



Mandarin Excellence Programme

Communications Pack for Schools



Thank you for continuing to take part in the [Mandarin Excellence Programme \(MEP\)](#), an intensive language programme established in 2016 that has helped more than 16,000 school pupils in England get on track to fluency in Mandarin Chinese.

The MEP is delivered by UCL Institute of Education (IOE) on behalf of the Department for Education (DfE) and in partnership with the British Council.

By continuing your journey on the programme, your pupils are being given a head start to master the most widely spoken language in the world.

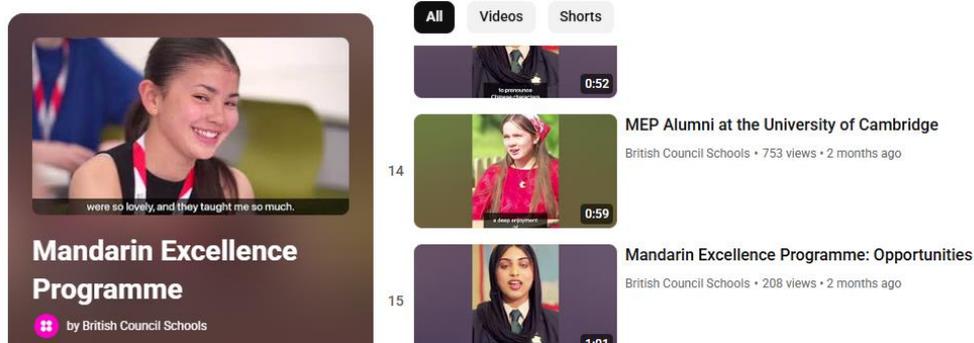
This is a unique and exciting programme to be part of. Your participation and advocacy are really valuable. By helping us communicate about the MEP within your school community, on your social media channels, in school email newsletters and through local media, you're helping show how important language learning is for young people. That's a message we want to share as widely as possible.

We hope you're looking forward to participating this year and supporting your pupils as they embark on their Mandarin-learning journey.

If you have any questions or would like additional communications support, please contact the British Council Mandarin Excellence Team at mepcourse@britishcouncil.org.

Communications checklist

- Let the school community know in your email newsletter, social media or other channels that you are taking part in the MEP.
- Post regular updates on your school's social media accounts about your pupils' progress in Mandarin, using the hashtag **#MandarinExcellence**.
- Follow us on X (Twitter). Our handle is @MEP_Excellence.
- Share [these MEP videos](#) on your school's digital channels so that your school community can learn more about the MEP.



Consider creating a dedicated MEP webpage on your school's website. Your school's website manager may link or embed any of the MEP videos on your website.

Social media

Social media is a quick and easy way to update people in both your immediate school community and wider networks and tell the story about your school's involvement in the MEP.

If you have some news, photos from a Mandarin-themed event or just want to shout about what a fantastic opportunity the MEP is, make sure to post on your school's Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram accounts.

We love to give shout-outs to the schools taking part in our programmes, so if you are posting, tagging us in your tweets and using the hashtag below will allow us to share your posts.

Some tips

- Use the hashtag **#MandarinExcellence** when you post anything about the MEP on social media so we can look out for your posts.

- Follow us on Twitter and tag us in your posts - @MEP_Excellence
- You may wish to tag the following MEP partners in your Twitter posts, or share some of their posts:
 - Department for Education - @educationgovuk
 - UCL Institute of Education - @IOE_London
 - British Council Schools - @Schools_British
- **Photos** can increase social media engagement. If your pupils are taking part in a fun activity or workshop, sharing pictures of colourful, pupil produced work can be very engaging.
- Short **videos** of your pupils discussing what they enjoy about Mandarin can be a powerful way to demonstrate the benefits of learning a foreign language – see our section on photography and video for more information.
- Remember to check your school's **consent policy** before posting photos and videos of your pupils on social media and always obtain parental consent.

Example Tweet:

We're excited to be taking part in the #MandarinExcellence Programme with @MEP_Excellence, which since 2016 has helped more than 16,000 school pupils in England get on track to fluency in Mandarin. Find out more below
<https://ci.ioe.ac.uk/mandarin-excellence-programme/>

Example newsletter copy or Facebook post:

We're delighted to be taking part in the Mandarin Excellence Programme – an intensive language programme that since 2016 has helped more than 16,000 school pupils in England get on track to fluency in Mandarin Chinese. Mandarin is recognised as one of the most important languages for the UK's future. Find out more here:
<https://ci.ioe.ac.uk/mandarin-excellence-programme/>

Local media

Your school's participation in the Mandarin Excellence Programme provides a good opportunity to get positive local media coverage for your school. This can include newspapers, TV and radio stations, as well as community magazines and websites. Journalists are always keen to hear about positive things going on in the local area. The clearer the information you can provide to them, the better.

