The Mandarin Excellence Programme
Evaluation of the first five years

A report for the UCL IOE Confucius Institute for Schools and the Department for Education

Research Stories incorporating monitoring and evaluation from In2Impact
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The UCL IOE Confucius Institute for Schools (IOE CI) is the lead delivery partner for the DFE funded Mandarin Excellence Programme. The IOE CI supports schools in starting and developing the teaching and learning of Mandarin Chinese. The IOE CI is supported by its partner university in China, Peking University. As well as a team of specialists in London, the IOE CI has a network of 45 Confucius Classrooms across England, schools which have Chinese firmly embedded in their own curriculum and which give advice, support and taster classes to other schools in their region looking to start offering Chinese. IOE CI’s vision is that every child in England who wishes to, is able to learn Chinese and that every school has access to high quality Chinese teaching. Key to the realisation of this vision is the development of the effective teaching of Chinese language in schools in England and beyond.

IOE CI sits within the Institute of Education (IOE) school of UCL and within IOE in the department of Culture, Communication and Media. Founded in 1902, IOE is a world leading centre for research and teaching in education and social science and is a major provider of teacher education. It currently has more than 8,000 pupils and 800 staff. In December 2014 IOE became a single-faculty school of UCL.

The British Council is a delivery partner for the Mandarin Excellence Programme. The British Council is the UK’s international organisation for cultural relations and educational opportunities. It was founded in 1934 and incorporated by Royal Charter in 1940. The British Council aims to create friendly knowledge and understanding between the people of the UK and other countries. It does this by making a positive contribution to the UK and the countries it works with – changing lives by creating opportunities, building connections and engendering trust. The British Council works in more than 100 countries across the world in the fields of arts and culture, English language, education and civil society. In 2018 its work engaged with nearly 80 million people directly and reached 791 million people overall, including online, social media and through broadcast and publications.¹

Research Stories is a research and insight agency specialising in education and international cultural exchange. Research Stories undertakes programme planning and evaluation in collaboration with its partner organisation, In2Impact. Research Stories aims to collate, illuminate and make sense of information to provide actionable insights and direction for organisations and programmes in the UK and internationally.

1. Executive Summary

Programme engagement

• The Mandarin Excellence Programme (MEP) has largely achieved the targets set for it on commission in 2016. Over its first five years it has successfully delivered against its headline ambition of creating a cohort of pupils in state schools in England on the path to fluency in Mandarin Chinese.

• At the end of 2020/2021, a portfolio of 71 schools was delivering the Programme. Forty of these seventy-one schools used MEP to introduce Mandarin Chinese onto the curriculum. These 40 schools represent an increase of 40% in the number of state schools in England teaching the subject when set against 101 schools recorded as entering at least two candidates for GCSE Chinese in 2019.

• The Programme has consciously focused on excellence and several participating schools are among the academically top performing state schools in the country. Twelve current MEP schools are grammar schools (17% vs 5% nationally) and a relatively high share are faith schools, which are often also high performing academically. All schools within the Programme prioritise pupil (and parent) motivation as a major criterion for participation but typically, participating pupils are among the more academically able in their school.

• Although in the minority, there are several schools which have embraced MEP successfully while serving communities characterised by relative deprivation. Some of these schools are in predominantly white British catchment areas, while others are in catchment areas with a highly diverse community. In all of these schools an important role of MEP continues to be its perceived ability to raise the expectations and widen the horizons of both pupils and parents.

• As successive MEP cohorts have joined, the participation of multiple schools within a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) has emerged as an important dynamic driving recruitment into the Programme. The reason is that the global outlook which commonly leads a school to join MEP is often shared by the other schools within the same MAT. A MAT usually supports schools in the same geographic area and so inter-school communication and the possibility of resource sharing within MEP is enhanced.

• The target of having 5,000 pupils on the path to fluency within four years was met with an estimated 5,088 pupils within the Programme at the end of the 2019/2020 academic year. At the end of the fifth year, 2020/2021, 6,274 pupils were studying within MEP across 5 annual cohorts.

• To provide perspective on these numbers, at the end of 2018/2019, the last academic year unaffected by the pandemic, data published by the DfE show that across the whole of England 2,159 pupils took GCSE Chinese (in both state and independent schools). Of these, two-thirds, 1,447 pupils, were in state schools.

• MEP has therefore already brought about a transformation in the raw number of children studying Mandarin Chinese in state schools in England.

• Prior to the pandemic, the annual drop-out rate of pupils within MEP was around 5%. In 2020/2021 more than 400 pupils left the Programme because of the drop-out of 10 schools over the 2019/20 and 2020/21 academic years, largely as a result of the pressures of the pandemic. Within schools remaining in the Programme, there was a small but significant increase in the drop-out rate reflecting the demotivating impact on pupils of the enforced cancellation of Intensive Study and other extra-curricular activities, lockdown periods and the transition to KS4 in a larger number of schools within the portfolio.

Pupil and school outcomes

• In summer term 2021, fourteen MEP schools entered pupils for GCSE. These schools were from the original cohort of Hub schools so they had prior experience of teaching Mandarin outside MEP. One school within the fourteen, Bohunt Liphook, entered MEP pupils for GCSE at the end of their Yr9, while all other pupils were entered at the end of Yr11.
The data show that these MEP pupils performed ahead of the national average for GCSE Mandarin Chinese, outperformed the national average for pupils in state schools in England and approached the attainment level of pupils in independent schools, outperformed pupils in the same schools who were previously taught outside the Mandarin Excellence Programme.

The data show that these MEP pupils performed ahead of the national average for AQA GCSE Chinese in 2021. 45% achieved grade 9 (vs 40% nationally) and 97% grade 5+ (vs 91% nationally).

Some MEP schools had extremely strong results. At Beths Grammar (22 pupils), Dartford Grammar (35) and Gumley House (25) every MEP pupil taking GCSE achieved grade 8 or 9. At Dartford Grammar, 27 of the 35 pupils attained grade 9.

This comparison is impressive but under-represents the achievements of this first cohort of MEP pupils because many of the pupils in the AQA comparison group are from independent schools.

As an indicator of attainment against independent and state school peers, comparison of the MEP results with national GCSE data for 2019 (the last year before the pandemic and the latest data available) shows that:

- 9% of state school pupils achieved grade 9 in 2019 (vs 45% for MEP) and 75% achieved grade 5+ (vs 97% for MEP),
- 50% of independent school pupils achieved grade 9 and 98% achieved grade 5+ in 2019.

Allowance has to be made for the fact that GCSEs in 2021 were graded based on teacher assessment rather than the exams used in 2019. Data from Ofqual shows that within GCSE Chinese, average grade inflation between 2019 and 2021 was 6.5% points at grade 9 and 3.8% points for grades 5-9 cumulatively.

But even adjusting for grade inflation, these data suggest that the first cohort of MEP pupils has outperformed state school peers by a large margin. Indeed, the MEP cohort appears to be achieving at a level closer to that of pupils in the independent sector.

Comparison of GCSE results from thirteen MEP schools in 2021 with 2019 results for the same schools shows markedly higher GCSE attainment among the MEP pupil cohort vs its 2019 non-MEP predecessor. In 2019, 12% of pupils in these thirteen schools achieved grade 9 and 78% grade 5+. Under MEP, 47% of pupils in these same thirteen schools achieved grade 9 and 98% grade 5+.

Again allowing for grade inflation between 2019 and 2021 and the fact that there has been some self-selection of more able pupils into MEP in these schools, the difference is large enough to suggest that MEP has improved the quality of Mandarin learning in this first cohort of participating schools by an order of magnitude.

Of the 274 pupils from 12 schools who took HSK3 in Summer 2020/2021, 52% scored above 60% - a mark generally taken to be a pass for HSK3.

Hurdle Test results point to some weakening of attainment among subsequent pupil cohorts vs the first cohort from Hub schools. This is to be expected given the increase in the proportion of pupils from schools new to the subject, the fact that a higher proportion of teachers in these schools are relatively newly qualified and the negative impact on learning of the pandemic over the last two years. Most likely, future GCSE results within MEP will not be quite as strong as those achieved by the first cohort.

Many teachers also point to wider cultural learning among MEP pupils than is captured through exam results and highlight the value of this learning in supporting language acquisition.

School leaders talk positively about the impact of MEP on pupils’ self-esteem and resilience and about the development of a sense of pride and obligation among participants which is often seen to extend to pupils across the whole school. Brand and reputational benefits with parents and the wider community are an important reason schools join the Programme.

Participating staff consistently rate the Programme a success. In the latest MEP staff survey, all respondents described themselves as being either positive advocates or supporters of MEP.

### The MEP model

- The finance within MEP typically allows a school to recruit a Mandarin Chinese teacher and to sustain the subject on the curriculum. Many schools have increased efficiency by part-sharing teaching resources. Of the sixty schools which responded to our latest survey, twenty-five say that they have teachers who teach Mandarin in other schools.
- The most commonly identified challenge to delivery of MEP is timetabling. The intensive hours makes it difficult to manage MEP pupil time and teacher resources within the wider school curriculum.
• As a result of the pressure on timetabling, most schools within MEP deliver the minimum required four hours of F2F teaching with the remaining four hours being guided self-study.

• There is wide variation but if there is a typical MEP school, it delivers two/three hours of this F2F teaching within the standard school timetable and the one/two extra hours outside the timetable. Extra hours for MEP from within the timetable are occasionally taken from another language, potentially reducing choice, although this is unusual. More commonly, the hours are taken from personal development time, from tutor time or from subjects ranging across, for example, Music, Art or Design. The number of hours within the standard timetable typically increases in KS4.

• The delivery model for out-of-hours F2F teaching varies enormously. Often it involves lunchtime or after-school classes but some schools run classes before school or on occasions on Saturday morning.

• Teachers recognise that 8 hours is a very significant burden of time and some tacitly accept that younger children in particular in Yr7 will spend perhaps 2 or 3 hours per week on self-guided study, rather than the full four.

• The fundamental driver of improved learning outcomes within MEP is seen to be the enhanced (typically four) F2F classroom hours, reinforced by the additional hours of self-guided study.

• The Intensive Study in China and the UK is seen to have multiple benefits including reinforcing language learning, offering a sometimes life-changing cultural experience, building pupils’ confidence, resilience and self-esteem and allowing pupils to meet, study and socialise on an equal basis with their peers. The enforced cancellation of the in-person Intensive Study during the pandemic is reported by teachers to have had a significant demotivating effect on some pupils within KS3.

• As more schools new to Mandarin have joined the Programme, the range and quality of support provided by IOE CI has become increasingly appreciated. Across all three waves of evaluation research many unsolicited comments of praise, both for individual members of the IOE CI team and for the institution as a whole, have been offered.

• IOE CI has provided direct support to learning outcomes in the shape of teaching and learning resources and input to teaching practice and teacher development which has been especially appreciated by the many recently qualified teachers delivering the Programme.

• Evidence for the effectiveness of the Hub and Partner model of support has remained mixed with some positive examples and some negative ones. To some extent the model has been overtaken by co-operation of schools within MATs, some of which are formally Hub and Partner schools anyway.

• Hanban/CLEC teacher assistants have played an important role in supporting MEP in many schools by giving greater opportunities for pupils to practise their language with a native speaker and through targeted support to individual learners. On occasions these assistants are shared between schools within the Programme or Hub schools lend them to Partner schools for a few days a week.

• MEP is also having a positive impact on the supply of Mandarin teachers. Respondents at thirty-nine schools in our most recent survey said that teachers have trained or are currently training to teach Mandarin Chinese while the school has been part of MEP.

• The Mandarin Chinese IOE PGCE delivered by IOE has also grown in the past four years along with MEP and the Programme provided 20 placements to PGCE students in the 2019/20 academic year. Access to teacher supply networks through IOE CI has been an important facilitator for several schools.

• The Jin Bu textbook has now become almost standard in KS3 with a smaller number of teachers using Easy Steps to Chinese or Kuaile Hanyu. During the transition in Year 9 and into KS4 teachers generally shift to one of the GCSE textbooks, with Pearson Edexcel GCSE Chinese (9-1) the most common.

• Teachers are very conscious that a requirement for rote learning as a foundation in Mandarin doesn’t lead to boredom and demotivation, so sessions of vocabulary drilling are often mixed up with language games, quizzes, peer-to-peer practice and sometimes videos or singing in KS3. Teachers typically try to combine language learning with wider learning about Chinese culture to provide both broader understanding and a more varied and interesting lesson.

• Teaching MEP in KS4 is often seen to be relatively easier because the pupils have chosen the language based on prior experience and they are accustomed to the Programme’s intensity and demands. Pupil well-being as they face exam pressure across the curriculum in KS4 is a common concern and explains why some teachers have reservations about the setting of HSK3 exams in Yr10.
• The structure and focus of self-guided out-of-classroom learning is markedly different to that within the classroom. Teachers often use the projects provided by IOE CI for Yrs 7, 8, 9 and describe them as being very helpful. Projects are also now available for Yrs 10 and 11, too. Pre-pandemic, technology platforms and apps were used very widely to help pupils practise and consolidate learning during self-study hours but were used far less often in the classroom.

• Quizlet, GoChinese and Kahoot are the online tools most widely used by teachers within MEP. During lockdowns, the range and frequency of use of online platforms and apps within MEP increased.

Impact of the pandemic

• The pandemic, and the lockdown periods in particular, disrupted learning within MEP to some extent as it did many other areas of the curriculum.

• The cancellation of the face-to-face Intensive Study in China and in the UK along with many other cultural and peer events is considered by many teachers to have reduced pupils’ level of cultural learning relative to previous MEP cohorts and diluted some of the wider benefits of increased pupil confidence, resilience and self-esteem. The cancellation of these events and activities also significantly impacted the motivation of some pupils in KS3.

