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The 2023 Boarding Schools' Association / Connexcel **Survey of Chinese Parents**

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David Walker, B.Sc. (Hons.), FTIOB
Director, Boarding Schools' Association

UK boarding schools show excellence in many ways. They provide the best balance of tradition with innovation, academic rigour with sporting and artistic prowess, and local connections with a global outlook.

It is the global connection that makes this year's survey of 967 Chinese parents so important. It demonstrates the confidence Chinese parents have in British boarding. It shows they recognise outstanding teaching and learning. It confirms that UK boarding schools are a strong bridge for accessing top-ranking universities. Most importantly it shows that parents think British boarding schools are safe, caring, supportive, and agile when it counts.

This survey has great value for schools, parents, educational agents, and anyone with an interest in boarding in the UK. It provides important data to back up anecdotal opinion. The Boarding Schools' Association is delighted to be a partner in its publication once again.

Whatever role you play in supporting boarding in the UK, we hope you find it a useful report.



Caroline Nixon M.A. (Oxon.), M. Ed., FTIOB
International & Membership Director, Boarding Schools' Association
Director, Caroline Nixon Education Ltd.

I am delighted to have been involved in the creation of this report, the third collaboration between Boarding Schools' Association and Connexcel. It is fascinating and informative to compare findings over a three year period, during which we have experienced the closure of schools during the pandemic, their reopening amid continued global travel disruption, and continuing discussion around immigration, visas and international education from both the British and Chinese Governments.

Overall the responses from Chinese parents whose children are actually or potentially at school in the UK are extremely positive. 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. It is pleasing to note that their concerns around safety, security and the welcoming nature of our schools have decreased from last year. However, we need to note emerging concerns around the messages from our country as a whole about how welcome their children will be as graduates.

We know from the feedback we received after last year's survey that schools found it useful and some of that feedback has been included in this report. We hope that boarding schools will use the results of this year's survey to inform their marketing and recruitment activities and also to increase the quality of provision for their existing and future Chinese and other international pupils. There are clear messages in the parental responses and we have pulled out some questions to consider at the end of each section of the survey to aid schools in these objectives.

I do hope that the survey and its conclusions will prove helpful to schools, agents, guardians and families who work together for the success and happiness of all pupils of every nationality.



John Zhang M.A.
Co-Founder of Connexcel

Connexcel is extremely honoured to work, once again with the BSA and BAISIS to launch 2023 survey of Chinese Parents. For the third year running, we have worked closely together to conduct an extensive study into the attitudes of Chinese parents towards a UK education. This has allowed us, along with schools and other educational organisations, to observe the trends, react to and resolve targeted concerns of parents and map the future of international study for Chinese students.

This year's survey has shown that the appetite and interest for Chinese students opting for a UK education is still strong and several main factors have emerged from the survey which govern this decision for parents. It has been increasingly noted by parents that further education, graduate employment prospects and immigration policies are important contributing factors in making the decision to apply for the UK boarding school.

Based on the previous years' survey results, the schools have already been looking carefully at effective recruitment strategies in partnership with qualified agents, recognising the importance of UK guardians, providing bespoke feedback and clarity towards possible university entrance. It is hoped that this survey's results will generate further discussion and will aid schools in creating targeted resolutions. In order to reach the Chinese audience more effectively, the school may consider adopting a different approach, in which regional and local expertise could be essential for success.

Finally, we would like to extend a thank you to all who have participated in this research and the writing of the survey report. We are so pleased to be able to continue this important study, to give an accurate insight into the future of Chinese students' trends of study in the UK. Our goal is to ensure a positive overseas learning experience for Chinese students in UK schools and, with this goal in mind, we will continue to work closely with parents and the BSA to keep abreast of changes in the international education sector.

I would like to personally extend a special thanks to Mr. Peter Wells, who has dedicated much time and effort to assisting with the research and the writing of the report this year, and in previous years.



Schools' Feedback on 2022 Survey

Irfan H Latif

Principal, DLD College London

Our Chinese pupils at DLD form an important part of our school community. The comprehensive BSA report helps us understand how we can further improve our provision and support for this important market.

Ted McGrath

Head of the International School, D'Overbroeck's Oxford

As we have a number of Chinese students, this information was extremely helpful in 2021 and 2022 and we are looking forward to the 2023 update.

Areti Bizior

Head , Luckley House School

The BSA/Connexcel report provides invaluable insights that enable us to customise our communication for the Chinese market, ensuring that we stay attuned to the requirements of both Chinese students and their parents.

Rick Cross

Principal, Reddam House

Reddam House has a thriving international boarding community, and our Chinese students and families are hugely valued. With the support of the BSA annual report, we are able to better understand their specific needs and views so we can provide the very best education and service.

William Goldsmith

Head, St George's School, Windsor Castle

BSA are consistently at the forefront of global trends within the independent sector, and their annual surveys of Chinese parents are invaluable for our schools. Getting our product right for the Chinese market is crucial, and the survey goes a long way to enable our schools to do this.

