



China's National Education Plan 2025

(Information as at July 2025)

WHY THIS MATTERS FOR AUSTRALIAN EDUCATION PROVIDERS AND STAKEHOLDERS

- This information for Australian education providers and stakeholders is intended to offer an overview of the major elements of China's current national education plan. It should not be considered official Australian Government endorsement.
- The *Plan for Building China into a Leading Country in Education by 2035* ('the Plan') is central to China's national development program, with international engagement a clear focus. The Plan emphasises that China's education providers should support Central Government priorities and policies, including the delivery of political content such as Xi Jinping Thought.
- For Australian governments, institutions and researchers, the long-term vision and investment in priority areas and critical and emerging technologies presents both opportunities and risks.
- As with all international partnerships, stakeholders are advised to consider their individual circumstances when considering engagement. This could include examination of institutions' individual standards, core purpose and mission, governance, institutional independence, academic integrity, risk mitigation and alignment with Australia's national interests.
- Australian state, territory and local governments and public universities should consider obligations under the Foreign Arrangements Scheme when negotiating arrangements with foreign entities.

KEY MESSAGES FROM THIS POLICY UPDATE:

- International cooperation and exchange is central to China's plan to become a leading country in education by 2035. China's provincial and municipal governments and Chinese education institutions will look to increase their international cooperation and funding for education.
- We are already seeing an increase in interest for international cooperation as China continues to build the capacity and quality of its education institutions. This interest is expected to continue into 2027 (when interim milestones the Plan are due to be achieved) and beyond.
- There are synergies with Australian Government education priorities in teacher workforce development, VET-industry engagement and tertiary harmonisation, with continued policy engagement by both countries to build the bilateral education relationship.
- Opportunities will emerge across the education landscape—from pre-school education, schools, vocational education and training, higher education, research and continuing education.
- While the Plan covers existing policies, significant new measures are included such as the commitment to increase investment, development of doctoral programs with global influence, a strategic investment mechanism for education, a city-county integrated school management model, early identification of promising students, increased funding for vocational education, and the launch of a National Digital University.

Introduction

On 19 January 2025, China launched a comprehensive education strategy, titled **Outline of a Plan for Building China into a Leading Country in Education 2024-2035** (the Plan).¹ The Plan sets a course for China to have a mature, world-leading education system in place by 2035, and to have made significant steps toward achieving this goal by 2027. It reinforces the Central Government's commitment to achieving 'national rejuvenation' through education.

The Plan was jointly issued by the Chinese Communist Party ('the Party') Central Committee and the State Council and builds on the previous China Education Modernisation 2035 Plan.² Within the guiding framework of Xi Jinping Thought, the Plan aims to take China's education system from 'big' to 'strong'—continuing its drive to move beyond quantity and capacity building, towards a high-quality, world-leading education system.

Under the Plan, China's education system is expected to expand enrolments at top universities, adopt a more integrated vocational education and training (VET) system, place stronger emphasis on science and research (including new courses already announced), and a school environment that places greater focus on student well-being and holistic development.

China is expressing continued commitment to expanding international education collaboration and exchange through the Plan. Australian stakeholders are likely to see new opportunities and risks emerge as governments in China at all levels and institutions implement the Plan.

The Plan offers an overview of China's national education strategy, touching on all key sectors from early childhood to higher education and research, but lacks detailed implementation guidelines—suggesting that perhaps additional policy documents or other guidance will follow to support its rollout.

Since the late 1970s, Central Government policies have recognised the role of education in contributing to the country's national and economic development agenda. While many of the initiatives outlined have been previously introduced or are already in progress, the Plan gives education an elevated strategic importance and political prioritisation. In July 2025, China's Minister for Education, Professor Huai Jinpeng, for example, stated that, for the first time, the Plan sets out an integrated strategic arrangement to strengthen the country through education, science and technology and by supporting outstanding professionals.³

The inclusion of existing measures reflects the Central Government's desire to accelerate progress toward its goals for education. Since its release, we have seen a marked increase in both the requests for international cooperation, and the pace and frequency of domestic policy announcements.

For Australian stakeholders, the Plan offers a starting point to understand China's broader educational, social, and economic landscape.

