



Transnational education reform in China, 2025

(Information as at 31 October 2025)

Key points

- International engagement is a key pillar of China's 2025 education with a focus on further transnational education (TNE) partnerships, as a tool for fostering new education models and global integration.
- Demand for international education in China is rising, driven by a growing middle class and a projected peak in college-age population around 2032.
- In 2025, China's Ministry of Education (MoE) introduced changes to its TNE framework, simplifying approval processes, easing enrolment quota and program model restrictions, accelerating review timelines, and introducing tools to support clearer communication and partner matching.
- 2025 saw a record number of new higher education project approvals since 2013, with 68 joint institutes and 161 joint programs approved. In 2025, three new Australia-China joint institutes and five joint programs were approved.

In 2025, the MoE approved one of the largest expansions of TNE in recent years, approving 68 new joint institutes and 161 joint programs between Chinese and foreign institutions.¹ This reflects the MoE's clear and growing emphasis on strengthening international education collaboration; positioning TNE as a tool to foster new education models and facilitate China's integration into global education networks.

While no formal national plan for large-scale TNE expansion has yet been released, recent developments—including the increase in approved programs and adjustments to regulatory processes—suggest a more enabling environment for joint education efforts. These changes indicate the potential for further growth in China's TNE sector.

On 19 September 2025, the MoE provided a briefing to 40 diplomatic missions in Beijing; identifying TNE as a key mechanism for advancing China's global engagement in higher education. TNE reforms aim to improve administrative efficiency, enhance institutional autonomy, and promote deeper academic partnerships.²

¹ Official TNE arrangements in China are approved under the China-Foreign Cooperation in Running Schools (CFCRS) initiative (中外合作办学).

² On 10 October 2025, the Education and Research Section at the Australian Embassy in Beijing provided a briefing to the sector these reforms. The Department of Education also covered these reforms in its China Market Update at the Australian International Education Conference (AIEC) that same month.

China's Current TNE Landscape

TNE in China primarily serves a growing middle-class population, estimated at over 30 million households, with interest in accessing international education domestically. In 2025, 13.4 million Chinese students took part in the National College Entrance Exams (Gaokao).³ Population projections suggest that the Gaokao student population will continue to grow, rising to a peak of around 17 million in 2032. This suggests demand for high-quality recognised international education programs will continue and increase over the medium term.

Since the early 1990s, China has approved around 200 joint institutes and 1,400 joint programs with foreign partners at university level, and around 60 joint institutes and 1,300 joint programs at higher vocational level.

Australia currently has 18 active joint institutes (15 at university level, 3 at higher vocational level), and more than 150 joint programs (around 100 at university level and 50 at higher vocational level).

2025 Approval Rounds

In 2025, China approved a total of 68 joint institutes and 161 joint programs.⁴ Of these, Australia accounted for 3 newly approved joint institutes (all at the university level) and 5 joint programs (2 at the university level and 3 at the higher vocational level). See [Attachment A](#) for a list of the newly approved Australian TNE projects in 2025 and active Australia-China joint institutes.

The total number of approvals across all countries marks the highest annual figure since 2013, with notable increases in the proportion of joint institutes (compared to the number of joint programs) approved in 2025. This emphasis on joint institutes reflects the MoE's desire for deep and sustained partnerships between Chinese and foreign institutions. In addition, 2025 has seen an increase in TNE approvals between Chinese institutions and a broader range of partners, including countries and regions participating in the Belt and Road Initiative.

³ Gaokao is the National College Entrance Exam. See: Education and Research Section (2025, January 3) [Updates on China's Gaokao - National College Entrance Exam](#)

⁴ Of the 68 joint institutes approved in 2025, 63 were at the university level and 5 were at higher vocational level. Of the 161 joint programs approved, 100 were at the university level and 61 were at higher vocational level. These approvals were announced in two batches, released in March and September, commonly referred to as the first and second half-year approvals.

Recent Adjustments to TNE Policy and Implementation

To support TNE development in China, the MoE has made several of regulatory adjustments.

