

# Boarding Schools' Association British Council Connexcel **Survey of Chinese Parents**

**bsa** BOARDING SCHOOLS' ASSOCIATION

**BRITISH COUNCIL**

**baisis** BRITISH ASSOCIATION OF INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS WITH INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

**CONNEXCEL** 康联卓越  
A Journey to a Better Education



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Robin Fletcher, MBA, MPhil, FRSA  
CEO Boarding Schools' Association and Boarding Schools' Association Group

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UK boarding schools have long cherished and highly valued their relationship with students and families from China. They have supported students to enjoy all the benefits of a British boarding school education and in turn greatly appreciated the contribution Chinese students make to school life.

While the number of Chinese students at UK boarding schools is annually tracked, less statistically clear has been the reasons why families from China choose the UK in the first place and how that differs, for instance, by age. **This survey helps to close that statistical gap and presents a very useful picture for boarding schools and related practitioners. It also comes at a time when the global impact of Covid-19 has inevitably disrupted the rhythm of regular student tracking, so the survey is doubly valuable in that respect.**

The BSA Group hopes stakeholders find the survey interesting and helpful and is grateful to its partners for their part in supporting this report.



Caroline Nixon M.A. (Oxon.), M. Ed.  
International Director, Boarding Schools' Association  
Director, British Association of Independent Schools with International Students  
Director, Caroline Nixon Education Ltd.

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I am delighted to have been involved in the creation of this valuable report. To have been able to collate the opinions of 15% of all the Chinese families with children currently at school in the UK is quite an achievement.

It is pleasing too to see from their responses that all the problems experienced by those children and their families as a result of the pandemic have done very little to dent their enthusiasm for British education. The many benefits of boarding education in the UK, ranging from portable qualifications which open the door to entry into top universities in any country in the world, to excellent pastoral provision, to networking opportunities, to increased confidence and independence, still exist regardless of the pandemic. By any standards, the UK remains a safe place for all our children, for whom we may fear social unrest, peer pressure and environmental dangers far more than Covid-19.

**We hope that boarding schools will be able to use the results of this survey to inform their marketing and recruitment activities as well as to increase the quality of provision to their existing and future Chinese and other international pupils.** We have tried to pull out some questions to consider at the end of each section of the survey to aid schools in these objectives.

We plan to build on this report and undertake further research on some of the issues raised. Meanwhile I do hope that the survey and its conclusions will prove helpful to schools, agents, guardians and families who work together so tirelessly for the success and happiness of all pupils of every nationality.



**John Zhang M.A.**  
Co-Founder, Connexcel Ltd

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Connexcel is delighted to have partnered with the Boarding Schools' Association and the British Council in conducting this important survey of Chinese families currently sending their children to UK boarding schools, or considering doing so in the near future.

The challenges faced by UK schools, students and their parents during the course of the COVID 19 pandemic have raised fundamental questions over the viability of an otherwise growing and healthy relationship. Can this relationship be maintained and, if so, what adjustments may need to be made by all concerned? This report does not provide all the answers, but aims to ask questions, as well as indicate where schools committed to international education should focus their attention.

It will be particularly important to address the issues presented by non-English-speaking families, largely unfamiliar with UK schools and reliant on reputable agents. All parents will want to see agility in responding to the ongoing challenges of COVID, through careful management of quarantining, depth and clarity of communication in Chinese, as well as reassurance that quality education will continue, even for stranded students. The evidence of this survey would suggest that UK boarding schools have largely satisfied current parental expectations, but newcomers remain to be convinced.

Moving forward, schools will need to look carefully at recruitment and retention efforts: online Open Days, ongoing bespoke feedback about each child's progress and well-being, positive re-engagement with alumni and ex-parents to initiate local recruitment events and show evidence of successful outcomes through university and career placements.

Many thanks to all who have taken the time to participate in this study; we anticipate there will be further discussions over many of the issues raised in this report. We would like to extend our gratitude, in particular, to our esteemed colleague, Mr. Peter Wells, who has dedicated much time and effort to compiling this report.



## Executive Summary

This study, conducted by the Boarding Schools' Association (BSA), the British Council (BC) and Connexcel, seeks to investigate the satisfaction levels of Chinese parents sending their children overseas to UK boarding schools during the COVID 19 pandemic. It aims to help schools reflect upon how they can better serve their international students, their families and guardians. The report should also give confidence to Chinese parents who are making a considerable effort to send their children overseas to UK boarding schools.

Letters were sent by BSA member schools to their mainland Chinese families, encouraging them to complete an anonymous online questionnaire by way of an embedded electronic address. The questionnaires were completed by the end of June 2021 and collated by BSA. Over 880 families took part, roughly 15% of all Chinese families in UK boarding schools. The vast majority of respondents were current parents facing the challenges of overseas schooling in the ongoing COVID pandemic, where travel restrictions, testing, isolation, remote learning and extended guardianship arrangements were part of their first hand experience. A small number were yet to send their children overseas or were at the start of the admissions process.

The results showed that the vast majority of families with children already in the system were very satisfied with the service provided, both at school and remotely when students were unable to attend in person. The majority nonetheless favoured education in school. However, many parents felt that schools could do more to improve their offering for international students at such a time as this. Greater flexibility and better communication between school and home, including through guardians, were two such areas of importance.

The results of the questionnaire, covering a wide range of concerns to international students, will be both encouraging and thought-provoking for UK boarding schools. On the one hand, parents affirmed the high value they place in a great all-round education which they find in the UK. Outstanding pastoral care was clearly a key element in this satisfaction. On the other hand, they want to be reassured about their child's well-being and participate more fully in understanding their progress, as well as receiving high quality advice over future university applications.

It is recommended that schools reflect on the parental responses charted in this report, together with feedback from their own international students who form such a significant element of their community. In doing so, they will surely deepen awareness of students' needs, anxieties and aspirations.

Communication, care and continuity are at the heart of the strong position many schools still find themselves in, yet this cannot be taken for granted. Schools also need to look carefully at how they maintain the confidence of their parent base and adapt further as the global position changes. To this must be added creativity and innovative thinking if they are to continue attracting those new to the sector. Working closely with trusted and reputable agents can only strengthen the position in countries such as China.



# Introduction

UK boarding schools are increasingly part of an international education network and Heads, as well as parents, understand that the best education prepares children for a global world, where collaboration will be essential. There is already considerable interest within schools about the importance of developing global awareness and intercultural understanding in young people, who will need to find solutions for many of the world's problems. These, together with new topics, languages and skills, have become part of the modern school curriculum, harnessing the power of digital media and opening up new possibilities for communication.

Recent years have seen a rapid growth of international interest in the benefits of British boarding school education with its strong traditions of corporate life, academic excellence, creative and personal development across a wide range of disciplines. The appeal to students of other nationalities is seen partly in the development of British international schools around the world, as well as the continued interest in UK boarding schools, where Chinese students have now become a major group. The viability of this trend is perhaps being called into question by the current COVID-19 pandemic.

This report provides a snapshot of opinions from Chinese parents with children currently at UK boarding schools (both Prep and Senior) and also includes some registered to begin boarding in the next three years (2021 - 2024). Conducted in May 2021, towards the end of the second phase of the pandemic, the report reflects the views of some 880 families - roughly 15% of the total number of Chinese students in UK schools. These families and their children have experienced some of the most extreme challenges posed by isolation, travel restrictions, distance learning and repeated health testing. In many cases, students have not been able to return home for holidays and have needed generous assistance from guardians and school house staff in the UK.

The aim of the report is to give valuable feedback to schools as they seek to meet the needs of international boarders and maintain confidence amongst their parents. It does not claim to be comprehensive or to cover every aspect of the educational experience. Rather it highlights many of the strengths and some of the weaknesses in current provision for international students across a spectrum of UK boarding schools. We hope that aspects of the report will be helpful to parents as they reflect upon the quality of experience their children have received in recent times. Future surveys are likely to extend our knowledge of this important sector and go more deeply into some of the issues raised.



# Chinese overseas entry to UK boarding schools

## 1. Chinese school types

The survey found that private schools and international schools in China account for nearly 70% of entrants to UK boarding schools. A further 30% come from Chinese state schools.

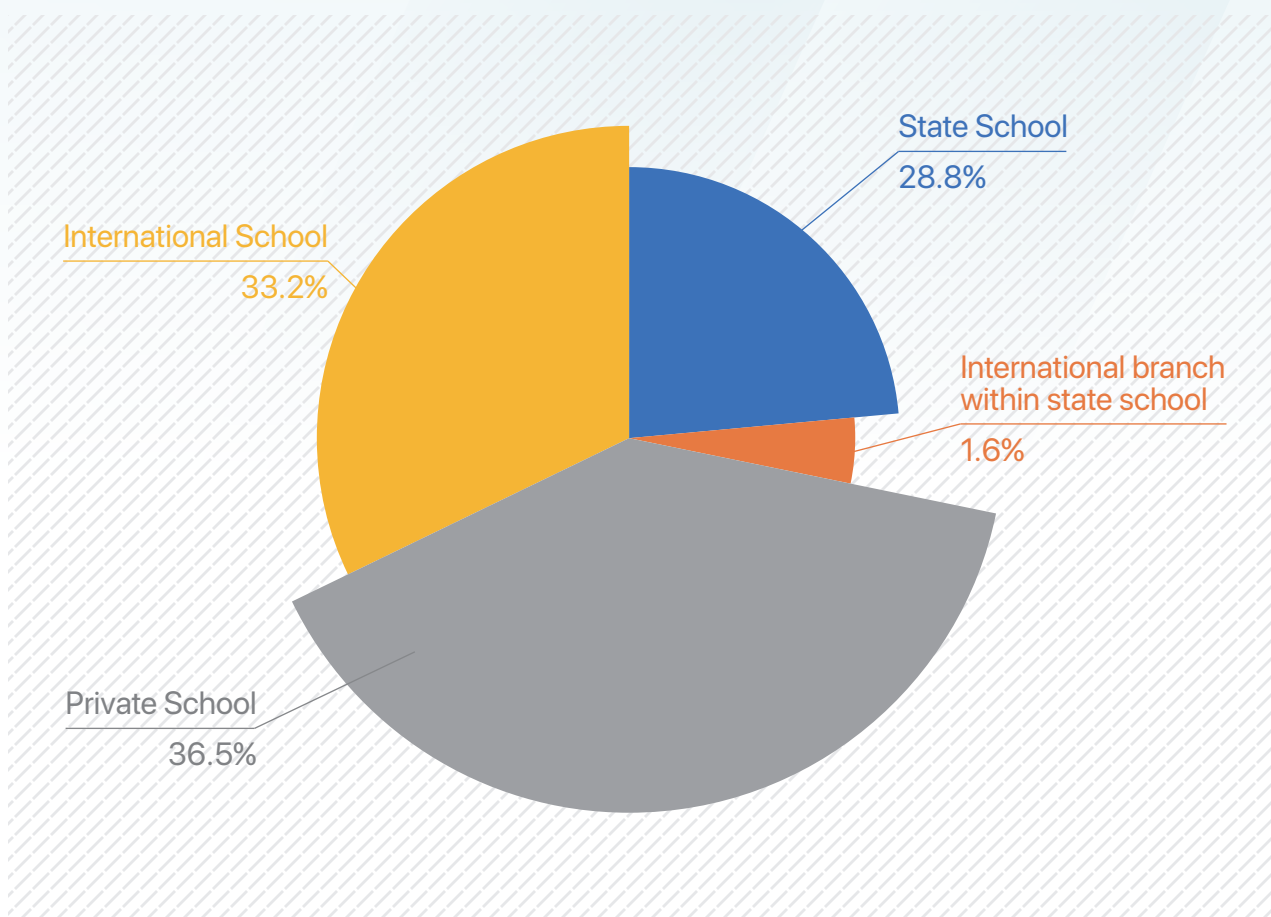
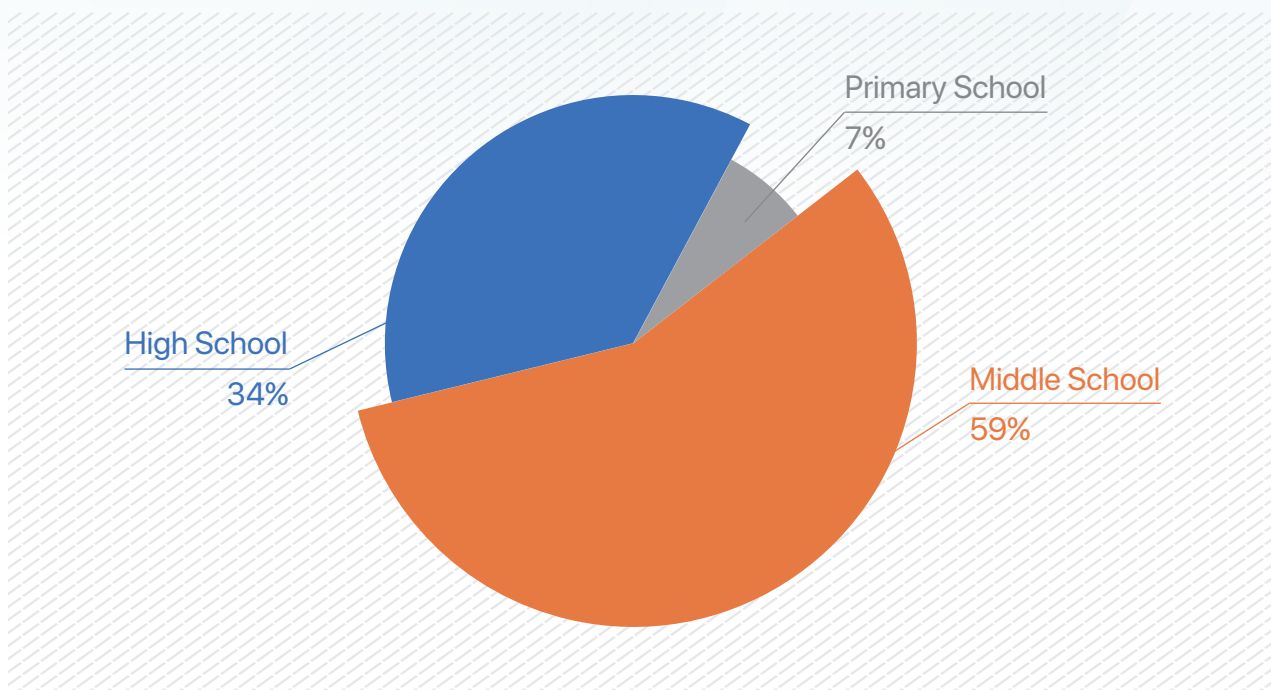


Chart 1: Chinese school types

## 2. Planned overseas study entry points

Of the families who responded to the questionnaire, the vast majority of pupils from China entered or planned to enter UK schools at Middle School age (59%), with 34% arriving at High School age and only about 7% at Primary School level. This suggests that investment in the younger age groups has traditionally been quite limited and there may be other factors in China which have held back a greater commitment. It will be important for UK prep schools to look closely at how they communicate the added value they provide with an earlier start, in particular for those parents seeking a wider choice of senior schools.



*Chart 2: Planned overseas study entry point*

*Chinese education age system:*

*Primary School: Age 6 - 11/12; Middle School: Age 11/12 - 15; High School: Age 16 - 18*

There is little historic data with which to compare these figures and it will be interesting to see whether the increasing numbers of international schools being founded in China alter the numbers coming to the UK.

There will be many factors holding back a greater commitment at Prep School level and this will be worth reflecting upon as families increasingly seek entrance to over-subscribed senior schools. UK school investment in the younger age groups has traditionally been rather limited and this may be an area worth exploring further. However, parents will need to be convinced of the added value provided by an early start below the age of 13.

UK schools will wish to gain a clear idea of the pupil's background and school experience in China, and this may be difficult without school reports and in some cases specific linguistic support. Contact with families will often be through an agent, whose report will be particularly important. So too will be the accuracy and reliability of any testing procedures.

