

Thinking outside the box in China

By Thomas Clayburn

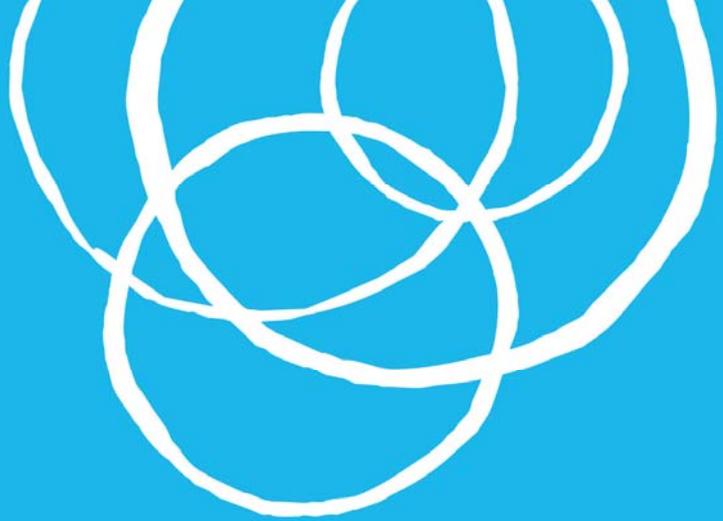
One year ago, Education Secretary Michael Gove expressed his concerns about declining UK results in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) tests and added: 'If our schools, and young people, are to become internationally competitive again we must learn from the best in the world.'

At the end of November, the Connecting Classrooms team in China organised a global conference in Beijing that illustrated how the British Council is supporting that objective. The conference included speakers and participants from the departments of education in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Their prominent role was no accident: for decades we've worked hard to disseminate UK best practice around the world but, as Michael Gove indicated, we have to work harder to bring the best global practices back to the UK. This will create value for Britain while simultaneously enhancing the British Council's profile in the UK.

Called 'Leading Learning for the 21st Century', the conference leveraged our global convening power and expertise in education by bringing together senior education policy makers from diverse backgrounds. These included China, South Korea and Singapore, whose students excelled in the latest round of PISA testing, as well as the UK, Egypt, India and many other countries. The conference also included representatives from government and business as well as civil society and academia, among them Andreas Schleicher, from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, who oversees the highly influential PISA test.



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The discussions focused on global trends in education policy and practice and the importance of learning from other countries in order to better prepare students for a globalised world. The talks also covered the role of education in conferring cultural influence. Chengdu vice mayor Fu Yonglin told the conference that China's power and role in the world would not be primarily determined by China's economic might, but by what China will be able to contribute to global knowledge and culture.

Panel discussions and sessions on effective curriculum assessment, leadership and raising school standards, and global visions in local curriculum supported our ambition to position the British Council as a thought leader in the sector. It challenged the stereotype that education is predominantly managed by professionals working solely in the field of education. Moreover, it demonstrated the importance of consulting with business, civil society and other stakeholders to build education systems that produce globally competitive workforces with the skills that employers require.