

The Evolving Funding Landscape for UK-China Research and Collaboration

Lancaster University China Centre roundtable memo 2024/01

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Executive summary

- **UK-China specific funding** calls from UK funders appear to be decreasing, but broad opportunities remain through the International Science Partnerships Fund (ISPF), particularly the “Resilient Planet” and “Tomorrow’s Talent” themes.
- **General PRC funding** for research continues to increase, but support for UK-China research are limited by the availability of matching funds from the UK side
- **Researchers seeking funding** for UK-China collaborative projects may look increasingly to industry, private companies, non-profits and investors

Background

Lancaster University China Centre (LUCC) brings together staff across all disciplines working on, in and with China. On November 14, 2023 LUCC fellows organised “**Sino-Foreign Research Collaboration: The Funding Landscape**,” a half-day workshop organised with sponsorship from the LU Confucius Institute’s China Engagement Fund and the Global Engagement Team. The event formed part of LUCC’s cross-disciplinary discussions on key topics for China-related research, collaboration and engagement.

Wide-ranging funding opportunities exist to support research on China and in collaboration with Chinese partners, but these opportunities have been subject to a broadening set of regulatory, legal and political constraints and risks from both the UK and Chinese sides. Amidst this increasing complexity, LUCC Fellows sought to survey the status quo and emerging trends in funding for China-related research, examining trends on the UK side, the PRC side, and industry.

1. UK funding sources: diversification away from UK-China

On the UK side, there has been a perceptible decrease in funding calls specifically oriented towards UK-China collaboration. Major pools of funding that supported China-relevant research and collaboration in the past have now been reconstituted as part of the International Science Partnerships Fund (ISPF). China has featured in some early ISPF calls, notably on [pandemics and microbial resistance](#) (and Taiwan in a call for [business innovation](#)) but with no equivalent to broad schemes like the UK-China Prosperity Fund and Newton Fund, the level of UK-China opportunities appears lower than before.

Workshop participants worked in groups to examine prospects for Lancaster-based research under ISPF's four themes. Of note, Lancaster's China-related research on electric transport and net-zero pathways fits with both "Resilient Planet" and "Transformative Technologies," and can draw further strength from LEC the Pentland Centre. Lancaster expertise in model building for evaluating disease fits with the ISPF's "Healthy People, Animals & Plants" theme. The "Tomorrow's Talent" theme is well aligned with numerous LUCC Fellows' management studies expertise.

2. PRC funding sources: two ongoing streams

PRC funding for international scientific collaboration is still growing, but there is no evidence of increases in funding for UK-China collaboration. In general there are two modes of PRC funding for research collaboration:

1. Funds dispersed to Chinese universities to support foreign collaborators to spend time in China, and make use of resources and equipment. These include the National Natural Science Foundation of China's (NSFC) Research Fund for International Scientists, and various provincial government schemes.
2. Co-funding: funds from MOST's general budget for international research collaboration remains conditional on co-funding arrangements with funders at the national level of the foreign collaborating country (e.g. UKRI, DSIT). As general rule, therefore, reductions in funding opportunities on the UK side also entail corresponding reductions in funding opportunities from the Chinese side.

3. Industry and beyond

With the above-mentioned process of diversification of the UK's international scientific collaboration funding away from UK-China specific schemes (see 1. above), alternative potential sources of funding are likely to become increasingly important. Guest speaker Yuki Yuan of Imperial College Business School demonstrated a range of alternative funding pathways for scholars at all stages of career to obtain significant support from industry for UK-China collaborative research.