Understanding China: The study of China and Mandarin in UK schools and universities

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With a Foreword by Professor Rana Mitter and an Afterword by Bahram Bekhradnia

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Foreword

Rana Mitter, Professor of Chinese History and Politics, University of Oxford

This report is a very welcome contribution to a discussion which is becoming ever more urgent in the UK: how can we assess the growing influence of China across an ever-growing number of parts of British life? China's activities have given rise to areas of deep concern to many in the UK, particularly in the fields of cybersecurity and the possibility of authoritarian norms influencing international organisations. Yet many of the UK's most valuable sectors have an interest in drawing on the massive market in China, most notably the finance and higher education sectors. And there remain areas of global concern, not least climate change and pandemic control, where international solutions are unthinkable without China being involved.

This HEPI paper does not seek to provide answers to these immensely difficult questions. Instead, it highlights a significant gap in the UK: the lack of knowledge and understanding that would enable actors in the private and public spheres to craft the answers that are needed. In one sense, it is irrelevant whether your view on China's activities are overall sceptical or supportive, or perhaps a mixture of both. Rather, what has become increasingly clear is that knowledge about this vast and influential state is still far too shallow among those who have to make complex judgements about its significance for the UK.

The report does important work in showing that there may need to be more of an explicit split in the development of two types of China expertise in the UK. The first type is a specialist knowledge, based on an in-depth linguistic specialisation on China, whereas the second is what one might term 'significant working knowledge', not necessarily involving any knowledge of Chinese language but developing a more sophisticated understanding of a society profoundly different from that in the UK in various important ways.

The first aspect, research specialisation on China, will likely be the preserve of a relatively small group for some time to come. But as the report shows, there is no reason it should not be expanded further. More students could take up Chinese at university, or participate in school programmes. At the moment, as the report demonstrates, there are practical barriers: in particular, the discouragement of school students who sense that taking a further qualification in a language that is undeniably complex for Anglophones may result in a final grade that is inferior to those who have grown up with the language. It is not clear what the way round this is, but it is clearly an important area for attention. The UK does have some of the best specialist university knowledge on China anywhere in Europe, rivalled only by Germany, but much of the expertise comes from the hiring of specialists from the rest of the world. This is a testament to the continuing attractiveness of the UK education sector, but the chance to develop the talent of British scholars of China should not be thrown away. This is not an either / or – all those in the field would want to stress the importance of attracting talent from around the world and to making sure that our own system is capable of producing

students and specialists eager to deepen their knowledge – and all of our knowledge – on China.

The second aspect, which the report also outlines with great skill, is the provision of knowledge on China, but in English. This does not involve linguistic skills, but it does involve serious effort. For students and indeed practitioners of politics, understanding how an authoritarian party-state runs a huge country is conceptually very different from understanding, say, the politics of the US or a European democracy. Understanding the cultural and historical assumptions of China takes time and effort, and as the report shows, for teachers and educators more broadly, for instance in museums, it is not always easy to find the time and resources to develop that knowledge. There is no quick fix, but deepening the knowledge base over the medium term has to be a key goal.

One thing that is certain is that the UK will not be able to ignore China in the 2020s. Post-Brexit Britain will want to enter new markets in Asia – and will have to learn how every single economy in the region has to take account of China's presence. In a post-COVID world, the way that China responds to questions relating to everything from science funding to global supply chains will have direct impacts on the UK. As in any democratic society, there will be varied views in the British public sphere on how to deal with China. Those views will often be robustly expressed, as is only right in a free society. But those conversations and debates can no longer afford to take in a swift and superficial view of China. The time to deepen the debate has surely arrived.

Executive summary

The ability to understand China was identified as a priority area by the Government in their March 2021 *Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy*. This reflects the importance of China in the modern world and the changing picture of UK-China relations from a 'Golden Age' to something still being defined. The building of 'China competence' has been identified as a generational challenge and, as such, schools and universities have a vital part to play.

Despite the growing importance of China since the start of the twenty-first century, there has not been a review into the state of Chinese Studies in higher education since the late 1990s. Undergraduate numbers on Chinese Studies courses have not grown and departments now face additional funding pressures. Furthermore, a considerable chunk of funding for Chinese Studies comes from external sources, including the Chinese Government, despite the strategic importance of the area to the UK Government.

In secondary education, after a prolonged absence of Mandarin teaching from the curriculum, there has been some progress introducing Mandarin programmes, although their full impact is yet to be felt. Furthermore, £50 million of joint private-public investment in Mandarin teaching programmes is under threat because of an A-Level that is not fit for purpose. Study of China that is not language based is almost entirely absent from secondary education, with the majority of school pupils not engaging with China at all during their studies.

Meanwhile, the role of academics working on China in UK universities is more important than ever but they also face challenges, especially around funding and academic freedom. Universities are not sufficiently transparent about many of their funding sources.

The paper concludes with a series of policy recommendations to reinforce the study of China and Mandarin in UK schools and universities.

Introduction

The UK's changing relationship with China

The importance of China's role in the world today and its trajectory is well documented. As the UK welcomes people from Hong Kong and reports accumulate on the 're-education camps' in Xinjiang as well as increasing tensions in Taiwan, what is happening in and around China increasingly features in British news. The UK-China relationship is an area of debate which often seems to have little consensus, with 'hawks' and 'doves' divided on how the UK should engage with China, if at all. There is as little consensus as there is clarity.[1] As yet, there is no published government strategy on China. Some argue such an approach of 'strategic ambiguity' is beneficial, while others call for a refreshed and clear strategy to guide engagement and to replace the last strategy published in 2009 under a Labour Government.[2]

In lieu of a China strategy, the March 2021 *Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy* offers some indication of how the UK Government might wish to steer the UK-China relationship, citing 'China's growing international stature' as 'by far the most significant geopolitical factor in the world today'. This was a break from the warmer language of the 2009 paper, *The UK and China: a Framework for Engagement*, as well as the *2015 UK-China Joint Statement on building a global comprehensive strategic partnership*.[3]

China and UK universities

Within the broader scrutiny of the UK-China relationship, there has been focus on key sectors where the UK and China are

intertwined. Higher education is one such example and has, since the start of 2020, been the focus of policy papers from the China Research Group, the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), Civitas and the KCL Policy Unit as well as HEPI's own collection of essays, *UK Universities and China*. Emphasis has been put on the reliance of higher education institutions on fee income from international students from mainland China, on the links between UK scientific research and China and on the risk of state-coordinated political interference on university campuses.[4] Unfortunately, this often comes at the expense of other concerns, such as the rise of anti-Asian discrimination towards students of East Asian and South East Asian ethnicities in the UK, tensions within those groups and the benefits of university collaborations with China.[5] There are no straightforward answers.

A problem closely related to this is the conflation of terms and ideas of 'China' with the Chinese Communist Party and people who might identify at least in part as Chinese. It is worth defining some of the terms used in this paper. 'China' refers to the state and the 'Chinese Communist Party' to the Chinese Government. 'Chinese Studies' is a broad term that covers Greater China (including Taiwan and Hong Kong), the culture, the citizens and diasporas, the history and the actions of the Chinese state today. As such, discussions about China competency and the study of China refer to knowledge and understanding of Greater China, not simply the country of China. Mandarin is the dominant spoken dialect in mainland China and the dialect used and pushed by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), but it is only one of many. Modern Standard Chinese has been the main written script in China since the 1960s and is distinct from the non-simplified writing

system that still is in use in Hong Kong. For the purpose of being succinct and in line with the terminology used by the British Association of Chinese Studies (BACS) I will refer to both as the ability to speak and read Mandarin.

The UK's China competency

Despite widespread disagreement on how the UK should interact with China – especially on which industries are open to investment from the Chinese state and organisations that have close ties to the Chinese Communist Party – there is a consensus about the lack of understanding of China in the UK. However, attention to how to remedy this deficiency is scant.

