British Council China Higher Education Partnership Fund (2018-2024)

The Universities Network on Global Leadership, Peace, and Development: innovative collaboration between King's College London and China

For academic institutions across the UK, China, and other global regions, creating meaningful and sustainable partnerships that foster international collaboration in higher education is a complex but essential task. The challenge lies in overcoming barriers such as limited resources, funding constraints, and varying educational frameworks, while seeking innovative ways to enhance academic exchanges, research, and student mobility.

The Universities Network on Global Leadership, Peace, and Development project, spearheaded by King's College London, provides a powerful response to these challenges. By securing seed funding from the **British Council China Higher Education Partnership Fund**, the project connects partner institutions across the UK, China, and African countries, aiming to foster transnational collaboration in higher education.

The initiative focuses on addressing global issues such as leadership, peace, and societal development through joint research and the internationalisation of academic curricula, paving the way for new educational pathways that benefit students, faculty, and institutions alike.

Running initially from 2019 to 2022, **the project's purpose is to maintain a network of like-minded universities with a shared commitment to transformative education and research**. The network focused initially on developing three master's-level modules – Global Leadership, Peace and Society, Practising Leadership, and Research Methods – that are scalable and adaptable across partner institutions.
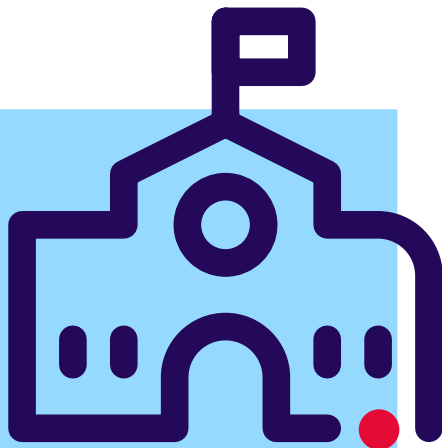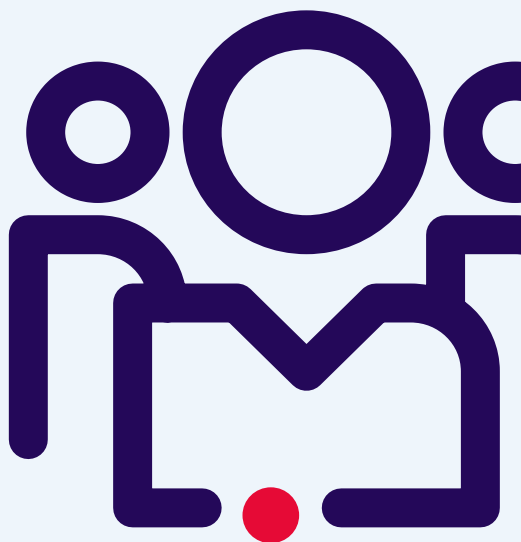
Innovative collaboration

Living up to the network's ethos of **innovative academic collaboration**, partner universities have worked flexibly and collaboratively in the phased development of the course modules. These stages ran from initial conceptualisation to delivery phase with the team at King's College London's African Leadership Centre acting as the design and technology hub for developing the programme's learning platform and achieving effective transmission of online learning and training assets to the network's institutions.

Alongside the module development, the programme is delivering a globally-scalable and sustainable academic programme through the training of junior faculty partners at Peking University and African member institutions. These capacity-building sessions have successfully equipped faculty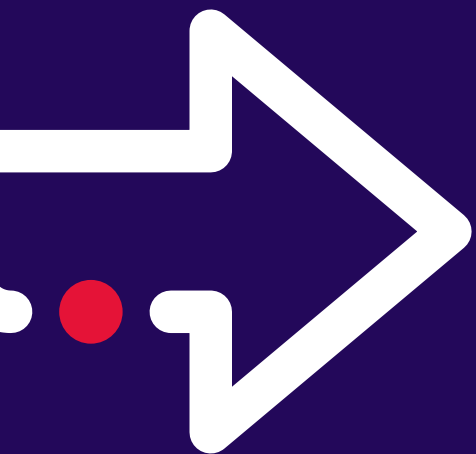 teams with the capabilities to conceptualise, design and deliver these modules as flexible, blended learning modules for postgraduate students from across the world.

As a testament to the modules' relevance, adaptability, and scalability, they are already enabling partner countries to achieve **inter-generational learning** within individual universities and across partner countries; senior faculty academics are able to oversee each module with junior faculty colleagues trained and empowered to deliver the bulk of the learning materials.

A resilient network

The project's committed partnerships, focused **collaborations and nimble technology strategy** have not only met the partners' aspiration of innovative, multi-partner delivery of academic materials but also withstood profound external disruption – most notably pandemic conditions. The network's in-built project resilience and creative spirit have inspired partner institutions to anticipate such challenges, realise their goals and, crucially, ensure value for money and sustainable outcomes.

