

After the rush of new institutional partnerships over the last five or six years, is the China education market saturated or are there still opportunities for mutually beneficial collaboration? What are the challenges, advantages and disadvantages of working in partnership with Chinese institutions – is China a goldmine, or a landmine? What is the future of China's education market and the likely impact of its vocational education reforms? What effect will the one-child policy have on the pool of suitably qualified students; what defines the lives and aspirations of Chinese young people and how can institutions best reach them?

To answer these questions on education collaboration opportunities and assess the current and future student market in the world's second biggest economy, British Council China assembled an impressive range of experts for the three day 2012 Going Global education conference held in Westminster, Central London.

Speakers included a senior official at the Ministry of Education responsible for quality assessment and evaluation, a member of the committee that approves applications for joint programmes, a senior economist at one of the world's top 100 companies, professors involved in joint ventures and programmes with UK universities and a senior director of China's leading marketing consultancy.

Go out and find suitable partners

The most consistent message coming out of the China sessions at the large international conference, organised annually by the British Council, was that China is keen to make links with more foreign institutions to help build capacity, achieve internationalisation goals set in its ten year Education Development and Reform plan and push its universities up the world rankings, but it is not prepared to compromise on quality.

Mr Wang Lisheng, a senior official at the Ministry of Education's agency for quality assurance, said China's gross enrolment rate in higher education had gone up from 11.7 per cent in the year 2000 to 26.5 per cent in 2010 and was expected to reach 40 per cent by the year 2020.

The Chinese Government was helping to support programmes that gave students exposure to foreign institutions on Chinese soil, through programmes or new institutions set up jointly by Chinese and foreign partners, such as the Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool university or the Nottingham-Ningbo joint campus. Recruitment to these foreign campuses was strong, he said, and China wanted to encourage more *world class universities*, to bring their campuses to China.

By the end of March 2011 Chinese governments had approved over a 1000 joint programmes with partners from 30 countries and regions, mostly from the UK, Australia, Canada, the US and Russia. The bulk of the programmes were in management, economics, computer science and engineering.

"We are encouraging universities in China to go out and find suitable partners and we hope that by doing this we can introduce quality education resources through the internationalisation of Chinese education," Mr Wang told the conference session on the future of China's education market.

Mr Wang, the deputy director-general of the China Academic Degrees and Graduate Education Development Centre, gave delegates a preview of the results of the first trial evaluation of Chinese-Foreign cooperation in four provinces and municipalities.

It found the programmes had imported educational resources and explored new models of cultivating talent and promoted the internationalisation of Chinese institutions.

However, in a significant number of programmes there were found to be problems in terms of poor quality teaching staff and educational resources. Most focussed on undergraduate degrees and there was insufficient provision of postgraduate courses. The evaluation is to be rolled out to the whole country and will identify excellent programmes that can set an example for others.

Money-making ventures need not apply

It is important for the foreign and Chinese universities to be well matched in terms of programmes, academic ranking and mission, said Mr Wang. He revealed that his organisation is working on a new ranking system for Chinese universities and disciplines and that will help foreign universities to find this necessary good match. The Ministry will be working with Britain's Quality Assurance Agency to evaluate joint schools and programmes in China.

The Chinese government was keen that joint programmes should nurture talent and innovation. "When we are evaluating a proposal, you will get a very low mark if you just focus on making money," he said. There was a problem with some study overseas agencies that provided joint programmes as a way of making money because sometimes the Chinese students paid thousands of dollars but did not learn anything worthwhile. In some cases their diplomas were not even recognised on their return to China, he said.

Asked about the kind of programmes that were most likely to be approved, Professor Zhao Yanzhi, a member of China's applications review committee, said the review committee wanted world class universities to come to China. It was important to point out that it also valued high standard programmes from less renowned universities and also encouraged universities that were not very famous but offered something unique, such as the ability to serve local economic development and produce the sort of graduates needed by employers in the locality. The committee also looked for the foreign partner's potential to bring innovation to the Chinese partner, perhaps in terms of good student support through internships and practical courses.