A pipeline to ensure China competency

Based on reports which discuss the issue, desk research and interviews with more than 40 experts and business representatives undertaken for this project, the points below are key areas for improving appropriate China literacy, understanding and expertise to inform the UK's China capability.

It would be beneficial if there were:

- a higher basic level of understanding of China's role today across the UK population;
- a greater proportion of the UK population able to speak Mandarin and / or read Modern Standard Chinese;
- a greater number of professionals with an understanding of aspects of China relevant to their work, for example, in the civil service, climate diplomacy, business, policing and civil society; and

- improved expertise in the UK on key areas, for example, on the workings of the Chinese Communist Party.

This paper focuses on the potential role of UK universities and schools in building understanding of China. The study of China in schools and universities inevitably sits within wider policy contexts and trends, most notably the poor state of languages provision in the education system, as HEPI has previously outlined.[6] So the policy recommendations in this paper are likely to be more effective if implemented alongside the robust set of recommendations outlined by the British Academy in *Towards a National Languages Strategy*.[7]

1. The lack of China competency in the UK

The lack of China competency is best illustrated by the number of recent reports from UK policy bodies that focus on UK-China relations. Each of them outlines China competency as either a key issue, a pre-requisite for effective engagement with China or as the single most important point in building a positive UK-China relationship. Numerous reports on the state of languages in the UK highlight the lack of Mandarin speakers and learners as an issue beyond UK-China relations, noting the significance of China as a regional force and Mandarin's presence in South East Asia.

Table 1: Major policy reports that note the importance of improving China competency, since 2017

Organisation	Report	Example Quotes
British Council (2017)	*Languages for the Future: Which languages the UK needs most and why*	'There are five languages which have the potential to add most to the UK's strategic interests post-Brexit … the greatest gaps are in Arabic and Mandarin Chinese'.
Royal United Services Institute (2019)	*China-UK Relations: Where to Draw the Border Between Influence and Interference?*	'With greater knowledge [of China and the CCP], the UK government and people can better differentiate legitimate influence from illegitimate interference; better assess the effectiveness of CCP interference; and thereby better decide what action, if any, to take in response'.
British Academy (2020)	*Towards a national languages strategy: education and skills*	'[Action is needed] for the UK to have sufficient numbers graduating with degrees in less widely studied but strategically important languages such as Mandarin … to meet national need in areas ranging from trade to security and defence'.

British Foreign Policy Group (2020)	*After the Golden Age: Resetting UK-China Engagement*	'Britain is currently deeply under-powered on China expertise. Only tiny numbers of Britons study the Chinese language … More attention to learning about Chinese language, society, politics, and history – institutionally, commercially, and societally – will be essential to creating a sustainable UK-China relationship'.
China Research Group (2020)	*UK Relations with China: A Values War*	'Government outside the FCDO lacks China literacy, particularly at senior levels … What expertise it does have needs to be better involved and listened to. It should also better consult outside expertise'.
HEPI (2020)	*UK Universities and China*	'Ultimately the capacity of any nation to develop productive relations in China will be determined by the depth and width of its knowledge of China's written and spoken language'.
KCL Policy Unit (2020)	*Towards a UK strategy and policies for relations with China*	'Any strategy and policies must be underpinned by a deep knowledge of CCP aims, what it thinks, its leadership dynamics, institutional set-up, the nature of its power and more'.
British Foreign Policy Group (2021)	*Resetting UK-China Engagement: 2021 Update*	'Deepen and enhance institutional knowledge about China at a granular level. Britain remains under-powered on China expertise, which continually places us at a strategic disadvantage … A better understanding of the shared history of China and Britain should not be an obscure cultural addendum to an understanding of its business environment, but rather should be central to providing a base of knowledge that enables us to understand China's contemporary nationalism'.
China Research Group (2021)	*The UK and China: Next Steps*	'Invest in improving the UK's understanding of China – its people, culture, language, and history to build a better foundation for a sustainable long-term relationship'.

House of Lords' International Relations and Defence Committee (2021)	*The UK and China's security and trade relationship: A strategic void*	'Policies [towards China] will require careful diplomacy and a degree of understanding of China that is currently neither as deep nor as widespread as necessary … An increased knowledge and understanding of China including its languages within Government, the civil service, and the public more generally will be crucial for both constructive engagement and managing periods of stress'.
KCL Policy Unit (2021)	*The China Question: Managing risks and maximising benefits from partnership in higher education and research*	'The current single greatest failure of UK policy is arguably to fail to admit that we lack basic levels of China, and Asia, literacy … The UK is closing down capacity in this area, not increasing it, and its failure to educate itself is seen by leading figures in the field of Chinese Studies as perhaps its biggest vulnerability'.

Despite the lack of a coherent UK strategy for engaging China, concerns about 'China-facing capabilities' were also registered in the UK Government's *Integrated Review* of March 2021:

> *We will invest in enhanced China-facing capabilities, through which we will develop a better understanding of China and its people, while improving our ability to respond to the systemic challenge that it poses to our security, prosperity and values – and those of our allies and partners.*

The phrase 'China-facing capabilities' is not expanded on in the *Review*, but the phrase 'systemic challenge' recognises the need for improvement across multiple UK sectors that interact with China. In an evidence session for the House of Lords' International Relations and Defence Committee in June 2021, the Foreign Office's Director for North East Asia and China said:

> *As the [Integrated Review] says, we will look to invest more in our China capability over the next years. The point, as some of the committee members have said, is that this is a generational challenge and it will take time to invest and build up the capabilities that we need.*[8]

How urgent is the 'China competency' problem?

In his KCL Policy Unit report, Charles Parton, former diplomat and leading China policy thinker, articulates the urgency of having a robust understanding as a prerequisite to any engagement with China:

> *Any strategy and policies must be underpinned by a deep knowledge of [Chinese Communist Party] aims, what it thinks, its leadership dynamics, institutional set-up, the nature of its power and more.*

Rana Mitter and Sophia Gaston, Director of the British Foreign Policy Group, in *After the Golden Age: Resetting UK-China Engagement* include as their first policy recommendation a similar point that reinforces the need for policymakers to understand China:

> *The distinct absence of any deep understanding of China and its behaviour needs to be remedied so that policy-makers can make judgements on the basis of the need to maintain a long-term relationship with China, which serves UK interests, without ceding core values.*

The urgency can also be highlighted by the knowledge imbalance between the UK and China. While there are tens of millions of speakers and learners of English in China, there are

just hundreds of people studying China and Mandarin in UK higher education. Furthermore, the level of understanding in China about the UK is higher among the Chinese Communist Party elite, many of whom have studied in the UK, the US or Europe. Xi Jinping has spoken about Western ideas in a way few Western leaders would be able to talk about Chinese culture:

> *When I was a young man, I developed a keen interest in French culture, particularly French history, philosophy, literature and art. By reading Montesquieu, Voltaire and Rousseau, I deepened my understanding of how progress of the mind propels progress in society. By reading Molière, Balzac and Hugo, I have better appreciated life with all its joys and sorrows. Learning about French culture has also helped me better appreciate both my own culture and the profound nature and rich diversity of human civilizations.*[9]

The lack of Mandarin speakers affects business too. In 2014, a Cardiff Business School report showed the UK's weaknesses in languages was acting as a 'tax on growth' equivalent to 2.5 per cent of GDP or £48 billion annually.[10] Since 2014, China's economy has grown significantly, with the new trade opportunities outstripping any growth in Mandarin ability. In 2017, the British Council described Mandarin as the most important non-European language post-Brexit, with a report highlighting the importance of China as a trading partner and the skills gap's effect on trade.[11] The annual loss may amount to hundreds of millions of pounds.[12]

An issue less well profiled is the social impact of a lack of understanding of China, Taiwan and Hong Kong. Since the

arrival of COVID in the UK in March 2020, there has been a troubling rise in anti-Asian discrimination: as of October 2021, reports submitted to the police were said to have risen 50 per cent since 2019.[13] More widely, Chinese British people are widely under-represented in UK life and often omitted entirely from British history.

