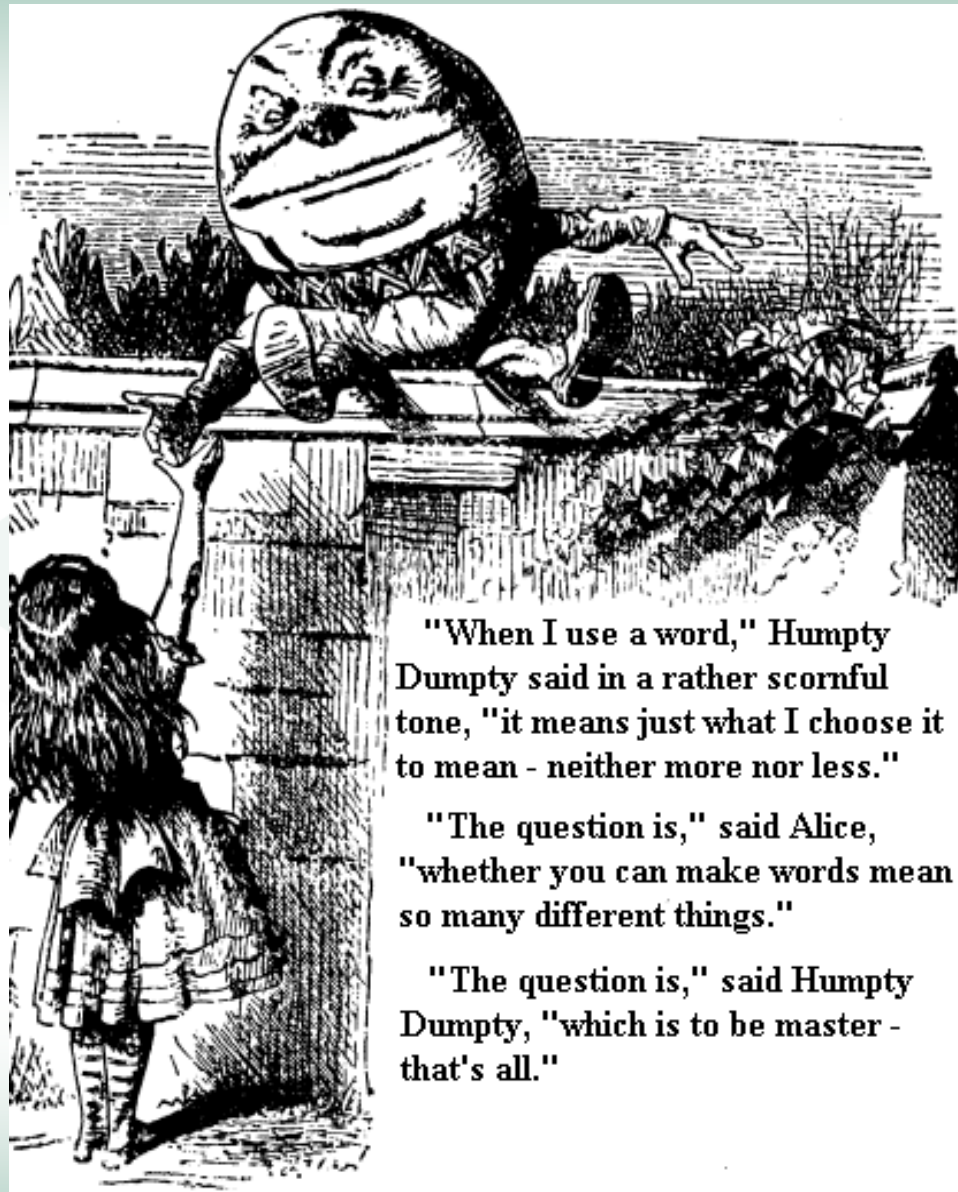


What's a university? The strange story of the United Kingdom

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"When I use a word," Humpty Dumpty said in a rather scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean - neither more nor less."

"The question is," said Alice, "whether you can make words mean so many different things."

"The question is," said Humpty Dumpty, "which is to be master - that's all."

Is a university...

- An institution that can award degrees?
- A place where students study for a degree?
- A resource allocation mechanism?
- A seat of learning?
- A community of scholars?
- A teaching institution?
- A research institution?
- A teaching and research institution?
- A powerhouse for economic development?
- An advanced skills training college?
- An independent bulwark of democracy?

