

EU-China Higher Education Platform for Cooperation and Exchange (HEPCE)

27 September 2019 - Helsinki, Finland

Final Report

The 2019 edition of the EU-China Higher Education Platform for Cooperation and Exchange (HEPCE) took place on 27 September 2019 in Helsinki, Finland, and was co-organised by the European University Association (EUA), the China Education Association for International Exchange (CEAIE), the Mission of China to the EU and the European Commission's Directorate-General for Education, Culture, Youth and Sport. The event convened around 80 participants, mostly senior institutional representatives responsible for internationalisation and other stakeholders active in EU-China cooperation.

The HEPCE is a regular event taking place in the framework of the EU-China High-Level People-to-People Dialogue (HPPD), launched in 2012 as the third pillar of EU-China cooperation, together with the EU-China High Level Economic and Trade Dialogue and High Level Strategic Dialogue. The overall aim of the HEPCE is to sustain a dialogue between university leadership from China and the EU.

This year, the main topic for discussion was “China-Europe university cooperation & balanced mobility”. Although major achievements have taken place over the past decade – in particular regarding the overall acceptance and mainstreaming of mobility, its organisation and management, as well as its recognition and quality – there is room for improvement. In the past, balanced mobility referred mainly to an equilibrated exchange between higher education institutions and countries. Nowadays, it is also increasingly expected to address issues such as inclusiveness, the quality of learning and teaching, as well as the use of technology in education.

Participants discussed how these issues can be better addressed in the ongoing EU-China cooperation, assessing the state of play, achievements and challenges, as well as newly emerging trends. Imbalanced student mobility flows, lack of international inclusion strategies, insufficient human and financial resources, as well as diverging recognition procedures are only a few of the main challenges identified, hampering mutual understanding and trust. Recent developments such as the EU's Strategy on Connecting Europe and Asia, China's Belt and Road Education Action Plan, the European Education Area, or the future Erasmus programme (2021-2027) are bound to have an impact on EU-China university cooperation, hopefully addressing some of the issues above.

To take discussions further, participants were split into different [break-out sessions](#), focusing on three main themes: i) Inclusive internationalisation strategies, ii) Credit mobility, and iii) Virtual mobility. Participants shared their experiences and discussed how these issues can be better addressed in the ongoing EU-China cooperation.

Outcomes of the 2019 meeting will feed the discussions at the next HPPD meeting scheduled in Brussels in 2020.

1) Breakout session: Inclusion

Discussions among participants led to a series of recommendations. Higher education institutions, for instance, could drive a culture of internationalisation by:

- creating awareness, transparency and equity for students and staff regarding opportunities to engage in relevant activities and in language training;
- pro-actively taking strides to internationalise the curriculum; and
- enabling shorter mobility periods to attempt to reduce barriers and allow for potential greater inclusion.

EU Member States could review their performance on higher education internationalisation activities related to inclusion, and provide clear strategies and policies for their higher education systems.

European and China system-level actions could include:

- drafting European and Chinese Inclusion Frameworks/Strategies, which can then guide and support the development of strategies and policies at country-level;
- examining the balance of internationalisation funding across Member States and provinces; seeking to redress apparent imbalances in order to foster better inclusion; and
- ensure that where European or Chinese funding exists to promote visiting fellowships for staff, it is widely promoted to stakeholder communities.

2) Breakout session: Credit Mobility

This session covered two related issues – credit mobility and inclusion in mobility practices. Speakers highlighted that partnerships, joint diplomas and strong collaborations between Chinese and EU universities already exist. There is also considerable financial support and experience available through the Chinese Scholarship Council and the Erasmus+ programme.

The experience of “Tuning EU-China¹”, however, highlights the complexity of evaluating and comparing courses, and of matching learning outcomes. There is currently little comparability and great variability between higher education institutions in China, which has an impact on readability and transparency, reducing the potential for credit mobility between Europe and China.

Credit mobility and ways to make it more inclusive, in particular under the “International Credit Mobility” action of Erasmus+ were also discussed, looking at adjustments which might open credit mobility to a wider body of students and to disadvantaged groups.

Key recommendations emerging from the session were:

- to intensify cooperation between academic leadership on both sides (using the LEAD project² as good practice example)
- to collect more evidence on recognition procedures at Chinese higher education institutions, in order to better compare the Chinese and European higher education systems
- to develop simple and light frameworks/methodologies for matching curricula and learning outcomes in order to facilitate credit mobility

¹ <http://tuningchina.org/>

² <http://lead-project.org/>

- to increase the number of available scholarships and joint programmes
- to build upon best practices and confirmed experiences in existing China-EU joint programmes
- to make the concept of “credit mobility” and “learning outcomes” better understood in China
- to encourage EU Member States to sign bilateral recognition agreements with China

3) Breakout session: Virtual mobility

Panellists and participants engaged in a comprehensive discussion about new ways of teaching and learning internationally supported by ICT. Despite varying definitions, virtual mobility was recognised as a relatively new but popular concept, bringing with it a large array of opportunities and challenges. Depending on the definition used, the impact and goals differ, but also the target group. Concepts such as blended mobility could for instance offset the current lack of balanced mobility between China and Europe. Participants all agreed that it is high time for virtual mobility to come more prominently into the picture, since it is an effective, convenient and economic way of increasing mobility experiences. However, it should be kept in mind that virtual mobility should not replace physical mobility, but complement it.

This session came up with the following recommendations regarding virtual mobility practices:

- need for long term planning to ensure sustainable cooperation
- need for human and financial resources
- need for know-how and appropriate technological conditions/infrastructure
- mutual understanding, trust and respect