

The Mandarin Excellence Programme Evaluation Report 2022/2023

Prepared for the IOE, UCL's Faculty of
Education and Society and the Department
for Education

by



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The IOE (Institute of Education) is UCL's Faculty of Education and Society and is the lead delivery partner for the Mandarin Excellence Programme (MEP).

IOE has more than 6,000 students, 900 staff, 190 research collaborations and cross-sector partnerships spanning five continents. Our six departments and 40 centres work across education, culture, psychology and social science to improve lives.

The Centre for Chinese Language Education at IOE supports schools in starting and developing the teaching and learning of Mandarin Chinese. The Centre consists of a team of Chinese teaching specialists in London who work with a large network of schools, headteachers and Chinese language teachers. IOE'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.

The British Council is a key 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 2022 its work reached 600 million people overall, including online, social media and through broadcast and publications.¹

Impact Stories is an insight and evaluation consultancy specialising in education, culture and social change. It works to collate, illuminate and interpret information to provide actionable insights and learning for organisations and programmes in the UK and internationally.

Insight and evaluation for this year's report has been significantly improved by close cooperation between the evaluators, Impact Stories, and the Curriculum and Qualifications Analysis and Research Team at the Department for Education (DfE). From this team, Analyst James Chudy undertook most of the data matching, cleaning and analysis of MEP profile and GCSE outcomes data presented in this report. His expertise has greatly supported and enriched the evaluation report.

To support the evaluation, pupils learning Chinese at state schools in England have been identified systematically within the National Pupil Database (NPD) allowing detailed analysis of participation and comparative outcomes in Chinese at GCSE level. The analysis developed for this year's report builds on the learning and knowledge gained working with the NPD in preparing the previous 2021/2022 evaluation report.

¹ https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/britishcouncil_annualreport_2022-23.pdf

1. Introduction

Overview

- This report sets out the detailed findings of an evaluation of the Mandarin Excellence Programme (MEP) over the academic year 2022/2023.
- This report builds on a summative evaluation of the first five years of the programme (2016-2021) completed in 2022 (<https://ci.ioe.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/MEP-Independent-Evaluation-Report-2016-2021.pdf>) and a previous evaluation report focusing on academic year 2021/2022.
- The Mandarin Excellence Programme was launched in 2016/2017. Academic year 2022/2023 was therefore the 7th year of the programme overall and the second year of the second phase of funding provided by the Department for Education.
- The lead delivery partner for MEP from its inception has been The Institute of Education (IOE), UCL's Faculty of Education and Society. The British Council is also an important delivery partner focusing in particular on delivering the intensive study in China element of the programme.

Aims and objectives of MEP

- Mandarin Chinese is the most widely spoken first language in the world. The growing importance of China globally as an economic, cultural and political power makes Mandarin Chinese 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 state schools in England. 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 all entries for GCSE Chinese were from students in independent schools.
- MEP was established to boost the quantity and quality of Mandarin teaching and learning in state schools in England. It 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.
- A Theory of Change (ToC) for MEP was developed by DfE and UCL IOE which identifies a number of short and long-term target outcomes and incorporates Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for the programme.

- Among the key outcome targets for MEP are:
 - Increased pupil uptake in Mandarin at KS4 and higher attainment,
 - Increased teacher understanding of how effective teaching can engender a positive attitude towards Mandarin, combating the '*Mandarin is too difficult*' culture,
 - A sufficient supply of Mandarin teachers (recruitment and retention),
 - Evidence generated to inform roll-out of MEP model for other languages.
- The indirect, long-term impacts of MEP are expected to be:
 - A permanent increase in the number of state schools teaching Mandarin and the number of pupils learning Mandarin at KS4,
 - Increased pupil uptake in Mandarin at KS5 and higher attainment,
 - Higher numbers of pupils going on to study Mandarin at HE level.

Evaluation Framework for MEP

- The evaluation of MEP within this report is organised around the six dimensions of the OECD DAC evaluation framework (<https://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/daccriteriaforevaluatingdevelopmentassistance.htm>):
 - **Relevance:** is the programme doing the right things?
 - **Coherence:** how well does the programme fit together?
 - **Efficiency:** how are programme resources being used?
 - **Effectiveness:** is the programme achieving its delivery targets?
 - **Impact:** what difference is the programme making?
 - **Sustainability:** will the benefits and impact of the programme last?
- Under each of these sections, data and analysis from all relevant sources is brought together to evidence achievements through MEP.
- Reporting within this document under the three results dimensions, Effectiveness, Impact and Sustainability, references specific target outcomes and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) set for the programme.

2. Executive Summary

- The evaluation of the Mandarin Excellence Programme in academic year 2022/2023 shows that it continues to deliver strongly against its target outputs and outcomes.
- The programme had a portfolio of 79 schools during the year.
- More than half the schools within the portfolio are offering Mandarin on the curriculum for the first time.
- 7,772 pupils were studying within MEP in 2022/2023.
- An additional 1,091 MEP pupils had sat GCSE Chinese in the prior two years (2020/2021 and 2021/2022). So the total number of students participating in MEP since inception stands at 8,863 (excluding pupils who have participated for only part of their full, five-year GCSE cycle).
- The largest source of pupil drop-out from MEP is the withdrawal of whole schools from the programme. By the end of 2022/2023 a total of 94 different schools in England had joined the programme since its inception in 2016/2017 while 15 of these 94 schools (16%) had withdrawn.
- Among schools which remained within the programme and entered candidates for GCSE over the three years 2020/2021 – 2022/2023, the annual pupil drop-out rate is of the order of 5% p.a.
- Data suggests that the share of Year 7 pupils entering MEP who are economically disadvantaged (as measured by Free School Meals status) is increasing but further work is required to ensure the accuracy of the data.
- 1,053 pupils within 51 MEP schools sat GCSE Chinese in 2023, an increase of 37% vs 2022.
- MEP accounted for 19% of the overall total of 5,569 GCSE Chinese candidates in England in 2023 and 28% of all candidates in state schools.
- An increase in the number of candidates with a background in a Chinese language and/or Chinese heritage has been an important driver of strong growth in candidate numbers outside MEP. An estimated 59% of state school students taking GCSE Chinese outside MEP had first language Chinese and/or Chinese heritage in 2023. Within MEP the estimated share was 6%.
- As a result, MEP accounted for almost half (47%) of all GCSE candidates in state schools who do not have a background in a Chinese language and/or Chinese heritage.
- In 2023, MEP pupils achieved an average grade of 6.4 in GCSE Chinese:
 - 82% achieved Grade 5 or above,
 - 36% achieved Grades 8 or 9.
- Pupils in first cohort MEP schools had higher attainment than pupils in second and third cohorts, especially at the top-end of the grade distribution. 50% of students in first cohort schools attained Grades 8 or 9. In second cohort schools this share was 27% and in third cohort schools 32%.

- First cohort schools typically have previous experience teaching Mandarin and more, and more experienced, Mandarin teaching staff.
- Across all 51 schools, 46 (90%) had an average grade of 5.0 or above, with two further schools having average grades just below this level at 4.8 and 4.9. Three schools at the bottom of the grade distribution were outliers.
- Allowing for students with first language Chinese and/or Chinese heritage (who as a group have significantly higher average GCSE attainment than other students), MEP pupils have higher average attainment than their non-MEP peers in state schools:
 - The average grade achieved within MEP was 6.3 vs 5.9 among comparable pupils in state schools outside the programme,
 - 80% of MEP pupils achieved Grade 5 or above (vs 73% outside) and 33% Grade 8 or 9 (vs 28% outside).
- Within the minority of MEP schools which continue to run dual stream (MEP and non-MEP) Mandarin programmes, GCSE results show an average uplift in attainment of 1.2 grade points for pupils taught within MEP.
- Multivariate modeling of the 2023 GCSE data, which controls for the impact of other independent factors affecting attainment, found that participation in MEP makes a unique, independent contribution to attainment in GCSE Chinese of 0.50 grade points. i.e. on average, a pupil within MEP will achieve half a grade point higher than an otherwise identical pupil studying Mandarin Chinese in an otherwise identical state school outside the programme.
- The results also show that participation in each of the MEP school cohorts has a statistically significant positive impact on average GCSE attainment ranging from 0.75 grade points in the more experienced Cohort 1 schools to 0.53 in Cohort 3 schools and 0.28 in Cohort 2 schools.
- Many teachers involved in MEP continue to argue that the programme's impact on childrens' personal development goes beyond what is captured by exam and test results in building confidence, resilience and critical thinking.
- The perception among a large majority of participating teachers and school leaders remains that MEP is a well-conceived and rounded programme. Its focus on supporting both pupils and teachers is widely valued.
- Thirty-nine of forty-two (93%) teacher respondents to the 2023 MEP online survey say they are '*Satisfied*' or '*Very Satisfied*' with the overall MEP programme structure.
- Among participating school leaders and teachers, the four key drivers of success for MEP are seen to be:
 - Financial support provided to schools,
 - Extended hours of classroom teaching,
 - Intensive Study in China,
 - Support from UCL IOE.

- The key challenges to effective delivery of MEP in 2022/2023 identified by teachers and school leaders are:
 - Sustaining pupils' motivation,
 - Timetabling,
 - Preparing pupils for Hurdle Tests/HSK,
 - Delivering four hours of learning outside the curriculum.
- Intensive study in China was delivered virtually in 2023 and disrupted by teacher strike action. Among 71 teacher and leader respondents to the MEP staff survey, 73% said that the motivation and engagement of students in MEP had '*increased*' or '*strongly increased*' as a result of the planned reintroduction of the in-person intensive study in China in July 2024.
- Nineteen (37%) of the 51 schools responding to the online survey are currently delivering the programme using only one qualified teacher, albeit some of these schools will not yet be teaching Mandarin to five year-groups.
- The programme in schools continues to be supported by the UCL IOE PGCE course in Mandarin. In 2022/23, UCL IOE trained 17 PGCE students of whom 15 are known to be currently teaching in schools in England.
- Exactly two-thirds (66%) of 53 MEP schools providing a response to the survey in 2023 reported that teachers had trained or are currently training to teach Mandarin at the school.
- Feedback from 39 teachers found that 82% agree strongly or agree with the statement: "*Through MEP my confidence as a teacher has improved*" and 77% with the statement, "*Through MEP I have become more confident in delivering a rigorous model for teaching Mandarin.*"
- Twelve of 50 schools responding (24%) say that teachers within MEP also assist in some way at other schools. Most commonly this is teaching Mandarin taster courses at local primary/feeder schools.
- Among 69 staff respondents to the 2023 survey, 59% said that they felt '*Very confident*' and a further 33% '*Confident*' in their school's ability to offer high quality Mandarin teaching and learning on the curriculum over the long term.
- The minority of schools which lack confidence in their ability to sustain the subject over the longer term typically identify concerns around staff retention and recruitment.
- The success of MEP in bringing through a generation of young learners to GCSE Mandarin at the end of KS4 is creating a focus within schools on pathways in KS5 and beyond into university. Many teachers and school leaders say they would benefit from further support in KS5.
- The current picture in KS5 in MEP schools is quite diverse. The most common KS5 pathways currently are towards HSK4 and A-level.
- Some schools have still offered the Cambridge Pre-U in its final year, while a growing number are offering the IB qualification facilitated by a special agreement negotiated to offer a standalone qualification to MEP schools.

3. Reflections and lessons learned

- The programme is highly valued by the leadership teams in participating schools and by the teachers delivering Mandarin classes. The combination of school funding, intensive study hours, curriculum resources, support to teachers and extra curricula activities is widely seen to offer a highly coherent, well-balanced package appropriate both to the learning needs of pupils and to the professional needs of teachers. The development of a strong community of practice among MEP teachers is a clear positive.
- The programme continues to provide strong support and facilitation for schools wishing to introduce Mandarin Chinese onto the curriculum, especially during the early years when schools are challenged by the need to balance the increased costs associated with teacher recruitment against the incremental growth in classes across year groups over the first five years.
- A large majority of participating schools are now committed to retaining Mandarin Chinese on the curriculum in the long-term. In response to the programme's aims, many schools within the portfolio have introduced Mandarin onto the curriculum for the first time. The majority of these schools have now embedded and consolidated the programme and are confident of sustaining Mandarin on the curriculum over the longer term.
- Cost pressures on schools generally have increased significantly over recent years and against this background it appears likely that if additional funding were to cease, many schools might revert to a less intensive model more typical of other Modern Foreign Languages.
- The ongoing engagement and support provided by the team at UCL IOE is very widely recognised and valued by participating schools and teachers.
- The intended reintroduction of in-person intensive study in China in 2024 is seen by teachers and school leaders to have re-energised the programme in many schools. It has created a renewed sense of excitement and engagement among pupils and parents, including those newly joining the programme in Year 7. This development has highlighted the enormous motivational impact of this element of MEP.
- While the three years of enforced virtual intensive study were generally well received, the consensus among teachers is that virtual study cannot compare to the in-person alternative in terms of its impact on language acquisition and confidence, cultural understanding and student motivation.
- There is also widespread recognition of the enormous effort and care which the British Council has invested in restarting and making possible in-person intensive study in China.
- Teachers' advocacy for the in-person vs the virtual intensive study also reflects some concerns, which are becoming more widespread within society generally, about the amount of time which young people are spending online in front of screens. These concerns are conditioning (albeit currently only at the margin) the slight reluctance of some schools to enforce rigorously the amount of out-of-curriculum (at home) learning time undertaken by younger pupils within the programme.