Made in China – glitter like never before

Universities are not the only institutions facing pressure to raise their standards and embrace innovation to help China move away from the label "made in China" to "created in China". The transformation and expansion of vocational education is a Government priority. Professor Zhou Hanmin, the Director of China Association of Vocation Education, Shanghai, told the session "Made in China or Created in China" that the aim was not to abandon the label "made in China" but to make it glitter like never before. "The label made in China is often linked with things that are cheaper or poor quality; linked with sweatshops where the working life is unacceptably difficult and dangerous and that is not always the case," said Professor Shi Weiping, Director of the Institute of Vocational and Adult Education, East China Normal University.

The Government had introduced national plans to enhance technical innovation and "vigorously" develop better vocational training for unskilled workers making up 80 per cent of the workforce. There were plans to build 1,200 highly-skilled workers training centres with the help of large enterprises, vocational colleges and training institutions.

To encourage people to take up the opportunity, secondary school vocational education was being offered free of charge and schools and colleges were being required to shift from an academic, knowledge based teaching tradition to one that embraced employment-oriented education and training giving students the skills demanded by employers.

Value for money in the information age

An overview of China's economy and its bearing on the student market was provided by Jeremy Chan, a senior analyst for the SK Economic Research Institute. China recovered from the 2008 financial crisis more quickly than any other major economy but its growth had slowed slightly to 9.2 per cent, he

said. The downside was the imbalance in its economic growth: an over-reliance on low-cost manufacturing and export industries and a low reliance on services.

Household consumption was exceptionally low – 34 per cent of GDP compared with 70.6 per cent for the United States and 65.7 per cent for the UK. Economic growth was forecasted to slow in 2012 and inflation would be a concern as rising wages started to push up prices.

China wanted to move from its export-led, investment driven economy to a consumption driven economy. To move from low cost to high cost manufacturing the Chinese government wanted to invest in its human capital through more innovative, world-class higher education and increasing access to vocational education to improve the skills of its millions of peasant and migrant workers.

The demand for higher education was likely to grow, however, driven by ambitious parents. As family size has declined, parents were more willing to invest in their children's education and as the Chinese society has become more information-based, they are looking for value for money. They want their children to go to a high ranking university and get the right degree which gives them an edge in the employment market.

Chinese families and students are seeking the very best universities and courses and want to come back to China as individuals with elite degrees, Jazreel Goh, the Director of Education Marketing at British Council China, Beijing, said. She told delegates from universities and colleges around the world. "They don't just want a good university degree, they want high quality programmes so it is important not to compromise on academic requirements because if you make it too easy you will have no value with your new Chinese customers," she said. "Our message is that the UK wants the best and the brightest and these Chinese students want to be the best and the brightest."

Tiger mums and wolf dads

Over the last 30 years China's middle class has increased to 300 million people, 23 per cent of the population, and it is expected to reach 33 per cent by 2020. It is no longer only the rich Chinese families that send their children overseas for an education, according to Liu Yunshan, a professor of education at Peking University and the director of the China Institute of the Sociology of Education. Many ordinary families treat overseas study as an effective investment - '76 per cent of families sending children abroad have an annual income of under 300,000 yuan, or around £30,000', she said.

Professor Liu gave a fascinating insight into the modern middle class Chinese family and the expectations parents hold for their children. Most children born in the 1980s and 90s came from one-child families. "*With the one child policy the child is the centre of the family. Failure is not allowed. The only child is the only hope – the Chinese family want the very best for their child,*" she said. Not only did Chinese young people have tiger mums, they also had wolf dads making sure they did well at school and engaged in skills to show off, such as playing the piano or skill in art. China's youth were being deprived of their childhood, growing up with adults and under pressure to work hard and excel to meet family expectations.

A consequence of this drive to excel was the paradox that "best" devalues "good" and the Chinese family agonise over how to provide an elite qualification for their child in an era of mass education and increasing competition. Some chose to extend the length of education through post-graduate studies. Others turn to overseas study to provide an advantage in the employment stakes.

