

CHINA'S PLAN FOR MEDIUM AND LONG-TERM EDUCATION REFORM AEI SUMMARY

Key Issues:

- The national plan is a comprehensive strategy identifying China's current challenges in education and its priorities for reform.
- It is a frank assessment of how China intends to reposition itself to meet its economic and social needs of the 21st century and acknowledges a number of areas where its education systems could be strengthened. These include:
 - China's concept of education, teaching methodologies and content are outdated;
 - Study burdens on school students are too heavy;
 - Students lack adaptability;
 - Skilled and innovative professionals are in short supply;
 - Education systems are inflexible;
 - Schools lack autonomy;
 - Access to education is not equitably distributed across rural areas and ethnic groups; and
 - Education funding is not meeting demand.
- The plan outlines high level goals that will see significant improvements in educational participation at all levels. The areas of largest growth sought are in:
 - preschool and kindergarten, up 25 per cent by 2020 (to 40 million students);
 - higher education, up 16 per cent by 2020 (to 35 million students); and
 - further or continuing education, with participation almost doubling to 350 million students by 2020.
- Achievement of the plan's goals would see a doubling of the population with higher education qualifications and a significant increase in the proportion of the working population with a senior middle school or higher education.
- The plan makes a strong case for change but does not include details of the resources required to achieve the reforms by 2020.
- It identifies broad reforms to:
 - Upgrade the qualifications of teachers, to benchmark teaching results and to enhance school autonomy;
 - Strengthen provincial governance of education at all levels; and
 - Promote international exchange and cooperation.

Preschool Reforms

- Reforms proposed at preschool level move towards a model of universal access to one and two year participation, with three year preschool a desired long-term outcome. The plan flags the need to strengthen access to preschool in rural areas and to train a large contingent of high-quality kindergarten teachers.

Schooling Reforms

- Schooling reform aims to enhance the current nine-year compulsory school education model and ensure its accessibility to rural and low income students in particular. It identifies the need to lift the quality of teaching, particularly between urban and rural areas.
- Reforms identify a need to reduce the heavy study burdens on primary school pupils and to prevent the ranking of schools according to students' rate of admission to higher schools.

Vocational Education Reforms

- The plan articulates the current gap between China's current vocational skill levels and its future needs, acknowledging the need for significant investment. Reforms propose a focus on quality improvement and teacher accreditation, and on building strong connections to schooling to facilitate transitions to vocational education.

Higher Education Reforms

- An improvement in the quality of higher education is central to the proposed reforms, including the need to develop world-class universities to enhance China's international competitiveness. The plan articulates a need to improve the pedagogical skills of university teachers, to improve the investment in infrastructure and to strengthen classroom instruction. Postgraduate education and research are identified as important in contributing to knowledge and innovation.
- The plan proposes a new regulatory framework for higher education and encourages universities to diversify their missions and activities to achieve best practice. International engagement is encouraged in both showcasing China's universities and in seeking to build strategic international alliances.

Further and Continuing Education

- China aims to mobilize its population to pursue lifelong learning opportunities, with employers to play a key role in providing further opportunities that enhance industry development. Mutual recognition arrangements will be designed to facilitate learning at all levels of education provision.

Areas of Alignment with Australian Government Reforms

- The proposed plan aligns with Australia's reforms in schooling, including the development of a National Curriculum, reforms to enhance teaching, to strengthen principal autonomy, in Australia's infrastructure investments through the Building the Education Revolution and the Digital Education Revolution.
- Proposed reforms also align with Australia's strengthening of quality assurance arrangements at the tertiary levels and reforms to enhance the accessibility of tertiary education.

Further Opportunities

- China's reform plan promotes the value of internationalisation and seeks to cooperate with world-class schools, universities and research organisations. It proposes to negotiate more extensive mutual recognition arrangements. It seeks to encourage engagement of its education institutions with those overseas and to enhance its program of selection of students to study overseas. It also seeks an expansion of the international student population in China.