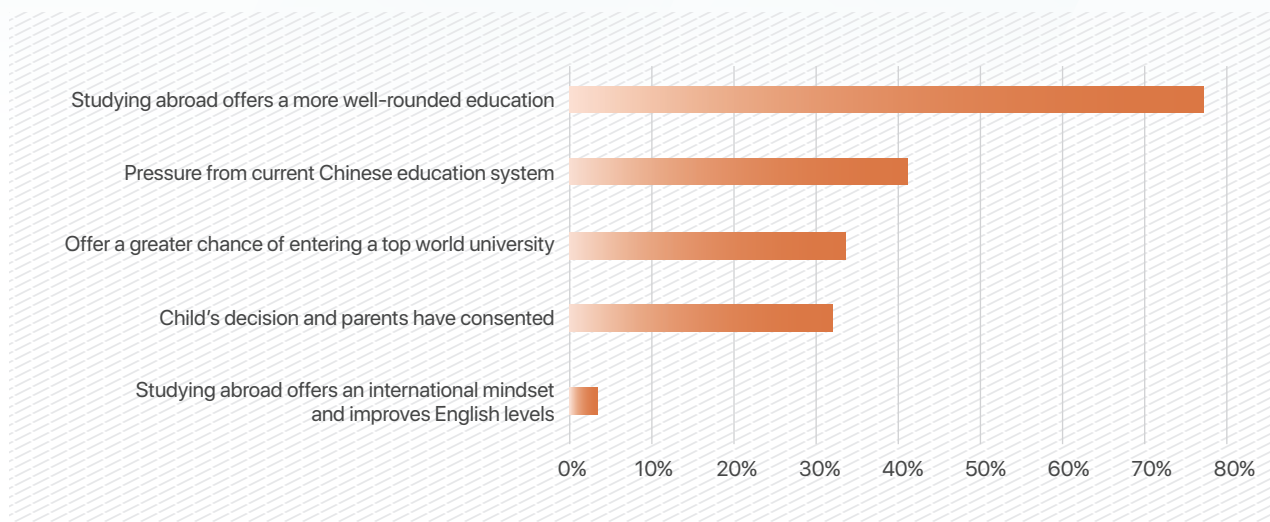
### Questions to consider

- What is the child's outlook as they approach a UK boarding education?
- How much experience of travel and staying away from home have they had?
- What has their current school prepared them for? How accurate is the assessment of their performance, potential and interests?
- How thorough are the UK school's own interview processes?
- Is there a reliable agent involved?
- UK prep schools need to look closely at how they communicate in China. Is it easy for Chinese parents to understand how their children will be cared for?
- Do parents understand the role and responsibilities of guardians?

# The attraction of study abroad

## 1. Top reasons for studying abroad

Our report found that the overwhelming reason Chinese parents choose to send their children to study abroad at either primary (prep) or secondary level is the offer of a more well-rounded education than is available in China (77%). Of secondary importance has been pressure from the current Chinese education system (40%). A third consideration is the offer of greater opportunity to enter top world universities (33%) and this is confirmed later by demand for greater advice over university and career destinations. The child's own decision also featured strongly, with 32% identifying this as a key element. However, of the 880 respondents only 2% identified improvement in English and the development of an international mindset as one of the three main reasons for considering study abroad.



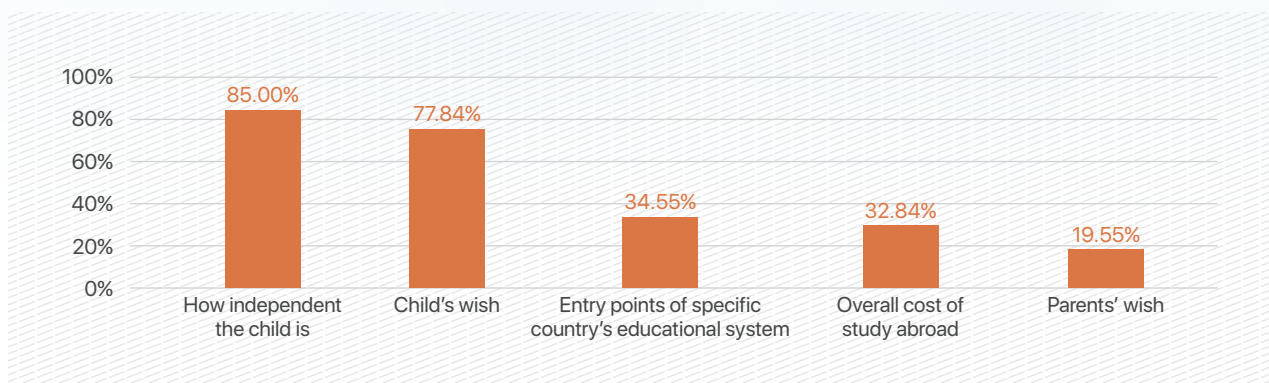
*Chart 3: Reasons for studying abroad*



## 2. What influences parental considerations on studying abroad?

The best age and timing for the commencement of study abroad is strongly related to the child's own wishes and how independent he/she is (78%). Parental wishes appear to be a far less important driver (20%), although parental confidence in their maturity level is likely to be necessary if it is to happen.

The overall cost of boarding education is significant for nearly a third of the respondents and reference will be made to the range of income levels in the final section of this report. Exact age entry points play a less significant part than the child's desire to go when they feel ready (35%).



*Chart 4: Parental considerations*

Our statistics confirm the prior view that children are more willing to study abroad after they have had some experience in the UK through a taster session or camp. Summer or winter camps consisting of a two-week, short programme, are recognised as a great way to introduce UK boarding schools to Chinese children, although this has obviously been interrupted by the pandemic.

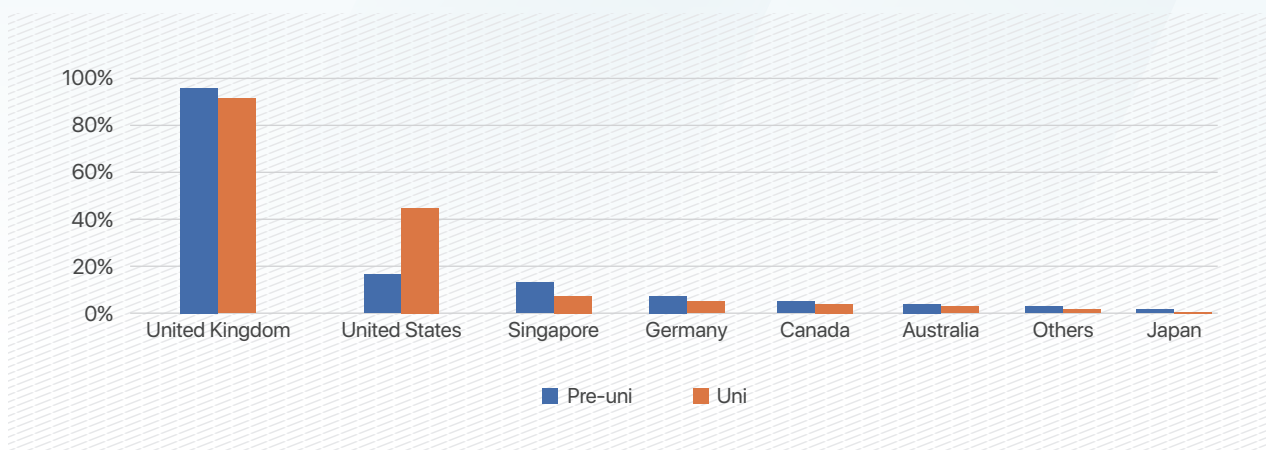
Almost all families who send/plan to send their children to UK are from Tier 1 and Tier 2 cities in China.

**Questions to consider**

- What kind of pressures has the child been under in their current setting?
- Does the school have a summer camp or study course it can recommend to parents?
- What do Chinese families understand by a well-rounded education?
- Schools need to reflect carefully upon how children gain an accurate picture of study opportunities overseas as the student's own desire and commitment will significantly influence their parents' decision.
- Are agents really in touch with school expectations and able to provide accurate advice in both directions?

### 3. Preferred study destinations

The best two study destinations identified by Chinese parents from a world-wide list of countries, were the UK (99%) and the USA (19%). This was not surprising, as the survey was mainly answered by parents who are considering or already benefiting from the UK education system. However, when compared with the two best choices for study at university level, the UK figure fell slightly and the United States strengthened to 49%.



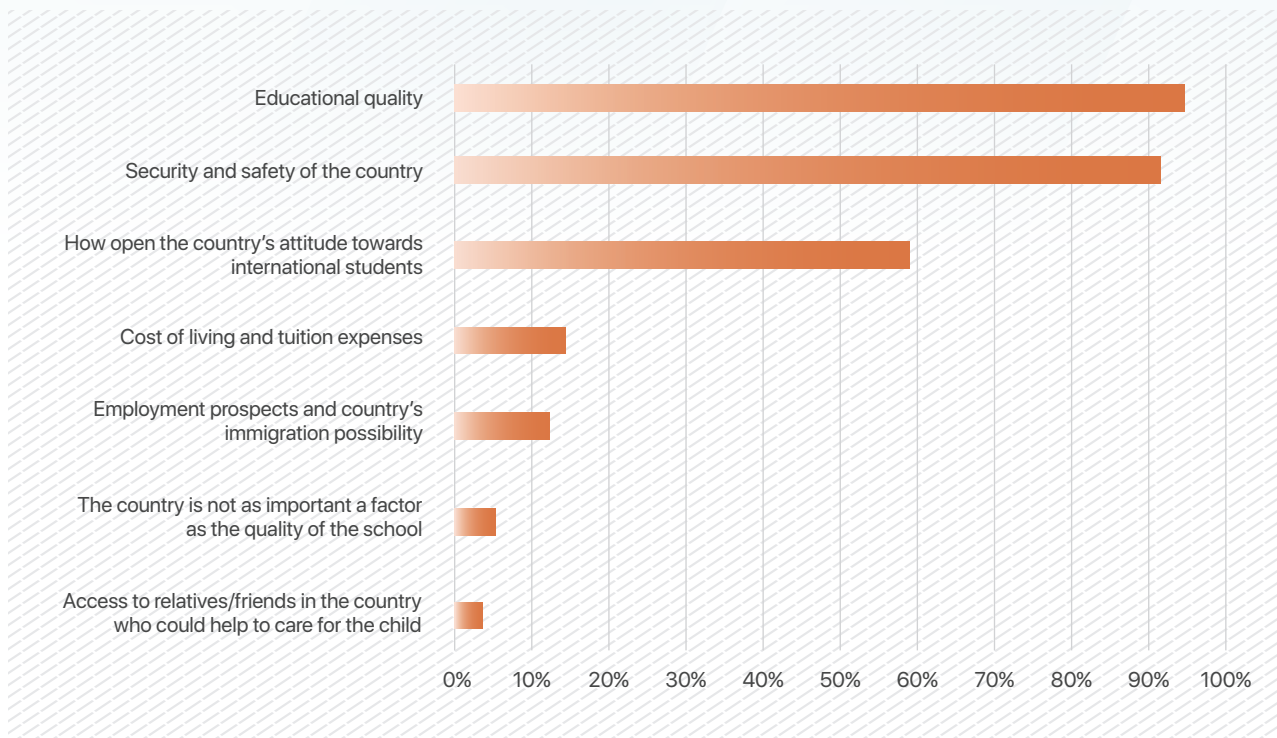
*Chart 5: Destination choices*

Clearly there is a view amongst some parents that US universities are better and stronger than UK universities, and here there may need to be greater support for the merits of UK undergraduate provision.

We know that the majority of students in UK boarding schools will apply to UK universities, but how effectively do UK schools inform and educate their international parent base regarding the range of university options, apart from the well-known Oxbridge/London route?

#### 4. What matters most to Chinese parents when choosing an international study destination for their child

The survey also confirms the three most important factors when Chinese parents choose a country for their child to study in overseas. Top of the list is educational quality (95%) closely followed by the security and safety of the country (92%); Britain scores strongly in this regard. The openness of a country's attitude towards international students also featured highly in parents' minds (60%). It is interesting to note that tuition and cost of living expenses were of far less importance than some other factors. Nor was access to friends and guardians, providing help and care, seen as a concern at this stage.



*Chart 6: What matters most to Chinese parents*

### Questions to consider

- How do prospective parents gain an accurate picture of the school's educational quality beyond its ranking in school league tables?
- How effectively do schools communicate their core ethos and values to their Chinese parents? What do these mean in terms of school life and relationships?
- Will students feel warmly welcome? It will be important to gauge post-COVID / post-Brexit attitudes, within the prevailing culture of the school.
- Does the school train all its staff to think internationally? How many staff come from a non-UK cultural background?
- How far does the school seek to show evidence of internationalism and demonstrate equality of opportunity?
- Does the school belong to any international organisations or federations of schools world-wide?
- Can students see international role models from current or former students such as prefects, school alumni or university graduates?

# How to choose a school

## 1. Key factors for choosing an overseas school

Most parents attach great importance to finding the right match between the school and the child's abilities and talents. This makes an honest appraisal of the child's potential essential, together with a clear understanding of the unique characteristics of the school, its ethos and values, as well as academic standing. Parents sometimes misunderstand the particular aims and strengths of the school and attach too much importance to a well-known name. Appreciation of their child's potential may also be poorly judged.

Parents value unbiased, well-informed advice and it is here that a reputable educational consultant is worth their weight in gold. Parents understandably have very limited knowledge of UK schools and tend to rely on league table rankings, so a broader perspective is essential.

The research process may take several years and will ideally include a physical visit to the UK school and meetings with staff and students. Sadly, this is not always possible and so schools have needed to find new ways of communicating their objectives effectively.

A number of senior schools and a few prep schools participate in international marketing events and whilst these have not been possible over the past two years, opportunities continue through agency webinars and consultations. It will be important for UK schools to maintain their profile in China, despite the current restrictions. Evidence would suggest that demand for a UK-based education remains strong.

Not surprisingly, the pastoral care of international students features very strongly in the survey responses (93%). This is closely followed by experience in looking after international students. The academic results of the school are also centrally important to most parents (91%). School facilities for boarders are also a key factor in school choice.

It is clear that the school's attitude and acceptance of international students as a positive element within the community, play an important part in the decision-making process. So too does the name and reputation of the school. The geographical location and number of international students was of rather less importance.