• In 2021, Virtual Intensive Study events were developed by IOE CI and the British Council. They were ambitious and generally regarded as being successful, especially in extending cultural learning, but they did not attract universal attendance of participating schools and most teachers and pupils would strongly prefer the in-person versions when possible again.

• Access and technology challenges across the curriculum during lockdown were also shared by MEP but a number of teachers observed that MEP typically had higher online attendance rates and better engagement than other MFL lessons. Older MEP pupils were already well used to technology-mediated study at home and an important element of MEP has always been the integration of interactive activities, e-learning tools and innovative approaches to learning within the delivery of the Programme. During the pandemic, these practices proved valuable in supporting pupil engagement online.

• Even so, data from the most recent Hurdle Tests and the fact that many teachers felt that either the school or their pupils were not ready for Yr10 HSK tests at the end of the 2020/2021 academic year evidences the negative impact on learning which resulted from the pandemic-related disruption.

• During lockdowns, many schools struggled to deliver the full teaching hours to MEP and there were knock-on impacts on the number of self-study hours undertaken, sometimes linked to more general concerns within schools that young people were spending too much time online.

• The consensus is that the greatest negative impact has been on Yr7 and Yr8 pupils within MEP and some teachers worry that these cohorts have not been able to establish the same platform for future learning as their predecessors. As elsewhere across the curriculum, teachers often believe that an impact of the pandemic has been to widen attainment gaps within cohorts and between schools.

• Feedback suggests that the changes in approach required during lockdown most impacted pupils' progress in the productive skills (speaking and writing Mandarin Chinese) with the receptive skills (listening and reading) less badly impacted.
2. Introduction: Aims and objectives

- This report is a summative evaluation of the first phase of the Mandarin Excellence Programme (MEP).
- The report examines the achievements of the Mandarin Excellence Programme over the first 5 years of its funding beginning in 2016. It builds on two previous waves of formative research and evaluation already undertaken in 2019 and 2020.
- The aim of the evaluation is to assess the impact of MEP to date against its stated objectives and to identify lessons about the implementation, effectiveness and sustainability of MEP within schools. These lessons will add to the existing evidence base of pedagogical and programme approaches to the teaching and learning of Mandarin Chinese in secondary schools.
- The original terms of reference for the evaluation of MEP highlighted several specific research questions under four headings:

  **Support for schools teaching Mandarin:**
  - What are the challenges for schools in teaching Mandarin and how have they overcome these challenges?
  - Is there sufficient support for participating schools from the Mandarin Excellence Programme? Would schools new to Mandarin have taught it without the Programme?

  **Teaching model and adherence to MEP pedagogy:**
  - Are schools following the requirements for 8 hours of study a week (with at least 4 hours of teacher taught classroom time)? How has this approach supported pupil outcomes and which elements of this approach might be useful in supporting the teaching of other subjects?
  - How have schools scheduled teacher taught classroom time into their timetable and how have they adapted the remainder of the school timetable to allow for this?
  - Which classroom teaching approaches are having the most impact on improving pupil attainment and progression in the subject, for example, whole class teaching, direct instruction and use of textbooks and e-learning platforms?

  **Learning outcomes:**
  - Are pupils on track to achieve a high level of fluency in Mandarin, this includes being on track for taking HSK4 and HSK5 qualifications, GCSEs and A level (or equivalents), within six years of joining the Programme?

  **Future sustainability:**
  - Do participating schools have sustainable practices in place to continue teaching Mandarin beyond the lifespan of the Programme?
  - What are the key barriers and enablers for the Programme?
3. The Mandarin Excellence Programme

Background

- On 20 May 2016 the Secretary of State for Education awarded a contract for the delivery of the Mandarin Excellence Programme in Schools (MEP) to the UCL IOE Confucius Institute for Schools, working with the British Council as a delivery partner. The Programme had an initial investment of £10m to run over a four year period from 2016 to 2020.

- In 2019/20, funding for MEP was extended for one additional year to the end of the 2020/2021 academic year. This marked a logical point for reflection on the Programme’s achievements, given that the first cohort of pupils taught within MEP took GCSE Mandarin Chinese at the end of KS4 in Summer of 2021.

- Mandarin Chinese is the most widely spoken first language in the world. The growing importance of China globally, not only as an economic power but increasingly as a political and cultural power too, makes Mandarin Chinese unambiguously one of the most important languages for the UK’s future.

- Prior to MEP, Mandarin Chinese had been taught in only a small number of English state schools. Proportionately, more pupils were learning the language in independent schools. Approximately 7% of all school children in England are educated in independent schools according to the Independent Schools Council (https://www.isc.co.uk/research) but data published by the DfE show that in 2019, 33% of entries for GCSE Mandarin Chinese were from pupils in independent schools.

- The Programme consciously seeks to give motivated pupils within the state sector the opportunity to acquire Mandarin language skills at an early stage, potentially giving them an advantage in their future careers. The headline goal of the first phase of the Programme on commission was to have at least 5,000 pupils on track for fluency in Mandarin by 2020.

- In establishing the Programme, the aim was to develop a model for delivery and development providing:
  - a framework for the sustainability of Mandarin Chinese in England beyond the life of the Programme;
  - an opportunity for schools with strong existing Mandarin Chinese delivery to act as Hubs to implement successfully the step-up of teaching required within the first year of the Programme, and to be able to lead confidently additional new schools in following years;
  - intensive activities for schools, including a residential intensive language study course in China at the end of year 8 for which as the Centre for Language Education and Cooperation (CLEC, formerly known as Hanban/Confucius Institute Headquarters) provides all the necessary funding support to cover costs associated with teaching, accommodation, food and in-China travel and activities;
  - a high quality online environment to provide resources;
  - development of teaching capacity and expansion of the provision of ITE places;
  - a communications plan and strategy;
  - stakeholder engagement to build demand.

- In order to participate in MEP, schools need to have an Ofsted rating of Good or Outstanding and be able to select a minimum annual cohort of 20 children into the Programme in Yr 7.

- Participating schools receive £20K core funding plus extra per-pupil payments reflecting pupil retention year-on-year and levels of participation in the Intensive Study in China.

- By increasing the number of schools teaching Mandarin Chinese, the Programme also aims to support parallel efforts to grow the number of teachers of the language in England. UCL IOE Confucius Institute for schools is the largest of a number of centres training teachers of Mandarin Chinese through the IOE Mandarin PGCE which has the most significant Mandarin specific input for student teachers. MEP has an important role to play by boosting the number of schools in which trainee and early career teachers can gain experience and fulfill their teaching practice requirements.
• Following the first five-year phase, MEP is now being taken into a second phase (which is outside the scope of this evaluation) during which the Programme will receive three years of additional funding over the period 2021-2024 and is subject to extension under the terms of the contract which means it could be extended until 31st August 2025.

Programme design

• The Programme developed for schools starts at the beginning of KS3 in Year 7 and allows selected pupils to study eight hours of Mandarin Chinese every week, including a compulsory minimum of four hours of classroom-taught lessons supplemented by up to four hours of guided self-study outside the curriculum.

• The key characteristic of the Programme within participating schools is therefore its intensive nature. In KS3 pupils are given at least twice the number of classroom teaching hours typically devoted to other Modern Foreign Languages and these contact hours are supplemented by the additional hours of self-guided study outside the classroom.

• Another important component of the Programme is activities organised for cross-school cohorts of pupils. The most significant is a two week Intensive Study in China originally designed for pupils at the end of Year 8 and organised by the British Council and UCL IOE Confucius Institute for Schools.

• The focus of the Intensive Study in China is the development of pupils' language ability and confidence by allowing them to experience China, to undertake intensive study and to practise their acquired language skills in a native speaker environment. The study includes cultural activities and 40 hours of intensive language study per visit.

• Teaching during the Intensive Study is delivered by teachers from one of a number of host universities in China. These teachers themselves receive training in advance of the Study from specialist trainers from the IOE Confucius Institute for Schools who spend time during Spring of each year at the institutions in China, aligning the teaching content and practice to the wider model developed within MEP. The costs of accommodation, local teaching and cultural activities in China are paid for by China’s Center for Language Education and Cooperation (CLEC). This leveraged partnership funding in 2018 and 2019 for 1,400 pupils is estimated to have been worth £1.25m. The DfE subsidises flight costs by £350 per pupil, leaving the remaining costs of visas, flights and incidental expenses to be paid for by parents or the MEP school.

(To ensure equality of access, the DfE has also provided some incremental funding to cover these costs for disadvantaged pupils).

• The MEP design also includes a three-day campus-based intensive study in the UK for pupils at the end of Year 9. This time gives pupils the opportunity to meet fellow learners, to reinforce their learning to date and look at future study paths and opportunities with Mandarin. The first Intensive Study in the UK was held at Nottingham University.

• Two tests are used to track the learning progress of pupils in advance of their targeted sitting of GCSE Mandarin Chinese at the end of Year 11.

• In the summer term of academic Years 7, 8 and 9, pupils sit Hurdle tests specially created by the IOE Confucius Institute for Schools to track their progress in the four key skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening.

• In the summer term of Year 10, the hurdle test pupils take is HSK3.

• The HSK testing system sits outside the UK’s formal examination structure but is well understood by British universities. It is the standardised test of language proficiency of Mainland China for non-native speakers. It is administered by the Chinese Testing International Co. (CTI) and sponsored by CLEC within the Ministry of Education.

• HSK assesses non-native Chinese speakers’ ability in using the Chinese language in their daily, academic and professional lives and currently consists of six levels. The standard of the UK’s GCSE Mandarin Chinese lies inbetween HSK3 and HSK4. The vocabulary doubles at every level making the gap between levels high. HSK4 is considered to be well beyond GCSE and just a little below A-level whereas HSK5 is beyond A-level.

• Throughout the Programme, the UCL IOE Confucius Institute for Schools provides significant practical and pedagogical support to participating schools, including support with curriculum development, teaching resources and teaching practice. The Institute also hosts termly meetings for both teachers and school Heads involved in the Programme.

• Peer support within the Programme is built on a Hub and Partner School model. The fourteen schools recruited into the Programme in the first cohort (2016/2017) were already experienced in teaching Mandarin and were designated as Hub Schools. These schools were chosen to act as local centres
Programme adjustments in response to the Covid-19 pandemic

• MEP was impacted by the pandemic as were many other aspects of school life during academic years 2019/2020 and 2020/2021. We discuss the wider consequences of the pandemic for the Programme in section 8. The specific changes to implementation of the Programme included (Table 1):
  - The Intensive Study in China planned for Yr8 pupils in the summers of 2020 and 2021 had to be cancelled;
  - In summer 2020, in the absence of Intensive Study in China, a Summer Showcase was held as an opportunity for pupils in all MEP year groups to create two projects of their choice to build on and demonstrate their Mandarin speaking and writing skills;
  - In summer 2021, the planned Intensive Study in China was replaced by a two-week Virtual Study organised by UCL IOE Confucius Institute, the British Council and CLEC. This Virtual Study was arranged for Yr9 pupils – those who had been unable to visit China the previous year;
  - A similar pattern was followed for the planned Intensive Study in the UK for Yr9s. This was cancelled in 2020 and in 2021 was replaced by a Virtual Intensive Study for then Yr10s focused on the theme of developing a Tourism Campaign;
  - No Hurdle Tests for Yr7, Yr8 and Yr9 were administered to pupils in Summer term 2019/2020;
  - In Summer term 2020/2021, these year groups did sit the appropriate Hurdle Tests with the exception of Year 7 pupils in one school, Archbishop Sentamu Academy;
  - The first round of HSK3 tests for Yr10 pupils targeted for Summer 2020 was postponed until October in the following academic year;
  - For the second round of HK3 tests, Yr10 pupils from 12 schools sat the exam as scheduled in Summer term 2020/2021. Yr10 pupils from a further 23 schools took up the option to carry over the HSK3 exam into Autumn of the 2021/2022 academic year;
  - Two schools, St Birinus School and West Coventry Academy, did not recruit any pupils into Year 7 for the 2020/2021 academic year.
  - From the time of the first lockdown starting in March 2020, UCL IOE CI was unable to provide face-to-face support to MEP schools as it had done in previous years. Individual visits to schools were suspended so UCL IOE CI set up individual calls with every MEP school to make sure schools had sufficient support in delivering MEP. Teacher and Headteacher meetings also had to be delivered virtually with a particular focus around online teaching and resources.

Table 1: Summary of major MEP activities across 5 years of the Programme

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*HSK3 tests planned for Summer 2020 were taken in October of the 2020/2021 academic year
** Schools had the option to take HSK3 in Summer 2021 or October of the 2021/2022 academic year
4. Methodology

Overview

- This evaluation report is based on three waves of data collection; the first wave of research was conducted during the 2018/2019 academic year, the second during 2019/2020 and the third during the 2020/2021 academic year.
- Across the three field-work periods, data was collected through 7 complementary areas of work:

  1) **Structured interviews Programme stakeholders** including at the UCL IOE Confucius Institute for Schools and the British Council.

  2) **Analysis of background documentation and Management Information (MI) data.** This includes summaries of Hurdle tests, HSK3 scores and teaching hours delivered in MEP schools provided by the UCL IOE Confucius Institute for Schools, historic results for GCSE Chinese published by the DfE and results for the latest round of GCSEs taken in June 2021, published by Exam Board AQA.

  3) **Scoping visits to fourteen MEP schools.** The schools were chosen to reflect a mix of Hub and Partner schools, locations and socio-economic catchment areas.

