QS World Future Skills Index 2027

China Briefing

What is the QS World Future Skills Index 2027?

The QS World Future Skills Index evaluates how effectively economies can develop, align, and apply skills in a fast-changing global economy. Rather than focusing on higher education only or labour markets in isolation, the Index measures how well higher education systems align with workforce needs in the age of AI.

As economies around the world adapt to the transformative impact of AI, both labour markets and higher education institutions face growing pressure to evolve. Covering 89 economies, the Index assesses readiness to harness the opportunities created by AI through a talent-supply and talent-demand analysis. It combines QS's proprietary data on university performance, jobs and skills, and AI transformation with internationally recognised indicators to provide a global benchmark of AI readiness.

How is the QS World Future Skills Index 2027 calculated?

The methodology consists of two indicators of talent supply and two indicators of talent demand. Core data sources used to compile the Index include: QS AI Workforce Transformation Index, three years of QS jobs and skills data, QS Employer Reputation Survey 2021–2016, QS World University Rankings 2027, QS World University Rankings by Subject 2026, QS Best Student Cities Rankings 2026, World Bank – Human Capital Index, International Labour Organization – employment data, and UN, UNESCO & IMF – economic data. Below is an outline of what each indicator measures and the sub-indicators and weightings.

Talent Supply

Skills Alignment

Matching supply with employer demand (25% weighting)

What this measures

How well a country's graduates skills match employer expectations.

Sub-indicators

- 70% Skills gap (QS employer survey reported gaps by cluster)
- 30% Human capital index (macro lens)

Academic Readiness

Strength of higher education systems (25% weighting)

What this measures

The depth, quality, and future-skills orientation of a country's higher education system.

Sub-indicators

- 20% Strength of institutions (number and performance of QS World Ranked Universities)
- 20% Subject competitiveness across disciplines (QS Subject Rankings)
- QS Subject Rankings
  - 15% AI
  - 15% Digital
  - 15% Green
- 15% Breadth and quality of student cities (QS Best Student Cities)

Talent Demand

Future of Work

Readiness for workforce transformation (25% weighting)

What this measures

How ready a country's job market is for AI, digital and green transformation.

Sub-indicators

- 70% AI Workforce Transformation Index (QS Occupational Augmentation vs Automation analysis)
- Job market exposure indicators (3-year rolling)
  - 10% AI skills penetration
  - 10% Digital skills penetration
  - 10% Green skills penetration

Economic Transformation

Capacity to absorb and deploy skills (25% weighting)

What this measures

The economic enablers to convert skills into productivity, innovation, and growth.

Sub-indicators

- 55% Economic Capacity (3-year GDP Growth, Gross Fixed Capital Formation (USD and % of GDP), Labour Productivity Rate)
- 20% Workforce Readiness (Unemployment rate, Labour Force Participation, Tertiary Enrolment)
- 25% Future Oriented Innovation and Sustainability (R&D expenditure (% of GDP), Youth Population (%), Environmental Performance Index)

Key Findings

A labour market's AI risk-reward ratio – the balance of AI-augmented vs AI-automated jobs – will shape long-term economic competitiveness.

No economy is insulated from AI-driven disruption, but advanced economies are better positioned to capture its benefits and mitigate labour-market displacement. Although early forecasts often predicted mass layoffs and widespread labour-market collapse, these results indicate that AI could generate net-positive economic outcomes, at least in the foreseeable future. Demand for higher-skilled, knowledge-intensive roles is expected to grow, while low-skilled and repetitive occupations remain most exposed to automation. The UK, US, Australia, and Germany lead globally in AI workforce transformation not because they are adopting AI more rapidly, but because their economies are more concentrated in occupations where AI augments human capability rather than replacing it.

As labour-market demand shifts towards roles where human expertise remains central, the competitive advantage of economies and higher education institutions will depend on how effectively they prepare learners for AI-enabled work. Without intervention and investment in upskilling and reskilling, there is a significant risk that AI will exacerbate inequality, concentrating opportunities among workers with the skills to leverage AI while increasing displacement among those in lower skilled roles.

Critical skills gaps persist, yet several countries have demonstrated that targeted interventions can narrow these gaps and strengthen workforce readiness.

