



**COUNTRY REPORT:**  
**The People's  
Republic of China**

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# Introduction

This report is part of a series of country reports that QAA, as part of its contractual arrangement with the four national funding bodies, will regularly produce to offer higher education providers an insight into the higher education and regulatory landscape of key countries for UK transnational education (TNE). The reports offer high level information and intelligence about regulations, challenges and opportunities, signposting to sources of further information. Country reports might also be associated with TNE review activity, in which case they will also include the main lessons learned from reviewing TNE in the subject country, for the benefit of the whole sector.

In producing these reports QAA seeks to liaise with local regulators and quality assurance agencies, and other UK sector bodies with relevant expertise. QAA has a number of strategic partnerships with counterpart agencies in key countries for UK TNE. These are a source of intelligence and direct access to up-to-date information about local regulatory developments.

We would like to thank our partner agencies in China, the China Academic Degrees and Graduate Education Development Center and the China Education Association for International Exchange, as well as the British Council China and Universities UK International, for their valuable support in developing this report.



# The People's Republic of China



The People's Republic of China (China) is the largest country in Asia (excluding the Asian part of Russia) and the world's most populous country, with a population of 1,379 million.<sup>1</sup> China is governed by the Communist Party of China, and comprises 22 provinces, five autonomous regions (Inner Mongolia, Xinjiang, Guanzhi, Ningxia and Tibet), and the Special Administrative Regions of Hong Kong and Macau.<sup>2</sup>

China's capital city is Beijing, while its largest city is Shanghai. The official language is Mandarin, although other local dialects and languages are also spoken, including Wu (Shanghainese) and Yue (Cantonese). Population growth is currently set at a 0.5 per year increase. Just over 58 per cent of the population comprises people below the age of 30, and around 17 per cent below the age of 15.

China's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is estimated by the World Bank at 11,199 trillion USD, with an annual growth of 6.7 per cent, and a GDP per capita of 7,924 USD. China is the world's 2nd largest economy, after the United States, with a 15 per cent share of global economy; it is expected to become the largest world economy by 2050.<sup>3</sup> Services contribute to 52 per cent of GDP and industry 40 per cent. The unemployment rate of the total labour force is 4.6 per cent, while the youth unemployment rate between the ages of 15 to 24 is 10.6 per cent.<sup>4</sup> China is ranked 90 in the Human Development Index, regarded as a country with high human development, with an adult literacy rate of 96 per cent and a tertiary gross enrolment ratio of 39 per cent.<sup>5</sup> In terms of percentage of national GDP spent on education,

1 World Bank, available at: [http://databank.worldbank.org/data/Views/Reports/ReportWidgetCustom.aspx?Report\\_Name=CountryProfile&Id=b450fd57&tbar=y&dd=y&inf=n&zm=n&country=CHN](http://databank.worldbank.org/data/Views/Reports/ReportWidgetCustom.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfile&Id=b450fd57&tbar=y&dd=y&inf=n&zm=n&country=CHN).

2 This report looks only at mainland China, excluding the two Special Administrative Regions, which will be the focus of separate forthcoming country reports.

3 See [www.weforum.org/agenda/2017/03/worlds-biggest-economies-in-2017/](http://www.weforum.org/agenda/2017/03/worlds-biggest-economies-in-2017/) and [www.pwc.com/gx/en/issues/economy/the-world-in-2050.html](http://www.pwc.com/gx/en/issues/economy/the-world-in-2050.html).

4 World Bank, available at: <http://data.worldbank.org/country/china>.

5 United Nations Development Programme, available at: <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/CHN>.

the latest available official World Bank data for China show this as 1.9 per cent in 1999.<sup>6</sup> This percentage has been increasing steadily over the years with a view to reaching the target of 4 per cent set in the National Plan for Medium and Long Term Educational Reforms and Development 2010–20 (the Plan).<sup>7</sup>

## Key policy drivers

The Plan, issued by the State Council, the chief administrative authority in China chaired by the Premier, is currently the key guidance document in Chinese education. It sets a series of concrete goals to be achieved by 2020 to support reform and development of education at all levels during these years, including:

- increasing national GDP spent on education to 4 per cent
- universalising pre-school education, raising the senior high school gross enrolment rate to 90 per cent
- increasing the higher education gross enrolment rate to 40 per cent
- supporting the development of western and middle regions of China
- improving the quality and international reputation of education and research
- promoting different forms of international exchanges and cooperation, especially with well-reputed international education and research institutions.

The implementation of these goals is supported by the 13th Five Year Plan for Economic and Social Development of the People's Republic of China (the Five Year Plan),<sup>8</sup> which stresses the need to modernise the education system, raise the overall quality of education and promote fairness in education, at all levels. With regard to further and higher education in particular, the Five Year Plan outlines the need to:

- improve the vocational education system and to better integrate it with higher education as part of an integrated system for lifelong learning and training
- support the development of a number of world-class universities and disciplines and improve universities' capacity for innovation
- improve the system for ensuring the quality of higher education
- strengthen and develop higher education in the central and western regions to ensure a more equitable access to higher learning across the country
- support the development of teacher training
- continue to support the internationalisation of higher education, including as part of the Belt and Road Initiative (also known as One Belt One Road).

The Belt and Road Initiative, was launched by President Xi Jinping in 2013 to drive the development of new trading routes, links and business opportunities between China and over 60 countries across Asia, Europe, the Middle East and Africa, along two historical strategic routes:

- the Silk Road Economic Belt (One Belt), aimed at enhancing and developing land routes, linking China's east coast all the way to Western Europe, as well as developing a number of economic corridors connecting China with Mongolia, Russia, central Asia and South-East Asia
- the 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road (One Road), a sea route that runs west from China's east coast to Europe through the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean.

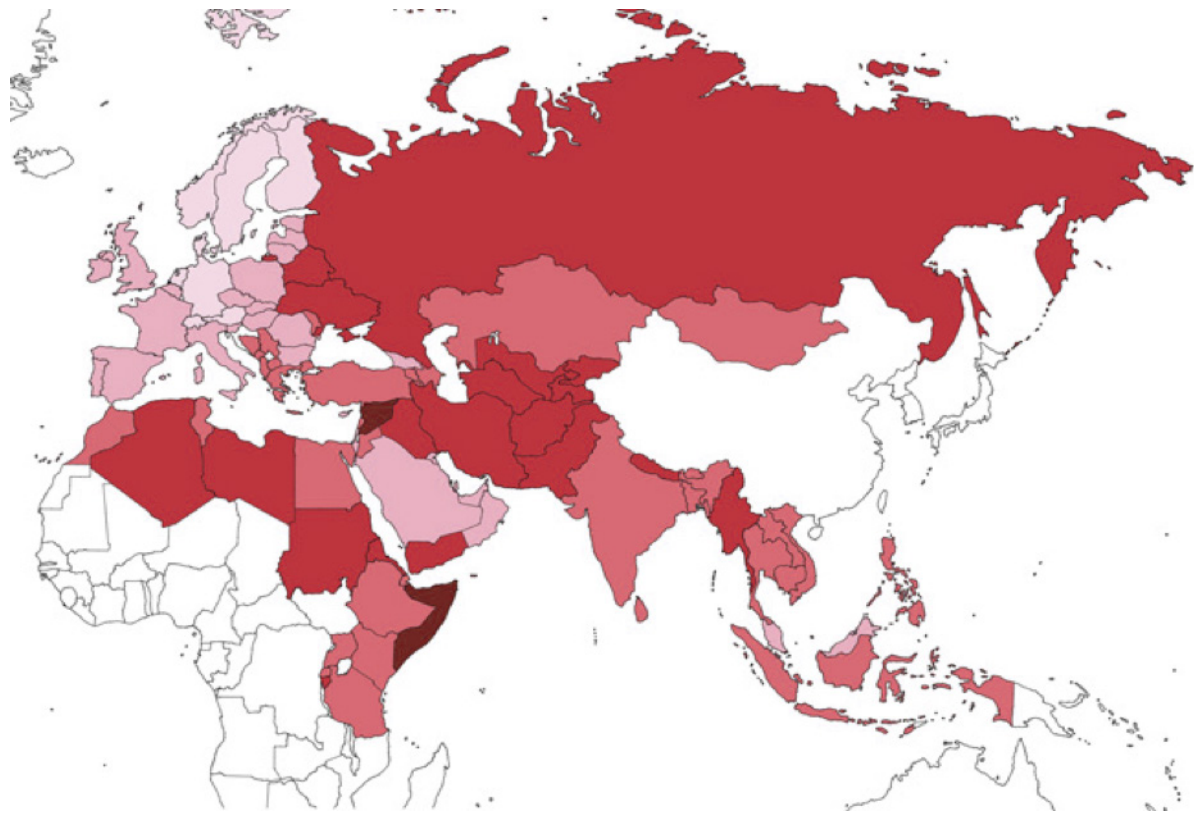
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6 World Bank, available at: <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.XPD.TOTL.GD.ZS?end=1999&locations=CN&start=1999&view=chart>.