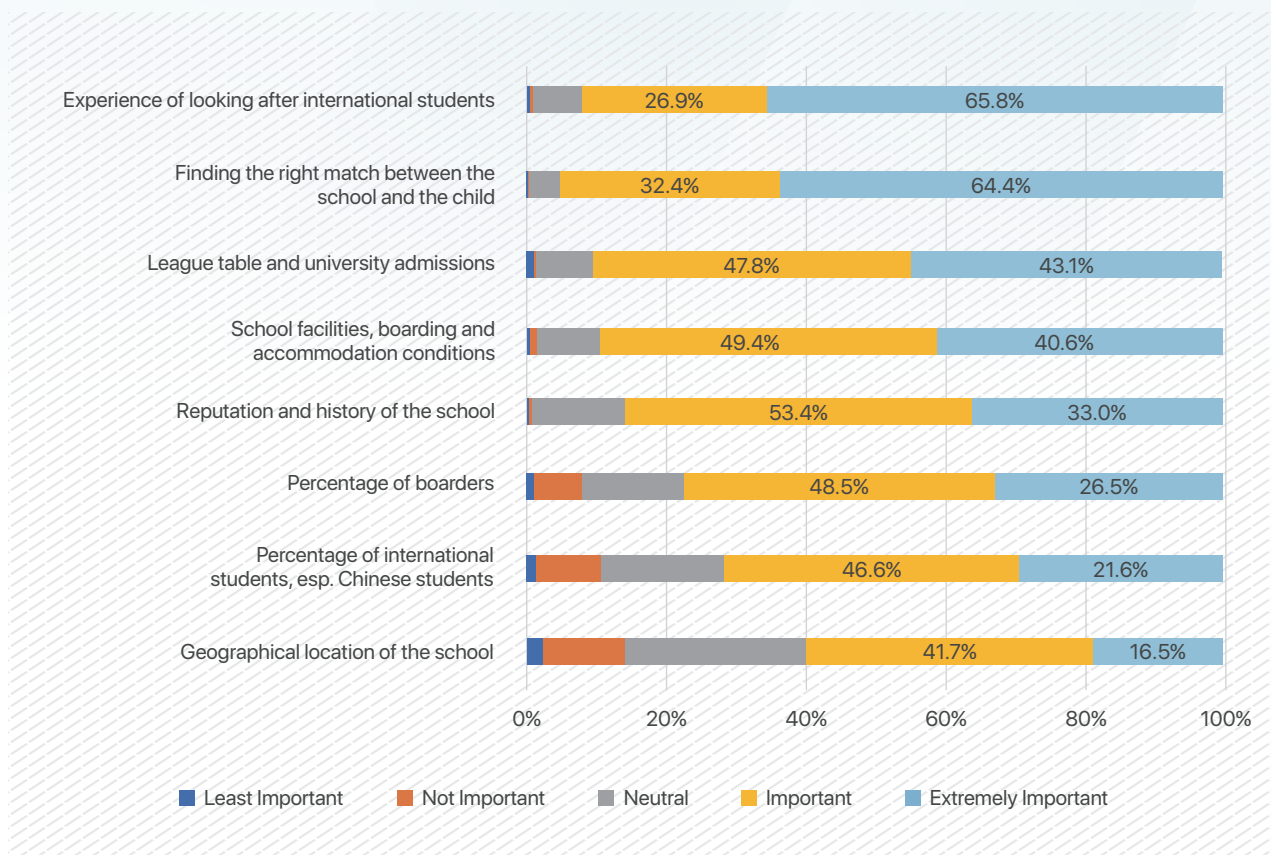


Chart 7: Key factors for school selection

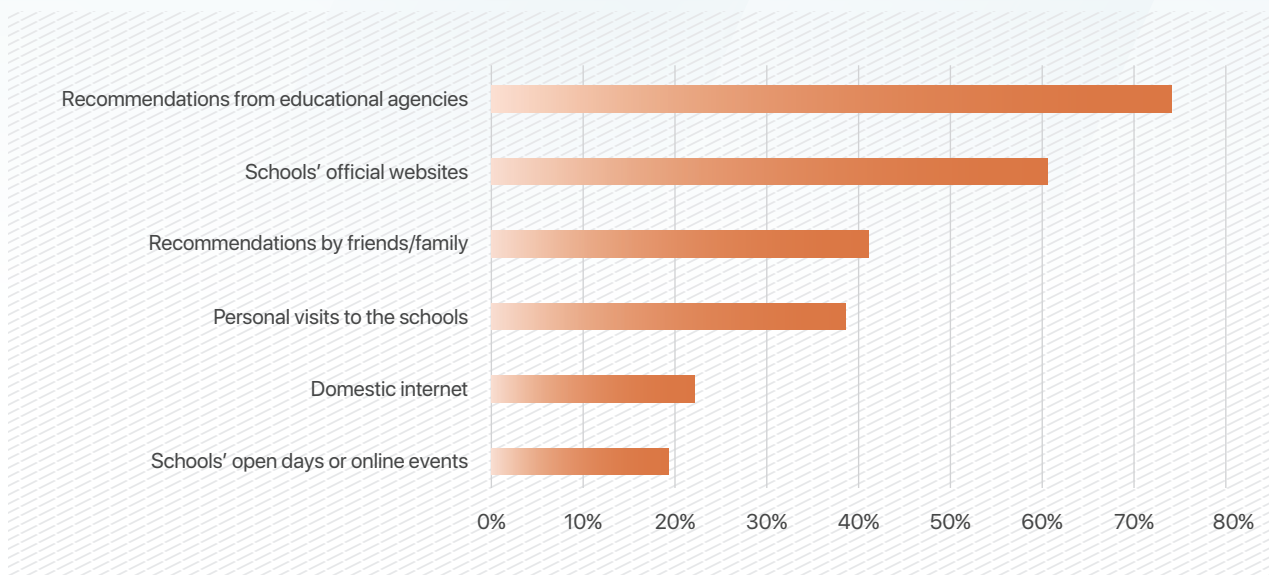
**Questions to consider**

- How can UK boarding schools better serve their international students? Do they conduct regular student surveys?
- Does the school mission statement refer to the aim of preparing children to be global citizens, with a high level of intercultural awareness?
- How do schools achieve this global outlook?
- How do schools make sure that the perspectives and experience of their international students are celebrated and of benefit to the wider school community?
- What systems are in place for effective, regular communication between school and home?
- Do schools make a special effort to meet and educate guardians?



## 2. Sources of information for international parents

The three most important sources of information when choosing to study abroad were recommendations from educational agencies (74%), official school websites (60%), and recommendations by friends and family (41%). Personal visits where possible are also very significant (39%). School Open Days and online events were understandably less useful to international parents, although some schools have produced virtual tours and filmed interviews with current students. Relatively little value was placed on internal Chinese internet sources (22%).



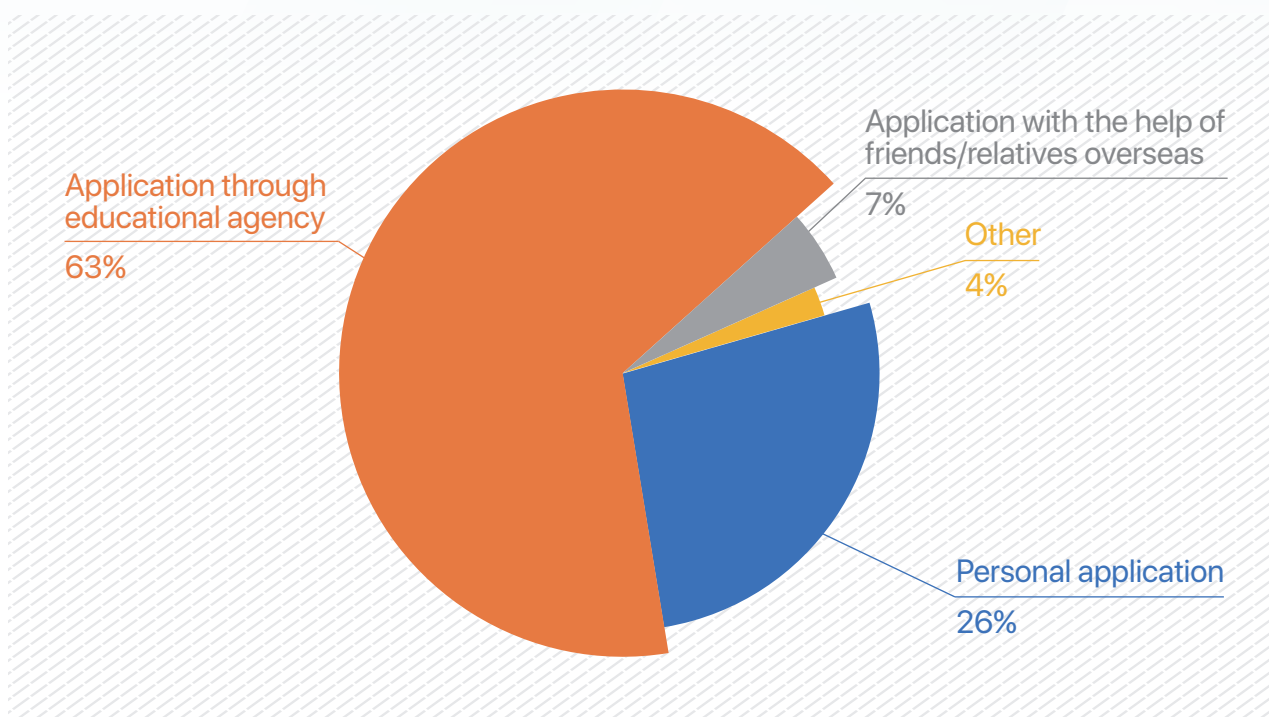
*Chart 8: Sources of information for selecting UK schools*

### 3. How to apply for schools

The survey indicates that 63% of prospective parents applied to schools through a recognised agent, with only 26% making a personal application. A further 7% applied through friends and relatives overseas or in other ways. We can infer from this that the key bridge between the school and the parents, both in terms of application and school recommendations, is the agent.

It is the same pattern for parents who already have children in UK boarding schools. 78% applied to schools through an agent and 14% made a personal application.

It would be interesting to compare these statistics with those for students coming from other countries.



*Chart 9.1: How prospective parents plan to apply to schools*

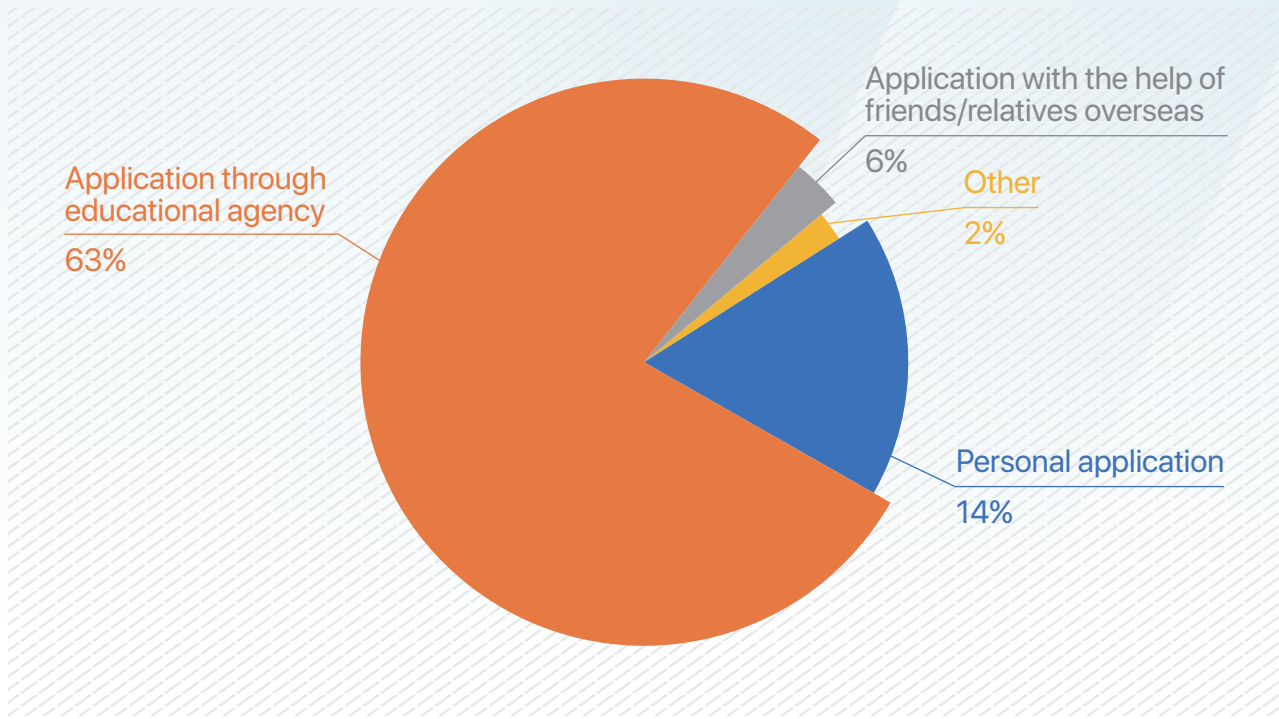


Chart 9.2: How current students applied to schools

**Questions to consider**

- The school's own website and marketing material are now more important than ever and schools should consider their accessibility and appeal to an international audience.
- Short films including 'student voices' and feedback can be effective but may be blocked in some forms.
- How far is the school making use of its alumni, as well as satisfied current parents?
- Does the school provide evidence of improvement and outcomes for its Chinese students?

#### **4. Choosing an agent**

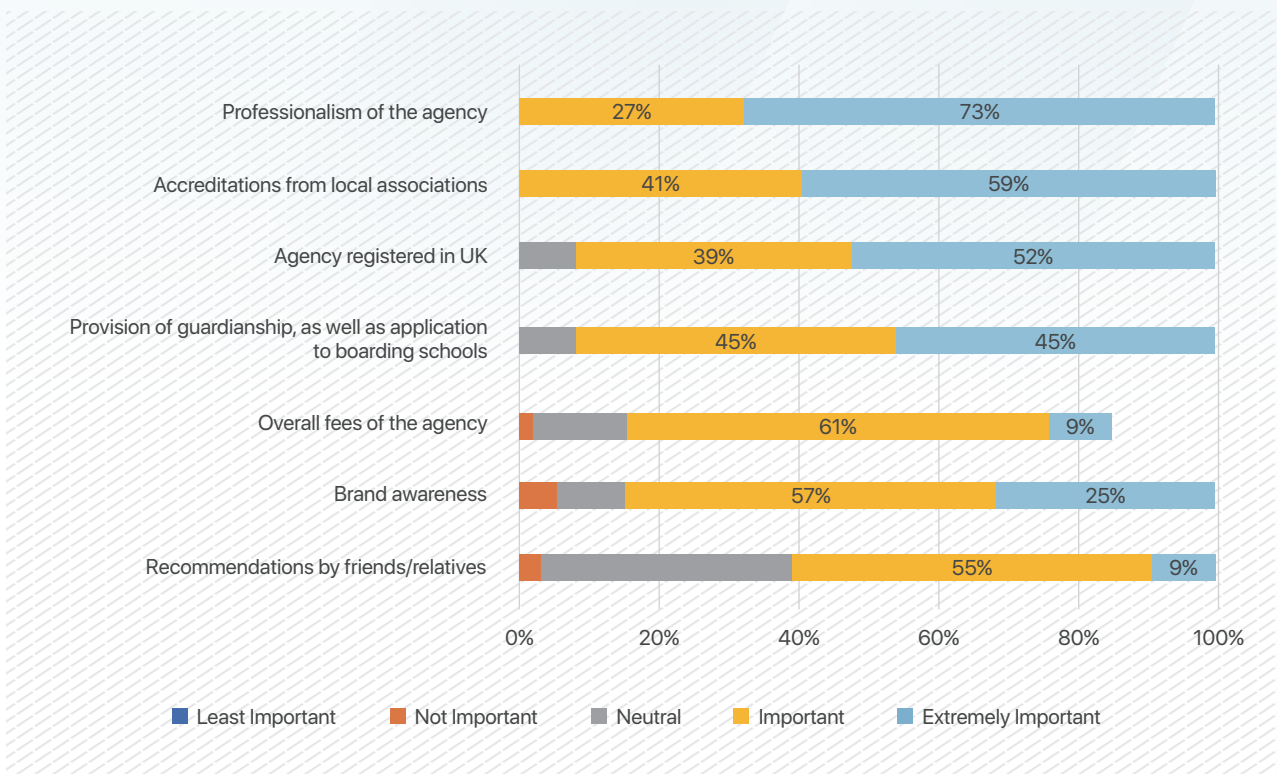
Finding the right agent is essential, both for the school and the parent. Experience suggests there are no short cuts and good agents attract good families. There are dangers in working with unproven or inexperienced agents.

Schools need to beware of agents who charge high fees and attract overly demanding parents who may lack judgement. Schools usually aim to work with trusted agents who demonstrate the best credentials, who are professional and offer a comprehensive service (perhaps including guardianship services). The BSA offers certification schemes for educational agents and guardians.

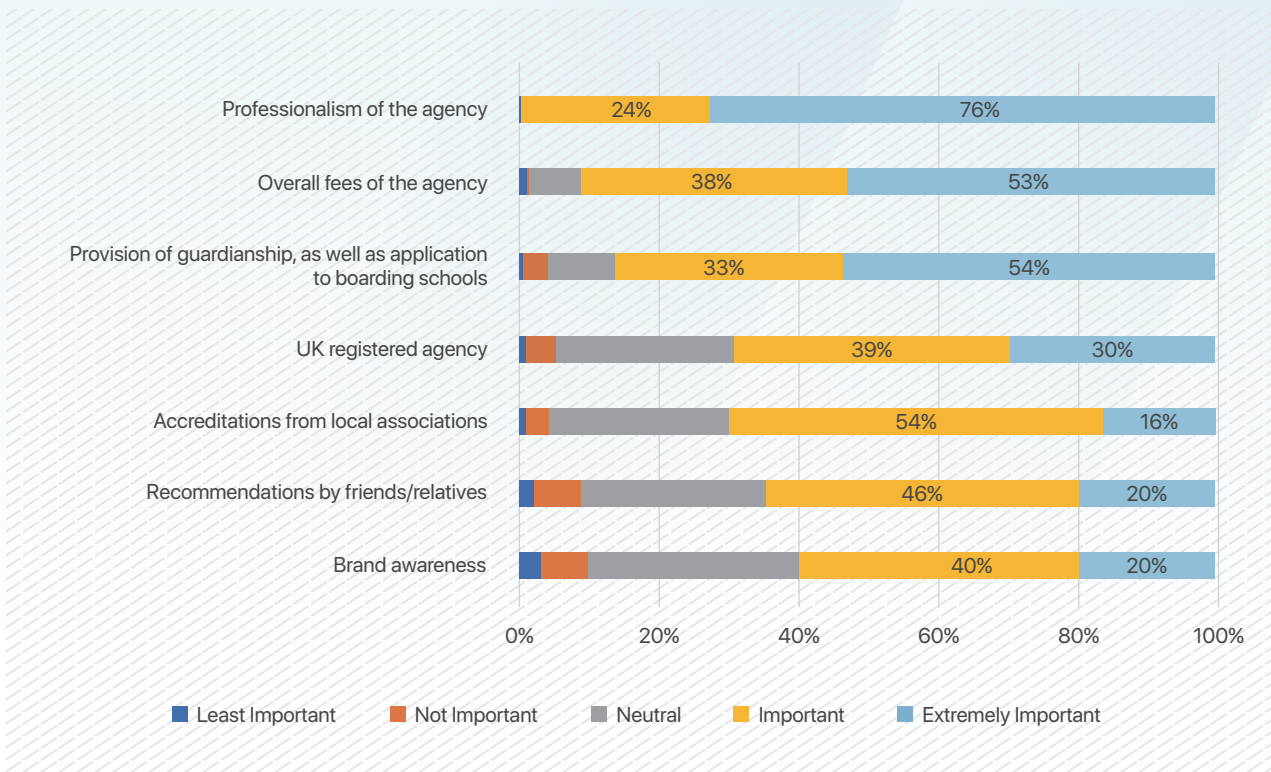
Schools also have a duty to UKVI to demonstrate that they are using reputable agents, with a proven track record.