Human skills remain the most sought-after capabilities among employers globally, according to the QS Global Employer Survey. Yet the QS World Future Skills Index shows that higher education systems are struggling to equip graduates for a rapidly changing labour market, with employer demand for AI, digital, and green-intensive skills often moving faster than universities can respond. This is not a challenge which universities can solve alone; it requires a broader reset across higher education policy, funding, curriculum governance, institutional agility, and employer investment in workforce development and lifelong learning. India represents one of the most significant opportunities for higher education globally. It ranks fifth for Future of Work readiness (96.0), but eighteenth for Skills Alignment (82.7), highlighting a gap between labour-market transformation and the ability to produce job-ready graduates. As one of the world's largest economies and higher education systems, India's success in closing this gap will shape both its national growth trajectory and the global supply of skilled talent. Encouragingly, India's National Education Policy 2020 is an ambitious attempt to address this challenge, with reforms focused on curriculum flexibility, industry alignment, future-focused skills, and graduate employability at scale. TNE partnerships including branch campuses, and collaborative delivery models can help high-growth economies close skills gaps faster while strengthening global talent pipelines for countries facing persistent skills shortages.

The most competitive economies will be those that successfully align higher education, industry, and public policy.

The depth, quality, and future-skills orientation of a higher education system are not enough on their own to drive economic transformation. Without the investment, infrastructure, and incentives needed to support R&D and technology transfer, academic excellence will fail to translate into significant industrial growth. The UK illustrates this challenge. Despite achieving the highest Academic Readiness score (100), it records an Economic Transformation score of 90.2, representing the largest conversion gap among the top ten economies. The findings suggest that world-class research is a necessary condition for economic success but the ability to convert talent and research into economic value depends on the symbiosis between government, industry, and higher education. Where these links are strong, universities increase the impact and commercial value of their research, while industry gains access to more market-ready innovations, clearer intellectual property frameworks, and stronger collaboration opportunities. Governments that fail to attract investment or incentivise R&D in emerging sectors limit their ability to translate research excellence into productivity, competitiveness, and long-term growth.

Key Findings

The seismic nature of AI-driven transformation in industry is not being matched in scale or pace by change in higher education – and employers are frustrated.

Employers increasingly perceive that higher education is not changing quickly enough to keep pace with the scale of workplace transformation. As Anthropic CEO Dario Amodei has argued, AI is entering a phase with societal and economic consequences comparable to the Industrial Revolution that will "test who we are as a species". Our findings suggest that economic transformation is accelerating faster than talent development, as AI-driven shifts in labour-market demand outpace the evolution of higher education systems.

Leading economies on Future of Work readiness include the UK, US, Australia, Switzerland, and Germany. Yet the weak relationship between AI workforce readiness and graduate skills supply points to a gap that will require rapid, coordinated action from higher education leaders, policymakers, and employers. Higher education institutions will need to undergo significant transformation to keep pace with AI-driven shifts in workforce demand. This will require faster adaptation of programme portfolios, curriculum content, and institutional operating models. Of course, universities must balance responsiveness with the academic quality, rigour, and governance standards that ensure long-term value for students and society. However, universities must balance responsiveness with the academic quality, rigour, and governance standards that ensure long-term value for students and society. Yet the pace of technological change means that maintaining the status quo is not an option. To remain relevant and sustain their central role in talent development, research, and innovation, universities must embrace transformation with greater urgency. At the same time, governments pursuing AI, digital, and industrial transformation risk constraining growth if higher education systems cannot produce the required talent.

Smaller economies can achieve outsized growth by aligning education, policy, and industry around specialist strengths.

For smaller economies, scale has never been the primary route to competitiveness, a pattern clearly reflected in the QS World Future Skills Index 2027. The Netherlands ranks eighth, Switzerland 10th, and Singapore 12th despite having much smaller higher education systems than the US, UK, or Germany. Rather than competing across every discipline, they typically concentrate investment in areas aligned with existing and emerging economic strengths. Faculty and subject-level reputation will become increasingly important. As students focus more on course-to-career outcomes than institution-to-career outcomes, the strength of individual disciplines and programmes will play a greater role in attracting talent. Institutions with recognised excellence in high-demand fields will be best positioned to maintain relevance and competitiveness.

Singapore is a strong example. With an economy centred on financial services, advanced technology, and AI, its higher education system has evolved in close alignment with labour-market demand, supported by a policy environment that combines long-term vision with institutional agility. This is reflected in both workforce outcomes and institutional performance. Nanyang Technological University, for example, has risen from 74th in the QS World University Rankings in 2010 to 12th in 2027. For smaller economies then, strategic focus and agility matter more than scale.

