

## National Seminar on China's Higher Education Reform

*The World Bank will be conducting an international seminar in Beijing in March 1999 concerning Higher Education reform for China. We are currently looking for Consultants to participate in the Conference for two weeks in Beijing. We seek individuals with experience in higher education reform whether for a Country or on an institutional case level.*

**Seminar objective:** to examine reorganization restructuring of universities in China, bringing to bear international experience on the situation.

**Background -** Since the early 1980s the government has been gradually moving away from a centralist model in which it controlled the detailed operations of higher education institutions. China is in the middle of moving from a "state-control model" to a "state-supervising model" (in current terms "macrocontrol" to "macromanagement") as regards the relationship between universities and government. The majority of higher education institutions do not have the managerial, financial, academic and technical expertise to contribute to economic stabilization and long-term growth nor to the development of an open and civic society.

Regular higher education institutions in China were established with the aim of meeting the requirements of a centrally planned economy and funded according to State planning. The fundamental challenge of current economic and educational reform is to orient institutions both to a more open labor market as well as to a more open society. The key issues confronting institutions are: (a) lack of clarity regarding respective roles and powers of SEDC, central ministries, and provincial and municipal governments; (b) inadequate or inappropriate management and administrative structures and processes; (c) inefficiency in the use of scarce resources for qualitative improvement and quantitative expansion; (d) an existing system of resource allocation that is not linked to improving operational efficiency and institutional quality; (e) difficulties relating to a balance between market-oriented programs of study and basic disciplines; and (f) uneven distribution of managerial, financial, academic, and technical capabilities and capacities among regions, provinces, institutions.

**Rationale:** The Higher Education system as a whole is up for scrutiny, including the "motherless universities". Some ministries have been abolished, leaving the institution under their jurisdiction "motherless." With the demolition of more than 10 ministries, a priority of the State Council is to decide on the new jurisdictions of the "motherless" universities. These institutions would profit from the planned seminar, and information from international experiences. Some recommendations for improving cost-effectiveness, quality and equity of the higher education system will be welcomed. The workshop also hopes to define the role of the state vis-a-vis the university, establish effective policy-making and funding bodies for higher education, and providing enabling environment for universities to develop their own strategies and strengthen their managerial capacity.

Case Studies, presentation of papers, and participation are welcomed from individuals with experience working with higher education reform in any country. Consultants will present papers and participate in the workshop. Individuals are sought who can present:

- (a) Documentation on Higher Education reorganization either at a national level or specific institutional case level;
- (b) Experience (successful) in orchestrating such restructuring;
- (c) Managers, Administrators, Academics, etc. who have developed expertise in the area;
- (d) Extreme familiarity with the case or selected country in which you present

*While thorough knowledge of the Chinese Higher Education system is not mandatory, for your general knowledge find attached a brief description of China's Education System. Further information can be provided upon request. Please fax CV's to Herma Percy at 202-522-7108 or 202-522-1656 or e-mail hpercy@worldbank.org. The telephone number is 202-475-0301 daytime, 202-328-0434 Evenings/Night.*

## ANNEX 1: CHINESE HIGHER EDUCATION: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

1. China's present higher education system was put in place in the early 1950s with the deliberate intention of training higher level personnel as effectively as possible for service in all sectors of the new socialist state. The model was derived directly from the Soviet Union, with the assistance of Soviet experts in both its design and implementation, and it was intended to counteract some of the well-known weaknesses of higher institutions during the previous Nationalist period: a tendency toward overly high enrollments in areas such as law, political science and humanities, which were strongly favored due to persisting values from the traditional civil service system, considerable geographical imbalances between coastal and central hinterland regions and a degree of diversity that did not ensure common academic standards.