Such considerations are particularly important in the context of an estimated 300,000 to 500,000 people arriving in the UK from Hong Kong by 2026, following the introduction of the British National Overseas (BNO) visa.

The Government should publish a strategy to address the China competency issue and acknowledge it as a generational challenge. A key part of this involves schools and universities. The policy recommendations that follow in this paper will be most effective if a coalition of Government departments – including the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, the Department for Education and the Department for International Trade – coordinate and support the delivery of a China competency strategy. Such a strategy could be embedded within a wider strategy for engaging with China or as a standalone plan.

2. The teaching of China and Mandarin language in universities

Chinese Studies in the UK

The periods of growth of Chinese Studies in UK universities since the Second World War have largely been in line with injections of government funding following reviews and subsequent reports. In 1945, there were China centres at just Oxford, Cambridge and SOAS. Since then, there have been several reports published:

i. the Scarborough Report (1945);
ii. the Hayter Report (1961);
iii. the Parker Report (1986);
iv. the Hodder Williams Report (1993); and
v. the Bekhradnia Report (1999).

Following the recommendations of the Bekhradnia Report, there were a total of 11 departments.

Academic positions or centres for the study of China were increased after each of these reports was published. But there has been no review into Chinese Studies in UK universities since the 1997 review (which culminated in the 1999 report). The 1999 report recommended the injection of £1 million each year to support the study of Chinese Studies, which continued for much of the 2010s through HEFCE's support for Strategically Important and Vulnerable Subjects (SIVS). Chinese Studies is no longer supported by the Office for Students, despite continuing to be a high-cost course to run due to the Mandarin teaching element.

We will soon have had the longest post-war period without an official review of the study of China in UK universities or targeted funding to support the growth of Chinese Studies departments. This is the same period in which China's importance has rapidly increased.

Chinese Studies: from 1997 to 2022

Many of the reports connected the importance of a strong Chinese Studies capability in UK universities to 'national, commercial and diplomatic interests', and the 1999 report made the connection too.[14] It reads:

> *[The 1997 review] was prompted by developments over the previous decade in the political culture, and international stance, of the People's Republic of China, culminating in the transfer of sovereignty over Hong Kong in 1997 …*
>
> *The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) had expressed concerns about the capacity of the United Kingdom (UK) to respond to the challenge posed by these changes … [and] questioned whether the UK higher education system could provide the back-up.*[15]

The aim was to increase the number of students enrolled on Chinese Studies courses, and to 'build up the research infrastructure' in certain universities.[16] Professor Kerry Brown, Chair of the Lau Institute at King's College London, highlights in his book *The Future of UK-China Relations*:

> *In 1999, there were 300 graduates in Chinese language from British universities; in 2015, long after China had*

> *overtaken the UK to become the world's second largest economy, largest exporter, second largest importer, chief trading partner to over 120 countries, holder of the world's largest foreign currency reserves, and producer of the world's largest cohort of international students and tourists, that figure had remained at just 300 graduates*.[17]

An annual overview, *Report on the Present State of China-related Studies in the UK* published by The British Association of Chinese Studies (BACS), draws on 2019/20 data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) and the 2020 University China Committee London (UCCL) annual survey, to assess the state of Chinese Studies in UK higher education institutions.[18] UCAS also shares data on the number of applicants. Due to incomplete reporting in the UCCL data and the collection methods HESA use, such data are useful for showing the direction of travel of Chinese Studies over time but cannot provide an exact number of students on Chinese Studies courses.

The 2021 BACS report concludes that the number of undergraduates and postgraduates studying China has been declining since 2017. Since 2013, there has been a trend away from single-honours undergraduate degrees, towards joint honours. This is reflected in the reduction of Chinese Studies departments offering single-honours undergraduate degrees: the number fell by around one-third from 13 to nine between September 2019 and September 2020. Furthermore, BACS note the reduction of the student: staff ratio by 40 per cent. Susan Hodgett, former President of the UK Council for Area Studies Associations and Research Excellence Framework 2021 Sub-Panel Chair for Area Studies, has expressed concern about

the widespread trend of Area Studies departments to close. Despite the closure of Chinese Studies departments, there are 44 institutions offering Chinese Studies programmes.

Heads of Chinese Studies departments highlighted in interviews that many joint-honours degrees tend to include only Mandarin learning as the 'Chinese' part of the degree, as opposed to a wider study of Chinese history and culture. Furthermore, the language modules on these courses are often taught in language centres which can offer a slower pace of course to accommodate extra-curricular learners. The trend towards modular study of China is reflected in the growth of demand for modules on China from students on other degrees.

There is a balance to be struck between the specialism that Chinese Studies offer and the need for more people to have exposure to China in their undergraduate degree. Academics have expressed concern about how the closure of Chinese Studies departments removes protection for the study of China institutions in the long-term, citing examples of closures that have led to 'relocated' academics not being replaced upon leaving. This trend was identified in the 1999 HEFCE report on Chinese Studies too.

Universities should encourage students on other degree programmes to engage in modules on China and accommodate access to single modules, whether or not undergraduate numbers of Chinese Studies courses remain low. If Chinese Studies departments are closed, universities should create protected roles in relevant departments for academics working on China-related topics.

The Director of one Chinese Department not currently offering an undergraduate course explained:

> *We looked into putting on a course, but there was simply not enough demand. Mandarin is a resource intensive language to teach and is not possible to deliver with low student numbers.*

UCAS data on applicants, offers and accepted places for Chinese Studies indicates there is a shortage of demand, as opposed to a high rejection rate.[19]

The data from UCAS highlight that applications from EU students for Chinese Studies undergraduate programmes have halved, due to the funding changes following Brexit. In the five years prior to the 2020/21 cycle, they made up approximately one-sixth (16 per cent) of applicants and one-in-eight places. This was raised by several academics when reflecting on uncertainty around funding for a subject that in many universities annually struggles to reach 20 undergraduate enrolments. **The Office for Students should reinstate Chinese Studies as an area of strategic importance to recognise the vicarious position of the subject, the high cost associated with teaching Mandarin and its strategic importance to the UK.**

The employment outcomes of Chinese Studies graduates is a further factor to consider. It is unlikely that graduate outcomes are a reason for low numbers studying Chinese Studies: business leaders and the public alike perceive a degree in Chinese Studies or proficiency in Mandarin to be a route to a good job.[20] The Graduate Outcomes data show Chinese Studies graduates are almost identical in their outcomes

to other languages and area studies students. However, to help stimulate demand for Chinese Studies undergraduate courses, the difficulties many Chinese Studies graduates face on entering the labour market need to be addressed.[21] In the context of mobilising China talent and literacy, it is important that students of Chinese Studies are able to apply what they have learned.

The British Association of Chinese Studies (BACS) 2020 report on the employability of Chinese Studies graduates concludes: 'despite the importance of China … employment opportunities in the UK for graduates are somewhat elusive' and 'finding a job in the UK where they can use their Chinese is very difficult'.[22] There is low recognition of the skills acquired on a Chinese Studies degree, including linguistic, social sciences and literature skills. Many interviewees also highlighted that Chinese Studies graduates are not able to compete for jobs that rely on Mandarin language ability due to competition from native Mandarin speakers with excellent English. In part, this is because most Chinese Studies graduates started Mandarin *ab initio* due to limited opportunities in schools.[23]

In partnership with China-focussed employer groups – for example, the China Britain Business Council – employers and universities should highlight the value of Chinese Studies graduates' skills for China-specific jobs and the wider skillset to employers, students and prospective students alike to stimulate demand. The British Council's work facilitating placements in China outside of degrees should target Chinese Studies graduates and undergraduates for opportunities outside of term.