¹ The Plan is referred to variously as a Blueprint, Guide or Strategy in English reports, the official Chinese translation uses the term 'Plan'; Chinese Communist Party Central Committee and the State Council. (2025, January 19). [中共中央 国务院印发《教育强国建设规划纲要2024—2035年》](#) [The Party Central Committee and the State Council issued the Outline for Building a Powerful Nation in Education (2024–2035)]. The Central Government of the People's Republic of China.

² Education and Research Section, Australian Embassy, Beijing (2020, April 1) [China's education modernisation plan towards 2035](#), Department of Education

³ National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China. (2025, July 18). [深入学习贯彻习近平总书记关于教育的重要论述 扎实推动教育强国建设](#) [Thoroughly study and implement General Secretary Xi Jinping's important discourse on education and solidly promote the building of a strong education nation]

OBJECTIVES AND KEY MILESTONES

The Plan provides a roadmap for education reform in two distinct stages:

- By **2027**, the initial requirements for a high-quality education system—from preschool through to higher education—will have been established, with significant improvements in teaching standards, infrastructure and governance.
- By **2035**, China will have established a mature, world-class education system, underpinned by robust governance and quality assurance frameworks, modern curricula and state of the art learning environments.

MORAL AND POLITICAL EDUCATION

Against the strong outward-looking focus described above, the Plan reiterates the central position of moral and political education in China's education system. In this context, 'moral' refers to character traits and values aligned with socialist ideals and traditional Chinese virtues, seen as essential for preparing future generations to 'shoulder the great responsibility of national rejuvenation'.

The Plan is firmly rooted in Xi Jinping Thought—which emphasises communist ideals and promotes heightened patriotism through education—and which has been promulgated through educational directives issued under President Xi Jinping's leadership.

The Plan introduces updated administrative strategies—such as strengthening the political role of field-level officials and continuing efforts to develop textbooks that reflect core Party ideology. In addition, a clear message is to encourage loyalty to the Party and foster patriotism among students.⁴

GLOBAL GOVERNANCE, INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATION AND EXCHANGE

International collaboration and exchange are a strengthened key feature of China's strategy to building a world-class education system. The Plan reiterates China's commitment to 'opening up', with internationalisation of the education system structured around three pillars:

- enhancing China's capacity to attract and educate professionals from across the globe
- expanding academic exchange and research collaboration with foreign partners, and
- actively participating in global education governance.

While a commitment to 'opening up' is not new, we expect that the pace and intensity of efforts to engage internationally will increase following release of the Plan.⁵ China remains committed to offering its students a world class education and is positioning itself as a leading force in shaping the future global education landscape.

To achieve these goals China is strengthening its inbound study programs, supporting the global expansion of Chinese language learning, and taking a more prominent role in international scientific research initiatives. This includes expanding academic partnerships and research cooperation worldwide and encouraging Chinese universities to lead or participate in global scientific projects, joint laboratories and to work with international organisations.

⁴ Education and Research Section, Australian Embassy, Beijing (2024, July 17) [Patriotic Education Law of China](#), Department of Education

⁵ Education and Research Section (2020, June 26). [China to persist in the 'opening-up' of education](#). Department of Education.



Global education governance

The Plan reiterates commitments to strengthen China's presence in global education governance. This includes deepening cooperation with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and other international organisations, and strengthen its engagement in multilateral cooperation on education. It also plans to establish an international education cooperation zone within the framework of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership.

In recent years, we have seen China taken on a more prominent role in international collaboration and exchange in education, particularly in areas such as digital learning and global collaboration. Since 2023, it has co-hosted the World Digital Education Conference in partnership with the Chinese National Commission for UNESCO, and in 2024, formally launched the World Digital Education Alliance. In 2020, amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, Tsinghua University and the UNESCO Institute for Information Technologies in Education established the Global MOOC (Massive Online Open Courses) and Online Education Alliance, which continues to host annual conferences, publish research, and facilitate international dialogue for online learning.

China's interest in global education governance and multilateral education engagement can also be seen in developments such as the UNESCO International Institute for STEM Education in Shanghai, which will be one of only ten Category 1 UNESCO institutes worldwide, and the first located outside Europe and North America.

Chinese international students

According to the Plan, the Central Government will strengthen education and guidance for Chinese students studying abroad and make the system for sending students abroad more. Outstanding individuals will be encouraged to pursue further study and training at internationally renowned universities and institutions.

