

REPORT ON THE PRESENT STATE OF CHINA RELATED STUDIES IN THE UK

The British Association for Chinese Studies



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Original report: Tracey Fallon

Previous report (2016): Pamela Hunt

Report updated for 2018/19 by Jonathan Dugdale

Report updated for 2019/20 by Barclay Bram

Report updated for 2020/21 by Naomi Standen

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Executive Summary

Aims

This report provides a survey of China related studies in the UK. It considers: student figures for Chinese studies; Chinese students studying in the UK; China related undergraduate and postgraduate courses on offer; and China related departments and research centres in UK institutions.

Summary

- Year-on-year numbers of students enrolled on Chinese studies related programmes in UK HEIs since 2017 have decreased each year in the figures provided by HESA (Higher Education Statistics Agency) but have risen for the last two years in the overall data from the UCCL survey. The (incomplete) numbers from the 15 universities that have responded for each of the last three years show a 13% fall in overall student numbers.
- The rise in the UCCL data is largely explained by the big jump in undergraduate (UG) figures created by 10 additional institutions submitting data for 2020-21.
- HESA counts students on joint degrees as fractions, and the fall in the HESA numbers for 2019/20 is almost certainly explained by a continuing shift towards joint degrees in that year that is visible in the comparable data from the 15 consistent responders. HESA institutional figures are probably of most use as a dataset provided as a service to the field for use by individual HEIs.
- The average total number of students per institution shows an apparent drop of 21% from 2019/20, while the data for the 15 consistent responders instead show just a small drop – under 2% – for 2020/21. For undergraduates the average for all submissions was virtually unchanged, so the overall drop reflects a reduction in taught postgraduate (PGT) numbers, even if taking into account the data missing this year from a university that has previously reported a large annual cohort.
- Single honours Chinese saw a 10% rise from the previous year in the overall figures, but there was a 65% rise in those taking joint honours including Chinese. The directly comparable figures from the 15 consistent responders diverge somewhat: a similar rise in single honours of 11%, but a 6% fall in joint honours. The overall increase in joint honours seems likely to reflect the expansion in the number of programmes and the addition of more universities offering Chinese studies, since most of the new offerings are joint degrees. This reinforces the direction of travel observed in the last few years, where language students in all languages, including Chinese, appear to be finding joint programmes more attractive than single honours.
- PGT numbers fell, but the recorded drop is mitigated by the omission of the figures for one university that normally has over a hundred PGT a year. Taking these into account, the resulting drop of 3% was probably due to Covid restrictions (international students reluctant to pay premium fees to take classes from home), Brexit (EU students) and the ‘hostile environment’ towards immigrants.
- Research postgraduate (PGR) numbers change more slowly and need to be watched to see if 2020’s small contraction persists in future years.
- Staff numbers have tumbled, largely due to Covid related budget cuts, which has worsened the staff : student ratio by 40%. Combining this with rising workloads generating concern about the sustainability of such staffing levels.

- Institutions with Confucius Institutes (CI) have around 60% more UGs on all programmes as those without, but their advantage in both PGT and PGR numbers fell significantly in 2020 to just half of those HEIs without a CI. CI institutions also employed only 6% more staff than other HEIs, rather than the 50% more seen in previous years.
- The number of Chinese students choosing to study at UK HEIs continues to grow with over 100,000 students concurrently enrolled for the first time. Chinese students now make up 48% of first year non-UK domiciled students at UK HEIs. Students from India, however, are increasing much more rapidly, and this comparison will be watched in future updates.
- More universities than ever are now running Chinese studies related programmes at undergraduate or postgraduate level, with 44 HEIs now represented in the UCCL annual survey, and there is huge variety in what is offered.
- A number of universities have ended the teaching of Chinese or in some cases all languages, citing funding issues arising from the pandemic. Others, however, are starting new programmes, notably St Andrews. The number of new entrants to the field may be just balancing those who are departing.
- A searchable spreadsheet of all 44 HEIs offering China related degrees has been attached to this report, containing tables of the latest statistics by institution from both HESA and UCCL (including a list of undergraduate and postgraduate Chinese studies programmes), separate tables for the 15 directly comparable institutions and for those with Confucius Institutes, and the figures submitted for the UCCL annual report.
- Factors to keep in mind include the continuing impacts of Covid, Brexit, the government's 'hostile environment' intended to dissuade immigration, relations between China and the West, the Chinese economy, and the UK government's hostility to the humanities including languages.

Aims and considerations

This is the latest version of a report originally commissioned by the Universities' China Committee in London (UCCL), and owned and updated annually by the British Association for Chinese Studies (BACS).

The aim of this report is to provide researchers, students and other interested parties with a broad survey of the present state of studies relating to China in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). It seeks to ascertain student demand, course offerings, and research activity in the UK. The survey focuses on: numbers of undergraduate and postgraduate students of China related studies; the number of PRC and Hong Kong students coming to the UK; the provision of undergraduate and postgraduate courses related to China in the UK; and the presence of Chinese departments and research networks in the UK.

There has always been great difficulty in gaining an accurate picture of study and research about China, and if anything, this is getting harder. Research and academic exchange activities can be situated within any topic, discipline, partner relationship, or institution. Researchers located in disciplines across the arts and humanities, social sciences, natural sciences and medicine may be carrying out research with a China focus. Any UK institution may be engaged in academic exchanges and collaborative projects with partners based in China. Thus, the range of China focused study, research and UK-China academic exchange in the UK is extensive. Furthermore, staff and student numbers may be recorded in different ways by different HEIs, while the categorisation of subjects by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) has changed, together with the granularity of freely available data, making official numbers for Chinese studies harder to obtain. This report presents an overview of the state of the field through an examination of student numbers, institutions, research activity and Chinese international students in the UK.

Some points which should be made at the outset: the existential threat to the HE sector from Covid 19 appears to be abating as of October 2021, but the long term effects of, for instance, reduced staffing, Covid-induced restructuring, and new working methods, will have long term effects. Although relations between China and the rest of the world have soured, the Trump presidency and the handling and repercussions of the withdrawal from Afghanistan have also damaged the international standing of the US, while China's profile continues to rise and its efforts to provide international leadership are being received more favourably on some issues in some quarters (e.g. some investments related to the Belt and Road Initiative). The impact that both Covid and shifting geopolitics might have on student numbers are beginning to show up in the data, and since neither issue is likely to disappear soon, they will continue to provide important considerations for future iterations of this report.

On the domestic front, although Brexit is now a reality, many of its workings and implications remain unresolved, which means that we still cannot clearly understand the impact it is having on the sector. Over a longer period, market models have become embedded in discussions about higher education policy, with government ministers recently emphasising issues such as 'value for money' and future earning potential as measures of degree programme quality.¹ Since languages are relatively 'expensive' to teach, and since for women, at least, 'the financial gains of studying ... languages are "close to zero"',² the survival of degree programmes in Chinese, in company with other Modern Languages, is at even greater risk under the present administration.

We will return to these considerations in the analysis that follows.

¹ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-51136353>; <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-44399444> (both accessed 12 Oct 2021).

² <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-51676530> (accessed 12 Oct 2021).

Students taking Chinese studies in the UK

There are currently two main sources for student numbers enrolled in 'Chinese studies' courses at UK HEIs. One set of figures is obtained for the UCCL by means of an annual survey. The other set of figures now has to be purchased as a bespoke dataset from HESA. Taken together, these datasets can help us to build a picture of student numbers for Chinese studies in UK HEIs, but both also have significant drawbacks that make an accurate assessment of real world numbers almost impossible. Both sets of figures will be discussed below.

UCCL figures

The UCCL carries out an annual survey of the number of staff and students participating in Chinese studies programmes in UK HEIs, which forms part of its annual report. For each university, numbers are recorded for staff; single and joint honours undergraduates (UG), taught postgraduates (PGT); and research postgraduates (PGR), in all cases distinguishing between full time and part time.

Each university identified as potentially offering a 'Chinese studies' related degree is sent a proforma requesting numbers of staff and students based on the following definition of Chinese studies:

Chinese Studies is here understood as a degree programme consisting of Chinese (Mandarin) language study with some additional element of China related study, such as culture, history, politics etc. However, the term can apply to language degree programme students who study Chinese jointly with another discipline or language.

