

La Trobe University China Country Strategy

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La Trobe University

China Country Strategy

Why a China Strategy?

China has become the world's second largest economy and has changed not only the life chances of hundreds of millions of Chinese people at speeds never before seen in human history, it has altered fundamental aspects of the global economy, the environment and geopolitics.

For Australia, China's transformation has been integral to its longest period of economic growth since European settlement. Higher education has been a beneficiary of China's growth particularly through fee-paying students in the country. But as China begins to reform its economy, it aims to develop an economic model in which growth is driven by productivity and innovation. As a result China is investing significantly in the university sector. This is intended both to provide new capacity for teaching and learning as well as to drive innovation through significant investment in research. According to the OECD China currently spends around 2% of GDP on R&D and plans to increase this to 2.5% by 2020, making it the world's biggest R&D investor. A large proportion of this investment will be channeled through universities.¹ This investment as well as Chinese researchers' growing capacity, means that there are huge opportunities for entrepreneurial Australian researchers.

Equally, given the ways in which China is changing the world, universities have a crucial part to play in helping their students and Australian society more generally better understand Chinese society and culture. This has long been a key part of La Trobe's activity and given our strategic focus on Asia we have an obligation to help students, staff and the broader society better understand China and its impact on the world.

La Trobe has a long record of engagement with China. In the early 1980s, we were among the first to admit students from the PRC, in the mid 1990s we had Australia's largest off-shore presence in the country and in 2015 we celebrated thirty years of partnership with East China Normal University in Shanghai. This provides us with an excellent platform of engagement on which to build.

¹ OECD, *OECD Science, Technology and Industry Outlook 2014* Paris, OECD, 2014, pp. 292-295.

Rationale

With the establishment of La Trobe Asia, the University formalized its commitment to make Asia the key focus of our international engagement. China lies at the centre of that regional focus.

By engaging strategically with China we are seeking a set of improvements across the full range of University activity:

Research: improve the volume and quality of joint research with China-based researchers, including joint PhD supervision.

Teaching and Learning: to improve La Trobe staff and students' understanding of China through improved access to China focused scholarship and to enhance their China literacy through increased opportunities to teach and study in China.

Partnerships: to develop excellent relationships with a small number of key universities and research institutions to advance these two aims.

Alumni: to improve the breadth and depth of our alumni relationships in China.

Goals

Through this China country strategy La Trobe is seeking to achieve four macro-level goals which will in turn be advanced by pursuing a series of specific strategies. They reflect a whole-of-university perspective and are informed by the broader strategic objectives of *Future Ready* (FR) and the *Internationalization Plan 2014-17* (IP). Crucially, if these objectives are to be achieved the various organisational components of La Trobe will need to collaborate over a sustained period of time and to understand the role each plays in the university's larger objectives.

Goal 1:

To become the leading centre for the study of contemporary China in Melbourne and among the top three nationally.

Goal 2:

To be recognized by others as the leading university in Melbourne, and among the top three nationally, for the quality of its academic engagement with China.

Goal 3:

To become a university of choice for China-based researchers and students.

Goal 4:

To shape national and international debate about contemporary China.

Strategies

1. Establish and implement a set of priority partnership programs with key Chinese universities
2. Re-launch the Centre for China Studies as a leading international centre for cutting edge research on contemporary China
3. Promote the University's China strategy, internally and externally
4. Undertake strategic investment to support collaborative research with Chinese institutions
5. Increase La Trobe students' engagement with China
6. Improve the Australian community's understanding of contemporary China
7. Further strengthen engagement of China alumni
8. Establish dedicated funding to support the China strategy
9. Establish an oversight body and implementation plan for the strategy

STRATEGY 1

Establish and implement a set of priority partnership programs with key Chinese universities

The political and cultural environment in China makes partnerships with institutions particularly important to achieving the University's strategic objectives. Whether it relates to increasing student mobility, developing next generation in-country teaching and learning programs, improving the reputation of the University in China or developing strong and durable research collaborations, good institutional relationships are of vital importance.

The aim of developing partners is to:

- Increase research collaboration to improve research quality, volume and impact
- Improve La Trobe's standing as a 'university of choice' for prospective researchers and students
- Encourage La Trobe students to spend part of their degree in China
- Increase La Trobe's presence in China
- Improve collaboration in teaching and learning

Each partnership will involve a commitment by the University to engage broadly, understood in terms of both disciplines and activities with that partner for a significant length of time. Activities would include: regular high level visits; research collaboration, joint teaching, academic and student exchange, joint appointments, and reciprocal PhD scholarships.