Promoting the 'Study-in-China' brand

The 'Study-in-China' brand—an initiative first raised in 2016 to attract professionals globally and international recognition of China's education system—will continue to be promoted, giving foreign students access to high-quality education in China. The value of a Chinese education will also be promoted through youth exchange programs. China's Vice Minister for Education has stated that China will launch 800 key international summer school projects in the next three years. In May 2025, an official logo and service platform for the 'Study-in-China' brand was introduced.

China's international expansion and academic exchange

The Plan commits China to increasing its education presence overseas. Chinese universities have already established campuses in Southeast Asia, building on the region's proximity to China, and long history of educational engagement, exchange and large overseas Chinese communities. A recent example is Suzhou University in Laos, initiated in 2008 and officially established in 2011. This was the first foreign-funded university approved by the Lao Government and the first overseas university approved by China's Central Government. Likewise, Xiamen University has established a branch campus in Malaysia which primarily serves students in Malaysia and the broader Southeast Asian region.



Under the Plan, the MoE has committed to supporting high-level research-oriented universities to initiate or participate in international mega-science facilities and to develop significant international research projects (including through academic alliances and support to establish international organisations). Efforts will be made to advance innovation, including through international joint laboratories at top-tier universities and research institutes. China will continue to participate in international ‘open science’ cooperation.

STRATEGIC INVESTMENT

The Plan introduces a new **strategic investment mechanism for education**, signalling a significant shift in the Central Government’s approach to education funding.

The Plan includes a mandate that public education expenditure must not decline, and all levels of government are required to increase education spending year on year. A new target for ‘National Fiscal Expenditure’ on education has been set requiring that *more than 4* per cent of China’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) must be spent on education (the previous target required education spending to be *no less than 4* per cent).

However, maintaining this level of investment has been challenging amid economic pressures and fiscal constraints. In addition, the Plan stipulates that both total and per-student public education funding must increase year-on-year. This may be to safeguard education funding from being diverted to other uses and support the development of sustainable, high-quality education, particularly in central, western, and less-developed regions.⁶

The Plan encourages greater diversification of funding for education through collaborative funding models involving universities, enterprises and individuals of society.

RAISING TEACHING STANDARDS ACROSS ALL LEVELS

To support ongoing reform and modernisation of China’s education system, the Plan places strong emphasis on cultivating a qualified and professional teaching workforce across all levels of education.

For school education, it prioritises enhancing the quality of teacher training institutions and ensuring equitable access to qualified educators, particularly in rural and underserved areas. For vocational education, the Plan reinforces the ‘dual teacher’ model, integrating instructors with both industry experience and effective teaching capabilities. At the university level, efforts will be made to attract top-tier faculty from around the world, with researchers supported to transition into teaching roles to enrich academic instruction.

In May 2025, the MoE and National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) launched a nationwide capability enhancement project for teaching staff which reinforces these objectives.⁷

Raising the status and salaries of teachers and lecturers

The Plan acknowledges the need to improve teachers’ compensation and elevate public recognition of the profession—aiming to make teaching a more respected, attractive, and sustainable career path in China.

The Plan’s support for teachers follows a recent policy document published in December 2024 by seven Central Government bodies including the MoE on offering tangible support to teachers.

⁶ Basic Education of China. (2025, Feb 12). 顾明远：落实《规划纲要》要关注的教育热点问题 [Gu Mingyuan: Key education issues to focus on in implementing the ‘Planning Outline’]. 新华网江苏频道 [Xinhua News Jiangsu Channel].

⁷ Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China (MoE). (2025, May 8). 教育部、国家发展改革委联合启动实施教师教育能力提升工程 [MoE and National Development and Reform Commission Jointly Launch Teacher Education Capacity Enhancement Project].

⁸According to the Plan, teachers will also be given priority access to social services, have the burden of non-teaching and administrative tasks reduced, be fairly compensated for after-school work, enjoy improved retirement conditions, and receive increased public recognition of outstanding teaching.

Furthermore, the Plan includes a commitment to recruit high-level teachers from all over the world and strengthen international exchanges and cooperation in teacher training.

DEVELOPMENT OF EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS – A FOCUS ON AUTONOMY, SCIENCE AND STANDARDISATION

A new initiative under the Plan is the launch of new teaching materials, including ‘China Series’ textbooks. This series is designed to reflect core Party ideology and national values, with its development and production overseen by the China’s Ministry of Education (MoE). The first textbook in the series, *Political Economy of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics*, was officially released in February 2025. This seeks to address some concerns related to reliance on curriculum materials either directly imported from overseas or developed without sufficient alignment with the ideological standards set by the Central Government.