While it is important to identify that 'Chinese studies' is more than just the study of Mandarin language, the above definition makes it challenging for any individual in each HEI to provide a complete set of numbers, as both the staff and students covered by this description could – and usually do – appear in several different departments in the HEI. Perhaps as a result, a large percentage of institutions either do not respond to the proforma or caveat their response with a statement that the numbers may not be accurate across all departments or reflective of the university as a whole. With discrete 'Chinese studies' departments increasingly being divided up and their staff incorporated into the wider structure of the HEI – for instance by transfer into Modern Languages or sometimes disciplinary departments such as Film Studies, Politics or Sociology – obtaining accurate numbers will only become more difficult in future. A new methodological tweak initiated in last year's (2020) report is that in the attached table are included comments on the statistics offered by institutions so that users can sometimes see how responding institutions were choosing to define candidates. This allows readers to better understand the differences between institutions and the difficulty in trying to create a definition that works for the entire range of HEIs represented.

This year, of the 44 institutions identified in the UCCL survey, 29 responded to the proforma with student numbers. This is a considerable improvement on the 19 respondents of the previous two years, and comfortably breaks the previous record of 20 replies set in 2017/18. The table includes four years of data from 2017/18 to 2020/21. However, because there are some differences each year in which universities respond, the directly comparable data is limited to that from the institutions that have provided figures in each of the last three years. This period is the minimum useful span, while aiming to maximise the number of qualifying institutions by not setting the bar too high. This year 15 institutions have maintained their history of responding regularly to the survey: Bangor, Cambridge, Edinburgh, Exeter, Glasgow, King's College London, Lancaster, Newcastle, Nottingham, Regents London, Sheffield, SOAS, Trinity St David, Warwick and Westminster. This year two of the institutions in this list responded after the first draft of this report was written, and it was instructive to notice the difference their (relatively large) numbers made to the analysis; for example, for some categories what looked like a fall was converted into a rise and *vice versa*.

Tables 1 and 2 show an overview of the results of the UCCL surveys from 2017/18 to 2020/21. Table 1 shows the complete results of the survey and Table 2 shows the numbers from HEIs that

responded in all of the last three years. The two are placed together to enable ready comparison. Staff and student numbers for individual HEIs can be found in the main spreadsheet attached to this report.

Table 1: Staff and student total numbers from UCCL surveys 2017/18 to 2020/21

Year	Responses	F/T Staff	P/T Staff	Staff Total	F/T UG Single Honours	P/T UG Single Honours	F/T UG Joint Honours	P/T UG Joint Honours	F/T PGT	P/T PGT	F/T PGR	P/T PGR	Student Total
2017	20	111	20	131	380	40	648	0	373	8	153	14	1616
2018	19	87	26	113	272	1	738	1	346	13	140	13	1524
2019	19	116	37	153	286	0	618	2	436	13	186	9	1551
2020	29	124.6	36.75	161.35	315	0	1020	1	308	20	197	6	1867

Table 2: Staff and student total numbers from HEIs that responded to the UCCL survey in all years 2018/19 to 2020/21 (n = 15)

Year	F/T Staff	P/T Staff	Staff Total	F/T UG Single Honours	P/T UG Single Honours	F/T UG Joint Honours	P/T UG Joint Honours	F/T PGT	P/T PGT	F/T PGR	P/T PGR	Student Total
2018	78	22	100	224	1	703	1	353	13	139	13	1447
2019	95	28	123	183	1	533	2	409	13	161	13	1315
2020	79.6	21	100.6	205	0	501	1	273	15	143	9	1144

The UCCL survey has historically always asked about part time students. The table clearly shows that part time study is extremely rare at undergraduate level, with the exception of the 40 students (all at SOAS) recorded in the anomalous year of 2017, which appears to be followed by a change in SOAS's method of counting for their submission. The part time figures remain more significant among postgraduates, and are rising (slightly) for taught courses and falling for PGR. The first probably reflects the out of pocket cost of a PGT degree, for which loans for UK students have been rarely obtainable until recently. The second may indicate that more PhD students have full funding, perhaps because more are now international students, and so can or need to study full time. Conversely, it may also be that fewer people, and perhaps especially UK students, are willing to self fund a PhD course, a route that is more likely to entail part time study alongside paid employment. This year the tables have all been reorganised to prioritise the type of degree rather than the full time or part time route of study, so that it is easier to see the total figures for, for example, PGT courses, regardless of route.

Turning to the numbers themselves, we can see in Table 1 that the UCCL data shows a recovery in overall student numbers, from 1616 in 2017, down to 1524 in 2018 but then climbing slightly to 1551 in 2019/20. The considerable rise (over 20%) in 2020/21, for a total of 1867, is attributable less to the expansion of the subject than to the larger number of responses (29 as against 19 for each of the previous two years). The change from 2017 to 2018 was largely accounted for by there being one response fewer in 2018 from institutions with undergraduate programmes (Oxford, normally taking 60 undergraduates) compared to the previous year, although two thirds of this was offset by the anomalous inclusion of SOAS's part time figures, discussed above.

Considering the average number of students per institution, shown in Table 3, should allow us to compare years with different numbers of responses, but in fact the 2020 figures suggest how institutional returns that diverge notably from previous patterns can skew the total figures without offering much useful information. The average per responding institution, where the number of

responses was steady, was 80.8 for 2017/18, 80.2 for 2018/19, and showed a small rise to 81.6 in 2019/20. In 2020/21, however, with more institutions responding and larger numbers overall, the average was just 64.4, an apparent one-year drop of 21%. These figures may suggest that a larger number of students are being shared around a still larger number of HEIs, but we also note that beneath the headline figures is a complex picture of closures of some programmes (e.g. Aston, Nottingham, Regents), the renewed response to the survey by some larger programmes (e.g. Chester, Leeds), and some elements of apparent expansion (e.g. Liverpool, Manchester).³

We cannot tell whether the roughly 20% rise in overall student numbers set against the roughly 20% fall in the average per institution is largely a result of the Covid pandemic. The lockdown starting in March 2020 coincided with the university application period, and somewhat unexpectedly, there proved to be increased rather than reduced demand for university places, resulting in a record number of applications for September 2020. Because the lockdown had prevented a great deal of school attendance, an algorithm was applied to that summer's A level results seeking to ensure comparability with previous years, but this approach had to be abandoned due to applicant protests after it produced a downgrading of 39,000 results. Many universities had by this time filled all their places, but were legally required to take all the students whose reinstated grades meant they had met the offer they had been made for entry. In turn, this forced the complete removal of the cap on undergraduate numbers for that year.⁴ This bumper cohort will be working its way through programmes for two or three more years. On top of this, applications, offers and grades all rose for September 2021 entry as well. It remains to be seen what, if any, effects this has had on Chinese studies in next year's state of the field report.

Table 3: Students and staff per institution

Year	HEIs	Staff Total	Average per HEI	UG Total	Average per HEI	PGT Total	Average per HEI	PGR Total	Average per HEI	PG total	Average per HEI	Student Total	Average per HEI
2017	20	131	6.55	1068	53.4	381	19.05	167	8.35	548	27.4	1616	80.8
2018	19	113	5.95	1012	53.3	359	18.89	153	8.05	512	26.0	1524	80.2
2019	19	153	8.05	907	47.7	449	23.63	195	10.26	644	33.9	1550	81.6
2020	29	161.35	5.36	1336	46.07	328	11.31	203	7.00	531	18.3	1867	64.4

Overall figures: undergraduates (UG)

For 2020 we see a huge jump of 47% in undergraduate numbers to a total of 1336, from a recent low point of 907 the previous year. However, this is with the addition of data from ten more institutions, and the institutional average shows a fractional fall from 47.7 to 46.07. This has also occurred almost at the bottom of the demographic curve in which the number of 18 year olds has been falling.⁵ We do not see here any effect from an overall trend of rising undergraduate numbers in all subjects assisted by the gradual lifting of caps on student numbers.⁶ Whereas universities were once subject to quotas for undergraduate recruitment, since 2011 HEIs have gradually been allowed to take many more students, normally up to a 'cap' and provided that applicants attain a minimum

³ These changes may be observed in the attached spreadsheet.

⁴ <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2020/aug/17/uk-exams-debacle-how-did-results-end-up-chaos>; <https://www.researchprofessionalnews.com/rr-he-government-education-2020-8-department-for-education-scrap-student-number-cap/> (both accessed 12 Oct 2021).

⁵ https://www.researchgate.net/figure/National-demographic-trends-for-18-19-age-group-in-UK_fig1_331345966 (accessed 12 Oct 2021).