Dr. Barney Walsh of the African Leadership Centre, Kings College London, and lead for the Universities Network on Global Leadership, Peace and Development project, comments:

"The modules' design has entailed deep, online collaborations across the conceptualisation, workshop and delivery stages of the programme and then moving the project forward after the initial stage. The seed funding was immensely useful in meeting the up-front costs of this development approach."

Internationalising learning

The programme's **major achievements** have included the establishment of successful partnerships with Chinese universities, new academic modules delivered through shared online platforms that are accelerating the development of collaborative educational frameworks, and enhanced knowledge-sharing, for example through partner universities publishing joint research findings in each other's academic journals.

By centring China as a key partner, the universities' programme has successfully built **a platform for sustainable long-term cooperation** to address and understand pressing global research issues as well providing a proven framework for attracting additional sponsorship and funding and collaborations from new external partners.

Enhanced master's education

The three modules are already enhancing partner universities' MSc/MA programmes; for example, Peking University is planning to integrate programme modules into its MSc in International Organization and Public Policy, reflecting the project's alignment with global and local academic priorities.

Through the three new postgraduate modules, students from across the world can attend customised, blended learning lectures and workshops via the unique, shared online learning platform. The project materials' innovative development methodology has also allowed for the **adaptation of all modules for executive training sessions at partner universities and there is scope for further module development and learning programme expansion in the future.**

Accelerated academic exchange

The project has supported joint research with Chinese partner institutions, particularly through the longstanding Africa-China Working Group of academics exploring African agency in Africa-China relations. Project members' faculty exchanges and participation in international conferences have helped realise the ambition for greater student mobility as well as strengthening partners' academic collaborations, particularly in critical research areas such as African statehood and development.

The benefits for partner countries' education sectors are most profound in Africa. The core modules are informing the creation of a Transnational Education Centre to deliver online learning to students across Africa. The momentum created has inspired a separate philanthropic grant of £10 million from Africa for the centre's establishment and operation.

The universities' programme has also enabled collaborative trans-disciplinary training workshops for emerging African scholars to supervise their postgraduate students. Workshop programmes have been held in Pretoria and Addis Ababa, training emerging African scholars from Ethiopia, South Africa, Kenya, and Cameroon, on supervising postgraduate students with approximately 80 faculty members trained over three workshops.

Expanding opportunities

Realising the vision of wider student learning opportunities and mobility, **the programme's total audience amounts to 330 learners on the three main modules and their adapted versions, together with the 80 emerging scholars trained**. There have already been thirteen faculty exchanges between member institutions. A further global audience of academics and postgraduate students will be reached through the publication of joint research activities, including partner universities' contributions to the Africa-China Special Issue of the Journal of Leadership and Developing Societies.

Partners attest to the success of the project's joint collaborations, teaching, and research initiatives. **Xu Liang, Associate Professor at the School of International Studies at Peking University**, believes that the project has improved 'capacity and experience,' 'scholarly communication' and 'broadened research horizons.' **Jimam Lar, Head of the Department of History and International Studies University of Jos**, Nigeria, comments that 'the shared experiences and shared lessons have been invaluable.'

The Universities Network on Global Leadership, Peace, and Development project has established **a transformative education agenda, teaching and training styles across UK, China and African countries.** Despite challenges like COVID-19, the project has thrived through robust processes and the collective commitment of partner institutions to overcome technical hurdles and achieve its goals.

Key breakthroughs include a sustainable, scalable approach to learning and expanding teaching capacity, while the project's global partnerships and dynamic learning platform contribute significantly to fostering international collaboration and expanding educational opportunities.
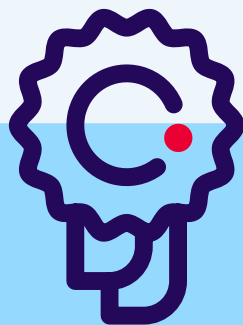
●● BRITISH
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British Council China Higher Education Partnership Fund (2018-2024)

King's College London

🔲 Project title

Universities Network on Global Leadership, Peace and Development: Creating Educational and Societal Transformation (2019-2022)

🗩 Project introduction

This project united universities from the UK, China, and African countries to build a global network for capacity building in leadership, peace and development. It co-developed master's modules, fostered joint PhD programmes and trained early-career academics to cultivate the next generation of scholars.

🎓 Major achievements

- Developed online and blended postgraduate modules for roll-out
- Built a shared online learning platform
- Laid the foundation for future online learning for African students
- Conducted collaborative workshops for emerging African scholars

Project in numbers

330
learners on **3** PG modules to date

80+
trained emerging scholars

13 faculty exchanges

10+ joint research papers

1 joint PhD programme with more planned

⚙ Key innovative aspects

Collaborative interactive PG modules co-developed by KCL, 8 African partners Universities, and Peking University

Emphasis on junior faculty's capacity building at African partners

Inter-generational learning within institutions and across partners

⚙ Key takeaway

Transformative education can be effectively delivered through online learning platforms.

The project improved 'capacity and experience', 'scholarly communication', and 'broadened research horizons.' It also 'impacted the level of scholarly collaboration to train the next generation of scholars.' -- Xu Liang, Peking University