    - Anglo European School (Nr Chelmsford, Essex)
    - Christ’s College Finchley (North London)
    - Melbourn Village College (Nr Cambridge)
    - Queen Mary’s Grammar School (Walsall)
    - The Crossley Heath School (Halifax)
    - Didcot Girls’ School (Didcot)
    - Ratton School (Eastbourne)
    - Homewood School & Sixth Form Centre (Tenterden)
    - Pinner High School (NW London)
    - Finham Park School (Coventry)
    - Lyng Hall School (Coventry)
    - Shevington High School (Wigan)
    - Pate’s Grammar School (Cheltenham)
    - The Grey Court School (SW London)

  - During the scoping visits, interviews were conducted with relevant school stakeholders including teaching staff, headteachers, administrators and CLEC assistants. In total, formal or informal discussions were held with 47 staff across these fourteen schools.

  - At each of the schools visited, at least one MEP lesson was observed and across the fourteen schools 19 classroom lessons in total have been observed. A small number of focus discussions were held with participating pupils as well as informal conversations with several individual pupils.

  - The scoping visits undertaken during the fieldwork periods for the first two evaluation reports form the basis of the case studies developed in this report.

  - As a result of the restrictions on access required during the Covid pandemic, no in-person scoping visits to participating schools could be undertaken during the third, most recent fieldwork period.

  4) **An online survey** distributed via the UCL IOE Confucius Institute for Schools to relevant staff including MEP teachers, school heads and other school leaders in all participating MEP schools. The survey was a mix of quantitative (closed) questions with a small number of open-ended questions for opinions and free response. Some core questions within the survey have remained consistent across the three waves of research while others have been changed to reflect the evolution of the programme over time.

    - In wave one, 129 staff responded at least in part and 103 fully completed the online survey. At least one response was received from 63 of 64 schools within the Programme at that time,

    - In wave two, 115 staff responded at least in part and 86 fully completed the online survey. At least one response was received from 72 of 76 schools within the Programme at that time,

    - In wave three, 107 staff responded at least in part and 75 fully completed the online survey. At least one response was received from 60 of 71 schools within the Programme at the time.

  5) **Follow-up in-depth telephone interviews** approximately 45 minutes long were undertaken with 23 staff from 15 MEP schools in Wave 1, with 13 staff from 12 schools in Wave 2 and with 14 staff from a further 14 schools in Wave 3.

    - Respondents spanned different roles – including headteachers, MEP teachers, heads of department and a small number of classroom assistants. Respondents were selected for interview in part based on their responses to the online survey and also to reflect a diversity of school contexts. Two of the interviews undertaken in Wave 3 were with individuals who had been interviewed in earlier waves in order to understand more about the evolution and embedding of the MEP programme within schools over time.
6) A short email questionnaire with 3 Heads of schools that have withdrawn from the MEP programme to understand reasons for that withdrawal.

7) Observation of sessions during the Virtual Intensive Study in the 2020/2021 academic year.

The necessary shift online during 2020/2021 created significant challenges for the programme overall but it did also create an opportunity to observe some of the Intensive Study and gain first-hand experience of how it supports achievement of the overall outcomes of MEP. Several sessions of the Virtual Intensive Study in China were observed during the second week of delivery.

- Feedback questionnaires on the Intensive Study were also developed and administered by the British Council. 19 participating teachers and 261 participating year 9 pupils completed feedback questionnaires.
- The scope of original data collection through the scoping visits, online survey and follow-up interviews across the three waves is summarised in Table 2 below. Further details of the methodology and research tools is provided in the Appendix.

Research limitations

- Data collection during wave 3 was impacted by the unprecedented pressures on schools which prevailed during the 2020/2021 academic year as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. As part of their response to the pandemic, some schools and staff felt unable to participate in the wave 3 evaluation research. No scoping visits to schools were possible during this third wave of research because schools could not allow external professionals on-site.
  - More generally, scoping visits have to be arranged with the co-operation of schools, so inevitably it was not possible to choose schools to visit on the basis of a pure stratified sampling approach.
  - Across all waves, there has been greater engagement and response to the research by some staff and schools than others. Typically, this is because of time and resource pressures.
  - However, in each wave of research we have received primary feedback from staff in more than 85% of participating schools and across the three waves of research, coverage includes the vast majority of all schools in the Programme.
  - The data collection coverage of schools and relevant staff across the three waves of research and the consistency of feedback gives us confidence that the findings are robust and accurately reflect the impact and achievements of the whole Mandarin Excellence Programme over its first five years.

Table 2: Summary of original data collection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No. school scoping visits</td>
<td>No. of telephone interviews</td>
<td>No. survey responses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohort 1 (2016/17)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohort 2 (2017/18)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohort 3 (2018/19)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohort 4 (2019/20)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohort 5 (2020/21)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not specified</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5. Programme engagement

School participation

- At the end of academic year 2020/2021, seventy-one schools in England were participating in the Mandarin Excellence Programme (Table 3).
- Fourteen Hub schools were recruited in the first academic year 2016/2017 plus one other school, Archbishop Sentamu Academy, which delivered the Programme but did not receive funding. Archbishop Sentamu Academy formally joined the Programme in 2018/2019.
- As the Programme has expanded, the number of schools designated as Hub schools has been increased to a total of 23.
- One school, Ingleby Manor Free School, left in 2018/2019 as a result of wider challenges affecting the school. At the end of the 2019/20 academic year, The International Academy of Greenwich closed down and a further 7 schools withdrew from the Programme. Two further schools withdrew during the 2020/2021 academic year.

- It is clear that while the cohort of schools within MEP was very stable up until the 2019/2020 academic year, there has been a far more significant loss of schools in the most recent period to Summer 2021. The two key reasons are the pressure of timetabling, a central challenge to the Programme discussed more fully in section 8, and the unprecedented pressure on schools resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic.
- As lockdown was imposed and schools realised they had to switch rapidly to a completely new way of delivering learning online, many felt that they had to prioritise core subjects, especially Maths and English. On occasions, schools simply decided that they did not have the capacity to deliver MEP in these extraordinary circumstances and felt compelled to drop out.
- Typically, it has been the compounding effect of the pandemic on the existing pressures on timetabling which has led schools to withdraw from the Programme. For example, one school which withdrew in 2020/2021 was using external tutors to teach the extra-curricular classroom hours. The school was unable to allow these tutors onto the school site during the pandemic and concluded that it could not cover the hours with in-house teaching resources.

Table 3: Number of schools delivering MEP by year of joining the Programme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Year</th>
<th>Schools joining MEP</th>
<th>Schools leaving MEP</th>
<th>Cumulative No. Schools delivering MEP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2016/2017</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017/2018</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018/2019</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019/2020</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8*</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020/2021</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* 8 schools left MEP at the end of the 2019/2020 academic year
Pupil numbers

- A central target of the Programme on commission was to have 5,000 pupils on the path to fluency in Mandarin Chinese by 2020, the fourth year of operation.

- In terms of pupils within the Programme, this target was met. An estimated 5,088 pupils were studying within MEP at the end of academic year 2019/2020 (Chart 1) based on the number of pupils taking end of year tests. This number increased to 6,274 at the end of the first extension year (2020/2021) including just under 2,000 Year 7 pupils newly joining in that academic year.

- To put these numbers in perspective, at the end of 2018/2019 the last academic year unaffected by the pandemic, data published by the DfE show that across the whole of England (in both state and independent schools), 2,159 pupils took GCSE Chinese. Of these, exactly two-thirds or 1,447 pupils were in state schools.

- MEP has therefore already brought about a transformation in the raw number of children studying Mandarin Chinese in state schools in England.

Chart 1 – Growth in Pupil Numbers within the Mandarin Excellence Programme

Number of Pupils within MEP (number taking end of year tests)
By academic year and pupil cohort

The data in chart 1 is based on the numbers of pupils taking end of year tests set for MEP.
In 2016/2017, 2017/2018 and 2018/2019 the data refers to special Hurdle tests set for MEP by UCL IOE CI.
In 2020/2021 the data refers to pupil sitting Hurdle tests (Yr7, Yr8, Yr9), HSK3 (Yr10) and GCSE (Yr11).
As a result of the pandemic, no tests were set in 2019/2020. The data for this year is derived from a census of participating schools undertaken by UCL IOE CI in Spring of 2020/2021.
One school within Pupil cohort 1 (Bohunt Liphook) entered MEP pupils for GCSE Mandarin at the end of Yr 9. The 323 pupils reported as Cohort 1 in 2020/2021 is therefore best interpreted as the number of pupils within MEP taking GCSE Chinese.
Pupil drop-out

- MEP is a demanding course for pupils in terms of time commitment and content. In conversations with teachers it is apparent that maintaining pupil motivation is a priority for many of them. MEP is also unusual in the context of typical school pathways in that by joining the Programme in Yr7, pupils and parents are being asked to make an implicit commitment to a five-year course and the choice of one GCSE.

- The original planning projections for numbers of children entering the Programme envisaged a relatively small initial cohort (400) of Year 7s in 2016/2017 (an average of 29 per participating school) who would then move through with the Programme to take GCSE Mandarin in Year 11 in Summer term 2021.

- In the event, the 382 pupils taking the first round of Hurdle tests for Year 7s in 2016/2017 across the fourteen schools in the Programme at that time was slightly below (5%) the initial planning target of 400. However, a further 20 pupils from Archbishop Sentamu Academy joined this pupil cohort in 2018/2019 making an effective cohort size of 402.

- At the end of 2020/2021, five years later, 323 pupils (80% of the effective original cohort) had taken GCSE Chinese.

- One of the original cohort of schools, Upton Hall, dropped out of the Programme before entering pupils for GCSE but it is to be expected that many of the Upton Hall pupils (approximately 18) who participated in MEP over its first four years will actually have taken the exam, although their results are not formally recorded within the Programme data.

- The original pupil cohort was atypical within MEP because the pupils attended schools which all had a prior history of teaching Chinese. From the second cohort onwards, an increasing proportion of pupils were at schools which were new to the subject.

- Within the second cohort, 1,012 pupils took end of year Hurdle tests in Yr7 in 2017/2018 and of these, 783 (77%) took HSK3 four years later at the end of Yr10 in 2020/21,

- Within the third cohort, 1,751 pupils took end of year Hurdle tests in Yr7 in 2018/2019 and 1,416 (81%) took Hurdle tests three years later at the end of Yr9 in 2020/2021,

- Within the fourth cohort, 2,157 pupils took end of year Hurdle tests in Yr7 in 2019/2020 and 1,776 (82%) took Hurdle tests (or were registered as being within the Programme) one year later at the end of Yr8 in 2020/2021.

- The annual drop-out rate per year, therefore appears to have increased significantly over time but the recent data is distorted by the impact of ten schools dropping out which is believed to have contributed to the loss of around 430 pupils from the Programme overall. There has been some increase in the drop-out rate over the last two years but that increase has not been as significant as suggested by the headline data.

- Feedback from teachers suggests that when pupils do drop out within schools which are continuing within the Programme, it is typically because there is a joint assessment by parents and teachers that they are not able to make the necessary commitment of time, they are experiencing difficulties in other areas of the curriculum which themselves require more time or because families have relocated and have withdrawn their child from the school.

- The transition from Yr9 to Yr10 (KS3 to KS4) is also significant for pupil drop-out because although MEP pupils have made an implicit commitment to taking Mandarin Chinese in KS4, that is typically the point at which most must decide whether it fits (in terms of subject and time) with their other GCSE choices. While schools generally encourage MEP pupils to continue into KS4, they don’t make continuation compulsory and most believe it is very important that pupils do not feel pressured into continuing, if that is not their real preference.

**At KS4 pupils choose options so there is a natural drop off in numbers at the end of Yr9.**

*Headteacher/School leader 2020/2021*

- As is often the case at KS4, individual subject choices are not always independent. In some schools, subject options constrain the number of pupils able to continue to follow MEP, whether that is the need to take Mandarin Chinese and other subjects or the inability to take Mandarin alongside other subjects.

**One of the challenges to maintaining the pupil numbers in KS4 is Mandarin can only be taken alongside French.**

*Teacher 2020/2021*
• The pandemic also appears to have increased drop-out relative to previous years in schools continuing within the Programme and especially so in Yr7 and Yr8. There appear to be two main reasons for this.

• The first is that pupils in the early years are least accustomed to the intensive nature and extended hours associated with the Programme. The wider challenges associated with the pandemic of extended home study, the need for access to IT equipment and the requirement for self-motivated learning were to an extent compounded for MEP, given its intensive structure and the inability of (almost all) parents to help their children with the learning content. Both teachers and pupils struggled more in Yr7 and Yr8 and some pupils did not make the hoped-for progress and as a result lost motivation.

• The second is the demotivating impact on Yr7 and Yr8 pupils of the cancellation of the Intensive Study in China. In many MEP schools and for many pupils, the Intensive Study for Yr8s is a very significant event in the school calendar. Practically speaking it takes significant organisation, and sometimes fund-raising as well, so is planned for well in advance. Teachers regard it as a key part of the Programme in terms of embedding language learning, broadening cultural understanding and helping children understand Chinese as a real, actively spoken language. For pupils it can appear to be a once in a lifetime opportunity and for many, certainly the most exciting and adventurous trip they have made in their lives to date.

• Many teachers observed that the unavoidable cancellation of the Intensive Study in 2020 had a significant demotivating effect on pupils and the uncertainty over future Intensive Study has weakened the overall coherence and motivational appeal of the Programme for those already enrolled. Participating schools are now generally de-emphasising the role of the Intensive Study for new cohorts of pupils and parents.

“After lockdown, [attainment] gaps are wider and some KS3 pupils dropped - which didn’t happen in previous years.

Teacher 2020/2021
6. Learning Outcomes

GCSE Results

- Throughout the Programme’s first five years, many teachers have argued that the extended hours, the out-of-curriculum activities and the Intensive Study both accelerate learning and deepen the foundations of understanding in Mandarin Chinese relative to non-MEP pupils.