⁶ To make things more complicated, the lifting of caps has occurred in the context of a tripling of course fees, which now provide the great majority of university income.

set of A level grades. In general, language degrees – evidently including Chinese studies – do not seem to have been significant beneficiaries of these circumstances, and the UK’s resulting lack of language skills continues as a major concern of a diverse set of public bodies from the British Academy to the Association of School and College Leaders.⁷

These undergraduate totals also show a surge in the rebalancing from single honours Chinese to joint degrees – either with another language or with another subject area such as business, political science or media studies – that has been noted in every version of this report since 2013. This shift seems to be happening across the field of Modern Languages as well as in Chinese studies. In Table 1 we see that the largest reported numbers for single honours were in 2017 (380 students), while the low came the following year in 2018 (273 students). 2019 showed a small recovery to 286 students, and this lacked the expected 60 or so single honours students at Oxford and reflected the loss of roughly 50 more due to the cessation of Nottingham’s single honours programme, suggesting that the real increase was considerably greater. The 2020 figure of 315 students is an increase of 10% over the previous year, but still 17% down on the high of 2017. Since this goes against what has appeared to be a trend against single honours, future reports will watch with care to see if these numbers experience a more sustained recovery.

Numbers for joint honours have fluctuated considerably over the last four years, but in 2020 leapt from their recent lowest point of 620 in 2019, to a startling and encouraging 1021, a rise of 65%. In most joint honours programmes the language component of the degree is the same as for single honours: usually 40 credits out of 120 in each of the first two years of UK based study. For a full joint degree, students will then take a non-language option in Chinese studies to make up their credits to 60 – half of the credits required each year. Where Chinese studies is taken as a minor, the 40 credits of language will take up all the available credits. Accordingly, the student preference for joint degrees including Chinese studies does not imply any reduction in graduate language competence. It does, however, suggest that students taking Chinese alongside another subject, such as history, linguistics or sociology, are getting a full disciplinary training alongside their language acquisition, and it is easy to see why this might be attractive to so many students.

This change could be seen as part of a wider trend away from Area studies in UK HEIs over at least the last decade that has led to closures first of smaller departments but more recently even large centres such as at Nottingham. On the other hand, some of the larger departments, such as English, History or Politics, which were traditionally deeply Eurocentric, are slowly undergoing ‘internationalisation’, ‘globalisation’ or ‘decolonisation’, primarily by recruiting staff to teach specialisms in different world regions, sometimes including East Asia. Having such regional expertise in these departments is creating more opportunities for joint honours students to complement their language study with specialist teaching on China in the wider disciplinary context of a different department.

Non-degree study

At the same time, many non-language degree programmes allow, encourage or require students to include in their degree some study of a different discipline, sometimes for credit and sometimes not, and languages are a fairly popular option for this purpose. Students studying for credit will typically join first-year Chinese studies students in language classes taught for four or more hours a week, while uncredited offerings are typically less demanding, and usually work like an evening class, meeting for perhaps two hours a week. Students taking either option are usually only able to fit a limited amount of language into their programme of credited study or their informal study schedule,

⁷ [Towards a national languages strategy: education and skills](#). Proposals from the British Academy, the Arts and Humanities Research Council, the Association of School and College Leaders, the British Council and Universities UK, July 2020.

and thus many colleagues responsible for Chinese language teaching find themselves with large numbers in introductory classes, most of whom do not continue much further with the language. This phenomenon, however, may provide the most comparable measure of student uptake of Chinese language study, since it is relatively straightforward to count how many students are enrolled in first year Chinese (for credit), or in uncredited classes. Accordingly, in an effort to provide at least one consistently comparable measure of trends in Chinese studies across UK HEIs, this year the UCCL survey added questions asking for these two numbers. It is hoped that over time these extra pieces of data will enable us to build a more systematic picture of this key activity in Chinese studies. The number on first year modules would include all those taking Chinese studies degrees, but the balance would represent those registered for degrees in other subjects.

Most Chinese studies degrees are four years long, including a year abroad. The total number of undergraduate students for 2020 is 1336, which gives us roughly 334 in the first year. If we take these away from the total of 704 students taking first year Chinese, we have 370 students taking Chinese language as part of a different degree. Although some free text comments indicate that there may still be occasional complications in how these students are counted, in general this should provide a more stable comparison of Chinese language uptake from year to year. The number of students taking extracurricular Chinese language (566) is considerably smaller than those taking the language for credit. From next year, we will begin to track changes in the level of wider student interest represented by these numbers.

Taught postgraduates (PGT)

In contrast to the clear rise in joint honours, Table 1 shows a dramatic fall (27%) in taught postgraduate (PGT) numbers in 2020 as compared to the previous year, even with many more HEIs included in the 2020 figures. However, these numbers are skewed by the absence of Newcastle's postgraduate numbers, which normally provide well over a hundred PGT to the total. Nonetheless, even if a reasonable estimated figure for Newcastle were included, PGTs would still have fallen, though only by 2.9%. These relatively small changes suggest that the diversity of institutional offerings and responses to circumstances has had a balancing effect. Thus Glasgow did not teach its MSc International Relations in 2020/21 and Cambridge, Sheffield and Westminster's PGT figures were all well down on 2019's numbers, but these were compensated by rises at Edinburgh, Exeter, Kings and Warwick (increases total 54 students and decreases 52).

A total number for enrolments to PGT courses in all subjects for 2020 is not yet available from HESA, but anecdotally, courses that typically recruit largely UK students reported increased enrolments. PGT courses classed by survey respondents as Chinese studies frequently recruit significant numbers of international students, so the drop in numbers for these courses may have been a result of such students being unable to reach the UK due to Covid, or being put off by new immigration rules or lack of clarity resulting from Brexit. On the other hand, the media reported that, looking across all subjects, universities unexpectedly recruited a record number of international students in 2020, mostly to PGT courses. There is in principle no limit to such recruitment since neither PGT degrees nor international students have ever been subject to direct quotas or caps. But unlike the undergraduate figures, where Chinese studies seems to have benefitted from the general increase in student numbers, the reduction in Chinese studies PGT numbers for 2020 seems to stand in contrast to PGT admissions across all subject areas.

Research postgraduates (PGR)

PGT courses generally last for 12 months and numbers can accordingly be volatile, whereas a PhD involves three years of registered study, and so annual figures change more slowly. PGR numbers

appear to have remained quite steady between 2019 and 2020, rising from 195 to 203 students.⁸ Last year's report hypothesised that the rise in PhD numbers for 2019 (from 153 in 2018) might have reflected the way that institutions compile their data, since it is relatively easy to identify students working on China related PhDs even if they are located in a department like History or Economics. If we consider the number of PGR per institution, however, we can see in Table 3 that there has been a fall of roughly a third from 10.3 to 7. This may suggest that there is an underlying downward change behind the overall figures. It is easy to imagine that UK students might hesitate to embark upon a PhD amid the uncertainty of Covid and Brexit, and that international PhD students might share with international PGT students the same concerns about Covid, Brexit and immigration regimes.

Staff

Turning to the staff who teach these students, it is most useful to compare staff per institution (teaching at all levels) and staff : student ratios (SSR) for undergraduates.⁹ Staffing numbers appear to fluctuate considerably, as seen in Table 3, for which the most recent figures show a dramatic 31% fall in 2020, despite the larger student body.¹⁰ Staffing numbers had already fallen faster than student numbers between 2017 and 2018, from 131 to 113 people. The SSR thus rose from 8.15 to 8.96 undergraduates per staff member. Staffing then rose by fully 26% in 2019, to 153, and because there was only a slight rise in student numbers, the SSR fell by 34% to just 5.92. For 2020 staff numbers have increased to 161.35, but they are spread across ten more institutions and are teaching 20% more students. As a result, the SSR is now 40% higher at 8.28, more than wiping out the previous year's fall, and placing considerable and sometimes excessive strain on teaching staff, particularly in the context of the extra work involved in teaching in Covid conditions. As in other subject areas, workloads are not sustainable.

This situation may again be attributed to Covid. With the onset of lockdown universities immediately began to seek cost savings; their first recourse in many cases was not to renew temporary contracts, and in some cases redundancies followed, some voluntary and some compulsory. In some cases these moves were combined with closure of degree programmes or even ending language teaching altogether (e.g. Aston). The UCCL figures do not specifically record temporary contracts, and although many of these are also fractional (part time), it is also the case that language teaching particularly lends itself to fractional contracts that may be permanent or renewed on a rolling basis. Conversation classes also have a much more rigid maximum size than many other types of teaching session, which may have helped to protect some jobs. We may further observe that since March 2020 many universities have expressed concerns about their fee income, which is now their main source of revenue. They are, however, currently taking fees from more students overall, including more international students, who are charged much more, while paying fewer staff.

