



# China encourages HEIs to offer Second Bachelor's Degrees from 2020

(Information as at 29 July 2020)

## What is a “Second Bachelor's Degree”?

The “Second Bachelor's Degree program” (SBD) is a domestic higher education scheme that allows students to pursue a second Bachelor's degree after successfully obtaining a first Bachelor's degree. The SBD is different to a “double degree” or “double major”, both of which are offered while students are completing their first degree. It is also not considered a postgraduate degree despite the student having already obtained an undergraduate degree.

The pilot program for SBDs was launched in 1987 by the then State Education Commission, which later became the Ministry of Education (MoE).<sup>1</sup> In July 2019, the MoE announced the SBD program would be officially cancelled.<sup>2</sup> The program was in place for over 30 years, but as postgraduate enrolment increased in China and universities began to offer double degree/double majors, its popularity began to wane.

Less than a year later, however, in May 2020, the MoE reversed the 2019 decision issuing the *Notice by the General Office of the Ministry of Education for higher education institutions to continue enrolling students for Second Bachelor's Degrees*<sup>3</sup> (the Notice). See **Appendix A** for an unofficial

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<sup>1</sup> People's Republic of China, State Education Commission, 高等学校培养第二学士学位生的试行办法 (Unofficial Translation Interim Provision for Higher Education Institutions to Educate for Second Bachelor's Degree) 6 June 1987 [http://old.moe.gov.cn/publicfiles/business/htmlfiles/moe/moe\\_621/201001/81944.html](http://old.moe.gov.cn/publicfiles/business/htmlfiles/moe/moe_621/201001/81944.html)

<sup>2</sup> People's Republic of China, Ministry of Education 国务院学位委员会印发《学士学位授权与授予管理办法》 (Unofficial translation: The Academic Degrees Committee of the State Council issues “Administrative Measures for the Authorisation and Issuing of Bachelor's Degree”) 26 July 2019 [http://www.moe.gov.cn/jyb\\_xwfb/gzdt\\_gzdt/s5987/201907/t20190726\\_392373.html](http://www.moe.gov.cn/jyb_xwfb/gzdt_gzdt/s5987/201907/t20190726_392373.html)

<sup>3</sup> People's Republic of China, Ministry of Education, 教育部办公厅关于在普通高校继续开展第二学士学位教育的通知 (Unofficial translation: Notice by the General Office of the Ministry of Education for higher education institutions to continue enrolling students for Second Bachelor's Degrees), 28 May 2020, [http://www.moe.gov.cn/srcsite/A08/moe\\_1034/s3883/202005/t20200529\\_460339.html](http://www.moe.gov.cn/srcsite/A08/moe_1034/s3883/202005/t20200529_460339.html)

translation. It is understood the change was made to address employment difficulties faced by graduates from higher education institutions (HEIs) as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The SBD is a two-year full-time program that is registered under China's higher education registration management system, making it an officially recognised qualification. Students are taught core subjects required by the major. However, given the shortened timeframe, students are not required to complete internships as part of their SBD program, which are required in most first Bachelor's degrees.

## Who is eligible?

According to the MoE's Notice, students who are in their last year of undergraduate studies, have graduated with a Bachelor's degree in the current year (often referred to as "**fresh graduates**"), or within the past three years and are currently unemployed, are eligible for the SBD program.

Students are allowed to apply for an SBD major from a different subject group from their first Bachelor's degree, or an SBD major from the same subject group but different major from their first Bachelor's degree. For example, "law" is a subject group, and "intellectual property law" is a major within that subject group.

## Who can offer SBDs?

According to the MoE's Notice, Chinese HEIs are encouraged to offer SBDs, as long as the institution has passed the undergraduate teaching assessment conducted by the MoE.

The priority disciplines for SBDs are those identified as being of national importance and include public health and preventive medicine, emergency technology and management, electronic information, big data, cyberspace security, circuits, energy and power, biology and medicine, aged care, household service and other related areas. HEIs can also set up SBDs in areas within the institution's capability that are in high demand by students. In addition, HEIs can offer SBDs in their Double First-Class disciplines.

HEIs will decide what majors to offer and submit the proposal to the managing government body for approval. For example, proposals by MoE-affiliated universities will be approved by the MoE; proposals by provincial government affiliated universities will be approved by the provincial government. Once the process is complete, the approved list will be sent to the MoE to be retained on file and published.