Tips for engaging with local media

- Work with whoever is head of communications in your school. We understand that external communication is often centrally managed in schools. Build a relationship with your Communications Manager and make them aware of the programme, the communications content and support available.
- Identify local media outlets and find their **contact details** online. Most will have a general email address for their news desk but consider calling to ask if there's anyone who covers school and education stories.
- Use a **press release** to get the attention of your local media. Fill in our template press release received with this pack or use it to help you write your own.
- Including **quality photos or video** with your press release will increase your chances of getting media coverage. Use a file-sharing site such as [WeTransfer](#) for large files, rather than sending them as attachments.
- You can also contact local **TV and radio stations**. Identify a **spokesperson** at your school who can be interviewed and talk confidently about the MEP.
- Don't be nervous about giving interviews – journalists want to make an interesting and informative news package, and they won't be trying to catch you out! The British Council team can help with interview preparation.
- Remember to check your school's **consent policy** and always obtain parental consent before sending photos or videos of your pupils to the media.

Photography and video

Photos and videos can increase engagement on social media, and a selection of quality photos sent along with a press release will greatly increase your chance of media coverage.

The good news is that you don't need to be a professional – you can easily capture strong photos and videos using your smartphone.

Photography tips

- Use the 'rule of thirds' when framing photos – imagine a grid dividing your photo into nine sections and position the important elements in your scene along those lines or the points where they meet.
- Make sure the light is behind you and shining on the subject of the photo.
- Play around with taking photos from different angles and perspectives. Don't just line everyone up in rows!
- Candid photos are usually more interesting than posed photos, so try to take photos of your pupils whilst they're involved in activities.

Video tips

- If people are moving around when you're filming, don't try to follow them with your camera – let the action enter your shot and leave it.
- It's better to get four or five quality still shots that last around ten seconds each, rather than a lot of unsteady footage trying to follow the action.
- Film short videos of pupils talking about their Mandarin learning – ask them open questions such as "What's your favourite thing about studying Mandarin?"

Captioning photos

If you have photos of individuals or small groups of up to five people, clearly caption them so the journalist knows who everyone is and doesn't need to contact you for names.

Sharing photos and videos

Use a file-sharing site such as [WeTransfer](#) to send large files, rather than attaching them to emails, and share the link with journalists.

Consent

Remember to check your school's consent policy and obtain parental consent before sending photos or videos of your pupils to the media or inviting journalists to attend an event.

FAQs

Parents, community members, teachers at other schools and journalists may all want to find out more about the MEP. Here are some responses to the most frequently asked questions.

What exactly is the Mandarin Excellence Programme?

The MEP is a unique intensive language programme that since 2016 has helped more than 16,000 school pupils in England get on track to fluency in Mandarin Chinese. It's funded by the Department for Education (DfE) and delivered by UCL Institute of Education (IOE) in partnership with the British Council.

How does it work?

Beginning in Year 7, selected pupils take six hours of Mandarin every week, including three hours of classroom-taught lessons, to ensure that they're on track towards fluency.

Isn't six hours of Mandarin per week stressful for pupils?

This is an intensive language programme, and it isn't suitable for everyone. Schools take this into account when selecting pupils to participate and provide guidance and support to help them manage their work.

Why is the government encouraging schools to teach Mandarin?

Languages are crucial for work and life in our globally competitive economy. China is recognised as the world's second biggest economy, so it's vital that more young people leave school with a good grasp of Mandarin.

What are the benefits for pupils on the Mandarin Excellence Programme?

British Council research has highlighted Mandarin as one of the most important languages for the UK's prosperity over the next twenty years. The ability to speak Mandarin is an incredibly useful asset for pupils, both professionally and personally. It will give them a competitive edge in an increasingly connected world, enabling them to explore and engage with China, its culture and economy. An independent evaluation of the programme in 2023 identified that MEP pupils have significantly higher GCSE attainment than their non-MEP peers at every point of the grade distribution.

Isn't Mandarin a difficult language to learn?