### 5. Key decision factors for choosing an agent

For those applying through an agency, 91% of current parents indicated that the overall fees charged were either important or extremely important to them in the decision-making process. This is compared with only 70% of prospective parents feeling the same way. Perhaps this indicates a growing awareness of significant costs as the child takes up a place.



*Chart 10.1: Key factors for choosing an agency - Prospective parents*



**Chart 10.2: Key factors for choosing an agency - Current parents**

It is vital that prospective parents are made fully aware, by agents as well as schools, of all fees expected in advance of accepting places and that no unexpected bills appear. Advice over individual school policies regarding possible fees in advance or other schemes for siblings and scholarships may be helpful in certain cases.

Personal recommendation of an agent through satisfied friends/relatives was seen as helpful by 66% of current parents and it seems that word of mouth plays an important part for Chinese families. Of course, some agents will only recruit for certain schools and this may be an unhelpful limitation for some.

**Questions to consider**

- Does the school have a warm and understanding relationship with one or more agent(s)? Do they have a formal agreement with them?
- How effective is the agent in securing and supporting suitable candidates from the international market?
- Does the agent visit a range of schools and collect recent information? Has the agent visited your school regularly?
- What is the current reputation of the agent? Up-to-date accreditation of the agent with local associations should be expected.

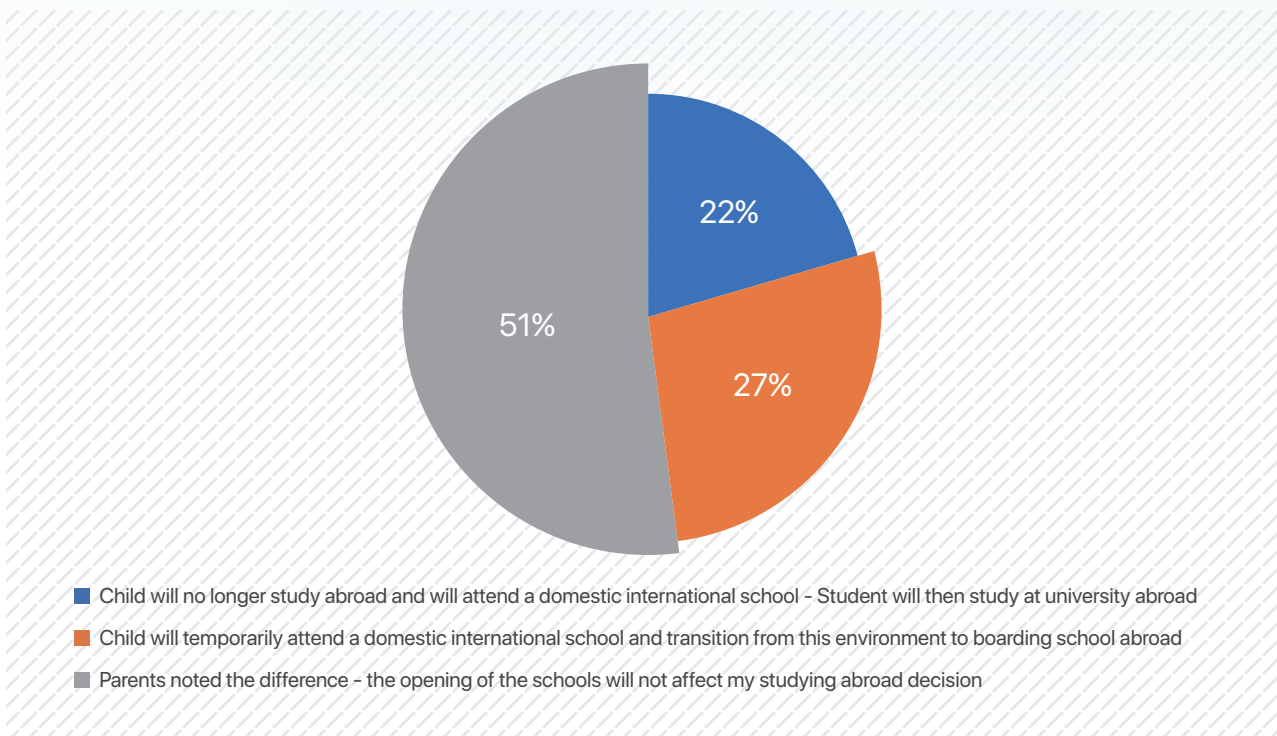


# Covid impacts on international boarding

## 1. The impact of the growth in the number of international schools in China - prospective parents:

There are a number of threats to international boarding recruitment which schools are only too well aware of. The growth of well-resourced domestic international schools in China certainly provides an attraction to prospective parents and 22% will apparently defer sending their children for overseas study until the university stage.

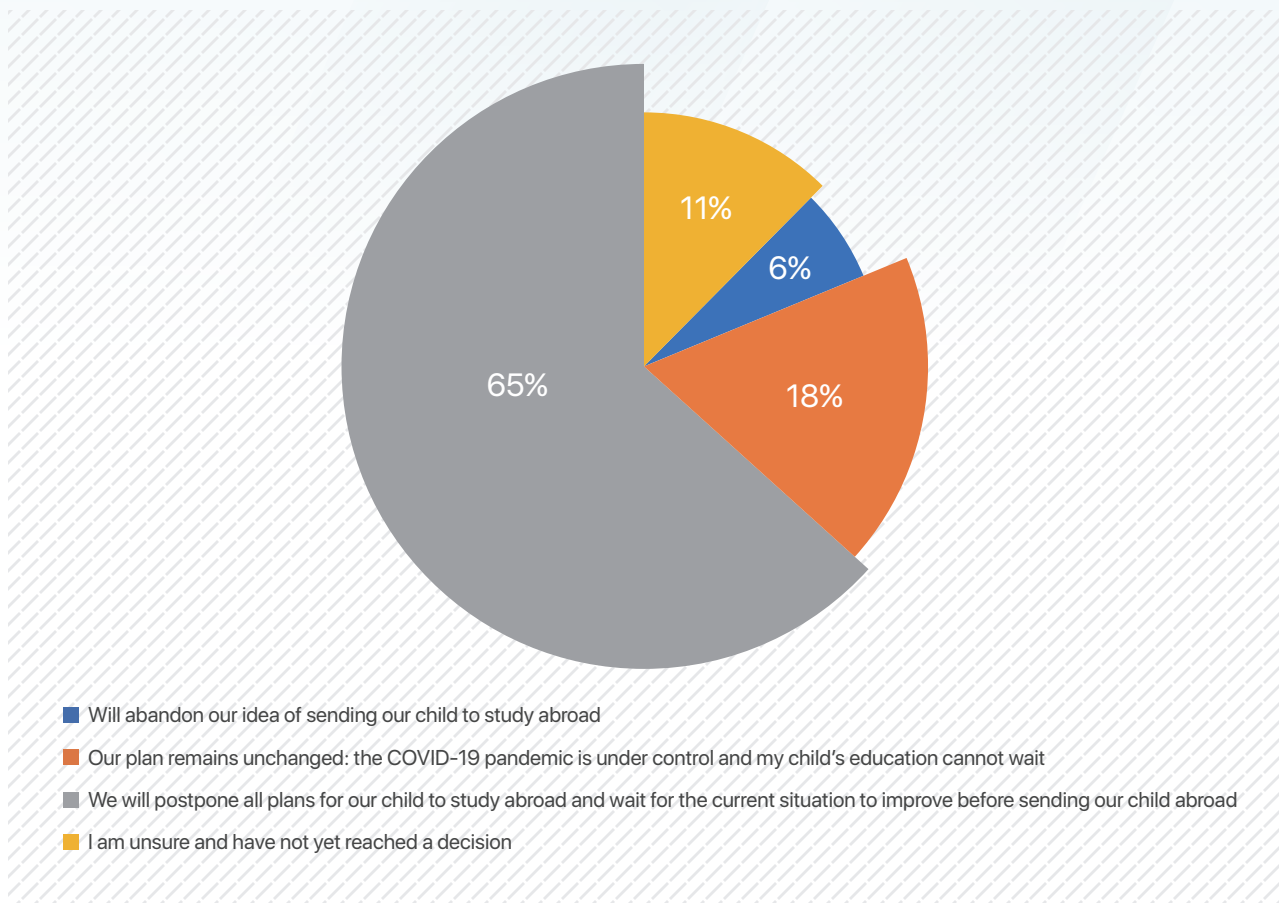
The current pandemic crisis accentuates this, with 26% of parents indicating that their children will temporarily attend a domestic international school. However, a significant majority (51%), note the difference between these schools and those in the UK and will not be affected in their thinking.



**Chart 11: The impact of the growth in the number of international schools in China - prospective parents**

## 2. The impact of Covid -19 on prospective parents' choices

The impact of COVID-19 on plans for children to study abroad has certainly been significant for those not yet in the system. It is noted that 65% of the smaller pre-entry group indicated that they will postpone all plans for children to study abroad with just 18% saying their plans will remain unchanged. A small minority (11%) are unsure and had not yet reached a decision at the time of the survey. Only 6% will completely abandon their aim of sending their children to study overseas.

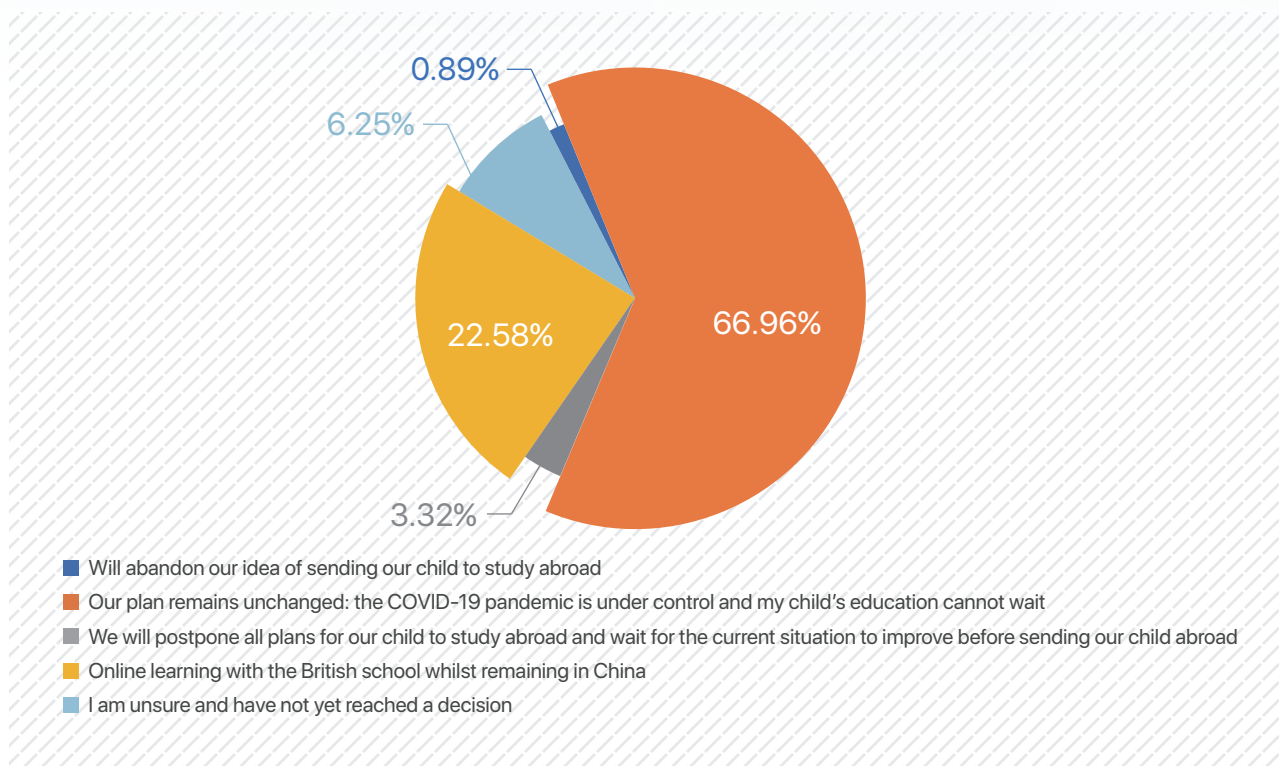


*Chart 12: The impact of Covid-19 on prospective parents' choices*

### 3. The impact of Covid -19 on current parents' choice

Current Covid restrictions have significantly impacted current parents but only a tiny minority (0.89%) say they will definitely abandon their idea of sending their child abroad. It seems that the vast majority are converted and convinced of the value of UK schools. 10% said that they are either undecided at the moment or that they may defer study in the UK. On the other hand, a solid 67% of parents indicated that their plans would remain unchanged as the pandemic was being brought under control and 23% said they would make use of online learning whilst their child remained in China. Thus, there seems to be a high degree of confidence amongst current parents. It will be interesting to see how strongly this remains in the autumn of 2021.

Thus, we see a clear difference between parents who already have children in UK schools at present and parents who are considering it.



**Chart 13: How Covid impacts current parents' decisions**

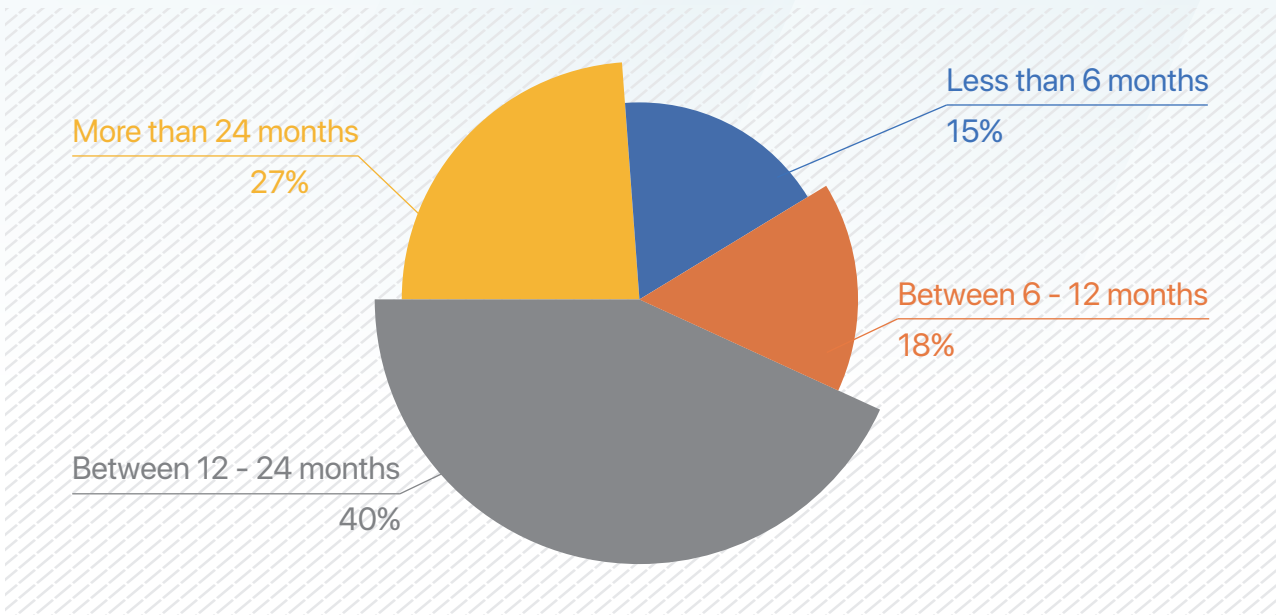
**Questions to consider**

- It is important for schools to consider what they will do in the short term to keep families informed and engaged in the move to the UK.
- Schools need to make it very clear to prospective parents what their policies are in the possible event of further infections, lock-downs and travel restrictions going forward.
- Heads and Governors also need to consider the impact of smaller numbers for their schools.
- Each school will need to try harder, be more proactive and demonstrate excellence in this market.