⁸ PGR numbers overwhelmingly consist of PhDs, but include a very small proportion of research based Masters degrees.

⁹ These figures give SSRs that are better than the reality because it is too complicated to disaggregate the four institutions that have only postgraduate programmes, which inflates the total number of staff in relation to undergraduate teaching.

¹⁰ Full staff figures were not provided this year for Newcastle which, as the previous years' figures show, has a healthy number of staff, but scattered over several departments. However, including these figures would only have mitigated, not changed, the overall trend for 2020.

Comparable institutions

If we turn to the 15 institutions for which we have comparable numbers since 2018, shown in Table 2, we see a rather different picture. Among the comparable HEIs, overall student numbers have fallen by 13% rather than rising by 21% for all institutions. This difference is not reflected consistently in all categories. Single honours shows an 11% rise in line with the 10% rise in the overall figures, while PGT figures, taking into account an estimate for Newcastle, show a similar drop (2.6%) as the overall figures (2.9%). The difference is seen first in the PGR numbers, down 12.6% in 2020 as opposed to rising 6% from 186 to 197 in the overall figures, although this divergence is attributable to the extra numbers counted overall. The greatest, and most surprising, disparity is the 6.2% fall in joint honours at the comparable institutions, in contrast to the remarkable 65% rise overall. One can only conclude that the additional institutions in the overall figures focus heavily on joint honours, while the comparable institutions appear to be strongholds of single honours.

Overall, then, these figures, which count real students without apportionment, at the same set of institutions over three consecutive years, do provide a useful alternative view of the state of Chinese studies. They suggest that the changes in the numbers seen in the overall data have some basis in reality, and are not just an artefact of recording methodologies. Where there are disparities between the overall and the comparable figures, we have reason to reflect on why that might be. Nonetheless, as several colleagues noted in their free text comments, this has been an extraordinary year in numerous ways, and no matter which figures one uses it is impossible to predict whether the changes of 2020 represent new trends or anomalies.

To close this section, it was noted last year that it might be worth looking at the number of applicants per place. However, although UCAS collects these numbers, the new subject categories unhelpfully group Chinese studies into Asian studies, which is not further disaggregated, so the necessary figures are simply not available.

HESA Figures

Figures for students enrolled in Chinese studies at university level are provided by HESA. Subject level data by institution is no longer freely available from HESA, so the data used here comes from a bespoke request, for which a charge is made.¹¹ The HESA subject areas included are (101164) Chinese studies, together with (101165) Chinese languages, (101166) Chinese literature and (101167) Chinese society and culture studies.¹² The most recent HESA data is always for the previous year, so the following discussion is based on the numbers for 2019/20.

The request covers undergraduates, Masters and doctoral students, all listed separately for each HEI.¹³ The HESA figures can only provide an impression of enrolments on Chinese studies programmes as the numbers have been apportioned; that is, they have been calculated by counting students studying single honours Chinese as 1.0, joint honours as 0.5 and as a minor subject as 0.33. Part time students are also counted according to the proportion of their course that they are completing in the relevant year, which will normally be 0.5.¹⁴ Therefore, these figures do not refer to individuals, but to the number of notional places taken up by a larger number of real students on a range of programmes where Chinese studies comprises different proportions of the degree.

¹¹ Totals by subject for all institutions are still freely available, but this is of limited value for this report.

¹² These are the HECoS (Higher Education Classification of Subjects) codes, which were adopted by HESA in 2019/20, replacing a system that had included as a separate category for Chinese studies.

¹³ The HESA figures for Masters students include research Masters and taught Masters in the same count, whereas the UCCL figures count research Masters as PGR along with PhDs.

¹⁴ For more details see HESA, Count of students vs full-person equivalent (FPE) vs full-time equivalent (FTE), <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/support/definitions/students> (accessed 31 August 2021).

Furthermore, HESA provides all of their data rounded to the nearest 5, which removes very small programmes from the figures altogether.

Due to the rising proportion of students taking Chinese studies as part of a joint degree or as a minor subject, the HESA data offers an increasingly significant undercount of the number of actual students taking Chinese studies. It seems likely that the HESA numbers represent no more than half of those actual undergraduates involved in Chinese studies. Moreover, HESA figures will not count postgraduate students working on a China focused research topic if their degree title does not contain the word 'Chinese' as in the four HESA categories listed above. This may be less of a problem at PGT level, since Masters courses in Translation or Interpreting provide probably the largest proportion of PGT students in Chinese studies. However, it becomes a much greater problem at PGR level, where more students with China interests are registered in disciplinary departments such as History or Sociology. Hence a student working on an aspect of Chinese politics and registered for a PhD in Politics will not feature at all in the HESA data requested. Thus the HESA data shares with the UCCL figures this problem of how to count (or even locate) those engaged in China related study where this is not mentioned in their degree title.

This issue is highlighted by the nine HEIs that appear in the UCCL list but not in the HESA data (Birmingham, Cambridge (!), Edge Hill, Heriot Watt, Hertfordshire, Portsmouth, Regents, Southampton and Ulster, even though several responded to the UCCL proforma.¹⁵ Some of these nine have no HESA data because they have no degrees (Edge Hill, Southampton, Ulster), some because they only have minors in Chinese (Birmingham, Hertfordshire, Regents), some either because their degrees do not fit the HESA subject definitions or because the HEI did not provide HESA with data (Portsmouth, which has joint degrees where Mandarin is one of a suite of language options), and some because their relevant programmes had 2.4 or fewer students and so would have been rounded down to zero. We also note here that the University of Bedfordshire and Glyndwr University are included in the HESA table but were not on the list used to request the UCCL figures. These institutions will be sent UCCL proformas for next year's report.

One result is that, as shown in Table 4, in 2019/20 there were more students recorded as enrolled in Chinese studies in the UCCL data (1551 students) from only 20 responding HEIs than there were by HESA (1105 students). The patterns of average number of students per HEI are also quite different, with UCCL figures suggesting more students distributed over more smaller programmes where the HESA figures fluctuate considerably with a consistently falling student body. Since HESA data is only available for the previous academic year, it is impossible to make any direct comparisons with this year's UCCL data.

Table 4: HESA data – most recent three years available

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
UCCL All Students	1616	1524	1551	1867
UCCL Average/HEI	80.80	80.21	81.63	64.38
HESA All Students	1315	1200	1105	
HESA Average/HEI	29.89	41.38	31.57	

¹⁵ Cambridge continues to have a programme, but recruitment is low, and may not have reached the threshold to provide a number greater than zero.

These differences are important for anyone seeking to use data to support arguments for defending, starting or expanding Chinese studies offerings. Senior management teams are likely to use HESA data and thus may interpret Chinese studies as a declining subject, even though the UCCL data is far more granular and representative, in spite of its incompleteness and the difficulties of capturing the complexities of the field. Providing the institutional HESA data may thus be seen as a service to the field, of interest to colleagues making comparisons for specific institutional purposes.

We may make a few comments on the data for individual institutions found in the attached spreadsheet. The HESA figures show the huge fall in numbers at Nottingham due to the closure of the Chinese Studies department and the reallocation of staff, resulting in the teaching out of single honours, of which the last year was 2019/20. The numbers also appear to show no students at Essex, even though its programme is in the strongly recruiting area of Translation studies (MA Translation and Professional Practice). Numbers have been steady or rising across 3 years of HESA data at Bangor, Cardiff, De Montfort, Durham, Goldsmiths, Hull, Kings, Lancaster, Liverpool, Manchester, Manchester Metropolitan, Newcastle, Nottingham Trent, Trinity St David and Westminster (15 institutions), but may be falling at Bristol, Chester, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Keele, Leeds, Oxford, Sheffield, SOAS and Swansea. The programmes with steady or rising numbers include only one of the half dozen oldest programmes that traditionally focused on single honours (Durham), while those with falling numbers include most of these (Edinburgh, Leeds, Oxford, Sheffield, SOAS), which tend to have larger enrolments.¹⁶

In terms of the field as whole, the greatest value of the HESA data is that it is recorded robustly for all UK HEIs and therefore should offer a more consistent picture than the UCCL data. The HESA data that is freely available also offers national totals for different categories, including international students, and we now consider these overall figures.