1. Changes to Quota and Structural Requirements

Internal administrative orders that set a limit on program size have been removed, including the removal of **caps on annual enrolment**. The removal of caps on annual enrolment does not mean that maximum enrolment limits will be removed entirely. The MoE will continue to consider the TNE partners' enrolment capacity as part of their approval process — but the previous 'ceiling' on TNE enrolments that was in place but not formally publicised has now been removed. This shift may provide Chinese institutions with greater autonomy in scaling their offerings and responding to student demand.

In addition to relaxing size constraints, the MoE has **formally endorsed a broader range of program structures**. The 4+0 model will no longer be given preference over other models such as 3+1 arrangements. This means that foreign partners will no longer face as much pressure to offer TNE students the option of completing their entire program onshore in China. Instead, the MoE will be more open to approving models that include an overseas study component.

The **application process has also been streamlined**. Since March 2025, institutions have been permitted to submit multiple applications within the same batch, a move expected to reduce administrative overhead and improve efficiency.

While the application process has been streamlined, the MoE has been clear that it does not favour franchise-style TNE arrangements—where foreign institutions replicate similar programs across multiple Chinese universities. In addition, the MoE will favour programs in emerging or strategically important disciplines, over those where there is low demand, poor graduate employability or an already high concentration of programs on offer.

2. Simplified Review Process

In addition, the review mechanism for TNE has been refined: applicants will now receive **consolidated feedback** rather than being asked to submit multiple rounds of supplementary materials. In cases where applications are unsuccessful, the MoE has committed to providing clearer explanations and allowing Chinese institutions to **resubmit** their TNE applications after appropriate revisions.

3. Faster Approvals

A new commitment by the MoE is to respond to applications within **45 days**—illustrated by a recent case where a July submission was approved by September. This suggests improved predictability for institutional planning.

4. Enhanced transparency

The MoE is making efforts to improve transparency and communication in TNE, including holding briefings for Chinese universities to **clarify application procedures** and **offering reference templates** for partnership agreements. According to the MoE, foreign institutions are encouraged to consult their Chinese partners for more detailed guidance.

5. Digital Matching Platform

On 30 October 2025, the MoE unveiled a new **digital TNE platform** to facilitate collaboration between Chinese and foreign universities and provide Chinese students with more information about TNE study options. The current iteration appears to be tailored for a student audience; however, the platform is likely to expand to facilitate institutional relationships, allowing Chinese institutions to input partnership requirements, compare potential collaborators, and initiate contact directly through the platform. It is expected that this functionality will also be expanded to allow foreign institutions upload a profile and seek new partners.

6. More Autonomy for Top Institutions

We understand that the MoE is considering increased autonomy for leading Chinese universities in the management of TNE. While specific details have not been released, this may indicate a future shift in governance arrangements for certain institutions, and lead to further regulatory change.

Areas not yet slated for reform

At present, undergraduate-level TNE programs in China are limited to ‘in-quota’ students admitted through the Gaokao system. The MoE has suggested that expansion of out-of-quota enrolment may be considered at non-undergraduate levels in the future, but for undergraduate programs, Gaokao-based admissions continue to be the standard.

The MoE has not committed to any changes to the Four One-Thirds rule.⁵ The requirement for foreign institutions to have a Chinese partner remain in place (except in the Hainan pilot area⁶); which means it is not possible for foreign universities to establish wholly independent ‘branch campuses’ in China. The diplomatic briefing on 19 September did not confirm reports that the MoE will delegate more responsibility for TNE approval and review to provincial governments. The high number of approvals in Jiangsu Province this year, suggests that a pilot to test greater autonomy in provincial level approvals was successful, and may be expanded.

Current restrictions that prevent students having their qualifications recognised if they include online delivery by a foreign partner remain in place. The Education and Research Section at the Australian Embassy in Beijing continues to work closely with the MoE on reform in this area.

China’s Internationalisation and Global Engagement effort

China’s current international education strategy reflects a clear emphasis on expanding global partnerships, enhancing its international presence, and promoting more people-to-people exchanges. To date, China has reportedly established educational cooperation with approximately 180 countries and is actively seeking deeper engagement with countries and multilateral organisations.

