

China's top universities expand enrolment to beef up capabilities in AI, strategic areas

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Several of China's top universities have announced plans to expand their undergraduate enrolment to prioritise what they called "national strategic needs" and develop talent in areas such as artificial intelligence (AI).

The announcements come after Chinese universities launched artificial intelligence courses in February based on AI startup DeepSeek which has garnered widespread attention.

Its creation of AI models comparable to the most advanced in the United States, but built at a fraction of the cost, has been described as a "Sputnik moment" for China.

Analysts say that DeepSeek's success, almost entirely staffed by researchers from elite domestic universities, highlights how Beijing's investment in building a large homegrown STEM talent pool and recent U.S. restrictions on Chinese student visas have allowed China to catch up on AI.

Peking University said on Saturday that it would add 150 undergraduate spots in 2025 to focus on areas of "national strategic importance", fundamental disciplines and "emerging frontier fields".

They would mainly be in information science and technology, engineering and clinical medicine.

Renmin University said on Saturday that it would add more than 100 places in areas such as AI to improve innovation.

The expansion is "closely linked" to the plan to make China a "powerful education country" and focus on growing talent in the digital era, it said.

Shanghai Jiao Tong University will add 150 spots focusing on "cutting-edge technologies" and emerging industries "urgently needed", in AI, integrated circuits, biomedicine, healthcare and new energy.

China in January issued its first national action plan to build a "strong education nation" by 2035, to help coordinate its education development, improve efficiencies in innovation and build a "strong country".

In December education authorities said they would begin AI education in primary and secondary schools to cultivate creativity, scientific interest and digital skills among students.