British Council's Generation UK programme and mobility to China

The British Council is a non-departmental public body sponsored by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). A strand of its work is focused on encouraging people-to-people relationships around the world, including in China. In 2013, Generation UK was launched which aimed to help 80,000 students boost their employability through work experience placements and study in China.

The Generation UK programme, which was suspended in 2021 due to COVID, should be renewed, retaining its widening participation agenda and including a premise to work more closely with schools and universities.

The Turing Scheme is another important programme for international mobility that supports school pupils and university students to study abroad, but there is not yet enough information to understand the scale of mobility to China. The HESA record indicates there was a decline in mobility during the pandemic for students going to China for their first degree, following two years of growth up to 2019/20.[24] **This is an important area to track. It has been reported that there are cases of students being put off or prevented from studying in China because the year in China is not well-enough funded for those without significant support from families. It would be damaging if undergraduates did not visit China due to a lack of support which could be remedied by small pots of funding.[25]**

Across education, facilitating and enabling experiences in China is hugely important for building individuals' understanding of Chinese culture and identity and spending time in Mandarin-speaking countries is vital to achieve an advanced level of Mandarin.

Language centres and Confucius Institutes

Mandarin learning also happens in language centres and Confucius Institutes. University language centres offer extracurricular and credited courses to students at no or low cost. Confucius Institutes are Chinese state-sponsored institutions which aim to teach Mandarin and promote Chinese culture on UK campuses.

The Association of University Language Communities (AULC) and the University Council of Modern Languages (UCML) 2020 report shows that, following a growth in popularity for studying Mandarin from 2013 and then a decline from 2016, the number of universities offering Mandarin levelled off in 2019/20.[26] The report notes that often language centres are only able to offer beginner's Mandarin rather than more advanced levels.[27]

There are 29 Confucius Institutes on UK campuses. Despite publishing the number of Confucius Classrooms in the UK and globally and the number of pupils reached through school programmes, there are no figures on the number of people reached on a country-by-country basis at university level. **Confucius Institutes should publish data about the number and the level of students they teach in universities and classrooms to demonstrate the value they add to the teaching of Mandarin in the UK. Increasingly their role on campuses are under scrutiny and they should be prepared to engage in conversations about their contribution to the teaching of Mandarin in the UK.**

It was noted in interviews that most learners at Confucius Institutes or language centres are beginners with very few

advanced students. Extracurricular Mandarin learning seems to have a limited effect on helping students reach fluent Mandarin but provides exposure and channels to pursue interest.

A desktop survey of 27 institutions shows few language centres have a Mandarin language teacher on a full-time contract, with the majority on part-time or hourly contracts. This contrasts with Confucius Institutes, which appear to employ multiple full-time members of Mandarin language teaching staff due to the levels of funding from the CCP.

Some interviewees suggested the imbalance of native and non-native Mandarin-speaking teachers raised pedagogical issues. Professor Steve Tsang, Director of the SOAS China Institute, highlighted that most universities recruit native Mandarin speakers who adhere to methods developed in China to teach Mandarin, rather than employing British-trained speakers of Mandarin who often have a better understanding of the difficulties native English speakers have in learning Mandarin. Relying on teachers at Confucius Institutes who are only in the UK for 12 to 24 months means the UK is not building depth in Mandarin teaching.

There was consensus among the interviewed academics working on China that, despite controversy, Confucius Institutes have been critical in the absence of investment in the teaching of Mandarin in recent decades in UK universities. As such, many noted it would be vital that any move off campus or closure would leave a gap in Mandarin teaching due to a funding and / or teacher shortage.

Together, these points speak to an under-investment of Mandarin teaching in UK universities. Targeted funding to

support Chinese Studies should include an emphasis on creating career pathways for academics for the teaching of Mandarin. Teachers of Mandarin should be supported to have time to publish and share research on pedagogy. In the context of national and international conversations about Confucius Institutes, any move to close them should be accompanied by support to maintain Mandarin teaching at the relevant institution.

3. The study of China and Mandarin in secondary education

Language learning in schools

Prior to 2016 there was limited Mandarin teaching in the UK to GCSE and A-Level, with most provision being in the independent sector and for international students wishing to take an A-Level in their native language. The Specialist Schools Academy Trust (SSAT) ran their first Chinese Teaching Conference in 2003, which was where the Confucius Institute of Schools was founded. In 2012 it transferred to the Institute of Education (IOE) and supported 34 schools, reaching 7,500 pupils from Years 7 to 11 – although most of them did not progress beyond Key Stage 3 (Years 7 to 9).

In 2010, Michael Gove as Education Secretary announced a partnership with Hanban, an institution under the Chinese Ministry of Education, to train 1,000 new Mandarin teachers, acknowledging a lack of teachers and quality teaching in English schools.[28] The Confucius Institute for Schools at the IOE continued to build capacity, publishing textbooks with Pearson and developing a Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) for Mandarin teachers and being the hub for school provision. IOE Confucius Classrooms receive a £7,500 grant from the Chinese Government to fund Mandarin teaching and are offered support from a Mandarin language assistant, who delivers Mandarin as an extracurricular subject and supports lessons led by the lead Chinese teacher.

This work paved the way for two initiatives – started in 2016 – that have increased the provision of Mandarin teaching

in state schools and guided more learners into Key Stage 4 / GCSEs: the Department for Education's Mandarin Excellence Programme and the Swire Chinese Language Foundation, alongside other initiatives to expose young people to the importance of modern China.

The Department for Education announced a £10 million fund for the Mandarin Excellence Programme (MEP) in 2016, the tender for which was won by UCL's Institute of Education. The stated aim of the Programme was to have 5,000 students 'on track to fluency' by 2021 with 100 new Mandarin teachers trained on a Mandarin PGCE.[29] The Programme won a tender renewal in 2021 of £16.4 million for a further four years to cement the presence of Mandarin teaching in 75 schools and enable them to become self-sufficient.

Katharine Carruthers, Director of the MEP, noted that there is no shortage of applicants for the Mandarin PGCE, rather the limiting factor is the low number of schools with significant Mandarin teaching experience that can offer placements for teachers on the PGCE programme. Katharine Carruthers said:

> *If more schools committed to teaching Mandarin, we would be able to take on more Mandarin PGCE teachers. The limiting factor is schools, not our ability to train Mandarin teachers. Buy-in from schools and particularly headteachers is fundamental to the expansion of Mandarin teaching.*

This is in part down to the commitment by the Institute of Education for those on the PGCE programme to have a placement in schools which teach Mandarin, as opposed to a placement for any foreign language, which is the practice

among some PGCE providers. In 2022/23, the first cohort of students on the MEP will reach Year 13 and be ready to apply for higher education.

Teacher training best practice

The teaching of Mandarin is still quite young in the UK. Native speakers of Mandarin and research by academics teaching Mandarin in higher education settings guide most of the pedagogy on Mandarin, which misses the vital contexts of pre-tertiary learners and the valuable experience non-native teachers can bring to teaching.

Further concerns include examples of trainee Mandarin teachers being placed in school classrooms to assist the teaching of French. This connects to the need for a wider acknowledgement that Mandarin requires distinct treatment in education and languages policy from the European languages that currently dominate the languages curriculum.

Mandarin teachers need formal teacher training specific to Mandarin and cannot rely on learning on the job without a bank of support or expertise to rely on within their school. PGCE providers should commit to a minimum time in Mandarin classrooms for their trainee Mandarin teachers, rather than any modern language teaching experience.

Since 2016, the MEP have taken 1,500 of their Mandarin learners to China in partnership with the British Council. Further plans for travel were curtailed by COVID, and instead students have attended a two-week online programme called 'Virtual China'. The Chinese Government fund a large part of the programme in China.

