

Education Opening-up: Examining Opinions of the Ministry of Education and other Seven Departments on Accelerating and Expanding the Opening-up of Education in the New Era

Authors: Gloria XU | Qiongxing WANG

Recently, *Opinions of the Ministry of Education and Seven Other Departments on Accelerating and Expanding the Opening-up of Education in the New Era* (the “**Opinions**”) were officially promulgated¹. The Opinions present comprehensive arrangements for opening-up education in China’s new era, pointing out that the opening-up of education is a distinctive feature and an important driving force for modernizing education, and the country should continue to adhere to the principle of education opening-up, with the view to form an all-dimensional, wide-ranging, multi-level and more proactive model for opening-up.

The Opinions present the following core guiding principles:

1. Remove institutional barriers, increase efforts to reform the management of Chinese-foreign jointly-run schools, reform the management of running of overseas colleges and universities, reform school foreign affairs approval policies, and continue to promote policy reforms involving management of overseas Chinese students, international students in China, foreign experts, and foreign teachers;
2. Improve the international competitiveness of higher education talents, accelerate the cultivation of high-level international talents with a global perspective. Promote vocational education to be more open and unimpeded, and accelerate the construction of an internationally advanced vocational education system with Chinese characteristics. Promote the opening-up of basic education to a new level, and train young people with an international perspective fit for the new era with all-round developments in ethnics, intellect, physique, aesthetics, and labor skills.
3. Optimize arrangements for studying abroad management, enhance the “Study in China” brand, deepen international cooperation in education, promote mutual recognition of credits and mutual granting of degrees between China and foreign countries, and expand the international influence of online education. Expand the supply of high-quality foreign education resources for low-performing schools in the central and western regions through the methods such as “Internet +” “intelligence +”, etc.

¹ http://www.moe.gov.cn/jyb_xwfb/gzdt_gzdt/s5987/202006/t20200617_466544.html.

4. Create an upgraded version of the “Belt and Road” education program, expand the supply of international public education goods, deepen cooperation with key international organizations, and promote the attaining of education goals prescribed under the United Nations’ *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, establish an international curriculum development and promotion system with Chinese characteristics, optimize the global spread of the Chinese language, and provide more countries with assistance in Chinese language teaching.

On June 18, 2020, a person-in-charge of the International Department (Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan Office) of the Ministry of Education answered questions from reporters regarding the Opinions², and interpreted the Opinions in terms of the promulgating background, the role played by education opening-up in the new situation in comprehensively opening-up, arrangements for promoting the opening-up of education at all levels, and how education will “bring in” and “go global” as it opens to the outside world.

Based upon the relevant contents of the Opinions and the answers to reporters’ questions by Ministry of Education officials, we observe the following trends which deserve special attention regarding the education opening-up in China:

Support high-quality development and innovation of education in relevant regions, create a new high ground for education opening-up

The person-in-charge of the International Department (Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan Office) of the Ministry of Education mentioned in answering reporters’ questions that the Ministry of Education will thoroughly study and implement the important instructions of General Secretary Xi Jinping with respect to the construction of the Hainan Free Trade Port, and will firmly promote the *Implementation Plan for Supporting Hainan to Deepen Education Reform and Opening-up* in accordance with the *Overall Plan for the Construction of the Hainan Free Trade Port*. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Education will support the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area to build an international education demonstration zone, support the Yangtze River Delta region to take the lead in education opening-up and to carry out pilot reforms, **and support Xiongan New Area to build itself into a new benchmark for education opening-up.**

It is worth noting that the documents and policies promulgated for the areas and regions as mentioned above have already clearly set forth certain policies and plans for education opening-up:

1. The Ministry of Education and the People’s Government of Hainan Province promulgated on June 20, 2019 the *Implementation Plan on Supporting Hainan to Deepen Education Reform and Opening-up*, which stipulates: (1) support for top-ranked foreign universities to run Chinese-foreign jointly-run schools in Hainan, and establishment of a ministerial and provincial government joint approval mechanism for Chinese-foreign jointly-run schools (projects) above the undergraduate level; (2) establishment of pilot international high schools and international kindergartens to carry out international education, provided relevant risks are controllable; (3) where conditions are ripe,

² http://www.moe.gov.cn/jyb_xwfb/s271/202006/t20200617_466545.html.

permitting overseas engineering universities and vocational colleges to independently run schools on a pilot basis in Hainan and to explore patterns for overseas high-level enterprises to run wholly-foreign-owned schools in Hainan.

2. The *Outline Development Plan for the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area*, promulgated by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council on February 18, 2019 stipulates: (1) supporting for jointly-run universities in Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao, and encouraging cooperation in building advantageous curricula, laboratories and research centers; (2) giving full play to the function of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao University Alliance, and encouraging universities across the three locations to explore arrangements for cooperation and exchanges in terms of the mutual recognition of credits for specific courses, for implementation of more flexible exchange student arrangements, and for sharing and transforming scientific research results; (3) supporting the construction of the Greater Bay Area International Educational Demonstration Zone, introducing world-renowned universities and characteristic colleges, promoting the construction of world leading universities and curricula; (4) strengthening exchanges and cooperation in terms of basic education, encouraging primary and secondary schools in Guangdong, Hong Kong, and Macao to recognize one another as “sister schools” and to set up schools and junior classes that also provide boarding services in Guangdong for the children of employees from Hong Kong and Macao.

