

Future Leaders Programme | Building the UK's China Skills 2024

An essential programme to prepare the UK's future political, government and business leaders to tackle the challenges and meet the opportunities accompanying China's rise

"It was a really unique experience and opportunity to engage with so many different perspectives and interests on China and to think beyond my day-to-day work on China."

– FLP alumni

Why invest in China Understanding and Capabilities?

The UK-China relationship is inherently complex given the differences between our political systems and values. Technology, global trade and human rights all illustrate the difficulty and urgency of dealing with China in a fast-changing geopolitical environment. Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the changing nature of global alliances raise urgent questions about what role China can and will play in international relations. China is a fellow permanent UN Security Council member and the world's second largest economy, and plays an influential role in international issues and institutions that are core to the UK's interests across a range of areas including international development, trade and climate change.

The Government published the **Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy: Global Britain in a Competitive Age** in March 2021, updated in March 2023. Although the Review describes China as a "systemic challenge" which presents the "biggest state-based threat to the UK's economic security", it also emphasises the Government's intention to pursue a "positive trade and investment relationship" with China, views cooperation with China on transnational issues like climate change as a necessity, and pledges to invest in the UK's "China-facing capabilities" in order to better understand both the challenges and opportunities China presents.

Now more than ever, a deeper appreciation of Chinese policy aims and broad cross-sectoral China understanding and capabilities are prerequisites for effective engagement with China across the full breadth of bilateral and global policy issues. The **Future Leaders Programme** responds directly to this need for enhanced China Capabilities among a growing network of political, government and business leaders.



What is the Future Leaders Programme?

The Future Leaders Programme brings together cohorts of mid-career policy- and decision-makers from across Westminster, Whitehall, think tanks and UK business in tailored courses on China and engagements with Chinese stakeholders. The Programme emphasises broad diversity of both opinion and participation and deliberately seeks to be a platform for both learning and lively discussion in a safe, Chatham House Rule setting where impartiality, rather than any kind of endorsement, is a guiding principle. Participants are recruited from across political parties, the UK's four nations, including devolved administrations and combined regional authorities, and UK-based international businesses.

Who attends the Future Leaders Programme?

- Members of Parliament, special advisors and parliamentary researchers
- Civil servants from across Whitehall and devolved administrations
- Representatives from UK businesses
- Representatives from think tanks and civil society

The Programme is geared towards busy mid-career professionals, with cohorts of 25-30 participants joining short, immersive courses in Oxford and London. This is complemented by a broad range of continuous deep dives and additional opportunities for engagement, which are open to both participants and the growing number of alumni.

- ✓ Personalised China exposure: This will start in March 2024 with the first group of FLP alumni spending a week in China, including a 2-day programme at the Central Party School at the key event. Other in-country experiences may include participation in bilateral dialogues and conferences, field visits, placements and fellowships.
- ✓ Bespoke support: Participants and alumni have access to input and guidance from experts and specialists if they wish to develop a guided project, such as a think piece, a case study, a policy brief, or a thematic roundtable discussion.
- ✓ Expanded network: Participants become part of a growing group of UK and Chinese professional counterparts that GBCC has built over almost 50 years of existence.
- ✓ Invitations to join GBCC's bilateral Track 1.5 dialogues with counterparts in China, meetings with Chinese delegations visiting the UK, or joining GBCC delegations visiting China.



What does the programme consist of?

Phase 1: Bespoke China Foundation Course

The core programme consists of two short courses, one residential in Oxford in the summer and one non-residential in London in the autumn, with a total of five days of lectures and interactive policy exercises. These courses are designed and delivered by top experts on China. The timings align with the parliamentary recess timetable so that MPs and political researchers can attend.



These Foundation courses are delivered by GBCC in close partnership with the Oxford University China Centre. Professor Todd Hall, the Centre's Director, brings in academics from Oxford University and guest speakers from other universities, think tanks and institutions to deliver the full course, offering a breadth of perspectives, and to support guided projects. Speakers and contributors include former Prime Minister of Australia Kevin Rudd, His Majesty's Ambassador to China Dame Caroline Wilson, and Dr Evan Madeiros, Georgetown University and China adviser to the Obama administration.