Mandarin is a fascinating and rewarding language to learn and not necessarily more difficult to get to grips with when compared to other languages. In fact, some things are simpler – for example, unlike in French, there is no conjugation of verbs.

What can pupils do with their Mandarin skills in the future?

Pupils will be encouraged to continue learning Mandarin. IOE and the British Council are engaging with universities to ensure that there are relevant opportunities for those on the programme to advance their skills beyond school. 77 per cent of British business leaders surveyed in 2018 said that speaking Mandarin will give school leavers a career advantage.

Who should I contact if I need some advice on MEP-related press or media?

Please contact the MEP team on mepcourse@britishcouncil.org

Press release

Within with this pack, we have included a press release template to make it easy for you to gain press attention for your involvement in the programme. Complete it or use it as a guide to create your own and share with local press to raise awareness that your school is taking part in the programme.

Press release

[Date]

[School name] pupils learning Mandarin on flagship language programme

Pupils at **[school name]** in **[town/city/region]** are participating in an innovative language programme that has helped more than 16,000 pupils in England get on track to fluency in Mandarin Chinese since 2016

The [Mandarin Excellence Programme](#) gives pupils an unprecedented opportunity when it comes to language learning. The programme is funded by the Department for Education and delivered by the UCL Institute of Education in partnership with the British Council.

Mandarin is the most widely spoken language in the world and is recognised as a valuable skill for young people in the UK to acquire. Research by the British Council found that Mandarin is the second most important foreign language for the UK's influence on the global stage.

[Year group] pupils at **[school name]** spend an average of six hours a week studying Mandarin to help them reach a high level of language ability. This is significantly more time than most schools spend on languages education.

The programme includes an intensive-learning course with China for Year 9 pupils, with a strong focus on language and culture, which aims to build pupils' confidence and resilience. Findings from the British Council show nearly two thirds of language students at university have been inspired to study a language degree because of an international exchange trip whilst at school.

If applicable: **[School name]** joined the programme in **[year]** and since then has seen more than **[number]** pupils gain Mandarin skills. **[Add any interesting details about previous year groups or upcoming activity e.g., Hurdle Test scores, participation in China trip, participation in Virtual School Partnerships.]**

[Name of teacher / head teacher] said: "Insert a brief quote about your involvement in the programme and the importance of Mandarin at your school."

Professor Li Wei, Director and Dean, UCL Institute of Education, said: “The Mandarin Excellence Programme has helped more than 16,000 young people in 75 schools get on track to fluency in Mandarin Chinese. Five year groups of MEP students have now completed GCSE study achieving very impressive results. We are delighted with the progress made by [insert name of school] since they joined the programme, giving their pupils the chance to learn Mandarin to an advanced level.”

Scott McDonald, Chief Executive British Council, said:

“The Mandarin Excellence Programme is helping thousands of young people in England to develop the language expertise and intercultural skills which will open the door to a whole world of study and career opportunities. Mandarin is one of the most important languages for young people in the UK to learn right now. Not only does it lead to a greater understanding of China’s people and culture, it builds stronger connections and mutual trust between our two countries, which is essential for future business, trade and prosperity.”

-ENDS-

For more information please contact:

Richard Evans, British Council Media Manager: +44 (0)7759 717 810,

RichardJames.Evans@britishcouncil.org

About the British Council

The British Council is the UK’s international organisation for cultural relations and educational opportunities. We support peace and prosperity by building connections, understanding and trust between people in the UK and countries worldwide. We do this through our work in arts and culture, education and the English language. We work with people in over 200 countries and territories and are on the ground in more than 100 countries. In 2024–25 we reached 599 million people.

www.britishcouncil.org

About UCL Institute of Education (IOE)

With more than 5,600 students, 900 staff, 250 research projects, collaborations and cross-sector partnerships spanning five continents, our six departments and 38 centres work across education, culture, psychology and social science to improve lives.

Founded in 1902, IOE has been shaping policy and helping government, organisations and individuals navigate a changing society for the last 122 years. We lead with academic rigour and research with real-world impact to create a future that is inclusive and just, and have been ranked number one for Education every year since 2014 in the QS World University Rankings by Subject.

In December 2014 we merged with UCL, putting us at the heart of a comprehensive, world-top-ten university with a shared legacy of innovation and academic excellence.

www.ucl.ac.uk/ioe | [About us](#) | [IOE podcasts](#)