The above policies and programs are breakthroughs in many aspects compared to the current policy framework. For example, overseas engineering universities and vocational colleges are permitted to independently run schools in China if the conditions are ripe, bringing a breakthrough to the current policy that overseas universities can run schools in China only jointly with Chinese educational institutions, and only overseas educational institutions are permitted to participate in Chinese-foreign jointly-run schools. As education opening-up evolves, the possibility exists in the future for further loosening in certain regions of foreign investment restrictions in education.

In terms of “bringing in” education, strengthen reform of Chinese-foreign joint education management

The person-in-charge of the International Department (Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan Office) of the Ministry of Education, in answering reporters’ questions, mentioned that the Opinions will strengthen reform of the management of Chinese-foreign jointly-run education in three aspects:

1. Improve the legal system and promote revisions to the *Regulations on Chinese-foreign Joint Running of Schools* and its implementing measures, to provide system safeguards for education opening-up, standardized education, and high-quality education;
2. Innovate working mechanisms and improve examination and approval methods by implementing the “project record-filing system”, “ministry and provincial government joint examination and approval system”, and others; and
3. Encourage the undertaking of experimental projects, explore appropriately loosening restrictions on parties engaging in joint education and on methods for cooperation, and implement corresponding encouraging and guiding policies or special access management measures, to echo the new round of

reform and opening-up in China.

Among these reform measures, the most important is the revisions to the *Regulations on Chinese-foreign Joint Running of Schools* and its implementing measures, as well as the loosening restrictions on the main subjects participating in cooperative education and mode of cooperation, which may result in changes to the access management measures for Chinese-foreign joint education and specific legal provisions that have been effective for many years, thereby allowing more qualified institutions to participate in Chinese-foreign joint education.

“Going global” – increase the overall planning of running schools overseas and improve support policies

The person-in-charge of the International Department (Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan Office) of the Ministry of Education, in answering reporters' questions, mentioned that education “going global” has become an increasingly important part of China's opening-up of education and the Opinions specify the basic ideas for education “going global,” i.e. acting within capabilities, running schools in accordance with the law, giving priority to quality, and pursuing stable progress. The Ministry of Education will actively promote application-oriented undergraduates and vocational colleges to “go global” concurrently with Chinese enterprises, realizing collaborations between schools and enterprises in running schools and achieving common development. At the same time, the Ministry of Education will also increase the international influence of the online education, develop professional courses, teaching management models, and evaluation tools with Chinese characteristics and international competitive advantages by relying upon the “China Education Cloud”, and establish an international course promotion platform with Chinese characteristics.

It indicates that application-oriented undergraduate and vocational colleges may become key forces in running schools overseas in the future, and with the development of education technology, online education may become a more important aspect for Chinese educational institutions to run schools overseas and will play a more in-depth role in the context of educational technology.

Differentiated arrangements for the opening-up of education at all levels and of all types

The Opinions distinguish arrangements for the opening-up of education at various levels:

1. In terms of higher education, the Ministry of Education will support colleges and universities to strengthen cooperation with world-leading universities and academic institutions, further implement requirements of the “powers, regulation and services” reform, granting “double tops” colleges with certain foreign affairs approval rights, and explore management measures for the classified examination and approval for international college meetings.
2. In terms of vocational education, breakthroughs are presented in policies regarding the introduction of the “dual system” and the introduction of high-quality foreign vocational education resources, encouraging qualified domestic vocational colleges and enterprises to join with enterprises in participating in international production capacity cooperation, and implementing overseas training

plans for innovative teacher teams of vocational colleges.

3. In terms of basic education, strengthen international understanding of education in primary and middle schools, educate students to establish a sense of community for a shared future for mankind, and cultivate youths fit for the new era with an all-round development in terms of ethics, intelligence, fitness, aesthetic appreciation and labor and with an international vision.

The Opinions support further opening-up and cooperation in higher education and vocational education, while focusing more in terms of basic education on strengthening general education of youths and cultivating their international perspectives. The Opinions distinguish the focus of the education for students in different regions and of different groups according to their respective characteristics.

Overall, with the release of the Opinions and the relevant works of the government following the release, and the gradual promulgation and implementation of relevant laws, regulations, policy documents, and supporting measures, China will further enhance its contribution and influence regarding education opening-up, will deeply participate in global education governance, and will see comprehensive promotion of the country's opening-up of education, solidly, orderly and effectively within a foreseeable time.

Important Announcement

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If you have any questions regarding this publication, please contact:

Gloria XU

Tel: +86 10 8525 5508

Email: gloria.xu@hankunlaw.com