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SUPPORTING THE STUDY OF CHINESE LANGUAGE AND CULTURE ACROSS SCOTLAND
SCIO ● Registered Charity Number SC046171● www.scen.info

The Future of Mandarin Learning and Teaching: Beyond the Pandemic Report

January 2021

This report focuses on the responses from stakeholders in the Chinese learning and teaching community in Scotland regarding three main questions regarding engagement and community support. These responses were collated by SCEN, resulting in a set of recommendations for SCEN, and the Chinese learning and teaching community, to develop and put into motion.

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Introduction

On 18 November 2021, SCEN facilitated a roundtable discussion with stakeholders from the Chinese learning and teaching community from across Scotland. The aim was to develop ideas and potential solutions to improve the learning and teaching landscape of Mandarin in Scotland, and bring stakeholders together to encourage collaboration. Delegates were asked three focus questions to discuss in breakout groups, then brought back together to further discuss collated ideas and suggestions. This report is a summary of the responses given at this event, along with a list of recommendations which SCEN plans to put into motion. SCEN hopes the wider community will take these recommendations forward together, to increase interest in learning Mandarin and enhance support for schools which are keen to introduce and develop Mandarin as part of their languages programme.

It has been the main goal of SCEN since its founding to bring together individuals, national agencies, and associations to support the improvement and development of teaching and learning Chinese language and culture in schools across Scotland. During this time when not only Mandarin, but all modern languages, are seeing drops in uptake, we feel it is key to put actionable strategies in place that will provide sustainable support to our community. We hope that the ideas and suggestions in this report will be used by stakeholders and the wider community to develop feasible solutions to the challenges we face, and that it will inspire further discussions and collaboration that will ensure a positive future for Mandarin learning and teaching in Scotland.

Question 1: How do we as a community engage with young people to increase interest in learning Mandarin?

1. Improve the perception of China and the value of learning Mandarin.
2. Solidify the perception of Mandarin in schools, not only as a normal part of the languages curriculum, but also as part of the wider curriculum of subjects on offer to students.
3. Ensure teachers of Mandarin engage with current learning and teaching methodology and work on continual improvement of pedagogy.
4. Support teachers to fully adapt lessons to suit age and level to maximise student participation and engagement in classes.
5. Incorporate relevant pop culture topics in the classroom to engage with young people.
6. Develop more cross-curricular learning, combining other subjects with language learning to emphasise the usefulness of language learning and practical applications.
7. Modernise the content of lessons to develop perception of China past traditional cultural topics. Introduce modern culture, science, and technology into classes.
8. Develop use of social media to engage with young people and share relevant information, such as opportunities to improve employability and information on career pathways.
9. Encourage and praise students from the early stages of language learning to solidify sense of success throughout their studies.
10. Offer students the opportunity to participate in communities and activities outside of school to enrich their learning, through projects such as Beyond the Panda at RZSS, the Climate Ready Classroom, and Chinese New Year programmes at National Museum of Scotland, etc.
11. Show students the variety of career pathways from early on to increase likelihood of progression.
12. Develop Mentorship links in schools (within schools and with university students, with oversight from organisations which can provide the appropriate governance) to offer students role models.
13. Develop links between schools and universities to highlight progressive learning and career pathways.
14. Work with universities to develop projects which will develop Mandarin learning and teaching in schools.
15. Create/develop links with schools in China to provide learning context for students.
16. Create work experience programmes (through links with businesses) for more advanced students, to see practical applications to language learning first-hand.
17. Develop a wider variety of language competitions to incentivise students to engage and take up language learning. (With viable and appealing rewards.)
18. Develop extracurricular opportunities for students of Mandarin, as clubs encourage both fun and the consolidation of learning.
19. SCEN should further develop the Youth Voice programme to have greater input from students on how to better engage with them about Mandarin learning and teaching.

Question 2: How do we encourage and support more schools to introduce and develop Mandarin?

1. Develop and display positive case studies to inspire and encourage other schools begin offering Mandarin. This will also demonstrate to local authorities and the Scottish Government the potential successes that can be achieved with a well-developed learning and teaching model for Mandarin in schools.

2. Engage with the development of digital technologies and their use for learning and teaching, which has enabled projects like the VET scheme and the platform e-Sgoil. These platforms make language learning more accessible geographically, and have the potential for increased continuity of teaching.