# Questions answered by prospective parents only

## 1. Time of preparation

There is widespread acceptance amongst Chinese parents that they need to prepare their children well in advance for study in the UK. 40% see this as a one to two year period of preparation, whilst 26% will put aside more than two years. Clearly this indicates a serious commitment to long-term educational strategy involving a considerable outlay of time and money.



*Chart 14: Length of preparation for UK schools by prospective parents*

UK schools recruiting pupils from China are likely to request a raft of academic and other information from schools before they make any offer. Here there may be scope once again to work with the agent, recommending material which will be of help to the child as they acquire the necessary linguistic and literacy skills to access the British curriculum.

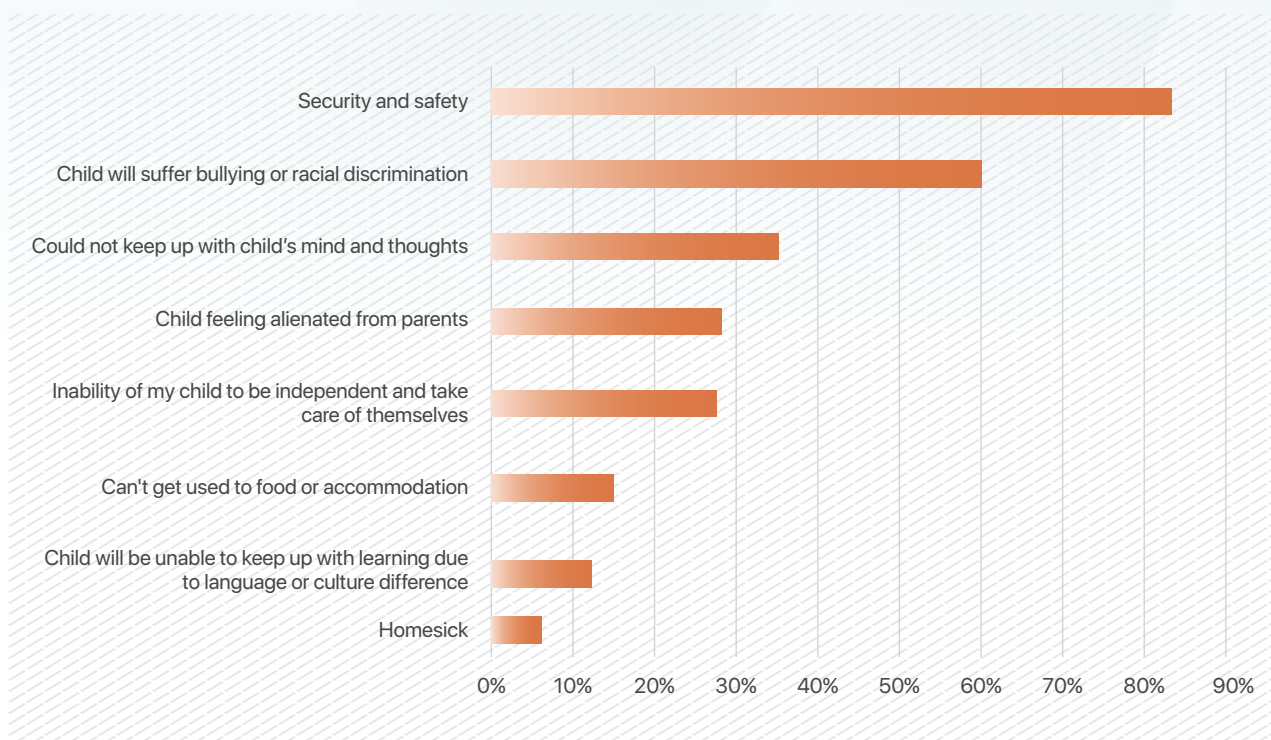
Good agents will be able to interpret school requirements for parents, providing reassurance and further guidance for the child through tutorial support if need be.

**Questions to consider**

- How much advice is the school prepared to give in advance of a child arriving in school?
- Does the school have a reading list, or even a developmental programme for students?
- Some schools, in normal times, will offer a 'taster visit' for students to gain confidence prior to their starting properly the following year. How might schools provide an online 'taster visit'?
- Is the school able to recommend a short-term international study centre, in which prospective students may acquire greater confidence prior to school entry?

## 2. Parental concerns about studying in a UK school - Prospective parents

The child's safety and security was certainly the most important consideration for parents about to embark on an overseas school placement (86%). In second place was whether their child would suffer bullying or racial discrimination (61%). Issues of alienation from parents and an inability to take care of themselves were less significant (29%), whilst lack of familiarity with food, standards of accommodation and homesickness were mentioned by 22% of prospective parents.



*Chart 15: Concerns of prospective parents*

**Questions to consider**

- Does the school fully demonstrate to parents exactly how they make their environment safe and that they have strict rules to deal with any possible bullying?
- Has the school reviewed its staff and pupil codes of conduct taking account of possible racial discrimination? Are these expectations clearly communicated to all pupils, staff, governors and parents?



### 3. Awareness of guardianship - prospective parents

Guardianship is a key area where prospective parents need advice and support. 60% of prospective parents had heard of it but did not know much about the role of a guardian. It will be important for schools and agents to help educate parents to understand the credentials for guardians, their responsibilities, expertise and cultural expectations.

Once again the role of the agent is recognised as potentially significant, particularly in being able to understand the cultures of both countries and the need for a good guardian.

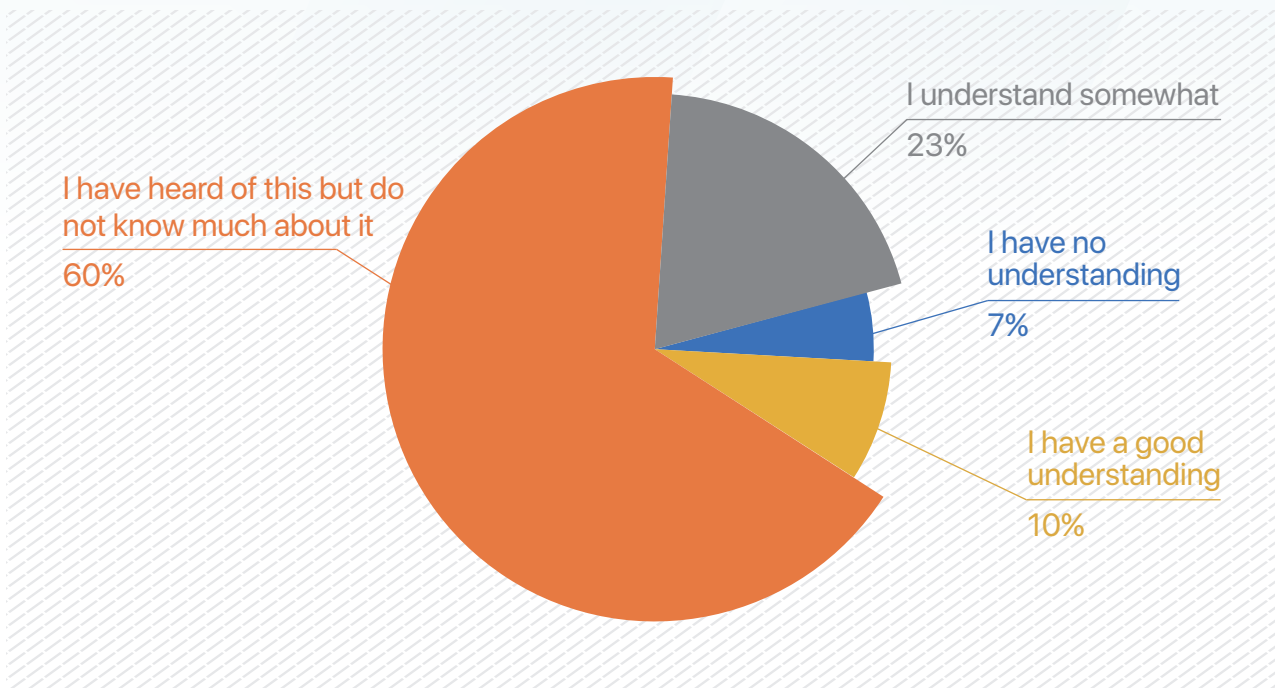
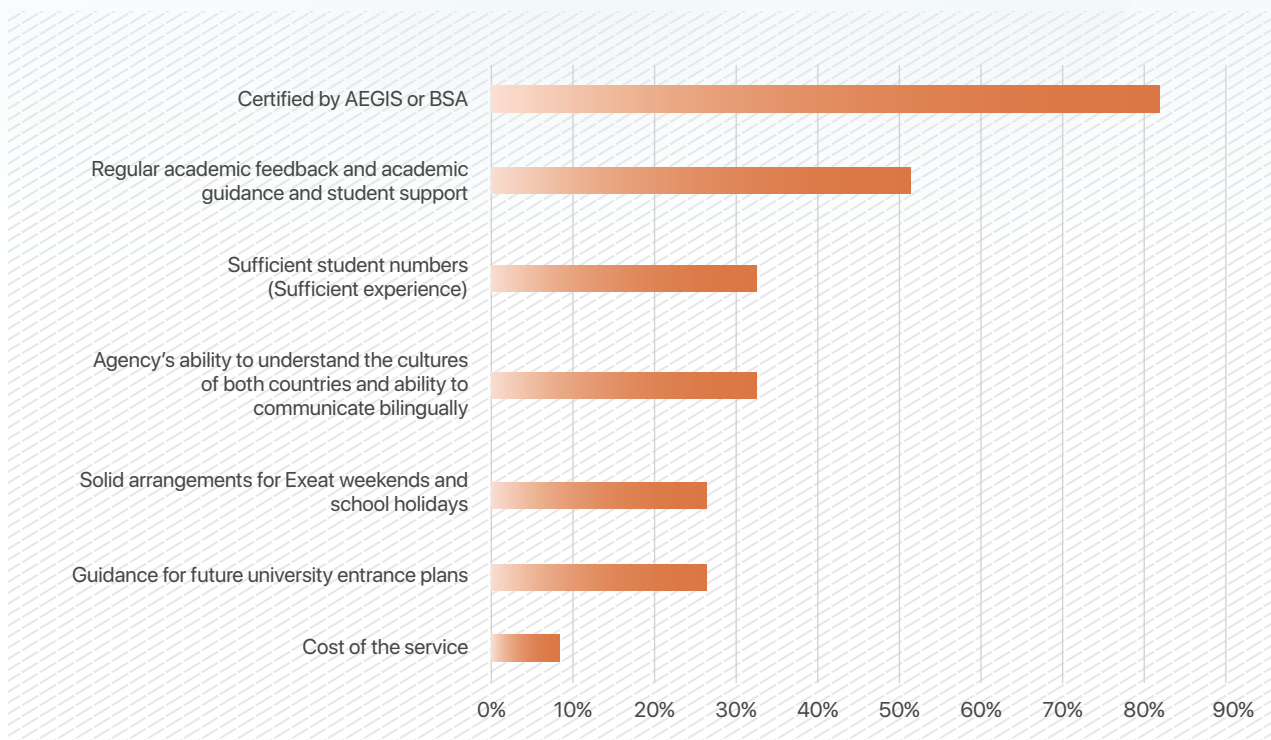


Chart 16: Awareness of guardianship - Prospective parents

#### 4. Important factors for prospective parents choosing guardians

Of primary importance to parents is assurance around the certification of a guardian or guardianship agency (82%). Regular feedback, as well as student support from guardians was also identified as valuable (53%) and schools will recognise the importance of parental involvement for academic success. Some prospective parents understood the importance of responsible arrangements for exeat weekends and school holidays (28%), and clearly all schools will require security over such matters. The BSA has a certification scheme for agents and guardians.



*Chart 17: Important factors for prospective parents choosing guardians*

### Questions to consider

- The relationship between the school and the pupil's guardians/host family is vital. How does the school take account of the child's perspective and what does it expect of the host family particularly in times of crisis?
- Schools may see the need to review their policies over exeat and holiday arrangements for international boarders during times of crisis where normal guardianship arrangements will need to be suspended.
- How will the school make suitable arrangements to protect international boarding students from any further outbreaks of Covid?

# Questions answered by current parents only

## 1. UK school entry points - Current parents

A total of 784 current parents responded to the BSA/BC/Connexcel survey. Of these 21% had enrolled their children in Year 8 or below, 41% had enrolled at 13+, 27% at Year 10 or 11, and 11% at 16+. It is important to note that of the 784 responses, 8.5% were not able to answer some of the questions, as their children were still in China during the summer term 2021.

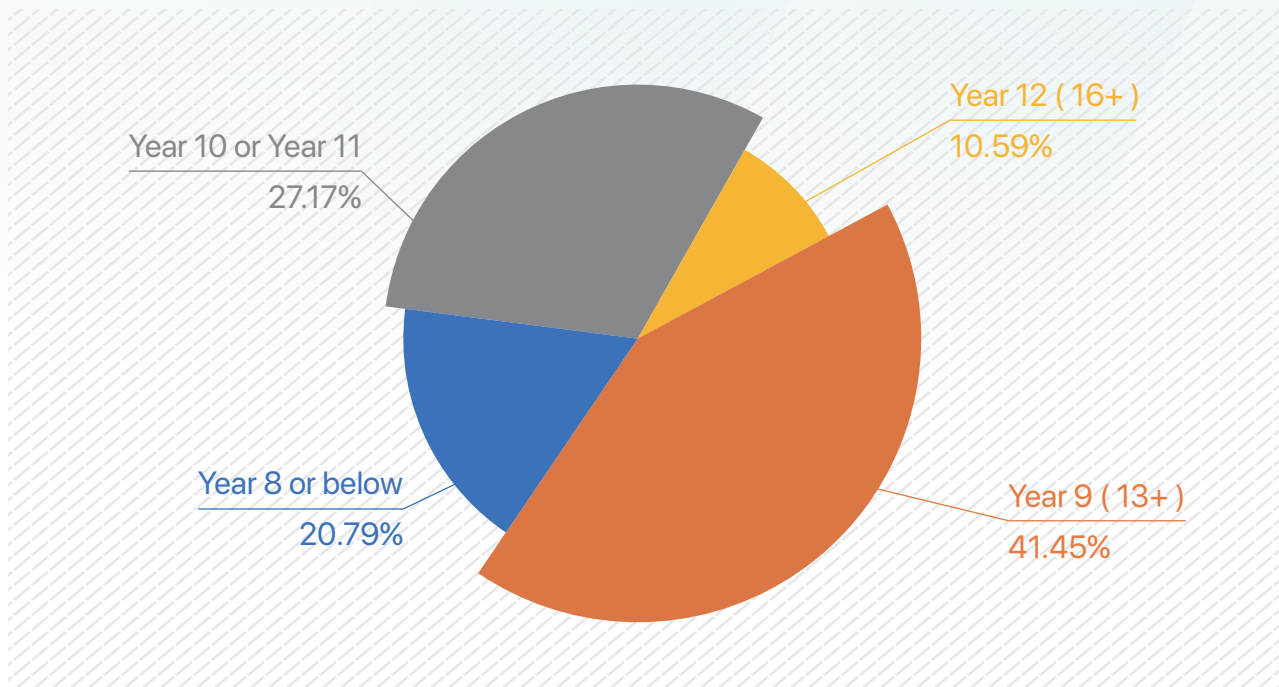
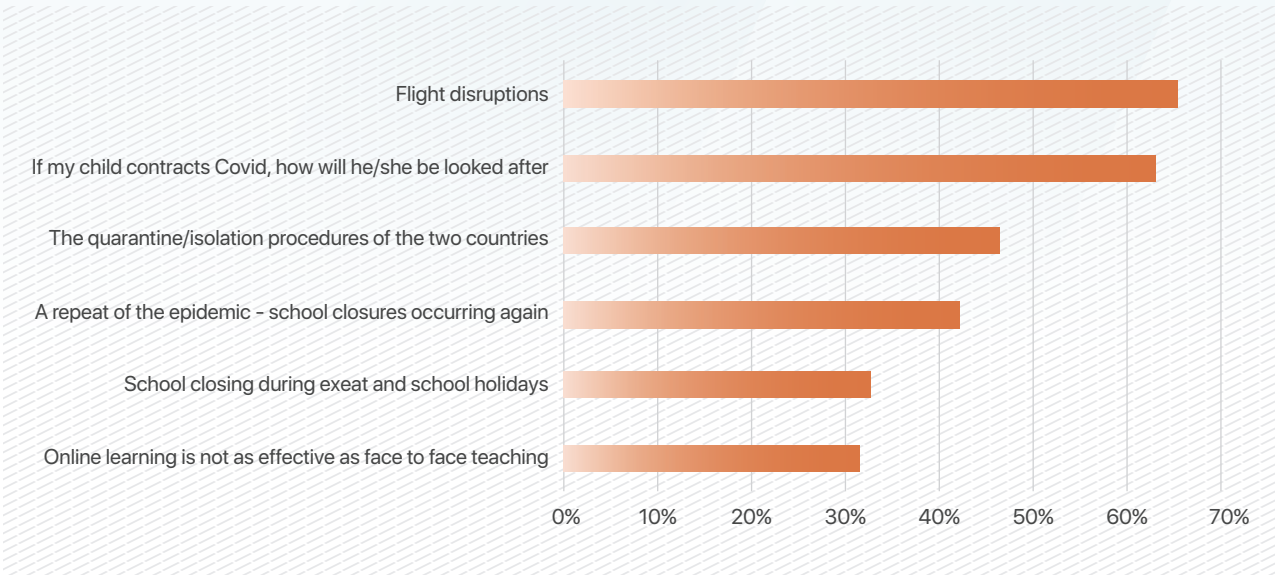