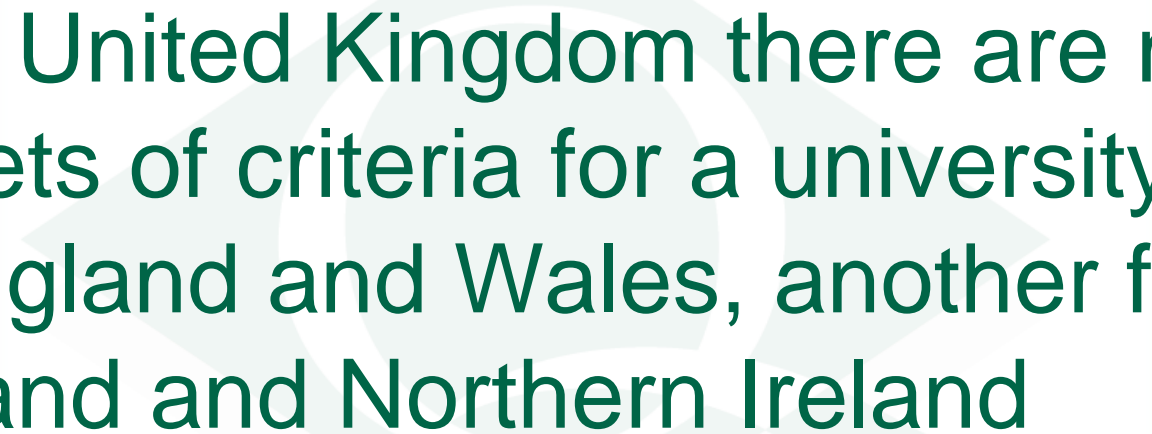
**There is no universally
accepted definition of a
university**



From the 'Magna Charta Universitatum'

Bologna, Italy, 1988

- A university 'produces, examines, appraises and hands down culture by research and teaching'
- Teaching and research in universities must be inseparable if their tuition is not to lag behind changing needs, the demands of society, and advances in scientific knowledge.



In the United Kingdom there are now two sets of criteria for a university, one for England and Wales, another for Scotland and Northern Ireland

How did this state of affairs
come about?

A faint, light green watermark is centered in the background. It depicts a graduation cap (mortarboard) with a tassel hanging from the right side. Below the cap, a hand is shown holding a pen, as if writing. The watermark is semi-transparent and serves as a subtle background element.

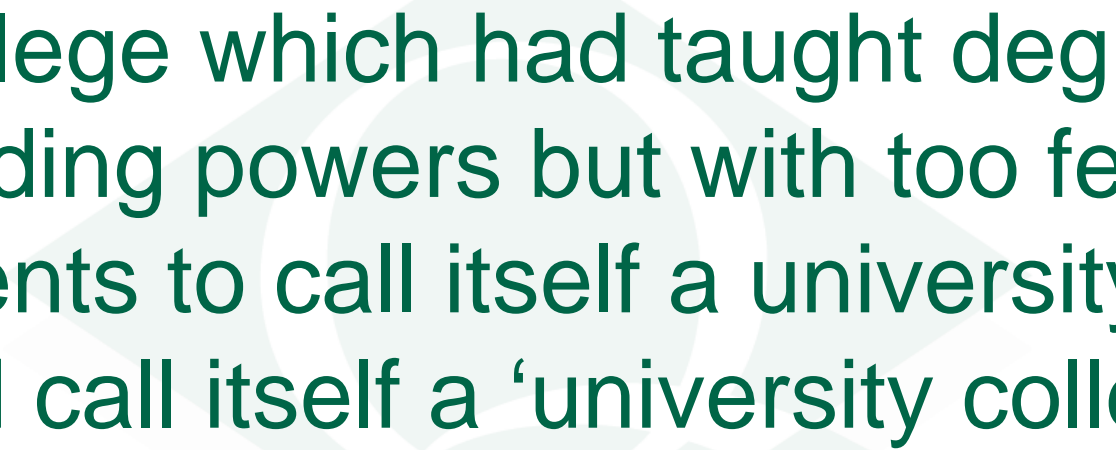
Before 1992, university title had no legal protection:

- Universities were set up either by Royal Charters or acts of Parliament
- All universities were empowered to award any degrees they wished
- There was no regulation of the title
- There were very few 'bogus' institutions

After 1992, powers to award degrees were divided into 'taught degree awarding powers' (bachelors' and master's degrees) and 'research-degree awarding powers' (research master's and doctorates)

After 1992, university title was protected by law:

- Only institutions with taught and research-degree awarding powers could apply to call themselves universities
- Applicants had to have
 - at least 300 full-time equivalent higher education students in 5 of the 11 subject areas listed for this purpose;
 - a higher education enrolment of at least 4,000 full-time equivalent students;
 - 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) conferments.



A college which had taught degree awarding powers but with too few students to call itself a university could call itself a 'university college'

In 2004 the ministries of education in England and Wales changed their definition of a university:

- Applicants must
 - 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.

Why the changes in England and Wales?

- The ministry wanted to enhance the status of teaching
- It wanted to acknowledge the work of small and specialist institutions
- It did not believe in the inseparability of teaching and research

The change in the regulations

- Demonstrated the significance of the 'university' title
- Made university title a political matter
- Raised the question of 'what is a university?'
- Broke the link between universities and research degrees

The rules weren't changed in Scotland and Northern Ireland, which thought the English/Welsh changes wrongly broke the teaching/research link

So what is a university?

- In the UK, it means just what the minister chooses it to mean - neither more nor less