- MEP has made a major contribution to strong growth in the number of candidates for GCSE Chinese in England. While this growth has also been seen in the independent sector and in the state school sector outside MEP, the programme appears to be unique in driving growth by attracting to the subject students without a Chinese heritage and background in the language.
- Analysis of GCSE data confirms results from last year that MEP is making a unique and statistically significant contribution to GCSE attainment by pupils. That contribution continues to be significantly higher in first cohort schools which have previous experience of teaching Mandarin and, typically, more experienced teachers
- Further consideration should be given as to how best to share learning, experience and resources between first and subsequent cohort schools. This consideration could include a further review of the Hub and Partner model which continues to work very well in some instances but less well in others and is now being challenged by the greater distance between schools within the portfolio.
- The staffing model is often different between first cohort schools and others within the portfolio. While some of this difference is explained by the lower level of demand within schools new to Mandarin, a high share of schools is delivering MEP across multiple year groups with only one teacher. This makes the programme in those schools vulnerable to teacher illness or resignation. It also places a very heavy burden and responsibility on that individual teacher.
- Schools with only one teacher and/or a newly qualified teacher are necessarily a priority for support by UCL IOE. Although outside the programme, the role of the CLEC/British Council Teaching Assistants programmes is regarded by teachers and school leaders as crucial in supporting Mandarin teaching in MEP schools. Wherever possible, priority for teaching assistants should be given to schools with only one teacher and/or a newly qualified teacher.
- As the MEP portfolio has expanded in number and geography, the pressure on teaching resources has become more acute. MEP school leaders recognise their dependence on engaged and motivated staff and their ability to recruit new teachers when required. Schools in communities distant from major conurbations (most likely with smaller local Chinese communities) are finding the challenges of teacher recruitment and retention greater. There are also some indications that in more rural areas, most likely with less diverse communities, it is also sometimes harder to interest students and parents in Mandarin Chinese and to sustain demand.
- To address issues of teacher supply, the parallel initiatives undertaken by UCL IOE in teacher training and teacher upskilling remain important for the future sustainability of Mandarin teaching in England. MEP is also serving an important role in providing teacher training and opportunities for early years teachers to gain experience and embed their practice.

- As more schools have brought through students to GCSE, issues of student time prioritisation and motivation in KS4 have become more apparent and challenging. Many MEP pupils are high achievers across subjects and in KS4 they (and their parents) are to some extent trading off extra time spent on Mandarin against time spent on subjects such as STEM and English which may be viewed as higher priorities. The reinstatement of in-person intensive study is seen by teachers as giving a huge boost to motivation and interest for these students.
- The use of HSK as a Hurdle Test in Year 10 continues to have both advocates and detractors among teachers delivering MEP. Analysis suggests that it is a useful indicator of likely GCSE attainment in Year 11 and results can serve as a guide to schools which require extra support in the run-up to GCSE. There remain concerns around the workload involved and the timing of HSK3 in the peak period of end-of year school examinations. Several teachers suggest that preparation for HSK3 should be built into the MEP learning pathway earlier in Years 8 and 9.
- The undoubted success of MEP against its original goals for KS3 and KS4 has created new challenges. Some of these challenges lie outside the immediate remit of MEP but do provide context for how the success of MEP can be built on in the future.
- A heightened focus of school leaders, teachers and students is on the role of Mandarin in KS5. Most MEP schools wish to offer Mandarin in KS5 and many are looking for guidance and support on pathways, curricula and resourcing. Some of the newly qualified teachers working within MEP are anxious about meeting the demands of teaching in KS5 and are looking for further support.
- The current provision in KS5 within MEP schools is diverse with some schools offering A-levels, some offering HSK4 and some offering IB (either as standard or the standalone programme negotiated to support MEP schools) to some extent as a replacement for the popular but now discontinued Cambridge Pre-U.
- MEP schools and teachers have essentially two priorities within KS5:
 - To be able to offer a course (such as A-level) to the relatively small number of students wanting to focus on the language, which is suitable for non-native speakers as well as native speakers,
 - To be able to offer a course(s) which allows a larger group of students to continue with Mandarin as a subject within KS5, even if their priority for A-levels is in other areas such as STEM.
- The concern of teachers and parents is that the time and effort invested in MEP by students in KS3 and KS4 might be wasted without this clarity in the KS5 offers.
- School leaders also recognise that it is very difficult to resource simply an A-level course in KS5 when it might attract only one or two students per year.
- The first pupils to have passed through MEP will have started their university courses in 2023/2024. So, the question of how to build on the success of MEP within Higher Education is also increasingly relevant.

4. Summary Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

Outcome	KPI	Result: Academic year 2022/2023	Data Source
A growing portfolio of schools on the programme	Baseline: 75 schools in 2021/2022 Target: 80 schools by 2023/2024	79 schools in the programme	Programme Data
Increased number of pupils on track to a high level of fluency in Mandarin	At least 9,000 pupils within the programme by academic year 2023/2024 11,000 pupils have participated in the programme since inception	7,772 pupils within the programme 8,863 pupils currently studying or have taken GCSE Chinese	Programme Data
Improved pupil attainment in Mandarin	GCSE attainment compared to national averages	0.5 grade point average increase in attainment within MEP	Analysis of GCSE attainment data available to DfE
Pupils are engaged and highly motivated to study Mandarin	% of pupils retained in the programme (90%+ pa)	95% p.a. (GCSE candidates vs students taking Yr7 Hurdle Tests; first three student cohorts; schools remaining within MEP)	Online survey of MEP staff and school leaders
Expansion of supply of qualified Mandarin teachers	Number of PGCE places offered by UCL IOE annually for the Mandarin Languages PGCE	17	Programme Data
Improved quality of Mandarin teaching practices	Teacher satisfaction with: - Learning pathways - Programme structure - Hurdle tests - Support - Resources	Satisfied+Very satisfied with.... (N=42) Learning pathway from Y7 to Y11 - 78% Overall programme structure - 93% Hurdle Tests as a tool for assessing pupils' progress - 76% Support to teachers and teaching practice - 80% Teaching and learning resources available - 79%	Online survey of MEP staff and school leaders
Improved teacher confidence in teaching Mandarin	Self-reported teacher confidence	Agree+Strongly agree (N=39) Through MEP my confidence as a teacher has improved - 82% Through MEP I have become more confident in delivering a rigorous model for teaching Mandarin - 77%	Online survey of MEP staff and school leaders
Increased pupil confidence, resilience and self-esteem	Teacher reported: - Confidence - Resilience - Self-esteem	Agree+Strongly agree (N=42) Participation in MEP improves pupils' self-esteem - 79% Participation in MEP improves pupils' resilience - 88% Participation in MEP improves pupils' self-confidence - 90% Participation in MEP supports the confidence and resilience of children from disadvantaged backgrounds - 81%	Online survey of MEP staff and school leaders
A higher proportion of disadvantaged pupils within MEP schools are engaged in the programme	Share of pupils within the programme eligible for FSM vs 2021/2022 baseline	Yr 7 FSM6 share within MEP = 19.9% (vs 17.6% in 2021/2022)	Analysis of NPD data available to DfE

5. Overview of The Mandarin Excellence Programme

Background

- On 20th May 2016 the Secretary of State for Education awarded a contract for the delivery of the Mandarin Excellence Programme (MEP) in schools in England. The contract was awarded to UCL IOE 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. The initial contract and investment was extended for a further 18 months running through to August 2021 when a new contract for the second phase of the programme was put in place.
- 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 pupils into the Programme in Year 7.
- On commission, the headline aim of the programme (which was achieved), was to have at least 5,000 pupils within state schools in England on a path to fluency in Mandarin Chinese by 2020 and in doing so create a model for delivery and development of the language providing:
 - diverse geographical location of schools to ensure the development of teaching and learning of Mandarin Chinese in schools across the country;
 - school-led development of the Programme, translating centralised guidance and support into local practice;
 - 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 residential intensive language study in China at the end of year 8;
 - a high-quality online environment to provide resources;
 - development of teaching capacity and expansion of the provision of training places;
 - a communications plan and strategy;
 - stakeholder engagement to build demand.
- In 2021, a minimum three years of additional funding for MEP was agreed through the Department for Education to cover the period to the end of academic year 2023/2024. In June 2024 this second phase funding was extended for a fourth academic year until 31st August 2025.

- The specific aims of the second phase of MEP were to:
 - Support, retain and where needed recruit secondary schools to maintain 75 schools in the programme. In March 2023 this formal target was increased to 80 enrolled schools by academic year 2023/2024.
 - Involve the rigorous study of Mandarin by highly able and motivated pupils for eight hours a week, made up of a combination of class-time teaching, after school teaching and self-study, including forms of blended/online learning;
 - Ensure continued recruitment and training of UK-based Mandarin teachers to contribute to meeting the needs of schools in England;
 - Embed effective, sustainable teaching practices that will continue to increase the number of pupils studying Mandarin beyond the funding of this project;
 - Provide pupils with an immersive experience of China through an intensive study period in China for most pupils who reach Year 9 on the programme and/or through the use of digital media where travel is not permitted or possible;
 - Achieve at least 9,000 pupils on the programme and 11,000 pupils since the beginning of the programme on track to a high level of fluency by academic year 2023/2024.
- 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, MEP also aims to support wider efforts to grow the number of teachers of the language in England by boosting the number of schools in which trainee and early career teachers can gain experience and fulfill their teaching practice requirements.
- The MEP lead delivery partner UCL IOE hosts the largest of a number of UK centres training teachers of Mandarin Chinese through the UCL IOE Mandarin PGCE.

6. Methodology

Original Research

- This evaluation report is based on the fifth wave of data collection undertaken since the launch of the Mandarin Excellence Programme.
- There were six main elements of data collection and analysis within this wave of research:
- **Analysis of programme data collected by IOE.**
 - This data covers the portfolio of schools in the programme, the number and attainment of pupils taking the standardised end-of-year Hurdle Tests designed by UCL IOE to assess pupil progress and the teaching hours delivered by schools.
- **Analysis of pupil profile and GCSE attainment data within the National Pupil Database (NPD)**
 - Data on pupil profile and GCSE attainment was identified by DfE analysts within the National Pupil Database (NPD) for all pupils in England studying Chinese. The subset of these pupils within MEP was identified to allow comparison between the two groups (studying within MEP and outside MEP).
- **An online survey distributed to staff (including school heads, deputies, heads of Modern Foreign Languages and teachers of Mandarin) in participating MEP schools.**
 - The survey carried over some core questions from previous waves of research and was updated to reflect the aims of the second phase of funding and the updated outputs and outcomes within the programme's Theory of Change.
 - The survey received 87 responses in total, of which 77 were complete and 10 partial.
 - At least one response was received from 53 schools out of a total of 79 in the programme (67%),
 - 29 respondents (35%) were school leaders (Heads or Deputy Heads) and the remainder were either Mandarin teachers or the Head of Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) at MEP schools.

- **In-depth interviews with staff in MEP schools.**
 - Thirteen in-depth interviews were conducted with teachers and heads from nine MEP schools
 - Schools for interview were chosen to give a broad representation across the portfolio of different MEP cohorts and different regions of England. Interviewees included both school leaders and teachers to provide both leader level and classroom perspectives on MEP.
 - Most interviews were held via Zoom/Teams and explored issues raised through the online survey in greater depth. They lasted 30-45 minutes.
 - Some interviews were held during an onsite visit to one participating MEP school.
- **Observation of several sessions within the virtual intensive study in China.**
 - A number of different lessons and cultural events within the intensive study programme, involving a sample of different schools, were observed.
- **Data from specific teacher and pupil surveys distributed at the end of the virtual intensive study in China developed and administered by the British Council.**
 - These surveys focused on immediate assessment of the value of the intensive study programme and its contribution to the overall target outcomes of MEP,
 - The surveys received 612 responses from participating pupils within 50 participating MEP schools and 43 responses from teachers supporting the intensive study programme,
 - A separate evaluation report on the intensive study specifically has been prepared for the British Council.

Challenges and future opportunities for research and analysis

- Data collection from schools is always challenged by pressures on staff time.
- Response rates to the survey and response to requests for in-depth interviews were high and the data collected gives a very representative perspective across schools within the programme.
- It proved more difficult to arrange on-site observation visits in schools. In future, it would be sensible to coordinate those visits with UCL IOE programme staff, so that schools do not receive multiple requests for visits from multiple sources.
- A focus of this wave of evaluation was the analysis of GCSE outcomes for pupils within MEP. The process of identifying and matching MEP student data within the National Pupil Database (NPD) was more accurate and comprehensive than in 2021/2022 but again proved time consuming. Several further issues around definition and data collection were identified which will inform future waves of evaluation.

- In consequence, there are some small discrepancies when reporting numbers and attainment of pupils within MEP which are reflected in some of the data presented in this report. There are also some small discrepancies with data reported in previous rounds of evaluation. Those discrepancies are typically minor and do not affect the overall conclusions drawn from analysis of the data.
- One specific data challenge was developing a consistent data series identifying the proportion of pupils within the programme from a disadvantaged background based on data on eligibility for Free School Meals (FSM). This is an area for further analysis during the next round of evaluation. An important question which is as yet unanswered is whether there is any significant difference in the rate of retention through the programme of pupils in receipt of FSM vs those not in receipt of FSM.
- The option available to candidates in GCSE Chinese to take Mandarin or Cantonese speaking variants complicates the analysis of the impact of MEP. GCSE data is routinely reported in a composite category of 'GCSE Chinese.' Working with exam boards to isolate results for the Mandarin variant will allow more accurate assessment of the impact of MEP in future.
- In further waves of evaluation there is also an opportunity to track pupils who have participated in MEP through their subsequent learning paths in KS5 and into Higher Education.

