

# The Mandarin Excellence Programme

Information from the Department for Education



## Frequently Asked Questions:

**What is the programme?** The Mandarin Excellence Programme is a new Department for Education funded programme which will see at least 5,000 school pupils in England on track towards fluency Mandarin Chinese by 2020. Participating schools – with support from UCL Institute of Education and the British Council - are at the forefront of delivering the programme and funding is available to support successful delivery.

**Who will participate in the programme?** Ultimately, the programme will see 5,000 school pupils in England becoming proficient in Mandarin Chinese by 2020. The first cohort of schools will begin the programme in September 2016. The schools come from across England and it is expected that a few hundred pupils will start the programme this year.

**How is this being funded?** This is a Department for Education funded programme. Participating schools – with support from the UCL Institute of Education and the British Council - are at the forefront of delivering the programme. Funding is available to support successful delivery of the programme.

**How will pupils be chosen to participate?** The first cohort of schools will select which of their Year 7 pupils will take part. There is no limit to the number of pupils per school on the programme provided that the school is confident that they can meet the programme outcomes. While the programme is open to all secondary schools, funding to support development is only available for state-funded secondary schools. Expressions of interest are now being accepted from schools in England that wish to become part of the programme from both September 2016 and September 2017 (<http://ci.ioe.ac.uk/mandarin-excellence-programme/>).

## What will a typical week look like for a student on the programme?

On average over a year, students on the programme will take on eight hours of Mandarin every week. In order that pupils are on track towards fluency, a typical week will include four hours of classroom taught lessons. While it is at the discretion of schools to decide how to best fit the four hours of taught lessons into their timetable, putting this on the curriculum signals the seriousness of the programme.

**What level will pupils on the programme reach in terms of their language ability?** This is an intensive language programme with an aim that pupils achieve a proficient level of Mandarin Chinese.

**Is eight hours of a language per week not putting far too much stress on a young person?** As this is an intensive programme, it will be demanding for pupils involved and so won't be suitable for everyone. Schools will take this into account

when choosing young people to participate in the programme with guidance and support to be given throughout to ensure that pupils are able to cope with the level of study required.

**What will the benefits be for a young person taking on the programme?** In being the most widely spoken language in the world, it is seen that more young people in the UK need to master Mandarin if the country is to remain competitive in the global race. A recent CBI survey, for example, revealed the growing importance of the language for businesses, while British Council research has highlighted Mandarin as being one of the most important languages for the UK's future prosperity over the next twenty years. Having advanced Mandarin skills will therefore be excellent for work and for life in an increasingly connected world as well as an excellent asset for a young person's CV. This programme gives students an unprecedented opportunity to gain these skills at an early stage.

**What happens after 2020?** Students will be on track towards fluency in Mandarin Chinese, which they will continue beyond 2020.

**Why is the government encouraging more people to learn Mandarin Chinese?** Language skills are crucial for work and life in the global race, and Mandarin Chinese is one of the frontrunners when it comes to languages that matter most to the UK's future prosperity. If the UK is to remain competitive on the world stage, we need far more of our young people leaving school with a good grasp of Mandarin in order to successfully work abroad or for businesses here in the UK.

**Is Chinese not incredibly difficult 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 actually easier to learn – there is no conjugation of verbs like there is in French, for example.

**But what can young people who have advanced Mandarin go on to do?** As part of the programme, the UCL Institute of Education and the British Council are engaging with universities to ensure that there are relevant options for those on the programme to continue to advance their skills beyond school.

**Why should we encourage our young people to engage with China?** China is a fascinating country with an interesting history – learning Mandarin Chinese will help young people in the UK explore and connect with the country and its culture.

**Will the young people on the programme get the chance to go to China?** Yes, some students on the programme will be given the opportunity to spend time abroad in China.