Table 5 shows the total number of students enrolled in Chinese studies degrees in each academic year from 2014/15 to 2019/20, using freely available HESA data.¹⁷

Table 5: HESA total student numbers for Chinese studies 2014-20

Year	Total Students Enrolled	From UK	From EU	Non UK/EU
2014/15	1440	850	190	395
2015/16	1385	895	175	315
2016/17	1420	925	180	315
2017/18	1325	885	170	270
2018/19	1225	805	160	260
2019/20	1150	785	160	205

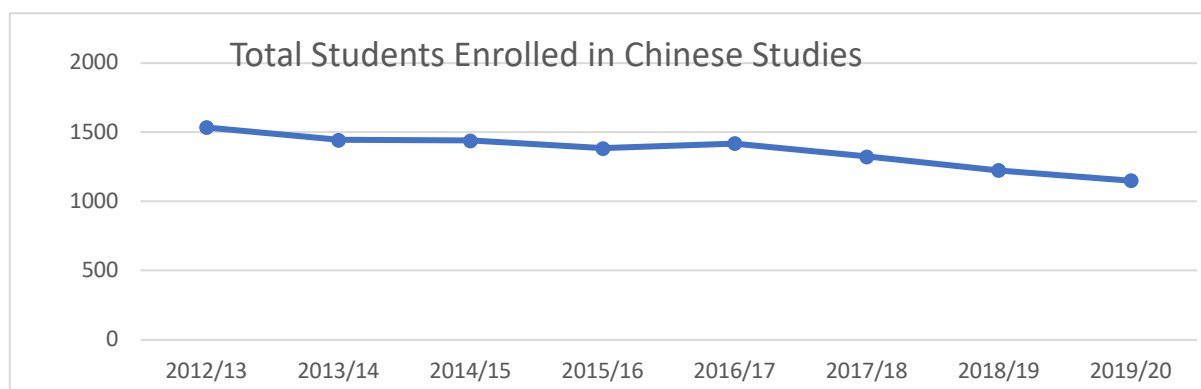
According to these figures enrolments in Chinese studies have been falling overall since at least 2015. If we include the total numbers for 2012/13 and 2013/14 that were recorded in the previous

¹⁶ Until the beginnings of expansion in the field in the 1990s, there were single honours Chinese programmes only at Cambridge, Durham, Edinburgh, Leeds, Oxford and SOAS, joined by Sheffield a little ahead of a wider growth and diversification in offerings. There were no joint programmes, but Leeds required a minor in a different discipline.

¹⁷ Note that there is a discrepancy between the freely available overall totals (1150) and the sum of the totals for individual institutions (1105). Typographical error seems unlikely since one would imagine that HESA does not engage in any manual entry of data, so the most likely explanation is that the freely available totals are able to include numbers that are too small to appear on the list of individual institutions.

versions of this report, the downward trend only becomes more apparent. In the graph below we can see how student numbers have fallen from 1535 in 2012 to 1150 in 2019/20, a drop of 25%. This fall applies to UK, EU and non-UK/EU students alike, despite a small rise in UK and EU students in 2016/17. From the high point of 2016/17 the drop for UK students is 15% to 2019/20; it is 11% for EU students and almost 35% for non-UK/EU students.

Graph 1



As noted, however, the HESA data is not representative of actual student numbers. A likely factor contributing to the decrease is the redistribution of students from single to joint honours degrees, noted above. Since HESA counts joint honours students as only 50% in Chinese studies, the shift towards joint honours that we saw in the UCCL data between 2018 and 2020 would more than compensate for the year on year decrease suggested in the HESA figures.

Tables 6, 7 and 8 show the HESA data for undergraduates, and for taught and research postgraduates. The tables record the total number of students for each academic year along with the number of first years, full and part time students, and the shares that come from the UK, EU and non-UK/EU countries.¹⁸ These tables only run to 2018/19 because at time of writing the relevant HESA data for 2019/20 had not yet been published.

Table 6: HESA undergraduate Chinese studies breakdown 2014-19

Year	Total UG	Yr 1 UG	F/T UG	P/T UG	UK	EU	Non UK/EU
2014/15	1110	330	1060	50	790	150	165
2015/16	1120	385	1070	50	835	140	145
2016/17	1100	320	1045	55	865	135	100
2017/18	1030	300	985	45	820	135	75
2018/19	940	250	920	10	750	130	60

The figures in Table 6 confirm an overall downward trend to 2019, which appears to have been accelerating in the last two years recorded here, with falls of over 6% and nearly 9% in 2017 and 2018, as against a 2% fall in 2016. UK numbers have been most volatile, with rises of 6% and 4% in 2015 and 2016 wiped out, and more, by the subsequent falls of 5% and 9%. EU numbers have been

¹⁸ The HESA numbers for each individual institution are also available in the spreadsheet that accompanies this report.

the slowest to change, but the best they have done is remain the same from year to year, and usually they have fallen. Non UK/EU figures have been plummeting by no less than double figures every year, with the biggest fall (31%) in 2016, in a year when UK numbers rose slightly.

Aside from reductions due to the shift towards more joint degrees, it seems likely that the large falls in non-UK students can be at least partly explained by the combination of international fees and the ‘hostile environment’ towards international students that applies even for temporary stays for study purposes. At times these frequently changing policies and regulations appear to have specifically targeted students, as with the Border Agency’s revocation of London Metropolitan’s ability to sponsor non-EU students for visas in 2012, and the Home Office’s response to reports – later found to be wildly exaggerated – of organised cheating in English language exams for foreign students in 2014.¹⁹ Conversely, the change to visa rules which allows students to remain in the UK to work for two years after completing degrees, which came into effect in September 2019, will not have appeared in the data yet, so it remains to be seen whether or not this will offset the various downward pressures.²⁰ The impact of the Covid pandemic is also not yet visible in the most recent HESA data, and will be an important part of the analysis in next year’s update of this report.

Table 7: HESA Taught Postgraduate Chinese studies breakdown 2014-19

Year	Total taught PG	F/T PGT	P/T PGT	UK	EU	Non UK/EU
2014/15	270	260	10	50	30	190
2015/16	235	225	10	60	30	145
2016/17	280	265	15	55	40	185
2017/18	260	240	20	60	35	165
2018/19	250	235	15	55	25	175

Postgraduate programmes are less likely to be joint degrees and so are much less subject to reductions created by HESA’s counting method. The PGT figures in Table 7 show a more stable picture than undergraduates, with annual fluctuations reflecting the fact that most PGT courses are just 12 months long. The relatively small numbers in the table are affected by HESA’s policy of providing data rounded to the nearest 5, which will tend to magnify the percentage changes and thereby distort their significance, but we note that the pattern is similar to that provided by the UCCL figures, which also show a slight fall in the years it is possible to compare, from 2017 to 2018.

With such small numbers a handful of programmes that recruit well can make a big difference. Hence it seems likely that the HESA numbers here come largely from Translation and Interpreting programmes, and from a couple of large PGT programmes in Chinese studies, or in other departments that, unusually, mention China in the title. Examples are the MSc China and Globalisation in the Politics department at Kings College London, which in 2019/20 had 57 students enrolled, or the suite of PGT programmes in various departments at SOAS, which collectively recruited 29 students in the same year.

It is encouraging that this data shows Chinese studies broadly maintaining its position in the busy and competitive field of PGT programmes. However, we note that overall PGT numbers in all subjects

¹⁹ <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2012/aug/30/border-agency-international-students-threat>; <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2019/sep/18/home-office-rushed-to-penalise-students-accused-of-cheating> (accessed 12 Oct 2021).

²⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-announces-2-year-post-study-work-visa-for-international-students> (accessed 12 Oct 2021).

continue to rise, in some places dramatically, but – as at UG level – Chinese studies does not seem to be benefitting proportionally from this growth. One explanation for this at PG level could be the language barrier for those yet to acquire Chinese language skills sufficient for postgraduate study. Such skills are harder to obtain outside the context of a first degree, which colleagues observe acts as a deterrent to some potential PG students. Set against that, these HESA figures for Chinese studies are certainly an undercount. As already noted, it is clear that PGT students are studying and researching China related topics in growing numbers in programmes that do not mention China options in the title, but these students are impossible to count systematically. As elsewhere in this report, the chief explanation for Chinese studies not sharing in the general rise in numbers at this level of study is the relocation of students outside Chinese studies programmes, rather than a reduction of interest in China related studies or, in some programmes, Chinese language acquisition.