7. Relevance

School Participation in MEP

- The relevance of the MEP programme is reflected most directly in its ability to recruit and retain schools and pupils into the programme.
- An initial cohort of 15 schools was recruited into MEP in the 2016/2017 academic year (although one of these schools did not formally join until three years later). Schools in this initial cohort were actively recruited because they had previous experience teaching Mandarin on the curriculum. It was intended that these schools would serve as beacons of good practice and mentors for other schools without prior experience.
- In each subsequent year, new schools have been recruited into the programme. The majority of these schools had no prior experience of teaching Mandarin on the curriculum and the programme is often used by these schools as a high-quality, facilitated approach to the introduction of the language onto the curriculum. The focus on Mandarin is often a school response to the changing environment in which children will be living and working in the future and the prestige associated with being part of MEP is welcomed by schools as a way of differentiating the school in its local market.

“In fact, this [MEP] is one of those things that we thought would make us stand out from other schools.” **School Leader, MEP (2023)**

- By the end of 2022/2023 a total of 94 different schools in England had joined the programme over its seven-year lifespan. Before the start of the 2022/2023 academic year, 15 of these 94 schools (16%) had withdrawn from the programme, meaning that the portfolio was 79 schools during the academic year.
- Throughout the programme’s life, schools which have withdrawn have done so mainly for two reasons:
 - A challenge at school level. For example, a change in Ofsted rating (meaning that the school can no longer remain within the programme) or a change in school leadership and overall direction,
 - Difficulty in managing and resourcing the extended hours and the timetable consequences of MEP within the wider school curriculum.
- These factors were compounded by circumstances during 2019/2020. At the end of this year, 9 schools withdrew from the programme. This was the first academic year impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic which created multiple challenges for schools. 2019/2020 was also the formal end of the first, initially four-year, phase of funding. Some schools were unsettled by the uncertainty around future funding and chose to withdraw.
- Seven of the nine schools withdrawing in this year were Cohort 3 schools which had joined the programme in the previous year 2018/2019. School withdrawal has impacted these Cohort 3 schools far more significantly than other school cohorts.

- Four schools withdrew at the end of the 2021/2022 year and a further four schools which participated in 2022/2023 did not continue within MEP in 2023/2024. Atypically, one of these schools, which serves a predominantly white British community, found it too difficult to attract pupils and parents into the programme.

"We have had to leave the Program due to the quality of candidates available. We love the programme and are sad to leave but getting suitable candidates in our location has proved too challenging." **School Leader, MEP 2023**

- Three of the four schools which did not continue into 2023/2024 belonged to the same Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) and the decision was largely taken at the level of the MAT. In a reflection of the supply-side challenges to MEP, this MAT decided to withdraw from the programme because of an inability to recruit and then retain suitable teachers. This MAT's experience was that few suitable teachers were willing to commit to living in their part of the country, with suitable candidates preferring opportunities in London or other major cities with a large Chinese diaspora community. The MAT's decision was taken reluctantly and despite considerable enthusiasm and demand among parents and children.

The profile of schools within MEP

- The programme is only open to applications from schools holding an Ofsted rating of *Good* or *Outstanding*, so the profile of the schools within the portfolio is a subset of these schools, rather than of the total universe of secondary schools in England.
- The programme's focus on excellence continues to attract academically high performing and selective schools. Within the 2022/2023 portfolio of 79 schools:
 - 12 (15%) were selective grammar schools,
 - A further 14 (18%) were faith schools.
- The representation of grammar and faith schools is, however, proportionately lower among cohorts of schools which have joined the programme more recently.
- MEP aligns well with the focus of schools which prioritise internationalisation within their curriculum. Many MEP schools have existing international links and/or participate in other international programmes such as the International School Award (ISA) run by the British Council.

"Internationalism is one thing that my school really values.....the MEP program also contributes quite a lot to the school's internationalism." **Teacher, MEP (2023)**

- The MEP portfolio remains concentrated in the major conurbations with the largest group in London and other significant urban clusters in the West Midlands and Leeds-Manchester. As the portfolio has expanded, efforts have been made to widen the geographic reach. Clusters are now being developed on the south coast and in the South-West around Bristol and Somerset with one school in Cornwall. Other schools have joined in towns including Newark, Macclesfield, Worcester and Canterbury.
- Participation of multiple schools within a MAT has become an increasingly important characteristic of the portfolio over time.

“Our college belongs to a Trust with other secondary schools. I have communicated with our headteacher about encouraging other schools to join MEP...” **Teacher, MEP (2023)**

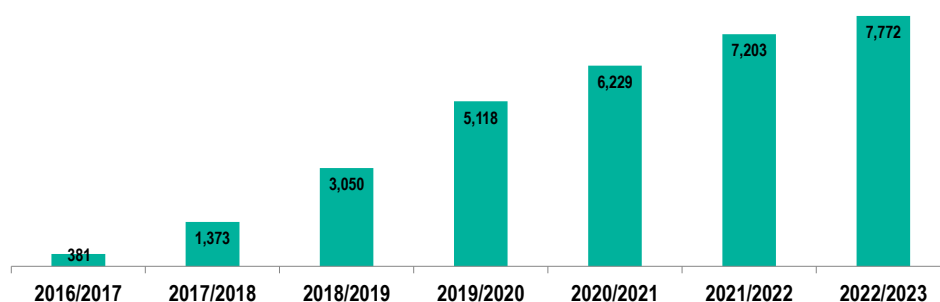
- An important minority of schools within the portfolio have catchment areas marked by relatively high levels of economic deprivation. School leaders in these schools are typically attracted by the programme’s potential to broaden the horizons of children and to provide a platform for interaction and engagement with pupils from more advantaged backgrounds elsewhere in England.

Student Participation in MEP

- 7,772 pupils were studying within the MEP in 2022/2023 (Chart 1).
- The number of pupils within the programme has risen every year since its inception in 2016/2017 as the number of schools within the portfolio has increased.

Chart 1: Growth in Student Numbers within MEP

Number of Students within MEP (number taking end of year tests)
By academic year



Source: Programme data from UCL IOE based on numbers of students taking year-end Hurdle Tests (Yr7-Yr9), HSK2/3 (Yr 10), GCSE (Yr 11).

NB: In individual years, small numbers of students may not take year-end Hurdle Tests, so the number of students actually studying within MEP during an academic year may be slightly higher than the numbers shown. Data for 2019/2020 is estimated because the pandemic prevented the administration of end of year Hurdle Tests



- The perceived attraction of the programme for parents remains its cultural relevance, the likely importance of China within the global economy of the 21st century and the competitive advantage in the employment market that understanding China and its language might provide to their children.

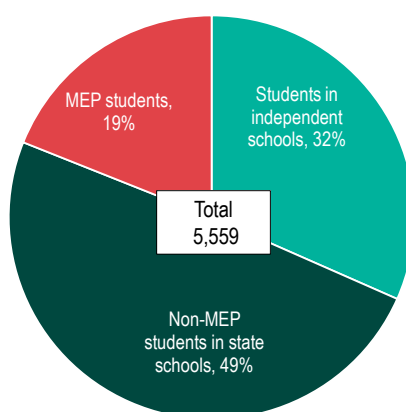
“People realise that China becomes the very big economic power; parents realise that children being able to speak Mandarin will increase their job opportunities.” **Teacher, MEP (2023)**

MEP pupil profile

- In 2023 MEP accounted for 19% of all students sitting GCSE Chinese in England (Chart 2).

Chart 2: MEP accounted for nearly one in five GCSE Chinese candidates in England in 2023

Students sitting GCSE Chinese in the state and independent sectors in England (2023)



Source: DfE (2023); Analysis by Impact Stories



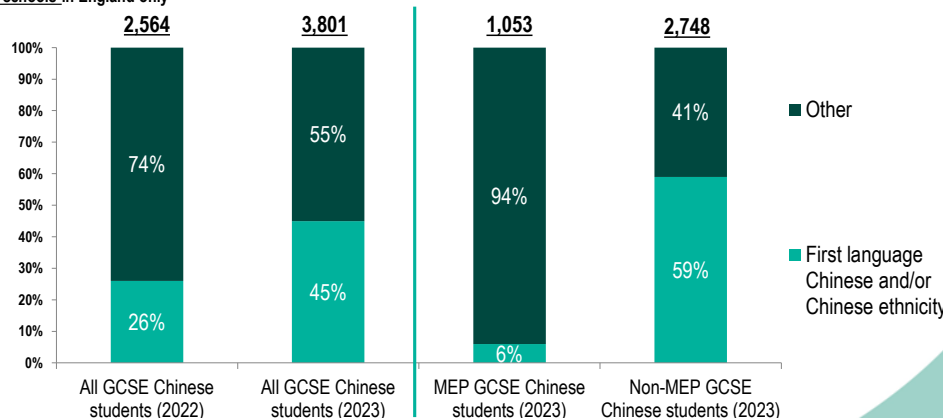
- It was noted in last year's evaluation report that Chinese is a curriculum subject in both the state and independent school sectors which attracts a high share of pupils with Chinese heritage.
- Data on the first language and ethnicity of pupils in state schools is taken from the school census. This provides a rich data source but is known to be incomplete and prone to some inconsistencies and inaccuracies. The data around this issue should therefore be taken as indicative rather than definitive. [Data on first language and ethnicity is not available for students in the independent sector].
- In 2023, 3,801 students sat GCSE Chinese in state schools in England. Of these students an estimated 1,697 (45%) are believed to have first language Chinese and/or Chinese ethnicity. While there may be some inconsistency in measurement, these data indicate a large increase from 2022 when the estimated share of first language Chinese and/or Chinese ethnicity students taking GCSE was 26%.

- Chinese GCSE in England can be taken with either a Mandarin speaking component or a Cantonese speaking component.
- Part of the explanation for the increase in share of Chinese heritage candidates may lie in the introduction of a new immigration route for holders of British National (Overseas) status from Hong Kong in January 2021. There has been an increase in the number of families from Hong Kong moving to the UK and of the 1,697 students with Chinese ethnicity and/or first language taking GCSE Chinese in 2023, at least 515 (30%) are believed to have first language Cantonese.
- In practice, many GCSE candidates with a Chinese heritage may not even be studying within the school curriculum. It is known that a share of candidates for all GCSEs, and especially for Modern Foreign Languages, are private candidates; students who do not study the subject within the curriculum but use the school as an examination centre to validate their existing knowledge or their private study outside school.
- There is no formal tracking of private candidates but among the 5,559 students who sat GCSE Chinese in 2023 across both the state and independent sectors in England, 955 (17%) sat the exam at a school with 3 candidates or fewer – strongly suggesting that the subject is not being taught as a curriculum subject at those schools.
- The important insight for understanding the impact of MEP is that the heritage/first language profile of students taking GCSE Chinese in 2022/2023 is markedly different within and outside the programme.
 - An estimated 59% (nearly 6 in 10) of state school students taking GCSE Chinese outside MEP were believed to have first language Chinese and/or Chinese ethnicity,
 - Within MEP, the estimated share was only 6% (Chart 3).

Chart 3: Six in ten state school GCSE Chinese students outside MEP have Chinese first language/ethnicity

Students sitting GCSE Chinese in state schools by first language/ethnicity*

Data for state schools in England only



Source: DfE (2023); Analysis by Impact Stories

*NB: Data on first language and ethnicity is taken from the school census and is known to be incomplete and on occasions inaccurate. Data should be considered to show order of magnitude



- MEP was designed for non-native speakers of the language and is typically unattractive to native speakers because of the time commitment within the curriculum. In 2023, while MEP accounted for 19% of all GCSE Chinese candidates in England and 28% of candidates in state schools, it accounted for almost half (47%) of all GCSE Chinese candidates in state schools who do not have a background in the language and/or Chinese heritage.
- At the same time, many MEP schools serve ethnically diverse communities. A feature of MEP is the high proportion of pupils from non white-British backgrounds, reflecting the urban catchment areas from which they are often drawn and, possibly, the international priorities of their parents.
- Related to this, a high share MEP pupils has a non-English (and non-Chinese) home language. As one indicator, 716 Year 9 MEP pupils who participated in the 2021/2022 Virtual Intensive Study in China were asked, ‘Do you speak any language(s) other than English at home or with members of your family?’ 38% answered, ‘Yes’.

Advocacy from participating schools

- MEP continues to be highly regarded by school leaders and teachers in the schools which are delivering the programme.
- Among 77 respondents to the 2023 staff survey in MEP schools, all but one describe themselves as either ‘Positive Advocates’ or ‘Supporters’ of the Programme.

“The MEP programme is an excellent offer to enhance students’ cultural capital as global citizens. Not only do they learn another language but they learn about another culture and way of life which opens up their eyes to the world around them.” **School Leader, MEP (2023)**

“As a proud headteacher of a school that delivers the MEP and a parent of a student who participates in the programme I am a big advocate for its impact.” **School Leader, MEP (2023)**

8. Coherence

Programme design

- Key features of MEP within schools include
 - Extended learning hours,
 - Periods of intensive study in China for pupils in Year 9 and intensive study in the UK for pupils in Year 10,
 - Extra-curricular activities and cultural events at school level,
 - Milestone end-of-year Hurdle tests set by UCL IOE to assess progress,
 - Extensive support to teachers including learning resources and training.
- The MEP programme starts at the beginning of KS3 in Year 7. The selection method into MEP within schools varies widely but always involves consultation with parents about the long-term time commitment that will be required to pursue intensive study through to GCSE. It therefore places considerable emphasis on parent and pupil motivation.