The Global Top 25

Rank	Economy	Region	Income Group	Final Score	SA	AR	FW	ET	Balance Index	Top Strength
1	United States	NA	HI	99.2	100.0	99.3	100.0	97.4	1.2	SA
2	Australia	APAC	HI	97.5	96.9	98.6	98.0	96.4	1.0	AR
3	United Kingdom	ECA	HI	96.6	99.0	100.0	97.0	90.2	4.4	AR
4	Germany	ECA	HI	95.5	93.9	98.0	99.0	91.2	3.6	FW
5	Canada	NA	HI	93.7	94.9	95.9	94.1	89.7	2.7	AR
6	South Korea	APAC	HI	93.4	95.9	93.2	86.1	98.4	5.3	ET
7	China	APAC	UP	92.5	98.0	91.8	80.2	100.0	8.9	ET
8	Netherlands	ECA	HI	91.9	89.8	95.2	88.1	94.3	3.4	AR
9	Spain	ECA	HI	91.7	90.8	93.9	89.1	92.8	2.1	AR
10	Switzerland	ECA	HI	91.6	84.8	96.6	90.1	94.8	5.3	AR
11	France	ECA	HI	91.2	87.8	97.3	95.0	84.6	6.0	AR
12	Singapore	APAC	HI	91.1	86.8	88.4	91.1	97.9	4.9	ET
13	India	SA	LM	89.4	82.7	85.7	96.0	93.3	6.3	FW
14	Sweden	ECA	HI	89.2	79.7	91.2	92.0	93.8	6.4	ET
15	Japan	APAC	HI	89.0	92.9	87.1	84.1	91.7	4.1	SA
16	Taiwan	APAC	HI	88.7	77.7	89.1		99.4	10.9	ET
17	United Arab Emirates	MENA	HI	86.5	83.8	85.0	78.2	98.9	8.8	ET
18	Hong Kong SAR	APAC	HI	85.1	88.9	90.5		75.8	8.1	AR
19	Denmark	ECA	HI	84.9	69.6	87.8	85.1	96.9	11.4	ET
20	Poland	ECA	HI	83.5	71.6	84.4	82.2	95.8	9.9	ET
21	Ireland	ECA	HI	82.3	85.8	83.0	76.2	84.1	4.2	SA
22	Italy	ECA	HI	81.0	75.7	94.6	75.3	78.4	9.2	AR
23	Israel	MENA	HI	80.4	72.6	66.7	93.0	89.2	12.7	FW
24	Türkiye	ECA	UP	79.2	81.7	78.9	65.4	90.7	10.5	ET
25	Austria	ECA	HI	79.0	68.6	89.8	69.3	88.2	11.6	AR

Regions:

NA – North America
APAC – East Asia & Pacific
ECA – Europe & Central Asia
SA – South Asia
MENA – Middle East & North Africa

Income Groups:

HI – High-income countries
UP – Upper-middle-income countries
LM – Lower-middle-income countries

Indicators:

SA – Skills Alignment
AR – Academic Readiness
FW – Future of Work
ET – Economic Transformation

Balance index:

Lower score: well balanced
Higher score: imbalanced

China | Economy Benchmark

92.5
Final score

#7
Overall rank

Indicator	Score	Rank	Peer Median	vs Peer
Skills Alignment	98.0	#3	86.8	▲ +11.2
Academic Readiness	91.8	#13	91.2	▲ +0.6
Future of Work	80.2	#21	89.1	▼ -8.9
Economic Transformation	100.0	#1	93.3	▲ +6.7
→ FINAL	92.5	#7	89.4	▲ +3.1

Indicator performance & peer benchmark

Indicator insight – what the four indicator scores tell us about this economy

The China profile shows a broadly balanced performance across the four indicators (spread of 19.8 points). Its strongest contribution comes from **Economic Transformation (100.0, rank #1),** while Future of Work is the relative weak spot (80.2, rank #21).

Economic conditions appear supportive, but skills and academic foundations need strengthening to convert that economic capacity into future-ready workforce outcomes.

PROFILE ANALYSIS — Top Strength & Biggest Gap	
Top strength:	**Economic Transformation (100.0)**
Biggest gap:	**Future of Work (80.2)**
Indicator spread:	19.8 points (Balanced)
Cohort percentile:	93.2% of eligible economies score lower (i.e. economy is in top 6.8%)
Benchmark cohort:	Top 25 globally (median used in comparison column)
Above peer median:	3 of 4 indicators exceed top-25 median

Rival economy comparison

Peer positioning insight – comparison against regional and income-group cohorts

In its regional cohort (East Asia & Pacific), China ranks **#3 of 14 eligible economies.** Its Final Score of 91.5 compares to a regional median of 81.2 (+11.3 vs regional median).