“...we have only been teaching in the MEP for one half term. So far, the mastery and depth of knowledge achieved by MEP pupils far outstrips that achieved by their peers in mainstream Mandarin classes.

Teacher 2019/2020

‘...the funding has given our pupils additional opportunities (eg additional lessons, Year 7 intensive learning days, Foreign Office celebration, China trip, Nottingham Uni) which have resulted in pupils’ level of Mandarin being significantly higher than before the MEP.

Teacher 2019/2020

Table 4: GCSE Chinese: Grade achieved 2021 - MEP vs AQA national results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GCSE Chinese Grade achieved (% cumulative)</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>U</th>
<th>Total Pupils</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>AQA 2021</strong> (National results)</td>
<td>40.4%</td>
<td>62.3%</td>
<td>75.9%</td>
<td>82.2%</td>
<td>90.7%</td>
<td>95.3%</td>
<td>98.1%</td>
<td>99.2%</td>
<td>99.8%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>2241</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MEP 2021</strong> (14 schools)</td>
<td>44.9%</td>
<td>73.1%</td>
<td>87.6%</td>
<td>92.6%</td>
<td>97.2%</td>
<td>99.4%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>323</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: UCL IOE CI and AQA (2021)

- The data show that MEP pupils performed ahead of the national average for AQA GCSE Chinese. 45% achieved grade 9 (vs 40% nationally), 73% grades 8 or 9 and 97% (vs 91%) grade 5 or above.

- Some MEP schools had extremely strong results. At Beths Grammar (22 pupils), Dartford Grammar (35) and Gumley House (25) every MEP pupil taking GCSE achieved grade 8 or 9. At Dartford Grammar, 27 of the 35 pupils attained grade 9. At Bohunt Liphook, 28 pupils sat GCSE at the end of Yr9 and all achieved grade 6 or above.

- This comparison with national results is impressive but under-represents the achievements of this first cohort of MEP pupils because many of the pupils in the AQA comparison group are from independent schools.

- Results for GCSEs taken at the end of 2020/2021 and of HSK3 exams, taken by Yr10s within the Programme, provide the most important evidence to date to support those assertions.

- In summer term 2020/2021, fourteen MEP schools entered pupils for GCSE. One school within the original cohort – Upton Hall – had dropped out of the Programme in the previous year but Archbishop Setamu Academy, which had been teaching the Programme since 2016/2017 but not formally joined until 2018/2019, also entered pupils for the exam. One school within the fourteen, Bohunt Liphook, entered MEP pupils for GCSE at the end of their Yr9, while all other pupils were entered at the end of Yr11.

- Table 4 provides a comparison of the grades achieved by the 323 MEP pupils within the fourteen schools sitting GCSE in 2021 vs national results for 2021 published by exam board AQA. (Thirteen of the fourteen MEP schools entered pupils for the AQA GCSE. The one exception was St Joseph’s College).
As a consequence of the pandemic, all GCSEs in 2021 had teacher-assessed grades and there has been general grade inflation vs exam-assessed results in 2019. According to Ofqual (https://analytics.ofqual.gov.uk), this general grade inflation in GCSE Chinese was 6.5% points at grade 9 and 3.8% points for grades 5-9 cumulatively.

The national data for 2019 highlights the gap in attainment between state and independent schools teaching Mandarin Chinese which existed prior to MEP. In 2019, 50% of independent school pupils achieved grade 9 and 98% achieved grade 5 or above vs 9% of state schools pupils who achieved grade 9 and 75% who achieved grade 5 or above.

After allowing for the general grade inflation discussed above, the first cohort of MEP pupils still appears to be outperforming state school peers by a large margin. Indeed, the MEP cohort appears to be performing at a level closer to that of pupils in the independent sector. 45% of MEP pupils achieved grade 9 vs 50% in independent schools in 2019 and 97% of MEP pupils achieved grade 5 or above vs 98% in independent schools in 2019.

The first cohort of MEP schools is itself atypical since all had previously taught Mandarin Chinese before entering the Programme. So, a legitimate question is how the results within these schools have changed as a result of participation in MEP.

Comparison of GCSE results from MEP schools for 2021 with results for the same schools in 2019 provides an indicative answer to this question. Table 6 below compares published results from thirteen of the fourteen MEP schools reporting results in 2021 vs the results from these same thirteen schools published within the 2019 national data (results for the 14th school, Finham Park, were not reported in 2019 because of the small number of candidates).

---

**Table 5: GCSE Chinese: Grade achieved - national results 2019 (Independent and State) vs MEP 2021**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GCSE Chinese Grade achieved (% cumulative)</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>U</th>
<th>Total Pupils</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Independent Schools 2019 (National Results)</td>
<td>49.9%</td>
<td>80.5%</td>
<td>94.4%</td>
<td>97.3%</td>
<td>98.2%</td>
<td>99.1%</td>
<td>99.3%</td>
<td>99.3%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td></td>
<td>555</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Schools 2019 (National Results)</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
<td>27.1%</td>
<td>48.0%</td>
<td>60.7%</td>
<td>74.6%</td>
<td>83.4%</td>
<td>90.2%</td>
<td>95.8%</td>
<td>98.8%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>1177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEP 2021 (14 schools)</td>
<td>44.9%</td>
<td>73.1%</td>
<td>87.6%</td>
<td>92.6%</td>
<td>97.2%</td>
<td>99.4%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>323</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: National data does not include grades for pupils (103 Independent, 266 State) in schools with very small numbers of candidates which is not published for reasons of confidentiality.

Source: Research Stories analysis of data from DfE, UCL IOE CI

**Table 6: GCSE Chinese: Grade achieved – 13 MEP schools 2021 vs 2019 results**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GCSE Chinese Grade achieved (% cumulative)</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>U</th>
<th>Total Pupils</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MEP Schools 2019 (13 schools)</td>
<td>12.2%</td>
<td>34.5%</td>
<td>54.5%</td>
<td>65.5%</td>
<td>78.0%</td>
<td>87.2%</td>
<td>90.8%</td>
<td>96.4%</td>
<td>99.1%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>336</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEP 2021 (Same 13 schools)</td>
<td>46.5%</td>
<td>75.2%</td>
<td>89.8%</td>
<td>95.0%</td>
<td>98.3%</td>
<td>99.7%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>303</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Research Stories analysis of data from DfE, UCL IOE CI
The data show markedly higher GCSE attainment among the MEP pupil cohort within the 13 schools vs its 2019 non-MEP predecessor. Under MEP, 47% of candidates in these 13 schools achieved grade 9 and 98% achieved grade 5 or above. Among the 2019 cohort, the comparison was 12% grade 9 and 78% grade 5+.

Allowance again has to be made for general grade inflation between 2019 and 2021 and also for a degree of self-selection in these schools (with the higher potential pupils more likely to participate in MEP vs non-MEP Mandarin Chinese classes). Even so, the difference in results between 2019 and 2021 is large enough to suggest that MEP has improved the quality of Mandarin learning in this first cohort of participating schools by an order of magnitude.

To summarise, these GCSE results suggest that the first cohort of MEP pupils within Hub schools:

- Outperformed the national average for GCSE Mandarin Chinese,
- Outperformed the national average for pupils in state schools in England and approached the attainment level of pupils in independent schools,
- Outperformed pupils in the same schools who were previously taught outside the Mandarin Excellence Programme.

**HSK3 Results**

- HSK3 is the Hurdle Tests for Yr10 pupils within MEP. Since the standard of GCSE Mandarin Chinese is generally taken to lie somewhere between HSK3 and HSK4, results for HSK3 can provide an indicator of progress towards GCSE.
- At the time of this report, results were only available for the 274 pupils from the 12 schools which took HSK3 in Summer 2020/2021. These show that 52% of candidates scored above 60% - a mark generally taken to be a pass for HSK3 (Chart 2). Just under 4% scored 90%+ and a further 11% scored between 80% and 90%.

**Chart 2 – HSK3 results by score range**

% of pupils (cumulative) by overall HSK3 score (274 pupils in 12 MEP schools)

- The range of average marks per school was quite wide. The average mark was 82% and the lowest 43%. The top three performing schools were all first cohort, Hub schools and of the 12 schools which entered candidates for HSK3 in Summer 2021, 8 were Hub schools from this first cohort.
- The wider significance of these initial HSK3 results is therefore quite difficult to interpret since they again relate mainly to first cohort schools, for whom the GCSE results discussed above are a better indicator, and there is no similar Yr10 data for those pupils who have now taken GCSE.
- While HSK provides a milestone on the path to GCSE, the fact that it sits outside the UK qualification pathway and has its own vocabulary list and learning content is regarded as a challenge by many MEP teachers, even in a normal year. The fact that 23 out of 35 schools did not enter pupils for the test until Autumn 2021 reinforces both the scale of this challenge and the level of disruption which the pandemic has caused for MEP in many schools.
The Mandarin Excellence Programme: Evaluation of the first five years

The HSK3 exam is extremely challenging to Year 10 pupils. Our Year 10 pupils are under huge stress to prepare for HSK3 and to learn GCSE content at the same time.

Teacher 2020/21

I think content wise it is good for the children to expand their reading. I think that is great but I am not very sure about preparing them for two exams; whether our children are going to cope with it is another thing…This is also additional stress for the pupils.

Teacher 2019/2020

Hurdle Test Results

- Special Hurdle Tests set by UCL IOE CI are the main assessment of pupil progress within MEP in Yrs 7, 8 and 9.
- Each test consists of four elements – Speaking, Reading, Writing Listening (with the exception of Speaking in Yr 9). Charts 3 and 4 show the distribution of pupils and schools by Hurdle Test scores and by average school score over the four waves of testing conducted since 2016/2017.

Chart 3 - Distribution of pupils by overall Hurdle Test score

% of pupils by overall Hurdle Test score

Source: MEP Hurdle test results 2017, 2018, 2019, 2021; UCL IOE data; Analysis by Research Stories.
Base: All MEP schools results for pupils participating in MEP programme NB: No data for academic year 2019/20 as no Hurdle Tests were held due to covid-19 Pandemic.

There is no speaking component for the Year 9 Hurdle Test in recognition of finite staffing capacity in schools. The decision not to include a speaking component in the Year 9 Hurdle Test was agreed and approved by the MEP Expert Group.
The Hurdle Test data in both charts show a consistent picture.

Average scores for Yr7 are high and relatively consistent over time, reflecting the relatively limited amount of vocabulary required to that point. Approximately half of pupils at the end of Yr7 consistently score over 90% and around three quarters more than 80%.

Tests in Yr8 and Yr9 are more challenging and average performance, while still strong, has declined over time. There are two reasons for this. The first is that over time, a higher share of test-taking pupils are at schools new to Mandarin, so the comparison to the first year of results (for each cohort) is not really like-for-like. The second is the impact of Covid. The results for 2020/2021 are the weakest of the four cycles and evidence the negative impact on learning outcomes of the disruption caused by Covid.

In 2020/2021, 31% of Yr9 pupils had an average score above 80% compared to 57% in 2018/2019. For Yr8 the comparison is 30% vs 36%.

Wider pupil benefits

Teachers often suggest that the breadth of learning, especially cultural learning about China and Chinese people, extends beyond what is measured formally through exams.

School leaders have also spoken of the sense of pride and confidence which develops in MEP pupils leading to a reinforcement of self-esteem. Some suggest that that pride also extends to pupils who do not participate directly because they take pride in their school hosting a national programme for excellence.

"[MEP] Develops a feeling of doing something different and special."
Headteacher/School leader 2019/20

Programme has been a huge success; pupils are proud to be Mandarin learners.
Headteacher/School leader 2019/20

The activities outside the classroom, the opportunities to meet pupils from other schools, the Year 9 Intensive Study in the UK and above all the Intensive Study in China are seen to have a marked positive impact on children’s resilience, self-confidence and personal development, especially in MEP schools in relatively deprived areas. The activities within the Programme have also been a springboard to development activities outside it. In 2019/2020 thirty-four schools in the Programme said they had participated in the annual HSBC/British Council Mandarin speaking competition, a national competition for non-native speakers which historically has been dominated by independent schools.
Several schools have used the platform of MEP to increase China focused activities across the school more widely. These include Mandarin Clubs or non-MEP pupils and wider cultural activities.

Mandarin lunch time club is provided to the whole school because of MEP.

As a result of the school’s participation in this programme, we have delivered assemblies on aspects of Chinese culture for all pupils. We have also been hosts to a school group from our sister school in Beijing, and many children outside of the MEP programme were involved in and benefited from this.

Impact of the pandemic on learning outcomes

• The pandemic and the lockdown periods in particular clearly disrupted learning within MEP to some extent as it did many other areas of the curriculum.

• The need for such a rapid change to delivering lessons virtually posed access and technology challenges which were more or less common across the school curriculum (e.g. no suitable work environment in the home, no access to devices, no access to wi-fi, connectivity issues, pupils keeping their cameras switched off, pupils forgetting passwords etc.) which made it harder for teachers to interact with pupils effectively and to keep them engaged.

• Teacher feedback suggests that on average across the curriculum fewer pupils attended virtual lessons vs standard classroom lessons, effective teaching time per lesson was shortened (because of time lost to dealing with access and technology issues) and the level of pupil engagement decreased. Teachers found it more difficult to monitor pupil progress and behaviour management was often more challenging, too.

• These challenges were also shared by MEP but a number of teachers suggested that MEP typically had higher online attendance rates and better engagement than other MFL lessons. Older MEP pupils were already well used to technology-mediated study at home and an important element of MEP has always been the integration of interactive activities, e-learning tools and innovative approaches to learning within the delivery of the Programme. During the pandemic these practices proved valuable in supporting pupil engagement online.

• Even so, data from the most recent Hurdle Tests and the fact that many teachers felt that either the school or their pupils were not ready for Yr10 HSK3 Tests at the end of the 2020/2021 academic year evidences the negative impact on learning which resulted from the pandemic-related disruption.

