



Mainland China: Education Topics from the 2026 Two Sessions

Information as at 30 June 2026

Introduction

This Policy Update provides an overview of key domestic education reform priorities and major directions for international education cooperation following China's 2026 Two Sessions program and release of the 15th Five-Year Plan. The 'Two Sessions' refer to two key events that both occur in March each year—the Fourth Session of the National People's Congress and the Fourth Session of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference National Committee.

The 2026 Two Sessions reaffirmed the key role that education plays in meeting the Central Government's national development priorities, including through efforts to integrate industry, science and technology and talent. International cooperation remains a priority, with strategies aimed at both Chinese education 'going out' into the world and 'bringing in' international talent and resources.

A note on demographic change

Demographic change is playing a key role in shaping China's education system and reform agenda at all levels. In 2025 the junior secondary school-age population reached a peak. The senior secondary school-age population peak is expected around 2029, and the university-age population is expected to peak around 2032. After each peak each cohort's population will rapidly decline, mirroring the sudden fall in fertility rates that occurred in around 2017. Over the even longer term, China's higher system may have more places that its domestic student population can fill, as fertility rates continue to fall. In 2025, the number of newborns dropped to 7.92 million, a 17 per cent decrease compared with the previous year.

Key Domestic Education Priorities

Basic Education: Promoting Equity and Quality

Priorities for schooling, or basic education, focus on building a fair, inclusive and high-quality system. Measures include expanding access to quality education by increasing the supply of public kindergarten places and high school placements, improving the quality of compulsory education, supporting the development of county-level and rural schools, and ensuring equitable access for migrant children and other vulnerable groups.

At the same time, the Ministry of Education (MoE) is carefully monitoring demographic changes to ensure that schooling resources are allocated efficiently. High-growth urban areas and underdeveloped regions will be prioritised for basic education investment, alongside efforts to upgrade rural schools and encourage experienced teachers to teach in China's central and western regions.

Consistent with the [*Outline of a Plan for Building China into a Leading Country in Education 2024-2035*](#), the MoE will continue to promote the all-round development of students across moral, intellectual, physical, aesthetic, and labor dimensions, strengthening physical and mental health education, and encouraging more personalised and diversified learning approaches. Efforts are also being made to improve the overall education environment by reducing excessive competition in school admission processes and fostering a more balanced, student-centered schooling system.

Higher Education: Supporting Innovation and Talent Development

Reforms in higher education are closely aligned with national strategies in science, technology, and talent development. Universities are being encouraged to adjust disciplines and programs by strengthening fields linked to strategic sectors such as artificial intelligence, advanced manufacturing, and life sciences, while also promoting interdisciplinary study and emerging fields. Talent training models are being enhanced through increased collaboration across disciplines and stronger linkages between universities, research institutions, and industry.

These efforts aim to support the development of high-level innovative talent. Furthermore, research capacity is being strengthened through greater emphasis on basic research and innovation. Evaluation systems are being refined to focus more on real-world impact, and collaboration between academia and industry is being further encouraged to translate research outcomes into practical applications.

Vocational Education: Enhancing Relevance and Status

Vocational education is positioned as a key component in supporting industrial development. Efforts are underway to improve institutional capacity by building high-quality vocational colleges and aligning programmes more closely with industry and labor market needs.

Industry–education integration is being strengthened through closer cooperation between schools and enterprises, with a particular emphasis on practical training and skills-based learning. At the same time, greater attention is being given to enhancing career development pathways by improving connections between vocational and general education and by strengthening career progression systems for skilled workers.

Digital Education: Driving Transformation

Digitalisation is identified as a major driver of education modernisation. Efforts to expand digital infrastructure include the continued development of national smart education platforms and improved access to digital learning resources. The application of new technologies, particularly artificial intelligence, is being actively explored across teaching, learning, and administrative processes, accompanied by stronger governance and ethical frameworks for technology use. In addition, digital initiatives are aimed at reducing regional disparities by extending digital resources to rural and less-developed areas and leveraging technology to promote greater educational equity.

International Education Cooperation and Opening-Up

International cooperation remains a priority, with strategies aimed at both Chinese education ‘going out’ into the world and ‘bringing in’ international talent and resources.

Expanding International Cooperation

China is continuing to expand international cooperation through improvements in China–Foreign Cooperation in Running Schools (CFCRS). This includes introducing high-quality international education resources, supporting joint programs and institutes, and promoting the internationalisation of domestic universities.

Cooperation in vocational education is also being strengthened through partnerships with other countries, the sharing of vocational education practices and standards, and efforts to enhance the international recognition of Chinese vocational education. In addition, joint research is being encouraged, particularly in addressing global challenges such as climate change and public health, alongside the establishment of joint laboratories and collaborative research platforms.

Facilitating Talent Exchange

Talent exchange remains a key priority. Efforts are being made to improve the ‘Study in China’ brand by strengthening support services for international students and enhancing the quality of education and training provided. Mobility of students and faculty is being encouraged through expanded academic exchanges, joint programs, overseas study, and international training opportunities. At the same time, initiatives are being implemented to develop internationally oriented talent by strengthening foreign language and regional studies programs and cultivating interdisciplinary capabilities with global competencies.

Participating in Global Education Governance

China is also increasing its participation in global education governance. This includes strengthening collaboration with international organisations, actively engaging in global education policy discussions, and enhancing its role in shaping international education standards.

Promoting Innovative Cooperation Models

Innovative models of international cooperation are being explored, including integrated programs that combine language learning with vocational skills. New bilateral and multilateral cooperation frameworks are being developed, with an emphasis on practical, demand-driven international education initiatives.

Conclusion and Outlook

The 2026 Two Sessions an approach to education that integrates domestic reform with international engagement. The focus remains on improving quality, promoting equity, and fostering innovation, while continuing to expand global cooperation. There is strong policy continuity with the direction set out in the [*Outline of a Plan for Building China into a Leading Country in Education 2024-2035*](#), released in January 2025. There is potential for collaboration between China and Australia in areas such as higher education and research, vocational education and training, education technology, and student wellbeing and talent development. These areas offer opportunities for mutually beneficial partnerships and continued growth in bilateral education cooperation.

Enquiries

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