7 China Ministry of Education, available at: <http://old.moe.gov.cn/publicfiles/business/htmlfiles/moe/s3501/201010/109031.html>.

8 The Five Year Plan, available at: [www.china-un.org/eng/zt/China123456/](http://www.china-un.org/eng/zt/China123456/) and <http://en.ndrc.gov.cn/newsrelease/201612/P020161207645765233498.pdf> (PDF, 1.15MB).

Figure 1: The geographic scope of the One Belt, One Road framework (source: Economist Intelligence Unit)



The Belt and Road Initiative, backed by a 50 billion USD investment fund disbursed as loans financing, is deemed to cover nearly two thirds of the world's population and one third of global GDP.<sup>9</sup> Its specific aims include:

- developing prosperity for underdeveloped parts of China, particularly in the west of the country
- developing new opportunities for China to partner and cooperate with the various countries along the routes, many of which are developing countries
- increased integration, connectivity and economic development along both routes.

As part of the Belt and Road framework China is encouraging the development of education collaboration between Chinese and foreign higher education institutions. The University Alliance of the Silk Road (UASR), led by Xi'an Jiaotong University and involving over 130 institutions in more than 32 countries along the two silk roads, was established in 2015 specifically for this purpose, encouraging joint research, partnerships, and student exchanges among universities in these countries.<sup>10</sup> China's Ministry of Education has also launched a scholarship scheme that will fund 7,500 students to study abroad and 10,000 international students to study in China, over five years, to foster education collaboration along the Belt and Road trading routes.

The scholarship scheme has been set up as part of China's new international education strategy 2016-20, laid out in the document Opinions on Opening-Up the Education Sector in the New Era.<sup>11</sup> The strategy sets out the government's intention to encourage partnerships with foreign institutions, improve the quality of international education, and promote China as an attractive study destination, ensuring a balance between outbound and inbound student mobility.

9 Economist Intelligence Unit, available at: [www.eiu.com/topic/one-belt-one-road](http://www.eiu.com/topic/one-belt-one-road).

10 Xi'an Jiaotong University, available at: <http://en.xjtu.edu.cn/info/1043/1706.htm>.

11 Opinions on Opening-Up the Education Sector in the New Era, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/y98ctby9> (PDF, 163KB). For further information, see: <https://thepienews.com/news/china-releases-outward-facing-international-education-strategy-to-2020/>.

The overarching aims of the international strategy are to:

- accelerate the development of inbound and outbound study abroad, improving the quality of inbound and outbound study abroad, by better overseeing agencies supporting outbound mobility and building the 'Study in China' brand
- support the development and enhance the quality of cross-border education, by reforming the programme approval system and strengthening the evaluation and accreditation of Sino-foreign education provision in China, as well as encouraging Chinese higher education and vocational institutions to expand overseas
- lift the international standing and competitiveness of China's higher education system, developing world-class universities and disciplines, including through supporting international research partnerships with world-leading universities, participation in major international scientific programmes, and the establishment of joint research centres
- promote broader international cooperation in education and foster people exchange mechanisms by strengthening participation in international and regional organisations, developing bilateral and multilateral high level meetings, increasing education aid to developing countries, and improving education cooperation with BRICS countries
- support the implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative, promoting educational cooperation with the countries along the Belt and Road - including through the establishment of the 'Silk Road' Chinese Government Scholarship.

Aligned with its international education strategy is China's participation in the Asia Cooperation Dialogue (ACD), a continent-wide forum aimed at consolidating Asian strengths and strengthening its competitiveness. The 2016 Bangkok Declaration commits ACD member states to consolidate cooperation on six priority pillars:

- Science, Technology and Innovation
- Education and Human Resource Development
- Interrelation of Food, Energy and Water Security
- Connectivity
- Culture and Tourism
- Promoting Approaches to Inclusive and Sustainable Development.<sup>12</sup>

In particular, the 2016 proposed Road Map for ACD Regional Connectivity places emphasis on improving access to quality education as key to ensuring that all citizens benefit from economic growth and sustain further economic and social development. This includes cooperation in the development of joint universities, vocational colleges and research institutions' activities and networking to better facilitate student mobility, as well as technology and knowledge sharing in ACD countries.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> The Bangkok Declaration, available at: [www.acd-dialogue.org/ACD-summit/2nd/Bangkok-Declaration.pdf](http://www.acd-dialogue.org/ACD-summit/2nd/Bangkok-Declaration.pdf) (PDF, 203KB)

<sup>13</sup> Road Map for ACD Regional Connectivity, available at: [www.acd-dialogue.org/ministerial-meeting/14th/acd-road-map-for-acd-regional-connectivity.pdf](http://www.acd-dialogue.org/ministerial-meeting/14th/acd-road-map-for-acd-regional-connectivity.pdf) (PDF, 14.3MB).

To support the strategic goal to enhance the quality and international standing of its higher education system, the Chinese Ministry of Education announced in 2015 a new initiative called World Class 2.0, also referred to as Double First Class.<sup>14</sup> The initiative, building on the mid-1990s projects 211 and 985 (see page 8), and running on a five-year cycle in line with the Five Year Plan, aims to:

- develop a number of world-class universities and a group of world-class disciplines by 2020
- increase the number of top-ranked universities and disciplines by 2030 (with a view of having six of China's nine top-ranked institutions ranked within the world's top 15 universities)
- establish China as a world-leading higher education power by 2050.<sup>15</sup>

Under the project, 42 institutions have been selected for funding to help transform them into world-class universities; further support will be provided for specific disciplines at these institutions (and a further 95 universities) to help them build upon their distinctive strengths.<sup>16</sup> Priority is given to those institutions that are close to becoming world class or are recognised for their strength in relevant disciplines, prioritising those disciplines related to national security and key to supporting industry and regional development, as well as emerging and interdisciplinary subjects. Selected institutions will be re-assessed every five years, allowing funding to be shifted to institutions with stronger progress. As a result of the Double First Class project it is to be expected that there will be more university mergers and reorganisations in the future, to rationalise education resources and increase national and international competitiveness, while increasing international partnerships between Double First Class universities<sup>17</sup> and leading foreign universities.

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14 China sets direction for world class universities', available at: <https://internationaleducation.gov.au/InternationalNetwork/china/PolicyUpdates-China/Pages/China-sets-direction-for-world-class-universities.aspx>.

15 'Implementation measures released for China's new world-class university policy', available at: <https://internationaleducation.gov.au/News/Latest-News/Pages/Implementation-measures-released-for-China's-new-world-class-university-policy.aspx>.

16 British Council news, available at: <https://siem.britishcouncil.org/news/market-news/china%20per%20centE2%20per%20cent80%20per%20cent99s-ministry-of-education-publishes-list-of-heis-developing-world-class>

17 British Council list of universities to develop world-class universities and world-class disciplines, available at: <https://siem.britishcouncil.org/sites/siem/files/field/file/news/List%20of%20universities%20to%20develop%20World-Class%20Universities%20and%20World-Class%20Disciplines.pdf> (PDF, 758KB).



# The China higher education landscape

Higher education in China has experienced a huge expansion in the 21st century, becoming the largest higher education system in the world. The gross enrolment ratio has doubled in this period to over 40 per cent, and higher education enrolments have been growing by 50 per cent year on year.<sup>18</sup> In 2016 there were over 36 million students enrolled in higher education programmes,<sup>19</sup> with eight million expected to graduate in 2017.<sup>20</sup> The number of higher education institutions has also increased steadily. The Chinese higher education sector currently comprises a total of 2,914 higher education institutions. Among these institutions, 2,631 are regular higher education institutions, and 283 are adult higher education schools.<sup>21</sup>

The regular sector includes universities and vocational colleges, offering four-year bachelor's degrees and three-year diplomas (dazhuan) more focused on vocational and occupational skills. Adult higher education institutions offer two and four-year diploma programmes, following the curriculum offered by regular institutions, but the teaching format is more flexible, including distance learning and part-time study. Admission requirements also differ. Students gain access to regular higher education institutions on the basis of the National Higher Education Entrance Examination or Gaokao, while entrance to adult higher education institutions is based on the National Adult College Entrance Examination or the adult Gaokao. A high school diploma is not required for adult education, although applicants are expected to have academic skills on par with high school graduates. Different higher education certificates are also issued by regular and adult higher education institutions.