For TNE, the focus has shifted from expansion of scale toward supporting high-quality initiatives—particularly joint institutions—that deliver globally relevant programs aligned with China’s national

⁵ Introduced in 2006, the Four One Thirds Rule aims to ensure that foreign education partners commit to delivering at least one third of the teaching and learning resources to a joint venture.

⁶ Education and Research Section (2023, January 20) [Hainan issues details on independently run foreign higher education institutions](#)

development priorities and curricular standards. Recent developments illustrate this strategic direction, including pilot efforts in regions such as Hainan, which has emerged as a testing ground for innovative approaches to internationalisation. Notably, this has led to the official opening of two independent foreign institutions by German and Swiss partners this year.

Looking ahead, TNE in China is expected to be governed with greater transparency and strategic alignment, especially in light of recent high-level policy documents signaling stronger commitment to internationalising the sector. Chinese universities are increasingly motivated to explore new models and enhance the quality of their academic offerings. Joint education ventures, with their proven track record of fostering academic excellence and cross-border collaboration, are likely to become even more attractive to both domestic and international institutions.

Further reading

Additional Policy Updates published by Education and Research Section are available at [China Resources - Department of Education, Australian Government](#) including:

- 2025: [China's National Education Plan 2025](#)
- 2025: [May 2025 China-Australia Joint Institutions and Joint Program Approvals](#)
- 2024: [Approvals processes for Chinese-Foreign Joint Institutions and Joint Programs](#) (originally published in 2015; updated October 2024)
- 2023: [Hainan issues details on independently run foreign higher education institutions](#)

Enquiries

For enquiries, please contact the [Education and Research Section](#) of the Australian Embassy in Beijing.

Australia-China Joint Institute and Programs approved in 2025

University level

Table 1: China–Australia joint arrangements at the bachelor’s degree level and above, approved in 2025

Institute/ Program	Location	Australian partner	Chinese partner	Name of joint institute/program offered	4+0	Intake/ year
Institute	Jiangsu	Macquarie University	Nanjing Normal University	Nanjing Normal University Macquarie University Joint Institute	yes	330
Institute	Jiangxi	Griffith University	Jiangxi University of Finance and Economics	Griffith Digital Intelligence School, Jiangxi University of Finance and Economics	no	300
Institute	Guizhou	International College of Management, Sydney	Guizhou University of Commerce	GZUC-ICMS United College, Guizhou University of Commerce	Yes	300
Program	Jiangsu	Monash University	Jiangnan University	Bachelor of Business with a major in Business analytics and statistics	no	100
Program	Henan	Melbourne Polytechnic	Zhengzhou Shengda University	Bachelor of Applied Architecture	Yes	120

Source: Compiled by Australian Government Department of Education, Education and Research Section, Australian Embassy Beijing from the Chinese Ministry of Education's website, [中华人民共和国教育部 中外合作办学监管工作信息平台](#), [Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China Information Platform for the Supervision of China-Foreign Jointly-Run Schools], information as of Oct 2025.

Higher vocational level

Table 2: China–Australia joint arrangements at higher vocational level, approved in 2025

Institute/ Program	Location	Australian partner	Chinese partner	Name of joint institute/program offered	Intake / year
Program	Zhejiang	Australian Institute of Music	Zhejiang Vocational Academy of Art	Completion Certificate of Music (Performance Vocal Music)	70
Program	Zhejiang	International College of Management, Sydney	Taizhou Vocational College of Science & Technology	Associate Degree of Business	90
Program	Guangdong	William Angliss Institute of TAFE	Zhongshan Polytechnic	Advanced Diploma of Hospitality Management	100

Source: Compiled by Australian Government Department of Education, Education and Research Section, Australian Embassy Beijing from the Chinese Ministry of Education's website, [中华人民共和国教育部 中外合作办学监管工作信息平台](#), [Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China Information Platform for the Supervision of China-Foreign Jointly-Run Schools], information as of Oct 2025.