## What are the benefits of an SBD?

The main aim of the SBD program is to produce graduates with greater inter-disciplinary ability, in priority disciplines as identified in recent Government-issued development plans. At this particular time, the SBD program has the additional aim of alleviating the unemployment levels of higher education graduates due to COVID-19 - keeping students engaged in the education system rather than in the job market.

For students, the SBD allows them to gain knowledge in an area that is different to their first degree, which may increase their competitiveness in the job market in the future. Some also see the SBD as an opportunity for a second "take-off". In order to comprehend the benefit of an SBD for students, it is important to understand what incentives "fresh graduates" have over other graduates in the China market.

“Fresh graduates” – those that are in their last year of undergraduate studies or have graduated from HEIs in the current year - have major advantages in the employment market over graduates from previous years. There are many employment fairs and attractive job positions that are reserved for fresh graduates and they are targeted for many national and local level government employment policies and incentives.

In March 2020, the State Council issued a document to promote business activities and support employment.<sup>4</sup> The document specifically mentioned the increase in state-owned enterprise’s recruitment of fresh graduates. Both Shanghai<sup>5</sup> and Henan<sup>6</sup> quickly responded to the call and announced at least 50% of state-owned enterprise’s new recruitment positions this year will be allocated to fresh graduates from local universities. On a regular basis, local governments also provide rent/allowance subsidies to fresh graduates that work in or start-up companies in the region.

The Chinese Government has also called on individual universities to offer targeted support to graduates to find employment. In Fujian Province, HEIs were recently tasked to ensure that no less than 70% of new graduates this year are employed by 1 September.<sup>7</sup>

## Why not a Masters?

Completing an SBD may take a similar amount of time as a Master’s degree – which is also often a two-year full-time program. However, the admissions process for SBD is much simpler and faster than a Master’s degree. Master’s degrees are also more competitive with most students gaining admission through competitive testing – the “National Postgraduate Entrance Examination (NPEE)”.<sup>8</sup> In 2020, more than 3.41 million students will sit the NPEE, up by 510,000 from the previous year, making it another record high year.<sup>9</sup> Most students would say that the NPEE is almost as challenging and competitive as the National College Entrance Exam (Gaokao) if students want to get into a top university.

In contrast, the SBD admissions requirement is set by individual universities, and usually does not involve a separate test. According to the 2020 SBD Admissions Scheme published by China University of Political Science and Law<sup>10</sup>, the university’s SBD program is only open to students that have graduated with a Bachelor’s degree from the university in 2020. Students will be admitted based on their eligibility and do not need to take an entrance exam.

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<sup>4</sup> People’s Republic of China, State Education Commission, 高等学校培养第二学士学位生的试行办法 (Unofficial Translation Interim Provision for Higher Education Institutions to Educate for Second Bachelor’s Degree) 6 June 1987 [http://old.moe.gov.cn/publicfiles/business/htmlfiles/moe/moe\\_621/201001/81944.html](http://old.moe.gov.cn/publicfiles/business/htmlfiles/moe/moe_621/201001/81944.html)

<sup>5</sup> “State-Owned Enterprises in Shanghai to Provide 65,000 University Graduates with Jobs by May.” *Global Times*, 11 June 2020, [www.globaltimes.cn/content/1191273.shtml](http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1191273.shtml).

<sup>6</sup> Li, Na. 河南：国企 50%以上岗位招聘应届毕业生 (Henan: State-owned enterprises to allocate more than 50% of recruiting job positions to fresh graduates) . Zhong Gong News, 12 June 2020, [news.worker.cn/32843/202006/12/200612182003371.shtml](http://news.worker.cn/32843/202006/12/200612182003371.shtml).

<sup>7</sup> Ye, Ruolin. “Fujian Tasks Universities With Helping Graduates Find Jobs.” Edited by David Paulk , Sixth Tone, 12 June 2020, [www.sixthtone.com/news/1005798/fujian-tasks-universities-with-helping-graduates-find-jobs](http://www.sixthtone.com/news/1005798/fujian-tasks-universities-with-helping-graduates-find-jobs).