At the higher education and vocational levels, the Plan encourages the development of curriculum materials with a focus on standardisation, quality, and innovation. Directly sourced foreign materials are most likely to continue to be incorporated in disciplines and majors where there is a need to build on foreign expertise and ‘cutting edge’ knowledge; otherwise, we expect that curriculum materials developed in China will be preferred.

DIGITAL EDUCATION AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

The Plan builds upon China’s focus on educational digitalisation and integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into its education system. Its mandate includes strategically leveraging digital education to promote lifelong learning; positioning digital pedagogy as a national priority; and harnessing the education system to accelerate China’s AI advancement.

The document reaffirms existing mechanisms—such as qualifications frameworks, credit banking systems, and outcome-based lifelong learning pathways—while introducing a new structural element: the **National Digital University**, envisioned as the central platform for digital learning infrastructure. A follow-up document on the digitalisation of education, published in April 2025, outlines plan for the establishment of the National Digital University, which will see it pilot digital degree recognition from this Chinese university in collaboration with overseas universities.⁹

AI is viewed as a precondition to China achieving its broader economic and strategic aims and modernisation agenda. The Plan foreshadowed a new national strategy for digital education, which was launched on 16 May 2025 at the conclusion of the 2025 WDEC.¹⁰ The White Paper on Smart Education in China and the National Education Digitalisation Strategic Plan 2.0 includes commitments to integrate AI across all levels of education¹¹. Key elements include improving access, equity, personalisation (using AI to evaluate learner competencies and tailor resources accordingly), flexibility and global reach.

⁸ MoE (2024, December 10). [教育部等七部门印发进一步加强尊师惠师工作的若干措施](#) [MoE and six other departments issue measures to further strengthen respect and support for teachers].

⁹ MoE. (2025, April 11). [教育部等九部门关于加快推进教育数字化的意见](#) [Opinions of the MoE and eight other departments on accelerating the advancement of education digitalization].

¹⁰ MoE. (2025, May 16). [《中国智慧教育白皮书》和启动国家教育数字化战略行动 2.0](#) [Release of the White Paper on Smart Education in China and Launch of National Education Digitalization Strategic Action 2.0]

¹¹ *ibid*

Other features of China's digital education strategy include the World Digital Education Alliance mentioned above, the Global Digital Development index, and an 'exportation of MOOCs' policy to serve learners worldwide, spreading China's influence and providing users with deeper understanding of Chinese perspectives. Aligned with these approaches, China continues to develop its national smart education platform, Smart Education of China, including to a global audience.

HIGHER EDUCATION

Higher education is a core element of the Plan, with a goal to elevate the quality, structure, and global competitiveness of the higher education system to achieve China's development agenda. This means not only responding to current labour market demand but preparing for the future.

Governance and structural reform

As part of the ongoing effort of China's higher education structural reform, the Plan is guiding higher education institutions to develop along distinct pathways aligned with their primary mission and research speciality— be it comprehensive education, research, applied learning or vocational education. One central component of the structural reform of higher education is to differentiate institutions based on their functional positioning, contributions, and distinctive strengths.

By introducing incentive mechanisms aligned with these classifications, the reform encourages universities to develop unique profiles and excel in specific domains. This strategy is designed to foster a more diverse and balanced higher education ecosystem, where institutions can leverage their comparative advantages to contribute meaningfully to national development goals.

Aligning with national priorities and industry needs

In line with the Plan, China is expanding and refining academic majors to ensure that students are studying in areas that contribute to China's national rejuvenation and is prepared to 'take extraordinary measures' to do so.

In addition to the continued development of disciplines identified under the Double First-Class initiative, key areas for development are foundational disciplines such as mathematics and physics; disciplines in emerging fields such as AI and quantum technology; and interdisciplinary areas that combine knowledge across traditional boundaries.¹²

In April 2025, the MoE released an updated undergraduate program catalogue, which saw the inclusion of 29 new majors aligned with China's national priorities, technological development needs, and market demand. Majors in regional and country studies, carbon neutrality science and engineering, marine science and technology and healthcare security have been added to meet China's national priorities. Program majors in intelligent molecular engineering, medical equipment and device engineering and spatiotemporal information engineering have been introduced to meet China's technological development needs. Majors in international cruise management, and aviation sports have also been added to respond to market demand; as well as a raft of new majors aimed at integrating AI into areas such as education, audiovisual engineering and drama.