• As a result, the Hurdle Tests in 2021 were designed to provide teachers with a realistic assessment of where their pupils had reached in their learning journey and to ensure that future expectations (the attainment levels that can be expected of pupils) were realistic.

• Feedback suggests that the disruption of the pandemic impacted progress in the four core language skills to different extents and it was progress in the productive skills of speaking and writing that suffered the most. The reduction in opportunities for peer-to-peer practice and group or individual sessions with classroom and CLEC teachers impacted progress in speaking. Several teachers noted that when pupils went back to school after lockdowns the confidence of some was lower and these pupils found it more challenging to speak with peers or to work in groups.

• There were also more limited opportunities for pupils to practise their character writing skills since they were working almost exclusively via keyboard where only pinyin typing is possible. The act of typing pinyin can reinforce pupils’ ability to recognise characters visually and phonetically but actual writing practice is necessary to learn and embed that specific skill.
Pupils need to maintain certain amount of writing practice but it’s difficult to check pupils’ work during remote learning. Also, without homework given, it’s hard to keep up to the learning speed.

Teacher 2020/21

Learning Mandarin requires a proper amount of time for writing practice. Writing is challenging in general for Mandarin learners, but remote teaching has made it even harder.

Teacher 2020/21

Interaction with my pupils during remote learning was limited to almost nothing. Attendance was good, but interaction was tricky. Character writing and speaking were the two areas most neglected - despite vocaroo. Any hand writing work was either very hard to feedback effectively on, or pupils relied on typing.

Teacher 2020/21

• The consensus is that the greatest negative impact has been on Yr7 and Yr8 pupils at the start of their learning journey in Mandarin and some teachers worry that these cohorts have not been able to establish the same platform for future learning as their predecessors in MEP. As elsewhere across the curriculum, an impact of the pandemic has been to widen attainment gaps within cohorts and between schools – reflecting the different contexts of schools and individual pupils and practical issues around access to technology and levels of parental support.

• The cancellation of the Yr8 Intensive Study in China and many other formal and informal cultural events along with many opportunities to network with other MEP pupils from across the country, are believed to have reduced cultural understanding relative to previous MEP cohorts and diluted some of the wider benefits of increased pupil confidence, resilience and self-esteem.
7. Would schools new to Mandarin have taught it without the Programme?

Schools new to Mandarin Chinese

- Encouraging and supporting schools new to Mandarin Chinese to introduce the language within the curriculum was a priority of MEP over its first five years.
- Feedback through the online surveys from staff at the 57 schools which joined after the first cohort shows very clearly that for them, establishing Mandarin Chinese on the curriculum was one of the three main motivations for joining the Programme – alongside enhancing the school’s reputation and accessing funding (Chart 5).

Chart 5 – Establishing Mandarin Chinese on the curriculum is a key motivation for schools to join the Mandarin Excellence Programme

Which of the following were important motivations for your school to join MEP?

Respondents from schools joining MEP after the first cohort

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motivation</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enhance brand image/perception of the school</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to funds</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduce/establish Mandarin on curriculum</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expand Mandarin teaching</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to networks</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to expert support in Mandarin</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve Mandarin teaching</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to teaching resources</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to textbooks</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: MEP Staff Surveys 2019/20 (70) and 2020/21 (7 – from schools joining that year) Fieldwork and analysis by Research Stories

“The MEP programme is a good programme for schools if they want to make a start to teaching Mandarin, and the MEP team do give teachers and schools a lot of support. I would strongly recommend this programme to other schools that are interested in delivering Mandarin.

Teacher 2019/2020
• It is harder than might be expected to determine exactly how many schools have used MEP to introduce Mandarin to their school. A small number of schools had previously taught the language, discontinued it, and then accessed MEP as a way of re-establishing it within the school. In other cases, Mandarin had been offered as a special option for very small numbers of pupils, sometimes using external teachers, offered in KS3 but not KS4 or offered outside the formal curriculum through lunchtime classes.

• Our estimate is made by cross-referencing the list of 71 participating schools at the end of 2020/2021 with data published by the DfE on schools submitting at least one candidate for GCSE Chinese in 2019. This analysis suggests that of the 57 schools which joined after the first cohort (and remain in the Programme), 40 did not enter a GCSE candidate in the language in 2019.

• On this measure, 56% of all 71 schools in MEP have newly established Mandarin Chinese on the curriculum or 70% of schools joining after the first cohort.

• To put that in perspective, 280 state schools entered at least one GCSE candidate in 2019, so the 40 MEP schools new to the language have potentially increased national provision by 14%.

• The Programme’s real influence is far more significant because a majority of those 280 schools entered only one candidate (possibly a mother tongue speaker). As an indication of more substantive provision, 101 schools nationally entered at least two candidates in 2019 and on this basis, MEP has increased the number of schools in England offering the language within the curriculum by 40%. [Some of the schools which have dropped out of the Programme are not taken into account in these numbers but may also continue to offer Mandarin Chinese].

• Our broad conclusion throughout the three waves of evaluation research has been that while a number of schools within the portfolio have reacted directly to the opportunity presented by MEP to introduce Mandarin Chinese onto the curriculum, a larger number have used it as a catalyst to accelerate ideas or plans that they were at least already considering with different levels of detail.

• Many of the participating schools are internationally oriented, academically ambitious and high performing and many well have looked to offer a Mandarin option eventually in order to remain academically relevant and responsive to the demands of globalisation. But MEP has clearly given an impetus to the plans of those schools, dramatically accelerated the speed of implementation of the subject and, crucially, provided both funding and practical support during the most difficult early years in order to embed the subject within the curriculum on a sustainable basis.

The profile of schools within MEP

• Participating schools have an underlying ethos which not only aspires to excellence across the curriculum but typically prioritises internationalisation and preparing their children for work in a globalised world. Many MEP schools have existing international links and/or participate in international programmes such as the International School Award (ISA) run by the British Council. Twenty-three of the 72 schools (32%) which responded to our survey in 2019/2020 were already Confucius Classrooms, a global initiative of the Chinese Ministry of Education, before joining the Programme.

• Many schools are high performing academically. Of the seventy-one schools currently in the programme, 12 are grammar schools (17% vs 5% nationally) and a relatively high share are faith schools. A number of participating schools could reasonably claim to be among the academically top performing state schools in the country. Many others are at the very least academic leaders in their local area.

• Schools are geographically clustered. The first cohort of Hub schools which had an established track record in the teaching of Mandarin was heavily concentrated in London and the South-East. Successive cohorts have widened the geographic coverage and there are now clear clusters of MEP schools in the population centres of the West Midlands, North-West and North-East, with further smaller clusters established along the South Coast around Brighton, along the Thames and M4 corridors towards Oxford and Bristol and through Hampshire towards Southampton (Chart 6).
• This clustering is a function of a number of factors. To some extent it reflects simple population and school density; it is where most schools are. It also reflects in part the challenges of sourcing a Mandarin teacher. Sourcing teachers is relatively easier in major conurbations with Chinese diaspora communities and easy access to university networks.

• The clustering is also to an extent a consequence of the Programme’s original Hub and Partner School delivery model. The original 14 hub schools recruited partner schools in relatively close proximity. With most Hub schools located in major cities and towns, it makes sense for both the Hub and the Partner schools that they are geographically close. This not only makes it cheaper and more time efficient for staff and pupils to meet but also means that the Hub schools are more likely to be familiar with the context of their Partner schools and more able to provide appropriate support.

• As successive MEP cohorts have developed, Multi Academy Trusts (MATs), typically involving schools in the same town or region, have also become increasingly important in driving recruitment into the Programme. The same factors that attract one school in a MAT to MEP are also likely to attract its sister schools. Initial school experience with MEP will have been shared within the MAT and there is a potential efficiency gain when multiple schools within a MAT are within the Programme and each able to access funding. For example:

• Finham Park is the lead school within the Finham Park MAT. Under the guidance of Finham Park, two further schools in Coventry within the MAT - Finham Park 2 and Lyng Hall - joined MEP in 2017/2018. In 2018/2019 another local school outside the Finham Park MAT – West Coventry Academy – joined MEP as an additional Partner school.

• Bohunt School in Liphook, Hampshire is the lead school within the Bohunt Education Trust MAT. It was an MEP foundation Hub school in 2016/2017. It is a large school with a heritage as a specialist language college including the championing of an immersive approach to language learning. In
2017/2018 a second school within the Bohunt MAT joined MEP. Bohunt School Worthing is a new comprehensive school opened in 2015 and is about 35 miles from Liphook on the south coast. In 2018/2019, The Petersfield School, a third school within the MAT joined the Programme.

- St Wilfrid’s Roman Catholic College in South Shields joined MEP in 2018/2019. It is the founding school of a local MAT, recently renamed the Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust. St Joseph’s Catholic Academy in Hebburn outside Newcastle, about 5 miles away, joined MEP in the same 2018/2019 cohort before coming together with St Wilfrid’s in the MAT in May 2019. A third catholic secondary school, St Bede’s Catholic Comprehensive School in Peterlee was already working in close partnership with St Wilfrid’s and joined the MAT formally in the last year. It also joined MEP in the same 2018/2019 cohort.

- The Programme’s explicit focus on excellence and its natural skew towards high performing schools (all participating schools need to have an Ofsted rating of Good or Outstanding) means that there has been an equally natural skew towards parents and children from relatively affluent areas and professional backgrounds; the same skew which surrounds high performing schools in general.

As a central area in England and multinational city, it is important for pupils to access different culture.
Teacher 2019/2020

- Although in the minority, there are several schools which have embraced MEP successfully while serving communities which are relatively deprived. These schools are equally Good or Outstanding schools as assessed by Ofsted. In our 2019 report we mentioned the examples of Melbourn Village College, a small secondary school in rural Cambridgeshire and Cowley International College in the North West, both of which serve majority white British school communities with relatively high levels of deprivation. Shevington School on the outskirts of Wigan is another example of a relatively small community school within MEP which serves a predominantly white British community in a post-industrial local economy. Similar dynamics also apply to schools such as Lyng Hall School in Coventry or UCL Academy in Swiss Cottage London. Both have catchment areas with high levels of deprivation and also high levels of diversity.

- In all of these schools an important role of MEP is perceived to be its ability to raise the expectations and widen the horizons – literally and metaphorically - of both pupils and parents. It supports the schools’ aims of demonstrating to all stakeholders that despite the challenges of relative deprivation, their children can participate and perform in a challenging programme just as well as peers from more advantaged backgrounds.

It [MEP] increases the cultural capital and global understanding in an area of the country where people often don’t experience anything beyond our peninsula.
Headteacher/School leader 2019/20

- In our area of social deprivation, the MEP offers life-changing opportunities.
Headteacher/School leader 2019/20

The parents here have high aspirations for their children and many work in companies which have branches in China so they see its [MEP’s] importance for the future.
Teacher 2019/2020

We are a very successful academic school and it [MEP] provides for a need and desire for our pupils. Our parents value the breadth of the curriculum and we delight in giving our pupils the best opportunities.
Headteacher/School leader 2019/20

- The concentration of MEP schools in the major conurbations also means that many participating schools have large proportions of children from minority ethnic backgrounds and this ethnic diversity is immediately apparent through observation of MEP classes during scoping visits.

“"
8. Benefits and challenges for schools delivering MEP

Wider Benefits of MEP

- Throughout the three waves of evaluation research for MEP, a large majority of staff with whom we have spoken have said that they regard the Programme as a success. This remains true, despite the impact Covid-19 pandemic has had on the delivery of MEP in 2020 and 2021.
- 91% of respondents to our latest MEP staff survey regard the Programme as either Very Successful (48%) or Successful (43%) – with a further 4% saying it is too early to tell.
- In the latest online survey (Chart 7), 100% of staff respondents describe themselves as being either Positive Advocates for the Programme (60%) or Supporters (40%) with positivity common across teachers and school leaders.

This programme has revolutionised the way our pupils learn languages and given our pupils the most amazing enrichment opportunities which has bought this language to life in many different contexts.

Headteacher/School leader 2019/20

The experience our children have had up until this point is excellent. The opportunity to study such a diverse culture and such a different language has lit a spark under them.

Headteacher/School leader 2019/20

Chart 7 – Almost all staff involved in MEP remain positive advocates or supporters of the Programme

Which one of these phrases best describes the way you would now speak about MEP?

Source: MEP Staff Survey 2018/19; MEP Staff Survey 2019/20, Fieldwork and analysis by Research Stories
Base: All staff involved in MEP 2018/19 (115); All staff involved in MEP 2019/20 (98); Staff involved in MEP 2020/21 (83)
Many staff have spoken of the huge interest and enthusiasm among both parents and pupils.

Parents see the value in it, it is more novel and interesting than French, Spanish.

Headteacher/School leader 2019/20

It offers a new and interesting curriculum alongside the already established one. Parents are genuinely interested in what this offers their children.

Headteacher/School leader 2019/20

The data of chart 5 show that participation in MEP is widely believed to bring profile and brand benefits to the school and often to create a USP and point of difference in areas in which schools are in competition for children. In the latest survey, two-thirds of respondent staff say that MEP is important or very important for the marketing of their school to prospective parents. Almost half say that articles and blogs for parents have covered MEP, 70% say MEP has been covered on the school website, 49% say that the Programme has been covered in the school’s newspaper/magazine, 43% social media and 14% local newspapers.

We are the only school [in the area] so far to offer Mandarin. Some parents come to the school because of this...

Teacher 2019/20

We offer something which no other school in the area offers - a unique selling point. It prepares them for life in a global world.

Headteacher/School leader 2019/20

A number of teachers also see MEP playing a role in helping to counter the decline in language study generally and offering a visible demonstration to pupils and parents that it is possible to study successfully what is typically considered to be a difficult language within the wider field of MFL.