Specific Tasks

- Seek approval from SDVC (International) for identified priority partnerships.
- Identify a senior academic to lead the partnership with each university.
- Develop a two year engagement plan to develop the relationship.
- Promote the partnership internally and externally.

Future Partnerships

The higher education sector in China is undergoing rapid change, as such it would be prudent to maintain active 'watch list' of a small number of institutions that have potential to develop into future priority partnerships. The University should also look to develop relationships with international universities operating in China (discussed further in Strategy 5).

STRATEGY 2

Re-launch the Centre for China Studies as a leading international centre for cutting edge research on contemporary China

The Centre for China Studies will become a flagship of La Trobe’s research expertise and engagement with China with the following functions:

- Deliver high quality research outputs in China Studies.
- Develop and enhance La Trobe’s research reputation and expertise.
- Foster productive research collaborations with leading institutions in China.
- Increase the University’s capacity to win competitive research funding.
- Provide intellectual leadership across the University in relation to contemporary China.
- Play an important collaborative role across the University to support the research aspects of the China Strategy.

To become a leader in the study of contemporary China will also require further investment in the research and teaching of contemporary China. Several appointments will need to be made in the field with disciplinary bases in recognized areas of strength in ASSC (e.g. Economics, History, Archaeology, Sociology, Anthropology, and Politics).

Specific Tasks

- In 2016, the Centre will be re-launched with at least one high profile event in China that is intended to showcase La Trobe and rejuvenate the partnerships with BFSU and Peking University.
- Make a number of China-focused appointments in areas of comparative strength over the coming three years to build ‘critical mass’ in China studies.

STRATEGY 3

Promote the University's China strategy, internally and externally

Communication is a vital part of the University's engagement with China and the broader purpose it serves. There must be a systematic dissemination within the University across the colleges, schools and departments as well as the professional and administrative divisions of what we are trying to achieve and why. This should be couched in a larger narrative about the University's regional engagement.

As it is a 'whole of university' effort, coordination and communication across the institution must be first rate and there must be a clear sense of the larger goals we are seeking to achieve. Equally, much of what we are trying to achieve will depend on the effectiveness of activity at the operational level of the university.

To help institutionalize the strategy we will establish a China Contact Group that will bridge the gap between senior leadership of the university and the operational/grass roots on whom the successful achievement of the goals depend. The Group will be comprised of academics as well as professional and administrative staff with interests and expertise in China drawn from across the University. It will meet regularly and report to the coordinating mechanism detailed in Strategy Nine.

There also needs to be a clear and systematic communication of this narrative outside the University. Here the aims of our China strategy need to link back to the underlying purpose of the University, the goals in Future Ready and the vision for the future. The message should make clear in an engaging manner what we are trying to achieve with our China strategy, its significance and its importance to the broader life of the university. It should also play a key role in the broader marketing activities of the University.

Specific tasks

- Development of a China strategy narrative in consultation with Marketing and Communication and should reflect La Trobe's distinctive qualities.
- Develop a clear communication strategy a) internally; b) nationally; and c) in China.
- Establish China Contact Group with clear terms of reference around communication of China Strategy. Membership will reflect diverse University interests in China and include senior and more junior staff as well as representatives from professional and administrative staff.
- Ensure a consistent reinforcement of the narrative in key events nationally and in China.

STRATEGY 4

Undertake strategic investment to support collaborative research with Chinese institutions

Changing the focus of the Centre for China Studies represents a reinvestment in the research capacity in China Studies, however, if the University is to realise the research potential available in Chinese universities and research institutions and to improve the volume and quality of joint publications, strategic investment will be needed.

Investment should be channeled through areas that have already been identified as areas of research strength and/or University comparative advantage (such as the RFAs and DRPs). New funding should be made available that drives collaboration that is focused on research outputs that influence La Trobe's ranking and research stature.

Specific tasks

- Creation of a visiting scholars fund to facilitate the movement of researchers between China and Australia.
- Creation of funds to support joint PhD students.
- Establishment of joint research appointments between priority partner institutions and La Trobe.
- Develop a plan to broaden recruitment of PhD students through research partnerships.
- Seek to increase the number of CSC scholarships.
- Hold regular research workshops and conferences with partners in China.