In addition to regular and adult education, higher education can be obtained through 'self-study'. Self-taught higher education has an entirely open enrolment policy that accepts applications from all backgrounds and academic levels. Applicants register with the provincial Self-taught Higher Education Examinations Committee and complete the programme at their own pace. Only a small percentage of undergraduate students choose the self-study route, just over 150,000 in 2015. Higher education qualifications certificates for self-taught examination are jointly conferred by the Self-taught Examination Committee and their associate institutions.

The recruitment process to regular higher education is hierarchical and sequential: degree-awarding institutions are divided into three tiers; tier 1 recruits first, followed by tier 2, and then tier 3. Selection is based on students' Gaokao results; those with the best results are recruited at tier 1, and so on down the line. Students with the lowest Gaokao scores, or whose abilities or interests are more practical than academic, go to dazhuan colleges. Graduates of these colleges either enter the workforce or can upgrade from a diploma to a degree by passing an examination towards the end of their programme and studying for a further two to three years. A master's degree generally involves two or three years of study, and a doctoral degree three years.

Higher education institutions are highly stratified in terms of their quality. This is in part the result of government policy aimed at improving the international competitiveness and ranking of Chinese higher education, investing heavily in top-tier higher education institutions in China. To this aim in the mid-1990s the government launched two initiatives to support national key universities: Project 211 and Project 985. The former is aimed at raising

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18 Further information: [www.oecd.org/china/Education-in-China-a-snapshot.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/china/Education-in-China-a-snapshot.pdf) (PDF, 2.7MB); <https://theconversation.com/inside-the-worlds-largest-higher-education-boom-74789>.

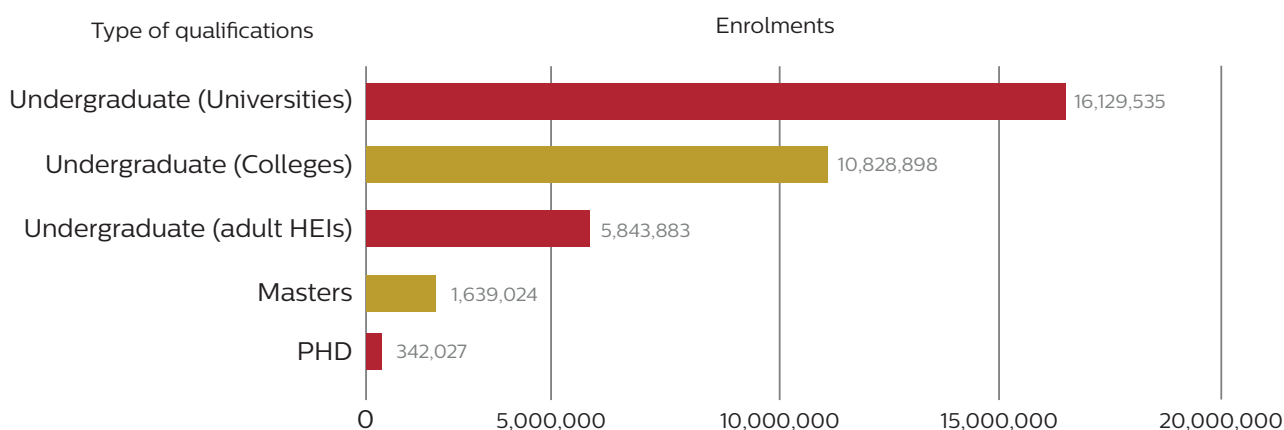
19 China Ministry of Education, available at: [www.moe.gov.cn/s78/A03/moe\\_560/jytjsj\\_2016/2016\\_qg/201708/t20170823\\_311668.html](http://www.moe.gov.cn/s78/A03/moe_560/jytjsj_2016/2016_qg/201708/t20170823_311668.html).

20 For comparison, this represents nearly double the number of students expected to enrol in higher education, and graduate, in the US in 2017. Further information: <https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=372>.

21 Further information: [www.moe.edu.cn/srcsite/A03/moe\\_634/201706/t20170614\\_306900.html](http://www.moe.edu.cn/srcsite/A03/moe_634/201706/t20170614_306900.html); [http://english.gov.cn/state\\_council/ministries/2017/06/16/content\\_281475687665450.htm](http://english.gov.cn/state_council/ministries/2017/06/16/content_281475687665450.htm).

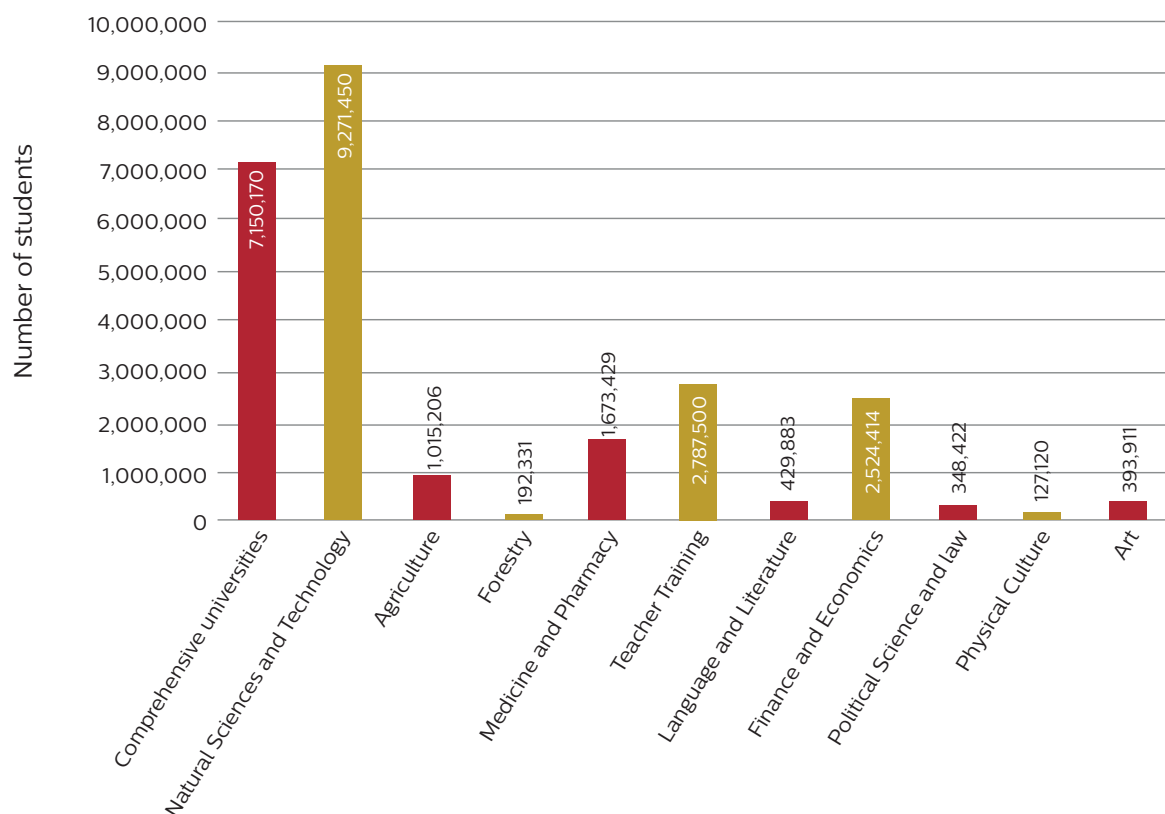
the research capabilities of selected institutions, currently 117, with a focus on key disciplines for socio-economic development. Project 211 universities utilise 70 per cent of scientific research funding, training 80 per cent of doctoral students and 66 per cent of graduate students. The name of the project comes from an abbreviation of the 21st century and 100 – the expected number of participating universities. Project 985 aims to enhance the reputation of Chinese higher education, supporting the development of world-class universities with substantial contributions from national and local governments. Initially, it was made available to an elite group of nine universities, which later joined together to establish the C9 League; it now supports 39 universities, which also benefit from Project 211<sup>22</sup> funding. Most higher education enrolments are at undergraduate level studying at regular universities, as shown by Figure 2. Figure 3 shows the number of students by type of regular higher education institution according to their main subject area specialism.

Figure 2: Enrolments in higher education institutions



22 It is speculated that the World Class 2.0 initiative will gradually replace Projects 211 and 985, and create a more inclusive elite club of selected Chinese universities. A full list of institutions supported by Projects 211 and 985 is available here: [www.uky.edu/international/211\\_985](http://www.uky.edu/international/211_985).