In April 2025, the MoE announced a new approval mechanism—the exceptional establishment mechanism—which will allow for fast tracked approval for academic programs in emerging and critical strategic disciplines aligned with national strategies. As a result, six universities, including Beihang University in Beijing, have added low-altitude technology (i.e. drones) and engineering programs, which are included in the fast tracked process, to support China's low-altitude economy.

¹² Education and Research Section (2022, 16 September) [Second round announced of Double First Class initiative](#), Department of Education.



According to the 2024 National Education Development Statistical Bulletin, the MoE has approved the establishment of 68 new undergraduate level higher education institutions, with an emphasis on science, engineering, agriculture and medicine.¹³

In addition, many of the newly approved institutions show stronger regional characteristics, aligning their focus area with local development strategies.

Expanded enrolments at top universities

The Plan reaffirms China's commitment to expand undergraduate offerings and undergraduate enrolments. Implementation is already underway. Since late 2024, several top-tier Chinese universities including Tsinghua University, Peking University and Shanghai Jiao Tong University have increased their undergraduate admissions, particularly in cutting-edge and interdisciplinary fields. Programs in fields such as AI, integrated circuits and emerging technologies are among the most sought after.

FOSTERING ACADEMICS, RESEARCHERS AND PROFESSIONALS

In 2021, China released its first comprehensive plan on education evaluation, aiming to enhance governance and improve the quality of education. A key focus of the Plan was to shift away from an overemphasis on grades, academic titles, and other abstract or formal indicators, and instead promote more holistic and meaningful measures of educational outcomes. The Plan is continuing this narrative, placing emphasis on innovation, quality, comprehensive outcome rather than scores or academic titles. This applies to all levels of education and research and forms part of the work supporting 'well-rounded development of individuals'.

Building a Globally Competitive Graduate Education System

As part of its education reform agenda, China is aiming to expand postgraduate education, with a particular focus on increasing the number of doctoral students and strengthening professional degree programs. A key priority is to modernise and internationalise doctoral training, with the goal of building a globally recognised system that enhances the country's ability to develop leading researchers and attract top scholars from around the world.

Supporting graduate employment outcomes

Chinese graduates face a highly competitive and challenging labour market. In 2025, China's higher education institutions produced 12.22 million graduates—marking the fourth consecutive year of over 10 million graduates—and with the college-age population projected to grow until 2032, employment pressures are expected to intensify.¹⁴ Currently, China's youth unemployment rate is extremely high, sitting just below 18% in July 2025.¹⁵

The Plan calls for further efforts to deliver high quality employment services for college graduates and for graduates to have greater access to high quality employment that utilises their skills and capabilities. The Plan makes note of the need for better alignment between the China's education system and its labour market and calls for a more flexible and responsive system. In April 2025, the Central Government issued the *Opinions on Accelerating the Development of a High-Quality Employment Service System for University Graduates*, which outlines a goal to establish, within three

¹³ MoE. (2025, June 11). 2024 年全国教育事业发展统计公报 [2024 National Statistical Bulletin on the Development of Education]; the new approval includes approval of new institutions as well as upgrade of higher vocational colleges to universities and renaming of institutions.

¹⁴ Sohu. (2023, August 11). 高考转折点! 2032 年, 1785 万?详细数据研究解密 [Turning point in Gaokao! 17.85 million in 2032? Detailed data analysis revealed]. 搜狐网 [Sohu News].

¹⁵ Central Government statistics as of July 2025; see 国际统计部 [National Bureau of Statistics], 国家数据 [National Data]

to five years, a comprehensive and inclusive employment support system for graduates.¹⁶ These measures are aimed at progress to bring down the high youth unemployment rate.

VET AS A PILLAR FOR MASTER CRAFTSMEN AND TECHNICAL TALENT

China continues reform of its vocational education system. The Plan promotes deeper integration between industry and education, while expanding flexible pathways that allow students to move between vocational and academic tracks. This approach is designed to broaden students' options for personal and professional development. Additionally, the Plan seeks to enhance the quality of vocational institutions and improve policy support for skilled professionals, who have traditionally received less recognition than their academic peers.

