



# China's World Class 2.0 – an update

## (Information current as at 2 September 2016)

The Chinese government has recently released a high level document providing guidance on policies to support China's education system. A key component of this involves changes to funding for universities, essentially encouraging more competition to drive quality.

In December 2015, we provided an [overview of a new directive](#) from the Chinese State Council to lift the status, standing and international competitiveness of China's higher education system, under a plan unofficially known as "World Class 2.0".

A subsequent article on [ranking China's universities](#) discussed China's two long-standing projects to develop world class universities, namely the "211" project and the more recent "985" project.

While these two projects have helped China to grow the research capability and international reputation of its best universities rapidly, [critics of these two projects](#) say that too many educational resources have been set aside specifically for these two projects, causing severe inequality and academic corruption. For some university graduates, graduating from a 985 or a 211 university has typically led to better employment outcomes, due in part to the prestige associated with participating in these projects.

In May this year, the CPC Central Committee and the State Council issued a high level directive to provinces and departments to implement new policies to improve China's education system ("Opinions on the work of the opening-up of education in the new era"). Part of these "Opinions" included a priority to reinforce the development of high-quality education resources and enhance the strength and innovation of China's education – World Class 2.0.

On 23 June 2016, the Chinese Ministry of Education (MOE) removed a number of now redundant policy guidelines, including those related to the 211 and 985 projects. Following this, there was conjecture in the Chinese public that this meant that these projects had been abolished. On 1 July 2016, the MOE officially responded to these rumours, saying that the projects had not been abolished, but that the period of funding for the 211 and 985 projects has now ended, and is being replaced by the World Class 2.0.

A significant change under World Class 2.0 is that any Chinese university can now potentially receive strong government support and investment if they have performed well in the construction of first-class disciplines: funding is no longer restricted to those universities in the 211 and 985 projects.

This new policy is expected to address a number of problems associated with the 211 and 985 projects, including the solidified status of participating institutions, redundant construction and lack of competition among universities. It is anticipated that this will encourage more universities to compete to become world class, and to develop first-class disciplines, providing a longer-term significant increase in the overall education quality in China's higher education system.

In the short term, it is unlikely that these changes will have a significant impact on the perceived status of former 985 and 211 project universities, as these universities have benefitted from huge financial investments from the Chinese government since the 1990s, and have strong and influential alumni associations and links with industry.

Specific implementation measures are still under discussion, although the government has announced that it will establish an independent third-party audit system to monitor the use of research funds in Chinese universities. The "Opinions" also note that China will assign selected outstanding young teachers and academic leaders of Chinese institutions to study in world-class foreign institutions, to help speed up the development of world-class teaching practices in Chinese universities.

We anticipate further detail on World Class 2.0 will be included in China's 13th Five Year Plan for Education, yet to be released.

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