Figure 3: Higher education enrolment by subject area of specialism



Among the 2,914 higher education institutions, 75 universities are managed directly by the Ministry of Education at national level. The remaining institutions include universities and colleges administered by local authorities at provincial and municipal level, and 735 non-state colleges. The latter include 265 affiliated independent colleges, originally established by the public university they are affiliated to, with support from private investors.<sup>23</sup> The remaining non-state colleges are private (minban) colleges set up by private investors. Independent affiliated colleges and minban have traditionally been set up for students who did not pass the Gaokao, or received very low Gaokao scores, thus contributing to the expansion of higher education among lower achieving students.<sup>24</sup> Most minban colleges recruit locally and also recruit ‘off-quota’ for adult education or distance learning.

The number of higher education institutions also includes nine joint Sino-Foreign universities and two Sino-Foreign colleges with independent legal entities and degree awarding powers in China.

Table 1: Total higher education providers by type

Total higher education providers		2914		
	Public	Non-state	Sino-foreign	
Universities	819	417 <sup>25</sup>	9	
Colleges	1,068	318	2	
Adult Higher Education Institutions	283			

23 Some minban used to be associate colleges of public universities, but clear lines have now been drawn requiring these colleges previously associated with public universities to be completely independent, including removing the name of the public universities from the original minban college names.

24 Recent studies show how independent colleges tend to recruit students from higher economic and social capital backgrounds, who can afford higher fees, to benefit from the affiliation to prestigious public universities, while minban recruit more from poorer backgrounds. Hubert Ertl and Kai Yu (2015) Institutional Diversification in Chinese Higher Education, *International Higher Education*, n 58, China: Trends and Developments.

25 Two hundred and sixty five are independent colleges affiliated to public universities.

In addition to these Sino-Foreign institutions integrated into the Chinese higher education system, there is also a significant number of partnerships between Chinese and foreign education providers delivering higher education programmes at different levels, leading either to a single qualification from the foreign university or a double degree. This usually depends on the type of students recruited to these programmes. Students recruited through the national quota system, such as students who pass the Gaokao examination, will obtain a double degree or a Chinese degree only; non-quota students, such as students with low or no Gaokao score, including international students, will obtain only the degree awarded by the foreign institution.

## The China TNE landscape

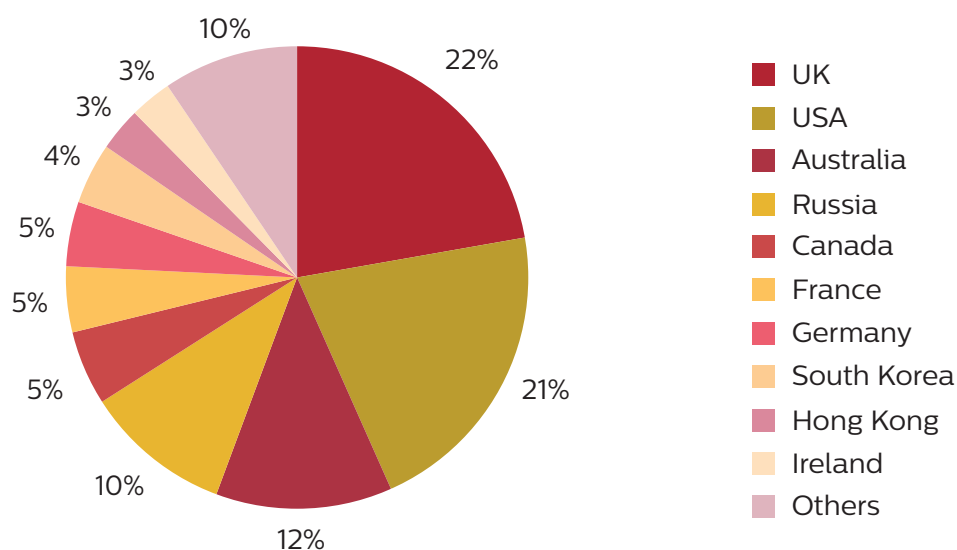
Foreign providers in China cannot offer their own degree programmes without a Chinese partner. TNE, therefore, takes the form of partnerships between Chinese and foreign universities, which are referred to as China-Foreign Cooperation in Running Schools (CFCRS). CFCRS include both joint institutes operated in partnership between Chinese and foreign providers, and joint programmes delivered at Chinese universities in partnership with foreign providers. A small number of joint institutes have been established as joint ventures with independent legal status under Chinese law and the power to award Chinese degrees. However, the vast majority of joint institutes operate as institutions affiliated to the parent Chinese university, on which they are dependent financially, as well as being integrated into its governance and management structure.

Joint programmes are by far the most common type of CFCRS, with 1,154 joint programmes having received ministerial approval at bachelor’s degree level and above.<sup>26</sup> The majority of these partnerships are at the undergraduate level. In total, there are 86 joint institutes delivering programmes at bachelor’s degree level and above, with nine joint ventures with independent legal status and Chinese degree awarding powers.

Table 2: Total approved TNE partnerships (Source: Ministry of Education)

	UK-China partnerships	Partnerships with other countries	Total
Joint programmes	254	900	1,154
Joint institutes	21	65	86

Figure 4: Total approved TNE partnerships by country (Source: Ministry of Education)



26 This total includes some partnerships whose approval has expired or is inactive.

UK higher education providers are the top partners for CFCRS, with 275 approved joint programmes and institutes (254 and 21 respectively), representing 22 per cent of the total. The USA follows with 261 programmes and institutes, while other partner countries have far fewer approved programmes (see Figure 4).

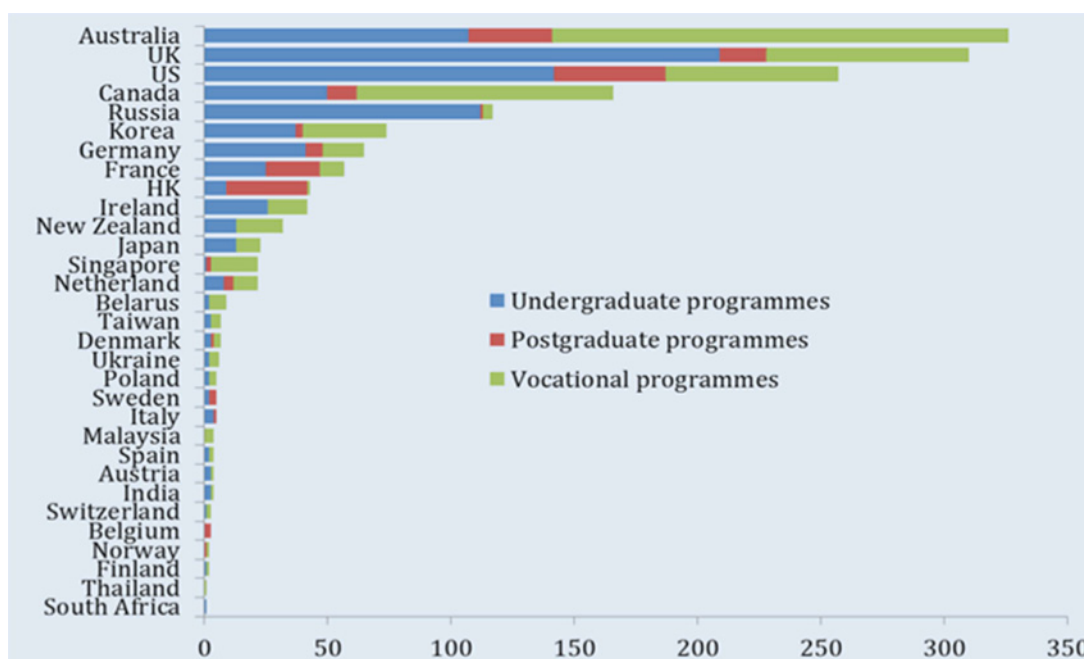
Table 3: The nine independent Sino-foreign universities

Joint venture	Chinese parent	Foreign parent	Location
University of Nottingham Ningbo China (UNNC)	Zhejiang Wanli University	University of Nottingham (UK)	Ningbo, Zhejiang
United International College (UIC)	Beijing Normal University	Hong Kong Baptist University (HK)	Zhuhai, Guangdong
Xi'an Jiaotong Liverpool University (XJTLU)	Xi'an Jiaotong University	University of Liverpool (UK)	Suzhou, Jiangsu
NYU Shanghai	East China Normal University	New York University (USA)	Shanghai
Duke Kunshan University (DKU)	Wuhan University	Duke University (USA)	Kunshan, Jiangsu
CUHK-Shenzhen	Shenzhen University	Chinese University of Hong Kong (HK)	Shenzhen, Guangdong
Wenzhou Kean University (WKU)	Wenzhou University	Kean University (USA)	Wenzhou, Zhejiang
Shenzhen MSU - BIT University	Beijing Institute of Technology	Lomonosov Moscow State University (RUS)	Shenzen
Guangdong Technion	Technion and Shantou University	Israel Institute of Technology (ISR)	Shantou, Guangdong