2. The new system was put in place initially between 1950 and 1953, with a complete reorganization of old institutions and the creation of new ones around a national plan, which emphasized curricular patterns that would ensure close coordination between higher education programs and personnel needs of the state, as well as a rational geographical distribution of higher education. The country was divided into six major geographical regions, and from 1950 to 1954 each had an educational bureau that coordinated planning for the region. At the core of the system were three or four main types of institution that were directly administered by a new national ministry of higher education: polytechnic universities with a wide range of applied scientific and engineering programs, comprehensive universities, with programs mainly in the basic arts and sciences, and normal universities with arts and sciences programs combined with education, which were responsible for setting national standards for teacher training at tertiary and secondary level. Each region had at least one of each of these three types of institution, some two or three, and their role was both a national and regional one. In addition to these core institutions there were a large number of sectoral institutions, in areas such as agriculture, medicine, steel, finance, law, railways etc., which were managed by appropriate ministries, and were distributed across the country, taking into account differences of regional emphasis by sector. Each institution was narrowly specialized in its programs, and its role was to train personnel for its specific sector.

3. Between 1950 and 1954, each region had the responsibility of enrolling students through entrance examinations, but in 1955 a national unified entrance examination was established. The recruitment base was still a selective and highly academic upper secondary education system, and so competition was not as intense as it later became. A unified national job assignment system was put in place in 1956, which was managed jointly by the State Planning Commission, the sectoral ministries and the ministry of higher education, to ensure that each graduate was assigned a position as a state cadre in a

setting where their knowledge could be put to good use. It was the norm for graduates to be sent far from their homes, often to serve in the development of new institutions or industries in hinterland areas.

4. The main function of this new higher education system was teaching, with a separate system for research established under the Chinese Academy of Sciences, and various national ministries. A large number of research institutes developed, with research topics and funding assigned by plan from the state, and with very little connection to the higher education system, except for the fact that research staff were drawn from its graduates. A few institutes under the Academy undertook programs of graduate training in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

5. In 1957-58, with the Great Leap Forward, a second important stage in the evolution of the socialist higher education system took place, with the vigorous development of new institutions at the provincial level, and the decentralization of authority over some national institutions. The ministry of higher education was combined with the ministry of education. Many provinces created their own comprehensive and normal universities in this period, as well as various specialized institutions which were designed to serve provincial personnel needs. This was a time when a large number of graduates from the best universities in coastal areas were sent to remote regions as core faculty for newly established local institutions. Also some coastal institutions were moved to the hinterland.

6. In a situation where the priorities were to build heavy industry as the basis for a modern economy, and establish a strong socialist governmental and education system, these patterns set in place in the 1950s worked well at first, since there was a fairly high degree of predictability in personnel planning for these areas. However, with a new emphasis on agriculture and light industry in the late 1950s, also with the rapid growth of secondary education, and thus of the pool of graduates competing for entry to higher education, many concerns about equality of access, and about the suitability of the system to China's indigenous economic and cultural development came to the fore. The Cultural Revolution was a period in which some of these concerns were aired, and strong criticism was expressed of the Soviet-derived pattern. For three years, from 1966 to 1969, all regular recruitment to higher education was halted. Between 1971 and 1976 much smaller numbers of students were enrolled. Unfortunately, efforts to run open-door institutions, and link academic knowledge with social transformation failed and this caused inestimable damage to the economy and society, especially affecting intellectuals and government cadres.

7. In the late 1970s, the concern for modernization through economic revitalization became paramount, and the leadership of Deng Xiaoping opened up a new era of reform, which brought about fundamental changes in higher education. In an important national conference for science and education, held in 1978, clear goals of service to economic modernization in the four areas of agriculture, industry, national defense and science and

technology were set forth. This national policy emphasis on the economy has resulted in dramatic changes over the 1980s.

8. In 1985, the Chinese government's new policy entitled "The Reform of the Education System" emphasized the implementation of a three-level school management system at the central, provincial and major municipal levels. The same reform plan gave universities new powers, particularly with regard to the content and methods of teaching, as well as freedom to develop new programs and even new local institutions at the short-cycle level, and in adult education

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