3. Address the gaps for progression in school, and support schools in offering students clear learning pathways.

4. Engaging with both the careers and languages departments in schools when offering support for language learning.

5. Discussing employability options with students ahead of choosing university subjects, as to set up clear long-term pathways for new qualified teachers of Mandarin to be employable and marketable to schools. (Having more than one subject to offer.)

6. Engage with Headteachers and Deputy Headteachers to make them aware of the available networks and resources that can help support Mandarin teachers in schools.

7. Develop resources for Mandarin teachers for all levels of learning. Teachers require more high-quality resources and materials, especially for prelims/mock exams.

8. Signposting resources for teachers, and support them while learning how to use different platforms/technologies that have useful resources. Breaking technological barriers.

9. Create more CPD workshops and courses so that best practice can be shared, and collaborative networks developed.

10. Enable Senior leadership teams and middle management to visit China to develop a greater understanding of the importance of Mandarin learning.

11. Showcase accessibility and success of disadvantaged learners studying Mandarin, to help dissuade people of the myth that Mandarin is an especially difficult language to learn.

12. The community of stakeholders should be more proactive in engaging with other schools to demonstrate the possibilities when offering Mandarin as a subject.

13. Support teachers via SCEN's Chinese Teaching Club to integrate into their schools' teaching communities.

14. Support teachers and schools in decolonising schools' curricula so that they are less Eurocentric.

15. Receive additional support from the Scottish Government in terms of funding and policy.

Question 3: How can all organisations involved in Mandarin learning better work together and share experience and best practice?

1. SCEN should further facilitate collaborations and partnerships within the Chinese learning and teaching community.
2. SCEN should develop links between the education, business, and culture sectors.
3. Improve integration and communication between programmes related to teacher training, as well as better connections with those engaged in Chinese language education in Scotland's universities.
4. Develop the Chinese Teaching Club as a platform for regular professional learning and networking.
5. Increase and develop resources and accessibility of resources on SCEN's Teaching Zone.
6. Increase collaboration between CISS and SWIRE to share best practice and teaching strategies to create consistency in partnered schools.
7. Increase engagement between private and state schools to share best practice.
8. Develop/improve a joint up approach among schools in Local Authorities.
9. Collaborate to annually analyse SQA results to develop a better picture of trends of uptake and progression across Scotland.
10. Develop business connections within the community, potentially even a Business Ambassador programme to encourage businesses to see mutual benefits in getting involved in outreach work in schools.
11. Get parents more involved in students' learning, and involve them in the community.

With these suggestions, SCEN aims to develop the following ideas for collaborative action:

1. Continue to facilitate collaborations between stakeholders in the Chinese learning and teaching community.

2. Develop both its Youth Voice and Ambassador programme to further engage with young people studying Mandarin across Scotland.

   a. Develop a reliable and proactive group of young people to lead the Youth Voice and engage closely with SCEN and its work.

   b. Hold more event for young people to showcase their work and share their passion for language learning.

3. Develop the Chinese Teaching Club to improve support for teachers.

   a. Support teachers in the development of materials and resources.

   b. Create more spaces for sharing best practice and developing pedagogy.

   c. Encourage collaboration and discussion between teachers to develop the current support network.

   d. Bring more Mandarin teachers into the Chinese Teaching Club to expand the network.

4. Increase the number of active partners collaborating with SCEN to support and develop the Chinese learning and teaching community in Scotland.

5. Utilise the new SCEN website to share news, articles, and events to support the community.

   a. Share and promote relevant opportunities and events.

   b. Publish useful CPD articles for teachers.

   c. Signpost resources for teachers.

   d. Share articles written by students for students encouraging language learning.

6. Organise, and publish on the SCEN website, profiles on schools offering Mandarin qualifications as examples of case studies of successful Mandarin language learning and teaching.

7. Lead the annual analysis of SQA results to develop a better picture of trends of uptake and progression across Scotland.

Conclusion

The valuable ideas and suggestions collated in this report are just the first step in working towards a healthier Mandarin learning and teaching landscape in Scotland. SCEN hopes that it can continue to be utilised to facilitate more engagement and collaboration between its partners, and help enable the community to work together to achieve our shared goals.

If you have any thoughts or feedback on this report, or you would like to get involved with SCEN's work, please contact Megan Hammell, Online Communications and Administrative Officer for SCEN, at admin@scen.info.