The format varies between lectures and interactive seminars, led by topic experts but with frequent participant-led interaction in the form of case studies and policy simulation exercises. All sessions and discussions are held under the Chatham House Rule to allow for vibrant debate and candid exchanges of views. Over the five days of the course, speakers cover a wide range of topics such as:

- ✓ How China Is Governed: The Party-State Nexus and Elite Politics
- ✓ China's History and Self-Perceptions and Their Impact on the UK-China Relationship
- ✓ Party Control at the Social Level
- ✓ The Fundamental Structures of China's Economy & China's Economic Interactions with the World
- ✓ China's Foreign Relations and Interactions with Multilateral Institutions
- ✓ China's Neighbourhood and The Belt and Road Initiative
- ✓ China's Public Diplomacy: Influence vs Interference
- ✓ The UK's Current China Strategy and Policy
- ✓ Digital and Tech Challenges in the 21st Century
- ✓ The UK's Trade and Business Relationship with China
- ✓ Cross-Party Discussion on UK China Policy Direction

Phase 2: Ongoing “deep dives” and additional opportunities for engagement

An expanding range of thematic sessions and engagement opportunities runs alongside the core programme to build on the skills and knowledge acquired during the Foundation course, to offer additional opportunities for engagement and exposure, and to respond to the expressed interests and needs of participants. These events are open to current participants and the growing number of alumni, providing opportunities to build a wide network of future leaders with a keen interest in China.

At a time when international travel has been difficult, thematic sessions have provided interactions with Chinese counterparts. Examples include private discussions with the Chinese Ambassador to the UK, roundtables with Chinese public intellectuals, and briefings on political developments in China by the CCP.

Engagement activities are designed to be flexible and responsive to participants’ career goals and can be personalised, focused on small groups, or delivered to the full cohort. For example, participants who want to develop a guided project, such as a think piece, a case study, a policy brief, or the China strategy of their organisation can receive input and guidance from experts and specialists.



Participants may be invited to join GBCC’s bilateral Track 2 dialogues with counterparts in China or to join delegations to visit China. Personalised exposure through field visits, placements in Chinese companies or fellowships in policy thinktank or universities can also be offered to participants, again depending on the specific needs of the participants/alumni. In March 2024, a programme with the Central Party School in Beijing for FLP alumni is being piloted, with the aim to expand the China-based opportunities for FLP participants and alumni.

The role of China globally, and perspectives on how other countries especially in the Asia-Pacific region manage their relationship with China, are increasingly relevant to the UK. GBCC is exploring opportunities for exchange with institutions in Singapore and across the region.

What do previous participants say about it?

Conversations with participants and formal evaluations allows GBCC to continuously adjust the programme content and delivery mechanisms as the Programme evolves. The feedback from participants has been overwhelmingly positive; in particular the diversity of perspectives and positions, the relevance to day-to-day China jobs and the platform for open and nuanced discussions on sensitive issues is remarked upon.

"...The depth of expertise from the subject experts we heard from. Absolutely terrific..."

"...The breadth and depth of the expertise from the speakers, it was pitched at the right level and was really engaging..."

"...I liked that we were encourage[d] to read and think for ourselves, rather than just accept everything that was being said to us..."

"I found all of the lectures incredibly insightful and found the bringing together of civil servants, MPs and business a really rewarding way of hearing different perspectives."

"The whole programme was extremely high quality, and a lot of the insight and reward came from the mix of sessions, the mix of participants and the combination of formal lectures with more informal discussion over coffee and meals."



Programme Partners

The Great Britain-China Centre (GBCC) has been involved with the UK-China relationship since its establishment by the UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office in 1974. GBCC serves as expert convener of senior-level UK-China fora and dialogues involving UK parliamentarians and key political decision-makers. Working in close partnership with HMG and other UK institutions, including parliament, political parties, the judiciary and the legal profession, academia and business, GBCC occupies a niche role creating diverse entry points for UK-China engagement, especially on global governance, the rule of law and justice issues.

In addition to the Future Leaders Programme, GBCC delivers a number of comprehensive China Capabilities courses for the UK Civil Service and draws on a wide network of politicians, officials, academics, experts and practitioners to facilitate dialogues, exchanges and programmes.

The **University of Oxford China Centre** is an institutional partner to the Future Leaders Programme. With an expansive faculty of China experts and an academic network across the UK, it provides academic excellence to the Foundation course and expertise to the ongoing delivery of Programme activities.



The External Review Board

The External Review Board, consisting of senior representatives from academia, UK business, government and the non-profit sector, oversees and advises on overall Programme delivery to make sure that the Programme fulfils its stated aim of diversity of opinion and perspectives on China. In particular, the External Review Board scrutinises course content to ensure it is well balanced, takes into consideration the greatest possible variety of views on the UK-China relationship and brings in a plurality of voices from China, the UK, and internationally, to the extent this is possible and relevant. The Board also works to ensure gender balance among speakers and experts, and that Programme content is independent from corporate sponsorship, with corporate involvement proportionate and relevant.