The Swire Chinese Language Foundation (SCLF) is a charitable foundation that aims to 'build the foundations for a stronger engagement with China' and to 'widen the learning of Mandarin Chinese in Britain'. They are funded by a £25 million commitment from Hong Kong and London-based conglomerate, the Swire Group. They support 127 schools across the UK working out of 12 school-based regional centres.

Through five-year agreements with schools, the financial burden gradually transfers from the Foundation to the schools, starting with two years fully funded by the Foundation. What the SCLF delivers varies across schools with less curriculum time than the MEP. However, it does include A-Level provision whereas the MEP only encourages study beyond GCSE.

Interviews highlighted that these two programmes, the MEP and the SCLF, mostly work separately despite the fact the resources each programme hosts and creates are mutually accessible and teachers collaborate and talk. **It would be worthwhile for these two groups to identify how they can support each other in relevant areas.**

The UCL Institute of Education Confucius Institute, which delivers the MEP in partnership with the British Council, also works with 43 Confucius Classrooms in England. The IOE is explicit that each IOE Confucius Classroom needs to have a qualified local Mandarin teacher in the school. It was highlighted in interviews that where schools rely solely on assistant Mandarin teachers from China on one or two-year visas, there is an issue with the quality of teaching.

Confucius Institutes should ensure any work with schools overlaps with existing provision – for example, by the

Mandarin Excellence Programme or the Swire Foundation – to ensure efficient use of resources.

Level 2 and Level 3 exam entries for Mandarin

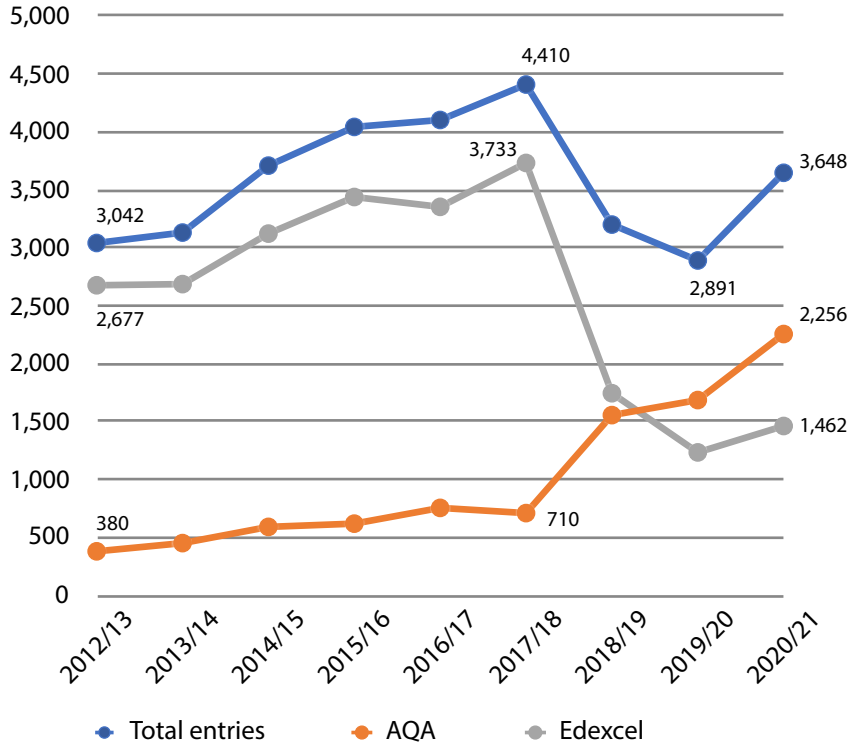
When establishing the number of UK-resident non-native speaking Mandarin learners and speakers, the number of international students and British Born Chinese Mandarin speakers taking the exams means figures can be used to identify trends, rather than precise figures.

All three groups are important to the level of China competency in the UK but, when assessing schools' teaching about China, it is necessary to make the distinction.

The following two charts show the total number of entrants for the two Mandarin GCSE exams between the academic years 2012/13 and 2020/21 and the number of entrants for the Level 3 exams (Pre-U and A-Level). In both cases it is too soon to tell by how much the two funded programmes will increase the number of A-Levels, though GCSE uptake is likely to increase.

The Edexcel GCSE exam has traditionally been taken by native-speakers (either international students or British Born Chinese attending Chinese language schools) due to the lack of parts of the exam that require responses in English or textual analysis. The AQA exam is considered to be more accessible for non-native speakers.

Figure 1. All Mandarin GCSE entries, 2012/13 to 2020/21

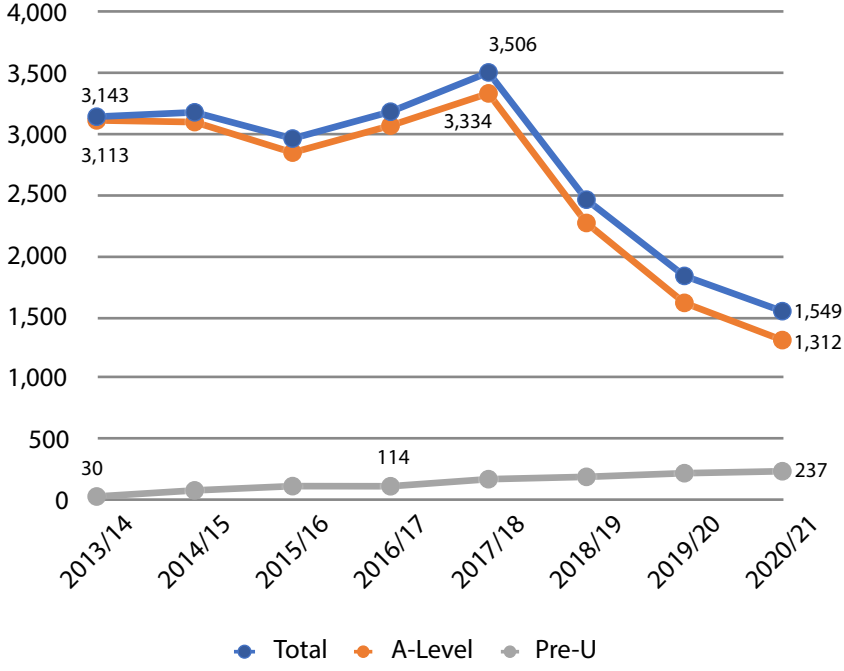


Source: Data from JCQ, Pearson and AQA

At Level 3, there is a similar split in choice of exam between non-native speakers and learners. Pearson estimate half of A-Level entrants to be from outside the UK, with more being native speakers of Mandarin in UK schools, which is something also highlighted in reports by the British Council and Ofqual.[30] The writer and education advocate Tim Clissold estimated in 2016 the number of non-native speakers taking the exam to be nearer '100 to 150'.[31] Between 2017/18 and 2020/21, entrants

for A-Level Chinese fell 60 per cent due to changes in exam requirements similar to those seen at GCSE level.[32]

Figure 2. A-Level and Pre-U entries for Mandarin Chinese, 2013/14 to 2020/21



Source: Pre-U data from freedom of information request from Cambridge Assessment International, 27 September 2021; A-Level data from JCQ open data examination results (https://www.jcq.org.uk/examination-results/?post-year=2021&post-location=)

In recent years, the Cambridge International Pre-U has become the syllabus of choice for non-native learners. The Pre-U curriculum has emphasis on language but includes cultural elements. From interviews with teachers on the SCLF programmes and the MEP as well as academics, it is clear that

the Pre-U exam is not just the preferred exam, but arguably the only suitable exam for non-native learners at Level 3. There are deeper issues with the A-Level for non-native speakers of Mandarin which Don Starr, Director of Oriental Studies at Durham, who has been teaching undergraduates about China since the 1970s, highlights:

> *As more native Chinese speaking applicants arrived in the UK, they took exams at GCSE and A-Level often with no teaching from their school. Non-native speakers who worked hard to learn the language had to compete with native speakers for the top grades and struggled to get even Bs and Cs in Chinese. The introduction of the Pre-U Chinese redressed the balance by including culture essays in English and a requirement to work between the two languages. It has been ideal as a fair test of a British learner's knowledge and skills in Chinese and as an excellent basis for further study of Chinese.*

Teachers have been switching to the Cambridge Pre-U, entries for which have grown from 2013/14 to 2020/21 and it now makes up about 15 per cent of the total entrants for Mandarin at this level, but interviewees indicated it likely comprises most non-native speaker entrants.