Accelerating VET and industry integration

Industry-education integration in vocational training is still a relatively new concept in China but is gaining traction. According to a 2023 action plan, the country aims to establish around 50 pilot cities by 2025 to test and refine mechanisms for collaboration, involving over 10,000 enterprises.¹⁷ These efforts are focused on strategic emerging industries such as information technology, integrated circuits, artificial intelligence, industrial internet, energy storage, intelligent manufacturing, biomedicine, and new materials, as well as essential service sectors like elderly care, childcare, and domestic services.

Like the higher education sector, VET has also seen recent changes to its course offerings. In December 2024, the MoE added 40 new majors to the VET directory, marking the largest expansion since the latest revision in 2021. Over half the new majors target practical areas such as advanced manufacturing and digital industries, precision manufacturing technology for aerospace equipment, and digital fashion design.

In addition to working with existing industry partners, China is continuing its efforts to develop a highly skilled technical workforce to support emerging industries such as AI, renewable energy, and advanced manufacturing.

Integration of vocational and general education pathways

Under the Plan, China is working to broaden students' development pathways by enabling more flexible transitions between vocational and academic education. This includes strengthening the integration between secondary vocational schools and general academic high schools, as well as between secondary and tertiary vocational institutions, supported by reforms to testing and admissions systems.

China will also continue to expand access to the Vocational Bachelor degree – both in terms of the number of institutions that offer this degree and in terms of overall student enrolment.¹⁸ These degrees are four-year undergraduate programs that combine academic study with practical training and are designed to produce highly skilled technical professionals in fields such as advanced manufacturing, digital technology and applied engineering.

¹⁶ MoE. (2025, April 8). 中共中央办公厅 国务院办公厅关于加快构建普通高等学校毕业生高质量就业服务体系的意见 [Opinions of the General Office of the CCPCC and the General Office of the State Council on accelerating the establishment of a high-quality employment service system for graduates of regular higher education institutions]

¹⁷ National Development and Reform Commission, People's Republic of China. (2023 年 6 月 13 日). 关于印发《职业教育产教融合赋能提升行动实施方案(2023—2025 年)》的通知 [Notice on the issuance of the Implementation Plan for the Empowerment and Enhancement Action of Industry-Education Integration in Vocational Education (2023–2025)].

¹⁸ The vocational bachelor degree was first introduced in 2019 as part of China's VET reform plan; Education and Research Section (2019, June 1). [China announces major reform to vocational education sector](#). Department of Education.

As of June 2025, China has approved the establishment of 87 vocational universities, to offer vocational bachelor degrees. While Vocational Bachelor's degree programs only account for a small share of China's VET sector, they have achieved significant momentum, with rapid year-on-year growth.¹⁹

Improving VET graduates' status and employment prospects

The Plan reaffirms China's commitment to strengthening vocational education and, for the first time, explicitly states that a portion of the newly added education funds will be directed toward supporting vocational development.

The importance of raising the status of vocational education was first highlighted in China's 2019 Vocational Education Reform Plan²⁰, which called for vocational pathways to be viewed as equally valuable alternatives to academic degrees. This commitment was further reinforced in a high-level policy document released in 2021, which, for the first time, outlined concrete measures to make this vision a reality.²¹

These concrete measures included ensuring that vocational school graduates receive equal treatment to their academic peers in key areas such as employment, household registration, recruitment, professional title evaluation, and career advancement. Together, these reforms signal a shift toward a more inclusive and equitable education system that recognises and supports diverse career pathways. These priorities are reaffirmed in the current Plan, which calls for continued and coordinated efforts to embed these measures across the vocational education system.

Vocational education graduates in China have traditionally received fewer benefits and incentives compared to graduates with bachelor level degrees and above—particularly in terms of residential registration (hukou) policies—which influences access to housing, quality healthcare, education for children, employment prospects, and opportunities within the public sector.²² Since the 2021 announcement, several provinces and municipalities including Hubei, Beijing, Sichuan and Guangdong have issued guidelines to ensure equal treatment for vocational graduates in areas such as hukou eligibility and related benefits.

SCHOOL EDUCATION

The Plan's application to primary and secondary school emphasises quality and equity, with the MoE's framing of quality closely intertwined with further standardisation—including of school governance, curriculum, and student's physical and aesthetic development.