Significantly, UK providers are the favourite partners for undergraduate programmes, while US universities lead on postgraduate provision and Australian ones on vocational education (see Figure 5). Of all joint Sino-UK programmes, over 80 per cent are at undergraduate level, with a higher percentage of postgraduate programmes (approximately 35 per cent) delivered at joint Sino-UK institutes.<sup>27</sup>

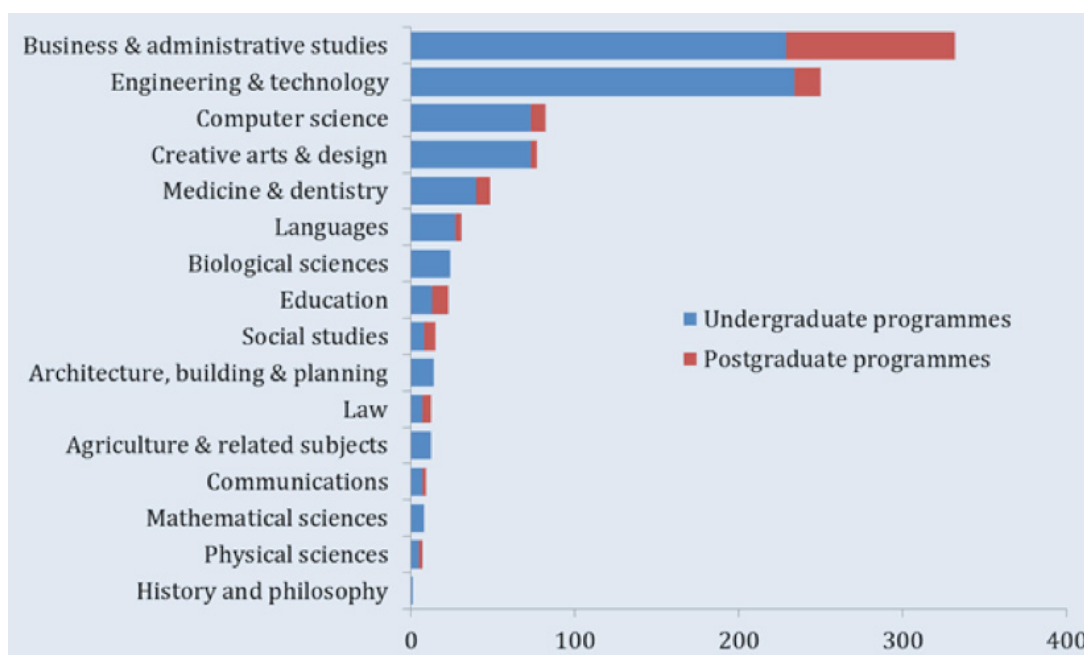
27 See the recently published report by the British Council and the China Education Association for International Exchange, Research on Current UK-China Transnational Education From the Perspective of Administrators and Students, available at: <https://siem.britishcouncil.org/sites/siem/files/field/file/news/2017%20BC-CEAIE%20Joint%20Research%20Report%20of%20UK-China%20TNE.pdf> (PDF, 1.4MB).

Figure 5: Total approved TNE partnerships by country and level (Source: Ministry of Education 2014)



Business and administrative studies, and engineering and technology, are by far the most common subject areas for CFCRS, with the former leading in particular at postgraduate level (see Figure 6). This is also reflected by MoE data for Sino-UK programmes, just over 50 per cent of which are in Engineering, followed by Management (20 per cent), and Economics and Art (12 per cent each).<sup>28</sup>

Figure 6: Total approved TNE partnerships by subject (Source: Ministry of Education 2014)



28 See footnote 27.

## The UK TNE landscape in China

According to the latest Aggregate Offshore Record published by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) for the academic year 2015-16, the number of students studying for a UK award in China has reached 65,199.<sup>29</sup> This represents an increase of approximately 14.5 per cent from the previous year, and over 80 per cent over the past five years, making China the fastest growing host country of UK TNE. China is currently the second largest host country after Malaysia and before Singapore.

Figure 7: Host countries for UK TNE

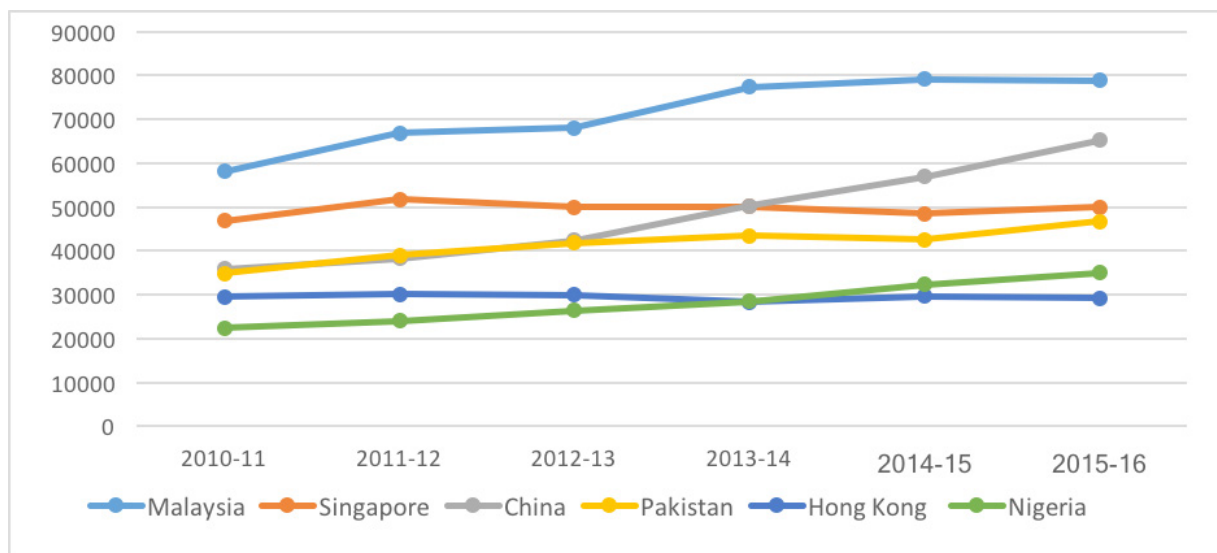
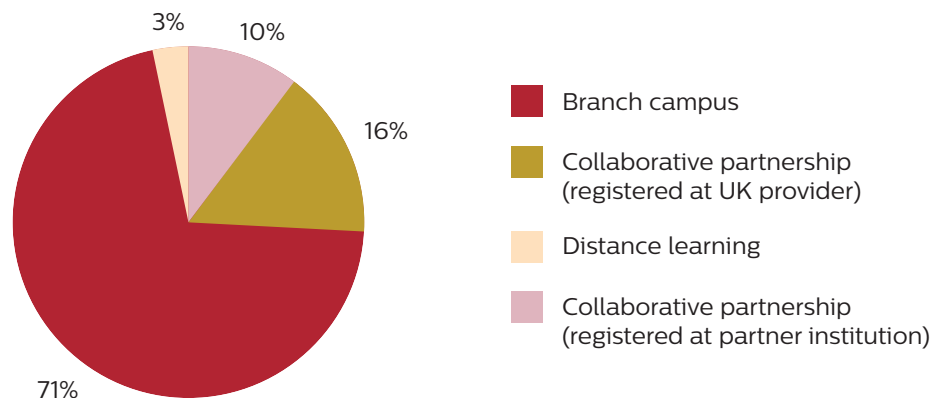


Figure 8: UK TNE provision per HESA type



Excluding distance learning, which accounts for just over 2,000 students,<sup>30</sup> 41 UK degree-awarding bodies offer degrees in China. The vast majority of UK TNE students in China (over 46,000 students, or 70 per cent of total UK TNE students in China) study under the HESA category of 'being registered at the overseas partner organisation'. This category includes over 37,000 students reported by Oxford Brookes University, presumably studying on the BSc in Applied Accountancy offered in collaboration with the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants; and approximately 7,500 students reported by the University of Liverpool, which presumably refers to Xi'an Jiaotong Liverpool University (XJTLU). The other UK university having established an independent university in China, the

<sup>29</sup> The total number of TNE students in China is 27,765, excluding TNE students studying on the Oxford Brookes University BSc in Applied Accountancy delivered in collaboration with the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants.