However, Cambridge Pre-U is due to close all examinations in 2023 and, as a two-year course, this means for those wishing to start the Pre-U course in September 2022, there is not an alternative Level 3 option to the problematic A-Level. Across interviewees in schools and universities this was labelled as 'severely disruptive' to 'catastrophic' and 'madness'. Those few learners who want to take A-Level Chinese will be

discouraged and there will be no suitable exam for native English-speaking learners in which they can achieve the grades they deserve.

This is a major sticking point and could damage the effectiveness of the joint 10-year investment of more than £50 million. It also continues to limit the number of undergraduates on Chinese Studies courses and the development of China competency in schools. As a priority, the Department for Education should ensure there is a suitable qualification and exam available for those starting Level 3 courses in Mandarin in September 2022. The most viable way of ensuring this is would be to support the continuation of the Pre-U exam for another year.

Meanwhile, some schools indicated they might teach towards the Chinese language qualification, HSK 4, in tandem with an Extended Project Qualification (EPQ) instead of the A-Level. **UCAS should encourage universities to recognise this combination as an alternative to a Level 3 qualification and clarify the UCAS point weighting of HSK qualifications. Currently, there is no indication of how many UCAS points HSK 4 is worth.**[33]

Curriculum change to encourage more Mandarin learners at Levels 2 and 3

The continued treatment of non-European and European languages as the same at Levels 2 and 3 is reducing uptake by flying in the face of the fundamental differences inherent in the languages. This is widely reported by the British Academy, British Council and HEPI's own report on modern languages.

Teaching and learning Mandarin comes with challenges that commonly-taught European languages, like French, German and Spanish, do not have. Features that make it more challenging include the lack of an alphabet; the script; and Mandarin's tonal aspect, which means the definitions of words change according to pitch. Pedagogical best practices for teaching European languages and non-European languages, such as Mandarin, are significantly different. Currently, however, Mandarin is being forced into structures designed with the pedagogy, syntax and grammar of European languages in mind.

This works against the uptake of Mandarin, perpetuating the low number of learners of the language beyond the beginner level and reinforcing the perception of Mandarin as an 'impossible language to learn'. While the low cultural appeal of China is driven by factors which largely cannot be changed by policymakers, curriculum design can be adjusted to stimulate demand from students.

Several interviewees argued that learning to write Chinese characters by hand is not a good use of resource. They believe that more time speaking the language and reading the characters would be useful, as characters are now more likely to be inputted via phones and laptops which use the Romanised alphabet. There is growing demand among teachers for exams to be taken on electronic devices. The 2019 Department for Education report *Realising the potential of technology in education: A strategy for education providers and the technology industry* outlined its key aim as helping to 'embed technology in a way that ultimately drives improvements in educational outcomes'.[34]

The Department for Education should commission a review of the curriculum design of non-European languages for GCSEs and A-Levels.

Beyond teaching Mandarin

Mandarin's presence in schools is growing, but cultural study of China is rare. Qualifications such as the Pre-U include cultural elements but there is limited content on China in subjects such as History, Geography, Politics and Economics A-Levels, as well as in Key Stages 1 to 4. Furthermore, HJ Colston, Katharine Carruthers and members of the Swire Foundation highlight that in the cases where relevant modules do exist, teachers often lack confidence in teaching them due to a lack of previous experience and the rapidly changing nature of the topic. **Many of the university-based Chinese Studies academics interviewed showed a willingness to be involved in supporting short training courses for schoolteachers who were interested in teaching modules on China. Schools and universities should coordinate to encourage teachers to present these modules to pupils in schools. This small intervention could have the potential to reach thousands of students and have a significant impact rapidly and cheaply, while stimulating young peoples' interest in China.**

Some interviewees were critical of the emphasis on language learning at the expense of teaching about Chinese culture, noting that pupils who do not feel confident in learning a language have little to no opportunity to engage with China.

Kerry Brown, Tim Clissold and Charles Parton think that, as Mandarin is arguably the hardest modern language in the world, many young learners will be put off learning about China at all because of the barriers to engaging with it. In the context of the collapse of language learning, for many students

Mandarin would be the first language they attempt, making it even more challenging. Alongside supporting teachers to deliver modules within existing modules on China, there is support from vice-chancellors and Chinese Studies academics for the introduction of an A-Level in Chinese Civilisation. The A-Level would focus on Chinese history and culture and could have a similar impact as the Classical Civilisation A-Level has had on introducing pupils to the Ancient World and opening the door to studying Classics in higher education.

Twenty leading academics working on China related subjects were involved in writing a subject specification for a Chinese Civilisation A-Level in 2018, with signed support from more than 10 vice-chancellors. Furthermore, there were several million of pounds of private investment committed to support the development of necessary resources including setting up a PGCE in this area.[35] **The Department for Education and Ofqual should support the introduction of an A-Level in Chinese Civilisation to open up the study of China to a wider group of young people.**

How school curriculum influences public discussion

Interviews with Sarah Saunders, Head of National Partnerships at the British Museum, highlight how the mixture of low exposure of China on the curriculum and low uptake by teachers has a knock-on effect on the work of the Museum and public discourse. The British Museum run visits for Key Stage 2 pupils on 14th to 17th century China:

> *The most popular visit days are about the Egyptians, Greeks and Romans because these are what teachers feel most confident teaching. This means the take up of*

sessions on Chinese history and culture is far lower. School engagement is a large part of our programming, a part of our charitable objectives and plays a part in shaping our wider work with the public and partnerships with other museums … If topics relating to China featured more on school curricula, and if teachers were happier teaching Chinese history, we would consider running more school programmes which would potentially have a knock-on effect into running more events for the public relating to China than we already do.

There are museums and galleries with significant China collections which could support moves to teach about China more on school curricula. This would work in tandem with training days for teachers. However, there are just nine full-time staff working on China in the UK in museums and galleries, so further support for museums and galleries might encourage this expansion.[36] Increased China coverage in school curricula would indirectly support the growth of understanding of China in the UK population.

4. Expertise and research in UK universities

UK universities host some of the world's leading research on China and are home to a significant source of expertise on many aspects of China.

Beyond universities and schools, there are numerous organisations which contribute to the UK's understanding of China. A selection of these include:

- **The Great Britain China Centre (GBCC):** an executive non-departmental public body founded by the Foreign Office in the 1970s. Part of its work centres on training, briefing and informing parliamentarians about China.
- **The China Britain Business Council (CBBC):** the UK's national business network that promotes trade with China. It receives funding from the Department for International Trade (DIT) and its member organisations, which it helps to do business in China.
- **The UK National Committee on China (UKNCC):** an independent group set up to host conversations about China. It includes a switchboard-type service that signposts parliamentarians, journalists and other influential figures to relevant China-experts to provide context for questions.[37]
- **Museums and galleries:** Museums and galleries have an important role in shaping and informing the public through exhibitions and online collections.

There are many more examples of organisations that draw on the expertise of UK Chinese Studies academics and their research. For example, the GBCC run a programme in partnership with the University of Oxford China Centre. Academics in UK universities are a huge strategic resource.

Part of the Government's strategy on China competency should involve explicit support and funding to enable academics to engage in public discourse. Universities should ensure that academics can be involved in consultations without detriment to their career.