The decision to join MEP has often run alongside a wider assessment of MFL provision within schools and several Heads see MEP has having acted as a catalyst for the establishment of a stronger and more sustainable approach to MFL generally, often resulting in a boost in pupil numbers.

MEP is also having a positive impact on the supply of Mandarin teachers. Respondents at thirty-nine schools in our most recent survey said that teachers have trained or are currently training to teach Mandarin Chinese while the school has been part of MEP. A number of teachers now delivering MEP were trained at MEP schools while taking their PGCE.

The Mandarin Chinese IOE PGCE has also grown in the past four years along with MEP and the Programme provided 20 places to PGCE pupils in the 2019/20 academic year. A number of MEP schools are Teaching Schools and in some cases, teachers of other languages at MEP schools have enrolled in the Mandarin up-skilling course at IOE Confucius Institute.

For schools new to Mandarin Chinese, the ideal teacher from a resource efficiency perspective is somebody who can also teach other subjects and there are several examples of MEP teachers who do exactly this, most commonly teaching other languages such as Spanish or French.

Several schools have taken the opportunity of some temporary spare capacity as the Programme builds to offer cultural and taster sessions about China and Chinese to a wider group of pupils than those in MEP. A small number have introduced courses for older pupils in KS5.

Many others have responded to the pressure to use resources efficiently by part-sharing Mandarin teachers. Of the sixty schools which responded to our most recent survey, twenty-five say that they have teachers who teach Mandarin in other schools. Of these, thirteen say that teachers teach in other schools within MEP and twelve in other schools within the MAT (many of which are also part of MEP).

The opportunity for resource sharing is an important reason why MATs have become increasingly important multipliers of MEP.

With this programme [MEP] we are changing the school view and the school has started to support the Modern Foreign Languages department better.

MEP teacher 2020/21

We now offer Mandarin and Spanish in the school........we now have more children taking languages in KS4.

Headteacher/School leader 2020/21
There are wider benefits of this resource sharing. Teachers themselves often value the wider experience of teaching in different contexts. Several schools have also initiated links with local primary schools, especially feeder schools, so that pre-Covid, MEP teachers would spend perhaps a day per week giving taster sessions to local Year 6 pupils. The MEP school is able to offset a small amount of its employment costs, a wider group of children and parents within the local community are given exposure to Mandarin at an early age and potential recruits into the next cohort of MEP Year 7s are being identified by teachers even before the children start in the school.

It’s interesting to actually teach Mandarin MEP in different schools. We collect a lot of experience to improve our teaching and learning.

Teacher 2019/20

Challenges to the Programme

Against this background of widespread positivity, the most widely cited practical challenge to delivery of the Programme throughout its first five years has always been timetabling.

The core issue is that the devotion of at least four hours per week within the curriculum to one subject means that MEP pupils almost always have a different timetable to their in-year peers, especially in KS3 where it is the need to manage this misalignment of both pupil time and teaching resources which causes the challenge.

MEP is a good experience for pupils to broaden horizons but difficult to meet the curriculum demands.

Headteacher/School leader 2019/20

We have noted in previous reports that there is no common model for how schools have adapted to the challenge. Most have put in place at least one extra hour of class outside the standard school day – whether after school or in the lunchbreak, with a few establishing breakfast classes or even weekend classes on occasions. In KS3 most have also substituted in at least one hour from a subject that peer group pupils take, often, although not exclusively, from classes devoted to personal or civic development. Other schools have substituted class hours from Design Technology, Art or Music, for example.

It is very hard to overcome this challenge as the MEP pupils are taken out from their other lessons e.g. Drama, Computer Science and Music to do Mandarin. This could discourage them as they don’t want to miss these lessons.

Teacher 2019/20

Importantly, on occasions schools have resolved the timetabling challenge by limiting the typical choice of two languages in KS3 to the single choice of Mandarin Chinese.

One tension that can arise within the timetable relates to wider practices around setting and streaming. The fact that MEP allocates a large amount of curriculum time to a pupil cohort which is relatively fixed over a number of years means that it can conflict with how schools wish to organise ability groups across the wider curriculum. A number of schools mentioned this issue and at least one dropped out of the Programme over the last year because of an inability to manage this tension.

The requirements of the curriculum meant that pupils had to stay in a top set throughout Key Stage 3. This caused huge Timetabling problems. I wanted to create mixed achievement groups in KS3 but couldn’t because of this.

Headteacher/School Leader 2020/2021 (Drop-out school)

Typically, the challenges with timetabling are most acute within KS3 as schools new to Mandarin and new to MEP come to terms with its intensive demands but at least one school dropped out of the Programme as the number of year groups expanded into KS4, citing an inability to manage the time requirements across multiple classes.

We were unable to find adequate timetable time to enable all year groups in school to undertake Mandarin lessons. The number of hours required by the programme was prohibitive in this regard. With only one Mandarin teacher it would have been impossible to staff and/or would have required significant numbers of lessons to be taught outside of normal school hours.

Head of MFL 2020/2021 (Drop-out school)
• There is wide variation in how schools have addressed the timetabling challenge but prior to the pandemic, a typical MEP school was delivering the minimum required four hours of F2F teaching (rather than more hours) and doing so with two or three hours delivered within the standard school timetable and one or two extra hours outside the timetable. Only small numbers of schools adopted models of delivering four (or more) hours of teaching within the standard school timetable or, alternatively, only one hour of teaching within the timetable.

• Data collected by UCL IOE CI at the start of the 2020/2021 year suggests that formally at least, this 2+2 or 3+1 structure was still the most common model of delivery (Chart 8). As pupil cohorts have moved into KS4, the number of hours delivered within the standard school day has typically increased, reflecting the greater number of hours usually available to all subjects at KS4.

• Many teachers recognise that 8 hours is a very significant burden of time, especially for Year 7 children, and some tacitly accept that many children will spend perhaps 2 or 3 hours per week on self-guided study, rather than the full four, and they focus more on the outcomes than the process.

**Chart 8 - MEP schools typically deliver two or three hours of F2F teaching per week within the standard school timetable**

**Minutes of F2F teaching delivered per week within the standard school timetable (2020/2021)**

By number of schools and MEP year group

Source: MEP Staff Survey 2020/21, Fieldwork and analysis by Research Stories
Base: MEP schools reporting to UCL IoE Confucius Institute for Schools (2020)

**Challenges of the pandemic**

• During lockdown periods, schools had to rethink how to deliver 4 taught hours of MEP to fit within the new virtual learning environment because pupils were not in school and, therefore, there were no lunch breaks nor any before/after school sessions. Indeed, to some extent, the distinction between curriculum hours and non-curriculum hours became almost meaningless because pupils were studying from home all the time.

• Several schools found themselves unable to deliver the minimum four hours of contact time during lockdown:

> “During the pandemic the pupils had less contact time than they would have had normally because they would have not had the pre and after school time. Headteacher/School leader 2020/21

We couldn’t run any intensive learning sessions for Y7,8 and 9 face to face and it is not feasible to run in online. Teacher 2020/21”
• There were knock-on effects on the planned-for additional four hours of guided self-study. Many schools and parents had concerns about how much time pupils were spending on their devices and some imposed limits on numbers of hours pupils could spend online, so reducing the opportunities for out of curriculum study, especially among younger Yr7 and Yr8 pupils who were less accustomed to the demands of self-guided study within MEP.

“…………..Mandarin was being taught partially outside of the curriculum, so scheduling and prioritising virtual provision was more complex

Teacher 2020/21

A child who has been sat in front of a screen for five hours already cannot really be expected to then go away and do four further hours of independent study across the week. As a result, our overall learning hours have been cut by about half, leading to far slower progress through the curriculum and a huge loss of confidence in some pupils.

Teacher 2020/21

KS3 pupils in our school is kept in class bubbles, so all MEP lessons have to be done remotely (Google Meet lessons) with almost all MEP pupils. KS4 pupils do have timetabled lessons, but not the extra MEP hours due to loss of break and lunch time and staggered finish time (due to COVID).

Teacher 2020/21

• Conscious of the unprecedented demands placed on schools by the pandemic across all subjects, we asked a specific question during the third wave of online research, “Has delivering MEP during the Covid-19 pandemic been more or less challenging than delivering other Modern Foreign Languages in the curriculum?” The clear answer appears to have been, ‘Yes’, with 59% of respondents saying that it was either ‘More or Much more Challenging’, 32% saying it was ‘The same’ and only 8% saying it was ‘Less challenging’.

• The key reasons why staff think it was more difficult are shown in Chart 9. The practical challenges of delivering both the out-of-curriculum hours and the in-curriculum hours discussed above are shown clearly in the data. Linked to these has been a marked increase in the share of teachers identifying the challenge of sustaining pupils’ motivation.

• Pre pandemic, keeping pupils motivated within the Programme was generally not considered to be a particularly acute issue other than in the context of competing pressures on pupils’ time and the risk that teenagers simply become tired.
During the pandemic, the Programme’s intensive design, the demands of self-guided learning and the unavoidable cancellation of the wider learning and cultural activities did challenge pupil motivation in some schools within KS3. As discussed earlier, many teachers noted the particularly demotivating impact of the cancellation of the Year 8 Intensive Study in China and the Year 9 UK Study.

Some teachers argue that the cancellation of MEP Hurdle Tests also negatively impacted motivation. Pupils within MEP are often high achievers, driven and wanting to be challenged. The cancellation of the tests took away a goal and progress milestone.

A further consequence of the pandemic has been considerable disruption to the process of recruiting new pupils into Year 7, especially at schools new to the Programme. This is especially important because schools which have been within the Programme for a number of years recognise that the Programme will not suit every pupil and that appropriate selection at the outset is fundamental to developing and sustaining a successful Programme within the school over the longer term.

MEP schools have access to guidance and examples of good practice for recruiting pupils onto the Programme in Year 7 but no common model of recruiting pupils has been adopted across the Programme. Almost all schools prioritise the motivation and commitment (of parents and pupils) rather than pure academic ability when recruiting into MEP but it is typically the more
able children who do participate. Many schools with multi-year experience of the Programme have adapted their selection procedures quite considerably along the way as they have learned what works well for them.

- Many provide taster sessions for all Year 7 pupils in the first few weeks of term and then select based on motivation and some informal assessment of aptitude in discussion with parents. Pre-pandemic, some scheduled these taster sessions for lunch-times or after school and recruited in part on the basis of attendance - on the logical basis that if children do not attend these they are unlikely to attend sessions of the full Programme. A few have a light touch but more formal assessment as a selection criterion at the Autumn half term. All of these approaches were more difficult at the start of the 2020/2021 academic year.

- Over time, an increasing number of schools have aimed to identify potential pupils through outreach to Year 6 children in feeder schools and/or end of KS2 assessment. Disruption to schooling in Yr6 and to the KS3 assessment made this more difficult in 2020/2021 and points to a potentially higher than expected drop-out in subsequent years.

- An additional complicating factor flowing from the pandemic is that a small number of teachers working within the Programme resigned and returned to China, presumably to be closer to family. This exemplifies a continued element of vulnerability of the Programme, the dependence of many participating schools on one Mandarin Chinese teacher. Pre-pandemic, where schools had struggled with the Programme it was often because of a personal challenge faced by that one teacher. In larger schools and/or in bigger cities there are more resources to cover for individual difficulties. In smaller, more isolated schools, the absence of the one individual can make it very difficult to maintain the Programme. Twenty-six MEP schools replying to our most recent survey say that they have only one Mandarin teacher in the school.

Responding to the Challenges of the pandemic: Virtual Intensive Study

- The major programmatic response to the pandemic has been the replacement of the in-person Intensive Study in China (for Yr 8) and the UK (for Yr 9) with virtual events in 2021. When run in 2018 and 2019 both in-person Intensive Studies were well regarded by participating teachers.

- The Intensive Study in the UK previously held at Nottingham University was run as an online event for Yr 10s over four days in July 2021 oriented around creating a virtual tourism campaign to encourage Chinese tourists to visit pupils’ local area. Pupils were taken through a process with associated vocabulary and skills focus based on resources developed for the in-person event run in 2019. Pupil output was subject to peer review and judging by external industry experts with pupils from the winning school undertaking a short follow-up work placement at two companies represented on the judging panel. 612 pupils logged on to the learning platform over the four days.

"KS3 this year is particularly difficult as we don’t have their result from primary [school] due to COVID and lockdown. Hence, some pupils in Yr7 this year do not seem to be resilient enough to dedicate themselves to the MEP programme. Teacher 2020/21"

Two schools within the Programme found the circumstances of the pandemic so difficult that they did not recruit a Year 7 cohort in the 2020/2021 academic year and one further school only began delivering MEP in January 2021.

""
• The Intensive Study in China was replaced by a two-week virtual event also held at the beginning of July 2021 for then Yr 9s. Both the in-person and virtual events were organised by the British Council, working with IOE CI and CLEC in China. The virtual programme was at a scale rarely, if ever, attempted previously and included:
  • Opening and closing plenary sessions with ministerial level stakeholders in UK and China,
  • Cultural events (prepared by CLEC), including city visits and visits to the home of Chinese peer pupils,
  • Structured language learning around specific topics including environmentalism.
• Participating schools were allocated to a China host university (as they had been during the in-person study periods). Specific teaching and learning activities were undertaken with teachers from that university and in smaller groups rather than as one complete cohort but there were also plenary sessions and opportunities to talk with peer pupils from China.
• Overall, 56 MEP schools, all schools within the Programme with a current Year 9 class, were invited to participate in the Virtual Intensive Study, which meant that approximately 1,400 pupils across these schools could have participated. No formal register of pupil participation was taken (or indeed possible) but the fact that the event was arranged quickly and schools given relatively little notice meant that not all eligible schools chose to participate. Schools cited lack of time and the need to catch-up from Covid disruption to the core programme, competing priorities within the school, e.g. end of year exams and inability to timetable teachers for the full study period.
• In addition, many of the same technology and access issues which impacted wider MEP teaching and learning during lockdown periods also negatively affected the Virtual Intensive Study.
• Despite these challenges, feedback after the event from both pupils (Chart 10) and teachers point to positive benefits, especially around increased cultural understanding. However, pupils, teachers and school leaders agree that there is no real substitute for the in-person study period in China.
• As well as the need to plan well ahead, learnings for any future Virtual Study include the need to consider whether two weeks online is too long a period in one go, the importance of providing lots of opportunities for interaction, especially between UK and China peer pupils, and the need to address some technology access and management issues (including how to record participation) linked to the choice of technology platform.