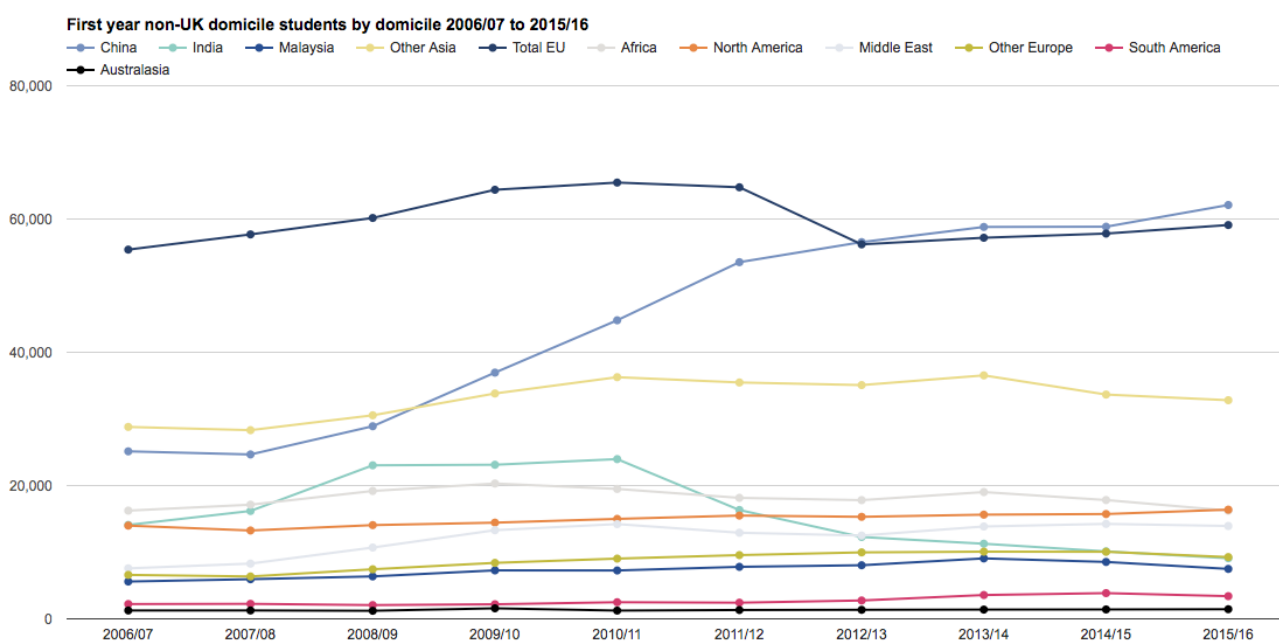
<sup>30</sup> It should be noted that China does not automatically recognise foreign qualifications delivered through distance learning.

University of Nottingham, reported 6,100 students to HESA under the category of 'branch campus provision', which can be assumed to refer to the University of Nottingham Ningbo.<sup>31</sup>

Just over 10,150 students have been reported as studying in partnership provision but 'registered with the UK degree-awarding body'. By far the largest provider under this category, with over 3,000 students, is Queen Mary University of London, which runs a number of joint programmes leading to double degrees with three different institutions, including Beijing University of Posts and Telecommunications, Nanchang University, and Northwestern Polytechnic University. The other large UK operator in China is Staffordshire University with a number of partnerships leading to its own awards, and a China Centre established on the campus of one of its partner institutions, the Global Institute of Software Technology (GIST) International College.

Significantly, UK TNE in China plays an important role in facilitating student mobility to the UK. It has been calculated that 55 per cent of Chinese students studying in England start their studies on UK TNE programmes in China.<sup>32</sup> This importance cannot be underestimated given that China is by the far the main sending country of international students in the UK (see Figure 8).

Figure 8: Main sending regions of international students to the UK (Source: HESA)



31 It should be noted that the expression 'branch campus' is used here only as a HESA category used for data collection, and does not refer to a campus owned and run independently by the UK university. All TNE provision in China must involve cooperation with a local provider, and this applies to University of Nottingham Ningbo too, established as a partnership between Nottingham University and the Wanli Education Group.

32 'Directions of travel: Transnational pathways into English higher education' (HESA), available at: [www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/year/2014/201429/](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/year/2014/201429/). This report draws on data from the Higher Education Funding Council for England, and refers to England only. However, the findings can be regarded as representative of patterns of Chinese students' mobility to the UK.



# The China regulatory landscape for TNE

The regulatory landscape in China is complex. At national level, the Ministry of Education (MoE) is the agency of the State Council that oversees education, devising macro policies and more specific measures to implement the broader strategic guidelines set out at government level. At the provincial and municipal level in China, there are departments of education or commissions that are in charge of implementing the policies and strategies designed by the MoE at a local level.

The MoE, working with the provincial and municipal educational authorities, regulates education through a licensing system, with three-year diploma programmes requiring provincial or municipal approval, and programmes leading to bachelor's degrees or above requiring approval from the MoE itself. The MoE and local authorities decide on a number of specific issues including how many students can be admitted to individual institutions each year through the national quota system, what subject areas may be taught, and how much institutions can charge for tuition (primarily a local authority decision). Similar sharing of responsibilities applies to the approval of applications for foreign education provision in China. The MoE is responsible for the approval of CFCRS at undergraduate and above levels, while the provincial or municipal education departments are responsible for the approval of diploma-level CFCRS. These will, however, still need registering with the MoE, which retains the overall responsibility for issuing licenses to operate as a CFCRS.

Looking specifically at CFCRS, in China the demand for imported foreign provision is driven and regulated by clear national education and social policies and priorities. China began to allow foreign universities to offer education programmes in collaboration with local institutions in the mid-1990s as part of its efforts to meet growing demands for higher education, and to modernise and improve the quality of Chinese higher education. The 1995 Education Act of the People's Republic of China called for education cooperation with foreign partners, while the Interim Provisions for CFCRS, issued the same year, began to outline China's approach to imported foreign provision. Foreign higher education providers cannot offer education programmes in China, and to Chinese students, solely by themselves but must collaborate with local institutions, and should not be motivated by profit.

After joining the World Trade Organisation in 2001, signing up to the General Agreement on Trade in Services, China further committed to open up and internationalise its education sector. As a consequence, it began to develop its regulatory framework for foreign provision allowed to operate in the country, encapsulated in the key piece of legislation currently regulating CFCRS provision, the Regulations of the People's Republic of China on CFCRS, issued in 2003 by the State Council. These regulations have been followed by Implementation Measures for the Regulation of the People's Republic of China on Chinese-foreign Cooperative Education (2004) to deal with more specific issues in relating to the implementation of CFCRS. These documents state clearly that CFCRS must not jeopardise China's sovereignty on national education and must contribute to the development of Chinese higher education institutions and the broader development needs of China. This is the key policy driver informing China's approach to imported education provision, including the requirement that TNE in China can only take the form of partnership between foreign and local providers, and the criteria used to approve and evaluate CFCRS.

## The Academic Degrees and Graduate Education Development Center (CDGDC)

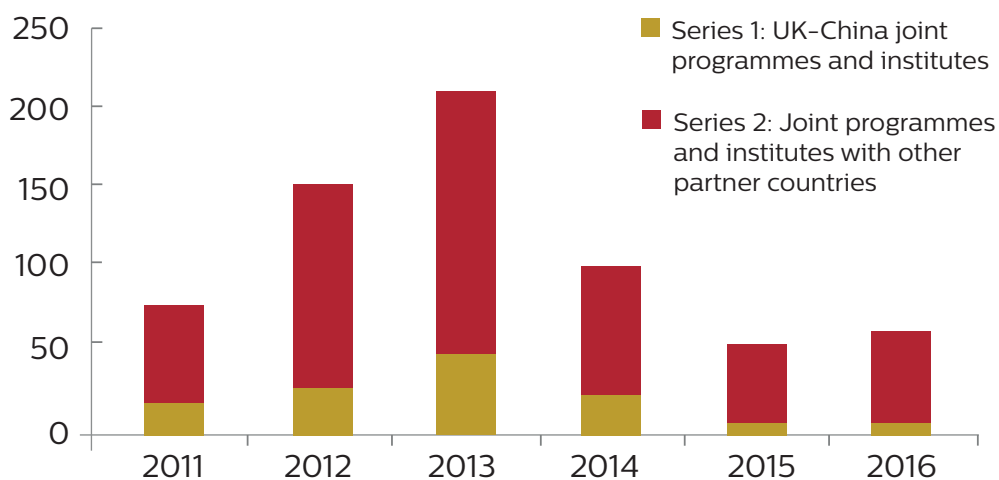
The CDGDC, established in 2003 as an administrative department directly under the MoE, is entrusted by the MoE and the Academic Degrees Committee of the State Council to evaluate, undertake research and provide expert advice on postgraduate education. It also verifies the authenticities of academic degree certificates, and compiles subject-level university rankings.