<sup>8</sup> Official translation of 全国硕士研究生统一招生考试

<sup>9</sup> Lang, Lang, and Yuqi Yang. 2020 年考研今起开考：341 万人报名 创历史新高. Xinhua Net, 21 Dec. 2019, [www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2019-12/21/c\\_1125371634.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2019-12/21/c_1125371634.htm).

<sup>10</sup> China University of Political Science and Law, Admissions Office, 中国政法大学 2020 第二学士学位招生简章 (China University of Political Science and Law Second Bachelor Degree Program Admission Scheme for 2020 intake) , 11 June 2020 <http://zs.cupl.edu.cn/info/1020/1786.htm>

## Going forward

On 10 July 2020, the MoE published the list of HEIs that will offer SBDs in 2020.<sup>11</sup> According to the list, 497 HEIs will be offering a total of 3,426 SBD programs this year. The list includes HEIs at every mainland province/municipality/autonomous region, and the majority of SBDs are offered by HEIs that are administered by provincial level governments. SBDs are also offered at 36 MoE affiliated top universities including Fudan University, Shanghai Jiao Tong University and Nankai University.

Engineering-related degrees take up about a third of the SBDs that are offered, followed by management-related degrees (14%) and science-related degrees (13.5%). “English” (including English and Business English) is offered by 147 HEIs, higher than any other program, followed by “Computer science and technology” and “Law”, which are offered by 132 HEIs and 113 HEIs respectively.

For further enquiries, please contact the [Education and Research Section](#) of the Australian Embassy in Beijing.

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<sup>11</sup> People’s Republic of China, Ministry of Education, 教育部办公厅关于公布 2020 年普通高等学校第二学士学位专业备案结果的通知(Unofficial Translation: Notice of the General Office of the Ministry of Education on the Recording of the Second Bachelor’s Degree in Regular Higher Education Institutions) 7 July 2020 [http://www.moe.gov.cn/srcsite/A08/moe\\_1034/s3883/202007/t20200710\\_471303.html](http://www.moe.gov.cn/srcsite/A08/moe_1034/s3883/202007/t20200710_471303.html)

## Appendix A

***Disclaimer: This literal translation by the Education and Research Section of the Australian Embassy in Beijing is provided as a working tool, and is provided "as is." No warranty of any kind, either expressed or implied, is made as to the accuracy, correctness, or reliability of any translations. Only the original official version should prevail as a source of reference.***

### **Notice by the General Office of the Ministry of Education for higher education institutions to continue enrolling students for Second Bachelor's Degrees**

(Unofficial translation of 教育部办公厅关于在普通高校继续开展第二学士学位教育的通知 by the Education and Research Section, Australian Embassy China)

28 May 2020

*To: The Education Department (Education Commission) of provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities, the Education Bureau of Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps, the education department (bureau) of the relevant departments (bureaus), ministry affiliated the higher education institutions and higher education institutions established by ministry and provincial level governments*

The Second Bachelor's Degree (SBD) is a form of post-undergraduate education and is an important pathway for developing inter-disciplinary professionals. In order to implement the spirit set out in the "Implementation opinion on strengthening stability of employment in response to COVID-19 pandemic by the General Office of the State Council"<sup>12</sup>, further optimise education and the structure for training professionals and provide more options for further studies to higher education graduates, it was decided, after consultation, to continue with implementing the SBD in regular higher education institutions. The relevant measures are to follow.

1. Higher education institutions (HEIs) that have passed the undergraduate teaching assessment conducted by the Ministry of Education (MoE) for five years or more can apply to offer SBDs.
2. HEIs can enrol students into its existing SBD majors, and/or apply to the MoE to set up new SBD majors in majors that it is currently qualified to offer bachelor's degree in. SBDs that were previously withdrawn will need to reapply to be filed with the MoE. The filing of SBD will be carried out at the same time as application for regular new undergraduate programs.
3. HEIs are encouraged to offer SBDs, there will be an additional round of application for SBD filing in 2020. HEIs will be supported to offer SBD in areas that are of national importance, including: public health and preventive medicine, emergency technology and management, electronic information, big data, cyberspace security, circuits, energy power, biology and medicine, aged care, housekeeping

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<sup>12</sup> People's Republic of China, General Office of the Chinese State Council, 国务院办公厅关于应对新冠肺炎疫情影响强化稳就业举措的实施意见(Unofficial translation: Implementation opinion on strengthening stability of employment in response to COVID-19 pandemic by the General Office of the State Council, 20 March 2020, [http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/content/2020-03/20/content\\_5493574.htm](http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/content/2020-03/20/content_5493574.htm))

and related areas, as well as majors that HEIs are capable to offer and are in demand. HEIs are also encouraged to set up SBDs in disciplines that are included in the “Double First Class” disciplines development scheme.