Chart 10 – Improved understanding of Chinese culture was a particular benefit of the Virtual Intensive Study in China

Thinking about the two week virtual intensive learning trip to China, to what degree do you agree or disagree with these statements?
MEP school pupil respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Agree or Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I feel I understand more about Chinese culture</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am motivated to learn more about China</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The course encouraged me to work with my school classmates to support eachother</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I made new friends with Chinese peers</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The course has motivated me to want to practise and learn more Mandarin</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I learned some new language I can use in real life situations</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I now feel more confident in my ability to learn Mandarin</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel more confident to express myself in Mandarin in a real situation</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: British Council MEP Year 9 Intensive Study (2020/21); Fieldwork by British Council, Analysis by Research Stories and In2Impact.
Base: MEP school pupil respondents (261). MEP pupil data is unweighted.
9. The effectiveness of the MEP Model

The overall approach

- Feedback through the three waves of evaluation has consistently pointed to the perceived coherence and complementarity of the main elements of the MEP model.

"The MEP has been a huge success in our school. The programme has been thoughtfully designed and the input from the various parties has been nothing other than excellent. The materials and resources provided by UCL are high quality and the input of the British Council has been extremely helpful. The intensive learning in China is an amazing experience for pupils (and staff) and was very well organised and supported. The way that the programme is funded is also very helpful in ensuring the programme is successful."  
Headteacher/School leader 2019/20

- The key elements of the Programme are seen to be financial support, the minimum four hours of classroom contact, the Year 8 Intensive study in China and the ongoing support from IOE CI (Chart 11).

"...the structure of the programme allows for meaningful learning of Mandarin which facilitates accelerated learning."  
Headteacher/School leader 2020/21

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Chart 11 – The Year 8 Intensive study in China, Financial Support, the 4 hours of classroom teaching and support from UCL IOE CI are considered key contributors to the success of MEP

Which are the three most important aspects in contributing to the success of MEP?

- Year 8 Intensive Study in China: 63%
- Financial support: 62%
- 4 hours of taught classroom time of Mandarin: 51%
- Support from IOE UCL Confucius Institute: 33%
- MEP teaching resources: 19%
- MEP teacher training days: 14%
- 4 hours of extra-curriculum Mandarin learning: 13%
- Year 9 Intensive study course at Nottingham University*: 13%
- Parents’ support: 9%
- Support to source teachers: 6%
- Support of hub schools: 4%
- Year 7 Intensive day: 3%
- Other: 4%

* Not all respondent schools have participated
Source: MEP Staff Survey 2020/21, Fieldwork and analysis by Research Stories
Base: All staff involved in MEP (79)
The fundamental driver of improved learning outcomes is widely seen to be the enhanced (typically four) F2F classroom hours. It is the more extensive contact hours, enabling both language and cultural learning, the fact that exposure to the language begins early in Yr7 and is relatively continuous throughout the school week that teachers believe makes the biggest difference to the speed and quality of learning outcomes achieved.

The Programme and the time allocated in the curriculum allows the pupils to work towards mastery of the language in a way that is difficult for pupils learning other languages in KS3 and 4. It also incorporates culture as an integrated part of the learning through the projects, and in my opinion this is incredibly important as language and culture are inextricably linked.

Teacher 2019/20

MEP gives pupils the necessary timetabled learning time in school, vital for any language learning, particularly when most pupils do not have help from parents.

Teacher 2020/21

The impact of enhanced F2F hours is amplified by the fact that those hours are delivered to pupils who have been pre-selected for their motivation and ability and often, although not always, delivered to smaller class sizes than is typical in other subject areas. This creates a reinforcing circle of talented, motivated pupils who see their own rapid progress in the subject which in turn builds their self-esteem and motivates them to do more. The learning is then reinforced during the extended self-guided study hours.

Due to increased curriculum time and smaller classes pupils are more confident when communicating orally. Groups made up almost exclusively of higher ability pupils mean that the majority of lessons can be taught in the TL, so aural comprehension is increased.

Headteacher/School leader 2019/20

The perceived value of the Year 8 Intensive Study in China among staff in MEP schools increased following the success of the Summer 2019 Intensive Study which involved around 1,000 children.

The funding and opportunity for Year 9 pupils to visit China is wonderful. These pupils are being offered something incredible and unique, and an opportunity that is potentially life-changing. Long may it continue!

Teacher 2019/20

.......I think MEP is really beneficial for the pupils, especially the intensive learning weeks in China.

Teacher 2019/20

Along with the Intensive Study in the UK for Year 9 pupils, this extra-curricular element is seen to have several direct benefits as well as its motivational ones:

- It embeds and reinforce language learning, in particular allowing pupils to see and practise Mandarin Chinese as a living language,
- It provides a unique cultural experience which for some pupils is seen to be potentially life changing,
- It builds pupils’ independence, confidence and resilience,

You can see that when they come back from the China trip, they are confident, their language ability and even their passion is really different. It is a life changing opportunity. Even their personality changes.

Teacher 2019/20

- It allows pupils to meet, study and socialise with their peers from across the country on an equal basis in a shared community of learning,

The pupils enjoy meeting other MEP pupils. By knowing there are a lot of pupils around the UK like them, it really helps them to learn and face the challenges.

Teacher 2019/20

- It provides a forum for teachers from across the Programme to meet, discuss and share knowledge and learning in a shared community of practice.
- School leaders point to the importance of financial support in facilitating their school’s participation
in the Programme. The funding allows schools to recruit staff and in particular to bridge the gap while classroom demand is building in the first two years of the Programme. It also facilitates pupils’ engagement in the wider programme of activities, both those organised nationally within MEP and those organised locally within and between partner schools.

The programme is well funded and the support we have received from UCL has been excellent. It has allowed us to introduce a completely new language to our curriculum and pupils absolutely love it!

Headteacher/School leader 2019/20

The Mandarin Excellence Programme is good news for schools wanting to put Mandarin firmly on the curriculum for their pupils. As well as providing a very welcome injection of funding, it provides regular support for teachers in the form of training and resources, opportunities to network and collaborate with other MEP schools and support in arranging immersive language learning experiences.

Teacher 2020/21

- Access to supply networks of teachers through UCL IOE CI has also been a crucial enabler for many schools new to the language.

MEP has connected me with the network to get the message out when we are recruiting……we’ve been able to access a much richer market of teachers.

Headteacher/School leader 2020/2021

Being a part of the MEP has enhanced our Mandarin provision and may well have helped attract quality staff required…..

Headteacher/School leader 2019/20

- As more schools new to Mandarin have joined the Programme, the range and quality of support provided by IOE CI has become increasingly appreciated. Across all waves of evaluation research we have heard many unsolicited comments of praise both for individual members of the IOE CI team and for the institution as a whole.

- IOE CI has provided direct support to learning outcomes in the shape of teaching and learning resources and input to teaching practice and teacher development which has been especially helpful to the many recently qualified teachers delivering the Programme.

IOE are excellent and have supported the school with sourcing teachers and improving the quality of teaching and resources.

Headteacher/School leader 2019/20

As I’m new to MEP, I found the training organised by IOE most useful. Furthermore, the MEP team in IOE are very helpful.

Teacher 2019/20

- Schools have pointed to the MEP teacher meetings and training sessions as being valuable in themselves and also as opportunities to network, build collaboration and develop a community of practice.

Teacher training sessions are a key opportunity to network, to hear about upcoming initiatives, to solve problems together, to arrange opportunities for collaboration etc. The head teachers’ steering group is also a great opportunity for our SMT to stay in touch with new developments and to have a say in what happens next on the Programme.

Teacher 2020/21

Networking events organised by UCL IOE are particularly useful so that we can meet other teachers and share ideas/ challenges face to face. This has been MEP teachers meetings and also more general training events e.g. re the new GCSE.

Teacher 2019/20

- Initiatives to maintain leadership level engagement in the shape of regular meetings of Heads also appear to have worked well in maintaining their support for the Programme.

IOE support and materials are great as are the meetings hosted at UCL as these provide valuable networking opportunities. The Chinese teacher community which has grown out of MEP is very supportive.

Headteacher/School leader 2019/20
The affiliation with UCL IOE has been an invaluable network support guidance and an opportunity particularly at a teacher level to share best practice in terms of leading languages in a school. It has also given me the opportunity to sit in a forum with Headteachers in a room and for each of us to bring what we are doing in our school and share it.

Headteacher/School leader 2019/20

• By the end of the 2019/20 academic year, out of the 76 enrolled schools at that time, 68 (89%) had received an in-person visit from the MEP coordinator from IOE CI. The plan was for all schools to have received at least one visit by the end of the 2020/2021 school year but the pandemic made that impossible.

• As pupil cohorts have moved through the Programme, an increasingly important area of support for teachers has been around guidance and resources on the transition from KS3 to KS4. Recently qualified teachers in particular have often sought advice from the team at IOE CI to support the step-change in intensity as pupils begin to focus on GCSEs.

• IOE CI has also provided support to the small number of schools which have struggled to deliver the Programme. When this has happened it has generally been for one of two reasons. Either the school as a whole has been experiencing difficulties or an individual teacher has encountered difficulties professionally or personally. As we noted earlier, many schools within MEP have only one teacher which makes their role within the Programme in that school absolutely critical.

• CLEC teachers (previously known as Hanban teachers) have played an important role in supporting delivery of the Programme, especially, although not exclusively, alongside non-native teachers. On occasions CLEC teachers are shared between schools within the Programme or Hub schools lend them to Partner schools for a few days a week.

• The CLEC Teacher Programme is an IOE CI programme, implemented in collaboration with CLEC. It is a global initiative supported by the China Ministry of Education which sponsors qualified teachers from China to spend up to two years supporting the teaching of Chinese as a foreign language outside the country. Within MEP, CLEC teachers offer important practice in speaking and listening and often play a particular role supporting children who may be struggling with remedial and/or one-on-one sessions.

Our well-trained CLEC teacher is an invaluable support for a non-native teacher like myself.

Teacher 2019/20

Our two CLEC teachers are a huge help! Without them we would not be able to deliver the MEP effectively.

Teacher 2019/20

• During the 2020/21 academic year, travel restrictions made it impossible for CLEC teachers to travel to the UK, reducing the number of CLEC teachers available to support the Programme and adding to the challenges of maintaining in-school delivery during the pandemic.

• The one mechanism of support within MEP that has worked less well than originally hoped is the Hub and Partner school system. There have been some very positive examples of support being offered and received through the model but overall, its effectiveness has been patchy.

• Pressures on teacher time and the costs of travel sometimes weakened the links between Hub and Partner schools and a re-orientation towards online meetings and the increasing role of schools within MATs has to some extent superseded the role of the Hub and Partner School model.

Teaching approaches

• Teachers and teaching practice are of course central to the delivery of learning outcomes through MEP. The extended hours available within the Programme have given teachers some opportunity to vary their classroom practice and to bring in a far greater level of cultural learning. The value of this wider cultural learning is an aspect of MEP which many teachers have emphasised during the three waves of research. They see it as underpinning accelerated language learning by giving context to that language and helping to maintain interest and engagement, especially in KS3.

MEP delivers diversified teaching and learning materials which is not just language based, but also involves Chinese culture and traditions. This plays an important part in stimulating and engaging learners for exploring China and Chinese in a broader and [more] effective way.

Teacher 2020/21
• The project resources provided by UCL IOE for Years 7, 8, 9 are widely used to develop understanding of cultural themes and these projects are often a significant focus of the extra-curricular study which pupils are asked to undertake. On occasions, this project focus helps to manage potential tension in schools which otherwise have a no homework policy.

• A typical KS3 lesson will involve an initial, teacher-led exploration of a textbook theme, area of vocabulary or a point of grammar in a whole class setting using PowerPoint or a whiteboard followed by timed exercises to test learning and/or group working supported on a more personal basis by the teacher and classroom assistant.

• Establishing a strong foundation in the language does require a degree of rote learning and repeated practice which is possibly greater than for European languages. So, there is an attention to learning characters and practice writing them which might involve drawing the strokes in the air in a classroom setting and then consolidating learning using tracing books or apps at home. To address this challenge, IOE CI has established the Chinese Character Pedagogy Project, funded and delivered through the MEP contract. The Project is a teacher-led research project that will develop a clear pedagogical approach to teaching Chinese characters. The intention is that not only pupils within the Mandarin Excellence Programme but also pupils learning Chinese in all schools should benefit from a clearer pedagogy with respect to the best approaches to the teaching of Chinese characters.

• Teachers are conscious that this requirement for rote learning doesn’t lead to boredom and demotivation, so in KS3 sessions of vocabulary drilling and repetition are often mixed up with language games, quizzes, peer-to-peer practice and videos or singing, using for example YouTube Chinese Buddy. Practising speaking in pairs by asking and answering questions in Mandarin is an approach used by many teachers, with some asking pupils to record their conversations and listen to their pronunciation (Chart 12).