"[We dedicate time to] a lot of contact with parents very early on in the process." **School Leader, MEP (2023)**

- Some schools offer a trial period for all Year 7 pupils and some offer teaching outreach to pupils in local/feeder primary schools within their catchment area, in part as an opportunity to generate interest and awareness of MEP. Twelve of 53 schools (23%) responding to the online survey reported that Mandarin teachers undertake outreach in local/feeder primary schools.
- Often, although not always, more academically able children at participating schools enrol in the programme.
- The extended learning commitment requires 8 hours of study of the language each week. Over the life of MEP, a typical model has developed under which the required minimum four hours are actually taught within the curriculum. Data collected from schools by UCL IOE show that in 2022/2023 most MEP schools adhered to this model but a small number delivered 5 or even 6 hours of classroom teaching per week.
- In KS3 one or two of these teaching hours is typically taught outside the school day – during lunchtime or before or after the standard school day. In KS4 it is more common, although not universal, for all four hours to be taught within the standard school day and curriculum.
- The intensive study in China within MEP is an annual programme organised by the British Council and UCL IOE and managed by the British Council China in partnership with CLEC (The Centre for Language Education and Cooperation), within the China Ministry of Education.
- The focus of the intensive study in China is the development of students' language ability and confidence by allowing them to experience China through various cultural activities, to undertake intensive study and to practise their acquired language skills in a native speaker environment.

- The intensive study in China was delivered virtually for the third year running in July 2023 because of ongoing travel restrictions in China resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic. It was also delivered to students at the end of Year 9 rather than Year 8, a change that was implemented as a deliverable of the new contract (since 2021).
- The MEP design also includes a three-day campus-based intensive study in the UK for pupils at the end of Year 10 which is organised around a tourism project. This time also gives pupils the opportunity to meet fellow learners, to reinforce their learning to date and look at future study paths and opportunities with Mandarin. Individual schools and sometimes groups of local schools also undertake a variety of more local cultural enrichment activities.
- 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 UCL IOE to track their progress in the four key skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening (the speaking element is not included in the test in Year 9 to reduce teacher workload).
 - In the summer term of Year 10, the Hurdle test which pupils take is HSK3.
- The HSK (Hanyu Shuiping Kaoshi) testing system sits outside the UK's formal examination structure but is familiar to many UK universities. It is the standard test of Chinese language proficiency for non-native speakers. 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.
- While there has been no formally recognised mapping between HSK and UK examinations, the standard of the UK's GCSE Mandarin Chinese is generally taken to lie in-between 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.
- To address the concerns of some teachers around the workload involved in administering and preparing students for HSK3 post-Covid, MEP schools were able to agree with UCL IOE a one-year exception allowing them to prepare Year 10 pupils for HSK2 (rather than HSK3) in 2022/2023. Sixteen schools did so. UCL IOE also engaged a provider of HSK mock tests online to help schools and pupils prepare better for the marked HSK3 test.
- Throughout the programme, UCL IOE 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 leaders involved in the programme.

- Peer support within the programme is built on a Hub and Partner School model. The fifteen 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 of excellence for a small number of Partner schools. Schools recruited in subsequent cohorts have been assigned to a Hub School (based primarily on geography) in order to receive support and guidance in establishing the programme. As the programme has expanded, further schools in which MEP has been running successfully have been designated as Hub schools to support further expansion in school numbers across the programme.

Satisfaction with programme design

- The perception among a large majority of participating teachers and school leaders remains that the MEP is a well-conceived and rounded programme which has the benefit of funding and is well supported by IOE UCL and the British Council. Its focus on supporting both pupils and teachers is widely appreciated.

“The programme is excellent - students make great progress in their languages studies, and equally learn about culture, and have access to the visit to China and other collaborative opportunities. The programme is also popular with teachers - they feel valued, supported and respected through the programme, and have great access to professional discussions on language pedagogy.” **School Leader, MEP (2023)**

- Thirty-nine out of forty-two (93%) teacher respondents to the 2023 MEP online survey say they are ‘Satisfied’ or ‘Very Satisfied’ with the overall structure of the MEP programme.

“I am impressed with the course design and the resources, support available. I think this is a great course to promote to students.” **Teacher, MEP (2023)**

“MEP is a well-designed programme [which] offers a platform for Mandarin teachers to share resources, discuss mandarin-specific teaching strategies and promote cultural and language learning. As a MEP teacher, I benefit a lot by attending MEP meetings, accessing resources, as well as engaging in various trip/event opportunities organised by the programme. It is wonderful to be part of the team.” **Teacher, MEP (2023)**

9. Efficiency

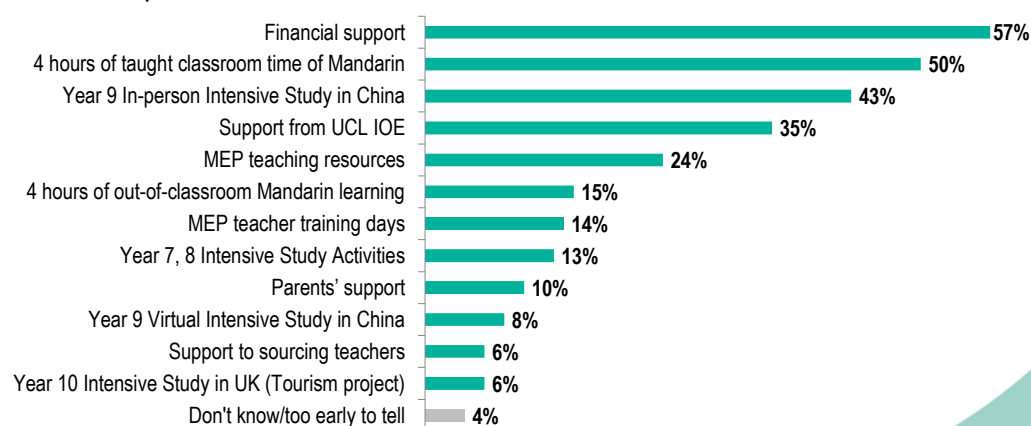
Drivers of programme success

- Among participating school leaders and teachers, the four key drivers of success for MEP are seen to be the financial support provided to schools, the extended hours of classroom teaching, the intensive study in China and support from UCL IOE (Chart 4).

Chart 4: Financial support, extended classroom hours, intensive study in China and support from UCL IOE remain the key contributors to the success of MEP

Which are the most important elements contributing to the success of MEP?

Please select up to THREE



Source: Online survey of school leaders and teachers in MEP schools, 2023 (Base = 72)
Analysis by Impact Stories



- The identification of these key drivers by participating staff has remained broadly consistent throughout the life of MEP.
- The financial support to schools which comes with participation in the programme remains important to school leaders, especially during the early years of introducing Mandarin onto the curriculum. During this period schools often struggle to balance the increased fixed costs associated with recruiting teachers against the incremental growth in the number of Mandarin classes on the school's curriculum over the first five years.
- Within the classroom, the extended teaching hours are consistently identified by teachers as being at the core of enhanced student attainment.
- The intensive study in China is a core part of MEP's wider cultural enrichment offer and learning consolidation.
- The perceived importance within the overall programme structure of the intensive study in China increased in 2022/2023 relative to the results of previous staff surveys. This increase reflects the better understanding which has developed over the last three years of the learning impact of in-person intensive study and the very significant motivational impact on students of the opportunity to visit China.

- This motivational impact has both a negative and positive dimension. Many teachers and school leaders have noted the demotivational effects on pupils of not being able to undertake study in-person in China; an exciting opportunity for them which had been ‘taken away’. But as the immediate effects of the pandemic have receded in 2022/2023 and the prospect of a resumption of in-person intensive study in China became more realistic, many teachers have noted a significant positive impact on pupil motivation.

“Student motivation definitely fell as a result of Covid and the cancelling of the China trips. We have struggled with retention from that point onwards. Already the Y7-9 students are talking more about Mandarin and are excited about going to China.” **School Leader, MEP (2023)**

“The reintroduction of the China trip matters a lot here - some of our students have dropped out of Mandarin in the last couple of years (citing mental health/workload issues) - these students would normally have stayed the course, at least until GCSE. The prize of a trip to China in Year 9 will be a significant boost in our efforts to retain these students on the programme.” **School Leader, MEP (2023)**

- Among 71 teacher and leader respondents to the school survey, 73% said that the motivation and engagement of pupils in MEP had ‘increased’ or ‘strongly increased’ as a result of the planned reintroduction of the in-person intensive study in China for Year 9 pupils in June 2024.
- In 2022/2023, in-person study in China was still impractical, with China only recently having lifted its pandemic-era restrictions. Feedback from previous virtual intensive studies had highlighted the challenges of maintaining pupil engagement and motivation online for two full weeks, so the 2022/2023 intensive study was developed as a one-week set of online activities held over five days from 3rd – 7th July, 2023.
- The 2022/2023 virtual intensive study in China involved 11 host institutions in China – 10 universities and 1 school. MEP schools were paired with one of these China institutions. 63 MEP schools (all those with Year 9 pupils), were invited to participate and at least 50 did so. No comprehensive register of participation was taken but 43 teachers and 612 pupils gave feedback on the virtual intensive study via an online survey.
- The programme included:
 - An opening ceremony attended by education and government stakeholders in UK and China,
 - Live teaching sessions led by a China-based teacher,
 - Cultural activities including meeting peers in China, online visits to cultural landmarks and ‘hands-on’ activities such as Tai Chi and Chinese martial arts.

- Feedback on the 2022/2023 intensive study from pupils and teachers was generally very positive, with teachers often focusing on the value of the opportunities provided for interaction with peers and teachers from China who offer 'different Chinese voices' and on the breadth of cultural learning.

"Overall, the programme was very impressive. The Y9 MEP virtual China trip has been going really well. The students have been thoroughly enjoying this unique experience, learning language and learning more about Chinese culture through live lessons." **Teacher, MEP Virtual Intensive Study (2023)**

- There remained some practical challenges around universal access in schools to laptops and microphones and the quality of internet connections with China.
- The 2022/2023 virtual intensive study was disrupted by national industrial action which meant that teachers in England were unavailable on the Wednesday and Friday scheduled within the original plan. The timetabled activities on these days were replaced by self-study material for use by the pupils at home. Inevitably, this disruption impacted pupil engagement and impact. Relative to the prior year virtual intensive study, pupil and teacher ratings of engagement and impact on most categories were down by a small amount.
- School leaders and teachers often voice the value they attach to the various aspects of support and resources provided by IOE within the MEP programme.

"Since joining the programme we have had nothing but positive experiences. Working in partnership with UCL, the British Council and CLEC / Hanban has been excellent. The quality of resources and teaching training are outstanding and being part of a close-knit Chinese teaching community has helped schools to support each other." **School Leader, MEP (2023)**

- This support is seen to be especially important when the teacher is in early career and/or the sole teacher of Mandarin at the school. The connection of teachers to a wider community of practice is often seen as being a particularly valuable part of the support provided.

"As a new MEP Mandarin teacher, I can't say how good MEP is. For me, it provides me the chance to connect other Mandarin teachers. It offers a lot of resources." **Teacher, MEP (2023)**

- 80% of teachers (base=42) responding through the MEP staff survey in 2023 rated themselves 'Very satisfied' or 'Satisfied' with 'Support to teachers and teaching practice', and 79% expressed themselves 'Very satisfied' or 'Satisfied' with 'The teaching and learning resources available'.

In-school delivery

- The MEP staffing model at schools varies considerably.
- A small number of schools, most commonly Cohort 1 schools with extensive experience of Mandarin on the curriculum, have 4 teachers either qualified or in training. Several of these schools are also delivering non-MEP Mandarin streams as well as delivering teaching in KS5.
- Nineteen (37%) of the 51 schools responding to the online survey are currently delivering the programme using only one qualified teacher. Some of these schools are recent joiners to the portfolio with possibly only Year 7 and Year 8 classes but a few schools are delivering teaching to five year-groups with one teacher – which makes the success of the programme highly dependent on the continued motivation and retention of that individual teacher.
- In this context, the support of Chinese language assistants sourced through CLEC or the British Council is often extremely important. Of the 51 schools responding to the 2023 staff survey, 31 (61%) say they have access to a Chinese language assistant.

“Makes such a massive difference to students in terms of having an extra member of staff to be in the room to support, to do small group speaking, especially with some of our older students and the cultural capital, the cultural knowledge and cultural things that that new teacher brings. And just having someone else in there in the school promoting Chinese is amazing.” **Teacher, MEP (2023)**

- Across MEP school leaders, there continues to be recognition that the success of the programme depends very much on the commitment and professionalism of the staff involved.

“I think it [the success of MEP] is our teachers who are both excellent.”
School Leader, MEP (2023)

“We have an excellent teacher of Mandarin now who we have made Head of Subject and who has established long-term systems and procedures as well as a tight curriculum.” **School Leader, MEP (2023)**

- Equally, among teachers there is recognition that the MEP model works best if the school leadership is fully committed to it and supportive.

“Support from the school's Headteacher - he is very supportive and this means that others at the school see his support and respond accordingly when issues arise (having Mandarin on the curriculum does cause issues - timetabling, setting, scheduling etc). Without the headteacher's very visible support, some of the issues would probably have been concluded in a way that hindered Mandarin at the school. Instead, Mandarin was supported and can therefore continue to thrive.” **Teacher, MEP (2023)**

- The extended teaching hours within the curriculum (typically 4 hours per week) are seen by teachers as providing time to establish strong foundations in the language during KS3 and to consolidate and prepare for GCSE in KS4
- The additional hours (again, typically 4) are guided self-study undertaken by the pupils at home and supported and monitored by teachers. The focus of this guided self-study covers homework and consolidation, project work and wider cultural learning.

“Definitely MEP has made a difference. They have their evening work. They have their weekend work. It makes a big difference.” **School Leader, MEP (2023)**

- In practice, some teachers monitor the amount of home study very closely while others take a more hands-off approach, on occasions as a reflection of a school's wider policies and some growing unease among teachers and parents around screen time, especially for younger children in KS3.
- Teachers continue to recognise that the opportunities afforded to children for wider cultural learning, including through the intensive study elements and extra-curricular activities, provide a cohesive and mutually reinforcing structure for the programme.