Allocation of resources in response to demographic change

China is facing a conundrum when it comes to supporting a world-class school education system. Currently the Chinese school-aged population is continuing to grow—driven by a surge in birth rates between 2007 and 2017. Providing high-quality education to this cohort of students will require substantial investment in school infrastructure, teaching workforce and other educational resources.

Once this cohort reaches its peak, the school-aged population is set to rapidly decline—which may result in a diminished need for schools in some areas, with flow on impacts for infrastructure, teaching workforce and the broader economy.

¹⁹ The latest official data is for 2023 – there were 33 vocational universities and 1547 higher vocational institutions. Enrolment for vocational universities was 89,900 and higher vocational education was 5.55 million.

²⁰ Education and Research Section (2019, June 1). [China announces major reform to vocational education sector](#). Department of Education.

²¹ Education and Research Section, (2022, April 22). [China's focus on vocational education towards 2035](#). Department of Education.

²² Education and Research Section (2019, August 29). [China's Hukou system and impact on study abroad](#). Department of Education.

In response, the Plan introduces a city-county integrated management model for school education. This approach aims to break down barriers between different education stages and enable dynamic adjustment of resources—such as teaching staff and school facilities—to better respond to the fluctuating school-aged population. The ability to monitor and respond to demographic changes in a timely and coordinated manner is not only essential for maintaining educational quality but also has wider relevance for workforce planning and public service delivery. Given the scale of China’s student population, effective resource management is critical to ensuring long-term social and economic stability.

Narrowing the disparity between urban and rural school education

The Plan also seeks to address disparities in participation and educational attainment in China’s primary and secondary education system, narrowing the gap between urban and rural areas and focussing efforts on disadvantaged regions, student cohorts and underperforming schools, with a focus on student retention.

Measures already being implemented include rotating outstanding teachers and school leaders between urban and rural areas, promoting small class teaching, upgrading rural schools to meet national standards, and improving boarding school conditions and management. A key driver behind China’s vigorous push for digital education is its potential to reduce the rural-urban education gap by enabling students in remote and underserved areas to access high-quality teaching resources and learning materials. Additionally, improvements will be made to the care system and mechanisms for children left behind in rural areas by migrant worker parents and for children with disabilities living in rural areas.

Science education in schools

In line with science and technology measures implemented for universities and VET, the Plan highlights the importance of science education in schools and introducing students to research-related subjects.

To support this, the Plan introduces two major initiatives: the Fertile Ground Initiative, which focuses on building scientific literacy among primary and secondary students, and the Emerging Talent Program aimed at identifying and supporting high school students with potential for innovation.

The MoE has issued new guidelines to support science and research development in schools, including specific measures such as requiring every school to appoint at least one 'vice-principal for science' to oversee the implementation.²³ In January 2025, the MoE established a *National Expert Committee on Science Education for Primary and Secondary Schools* to oversee the works of integrating science into school education.²⁴

Well-rounded development and student health

The Plan highlights the need for the education system to support well rounded student development, to strengthen physical health, aesthetic education, and hands-on learning, as well as the traditional focus areas of moral and academic learning.

Building on earlier initiatives, it reinforces the ‘health first’ policy and mandates at least two hours of daily physical activity in schools, alongside expanded soccer training and nationwide efforts to combat short-sightedness and obesity. Addressing mental health issues among school aged children

²³ Wang, Q. (2025, February 12) *Greater scientific inquiry to be fostered in schools*. China Daily

²⁴ MoE (2025, January 1). [National Expert Committee on Science Education for Primary and Secondary Schools established](#).



is also a growing concern in China, and the Plan commits to promoting mental health education and establishing a national student mental health monitoring program and early warning system.

These efforts complement and progress the 'Double Reduction' Policy, introduced in 2021 to reduce the academic burden on students, while also encouraging more students to consider a vocational pathway, and at an earlier stage in their education.²⁵

Education for children with disabilities

In China, education for children with disabilities generally occurs in specialised schools, referred to in China as Special Education. The Plan includes a commitment to support counties with a population over 200,000 to run a special education school that meets basic standards.