Postgraduate funding

To ensure expertise on China thrives in universities, it is vital that there is a pipeline of postgraduates entering academia. The British Association of Chinese Studies (BACS) highlight that there are 'sources of funding for study and research on China related topics, but there is never enough to meet demand, especially for taught Masters (PGT) courses and language training'.[38] Nor is there certainty that these will persist; BACS also note that, after Brexit and COVID, some key sources have disappeared. Steve Tsang highlighted that in many cases some of the most capable graduate students are hired by professional and financial services, which has a negative impact on the future of China expertise in UK universities, despite the benefits to those other sectors. Furthermore, many interviewees highlighted the reliance on talent from outside the UK, rather than increasing China expertise in the UK. The Government have committed to increasing Research and Development (R&D) spending significantly, with £22 billion of additional investment mentioned at the 2021 Spending Review, meaning 150,000 new members of the R&D workforce need to be recruited by 2030.[39] **The Government should consult students and universities on how to ensure there is a pipeline of talent in this field to boost knowledge in universities.**

Academic freedom

All of the academics interviewed identified the fact that the work they do on China is in a politicised atmosphere, although they were resolute it did not mean they self-censor their work. One departmental head said:

> *When I write anything about China publicly, I get blasted by people on one side for being 'too hard' on China and berated by others for being 'too soft' on China.*

Self-censorship and the choice of topics to study is a complex matter. In subjects that are not as politicised as China, these decisions are often shaped by viability and whether or not funders of research support various areas of research. There are added challenges with China due to the CCP monitoring various groups and withholding visas from academics whose work they dislike. This informs decisions about what areas are viable to study and those which are not, throwing up challenging questions about academic freedom and self-censorship. Kerry Brown explores these issues in a chapter in the HEPI collection, *UK Universities and China*.[40]

For example, a postgraduate student from Hong Kong might wish to write an extended project about the history of protests in China. If they did so and then returned to Hong Kong, they would run the risk of being harassed and could put their families at risk. While it is the student's decision, academics in UK universities might advise the student to write on a different topic for the student's wellbeing. In another scenario, an academic might know that researching an area would mean never being able to return to China to do field research, and so they might decide to pursue different but still valuable research.

As such, the bullying tactics of the CCP do influence the study of China within UK universities and it is important this is acknowledged, minimised and mitigated against. A number of reports have been published that touch on how to protect the academic freedom of academics working on China, including by the British Association of Chinese Studies, the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) and the Academic Freedom and Internationalisation Working Group (AFIWG), who highlight that this issue is relevant to other countries too. There is not, however, consensus on exactly how this should be solved. Susan Hodgett, former President of the Association for Area Studies, notes that considerations such as political pressure from foreign countries have always played a part in Area Studies and other disciplines when considering research areas. Steve Tsang suggested that academics who have had their access to China revoked or sanctioned should be protected against having their career penalised for this, although he acknowledged the current system for career progression makes this difficult.

There is wider work to do around academic freedom: according to the *International Journal of Human Rights*, 'almost two thirds (65 per cent) of respondents did not know if their department provided guidelines on academic freedom'.[41]

Universities must be clear on their policies to protect academic freedom, speak up in support of it and involve junior staff, including postgraduate students as well as senior staff working in these sensitive areas, in conversations about how they can be supported. Universities should be more transparent about donations

from external sources, including businesses, the Chinese Communist Party or organisations close to it as well as Confucius Institutes.[42]

5. Concluding policy recommendations

A small centralised budget designated to building China competency in the education system would support schools and universities to teach about China and fulfil the Government's commitment to improving 'China capabilities' as outlined in the March 2021 *Integrated Review*.

The Government's decision to remove Huawei from UK networks in light of perceived security risks was estimated to cost BT £500 million, a cost that arguably could have been avoided if there had been greater understanding and awareness of China within the UK Government.[43]

As China grows more influential, similar moments may come which could be avoided with more knowledge of the country. Therefore, a new pot of money to the tune of 1 per cent to 2 per cent of that £500 million sum put towards supporting the growth of China capability would be a modest and wise investment to prevent further costly errors and take advantage of appropriate trade opportunities.

This could help to coordinate activities across different parts of the pipeline. The Director in the Foreign Office announced that they had spent £3 million on developing in-house expertise in recent years. An investment of a sum between £3 million and £10 million in higher education and schools would be beneficial and would represent a small expansion on the commitment of £40 million over 10 years to the teaching of Mandarin.

A government strategy on China competency

- The Government should publish a strategy for improving China capability, either as part of a wider China strategy or as a standalone document. A major portion of such a strategy should cover schools' and universities' critical roles.
- The Department for Education should ensure there is a suitable Level 3 qualification for the start of the 2022 academic year. The most likely solution to the impasse at Level 3 is to support the continuation of the Pre-U Mandarin for another year.
- The Department for Education should revisit the widely supported prospect of an A-Level in Chinese Civilisation to open up the study of China to a wider number of school pupils without the language barrier.

Schools

- A wider review of the teaching of modern languages at Levels 2 and 3 would be beneficial across different languages, especially those of strategic importance as identified by the British Council.
- Closer collaboration is needed between the Mandarin Excellence Programme, the Swire Foundation Chinese Language schools, Confucius Classrooms and the British Council if there is to be more effective teaching in schools. This should include the aim of concentrating resource to ensure high-quality provision.
- A small pot of funding should be made available to support the training of schoolteachers in modules that cover China.

Higher education

- The Office for Students should review whether Chinese Studies, along with a selection of other key area studies, should be should be eligible for targeted funding.
- Universities should work with employers and schools to highlight the value and variety of skills gained from a Chinese Studies degree. Interviews reveal the willingness of significant China-facing organisations to work with universities on recruitment of graduates in Chinese Studies.
- Universities should publish clear guidelines and considerations concerning internationalisation and academic freedom, written in partnership with academics working in areas which are likely to have particularly strong challenges to academic freedom. Transparency around donations and movements of money from external donors is paramount.
- To join up the various opportunities and programmes that exist to study China, a portal of information should be created to serve as a signpost to highlight opportunities, material and public lectures organised by universities and civil society. A suitable place to run this might be the UCL Institute of Education as part of an expanded Mandarin Excellence Programme.

Afterword

Bahram Bekhradnia, President of HEPI and Chair of the 1999 Review of Chinese Studies

The last national committee that examined Chinese Studies, and which reported in 1997/98, was established at a time where there was concern that UK knowledge, understanding and expertise in matters relating to China were inadequate to respond to its developing influence and importance. It is noteworthy that the Committee who produced that response was created in large part in response to representations from the Foreign Office.

That report, which I oversaw, recommended measures to increase the output of graduates able to speak Mandarin and to enhance our research capacity related to China. Our recommendations were largely accepted and as a result, there was significant additional investment in UK universities' capacity in Chinese-related studies.

It is therefore disappointing and worrying that this important new report by HEPI reveals there has been little increase in the number of graduates expert in Mandarin, and that there remains a gap in our knowledge and expertise in Chinese affairs. Nearly 25 years have passed, and without doubt opportunities have been missed and will be missed in the future. As a result our country will be at a disadvantage as China's influence and power has already increased and will undoubtedly further increase.

Our 1999 report focused exclusively on supply side issues, and the response focused on universities' capacity in Chinese

studies – and especially the availability of departments of Chinese in universities. This new report makes it clear that, important though the supply-side may be, it is demand that is the critical factor. On the supply side, it is hugely disappointing that the Office for Students does not regard Chinese as a strategically important subject, but undoubtedly this report is correct in asserting that action is needed at school level – and indeed in the wider community – in order to boost demand and meet the challenge. Without doubt, the report is right too that the expertise that exists in universities today should be harnessed to develop awareness and understanding, not only in the general public, but specifically at a policy and political level as well.