“Students make rapid progress and this is evident in their GCSE results, which so far have been the best in the school for two years running. Students also hugely enjoy the programme and the many benefits such as cultural enrichment.” **School Leader, MEP (2023)**

- Apps have been used widely within MEP to support learning since the programme's inception. Feedback from teachers in 2023 suggests that Quizlet remains by far the most commonly used learning app followed by GoChinese, Kahoot and the Chairman's Bao.
- Project resources developed by UCL IOE are often used by teachers as a basis for study during some of the out-of-classroom learning time.

Cross-school resourcing and collaboration

- Twelve of 50 schools (24%) responding to this year's survey say that teachers within MEP also assist in some way at other schools. Most commonly this is teaching Mandarin taster courses at local primary/feeder schools. It was noted above that some schools use this opportunity to generate interest in MEP and/or as an informal part of selection for MEP in secondary school.
- A number of schools also share teachers within a MAT. The participation of multiple schools within a MAT has become an increasing feature of the MEP portfolio and given the shared ethos and the relatively short distances normally involved for schools within a MAT within MEP, some level of resource sharing can often be an efficient solution. Schools within a MAT have also been incorporated into the programme's Hub and Partner model designed to facilitate knowledge and resource sharing between schools.

- The success of the wider Hub and Partner model has been patchy throughout the life of the MEP programme and UCL IOE has taken steps to strengthen collaboration between Hubs and Partners.
- 40% of teacher respondents to the 2023 staff survey (base = 42) said that school-to-school collaboration within the Hub and Partner model was ‘strong’ or ‘very strong’ and some schools are working very closely with their partners.

“We organise activity together as well, like Chinese New Year. I take my students to the hub school to celebrate, have a whole day event together and I also organize a year nine trip and I invite them to join us too.....we have a very good connection.” **Teacher, MEP (2023)**

- In contrast, 27% of teacher respondents said that Hub and Partner collaboration was ‘weak’ or ‘very weak’.
- Time and distance remain the key barriers to greater cooperation between Hub and Partner schools. Almost all schools recognise the potential benefits of school-to-school collaboration and some advocate for more, for example through the establishment of larger, regional hub groupings. However, some schools, especially those with very tight resourcing, struggle to manage collaboration efficiently and default to seeing it as a burden and extra demand rather than the resource and source of support which it is intended to be. As the portfolio has expanded and more schools outside densely populated conurbations have joined the programme, distance has become more of an issue for some.

“It is unsustainable to ask teachers to plan to work with hub schools when they are already overstretched” **School Leader, MEP (2023)**

- A few schools suggest that Hub and Partner school collaboration should be planned (and mandated) more centrally by UCL IOE, although that model runs in opposition to the aim of having engagement which is locally relevant and flexible.

10. Effectiveness

School portfolio

- The MEP portfolio total of 79 schools actively participating in the programme during the 2022/2023 academic year (Table 1) was ahead of the initial target of 75 schools in the portfolio for the second phase and on track towards the target for 2023/2024 of 80 schools.

Table 1: The growth of the MEP school portfolio

Academic Year	Number of schools joining MEP	Number of schools leaving MEP (last year of participation)	Portfolio of schools during academic year
2016/17	15		15
2017/18	23		38
2018/19	26	1	64
2019/20	13	9	76
2020/21	5	1	72
2021/22	6	4	77
2022/23	6	4	79
Total	94	19	

Source: UCL IOE (2023); Analysis by Impact Stories

- More than 40 schools within the portfolio are offering Mandarin on the curriculum for the first time and introducing Mandarin remains a key motivation for participating schools.

"This has offered a different dimension to our curriculum by offering an MFL not always accessible to others. It has enhanced student's learning and broadened their horizons as well as contributing to our inclusive ethos."

School Leader, MEP (2023)

Student recruitment

- The second phase of MEP has a primary goal of 9,000 pupils on the programme and 11,000 pupils since the beginning of the programme on track to a high level of fluency by academic year 2023/2024.
- Data suggest that MEP is on-track to exceed its primary goal with more 7,772 pupils in the programme during 2022/2023 and a new, Year 7 cohort, of over 2,000 enrolled.
- An additional 1,091 pupils had sat GCSEs in the prior two years having been taught through the programme. So, the total number of pupils participating in MEP since inception stands at 8,863, excluding pupils who have participated for only part of their 5-year cycle.
- Over the three academic years 2020/2021, 2021/2022, 2022/2023, 2,144 pupils have taken GCSE Mandarin Chinese on completion of the MEP programme.

Student retention

- Understanding student retention within MEP is complicated by the fact that the largest source of pupil drop-out is the withdrawal of whole schools from the programme.
- As discussed above, since 2017 15 of 94 schools had withdrawn from the programme in advance of the 2022/2023 academic year and a majority of these schools withdrew from the programme at the end of the 2019/2020 academic year.
- A very small number of pupils join the programme after Year 7, perhaps having changed school, but the vast majority of students who take GCSE within MEP will have joined the programme in the same school five years previously in Year 7.
- Therefore, to understand retention within schools which remain within MEP, the data of Table 2 focuses only on schools which entered GCSE candidates in each of years 2020/2021 (student Cohort 1), 2021/2022 (student Cohort 2) and 2022/2023 (student Cohort 3) and for whom there is data for the number of hurdle tests undertaken by each of these student cohorts at the end of Year 7, four years previously.
- The data show that the average Year 7 MEP cohort size per school has remained very stable over this period at between 27 and 28 pupils.
- For each of these student cohorts, approximately 4 out of 5 pupils (80%) who took Hurdle Tests at the end of Year 7 went on to take GCSE four years later.
- There has been a small increase in the rate of attrition over these three student cohorts from 18% to 22% but this is equivalent to drop-out increasing only marginally from approximately 1.2 pupils per school/year for student Cohort 1 to 1.5 pupils per school/year for student Cohort 3. The annual drop-out rate is almost exactly 5% per annum.

Table 2: Student retention within MEP

Student retention within MEP Schools	Student Cohort 1 (MEP Yr7 2016/2017)	Student Cohort 2 (MEP Yr7 2017/2018)	Student Cohort 3 (MEP Yr7 2018/2019)	Average over first three student cohorts
Number of schools with consistent data	13	32	47	92
Pupils taking Yr7 Hurdle Tests	362	904	1,281	2,547
Average Yr7 pupils per school	27.8	28.3	27.3	27.7
Pupils taking GCSE four years later	298	730	1,000	2,028
Average GCSE pupils per school	22.9	22.8	21.3	22.0
4yr Student attrition (Number of pupils/school)	4.9	5.4	6.0	5.6
4 yr Attrition rate (%)	17.7%	19.2%	21.9%	20.4%
Annual attrition rate (% p.a. vs base year)	4.4%	4.8%	5.5%	5.1%

Notes: Data relates only to MEP schools which remained within MEP until the student cohort sat GCSE

Source: UCL IOE / DfE (2023); Analysis by Impact Stories

- The picture is a little different if the focus is on school cohorts rather than student cohorts. The 1,053 MEP pupils who sat GCSE in 2022/2023 were drawn from 51 schools. The 14 Cohort 1 schools within this group entered an average of 25 GCSE candidates each, the 20 cohort 2 schools an average of 21 and the 17 Cohort 3 schools a significantly lower average of 17 candidates each.
- So, while student retention between Year 7 and GCSE overall has declined by only a small amount over the first three student cohorts, there is some evidence that schools which entered the programme after the first group of schools with experience are suffering greater rates of pupil drop-out.

Participation of disadvantaged students

- An additional target of the second phase of MEP is to increase the share of children from disadvantaged backgrounds relative to a baseline for 2021/2022. A common measure of disadvantage is a child's eligibility for Free School Meals (FSM). The DfE tracks two FSM indicators.
- Raw FSM is an annual indicator. An individual child's FSM status might vary from one year to the next so that over the time period in which an individual pupil participates in MEP their raw FSM status might change, possibly several times. In 2018 it was decided that any child qualifying for FSMs (throughout the school system in England) would keep that status up until 2025, so over that time period the number of children recorded within the raw FSM data can only increase.

- An alternative measure is 'FSM6' which attempts to allow for the potential variability of FSM status from year to year by identifying children who have qualified for FSM at any point over the previous 6 years. It therefore varies more slowly than raw FSM data and is arguably a better and more consistent measure of disadvantage, a complex set of circumstances which in the real world rarely 'disappears' over the course of one year.
- Table 3 shows the FSM and FSM6 status for Year 7 pupils entering the MEP programme between 2016/2017 and 2022/2023.

Table 3: Year 7 MEP pupils by Free School Meal (FSM) status

	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023
Total Yr 7s in MEP	381	1,011	1,749	2,065	2,017	2,180	2,073
Of which, known to be FSM	21	73	127	202	240	294	346
% Share	5.5%	7.2%	7.3%	9.8%	11.9%	13.5%	16.7%
Of which, known to be FSM6	61	173	273	377	384	383	412
% Share	16.0%	17.1%	15.6%	18.3%	19.0%	17.6%	19.9%

Notes: FSM status is annual measure which is cumulative between 2018 and 2025;

FSM6 status captures children who have had FSM status at any point over the previous 6 years.

Source: DfE (2023); Analysis by Impact Stories

- The data from the NPD shows that the share of Year 7 pupils entering MEP with an annual FSM status has indeed risen markedly since the programme's inception from 5.5% in 2016/2017 to 13.5% in the base year of 2021/2022 and to 16.7% of the total intake in 2022/2023. This does indicate that the programme's formal target for increasing the participation share of disadvantaged pupils is being met.
- As expected, the picture through the lens of FSM6 status is more nuanced. There has been a significant increase in Year 7 FSM6 share over the life of the programme and a small increase over the base year of 2021/2022, against a background of a small decline in FSM6 status nationally. However, there is also considerable year-on-year volatility, with some declines from one year to the next as well as some increases.
- Disadvantage and FSM status within MEP is an area in which further work can be undertaken next year to improve the quality and consistency of data and analysis. This would aim to confirm the apparent increase in FSM share and also to explore whether there is any difference in the retention rate within the programme between pupils with FSM vs non-FSM status.

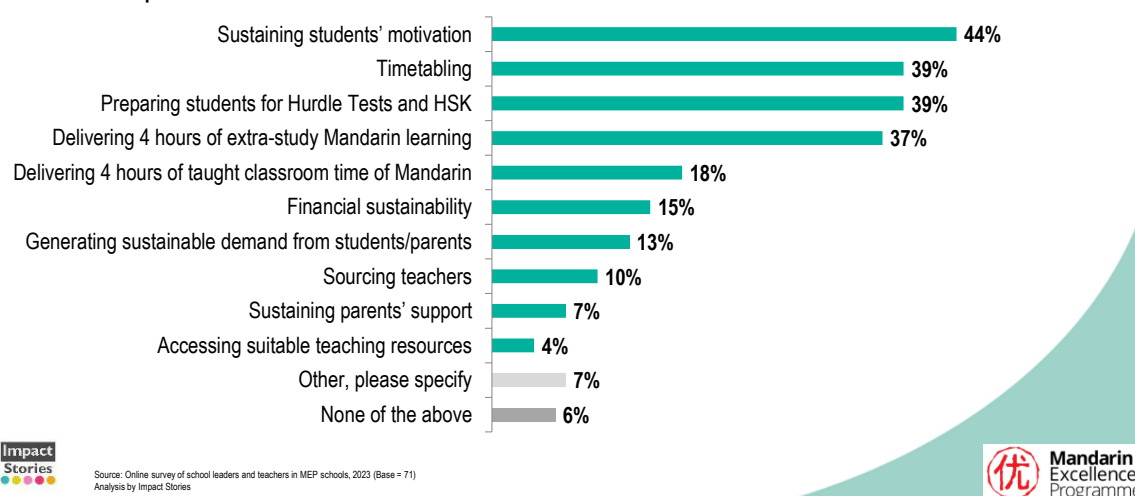
Challenges to MEP

- The key challenges to effective delivery of MEP in 2022/2023 identified by teachers and school leaders are shown in Chart 5. Four challenges stand out:
 - Sustaining students' motivation,
 - Timetabling,
 - Preparing students for Hurdle Tests/HSK,
 - Delivering four hours of learning outside the curriculum.

Chart 5: Key challenges for MEP schools in 2022/2023 have been sustaining students' motivation, timetabling, preparing students for hurdle tests and delivering 4 hours of study outside the curriculum

In the last academic year 2022/2023, What were the most difficult challenges to delivering MEP in your school?

Please select up to THREE



- The challenge of maintaining pupil motivation within MEP has become more prominent over the last few years. One reason is the disappointment which pupils within the programme have felt because they have been unable to participate in the in-person intensive study in China. A second reason is the natural consequence of an increasing number of schools having MEP classes within KS4. As pupils concentrate on their GCSEs, issues of time management often become more acute and schools recognise that it becomes harder for some to maintain their motivation.

“KS4 students with GCSE workload find it harder to enjoy extra Mandarin lesson[s].” Teacher, MEP (2023)

- The challenge of motivation is closely linked to the challenge of maintaining the typical 4 hours of self-guided study outside the curriculum. This issue is also seen by most teachers to be more acute in KS4 and reflects both the pressures on pupils' time and the concerns of many teachers and parents around the amount of time children now spend online in front of screens.

- Timetabling has been identified as a prominent challenge to delivery since the inception of MEP. The core of schools which have remained with the programme over a number of years have found workable solutions. The four hours of classroom teaching are typically divided into 2 or 3 hours delivered during the standard school day with the remaining 1 or 2 hours delivered at lunchtime or early evening.
- But schools new to the programme still find it challenging to adapt the timetable to accommodate the extra hours devoted to MEP. And since a majority of schools within the MEP portfolio now have multiple pupil cohorts, more have found it challenging to address the role of MEP within the GCSE-focused timetable of KS4.