Chinese netizens and reaching Chinese audiences

Over the last few years the internet has taken hold of China's youth and they use technology in a more creative and involved way than the youth of other countries, such as America, Tina Hu, a senior director of CIC, China's leading social business intelligence provider, told the conference.

China does not have Facebook or Twitter but it has its own social media landscape. Weibo, the social media site, has 250 million users, Video, a video sharing site has 325 million, BSS, offering deeper

discussion about topics, has 144 million, SNS, an enclosed friendship site 244 million and Blogs 318 million. On Government figures, that may be underestimated, the number of internet users had skyrocketed from 111 million users in 2004 to 513 million in 2011

Brands were moving advertising away from TV and towards the social media, producing short videos to go “viral” and tapping into internet blogs, identifying the most followed bloggers or “thought leaders”.

Universities and colleges wanting the reach the student market could adopt the same strategy, finding the most popular tweeters and bloggers and perhaps getting them involved in on-line debates. Prioritising the on-line forums using current students and alumni, was a possible strategy, and also sites that students would visit, such as those belonging to airlines, banks and government bodies. “Looking at the big picture and with long-term planning, I would say China is a goldmine,” Tina Hu concluded.

Two way benefits

Concluding the last of three sessions dedicated to China, Professor Zhou Hanmin said the benefits of academic collaboration did not go all one way. China wanted international partnerships and programmes to raise the standard of its higher education system through innovation and fresh talent but in return the foreign universities were able to become more global in their outlook.

Foreign universities and their staff and students had access to a major economy in transition and a different culture and way of doing things: “In China there are thousands and thousands of corporations from other countries doing well and they need to have young talents working for and trading for them who understand the way of doing business, the cultural traditions and the language.”

[End]

Notes:

About Going Global

- Going Global 2012 is the biggest ever gathering of the world's higher education leaders - More than five hundred university Presidents, Vice-Chancellors and sector leaders were among the 1400 delegates;
- Going Global 2012 is the largest ever gathering of the world's leaders in HE, who are in London to try and establish a vision of the right models of the internationalisation of HE for a changing world;
- International HE is currently worth £14bn to the UK economy, is a vital driver of economic growth and innovation;
- Internationalisation of HE is a major tool for wider international engagement – The British Council's work keeps the UK at the heart of the international HE landscape and central to its development - and Going Global is a vital part of this strategy

British Council Going Global China programme

British Council China put up 3 China sessions at Going Global 2012 attended by a total of around 400 delegates. These sessions are:

- a) A pre-conference practitioners' workshop on student recruitment and partnership opportunities in China - *China Landmine or Goldmine?*
- b) A higher education session on the pilot evaluation of China-foreign joint programmes across 4 provinces in China and a discussion on China's further opening up policy on joint partnerships – *The Future of China's Education Market*
- c) A further education session discussing China's move into high value manufacturing and the vocational skills requirements - *Made in China or Created in China*

A delegation of 11 key speakers representing private sector, universities, Ministry of Education and vocational education specialists formed the panel of experts in the sessions led and formed by the British Council China. Speakers include:

- **WANG Lisheng**, Deputy Director-General, China Academic Degrees and Graduate Education Development Centre, Ministry of Education
- **Professor GONG Ke**, President, Nankai University
- **Professor ZHOU Hanmin**, Director, China Association of Vocational Education
- **Professor YING Yashu**, Dean of International School, Beijing University of Posts and Telecommunications
- **Professor ZHAO Yanzhi**, Professor of Finance, Dongbei University of Finance and Economics
- **Prof. Dr SHI Weiping**, Professor and Director, Institute of Vocational and Adult Education, East China Normal University
- **Dr. LU Hong**, Chongqing College of Electronic Engineering
- **Professor LIU Yunshan**, Professor of Education, Peking University
- **Jeremy Chan**, Analyst, Economic Research Team, SK China Economic Research Institute
- **Tina HU**, Senior Director, CIC Research & Consulting
- **Paul Turner**, Director, NCUK Asia Pacific Office