Chart 18: UK school entry points - current parents

## 2. Major Covid-related concerns for current parents

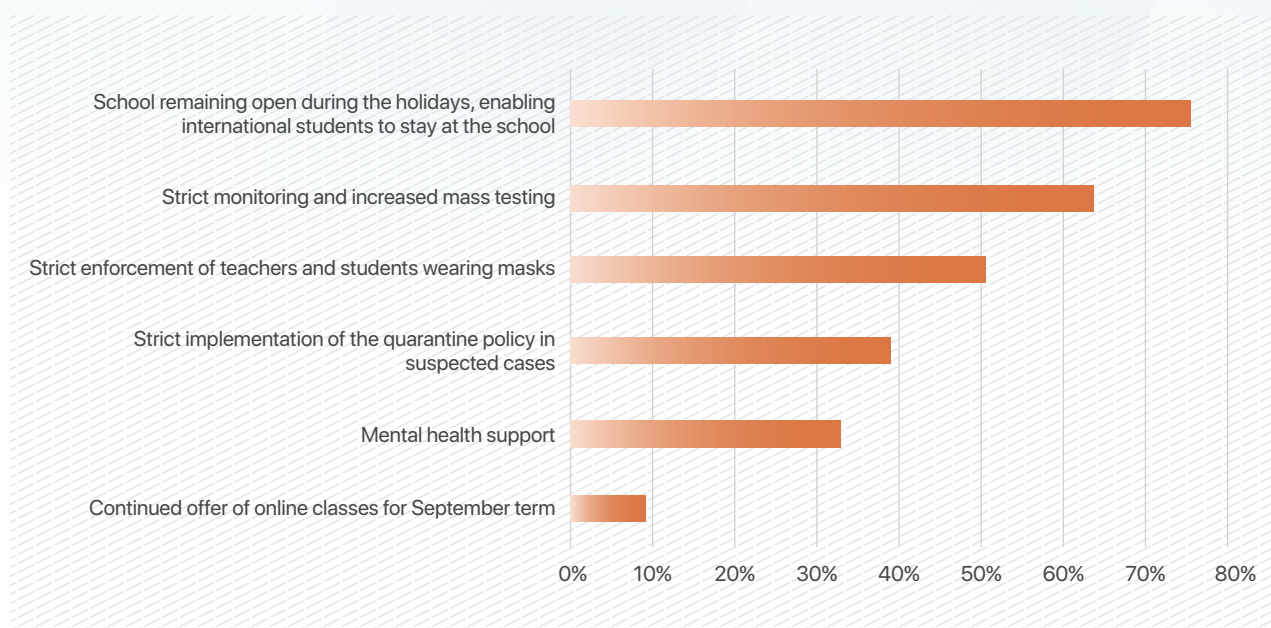
Two major concerns stand out for parents with children already in the UK boarding school system: flight restrictions (67%) and if my child contracts Covid, how will he/she be looked after? (64%). Quarantine and isolation procedures in the two countries were also identified by 47% of parents. At least 42% of current parents were worried about further school closures occurring by repeated waves of the COVID 19 pandemic.



*Chart 19: Major Covid-related concerns for current parents*

### 3. Covid safety measures current parents desire most

Asked to consider the three most important measures that their school needs to take to ensure safety in the pandemic, current parents were particularly keen to see schools remaining open during the school holidays (77%). They would also like to see continued strict monitoring and implementation of regular tests (67%) and the wearing of masks by staff and pupils (51.5%) in schools. Parents showed little interest in the continued offer of online classes from September 2021 (10%).



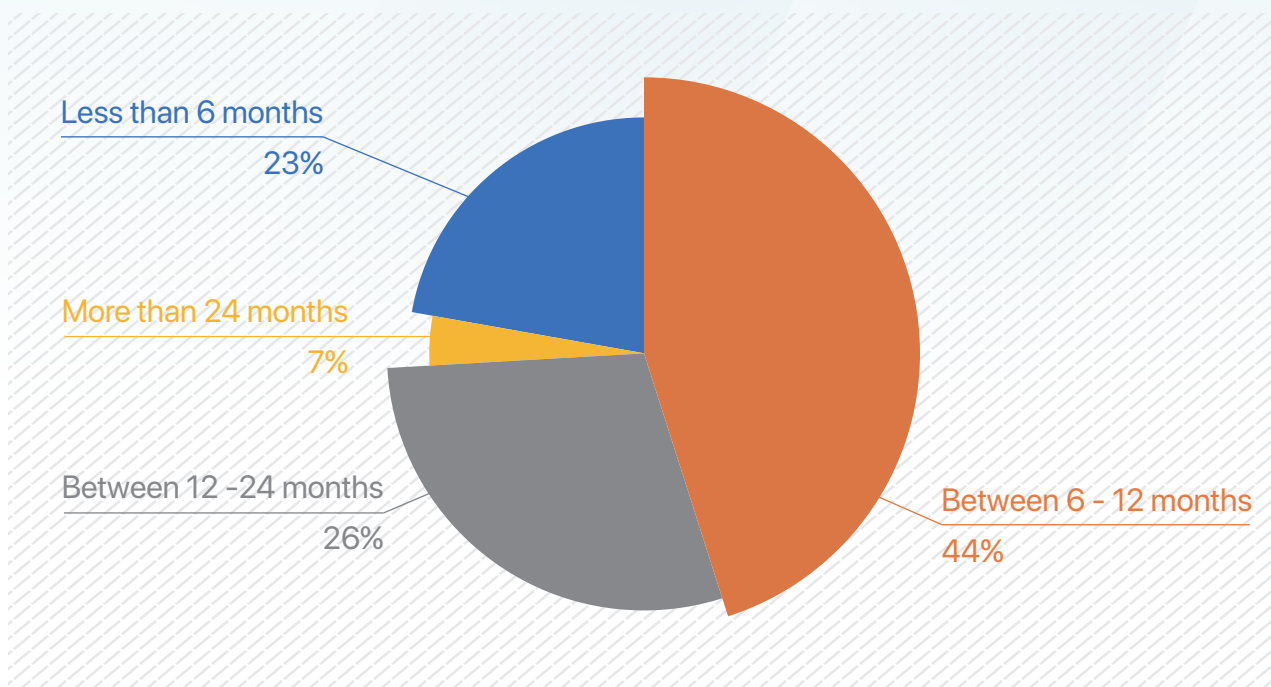
*Chart 20: Covid safety measures current parents desire most*

### Questions to consider

- What provisions (e.g. care, medical support) will the school provide in the event students contract Covid?
- If schools stay open through the holidays, as Chinese parents would like, what effect does this have on staff welfare, school maintenance etc.?
- Is there scope for boarding schools to cluster together to provide holiday arrangements?
- Is there scope for an increased use of holiday study centres?
- Is it realistic to insist on continued mask wearing around school? How is advice communicated to parents?
- How can the confidence of current parents be translated to prospective parents and candidates for UK boarding schools?
- Is there a need for specific mental health support for international pupils separated from parents for long periods of time?

#### 4. Preparing children for entry to UK schools

Parents with children already at UK schools largely allowed between 6 - 24 months for preparation, with the majority saying 6 - 12 months. This compared with more time identified by those currently planning entry (12 - 24 months) - (Chart 12) This may indicate greater uncertainty amongst potential pupils or a perception that entry is becoming more competitive.



*Chart 21: Length of preparation for UK schools - Current parents*



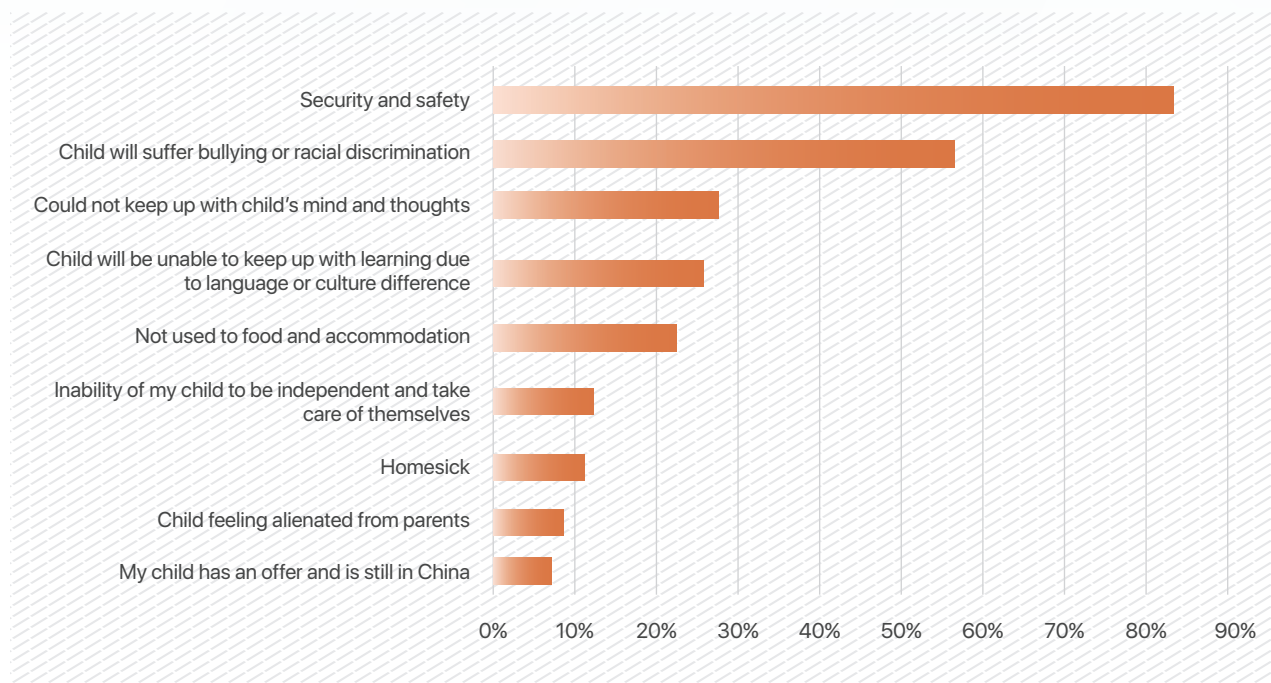
### Questions to consider

- How can schools reassure parents that a UK boarding education remains a viable option for them?
- How much advice is the school prepared to give parents in advance of a child arriving in the UK school?
- Does the school provide a reading list, or even a preparatory induction course available for pupils to access, having once registered for a place?
- Does the school provide agents with clear advice over academic standards and other expectations? Can they be sure the agent is giving good realistic advice to parents?

## 5. Challenges encountered by children studying abroad

Safety and security were identified as by far the biggest challenge facing Chinese families (83%) in the current pandemic period. This was followed by racial discrimination and bullying (58%). A third challenge identified by parents was an inability to keep up with their child's mental development and thought processes (30%).

The question of children being unable to keep up with learning due to language difficulties was also identified as a problem by 27% of parents, whilst 23% found school food and accommodation unfamiliar. However, homesickness was not seen as a major difficulty, perhaps reflecting the mature mindset of many taking this considered step towards overseas learning. Effective support for issues such as pupil homesickness is clearly provided by house staff. It is interesting to note that the fear of alienation or possible alienation from parents is not seen as a significant problem.



*Chart 22: Key concerns of current parents*

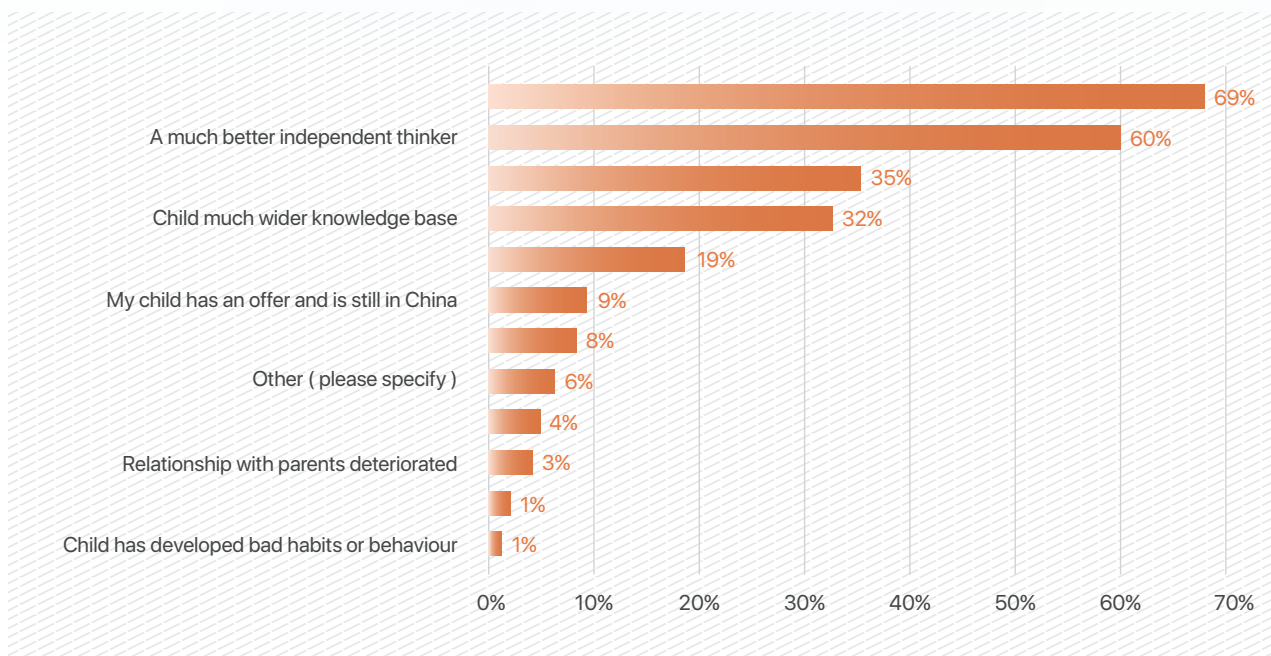
### Questions to consider

- Does the school provide some kind of induction course for international pupils? Are older students encouraged to mentor or 'buddy' new arrivals?
- Does the school offer specialist advice for international students? Are their interests and well-being represented by prefects, carers, house and tutorial staff?
- Does the school have an effective EAL department? Is pupil progress in English regularly assessed and reported to parents?
- Are international students allowed to study a limited range of subjects to begin with?
- Do house staff monitor how regularly students are in touch with their homes? Do house staff regularly message parents with information and reassurance?
- How effectively does the school deal with racial discrimination?

## 6. Positive benefits of studying in the UK - current parents

Most Chinese parents answering the survey believe that studying at UK boarding schools has a very positive impact on their children. They become more self-reliant and increasingly mature in their outlook (69%). They become much better at independent thinking (60%), as well as showing increased empathy and tolerance of others (35%). Parents were pleased with their child’s much wider knowledge base (32%) and often enjoyed improved relationships with their children (19%).