This is a timely report, and it is noteworthy that the action points of university language teaching and research treated in the 1999 report remain key action points, but it is undoubtedly correct also that action is needed throughout the education system – and indeed more widely in society – in order to ensure that as a nation we are able to meet the challenges that China poses.

List of interviewees

The author thanks the following individuals for their input into this project. This list is non-exhaustive as some individuals wished to remain anonymous. There are many useful articles not cited in the endnotes that were useful for forming a picture of the study of China and Mandarin in the UK.

- Salvatore Babones, Associate Professor, Chinese economy and society, University of Sydney
- Paola Barr, Global Strategic Network Associate, Elsevier
- Bahram Bekhradnia, President and Founder, HEPI
- Giles Blackburne, Associate Professor of International Business, University of Leeds
- Kerry Brown, Professor of Chinese Studies and Director, Lau China Institute, King's College London
- Keith Burnett, Former Vice-Chancellor, University of Sheffield
- Joanna Burton, Policy Manager, Russell Group
- Andrew Cahn, Non-executive director Huawei Technologies and Former CEO, UKTI
- Katharine Carruthers, Director, UCL Institute of Education Confucius Institute for Schools and Pro-Vice-Provost for East Asia, University College London
- Tim Clissold, China specialist
- HJ Colston, China specialist
- Sherard Cowper-Coles, Chair, China-Britain Business Council
- Kate Daubney, Director, The Careers Group
- Ingrid D'Hooghe, China researcher at the Clingendael Institute – the Netherlands Institute of International Relations and Leiden Asia Centre

- Lucy Fripp, Senior Programme Manager, British Council
- Natascha Gentz, Chair of Chinese Studies, University of Edinburgh
- Peter Gries, Director of the Manchester China Institute and Professor of Chinese Politics, University of Manchester
- Jessica Harrison-Hall, Head of China Section, British Museum
- Isabel Hilton, Editor, China Dialogue
- Susan Hodgett, Chair of the Research Excellence Framework for Area Studies and Director of Area Studies, University of East Anglia
- Janet Ilieva, Founder, Education Insight
- Simon Kemp, Press and Data Protection, HESA
- Gregory Lee, Professor of Chinese Studies, University of St Andrews
- Katie Lee, Senior Adviser, China Affairs, HSBC
- Merethe Borge MacLeod, Executive Director, Great Britain China Centre
- Nicola McLelland, Professor of History of Linguistics, University of Nottingham
- Eva McManamon, Senior Qualification Manager, Pearson
- Rob Neal, Director, Swire Chinese Language Centre (Manchester)
- Charles Parton, Senior Associate Fellow, RUSI
- Michael Peak, Senior Adviser, Education, British Council
- Stephen Perry, Chairman, 48 Group Club
- Alexa Sale, Assistant Manager, Swire Chinese Language Foundation
- Sarah Saunders, Head of Learning and National Partnerships, British Museum
- Matt Schofield, General Manager, IOE Confucius Institute
- Andrew Seaton, CEO, China-Britain Business Council
- Leina Shi, Director, Education, British Council

- Ollie Shiell, Founder of Asiability and the UK National Committee on China
- Don Starr, Director of Studies (Chinese and Japanese), Durham University
- Jonathan Sullivan, Associate Professor of Contemporary Chinese Studies, University of Nottingham
- Steve Tsang, Professor of Chinese Studies and Director of the SOAS China Institute
- Weiqun Wang, Assistant Professor in Chinese, University of Nottingham and Former Chair of the British Chinese Language Teaching Society
- Edward Watston, Executive Director, Swire Chinese Language Foundation
- Chris Webster, Director, Swire Chinese Language Centre (Oxford)
- Sophia Woodman, Senior Lecturer, Chinese Society, University of Edinburgh

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25 Charles Parton OBE, China-UK Relations: Where to Draw the Border between Inf*luence and Interference, Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), February 2019* https://static.rusi.org/20190220_chinese_interference_parton_web.pdf

26 UCML-AULC, *survey of Institution-wide Language Provision in universities in the UK (2012-2013)*, February 2013 https://s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/assets.creode.advancehe-document-manager/documents/hea/private/ucml_aulc_survey_of_institution_wide_language_provision_1568036915.pdf; and the 2016 report: https://university-council-modern-languages.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/1a9b7-10m-ucml_aulc_2015-2016.pdf; and the 2018 report: https://university-council-modern-languages.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/ad65a-aulc_ucml_2017-2018.pdf

27 The report also does not mention anything about the teaching of Cantonese. AULC-UCML, *survey of Institution-Wide Language Provision in universities in the UK (2019-2020)* https://aulc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/AULC-UCML-survey-of-Institution-Wide-Language-Provision-in-universities-in-the-UK-2019-2020.pdf and https://aulc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/UCML-AULC-Survey-of-Language-Provision-in-UK-Universities-in-2021.pdf

28 Department for Education Press Release, *Young people to be offered lessons in Mandarin*, 10 November 2010 https://www.gov.uk/government/news/young-people-to-be-offered-lessons-in-mandarin

29 The programme was mostly developed in-house by the Department for Education.

30 Kathryn Board OBE and Teresa Tinsley, *Language Trends 2013/14: The state of language learning in primary and secondary schools in England*, 2014 https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/language-trends-survey-2014.pdf

31 Oscar Holland, 'Tim Clissold on What the West Can Learn from China', 23 March 2016 https://www.thatsmags.com/beijing/post/12644/tim-clissold

32 It was noted in interviews that while taking a native language as a third A-Level for university entry was often seen as a legitimate A-Level choice in the past, many of the most selective universities are increasingly not accepting native language A-Levels as a third A-Level.

33 A phone call with UCAS revealed that the qualification is recognised, but there is not a listed value in UCAS points.

34 UK Government, Department for Education, Realising the *potential of technology in education: A strategy for education providers and the technology industry, April 2019* https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/791931/DfE-Education_Technology_Strategy.pdf

35 From interviews with a number of individuals, including Tim Clissold.

36 Desk research shows there are three permanent curators for China at the British Museum, two at the Victoria and Albert Museum, one at the Ashmolean Museum Oxford, one at the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, one at the Burrell Collection, Glasgow and one at the National Museum of Scotland. There are others who cover China as part of their role looking after Middle Eastern, African and Oceanic collections and similarly broad portfolio roles.

37 The UKNCC offers on-demand advice, as opposed to longer courses offered by the GBCC.

38 British Association of Chinese Studies, *Funding in the UK for higher level non-scientific China related studies*, August 2021 http://bacsuk.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/BACS-2020-21-Funding-Report-final.pdf

39 Russell Group, *Spending Review 2021*: Science, Innovation and Skills – a smart investment for Britain, September 2021 https://russellgroup.ac.uk/media/6004/russell-group-spending-review-2021-submission.pdf

40 Michael Natzler (editor), *UK Universities and China*, HEPI Report 132, July 2020 https://www.hepi.ac.uk/2020/07/09/uk-universities-and-china/

41 Will Hazell, 'Academics believe UK university freedom is at risk amid links to authoritarian states', *The I*, 19 February 2022 https://inews.co.uk/news/academics-believe-uk-university-freedom-is-at-risk-amid-links-to-authoritarian-states-1470268

42 It is worth restating the large number of students studying China outside of a Chinese Studies department.

43 Reuters, 'BT says Huawei ban can be absorbed in 500 million pounds already earmarked', July 2020 https://www.reuters.com/article/us-britain-huawei-bt-costs-idUSKCN24F2A2

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Despite the growth in importance of China, the number of Chinese Studies students in the UK has not increased in the past 25 years and there has been no official review into the state of Chinese Studies in universities since 1999. Based on interviews with over 40 individuals from education, government and business, this report from Michael Natzler makes a series of recommendations to improve China literacy and increase the number of Mandarin speakers in the UK.

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