Where conditions allow, localities will be encouraged to establish schools that provide continuous access to education for children with disabilities spanning a full 15 years from preschool through to senior high. This integrated model is designed to provide a smooth transition between different levels of schooling and tailored curriculum support for children with disabilities to address the current low preschool enrolment and limited access to high school for these children.²⁶

EARLY CHILDHOOD AND PRESCHOOL EDUCATION

One of the most notable new initiatives in the Plan is the conditional allowance for kindergartens to enroll children aged 2 to 3. This aligns with the new National Preschool Education Law that has taken effect from June 2025, which encourages this service.²⁷

The initiative to broaden access to preschool for younger children underscores a growing recognition of the critical role early childhood development plays in shaping cognitive abilities. It also reflects China's response to broader demographic and societal challenges, including a declining birth rate and an aging population. Enhancing access to childcare and preschool services is expected to alleviate the burden of parenting, promote higher fertility rates, and support greater participation of women in the workforce.

CONCLUSION

The Plan signals not only a deepened national commitment to educational reform but also a clear intention for continued international engagement. As China expands its investment in education, international partners can expect increased demand for collaboration in curriculum development, joint research, faculty exchange, and capacity building. The emphasis on world-class universities and academic disciplines suggests that China will continue to seek global benchmarks and partnerships to elevate its institutions. In vocational education, China's push for industry-education integration and applied learning creates space for overseas governments, institutions and companies with strong technical training models to contribute expertise.

ENQUIRIES

For enquiries, please contact [Education and Research Section](#) of the Australian Embassy in Beijing. Our other resources are at [China Resources - Department of Education, Australian Government](#)

²⁵ Education and Research Section (2022, January 20) [Double Reduction Plan reduces homework and off-campus tutoring for Chinese school students](#). Department of Education

²⁶ 15-year continuous special education is a system for students with disabilities allowing students with a disability to have with continuous access to the same school from preschool through to senior secondary level without the need to re-enrol at each stage.

²⁷ MoE (2024) [China Passes National Preschool Education Law](#), MoE, 9 November



KEY TERMS

English translation	Chinese term
<i>Outline of a Plan for Building China into a Leading Country in Education 2024-2035</i>	教育强国建设规划纲要(2024—2035 年)
China Education Modernisation Plan 2035	中国教育现代化 2035
Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era	习近平新时代中国特色社会主义思想
Xi Jinping Educational Philosophy	习近平总书记关于教育的重要论述
Education 'opening up' strategy	教育对外开放战略
International Education Cooperation Zone	国际教育合作园区
Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership	区域全面经济伙伴关系
UNESCO International Institute for STEM Education (IISTEM)	国际 STEM 教育研究所
'Study in China' brand	“留学中国”品牌
Strategic Investment Mechanism for Education	教育战略性投入机制
Dual qualified teachers	双师型教师
'China Series' textbooks	“中国系列”原创教材
National Digital University	国家数字大学
<i>White Paper on Smart Education in China</i>	中国智慧教育白皮书
<i>National Education Digitalisation Strategic Plan 2.0</i>	国家教育数字化战略行动 2.0
World Digital Education Alliance	世界数字教育联盟
Global Digital Development Index	全球数字教育发展指数
Promote the export of MOOCs overseas	推动优质慕课（大型开放式网络课程）走出去
Smart Education of China Platform	国家智慧教育平台
<i>Opinions of the Ministry of Education and eight other departments on accelerating the advancement of education digitalization</i>	教育部等九部门关于加快推进教育数字化的意见
Double First-Class initiative	双一流计划
Extraordinary establishment mechanism	超常布局急需学科专业
Catalogue of undergraduate majors in general colleges and universities (2025)	普通高等学校本科专业目录(2025 年)
New Eight-Level Worker system	“新八级工”制度
Small class teaching	小班化教
Small scale rural schools	乡村小规模学校
Boarding school	寄宿制学校
Eligible Rural Migrant Population	符合条件的农业转移人口
Well-rounded development	全面发展
Moral, intellectual, physical, aesthetic and labor aspects	德智体美劳
National Student Health Monitoring Program and Early Warning System	全国学生心理健康监测预警系统
National Youth Reading Campaign	青少年学生读书行动
Publicity Department of the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee	中国共产党中央委员会宣传部
Fertile Soil Program	沃土计划
Emerging Talent Program	脱颖计划
Double Reduction	双减
<i>Opinions on Further Reducing the Burden of Homework and Off-Campus Training for Compulsory Education Students</i>	关于进一步减轻义务教育阶段学生作业负担和校外培训负担的意见
Special education	特殊教育
15-year continuous special education	十五年一贯制特殊教育学校