Very few parents identified any negatives from studying in the UK, such as bad habits (0.5%), a deterioration in relationships with parents (3%), less confidence (1%), or less interest in Chinese culture (4%). This might seem surprising, and tells us something about the commitment of the entire family to this educational course of action.



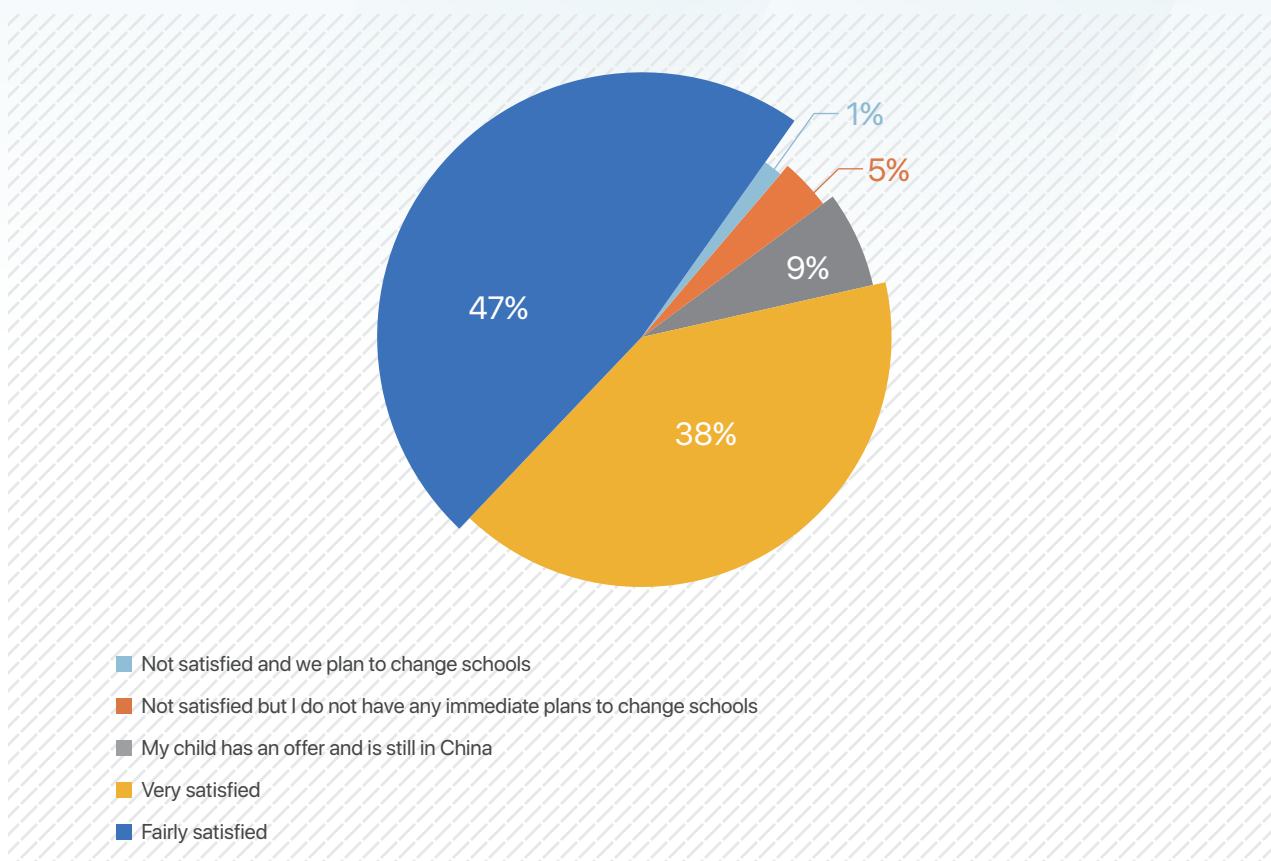
**Chart 23: Positive benefits of studying in the UK - Current parents**

**Questions to consider**

- Are international students encouraged to share and celebrate their interests with others?
- Does the School celebrate festivals such as Chinese New Year and Moon Festival?
- Do the parents get a clear picture of their child's progress and potential in all areas?
- Does the school recognise progress being made amongst international students and reward small as well as large achievements?

## 7. The performance of UK boarding schools during Covid

Parental opinion was generally very positive regarding the performance of UK boarding schools during the COVID-19 pandemic, with 85% fairly or very satisfied. However, 9% of current parents responding to the questionnaire indicated that their children were still in China and no doubt some of these will have benefited from remote learning provided by schools. It would be useful to know what schools needed to do to move parents from fairly satisfied (47%) to very satisfied (38%).

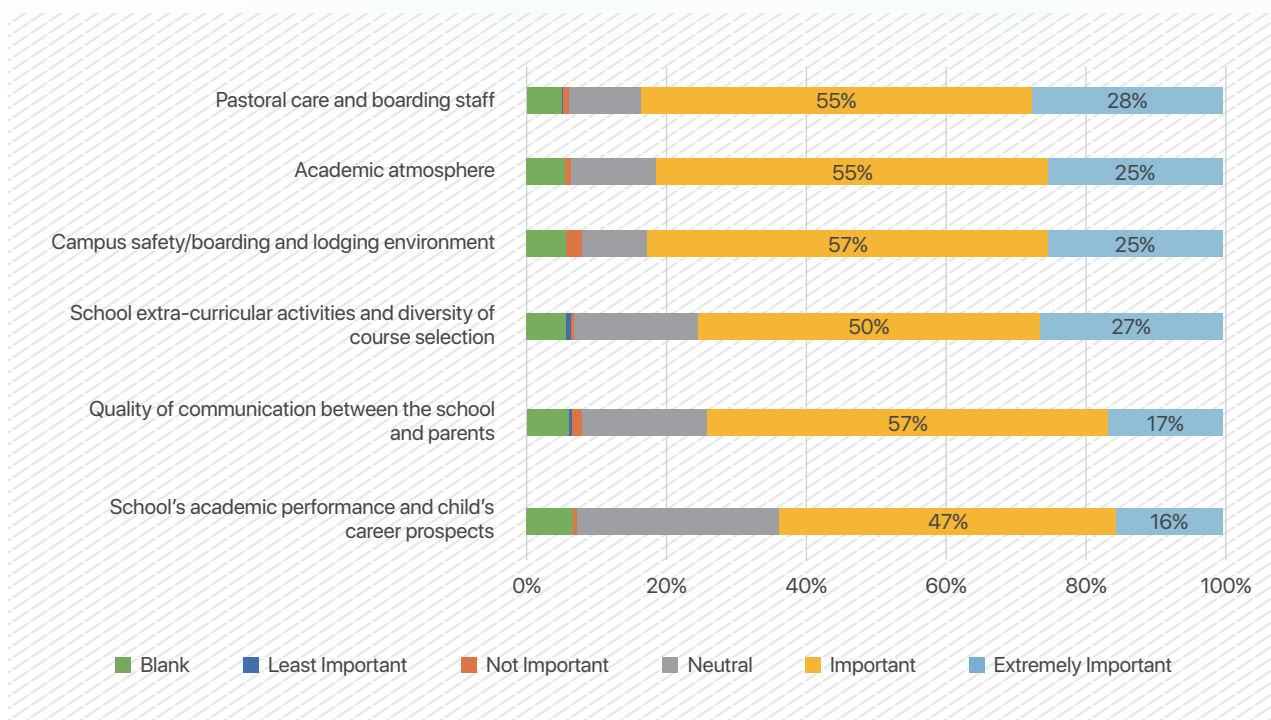


*Chart 24: The performance of UK boarding schools during Covid*

## 8. Current parents' satisfaction level

Pastoral care stands out as a great strength together with the high quality of boarding staff (83% of parents were either fairly or very satisfied). 80% of parents were fairly or very happy with the academic atmosphere and only 1% dissatisfied. Campus safety and the boarding environment also attracted favourable comment (82%). Extra-curricular activities and diversity of course selection attracted 77% positive satisfaction.

There were two areas where international parents felt schools could improve. These were in communication with international parents (22% neutral or negative), and in giving information on academic performance and career advice (34% neutral or negative). These are clearly areas schools will need to look at in further detail.



*Chart 25: Current parents' satisfaction level*

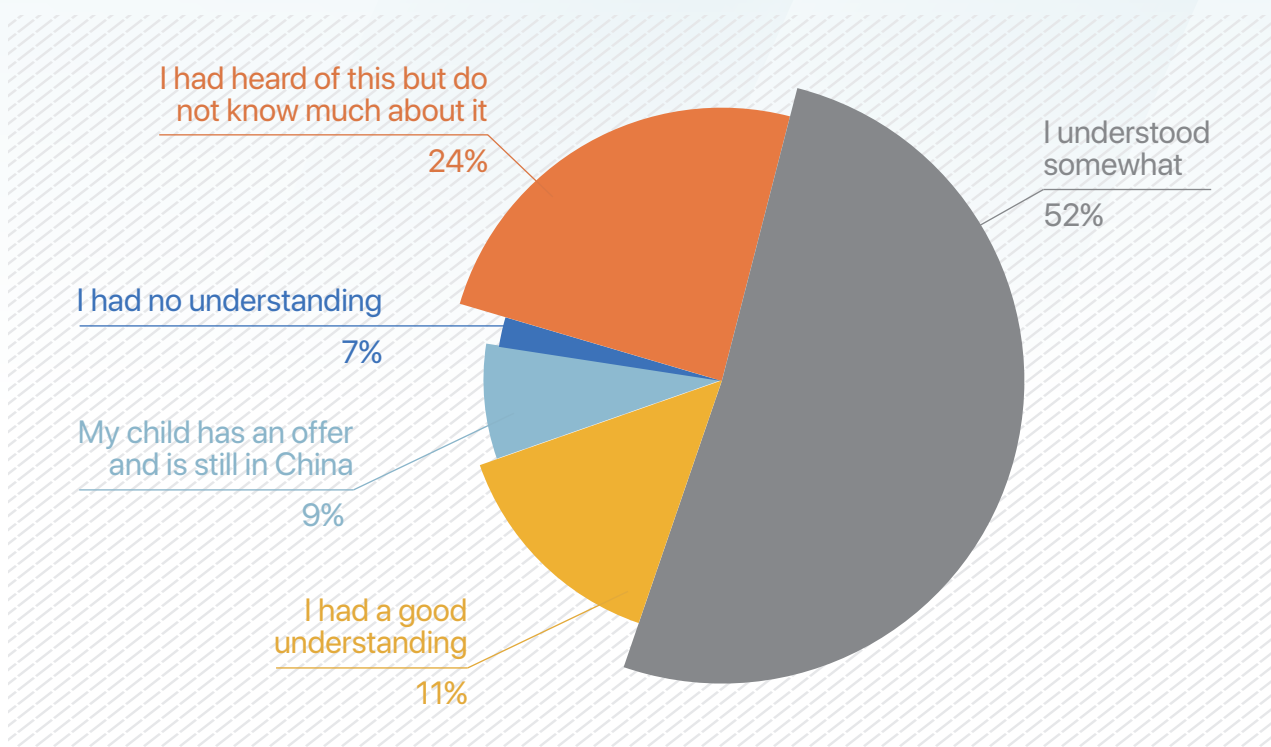
### Questions to consider

- Who is responsible for giving careers advice and who communicates it effectively to International parents?
- How can schools make sure that parents feel involved in their child's educational progress?
- Does the school have ways of showing parents and guardians the progress or 'value added' of its international students?
- Does the school have a clear understanding of the student's aims as well as their parents' aspirations? Do these match school recommendations?
- Does the school monitor the success of its international students when they leave school and communicate their achievements in literature available to international parents?



### 9. The importance of guardians before current parents choose them

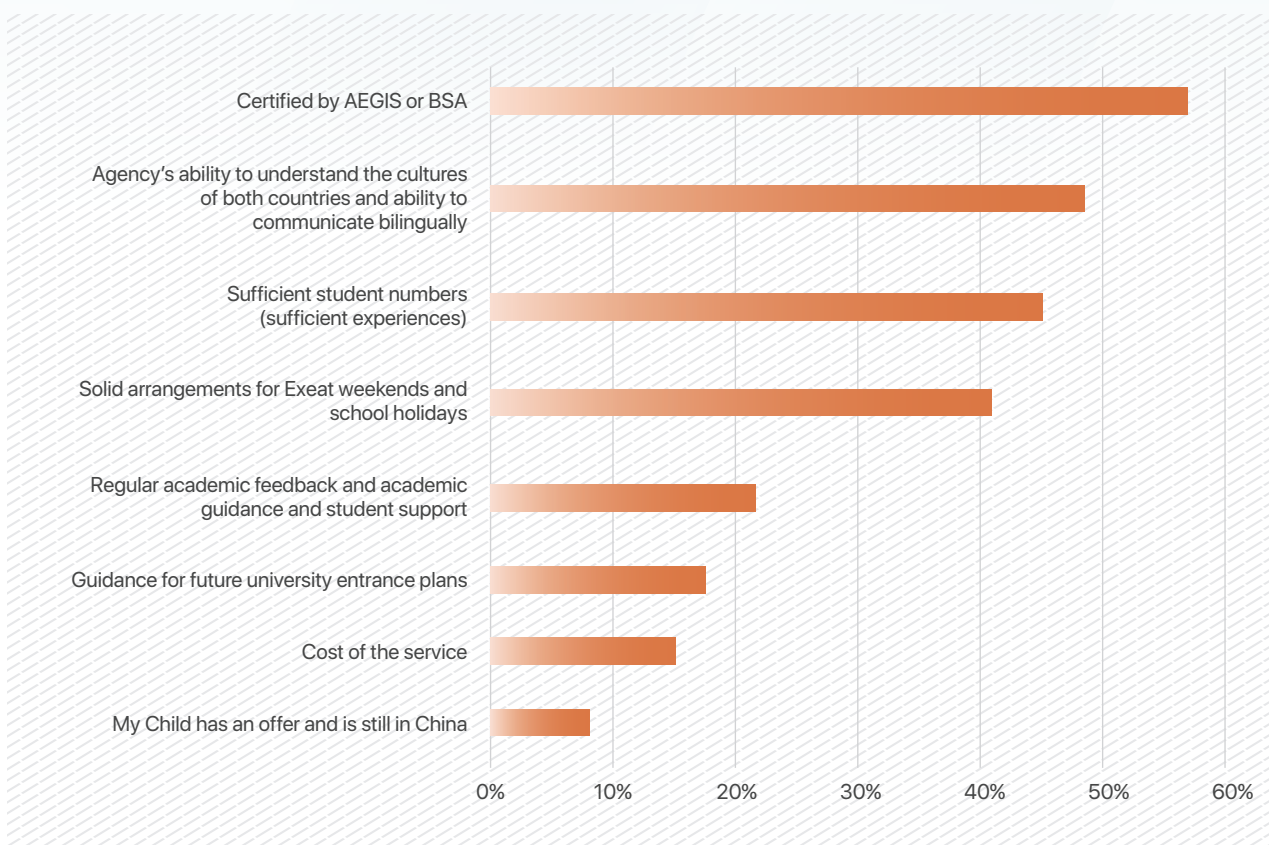
Most current parents have a fairly good understanding of the roles and responsibilities of guardianship agencies (63%), although conversely 28% had little or no understanding. Others had not made use of guardians as their children were still in China. This must be one area where greater publicity and support will be necessary going forward.



**Chart 26: Awareness of guardianship before current parents chose their guardians**

## 10. Important factors for current parents choosing guardians

The parents' top three requirements from guardianship agencies relate to quality, with their credentials, cultural understanding and experience the most important elements. Certification by BSA or AEGIS attracted 57%, the agency's ability to understand the cultures of both countries gained 48%, and sufficient student numbers to provide worthwhile experiences for those involved was a third choice for 46%. Solid arrangements for exeat weekends and school holidays also attracted 42% from current parents. However, expectations over academic feedback and student support were perhaps surprisingly lower in the list of requirements. Nor did the cost of guardianship services appear to be a major factor in current or prospective opinion.