STRATEGY 5

Increase La Trobe students' engagement with China

In *Future Ready* the University is committed to increasing the proportion of students who spend time abroad as part of their studies. As part of this La Trobe will aim to increase the numbers and proportions of students who spend time in China as part of their degree. By doing so not only will this improve our students' understanding of China, it will complement the broader Global Citizenship essential and improve their employability in a job market where cultural literacy is an increasingly valued commodity.

There are also a large number of universities from the US and UK which teach in China, such as the University of Nottingham Ningbo or Xian Jiaotong-Liverpool University in Suzhou, which should be used to broaden the appeal of China as a place to spend a semester abroad.

La Trobe is also seeking to make its graduates more employable and to take a global perspective on their studies. These goals can be enhanced by providing more opportunities for La Trobe students to study China-focused subjects across a range of disciplines, but in particular Chinese Studies (including language). At present staffing capacity limits the range and depth of these offerings. This capacity will be enhanced by the investment flagged in Strategy 2.

Specific Tasks

- Investment to support La Trobe Abroad in its efforts to increase the number of students spending time in China as part of their degree.
- Invest in capacity to support academic programs applying for NCP funding.
- In coordination with La Trobe Abroad, develop links to quality overseas universities present in China to provide more pathways and options for students.
- Invest in capacity to expand range and appeal of China Studies teaching (link to Strategy 2 - second task).

STRATEGY 6

Improve the Australian community's understanding of contemporary China

China's rise and its implications for Australia and the world are among the epochal issues of the current era. An excellent way in which La Trobe can build on its reputation for public debate, burnish its national and international reputation and improve its visibility in Australia and China is to actively work to improve the understanding of contemporary China among Australian society.

There are two specific aspects of this strategy:

1. engaging with the immediate communities surrounding our campuses to improve their access to and understanding of China; and
2. strategic interventions in public debate at the national and international level.

Specific Tasks

- Through the Confucius Institute, develop outreach program for (1) Melbourne's North and regional campuses with a strong focus on business and local government; and (2) schools with a focus on enhancing the capacity of primary and secondary schools to learn about Chinese language and culture.
- Develop clear media strategy to improve visibility of China expertise for public debate.
- Hold public events to shape broader debate based on research expertise.

STRATEGY 7

Further strengthen engagement of China alumni

In recent years the Alumni and Advancement Office (AAO) has actively sought to strengthen its links to the nearly 5000 alumni based in China. This has involved successful careers events in 2013, 2014 as well as a reunion of the first cohort of students from the PRC at the Melbourne campus in 2014. These efforts need to continue and in particular, investment needs to be provided to further develop efforts to reconnect with the thousands of alumni in China with whom we have no contact.

Alumni should also be integrated into the range of activities we undertake in China, from events such as conferences/workshops, to teaching and mentoring new alumni. This large group has a significant potential to support the goals of the University and in turn reconnect with La Trobe, creating stronger, long term bonds.

Specific Tasks

- Investment to support AAO efforts to reconnect with 'lost' alumni.
- Ensure active engagement with alumni groups in China particularly involving regular connection with La Trobe academic staff and senior leadership.
- Integrate alumni, particularly prominent alumni, into La Trobe's China activities visibly.
- Develop new alumni mentorship program to connect recent graduates to established figures in their field.

STRATEGY 9

Establish dedicated funding to support the China Strategy

To achieve the goals that the University has with regard to China will require significant investment. This funding should be linked directly to the particular strategies and tasks, however, it should be managed centrally to ensure that the larger 'whole of university' intent is not lost as the organisational interests of the University have a heavy inertial quality. There will be three types of funding: (1) annual ongoing costs; (2) initial 'start up' costs; and (3) an annual competitive process for particular projects.

Funding is be managed by an oversight body established in Strategy 10 and subject to strict rules of transparency and accountability.

Specific Tasks

- Creation of China Strategy funding in budget process.
- Development of processes for distribution of funding.
- Establishment of processes for transparency and accountability.

STRATEGY 10

Establish an oversight body and implementation plan for the Strategy

La Trobe Asia will provide the oversight and coordination function to implement the strategy and report on it systematically as part of its bi-monthly Steering Committee Meetings. The Steering Committee will act as an oversight body for the strategy.

Specific Tasks:

- Develop implementation plan.
- Devise operating procedures for implementation and disbursement of funds.