“Almost impossible to change time allocations at GCSE - these are written in to the option blocks and Mandarin gets the same allocation as say French.” **School Leader, MEP (2023)**

- Throughout the programme’s life, a significant proportion of teachers and schools have expressed concern over the extra workload (for both teachers and pupils) required to prepare for end-of-year Hurdle Tests. This concern continues to be most pronounced around preparation for HSK3 which serves as the Hurdle Test at the end of Year 10. In part this is because HSK is an exam which does not completely align to the GCSE learning pathway.
- HSK is a proficiency test developed in China for non-native speakers of Chinese. For context, a similar comparison would be between GCSE English and the IELTS test which is a common test of proficiency for non-native speakers of English. The vocabulary list for HSK 3 is different and the HSK papers and the question types are generally different to those that students are working towards for their GCSE.
- Although HSK does not generate UCAS points for pupils, it is recognised and understood by many UK universities and is a reference qualification for Chinese universities and for scholarships in China. Some MEP schools are now offering HSK 4 in the sixth form as part of the sixth form extension to the programme established from 2023/2024 onwards and therefore the HSK 3 test taken in Year 10 also serves as a useful foundation for further study.
- In response to teacher concerns, UCL IOE has made several changes to the programme requirements to reduce workload. It has removed the speaking component of the Year 9 Hurdle test, provided access to HSK practice tests and in 2022/2023 given schools the option, in exceptional circumstances, to administer the less onerous HSK2 exam rather than HSK3 in Year 10.
- Feedback through the online staff survey shows that in 2022/2023 a clear majority of teachers were broadly satisfied with Hurdle Tests as a tool for assessing students’ progress but there remain some concerns, especially within schools relatively new to the portfolio.

“Tried best to prepare pupils for Hurdle Tests and HSK but it's a very laborious and all-consuming task when you're one teacher with five year groups.” **Teacher, MEP (2023)**

"[We] don't have enough teaching hours for Y10 to balance GCSE course and HSK3/2." **Teacher, MEP (2023)**

- These concerns are often expressed in the context of the time pressures around preparation for other end-of-year tests typically held in schools at the same time.
- A minority of teachers would prefer not to use HSK at all as a milestone test, believing that it is a distraction from the main focus of preparation for GCSE.

"Don't insist on pupils doing HSK3 in Y10 - it's too laborious, takes lots of time out of lessons and most pupils find the format so dated and bizarre that the vast majority fail." **Teacher, MEP (2023)**

- Others suggest that if HSK is going to remain as an important milestone in Year 10 then it would be better to start preparing for it in Years 8 and 9, rather than cramming in Year 10.

"Priority: re-consider the incorporation of HSK3 or consider a more organic integration of HSK1-3 in lower year groups." **Teacher, MEP (2023)**

- Some teachers also ask that the turnaround of results for Hurdle Tests can be accelerated to allow those results to be added to the wider scheme of end-of-year feedback to pupils across all subjects, ensuring that those pupils feel motivated by their achievements in Mandarin.

11. Impact

Increase in the number of students taking Chinese GCSE

- The overall aim of MEP upon inception was to increase the number of children in England 'on the path to fluency' in Mandarin Chinese. GCSE is the first formal milestone towards fluency. As successive school cohorts bring pupils through to Year 11, the annual number of MEP candidates in GCSE Chinese is increasing, reaching 1,053 in 2023, an increase of 37% vs 2022.
- This growth within MEP is in the context of rapid growth in the number of candidates in GCSE Chinese overall. Candidate numbers have increased by nearly 50% from 2022 with strong growth in both the independent sector and the state sector outside MEP (Table 4).
- As discussed above, much of this growth outside MEP appears to have been driven by students with Chinese heritage and a share of these students are likely to be taking GCSE at as private candidates rather than studying the language on the school curriculum.

Table 4: GCSE Chinese – Growth in candidate numbers 2022 vs 2023

GCSE Chinese	2022	2023	% Change
Students in independent schools	1,199	1,758	47%
Non-MEP students in state schools	1,796	2,748	53%
MEP students	768	1,053	37%
All GCSEs in England	3,763	5,559	48%

Source: DfE (2023); Analysis by Impact Stories

GCSE attainment by MEP students

- The attainment of participating pupils in GCSE Chinese is the core measure of MEP learning outcomes.
- In 2023 the 1,053 MEP pupils within 51 schools who took GCSE Chinese achieved an average grade of 6.4 (Table 5).
 - 82% achieved Grade 5 or above,
 - 36% achieved Grades 8 or 9.

Table 5: GCSE Chinese (2023) – Summary MEP Results

	Schools	GCSE students	Achieving Grade 5+	Achieving Grade 8+	Average GCSE grade
All MEP	51	1,053	81.5%	36.2%	6.4
Cohort 1 Schools	14	350	86.9%	50.3%	7.0
Cohort 2 Schools	20	419	77.8%	27.0%	6.0
Cohort 3 Schools	17	284	80.3%	32.4%	6.2

Notes: The data include one Cohort 1 school which entered students for GCSE Chinese at the end of Year 9. In all other schools, students were entered at the end of Year 11.

One further Cohort 3 school remains in MEP but did not submit any candidates for GCSE in 2023.

Source: DfE (2023); Analysis by Impact Stories

- MEP candidates for GCSE in 2023 were drawn from the first three school cohorts joining the programme in 2016/2017 (School Cohort 1), 2017/2018 (School Cohort 2) and 2018/2019 (School Cohort 3).
- Pupils in first cohort schools show higher attainment than pupils in second and third cohorts, especially at the top end of the grade distribution. 50% of pupils in first cohort schools attained Grades 8 or 9. In second cohort schools this share was 27% and in third cohort schools 32%.
- First cohort schools had previous experience of teaching Mandarin (and, indeed, were recruited as Hub schools for this reason), whereas many second and third cohort schools introduced the subject on to the curriculum for the first time through MEP. First cohort schools often have more Mandarin teaching staff while teachers within first cohort schools are also, on average, more experienced than those teaching Mandarin in later school cohorts.
- It is important to note that the raw data of Table 5 does not allow for the different mix of school type (selective/non-selective) and pupil profile between the cohorts.

The distribution of attainment at GCSE

- The highest performing school within the MEP portfolio had 27 GCSE candidates in 2023 and the average grade achieved by these candidates was 8.3. A further seven schools had candidates with an average grade of 8.0 or above.
- Across all 51 schools, 46 (90%) had an average grade of 5.0 or above, with two further schools having average grades just below this level at 4.8 and 4.9.
- Three schools at the bottom of the grade distribution were very much outliers with average grades of 2.8, 2.9 and 3.5 respectively.
- The data therefore suggest that the majority of MEP schools achieve learning outcomes in line with, or sometimes well above, expectations but a small number struggle. This can be the result of challenge to maintaining pupil motivation and the extended hours on the timetable. It can also be the result of teacher turnover and the consequential loss of continuity in classroom practice. Relative to other subjects, even other Modern Foreign Languages, Mandarin is a subject which is difficult to cover with interim staff, even over the short-term.
- One of the three outlier schools did not continue within MEP into 2023/2024 and another is believed to be leaving the programme at the end of the 2023/2024 academic year.

The relative GCSE performance of MEP students vs non-MEP students

- To make a meaningful comparison of the performance of students within and outside MEP, the attainment of students with Chinese ethnicity and/or first language needs to be taken into account.
- 77% of state school students known to have Chinese as a first language and/or Chinese ethnicity were awarded GCSE Grade 9 in 2023 and a cumulative 91% were awarded Grades 8 or 9. Of all Grade 9s in GCSE Chinese awarded to state school students in 2023, 85% were awarded to students known to have Chinese as a first language and/or Chinese ethnicity.
- This subset of students is clearly performing at a different level to students who have started learning Mandarin Chinese as a foreign language at the age of 11 without any prior exposure. Therefore, the comparison data in Table 6 exclude the GCSE candidates known to have first language Chinese and/or Chinese ethnicity.
- These data show that MEP pupils have higher average attainment than their non-MEP peers. The average grade achieved within MEP was 6.3 vs 5.9 outside the programme. 80% of MEP students achieved Grade 5 or above (vs 73% outside) and 33% Grade 8 or 9 (vs 28% outside).

Table 6: GCSE Chinese attainment (2023) – Summary: MEP vs non-MEP

Excluding candidates with first language Chinese and/or Chinese ethnicity	GCSE candidates	Achieving Grade 5+	Achieving Grade 8+	Average GCSE grade achieved
All state school GCSEs (ex MEP)	1,118	73.3%	27.6%	5.9
All MEP GCSEs	986	80.3%	33.0%	6.3

Source: DfE (2023); Analysis by Impact Stories

The relative attainment of MEP pupils at GCSE within their school

- A minority of MEP schools continue to run dual stream (MEP and non-MEP) Mandarin classes. Typically, these schools joined the programme within Cohort 1 or Cohort 2.
- Table 7 provides the comparison of average grade achieved by MEP pupils versus pupils *in the same schools* taking GCSE Chinese outside MEP. The data in Table 7 includes only candidates at 12 MEP schools with at least 4 GCSE candidates outside the programme, to make allowance for schools which do not have a formal non-MEP curriculum offer but do provide the opportunity for private candidates to sit the exam.
- The results show an average uplift in attainment of 1.2 grade points for pupils taught within MEP. They suggest that even within the same school context MEP is having a significant positive impact on attainment.

Table 7: GCSE Chinese (2023) – Summary comparison MEP vs non-MEP pupils at schools with dual-stream Mandarin Chinese

GCSE Chinese in MEP schools with dual stream Mandarin	GCSE candidates	Average GCSE grade achieved
MEP stream	299	7.2
Non-MEP stream	190	6.0

Notes: Data drawn from 12 MEP schools with at least 4 GCSE candidates outside MEP

Source: DfE (2023); Analysis by Impact Stories

Multivariate analysis of MEP pupil attainment

- The comparison of headline results within and outside MEP presented above does not take into account the differential profile of students and schools within and outside the programme. For example, being a girl vs a boy, qualifying vs not qualifying for Free School Meals (deprivation pupil premium) and attending a selective vs non-selective school are among the factors that are likely to impact on average attainment at GCSE, independently of MEP.
- Equally, the headline data does not take into account the possible effect of the selection of more academically able pupils into the programme. i.e. the possibility that the apparent impact of MEP is primarily a result of selection bias rather than superior teaching and learning.
- Building on analysis first run in 2022, multivariate modeling of the 2023 GCSE data was undertaken to test the hypothesis that participation in MEP itself, independently of these other modellable factors, is contributing to average GCSE attainment.
- The dataset used for the multivariate analysis included all GCSE candidates (MEP and non-MEP) in state schools in England in 2023. Data from independent schools was excluded because important student level data – e.g. ethnicity – is not available for these students.
- The model excluded the records of 22 pupils from the one first-cohort MEP school which has a relatively unique, immersive approach to the learning of Mandarin Chinese and enters candidates for GCSE at the end of Year 9 (rather than Year 11). It would have been difficult to align the data of its Year 9 pupils to those for Year 11 pupils from all other schools in the country teaching Mandarin Chinese.
- Following exploratory analysis, it was also decided to exclude the pupils from the three outlier schools at the bottom of the GCSE grade distribution. Initial modelling suggested that these schools distorted the more general findings of the analysis.
- In total, the model was run on 3,720 student records using standard linear regression. The dependent variable was GCSE attainment in 2023 introduced as a numerical scale between 0 (Grade 0) and 9 (Grade 9). The first model introduced participation in MEP as a single variable without allowing for the differential impact of schools in different cohorts. A second model introduced variables for pupils at first, second and third cohort MEP schools identified separately.
- The full list of variables identified within the first, general model as being statistically significant at a confidence level ($P < 0.05$) of 95% or greater are shown in the Appendix, Table 1. The R^2 value for the model is 0.59 which means that 59% of the variance in attainment in GCSE Chinese is explained by the independent variables within the model.
- The coefficient estimates shown in the Appendix, Table 1 can broadly be interpreted as the average change in GCSE attainment uniquely attributable to that variable, taking into account all other modelled factors.

- The key finding of this first model (Table 8) is that participation in MEP makes a unique, independent contribution to attainment in GCSE Chinese of 0.50. i.e. on average, a pupil within MEP will achieve half a grade point higher than an otherwise identical pupil studying Mandarin Chinese in an otherwise identical state school outside the programme.

Table 8: Summary modelled impact of participation in MEP on average attainment in GCSE Chinese

Modelled Coefficient	Estimate (Impact on average GCSE attainment)	std.error	Significance (Confidence Level)
Model 1			
MEP overall	0.50	0.06	99.9%
Model 2			
Cohort 1 MEP school	0.75	0.09	99.9%
Cohort 2 MEP school	0.28	0.09	99.0%
Cohort 3 MEP school	0.53	0.10	99.9%

Base: 3,270 student records, State school candidates in England, 2023

Source: DfE (2023); Analysis by Impact Stories

- To set this finding for MEP in the wider context of the modelled results (Appendix, Table 1):
 - In line with the discussion above, having first language Chinese and/or Chinese ethnicity has the largest individual impact on attainment, equivalent to more than one and a half grade points (1.65).
 - Private examination candidates have an average uplift in attainment of 0.84. Private examination candidates, who do not study Mandarin on the curriculum, are often the most able candidates, either because they already have home fluency or because they have studied privately with a tutor or an extra-school programme.
 - Average student attainment at GCSE across English/Maths/Science also has a large effect of 0.82 (measured per 1 point increase in the E/M/S average score on a scale of 0-9). This variable is a proxy for the general academic ability of students taking GCSE Chinese and is introduced into the model to control for selection bias of more academically able students within a school into MEP.
 - The coefficient for attainment in English/Maths/Science might also be acting in part as a proxy for motivation (of both children and parents).
 - Attending a selective school has a positive impact on average attainment of half a grade point (0.50) – an effect exactly equivalent to participating in MEP.