Table 8: HESA Research Postgraduate Chinese studies breakdown 2014-19

Year	Total Research PG	F/T PGR	P/T PGR	UK	EU	Non UK/EU
2014/15	60	55	0	10	5	40
2015/16	30	30	0	0	5	25
2016/17	35	35	0	5	5	25
2017/18	35	35	0	5	5	30
2018/19	35	35	0	0	0	30

The trend in HESA’s numbers for PhD programmes closely matches the UCCL figures for PGR. PhD programmes are not affected by HESA’s counting of joint degree or part time students, because joint PhDs are essentially non-existent and the data show that there have been no Chinese studies PhD students on part time routes since 2014 or possibly earlier. However, since these numbers are obviously small, they are affected both by HESA’s rounding policy and by the disproportionate effect on calculations of percentage change. Taking all this into account, we can see that PhD numbers have remained essentially stable since a 50% fall between 2014 and 2015. Since these numbers are so small to start with, we need not automatically be worried about the falls to zero for both UK and EU students in 2018/19, but clearly it will be important to observe these figures for the next year of data in case they begin to suggest a trend towards still lower numbers.

Once again, however, we must note that significantly more students are now working on China related topics outside Chinese studies departments, although institutional structures mean that it remains impossible to get anything like an accurate count of just how many there are.

Impact of Confucius Institutes

The growth of Confucius Institutes (CI) at UK HEIs (and internationally) has been a subject of much discussion, concern and sometimes controversy – both within the field of Chinese studies and in the wider media.²¹ Last year’s report added the first assessment of the impact of CIs on the uptake of Chinese studies at UK HEIs.

Of the 44 institutions in the UCCL survey this year, 23 continue to be linked with a CI. 14 of the respondents to the UCCL proforma this year have a CI. The average number of students on Chinese studies courses at HEIs with a CI is 141.9 for 2020, compared to 89.6 for those without, a

²¹ For example, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-49511231> (accessed 12 Oct 2021).

difference of 37%. These numbers are dramatic, but warrant disaggregation. Institutions with CIs maintain a strong lead in undergraduate numbers over those without, holding steady at 60% more in 2020, but with the difference falling to 39% for full time single honours from 50% in 2019 and 86% in 2018. The advantage in joint honours has risen steadily from 62% to 71% between 2018 and 2020.

In previous years institutions with CIs also had significantly more PGTs, but in 2020 PGTs at CI institutions plummeted, to only half of the PGTs of institutions with no CI (92 as against 136). CI institutions only began to show an advantage in PGR students in 2019, when they tipped over from having up to 17% fewer PGR than non-CI universities, to having 27% more. But as with PGTs, PGR students at CI institutions plunged to two thirds of those at non-CI institutions in 2020. These changes in postgraduate numbers seem most likely to be a Covid effect, in that international postgraduates may have been pushed into CI institutions in China or other countries considered better at managing Covid, rather than coming to the UK.

The advantage in staffing also fell. Whereas CIs enjoyed around 50% more staff until 2019/20, in 2020/21 this fell to just a 6% advantage, no doubt because CIs may be more likely to use temporary contracts, which many HEIs did not renew due to Covid, and because staff seconded from China could not come to the UK.

Thus in considering the effect of CIs it is important to note that while they seem to correlate with much higher numbers of undergraduates, they could also be associated with greatly disproportionate falls in PG and staffing numbers between 2019 and 2020 which, like several of the other changes noted above, seem most likely to be related to Brexit and Covid. Future updates of this report will observe whether the significant changes between the last two years prove to be anomalous or the start of a new trend.

Numbers of Students of Chinese Nationality in the UK

The numbers of students of Chinese nationality in the UK are drawn from HESA's publicly available statistics, and the most recent data currently available is for the 2019/20 academic year.²² These figures used to represent actual student numbers, but now they are apportioned like the rest of the HESA data, which has changed the numbers discussed in previous versions of this report. This update reanalyses the data using the most recent figures, although the result is fundamentally the same.

The number of students of Chinese nationality studying in the UK continues to grow at record rates. Since 2006, the earliest year in the HESA data, the number of Chinese students at UK HEIs has more than quadrupled, and HESA's website currently notes that 'Since 2012/13 the number of entrants from China each year has exceeded the number from all EU countries combined'.²³ The 2017/18 figure of 76,825 Chinese nationals studying in the UK represents a 15% increase over the 66,705 enrolled in 2016/17. This was at the time the largest single year on year increase (both in real terms and as a percentage) since the massive growth (topping out at 28% year on year, in 2009/10) that occurred between 2008 and 2012 when numbers almost doubled across a four year period. That bulge was linked to the global financial crisis, which made it cheaper for Chinese students to study in the UK. The 2018/19 figure of 86,895 is a further 13% increase on the recordbreaking year before. And according to the most recent HESA dataset, 2019/20's increase is a remarkable 20%. Furthermore, it was in this academic year that apportioned figures for new entrants – an undercount

²² Chart 6 – First year non-UK domiciled students by domicile 2006/07 to 2019/20, <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students/chart-6>, CC-BY-4.0 licence.

²³ <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students/where-from> (accessed 30 Aug 2021).

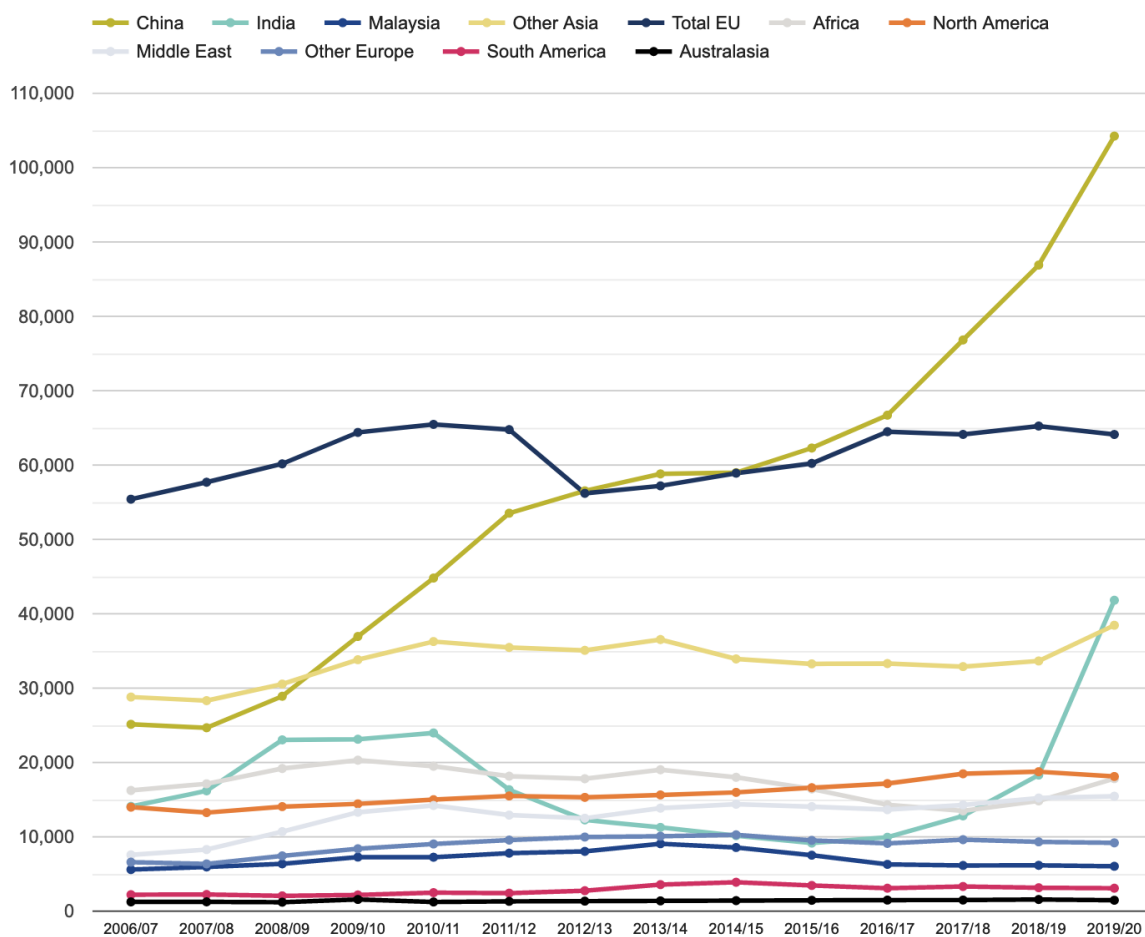
of the number of actual students – exceeded 100,000 for the first time, making China the first country ever to have this many first-year students concurrently registered at UK HEIs.²⁴

Since these figures are for 2019/20 they are not due to the pandemic. Some institutions suspended programmes for 2020/21 partly because international students could not travel, as was the case with Glasgow’s MSc International Relations. On the other hand, anecdotally, many institutions experienced an increase in Chinese students taking distance learning routes during 2020/21, and it will be interesting to see this and other effects of Covid on the HESA data for that year when it becomes available.