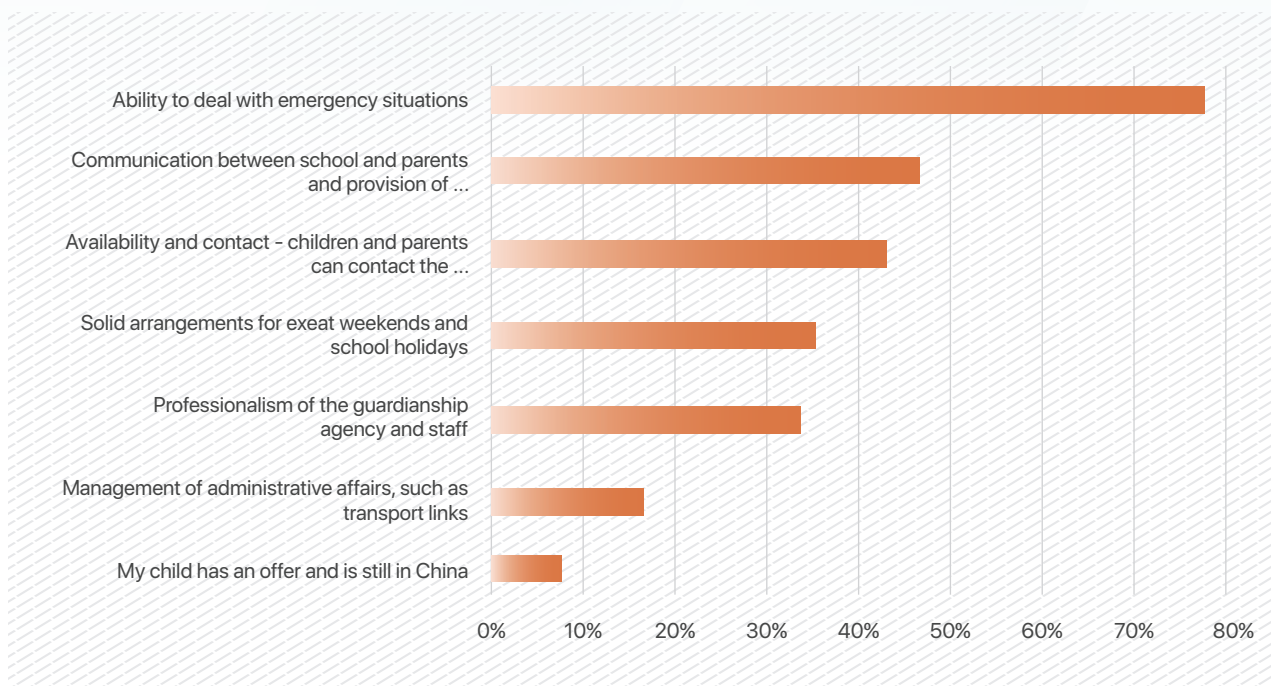


*Chart 27: Important factors for current parents choosing guardians*

## 11. Most valuable guardianship services - current parents

Current parents were also asked to identify the three most valuable services provided by a guardianship agency after they have experienced the guardianship services. By far the most important was their ability to deal with emergency situations (79%) and this is quite understandable with the current conditions. Expectations over student guidance and support and communication with home came through strongly (48%), although there is perhaps a realisation that not all guardians will have the ability to do so.

Parents clearly feel that guardians should be ready and available for children and parents to make contact easily with them and receive a prompt reply (44%).



**Chart 28: Most valuable guardianship services - current parents**

### Questions to consider

- How far should schools be monitoring the quality of guardians?
- Schools have an ongoing safeguarding duty which should be recognised, even when pupils are with guardians. This is part of the sponsorship requirements and responsibilities for international pupils. It is likely that the new NMS (National Minimum Standards) will highlight this further.
- Among students already in the UK, 11.6% said they were not satisfied with their guardians and 4% of these had plans to change agency. How far do parents have real freedom to change unsatisfactory guardianship arrangements?

## The level of income earned by parents who responded to the survey

The final question attempts to gauge the level of income earned by those who responded to the survey.

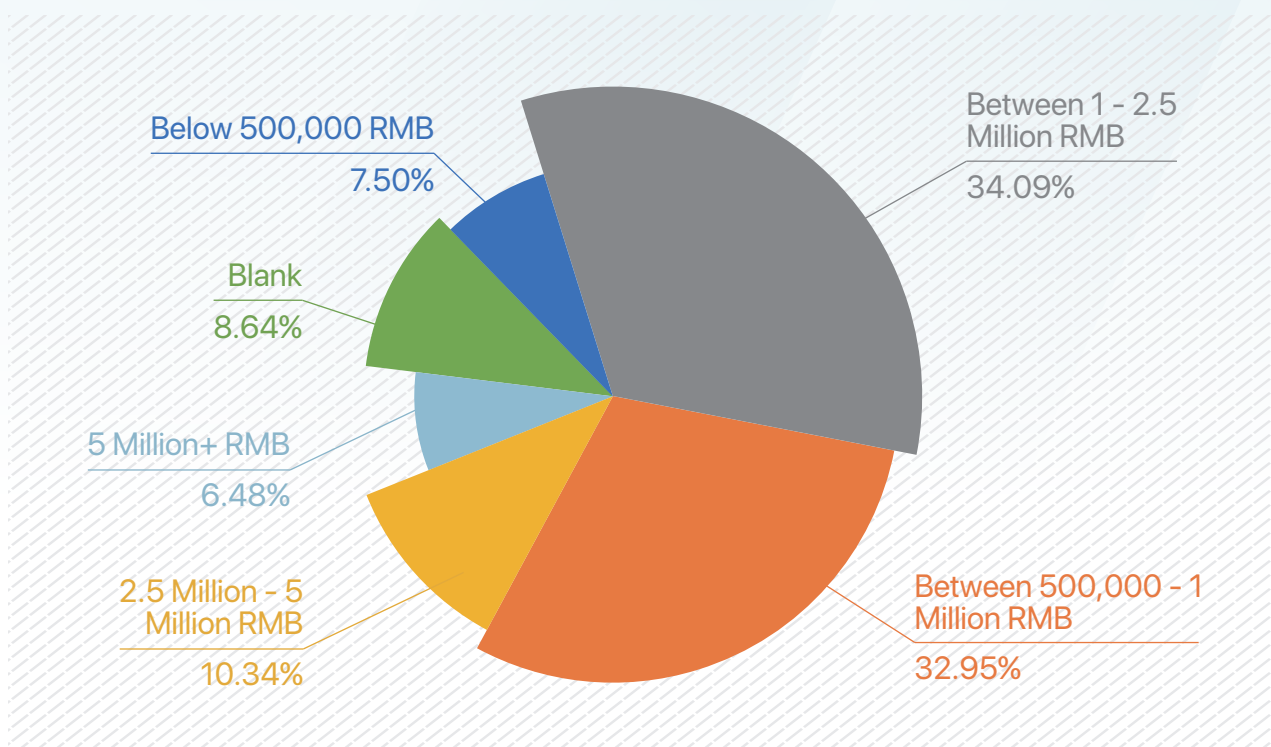
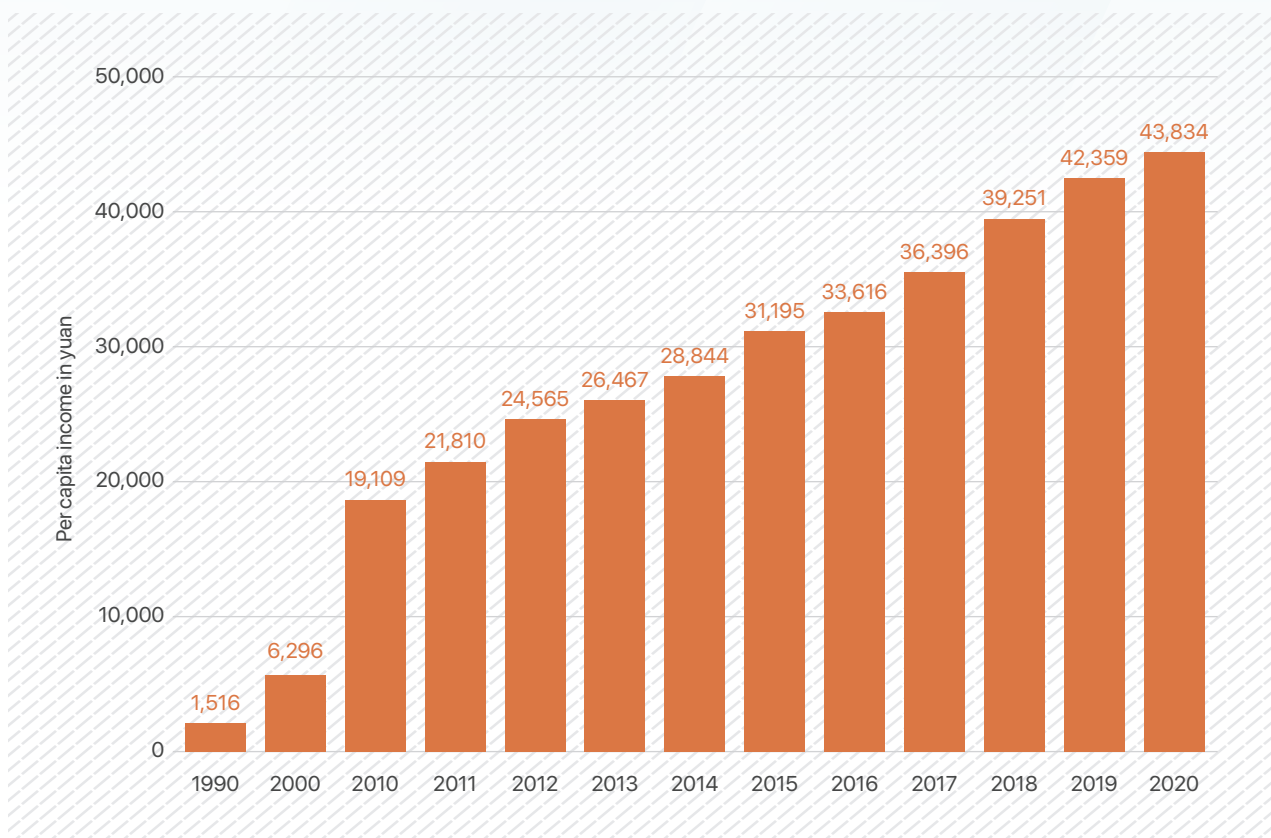


Chart 29: Parents who responded to the questionnaire

Exchange rate as of Sep 2021 : £1 : 9RMB

It is interesting to note that almost 85% of the parents who responded to the questionnaire identified their income as being above 500,000 RMB ( £56K) per year, which is, at the minimum, 10 times the average per capita income of just under 50,000 RMB and the number of parents who reported their income as more than 1 Million RMB (£112K) accounted for over 50% of our respondents. This suggests that parents who could afford to send their children to study overseas are in the minority and only take up a small portion of the pyramid. The trend of strong yearly growth of per capita disposable income of urban households in China also suggests potential for further expansion in the future.



**Chart 30: Per capita income in China (1990 - 2020)**

Annual per capita disposable income of urban households in China from 1990 to 2020 (in yuan)

Source: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/278698/annual-per-capita-income-of-households-in-china/>



## Conclusions and recommendations

The message of this report, focused exclusively on mainland Chinese families, is quite clear. Despite the many difficulties presented by the COVID-19 crisis, the UK boarding sector remains highly regarded and has generally responded extremely well through the current world crisis. Parents greatly appreciate the high levels of professionalism and care shown to their children.

Nonetheless, whilst high levels of parental satisfaction are evident amongst those within the system, much uncertainty remains amongst those thinking about, or preparing for, entry. It will be important for schools to do all they can to maintain strong levels of confidence in their ability to provide continuity and deliver an outstanding experience for all pupils. Positive feedback will be essential.

It is clear that UK schools are increasingly responsive to the potential of international students, who are valued for all they bring to the cultural enrichment of their schools as well as their academic and sporting achievement. Schools may need to review their policies for initial induction and inclusion. Publishing evidence of progress and allowing students to speak positively about their experience will provide powerful advocacy for many schools. Personal contact between house parents and home will also be invaluable.

Many schools have adapted their teaching methodology for online learning, if and when required, taking account of the varying learning needs of their students both locally and internationally. The evidence so far suggests that progress has largely been maintained despite the distances involved. However, parents recognise that there is no substitute for traditional face to face teaching and learning within real classrooms and school communities. Whilst Chinese parents are prepared to make great sacrifices to enable this to happen, they also look to schools to understand their needs and the anxieties of their children. Schools may wish to review their provision for holiday courses and extended care in the future. Pastoral care has never been more important.



The development of warm, understanding, trusting partnerships between schools, parents, students and guardians must be the objective for future relationships to flourish. The ability to communicate in Chinese should be considered in some cases. Greater communication making use of the best technological advances should also enable high levels of access and participation amongst parents and guardians, who will value the increased contact. Continued school commitment to personal service and individual attention to detail will be appreciated.

Guardians and host families have a vital part to play in enabling Chinese students to adapt and flourish. Schools need to establish secure, open relationships with guardians and be satisfied that they are fulfilling their obligations to the children in their care. Where guardians fail to meet standards expected, agents and parents will need to play their part in finding suitable alternatives.

The positive contribution made by Chinese students within UK boarding schools has become a notable feature of these schools in recent years. The Boarding Schools' Association, the British Council and Connexcel are delighted that the UK government gives strong support and encouragement to deepening educational relationships with China and the growing number of Chinese students in our schools. A recent letter to parents expressing this sentiment is included as an appendix to this report.



## Appendix

### Letter from Department for International Trade



**Baroness Berridge of the Vale of  
Catmose**

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**Department for  
International Trade**

**Graham Stuart MP**  
Minister for Exports  
Department for International Trade  
King Charles Street  
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London  
SW1A 2AH  
tel: +44 (0) 20 7215 5000

Dear International School Students and Parents,

We are pleased to write to you to set out the UK Government's ongoing commitment to the safety, welfare and education of all our students studying at schools in the UK and at British style schools overseas.

As restrictions begin to ease across the UK and we reopen our schools and further education colleges, we have worked closely with our independent schools sector as we jointly navigate our way through the issues and uncertainty raised by the pandemic. We recognise the important role which international students play in our independent schools and wider UK society, and we want to emphasise how much we value the positive contributions you bring socially, culturally and economically. We are committed to supporting independent schools and want to welcome more pupils to British schools, both at home and overseas.

It is clear that boarding schools have continued to take positive and decisive steps to make sure that teaching and learning are COVID secure, and that students are supported, safe and well looked after. The safety of students is paramount and for that reason, we will continue to work to ensure that you have the information and guidance required to reassure you of the high standards in British schools.

All governments across the UK continue to adhere closely to the most up-to-date scientific advice on our management of the Covid pandemic, as has been the case since its start, and our responses are calibrated to the level of threat posed by the virus and entirely informed by the data and guidance we receive.

NHS services are available to both domestic and international students. International students will always be able to access treatment that clinicians consider is immediately necessary or urgent at no upfront cost.

We acknowledge the impact that remote learning has had on many school students, and that is why we have taken steps to remove the barriers preventing students starting or returning to study at schools in the UK. We are pleased to have published guidance recently which explains how boarding school students returning from 'red list' countries can serve their UK quarantine in accommodation arranged by their boarding school, rather than in a managed quarantine hotel. This ensures that many more students can return to the school environment without delay. Furthermore, we have provided guidance to ensure boarding schools are aware of the arrangements that need to be put in place for quarantine accommodation, transport from the port of entry and testing for those students who are required to quarantine. As you will be aware, independent


boarding schools are required to meet the independent school standards and to adhere to UK requirements in relation to boarding school students quarantining. The UK has very high standards of regulation for boarders and, driven by a desire to maintain these standards, the Department for Education intends to commission additional inspections of a sample of boarding schools while this guidance applies. This will provide a further degree of reassurance to parents that schools are complying with the quarantine requirements and safeguarding all students in our schools.

In addition, further measures have been introduced to safeguard the health of our school students and the teaching workforce across our sector. We have made lateral flow COVID-19 tests available to all schools and colleges and students should be offered regular twice weekly testing to help identify those carrying the virus without displaying symptoms. This approach aims to keep as many staff and students in schools and colleges as possible and prevent further disruption to their education.

UK boarding schools offer students an outstanding education and are very much valued for the positive contribution they bring to society as a whole. International students make our world-class schools even better. We are committed to prioritising education and are certain that students starting or returning to boarding schools in the UK can do so with confidence. We look forward to our ongoing work with our school sector to ensure that the education we provide continues to be the best in the world.


As a government, we are proud that so many parents trust UK schools and British style schools overseas to give their children the best possible education. This cultural exchange helps build life-long friendships, as well as laying the foundations for future networks, and important business, political and diplomatic bridges.

Yours sincerely,



**BARONESS BERRIDGE OF THE  
VALE OF CATMOSE**

**PARLIAMENTARY UNDER  
SECRETARY**



**GRAHAM STUART MP**

Minister for Exports  
Department for International Trade



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