



"China-EU High Level People-to-People Dialogue" FORUM

"The 21st Century Student: Learning in a Globalised World"

18 April 2012 – Flagey, Brussels

15.00 – 16.40

Concept Note

University education in the EU and in China is confronted with a twin challenge: i) the need to match skills and jobs in global, innovative and competitive economies; and, ii) the ambition to nurture talent and creative thinking to deal with rapid technical and social change.

The new People-to-People mechanism could explore the prospects for exchanging views on our respective ways of coping with these two educational challenges and for identifying relevant topics for cooperation.

A twin perspective on higher education systems

Both China and Europe should take the opportunity to reflect jointly on these challenges for higher education. On the one hand, what is the right balance between the demands of fast changing labour markets and the need to develop innovative and critical thinking that is the humus of research and innovation? How can we ensure that all talent is tapped and that all individuals have fair access to higher education according to their merits and capacities? In other words, how do we combine effectiveness in exploiting the intellectual potential of our nations and fair access for individuals, regardless of their social and ethnic backgrounds?

How can education reconcile the needs of the economy, the task of advancing knowledge, and the need to contribute to social cohesion and individual accomplishment? This is a complex task, but it is also fundamental to our societies with respect to their common and singular characteristics.

The development of appropriate skills

China is concentrating huge efforts on the development of its higher education system, as evidenced by the performance of Chinese universities in the global university ranking systems. The EU is engaged in the Bologna process, the EU 2020 and the Higher Education Modernisation Agenda. Higher education has a fundamental role to play in the transmission of collective and individual values and ethics in our advanced societies, rich with the legacies of their respective ancient civilisations. But both China and the EU share the common concern of climbing up the technology ladder and coping also with issues of social cohesion, such as equal access to education. A key issue in this regard is youth unemployment – that also concerns the highly qualified.

The panel will explore how higher education institutions in Europe and China contribute to addressing the needs of their societies, for employable skills and creative thinking, while also contributing to the transmission of knowledge and culture, which are essential for social development and cohesion for individuals and societies.

International mobility

The international mobility of students is playing a role by enhancing the quality and diversity of education, but also for connecting our societies. Higher education cooperation and exchange between the EU and China has been steadily increasing over the past years and is key to our future relations. So how can it be further enhanced, and what are the prospects for the future?

Language and language learning

Linguistic diversity is a richness, but, if not addressed properly, it can become a barrier. Lack of language preparation is amongst the main causes hampering mobility. The panel will explore the current state of language learning between China and the EU and look into means and opportunities for enhancement.

Furthermore, there is a widening gap between “world class” universities and the others (middle-ranking universities) both between countries and inside the same country. But leading universities often impose high tuition fees, and this raises the question of access to higher education and social inclusiveness. Discriminatory tuition fees and the difficulty of accessing student loans can create an educational divide that will exacerbate the social divide. These are all issues which the panel will seek to address.

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