The increase in enrolled students from China is set against that of other countries in Graph 2 below.

Graph 2 (source: Chart 6 - First year non-UK domiciled students by domicile 2006/07 to 2019/20, <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students/chart-6>, CC-BY-4.0 licence)

First year non-UK domiciled students by domicile
Academic years 2006/07 to 2019/20



Here we see a sustained steady picture for much of the world, but we should pay particular attention to the figures for India which, like those for China, also rose significantly in 2008-11 in the

²⁴ The data available for last year’s update indicated that this threshold was first passed in 2017/18, but this was calculated on the basis of actual students, whereas the current data is apportioned, so that students on joint or part time degrees, for instance, may count for 0.5 and not 1.0.

wake of the financial crisis. But unlike for China, these numbers fell again from 2011 onwards, to a low in 2015/16. Since 2017 more students have begun to come to the UK from India, and in 2019/20 the growth rate was an astounding 128% over the previous year. Since the total for Indian students is still 41,815, there is some distance to go before India matches China's role in the UK HE environment, but the rate of growth will obviously be the crucial factor. This point will be worth pursuing in next year's update.

Overall, Chinese students now make up 48% of first year non UK domiciled students at UK HEIs, a share that is up less than 1% from the previous year.²⁵ At a few HEIs, this percentage is higher, such as at Sheffield, with 54% of first year non UK students being from China (5990 out of 11095, or significantly higher, as at Liverpool, where 66% of the non-UK domiciled student population now comes from China – 6025 out of 9165 international students.²⁶ Of the Chinese students at UK HEIs in 2019/20, almost 74% were newly enrolled that year, 2% up on the previous two years.²⁷ If most students were beginning three-year first degrees or PhDs we would expect the proportion of first years to be closer to a third, so this large disproportion suggests that a lot of these students are taking shorter degrees. Accordingly these figures are likely to reflect the popularity of taught Master's programmes for international students coming to the UK as these courses normally run for 12 months (full time). The Russell Group's 2018 report on *Links between China and Russell Group universities* confirms that, in these research intensive universities, over 54% of all Chinese students are enrolled on PGT courses.²⁸

That same Russell Group report also has some useful information not available in the HESA data about what Chinese students in the UK are choosing to study. The most popular courses among Chinese students at research intensive universities are: business studies (33%), engineering and technology (17%), social studies (10%), mathematics (6%) and architecture (5%).²⁹ For those institutions that do not already have a large proportion of Chinese students, these subjects may represent opportunities to internationalise the student body, as well as untapped recruiting possibilities at a time when UK HEIs are increasingly dependent on student fees, and especially on inflated international fees.

In total, there were 703,500 Chinese students studying abroad in 2019 (including part of the 2019-20 academic year), up 6.3% from the previous year, which had itself seen an 8.8% rise from 2017/18. The UK's share to the end of 2019 was not quite 14% of all Chinese international students, up 2% from the year to the end of 2018.³⁰

A final point worth mentioning is that the UK government has finally overturned its decision to remove the right for international students to apply for two year work visas after they graduate from a UK HEI. As of September 2019, students may now apply for such a visa to begin upon

²⁵ Calculated from Chart 6 – First year non-UK domiciled students by domicile, <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students/chart-6>.

²⁶ Table 28 – Non-UK HE students by HE provider and country of domicile, <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students/table-28>, CC-BY-4.0 licence.

²⁷ Calculated from Table 28 – Non-UK HE students by HE provider and country of domicile, <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students/table-28> and Chart 6 - First year non-UK domiciled students by domicile, <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students/chart-6>.

²⁸ <https://russellgroup.ac.uk/media/5680/russell-group-universities-links-with-china-january-2018.pdf> (accessed September 2019; as of 2021 there is no update to this report).

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1143787.shtml>; <https://www.tellerreport.com/news/2020-12-14-%0A---ministry-of-education--the-total-number-of-chinese-students-studying-abroad-in-2019-is-703-500%0A--B1xOB6iV3D.html> (accessed 12 Oct 2021); Chart 6 – First year non-UK domiciled students by domicile, <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students/chart-6>.

finishing their degree programme.³¹ In 2018 over 78% of Chinese international students returned home after completing their degrees, a rise of 8% over the previous year, but since the numbers going to study abroad rose by slightly more (8.8%), there was a net drop in returnees,³² so it may be that options to stay in the UK could be incentives to some students to choose to study here. For the current report, however, the impact of the UK government's decision is unlikely to have been represented in the available HESA figures because of when applications were made to programmes, but this will be tracked in future updates to this report to observe whether this change is having an upward effect on the number of Chinese students studying in the UK.

All of the possible explanations suggested here will be moderated by the economic and political impact of the pandemic and any possible reputational damage done by perceptions of the UK's handling of the virus, which is widely perceived as disastrous in China.³³ It is fairly likely that Chinese parents, and students themselves, watching this unfold, may rethink decisions to come to the UK. The only thing that may play in the UK's favour is that the USA under Trump handled the virus even more disastrously, including a ban on Chinese entering the country, so UK institutions have attracted some students who would have typically gone stateside for their education, and may continue to do so. Again, this remains to be seen.

China Focused Programmes at UK HEIs

Several of the universities with undergraduate options appear not to have postgraduate offerings (e.g. Cardiff, Central Lancashire, Chester, De Montfort, Lancaster, Manchester Metropolitan and Warwick). More unusually, others offer only postgraduate courses, including Glasgow and King's College London. New entrants to the field tend to start out with a focus on one level or the other, such as undergraduate courses at St Andrews, PGT translation and interpreting at Birmingham, and teacher training courses (PGDEs) at Strathclyde.

Undergraduate Level

A survey of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes offered for 2020 was conducted through the UCAS catalogue in August 2020 and compared with a similar survey in August 2021 for entry in 2021, being careful to include all programmes and not just those in Clearing.³⁴ Using the search terms 'China' and 'Chinese', the course offerings were compiled into a table by each institution. The spreadsheet shows the list compiled for entry in 2020, corresponding to the data in this year's UCCL survey. The list for 2021 entry will be the basis for next year's report.

These surveys, 12 months apart, show some rapid changes. In August 2020 41 UK institutions were offering a degree to commence that year that usually included the option of credited Chinese language modules alongside some other element of Chinese culture; of these, only 9 offered the study of China or Chinese language as a single honours subject, a drop of 4 institutions from the previous year. By August 2021 nine new institutions (Birmingham City, Cardiff Metropolitan,

³¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2019/sep/10/uk-work-visas-for-foreign-graduates-to-be-extended-to-two-years> (accessed 12 Oct 2021).

³² <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1143787.shtml>; <https://www.tellerreport.com/news/2020-12-14-%0A---ministry-of-education--the-total-number-of-chinese-students-studying-abroad-in-2019-is-703-500%0A--B1xOB6iV3D.html> (accessed 12 Oct 2021).

³³ <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-8319159/amp/China-brands-Britains-handling-coronavirus-mess.html> (accessed 12 Oct 2021). I have not been able to locate the original *Global Times* article.

³⁴ For future reports, this survey will be conducted in March, towards the end of the main admissions cycle, aiming to capture even new programmes announced late in the cycle. Thus a survey in March 2022 will provide a list of programmes for the update of this report compiled for the academic year 2022-23.

Coventry, Northern College of Acupuncture, Queen Mary, Reading, St Andrews, Strathclyde and Surrey) had added China related programmes to commence in that same year, while Hertfordshire, Hull, Nottingham Trent and Regents have either ceased their offerings in such programmes or have not recruited for 2021.³⁵ Exeter, Goldsmiths, LSE and Swansea appear to have closed their undergraduate programmes but retain postgraduate options.³⁶ Numerous institutions have undertaken major revisions of their offerings by dropping many courses and adding new ones, notably Bangor, Chester, Lancaster, Liverpool and SOAS. Others have reduced or streamlined their offerings for 2021-22, either temporarily or permanently, for instance, Central Lancashire, Chester, Manchester Metropolitan and Warwick.