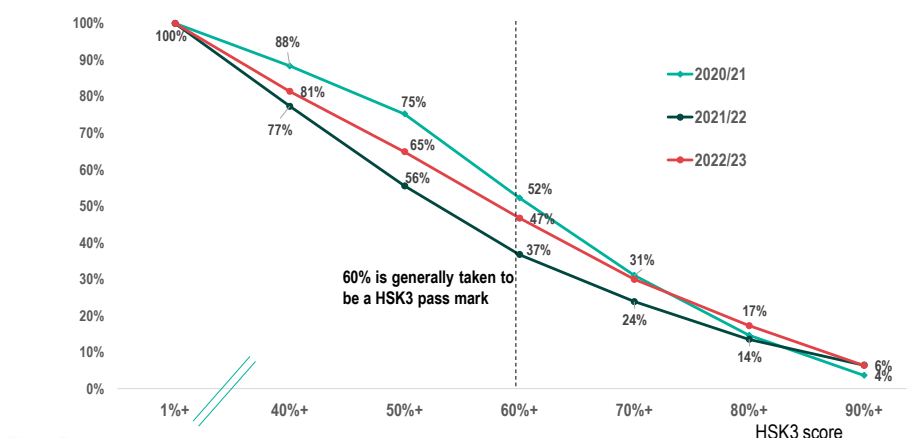
- Several characteristics have a negative impact on attainment, most notably being in receipt of free school meals (-0.26) and being a boy (-0.5) rather than a girl.
 - There are also some regional effects where the model has identified groupings of schools with attainment profiles which differ to a statistically significant extent from the national average. This result applies to the teaching and learning of Chinese overall (rather than to MEP specifically) and most likely reflects regional differences highlighted earlier in this report in the ability to recruit and retain teachers of Mandarin.
- The second model replaced the overall variable for participation in MEP with separate variables for each of the three student cohorts. This second model also explained 59% of the variance in GCSE attainment. The coefficients associated with variables other than participation in MEP remain very consistent with the results of the first model (Appendix, Table 2).
- The results of this second model (Table 8) show that participation in each of the MEP school cohorts has a statistically significant positive impact on average GCSE attainment ranging from 0.75 in Cohort 1 schools to 0.53 in Cohort 3 schools and 0.28 in Cohort 2 schools.
- The relatively higher boost to attainment in Cohort 1 schools is largely expected because of the longer experience of Mandarin teaching available in these schools.
- The lower impact of MEP in Cohort 2 schools vs Cohort 3 schools may stem from the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and schools' differential ability to respond, along with the differential impact on student motivation of the cancellation of in-person intensive study in China. While no GCSE candidates in 2023 had undertaken intensive study in China, those in Cohort 2 schools had had the direct disappointment of seeing the year 8 cohort ahead of them visit China in 2018/2019 and then found themselves unable to do so in 2019/2020.
- The impacts of the pandemic and the consequential cancellation of in-person intensive study may also be reflected in the lower modelled impact of MEP on GCSE performance in 2023 vs 2022, albeit the specification of the multivariate model used is a little different in each case, so some caution is necessary when interpreting the results.

HSK3 Results

- HSK3 results in 2023 are available for 865 Year 10 pupils from 44 MEP schools. A further 16 schools chose to administer HSK2 rather than HSK3. This HSK2 test was taken by 307 pupils.
- A score of 60% is generally taken to be a pass in HSK3 and this score was exceeded by 47% of pupils (Chart 6). This 47% share represented an increase on the 37% achieving a HSK3 score of 60%+ in 2022, when many schools were still recovering from the pandemic. It remains below the 2021 result of 52% but those data were from only 12 schools (274 pupils).

Chart 6: Cumulative HSK3 results by score range (2021-2023)

% of students by overall HSK3 score
(Data show cumulative % in excess of score)



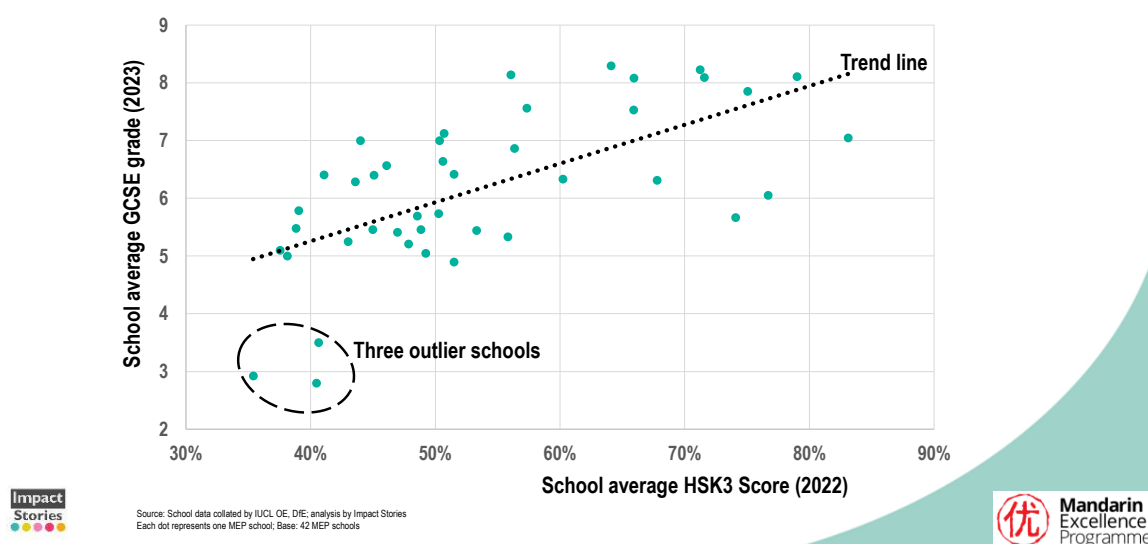
Source: School data collated by UCL OE; analysis by Impact Stories
Base: 274 students in 12 MEP schools in 2021; 844 students in 45 MEP schools in 2022; 870 students in 44 MEP schools in 2023



- In 2023, 6% of pupils exceeded 90% and a cumulative 17% exceeded 80% in HSK3.
- Chart 7 compares the school average score achieved at HSK3 in 2022 (Year 10) vs the school average GCSE grade achieved by that same student cohort in 2023 (Year 11). The data does show a clear, positive correlation, a result which reinforces the view that HSK3 is a useful tool for schools in tracking their pupils' progress towards GCSE.
- Chart 7 also highlights very clearly the three outlier schools within the 2023 GCSE cohort. These three schools, whose average GCSE grade in 2023 was 3.5 or below, had average HSK3 scores in 2022 for the same student cohort of around 40% or below. In the future, a school average score in HSK3 at or below 40% might be taken as an indicator of schools which require additional support for GCSE in Year 11.

- The stronger results in HSK3 in 2023 vs 2022 are a positive indicator for GCSE results within MEP in 2024 but at the time of writing this report it is as yet unclear how the decision of some schools to administer HSK2 in Year 10 has affected the results for the overall 2024 GCSE cohort.

Chart 7: School average attainment - GCSE (2023) vs HSK3 (2022)



Year 7 – Year 9 Hurdle Test Results

- Special Hurdle Tests set by UCL IOE are the main means of assessment of student progress within MEP in Years 7,8 and 9.
- Charts 8 and 9 show the distribution of pupils by average Hurdle Test score over the six waves of testing conducted since 2016/2017. [No tests were administered in 2019/20 as a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic].
- The Hurdle Test data in both charts show a fairly consistent picture post-pandemic but there has been a small weakening of 2023 results vs 2022.
- In 2023, the share of pupils achieving an average Hurdle Test score in excess of 60% was:
 - Year 7: 86% (vs 91% in 2022),
 - Year 8: 65% (vs 71% in 2022),
 - Year 9: 59% (vs 62% in 2022).

Chart 8: Distribution of students by overall Hurdle Test score (Years 7, 8)

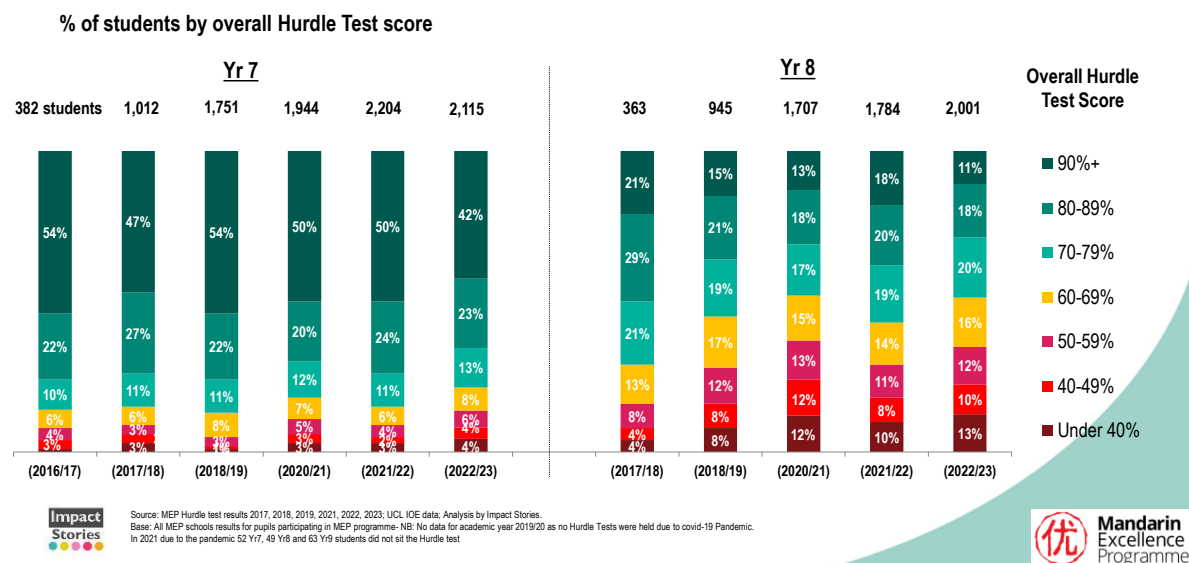
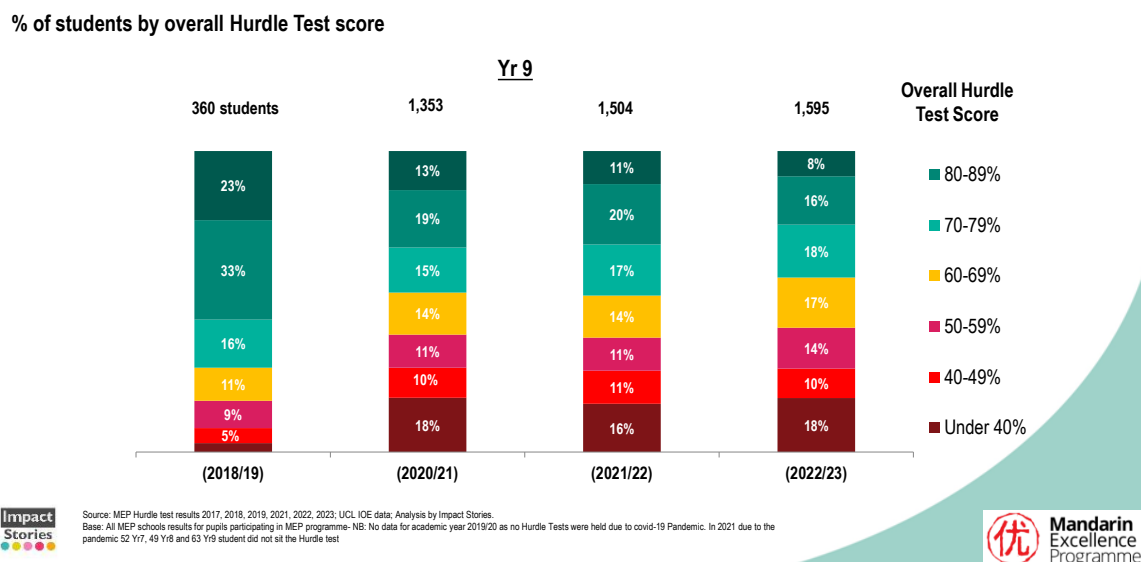


Chart 9: Distribution of students by overall Hurdle Test score (Year 9)



Teacher Supply and Teacher Confidence

- The programme in schools continues to be supported by the UCL IOE PGCE course in Mandarin. Last year, the IOE trained 17 PGCE students of whom 15 are known to be currently teaching in schools in England.
- MEP also provides opportunities for teachers who are in training or in early career to develop their practice in an environment which receives strong support from UCL IOE.
- Exactly two-thirds (66%) of 53 MEP schools providing a response to the online survey in 2023 reported that teachers had trained or are currently training to teach Mandarin at the school while the school has been part of MEP.
- The support to teachers through MEP is also contributing to the skills and confidence of the next generation of teachers.
- Feedback through the survey from 39 teachers found that 82% agree strongly or agree with the statement: *“Through MEP my confidence as a teacher has improved”* and 77% with the statement, *“Through MEP I have become more confident in delivering a rigorous model for teaching Mandarin.”*
- In a number of MEP schools, teachers of other MFL have been inspired to enroll in upskilling courses such as that provided by UCL IOE to enable them to teach Mandarin in KS3.