In its income-group cohort (Upper-middle-income countries), it ranks **#1 of 24 eligible economies,** with its Final Score +34.3 vs the income group median of 58.2.

The closest regional rival is South Korea; the closest income-group rival is Türkiye.

Regional peers – East Asia & Pacific

closest 5 by Final Score within selected economy's region

Rank	Economy	SA	AR	FW	ET	Final
7	**China**	**98.0**	**91.8**	**80.2**	**100.0**	**92.5**
6	South Korea	95.9	93.2	86.1	98.4	93.4
12	Singapore	86.8	88.4	91.1	97.9	91.1
15	Japan	92.9	87.1	84.1	91.7	89.0
2	Australia	96.9	98.6	98.0	96.4	97.5

Income-group peers – Upper-middle-income countries

closest 5 by Final Score within selected economy's income group

Rank	Economy	SA	AR	FW	ET	Final
7	**China**	**98.0**	**91.8**	**80.2**	**100.0**	**92.5**
24	Türkiye	81.7	78.9	65.4	90.7	79.2
31	Argentina	58.4	74.2	83.2	80.0	74.0
32	Indonesia	73.7	72.1	63.4	85.6	73.7
36	Malaysia	78.8	92.5	23.8	86.1	70.3
39	Brazil	43.3	78.2	68.3	82.5	68.1

China | Index Context & Diagnostic

Where this economy sits in the global Top 25 + index-level diagnostic insights

Strategic Narrative

China ranks seventh globally in the Index with a Final Score of 92.5. With an excellent Economic Transformation score (100), China's economy has the requisite investment capability and economic momentum to absorb highly skilled graduates, however its domestic workforce is at risk of AI automation (Future of Work 80.2) as a result of its industrial mix; nearly 25% work in agriculture, and a further ~20% work in manufacturing; two industries at high risk of automation.

China has rapidly moved from mass access to higher education, to near universal participation in two decades. The Education Blueprint 2035 signals a strategic shift from quantity to quality, with unprecedented curriculum realignment removing programmes misaligned with economic needs and adding programmes in AI, advanced materials, and interdisciplinary engineering. The system's strength is scale, STEM orientation, and the world's highest volume of research publications. QS data confirms this rapid ascent: four of the top five Chinese universities moving up by over 20 places in the QS World University Rankings. Overall, Chinese institutions have improved their median Citations per Faculty rank from 258 to 140 since 2016. Its weaknesses are consistency across the mass tier, graduate oversupply in non-technical fields, and a pedagogical culture that rewards conformity over originality.

China's Index profile is distinctive: very high on Academic Readiness and Economic Transformation, more variable on Skills Fit (reflecting critical skills shortages), and complex on Future of Work (reflecting simultaneous AI leadership and domestic labour market disruption). In the short-term, China can capitalise on political headwinds in the 'Big Four' to redirect global talent flows into industries with significant skills gaps; QS Global Student Flows data highlights Thailand, Pakistan and Vietnam as key sources of talent supply into China through to 2030, with over 120,000 students from these countries expected to study in China. Longer term, China must maximise its global standing and strong higher education sector to build co-ordinated research-industry hubs across the country and wider Asia Pacific region.

Headline – Key takeaway from QS World Future Skills Index 2027

China ranks **#7 globally** in the QS World Future Skills Index 2027 with a **final score of 92.5** — a top-tier performer.

- **Strongest indicator:** Economic Transformation (100.0)
- **Weakest indicator:** Future of Work (80.2)
- Indicator spread **19.8 points** – uneven.

Top Three Strengths

Indicator	Sub-Indicator	Score	Global Rank	Interpretation
ET	Economic Capacity	99.4	#2 globally	World-leading position
SA	Skills Gap	87.4	#2 globally	World-leading position
AR	Strong Institutions	98.1	#4 globally	World-leading position

Bottom Three Weaknesses

Indicator	Sub-Indicator	Score	Global Rank	Interpretation
AR	BSC – City Count	3.5	#56 globally	Material drag on overall score
SA	HCI+	58.3	#45 globally	Material drag on overall score
FW	Digital Skills Penetration	83.3	#44 globally	Material drag on overall score