While the changes in offerings for 2021 have certainly been affected by the pandemic, overall the survey results attest to the variety of programmes presently on offer with a China focus and show clearly that more institutions than ever are offering China related programmes.

The most common course offering for entry in 2021 remains a joint degree course with Chinese and another subject. Popular courses are in combination with other languages, politics, and business management. Thus Chinese studies will continue to be underrepresented in the HESA statistics, as universities respond to student demand for Chinese language skills combined with a disciplinary specialism.

Postgraduate Level

Postgraduate courses with a China focus likewise indicate a trend in offerings for Chinese language skills combined with professional or discipline-based training. According to the UCAS website there are currently 89 Chinese studies courses offered by 21 institutions for entry in 2021. These include 31 Translation and/or Interpreting degrees with various emphases, for example conference interpreting, or combined with subjects such as professional practice or entrepreneurship. But while the number of courses appears to have risen, these seem to be concentrated at fewer institutions – 12 as opposed to the 16 recorded in the survey for 2013. These courses are particularly popular with Chinese students in the UK, and may accordingly find favour with senior managements seeking international student fees. These courses find it much harder to find or recruit students for whom Chinese is an additional language. Conversely, there is also a growing number of courses aimed at teaching Chinese as an additional language, such as those at Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Leeds, Nottingham and Trinity St David, and a whole new suite of PGDEs (Postgraduate Diploma in Education) including Mandarin at Strathclyde.

Other disciplinary areas include law, politics and international relations, business, contemporary art, biomedical science, and Chinese medicine. Even more than for undergraduate courses, traditional Sinology is now in the minority.

As a further illustration of the diversity of offerings at this level, two degree awarding institutions not currently listed in the UCCL table are those at the auction houses Sotheby's and Christies. These

³⁵ By way of comparison, 29 UK institutions offered a degree with a Chinese language and culture element for entry in 2013 when this survey was first established. A search of UCAS course offerings for the year 2000 found 13 institutions offered programmes under the language heading Chinese, and another 8 programmes under Asian, East Asian or Asian Pacific studies. It is possible that there is some overlap in the count of institutions offering Chinese language and Area studies as the names of institutions are not given. Replicating the 2000 catalogue survey for comparison is not possible as the expansion of course offerings means the categories have changed.

³⁶ LSE was planning to start a BSc in Chinese Language and International Relations in 2020/21, but this was not listed on the UCAS pages in August 2021.

offer postgraduate qualifications in Chinese art, which cater to those with a personal or professional interest in this segment of the art trade.

Lastly in this section, we note that more institutions are benefiting from links with Chinese partners to offer summer schools or periods abroad in China as part of their postgraduate degrees. Double degrees, where students gain a qualification from both a UK HEI and a Chinese university from the same course, have been quite popular in the Chinese education market. For example, LSE offers UK based students a range of postgraduate double degree courses with Peking University and Fudan. These programmes capitalise on the appeal of future careers in business and diplomacy with China, and offer the prospect of increased two way exchange of students between the UK and China. At present, the Chinese approach to the pandemic means that the future of such programmes remains in question. In October 2021 China was still strongly restricting foreigners from entering, and such regimes will be in place until such time as the Chinese authorities decide that the risks from Covid have been sufficiently reduced. Whether the pandemic in the long term forces institutions here and in China to greatly rethink their commitment to such transnational programmes is thus an open question.

HEIs with China Focussed Departments, Research Centres or Research Networks

The situation for research and academic exchange between the UK and China is extensive and varied. In order to gain a sense of China related research activities in the UK, this report presents a list of China focussed departments and research centres compiled from an internet search. The list cannot be considered as fully comprehensive; because of the time constraints on this survey it was not possible to look at every HEI in the UK. Although not definitive, the list can provide an idea of the focus of research at doctoral and higher levels in UK HEIs. As can be seen, China related research is being conducted in the areas of business and management, contemporary Area Studies, translation and language teaching, social sciences, and, less frequently, in health, arts, archaeology, religion and media across the UK.

Institutions with Chinese Departments

- University of Cambridge – [Department of East Asian Studies](#) in Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies
- University of Durham – [Chinese Studies](#) in the School of Modern Languages and Cultures and [Centre for Contemporary Chinese Studies](#).
- Edinburgh University – [Scottish Centre of Chinese Studies](#)
- King's College London – [Lau China Institute](#)
- University of Leeds – [East Asian Studies](#) in the School of Modern Languages
- University of Manchester – [Centre for Chinese Studies](#)
- University of Nottingham – China Policy Institute (No webpage after being moved to School of Politics and International Relations)
- Newcastle University – [East Asian Studies](#) in the School of Modern Languages
- University of Oxford – [University of Oxford China Centre](#), [Centre for Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language](#), and the [Oxford Chinese Economy Programme \(at St. Edmund Hall\)](#)
- School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) – [Department of the Languages and Cultures of China and Inner Asia](#) and [SOAS China Institute](#)

- St Andrews – [Chinese Studies](#) in the School of Modern Languages
- University of Sheffield – [School of East Asian Studies](#)
- University of Wales, Trinity St David – [Chinese Studies](#) in the School of Cultural Studies

With China Research Centres

Some of these offer courses whereas others are research networks.

- University of Aberdeen [Chinese Studies Group](#)
- Birmingham Institute of Art and Design & Birmingham City University – [Centre for Chinese Visual Art](#)
- University of Birmingham – [China Institute](#)
- University of Bristol – [China Educational Research Network](#)
- Durham University – [Centre for Contemporary Chinese Studies](#)
- University of Exeter – [Global China Research Centre](#)
- Universities of Glasgow, Heriot-Watt, Edinburgh, St. Andrews, Dundee – [Scottish Centre for China Research](#)
- Lancaster University – [Lancaster China Management Centre](#) and [Lancaster University China Centre](#)
- Universities of Leeds and Sheffield – [White Rose East Asia Centre](#)
- The University of Northampton – [China and Emerging Economies Centre](#)
- University College London – [China Centre for Health and Humanity](#) and [International Centre for Chinese Heritage and Archaeology](#)
- University of Warwick – [Centre for the Study of Globalisation and Regionalism](#) (expertise in China)
- The University of Westminster – [Contemporary China Centre](#)
- [Russell Group-China Collaborative Programme](#)

Conclusion

It is impossible to draw a consistent picture regarding student numbers out of the disparate and variously problematical data available for this updated report. Nonetheless, we might cautiously suggest that, for a variety of reasons, overall student interest in Chinese studies remains quite strong, even though the balance between UG and PGT numbers has been skewed this year by a cocktail of Covid, Brexit and the continuing hostile policy environment towards immigrants. Although some institutions have left the field, usually for fundamentally economic reasons, others have seen opportunities. Overall, the number and diversity of courses seems to be rising even if the number of institutions may be falling slightly. It remains impossible to count all students engaged in China related study, but it does seem clear that these numbers are rising. Staff numbers, by contrast, are clearly down while workloads are up, creating concerns about sustainability. Nevertheless, despite the turmoil of the last two years, the general picture seems moderately hopeful, although future developments will continue to be influenced by a number of complex factors.

It was speculated that last year's report might have been the last to account for a significant shake up of the higher education sector in the wake of the pandemic, but both Covid and major restructuring

in universities have remained very much with us through 2020/21 and beyond. As also noted last year, worsening relations between China and the West and the fallout of Brexit remain factors to watch for their effects on the numbers of people choosing to study China related subjects and on the number of Chinese students able and desiring to study in the UK. Areas that might experience effects from these issues have been flagged in this report, so that future iterations will be able to better track the changes wrought by such geopolitical developments. A further factor of concern is the state of the Chinese economy in the light of the collapse of the Evergrande property company, and any global repercussions that might ensue from major changes.³⁷ In addition, we note that despite the increasingly urgent need for more China expertise in government, commerce and industry, the media and education, the UK government is pressuring for an increased emphasis on STEM subjects, and shows a rising contempt for and undermining of the humanities, including languages. All of these seem likely to be growing issues for the future, and will be considered in next year's analysis.

³⁷ <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2021/sep/25/how-fall-of-property-giant-evergrande-sent-a-shockwave-through-china> (accessed 13 Oct 2021).