• Typically, teaching MEP in KS4 is seen to be relatively easier because the pupils have chosen the language based on prior experience and they are accustomed to the Programme’s intensity and demands. Pupil well-being as they face exam pressure across the curriculum in KS4 is a common concern and explains why some teachers have reservations about the setting of HSK3 exams in Yr10.

“Game style activities and competitions work well with younger years. Teacher 2019/20

Encouraging pupils to create their own tasks in groups and then share them with the whole class. Teacher 2019/20

“Once in KS4 the pupils seem to be motivated, and to want to do well. The key challenges are in KS3. Teacher 2020/21

KS3 - to keep their motivation and commitment to the MEP programme; KS4 - to look after pupils’ wellbeing when facing the exam pressure. Teacher 2020/21
However, as overall pupil volumes within the Programme have increased over time and more pupils have moved through into KS4, schools have had to accept the reality that even within MEP not all pupils progress at the same speed and can be high achievers. Attainment gaps have often been accentuated by the experience of lockdowns. As in other areas of the curriculum, some schools are having consciously to address the needs of pupils with mixed abilities, even within MEP.

At KS4, it is about teaching increasingly [more] mixed ability. We have a number of pupils who will need to be entered for foundation tier. We are recognising that not all of our cohorts are natural linguists and so mixed ability teaching requires increasingly effective differentiation. **Headteacher/School leader 2020/21**

The balance of teaching approaches changes in KS4 but teachers still make a lot of use of peer-to-peer conversation, group work activities, timed exercises, quizzes and extract reading.

Some note that writing is a particular challenge during the KS3 to KS4 transition. This challenge has been heightened during the pandemic and the output from the Chinese Character Pedagogy Project may be particularly helpful here in the future.

Written skills are much more intense in KS4 and some of our pupils struggle with this difference. **Teacher 2020/21**

A minority of teachers teach more or less entirely in the target language but the amount of target language classroom time increases with the year groups. Where available, CLEC teachers are extremely important in providing opportunities for additional native language practice and helping individuals and small groups with specific learning activities.

A few more experienced teachers use almost all of their own resources but the majority structure lessons and the term around units within a textbook. The Jin Bu textbook is now almost standard in KS3 with a smaller number using Easy Steps to Chinese or Kuaile Hanyu. During the transition in Year 9 and into KS4 teachers generally shift to one of the GCSE textbooks, with Pearson Edexcel GCSE Chinese (9-1) the most common.
Most schools now have their own cross-school learning platforms such as Frog or Firefly. Many but not all MEP teachers also use Edmodo which is supported by IOE CI to access resources.

Pre-pandemic, there was relatively limited direct use of specialist apps and web platforms within the classroom but these have always been widely used within MEP to support out-of-classroom learning. Typically, the structure and focus of this out-of-classroom learning is markedly different to that within the classroom. The emphasis is very much on project work and practice and consolidation through the use of these platforms and apps.

Quizlet remains the most widely used online tool by MEP teachers.

During lockdown, when all lessons were delivered virtually, teachers tried to maintain a variety of teaching and learning approaches but there was a shift in the balance with most teachers increasing their use of apps, videos and online games to deliver MEP during both classroom learning hours and out of classroom hours. In addition to Quizlet, and GoChinese etc. apps which teachers mention using include Duolingo, Nearpod, Mandarin Matrix and Youtube.

For homework we have started to do some flipped learning by using Quizlet to allow the pupils to learn vocabulary before they formally start learning it in the classroom.

Teacher 2019/20

GoChinese and Kahoot are also frequently used (Chart 14). For example, all MEP pupils in the three schools in the Finham Park MAT are given a subscription to GoChinese and the school works with the provider to host relevant learning resources.

Teacher 2020/21

The pupils were given free access to Mandarin Matrix, an important reading platform that allows pupils to revise old topics and preview new content, very much in line with the independent learning habit we want to foster in the pupils for life-long learning. They can listen, read and earn points. My job is to motivate them, getting them to help each other and guiding them to take charge of their own learning by looking for interesting topics and making their own reading choices. More than 90 per cent of our 60 MEP pupils signed up during first lockdown and more than 50 per cent showed engagement at any given week.

Teacher 2020/21
### Chart 14 – Quizlet is the most widely used online tool within MEP

Which, if any, of the following online tools and apps do you use within MEP? Please select ALL that apply.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tool</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quizlet</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GoChinese</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kahoot</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hello Chinese</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little Fox Chinese</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Chairman’s Bao</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memrise</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese Buddy</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hanlexon</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gimkit</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ipandarin</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hacking Chinese</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decipher Chinese</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scritter</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: MEP Staff Survey 2020/21, Fieldwork and analysis by Research Stories
Base: All teachers involved in MEP (66)
10. Lessons Learned

• Assessed against its initial aims and objectives, the Mandarin Excellence Programme has to be judged a considerable success. That success shows that a well-designed and well delivered programme can transform the landscape within the school system for a relatively under-provided subject such as Mandarin Chinese and can do so in a relatively short period of time.

• MEP has benefited from having other complementary programmes – most notably the teacher training programmes offered by various university centres and the Hanban/CLEC language assistants programme – run alongside it. It has also benefitted from the considerable experience and expertise brought to it by the two lead partners, UCL IOE CI and the British Council.

• The central driver of improved and accelerated learning outcomes within MEP is the increased classroom hours but the other elements of the Programme complement and add to the impact of that central driver.

• The financial support has undoubtedly been important in encouraging schools to enrol but most have done so because they have recognised the importance of Mandarin Chinese for children in the globalised world of the 21st century and have seen a Programme which they believe can be practical and effective.

• A minority of schools within the Programme are in deprived areas of the country. The majority are high achieving schools, often in relatively affluent catchment areas and on balance, participating pupils are high achievers in those schools. This is a logical consequence of the Programme’s explicit focus on Excellence.

• A large majority of participating schools are now committed to retaining Mandarin on the curriculum in the long-term. However, if funding and support were to be withdrawn, most envisage that Mandarin provision would revert to the less intensive model followed by other Modern Foreign Languages.

• The central challenge to the Programme of timetable management means that not all schools could adopt an MEP model. A small number of schools have tried and decided that it is not for them. The unprecedented pressures of the pandemic have added to the timetabling challenges for those schools.

• Seventy-one schools have managed to adapt their timetable to the model and this suggests that in principle, the same approach could be applied to other languages or indeed other priority subjects within the curriculum. However, it is highly unlikely that any one school could ever enrol in more than one Excellence Programme without far more fundamental changes to expectations and structures around pathways in KS3 and KS4.

• Adoption of MEP has required some compromises across the curriculum with other subject areas losing out. On occasions this has meant a reduction in MFL options. A small number of schools have removed a MFL option in KS3 in order to allow pupils to concentrate on Mandarin and a slightly larger number have introduced MEP alongside a wider reassessment of MFL provision which has sometimes seen a re-focusing around Mandarin and Spanish at the expense of German and French. So, at the margin, the success of MEP may come at the expense of a decline in the number of pupils taking other language options.

• The success of MEP has itself created some challenges. The initial GCSE results are so strong that several Heads have observed that MEP may start to crowd out non-MEP Mandarin in state schools. The argument is that pupils in non-MEP Mandarin classes will be unable to compete in terms of expected GCSE grades with their MEP peers and this may cause non-MEP state schools (and indeed some MEP schools with dual Mandarin streams) to close their non-MEP streams. It is possible that Mandarin Chinese provision in state schools may come to mean MEP almost exclusively.

• The number of pupils now within the Programme means that differences in ability are becoming more apparent in some schools and these gaps have often widened during the pandemic. The need to manage these differences within an intensive programme focused on excellence and high achievement will be a challenge.

• A further challenge arises from the question of what comes next for MEP pupils in KS5. Having achieved its aim of setting a large cohort of pupils on the path to fluency, there is a need to chart sensible pathways to allow those pupils to pursue Mandarin in KS5 and indeed into university. This is especially the case for pupils who will focus on other subjects in KS5 but desire to continue with Mandarin as an adjunct subject.

• Almost all MEP schools are keen to offer Mandarin within KS5 but there is widespread dissatisfaction with the exams pathways currently available. Many
teachers within MEP are highly critical of the suitability and fairness of the current A-level syllabus. In contrast, many are extremely positive about the Cambridge Pre-U but that qualification is being discontinued from June 2023. HSK4-5 are alternatives but HSK does not currently generate UCAS points for the pupil.

- KS5 is a focus of the next phase of MEP and discussions about exam pathways and recognition of HSK are ongoing with the DfE. It is a challenge that many schools which have been successful to date in generating interest in Mandarin Chinese feel that they might be left in a position of having to pick from the least worst option in order to help pupils pursue that interest into KS5.

- Some aspects of Mandarin learning lend themselves particularly well to digital solutions and the use of online platforms and apps as teaching and learning tools has been an important element of MEP from the outset, especially to support out-of-classroom study.

- Unexpectedly, the pandemic required similar approaches to be adopted more widely across the curriculum and it is instructive that MEP was to some extent more resilient through the pandemic because of its prior use of digital technology. Developing the potential of that technology remains a priority for the next phase of MEP and some lessons about virtual learning from MEP may well be transferable to other areas of the curriculum.

- Similarly, older pupils within MEP appear to have benefitted during the pandemic from being well accustomed to undertaking structured, self-guided study (often using digital technology) and to have been relatively more resilient under the pressures of learning during lockdown. Again, there may be learning from the MEP approach which is transferable to other subjects, irrespective of whether schools have to undertake lockdown teaching in future.
Appendix 1: Methodology

Online survey

- The online survey was distributed to Headteachers and the main MEP delivery teacher in all MEP schools. These also shared the survey link with other relevant staff, including the Head of MFL and other Mandarin teachers.
- Survey responses were monitored throughout the fieldwork and reminders sent out to boost response.

Structured interviews

- Interviewees were chosen based on criteria including how many years the school has been in the Programme, geographic location, school type, hub or partner school, Confucius Classroom status and participation in previous waves of research.

School scoping visits

- Selection of schools for scoping visits was based on criteria including how many years the school has been in the Programme, geographic location, school type and hub or partner school (Table 7).
- Within each school visit a minimum of 2 people were interviewed, typically the Headteacher and main MEP delivery teacher. Other staff, including the Head of MFL, other Mandarin teachers, CLEC Assistants and teachers of other languages were also interviewed on occasions.
- Informal conversations were also held in communal spaces or teachers’ rooms and in classrooms before or after observing MEP lessons.
- The aim of attending MEP lessons was to observe the classroom approaches used by teachers and to see pupils’ motivation and engagement.

Table 7: School Scoping Visits

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>School location</th>
<th>Hub / Partner</th>
<th>Confucius Classroom</th>
<th>Year joined MEP</th>
<th>School type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Melbourn Village College</td>
<td>East</td>
<td>Partner</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>2017/18</td>
<td>Academy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queen Mary’s Grammar School</td>
<td>Midlands</td>
<td>Hub</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>2016/17</td>
<td>Grammar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crossley Heath School</td>
<td>North</td>
<td>Hub</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>2017/18</td>
<td>Grammar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christ’s College Finchley</td>
<td>London</td>
<td>Partner</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>2017/18</td>
<td>Academy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anglo European School</td>
<td>East</td>
<td>Hub</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>2016/17</td>
<td>Academy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Grey Court School</td>
<td>London</td>
<td>Partner</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>2018/19</td>
<td>Academy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Didcot Girls’ School</td>
<td>South East</td>
<td>Partner</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>2017/18</td>
<td>Academy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finham Park School</td>
<td>Midlands</td>
<td>Hub</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>2016/17</td>
<td>Academy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homewood School &amp; Sixth Form Centre</td>
<td>South East</td>
<td>Hub</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>2016/17</td>
<td>Academy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pate’s Grammar School</td>
<td>South West</td>
<td>Partner</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>2018/19</td>
<td>Grammar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shevington High School</td>
<td>North West</td>
<td>Partner</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>2017/18</td>
<td>Community school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ratton School</td>
<td>South East</td>
<td>Partner</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>2019/20</td>
<td>Academy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pinner High School</td>
<td>London</td>
<td>Partner</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>2019/20</td>
<td>Free school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lyng Hall School</td>
<td>Midlands</td>
<td>Partner</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>2017/18</td>
<td>Academy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data collection tools

- Discussion guides, survey questionnaires and scoping visit guides were developed for original data collection.
- A number of questions were asked consistently in each wave of research but as the Programme has evolved, new questions were introduced to reflect the changing environment. Notably, during the third wave of research, questions around the challenges of delivering MEP during the pandemic and the (perceived) impact of the pandemic on delivery and learning outcomes were introduced.

Example questions - Online survey

- S1. Which one of these phrases best describes the way you would now speak about MEP?
  - Advocate: You would actively go out of your way to encourage other schools to participate
  - Supporter: You would encourage other schools to participate if asked
  - Neutral: You would neither encourage nor discourage other schools to participate
  - Critic: You would discourage other schools from participating if asked
  - Strong critic: You would actively go out of your way to discourage other schools from participating
- S2. Do mainstream Mandarin classes benefit at all from the existence of MEP? If yes, how?
- S3. Overall, how do you rate the success of MEP at your school so far?
- S4. Which are the three most important aspects contributing to the success of MEP?
- S5. Which, if any, elements of MEP have been made especially challenging by the Covid-19 pandemic?
- S6. What are the key challenges when planning for intensive/accelerated Mandarin learning structured like MEP in the long term?

Example questions – Discussion guide

- S1. How is teaching within MEP organised and resourced?
- S2. So far, do you regard the MEP in your school as being a success? How do you judge that?
- S3. How are you managing the curriculum planning of MEP?
- S4. Do you gain support/advice from other schools in the programme through the hub and partner system?
- S5. Has your school made any changes to the delivery of MEP during Covid-19 pandemic? If so, what?