4. The enrolment quota for SBDs will be made separate under the national enrolment quota for regular bachelor’s degree. All HEIs should strictly follow the enrolment plan for SBD and should not enrol or award students without approval.

5. The main group of students eligible for SBD are those that are in their last year of undergraduate studies or have graduated from regular HEIs with bachelor’s degree in the current year (fresh graduates), and those that have graduated with a bachelor’s degree from regular HEIs in the past three years and are currently unemployed. Other personnel in theory are not eligible for a SBD. The specific prerequisite for SBD enrolment will be determined by individual HEIs.

6. The form of admissions examination for SBD will be formulated by individual HEIs based on the requirement of the relevant major. The form of examination will be submitted to the provincial level education authority to be filed. HEIs should adhere to the relevant national testing requirement, strengthen management of admissions examination, standardise working procedures, be strict on the standard of enrolment to ensure procedure fairness and justice.

7. Students can apply for an SBD major from a different subject group from his/her first bachelor’s degree, or for a SBD major from the same subject group but different major from his/her first bachelor’s degree. For details on the subject groups and majors, visit the MoE website ([www.moe.gov.cn](http://www.moe.gov.cn)) and search for “Regular Higher Education Undergraduate Major Index (2020) ”.

8. The SBD program is a two-year full-time program that is registered under the higher education registration management system.

9. Students will be taught core subjects and subjects that are required by the major, students are, in theory, not arranged for internships. HEIs can refer to the “National Standards For Teaching Quality For Undergraduate Majors In Regular HEIs”<sup>13</sup> for developing education programs and study plans for SBDs, and should not lower standards without proper justification.

10. The issuance of SBD qualification and graduation certificate will be in accordance to the current regular issuance of qualification and graduation certificate. The graduation certificate has to clearly indicate the full title and study period of the SBD, the qualification certificate also needs to clearly indicate that it is an SBD.

11. Students that complete the program within the required timeframe and have completed all subjects as required will be issued a graduation certificate and a qualification certificate. Those that do not meet the graduation requirement will not be given extension to complete the course, nor will they be allowed to repeat the program, they will be issued with a certificate of completion. For those that wish to drop out of the program, the HEI should issue a certificate of study or a certificate that describes the study that was undertaken.

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<sup>13</sup> unofficial translation of 普通高校本科专业类教学质量国家标准

12. Graduates from the SBD will be considered in the same way as regular “fresh graduates” in terms of employment. For students that drop out of the SBD during the course of their studies, they will be considered for employment based on their graduate status at the time of entry into the SBD – those that took on the SBD as a fresh graduate will be considered a fresh graduate in the year that they drop out of the SBD; those that took on the SBD as a graduate from previous years will be treated in accordance to relevant policies.

13. The funding, subsidy and fee for SBD should correspond the same undergraduate programs for regular students.

14. HEIs should attach great importance to continue carrying out SBD programs, and effectively improve their political stand. They should formulate enrolment and education plan in accordance with the status of the institution and actively carry out the program. Provincial level education authorities should supervise HEIs in carrying out planning and admissions of SBD programs. Those that violate relevant regulation and causes adverse impact to society will be held accountable.

15. HEIs should strengthen work on analysing current trends and promote positive publicity; conduct thorough interpretation on the relevant policies and provide assistance to applicants and their parents on understanding the policy; respond to the public in a timely manner; create a positive atmosphere and ensure all works are properly conducted. Enrolment should be completed before the end of July.

*The Education Department (Education Commission) of provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities, the Education Bureau of Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps, the education department (bureau) of the relevant bodies (bureaus) should forward this notice to the relevant HEI (undergraduate level) in your jurisdiction.*

General Office of the Ministry of Education