The CDGDC is the Chinese agency with delegated responsibility to evaluate approved CFCRS at undergraduate level and above. The CDGDC also undertakes research into higher education qualifications equivalency between China and foreign countries, providing advice to the MoE for reciprocal qualifications recognition agreements.

Over the years, China has raised a number of concerns about the way the 2003 Regulations were being implemented, periodically tightening up criteria for CFCRS approval. In 2006 the MoE issued opinions concerning CFCRS,<sup>33</sup> followed by notification of measures to better regulate the system.<sup>34</sup> The MoE expressed particular concern on the low levels of introduction of high-quality foreign education resources, the priority accorded to economic gain over meeting local and national development needs, and the lack of regulation of the certification of CFCRS qualifications. As a consequence, approval of new CFCRS was temporarily suspended, calling for strengthening the quality assurance of approved CFCRS. Among the measures introduced was the implementation of two web-based information platforms: the 'supervision platform', containing a list of approved CFCRS institutions and programmes, relevant policies and regulations, and guidance for students; and the 'recognition platform', requiring students to give notification that they are registered on their programme in order to ensure recognition of their degree.<sup>35</sup> Another measure was a pilot evaluation of CFCRS carried out by the CDGDC, the national agency entrusted by the MoE to conduct evaluations of CFCRS at undergraduate level and above.

Following these measures the MoE resumed approval of CFCRS in 2010, with the number of new approvals increasing rapidly. However, in the last couple of years approvals have slowed down again, as the MoE aims to further improve the quality of CFCRS and ensure that they suit national development needs (see Figure 9). In this context, the MoE is currently carrying out a consultation to inform a review of the current regulation of CFCRS, which is expected to conclude in 2018.<sup>36</sup>

Figure 9: Newly approved CFCRS by year, 2011-16 (Source: Ministry of Education)



33 Available at: [www.crs.jsj.edu.cn/index.php/default/news/index/1](http://www.crs.jsj.edu.cn/index.php/default/news/index/1).

34 Available at: [www.crs.jsj.edu.cn/index.php/default/news/index/18](http://www.crs.jsj.edu.cn/index.php/default/news/index/18).

35 Available at: [www.crs.jsj.edu.cn/index.php/default/index/sort/1006](http://www.crs.jsj.edu.cn/index.php/default/index/sort/1006).

36 Further information available here: [https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s?\\_\\_biz=MzUwOTAzMjY2NA==&mid=2247483732&idx=1&sn=d4fc403b0e06bdf528ffa4a8c84b7062](https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s?__biz=MzUwOTAzMjY2NA==&mid=2247483732&idx=1&sn=d4fc403b0e06bdf528ffa4a8c84b7062).

## The criteria for CFCRS approval

Drawing on existing regulation and policy statements, as well as information shared by QAA's partner agencies in China, it is possible to list a number of key considerations that are currently given particular weight by the MoE.

- With regard to the requirement for foreign providers to commit educational resources in delivering CFCRS programmes, the current MoE position is that foreign providers should deliver at least one third of a CFCRS programme, preferably by core faculty so as to ensure the same quality of the CFCRS programme to similar programmes delivered at the home campus of the foreign degree-awarding body.
- Jointly developed courses and merging of Chinese and foreign courses are favoured, as the MoE sees these as enhancing the quality of the collaboration, as well as a demonstration of the academic input from the foreign provider.
- Joint institutions (without legal person status) seem to be more encouraged than joint programmes, as they demonstrate a more substantial and longer term commitment of education resources on the part of the foreign provider.
- Serial partnerships, where a single foreign provider has many joint programmes with different Chinese partners, are discouraged, as the MoE believes they risk overstressing the capacity of foreign providers, potentially compromising quality. The MoE will assess whether providers can guarantee sufficient provision of qualified faculty and other educational resources when applying for additional partnerships.
- The MoE is also reluctant to approve new joint programmes where the overseas partner already operates a programme in a similar field, as possibly demonstrating a lack of commitment to its existing partnership.
- The MoE now encourages the majority of time spent at joint programmes and institutes to be conducted in China. At the bachelor's level, this means that programmes with a '3+1' model (three years of study in China plus one year abroad) or '4+0' model (four years in China, with or without a period of study overseas) are favoured, while '2+2' programmes are seen less as CFCRS and more as mechanisms for student mobility.
- CFCRS are encouraged to focus on subject areas that address provincial and national development needs, while programmes in oversupplied subject areas, such as business, finance and management, will be looked upon much less favourably.
- In line with the focus on improving opportunities in Central and Western China, TNE programmes in this part of the country are encouraged. Although the most developed regions still account for the largest proportion of new joint programmes, other parts of the country have increased their share in recent years.
- Chinese institutions are particularly encouraged to set up partnerships with 'high quality' overseas institutions, or with institutions that are highly regarded in the relevant subject field. Top-ranked foreign universities or programmes are therefore favoured.
- There is also an increasing focus on the overseas partner's prior performance in TNE delivery. It is important to show that any prior joint programmes have been delivered successfully. This usually means that at least one cohort of students must have already graduated from the programme.

## **The China Education Association for International Exchange (CEAIE)**

The CEAIE was established in 1981 and is registered with the Ministry of Civil Affairs as a not-for-profit organisation managing international education exchange and cooperation. The Secretariat of the CEAIE functions directly under the MoE.

The CEAIE assists the MoE in screening applications for new CFCRS, ensuring that applications submitted are not fraudulent.

CEAIE also provides quality assurance services for CFCRS to its member organisations, and recently launched a voluntary accreditation scheme for CFCRS at all levels to help enhance the quality of Sino-foreign partnerships.

It should be noted that MoE approval is not required for partnerships where the foreign partner does not provide any teaching in China, such as credit transfer or articulation agreements.

With regard to the application process, when applying to establish a new CFCRS at degree level or above, the partner university must submit an application to the relevant provincial education department, along with supporting information such as a detailed implementation plan and a clear financial model with an analysis of relevant costs and the contributions from each partner. The provincial education department is then responsible for submitting the application with its comments to the MoE, which will examine the application and make its decision. If approved, the MoE issues a 'Chinese-Foreign Cooperative Education License'. If the application is not approved, the MoE gives its reasons in writing to the Chinese institution. The MoE examination is carried out by a team of experts, which considers applications through desk-based analysis and possibly an inspection visit.

Provincial and municipal-level education departments lead on approval of joint programmes and joint institutions without independent legal status with higher vocational institutes. Their approval decisions are communicated to the MoE for registration and the issuing of licenses to operate.

In addition to obtaining a CFCRS license from the MoE, all programmes must also receive approval for their tuition fees from the provincial pricing bureau, the same body that approves tuition fees for domestic private providers.

## The quality assurance of CFCRS

Quality assurance and the establishment of educational standards fall under the authority of the MoE. The MoE delegates this responsibility to a number of agencies according to the level and type of education. The Higher Education Evaluation Centre (HEEC), established under the MoE in 2004, evaluates undergraduate degree programmes of universities and colleges in China, but it has no responsibility for CFCRS. The CDGDC has the responsibility for the evaluation of postgraduate Chinese education as well as the evaluation of CFCRS at both undergraduate and postgraduate level. The responsibility to quality assure CFCRS at the higher vocational and sub-degree levels is delegated to the CEAIE, which also runs a voluntary accreditation scheme for CFCRS at all levels endorsed by the MoE, as an additional measure to strengthen the monitoring and enhance the quality of Sino-foreign partnerships.

Following the pilot evaluation of CFCRS in the four provinces of Jiangsu, Liaoning, Tianjin and Henan, the CDGDC has developed its evaluation procedures with a view to applying them to all CFCRS across the country. All CFCRS must submit a self-evaluation document to the CDGDC every year, and every six years 20 per cent of CFCRS programmes will be evaluated through a combination of desk-based assessment and site visits (where the desk-based analysis has detected issues or concerns). The preliminary analysis is based on a self-evaluation document, and other available data including student satisfaction surveys. The following areas are specifically looked at, with slight differences depending on whether it is a joint institute or a joint programme that is being evaluated:

- strategic objectives of the CFCRS, and its unique characteristics
- management systems, including management of assets and funds
- quality management, including student admissions, and teaching and learning
- teaching faculty, including recruitment, appraisal and development
- teaching facilities, including improvement plans for the future
- students' outcomes, including student satisfaction
- social benefits of the CFCRS, both for the Chinese partner institution and the broader local or national community.

There are three possible outcomes of the evaluation: qualified, conditionally qualified, and unqualified. The conditionally qualified CFCRS are required to address any detected shortcomings within a certain time limit to retain their MoE approval to operate. The approval of unqualified CFCRS is either suspended or withdrawn.