Wider Impact of MEP

- Teachers involved in MEP continue to argue that the programme’s impact on pupils’ personal development is not fully captured by exam and test results.
- Many continue to argue that studying Chinese brings not only cultural enrichment to young people but also expands their horizons, ways of thinking and seeing the world which contributes to their development more generally.

“Generally, Chinese culture is fascinating and it’s very different to Western culture. And then the student at a young age, they’ll be able to experience and discover this very different type of culture, different type of thinking. And it is a very valuable at a young age to, like, have a wider perspective towards the world.” **Teacher, MEP (2023)**

“MEP students not only learn a language they develop academic rigour, organisational skills, and a wider cultural awareness.” **School Leader, MEP (2023)**

- Some also point to the increased confidence and pride which participation in the programme often brings to students.

“Pupils had little Chinese badges that they wear on their on their blazers, and it sounds like a really little thing but students were really proud to be able to say, ‘I’m part of this excellence programme’.” **Teacher, MEP (2023)**

- Many MEP schools try to share some of the benefits of the programme beyond the MEP cohort by running Chinese cultural events and celebrations for the whole school.

- Several schools have taken the opportunity of joining MEP to reassess their entire MFL offer. On occasions, they have carried over some of the approach to MEP, including increased teaching hours, to other MFL provision, too.

“We inquired about joining the Mandarin Excellence program, probably about 2018 and couldn't because we weren't able to meet the requirements of four hours of teaching time. And then we changed across the whole school our languages department and curriculum offer. I drove that to try to get to the point where all students only did one language but did it in much more depth.” **Teacher, MEP (2023)**

12. Sustainability

- Many of the schools which have joined MEP have used the programme to introduce Mandarin within the curriculum and the vast majority of those schools have done so with the intention of establishing the subject over the long term. School leaders within the programme believe that offering Mandarin is the right thing to do in order to broaden horizons and enhance the life opportunities of their students in the 21st Century.

"The programme is now embedded with strong leadership and good teaching." **School Leader, MEP (2023)**

"We are upskilling teachers and have a very good curriculum, the school is also committed to delivering Mandarin which is really promising, in our sixth year now. So long term, the prospects look very good!" **Teacher, MEP (2023)**

- Among 69 staff respondents to the 2023 online survey, 59% said that they felt 'Very confident' and a further 33% 'Confident' in their school's ability to offer high quality Mandarin teaching and learning on the curriculum over the long term.
- The minority of schools which lack confidence in their ability to sustain the subject over the longer term typically identify concerns around staff retention and recruitment.

"It all relies on finding high quality teachers. There is a shortage" **School Leader, MEP (2023)**

- MEP remains a demanding programme for students and teachers. Schools commonly report that as the number of year groups increases, the pressures on the timetable and the demands on staff also increase. A minority of schools and staff find delivering the programme very pressurized and it is not clear whether in the absence of continued funding and specialised support most schools would continue with the intensive type of Mandarin programme established through MEP. More likely, the teaching of Mandarin in many schools would revert to a more typical MFL model.

"There are pros and cons of being a MEP school.....The teacher has too much to organise [with] the trips and exams." **School Leader, MEP (2023)**

- The success of MEP in bringing through a generation of young learners to GCSE Mandarin at the end of KS4 is creating a focus within a growing number of schools on pathways in KS5 and beyond into university.
- Some of these issues are starting to be addressed through the sixth form extension to MEP established from 2023/2024 onwards, while some of the wider issues are outside the immediate scope of MEP but do challenge the longer-term impact of the programme.

- For several schools, the immediate question is resourcing. While almost all schools within MEP have ambitions to provide a Mandarin offer in KS5, several who do not have an offer currently are concerned about how they staff that offer.

“We have capacity in staffing [now] but we will struggle to add KS5; this is something that will require extra staffing.” **Teacher, MEP (2023)**

- A number of teachers, especially those newly qualified, are also more nervous about extending their teaching into KS5 and there is quite a widespread demand within the MEP teaching community for increased support, training and curriculum resources to facilitate the extension of teaching and learning into KS5.

“I feel more confident to deliver MEP to KS3, KS4 rather than KS5.” **Teacher, MEP (2023)**

- Several teachers and school leaders also note the challenge of encouraging anything other than small numbers of MEP pupils to continue with Mandarin into KS5. Since many of the pupils who are high achievers in GCSE Chinese are also high achievers in other subjects, Mandarin is seen to be competing in KS5 with STEM subjects and traditional A-level pathways into aspirational university subjects such as medicine, veterinary science and Law.

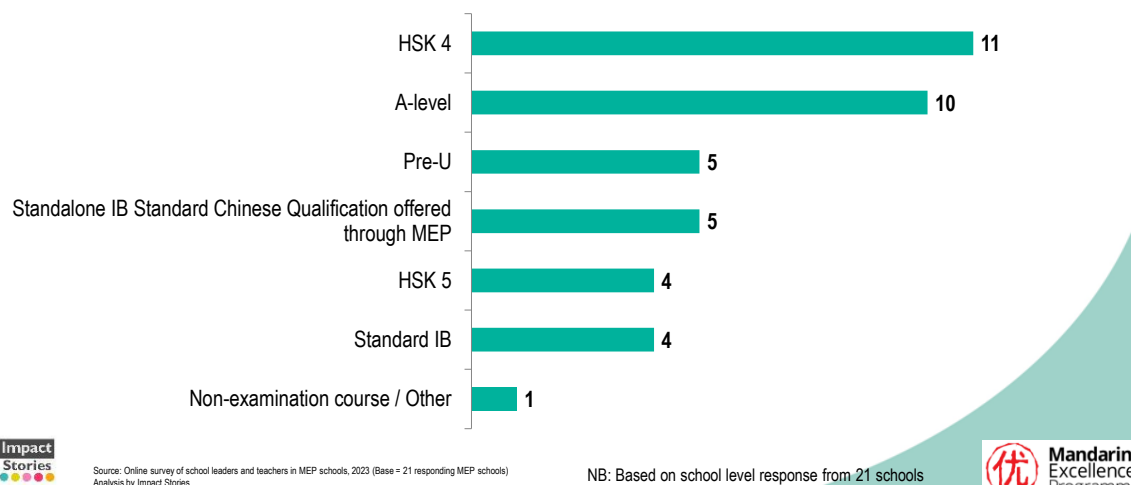
“The MEP has selected a group of highly ability students. However, most of these students are more inclined towards scientific subjects like Maths, Further Maths, Chemistry, Physics, and Biology for their A Levels.” **Teacher, MEP (2023)**

- The desire of teachers to be able to offer a Mandarin course in KS5 which can run alongside a student’s choice of more traditional A-levels underpins the widespread disappointment at the discontinuation of the Cambridge Pre-U qualification.
- The online survey in 2023 gained responses from 21 MEP schools about their KS5 Mandarin offer in 2022/2023 (Chart 10). Of note is the fact that a number of MEP schools, especially Cohort 1 schools, have several pathways.

Chart 10: HSK4 and A-level are the most common Mandarin offer in KS5

Which course/exam are former MEP students following in KS5?

(Number of responding schools – multi-code possible)



- The most common KS5 pathways are towards HSK4 and A-level. The popularity of HSK 4 reinforces the value of using HSK3 as a year 10 Hurdle Test and also reflects continued concerns among teachers about the suitability of the current A-level for non-native speakers of Mandarin. [The content and assessment of the A-level has been subject to recent review.]
- A small number of schools also offer HSK5, which would put learners potentially on a path towards access to a Chinese university.
- In its final year, some schools have still offered the Cambridge Pre-U, while a growing number are offering the IB qualification. Of these schools, about half are offering the standalone IB qualification which has been made available to MEP schools outside the full IB programme. Others are offering Mandarin within the full IB programme.
- The current picture in KS5 is therefore quite diverse and a priority of many school leaders remains the development of an offer in KS5 which can allow a larger number of pupils to build on their success within MEP at GCSE level and also generates sufficient classroom demand to make resourcing efficient.

“Because as a Head Teacher, that's one of the bug bears for me. Because everything should be about progress and what I'm finding is that I've got 30 or so kids doing GCSE Mandarin and then [only] one or two brave enough to take it on [into KS5].....” School Leader, MEP (2023)

“[We need] More support with the implementation of Key Stage 5.” School Leader, MEP (2023)

- An important additional element of data analysis next year will be a more systematic tracking of MEP pupils progressing into KS5 and potentially into Higher Education. Currently, no accurate data is available.

13. Appendix: Details of Statistical Modeling

Appendix Table 1: Results from Statistical Model 1

Coefficient - Model 1	Estimate	std.error	Confidence
Statistically significant variables			
lang_ethnic_dummyChinese	1.65	0.09	99.9%
private1	0.84	0.10	99.9%
eng_mat_sci_avg	0.82	0.03	99.9%
mep_pup_flag	0.50	0.06	99.9%
selectiveschool1	0.50	0.08	99.9%
regionEast of England	0.32	0.12	99%
fsm1	-0.26	0.09	99%
genderM	-0.50	0.06	99.9%
regionYorkshire and The Humber	-0.53	0.16	99.9%
regionEast Midlands	-0.53	0.19	99%
(Intercept)	1.64	0.70	95%
Other modeled variables			
lang_ethnic_dummyVery Likely Chinese	0.97	0.57	
regionLondon	0.14	0.08	
regionWest Midlands	0.12	0.10	
ks2emss	-0.01	0.01	
regionSouth West	-0.06	0.13	
senfK	-0.07	0.13	
regionNorth East	-0.08	0.13	
regionNorth West	-0.23	0.12	
senfE	-0.27	0.39	

The R^2 value of Model 1 was 0.586; the model explained 58.6% of the variance in GCSE results. Descriptions of the coefficients are set out in Appendix Table 3.

Appendix Table 2: Results from Statistical Model 2

Coefficient - Model 2	Estimate	std.error	Confidence
<u>Statistically significant variables</u>			
lang_ethnic_dummyChinese	1.63	0.09	99.9%
private1	0.84	0.10	99.9%
eng_mat_sci_avg	0.82	0.03	99.9%
mep_flagmep_pupil_frstchrt	0.75	0.09	99.9%
mep_flagmep_pupil_thrdchrt	0.53	0.10	99.9%
selectiveschool1	0.50	0.08	99.9%
regionEast of England	0.28	0.12	95%
mep_flagmep_pupil_scndchrt	0.28	0.09	99%
fsm1	-0.27	0.09	99%
genderM	-0.53	0.06	99.9%
regionYorkshire and The Humber	-0.55	0.16	99.9%
regionEast Midlands	-0.57	0.19	99%
(Intercept)	1.81	0.70	99%
<u>Other modeled variables</u>			
lang_ethnic_dummyVery Likely Chinese	0.98	0.57	
regionWest Midlands	0.10	0.10	
regionLondon	0.08	0.08	
ks2emss	-0.01	0.01	
regionSouth West	-0.08	0.13	
senfK	-0.09	0.13	
regionNorth East	-0.12	0.13	
regionNorth West	-0.21	0.12	
senfE	-0.23	0.39	

The R² value of Model 2 was 0.589; the model explained 58.9% of the variance in GCSE results.

Descriptions of the coefficients are set out in Appendix Table 3

Appendix Table 3: Description of variables in the Statistical Models

Coefficient	Summary description
lang_ethnic_dummyChinese	Recorded as (any) Chinese ethnicity and/or Chinese first language
private1	Private' candidate - took GCSE at a school with 3 or fewer candidates in GCSE Chinese
eng_mat_sci_avg	Average GCSE attainment in English, Maths and Science
mep_pup_flag	Studying within MEP at any of first/2nd/3rd cohort schools
mep_flagmep_pupil_frstchrt	Studying within MEP at a first cohort school
mep_flagmep_pupil_scndchrt	Studying within MEP at a second cohort school
mep_flagmep_pupil_thrdchrt	Studying within MEP at a third cohort school
selectiveschool1	Candidate at a selective (grammar) school
regionEast of England	At a school in East of England
fsm1	Recorded as in receipt of Free School Meals
genderM	Male (boy)
regionYorkshire and The Humber	At a school in Yorkshire and the Humber
regionEast Midlands	At a school in East Midlands
lang_ethnic_dummyVery Likely Chinese	Data suggest that the candidate has Chinese ethnicity and/or Chinese first language
regionWest Midlands	At a school in West Midlands
regionLondon	At a school in London
ks2emss	Attainment at the end of Key Stage 2
regionSouth West	At a school in South West
senfK	Recorded as having Special Educational Needs (EHCP)
regionNorth East	At a school in North East
regionNorth West	At a school in North West
senfE	Recorded as having Special Educational Needs (SEN Support)

Notes: Limitations to regression modelling

- The attainment of individual pupils within the GCSE population is not completely independent. Rather, an individual pupil's attainment is to some extent a reflection of the average attainment of the school which that pupil attends; the grade distribution of all pupils is therefore at least partly clustered. To test for this, last year the linear regression model was rerun to allow for clustering effects but the significance and order of magnitude of the coefficients did not change to the extent that it affected the conclusions.
- The dependent variable used, GCSE attainment as a 0-9 scale, is not strictly a linear variable. The grade distribution is actually fitted to some extent (by the exam board) so that the 'distance' between each grade point (e.g. 5-6 or 8-9) is not exactly the same as measured by a pupil's raw test scores. However, it is a reasonable proxy and provides results which are easy to understand.
- It is also possible that the effects of participating in MEP are more pronounced at different points of the grade distribution. The coefficient from the linear regression effectively averages out any differential effects over the distribution to assume that the impact on attainment between, for example, grades 5 and 6 is exactly the same as it is between grades 8 and 9. These differential effects were also tested last year through logistical regression and found to be relatively small.