Total Active Australia-China Joint Institute, as of October 2025

Note: Projects that have expired within the past 18 months are considered 'active' for the purpose of this Update as they may be undergoing renewal or reactivation.

University level

Table 3: Active Australian CFCRS Joint Institutes and year of approval, Bachelor Level and Above

Joint institute	Australian partner/s	Chinese partner	Year of approval
SILC Business School, Shanghai University	University of Technology, Sydney, Sydney, NSW	Shanghai University, Shanghai	1994
Asia-Australia Business College of Liaoning University	Victoria University, Melbourne, VIC	Liaoning University, Shenyang, Liaoning Province	2000
Southeast University-Monash University Joint Graduate School (Suzhou)	Monash University, Melbourne, VIC	Southeast University, Suzhou, Jiangsu Province	2012
Central China Normal University Wollongong Joint Institute	University of Wollongong, Wollongong, NSW	Central China Normal University, Wuhan, Hubei Province	2016
Westa College, Southwest University	University of Western Australia, Perth, WA & University of Tasmania, Hobart, TAS	Southwest University	2016
Xi'an University of Architecture and Technology University of South Australia An De College	University of South Australia, Adelaide, SA	Xi'an University of Architecture and Technology, Xi'an, Shaanxi Province	2017
FedUni Information Engineering Institute, Hebei University of Science and Technology	Federation University, Ballarat, VIC	Hebei University of Science and Technology, Shijiazhuang, Hebei Province	2019
SDU-ANU Joint Science College, Shandong University	Australian National University, Canberra, ACT	Shandong University, Weihai, Shandong Province	2019
Swinburne College of Shandong University of Science and Technology	Swinburne University of Technology, Melbourne, VIC	Shandong University of Science and Technology, Jinan, Shandong Province	2020
Sydney Smart Technology College, Northeastern University	University of Technology, Sydney, Sydney, NSW	Northeastern University, Qinhuangdao Economic and Technological Development Zone, Hebei Province	2020
International Engineering College of Xi'an University of Technology	James Cook University, Townsville, QLD	Xi'an University of Science and Technology, Xi'an, Shaanxi Province	2020
Haide College, Ocean University of China	University of Adelaide, Adelaide, SA	Ocean University of China, Qingdao, Shandong Province	2020
Griffith Digital Intelligence School, Jiangxi University of Finance and Economics	Griffith University, Gold Coast, QLD	Jiangxi University of Finance and Economics, Nanchang, Jiangxi Province	2025
Nanjing Normal University Macquarie University Joint Institute	Macquarie University, Sydney, NSW	Nanjing Normal University	2025
GZUC-ICMS United College, Guizhou University of Commerce	International College of Management, Sydney, Australia	Guizhou University of Commerce	2025

Source: Compiled by Australian Government Department of Education, Education and Research Section, Australian Embassy Beijing from the Chinese Ministry of Education's website, 中华人民共和国教育部 中外合作办学监管工作信息平台, [Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China Information Platform for the Supervision of China-Foreign Jointly-Run Schools], information as of Oct 2025.

Higher vocational level

Table 4: Active Australian CFCRS Joint Institutes and year of approval, Higher Vocational Level

Joint institute	Australian partner/s	Chinese partner	Year of approval
Sino-Australian Technical and Further Education Institute of Ningbo City College of Vocational Technology	Western Sydney Institute of TAFE (NSW TAFE), Sydney, NSW	Ningbo City College of Vocational Technology, Ningbo, Zhejiang Province	2011
Fuzhou Melbourne Polytechnic	Melbourne Polytechnic, Melbourne, VIC	Minjiang University, Fuzhou, Fujian Province	2017
Sino-Australian International Hotel Management School of Tourism College of Zhejiang	William Angliss Institute of TAFE, Melbourne, VIC	Zhejiang Tourism College, Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province	2018

Source: Compiled by Australian Government Department of Education, Education and Research Section, Australian Embassy Beijing from the Chinese Ministry of Education's website, [中华人民共和国教育部 中外合作办学监管工作信息平台](#), [Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China Information Platform for the Supervision of China-Foreign Jointly-Run Schools], information as of Oct 2025.