The CDGDC seeks to cooperate with quality assurance agencies in sending countries of TNE to coordinate and improve the oversight of CFCRS. In 2012 QAA and CDGDC signed a Memorandum of Understanding with a specific view to improving reciprocal understanding and developing cooperation to benefit the growth of high quality Sino-UK CFCRS. Cooperation started with the 2012-13 QAA review of UK TNE in China,<sup>37</sup> where the two agencies shared data, information and intelligence about Sino-UK CFCRS, and CDGDC colleagues joined a number of review visits in the capacity of observers. Since then, cooperation has continued and developed, including more recently at multilateral level in the context of the CDGDC-led initiative Cross-border Quality Assurance Network in Higher Education (CBQAN), and the development of the Beijing Statement,<sup>38</sup> led by the British Council and CEAIE under the People-to-People Dialogue in Education Framework.

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37 QAA review of transnational education in Mainland China 2012, available at: [www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education/review-of-overseas-provision/review-of-transnational-education-in-mainland-china-2012](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education/review-of-overseas-provision/review-of-transnational-education-in-mainland-china-2012)

38 'UK and China agree principles for delivery of TNE' (British Council), available at: [www.britishcouncil.org/organisation/press/uk-and-china-agree-principles-delivery-tne](http://www.britishcouncil.org/organisation/press/uk-and-china-agree-principles-delivery-tne).

### **Cross-border Quality Assurance Network in Higher Education (CBQAN)**

The CBQAN, which was established in 2013 under the Asia-Europe Meetings of Ministers of Education,<sup>39</sup> and formally launched in 2016, aims to build a platform for sharing information and enhancing reciprocal understanding between European and Asian countries, with a view to improving the quality and recognition of cross-border higher education.

### **The Beijing Statement**

The Beijing Statement is a statement of principles for the quality assurance of UK-China TNE jointly developed by the British Council, CEAIE, CDGDC, QAA, and what is now UUK International. The Statement was announced in 2016 at a workshop on UK-China TNE, co-organised in Beijing by the British Council and CEAIE under the People-to-People Dialogue in Education Framework.

The Statement commits the UK and Chinese higher education sectors to develop regular channels of communication to support the sharing of data, information and good practice, and to work together to explore ways to enhance quality and quality assurance of UK-China TNE.

QAA has also signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the CEAIE in 2015 as part of its effort to strengthen cooperation with key stakeholders in one of the main countries for UK higher education. A key area of cooperation is assisting the MoE in the screening of new applications for Sino-UK CFCRS. This is in response to cases of fraudulent applications by third-party agents in the recent past, and is therefore crucial to safeguarding the reputation of UK TNE. As part of this screening exercise, the CEAIE shares with QAA all new applications for Sino-UK CFCRS submitted to the MoE, and QAA checks with UK partners that the application is genuine and does not contain any inaccuracies. QAA and the CEAIE have also engaged in reciprocal sector-briefing activities to enhance reciprocal understanding of each other's operating environments. For instance, QAA has briefed CEAIE reviewers, including experts in charge of assessing new CFCRS applications, about the UK and QAA approach to TNE, and the CEAIE has contributed to briefing UK universities about the approval process and criteria for new CFCRS as part of a British Council workshop on UK-China TNE following up the commitment made in the Beijing Statement.

QAA and the CEAIE are also exploring cooperation in the context of the CEAIE's new voluntary accreditation scheme for CFCRS, to cover sharing of information and possible joint-review exercises. The CEAIE's accreditation scheme aims to help the MoE in strengthening the quality assurance and enhancement of CFCRS, assisting providers with continuous quality improvement, as well as helping prospective students and the public to identify quality CFCRS. The accreditation process is based on a desk-based analysis of a self-assessment document, followed by a review visit carried out by a team of local and international experts. The standards against which CFCRS are assessed cover five main dimensions, associated with a number of primary and secondary indicators; additional bespoke indicators can also be added by the partners seeking accreditation.

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<sup>39</sup> The Asia-Europe Meetings of Ministers (ASEM) is an intergovernmental process established in 1996 to foster dialogue and cooperation between Asia and Europe. Presently, it comprises 53 partners: 30 European and 21 Asian countries, the European Union and the ASEAN Secretariat. The ASEM addresses political, economic, social, cultural and educational issues of common interest, in a spirit of mutual respect and equal partnership. More information available at: [www.aseminfoboard.org/](http://www.aseminfoboard.org/).

The five core dimensions cover:

- the mission and purpose of CFCRS
- resource allocation and utilisation, including faculty and staff, facilities, assets and financial management
- teaching and learning, including curriculum and teaching, academic and creative activities, and admissions and student services
- governance and internal quality assurance, including organisational, administration, and quality monitoring measures adopted to ensure continuous improvement and sustainable development
- public relations and social integrity, including the contribution of CFCRS to the quality enhancement of parent universities, as well as to the wider academic and social community.

## China as higher education exporter

CFCRS play an important role in the internationalisation of Chinese higher education, contributing to the growth of international students' recruitment to China. According to the latest MoE statistics the number of international students studying in China in 2016 was just over 442,000, up 11.5 per cent from the previous year and 35 per cent over the past five years, placing the country among the top five destinations for internationally mobile students worldwide, and steadily approaching the target of hosting half a million international students by 2020. CFCRS contribute to this, with approximately 2,000 international students from different countries, with numbers growing year on year.

The growth of international student recruitment has been driven by a series of facilitating national policies, in particular the Belt and Road Initiative, supported by the government scholarship scheme, funding 10,000 international students per year from Belt and Road countries. Nearly half of all international students in China originate from countries included in the initiative, Pakistan being a telling example, having moved quickly into the top five sending countries over the past few years. Asia accounts for around 60 per cent of all international students, with South Korea by far the top sending country, with 70,500 students, followed by the US and Thailand (with about 23,800 and 23,000 students respectively). Europe is the second largest region for international students entering the country, while Africa reports the biggest growth rate.

The softening of post-study work visa regulations has also helped to increase international student recruitment, in particular at postgraduate level, allowing foreign postgraduate students graduating from Chinese universities to apply for a work visa within a year of graduation.

In addition, China is itself becoming an exporter of TNE, with Chinese universities now opening operations overseas. Branch campuses have recently been opened in Laos by Soochow University (2012) and in Malaysia by Xiamen University (2015); and collaborative projects have been set up or announced in a number of countries, including Thailand, Japan, Egypt and the UK. This expansion has been facilitated by the MoE, repealing in 2015 the Interim Measures for the Administration of Universities and Colleges Engaged in Overseas Education, thus allowing Chinese education institutions to establish overseas operations without needing administrative approval.

Looking at the UK, in 2015 Cardiff University and Beijing Normal University launched the Cardiff-Beijing Chinese Studies Joint College in Cardiff, Wales, offering programmes in Chinese language and cultural studies leading to a double degree, including a period of study in both countries.<sup>40</sup> In the same year, Imperial College and Zhejiang University in

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<sup>40</sup> 'Cardiff University in in new college joint venture with one of China's leading universities' (Wales Online), available at: [www.walesonline.co.uk/business/business-news/cardiff-university-new-college-joint-10081487](http://www.walesonline.co.uk/business/business-news/cardiff-university-new-college-joint-10081487).

Hangzhou announced plans to open a joint centre for transnational entrepreneurship in London.<sup>41</sup> More recently, Peking University announced that it will open a branch of its HSBC Business School in Oxford.<sup>42</sup>

The extended and growing network of over 500 Confucius Institutes around the world,<sup>43</sup> including 29 in the UK, facilitating the dissemination of Chinese culture overseas, might also support the development of Chinese education offered overseas. It is therefore to be expected that China will play an increasingly leading role in the internationalisation of higher education in the coming years, not only by continuing to send Chinese students overseas and developing education partnerships with foreign providers in China, but also by recruiting a growing number of international students into the country and expanding the offer of Chinese education overseas.

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41 'New UK-Chinese entrepreneurship hub planned for White City Campus', available at [www3.imperial.ac.uk/newsandeventspggrp/imperialcollege/newssummary/news\\_28-10-2015-13-49-11](http://www3.imperial.ac.uk/newsandeventspggrp/imperialcollege/newssummary/news_28-10-2015-13-49-11).

42 'Chinese university to open in Oxford despite ideological crackdown at home' (The Guardian), available at: [www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/apr/06/chinese-university-to-open-in-oxford-despite-ideological-crackdown-at-home](http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/apr/06/chinese-university-to-open-in-oxford-despite-ideological-crackdown-at-home).

43 Further information available at: <http://english.hanban.org/>.