Mark Lauder

Headmaster, Strathallan School

Our Chinese students are a very important part of the school and the report helped us understand this important sector.



Section A

The Composition of the Survey Group

The 2023 survey continued the policy of 2022 by dividing the participants into sub groups. It was therefore possible to separate students who had received offers from schools but who had not yet started boarding school (5%) from those who were still preparing to study abroad (45%) and those with children already studying in UK schools (47%). A small number were considering a change of direction and looking at alternative plans.

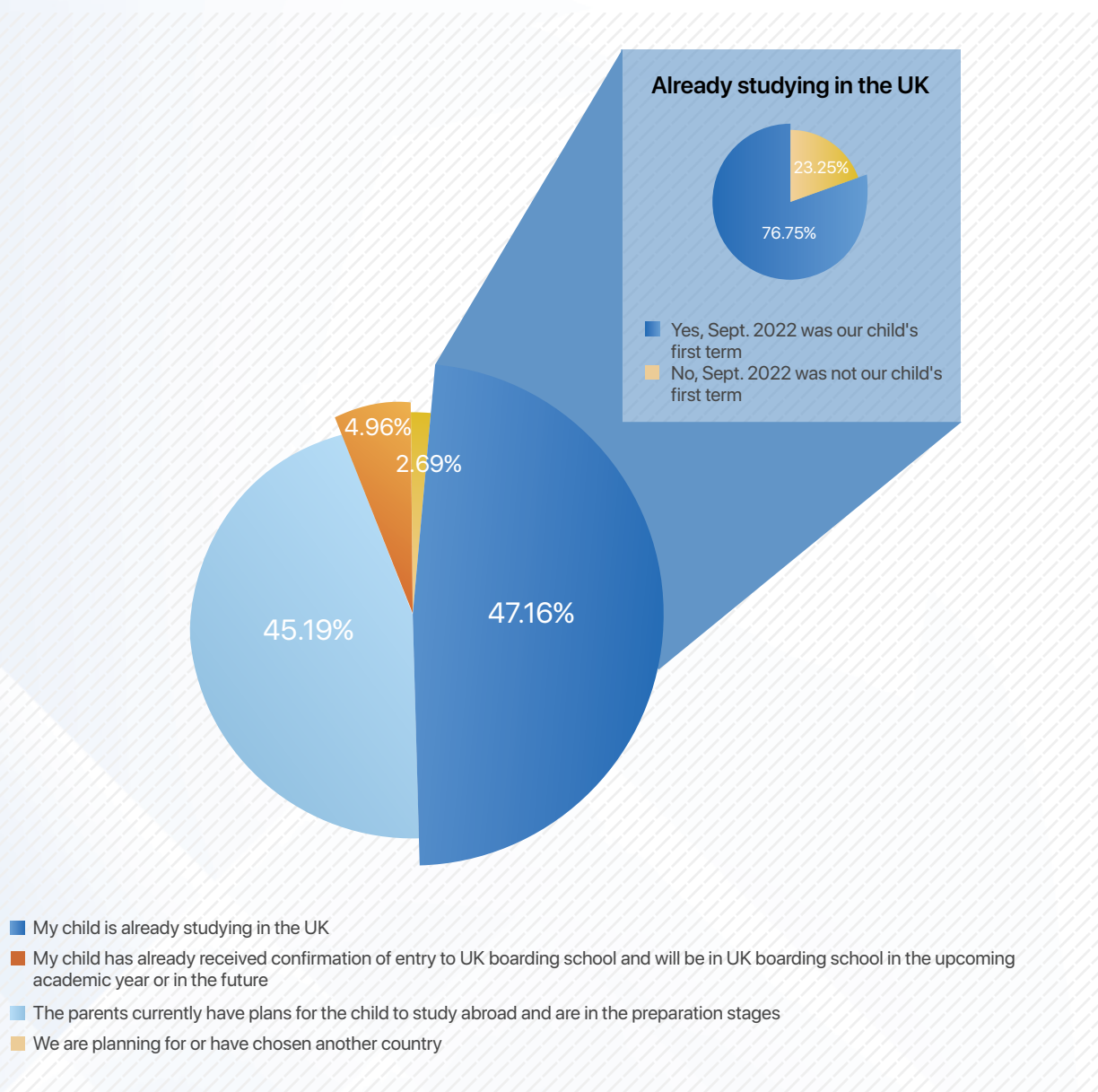


Chart 1: Composition of the survey group

1. Chinese school types

The survey found that the vast majority of Chinese children entering UK boarding schools came from International or Private school backgrounds. Only 22% came from State Schools and 3% from international branches of State Schools. Thus the mix of the 2023 survey participants is very similar to the 2022 survey. However, the diminishing interest from state schools is indeed a trend worth pondering. The figures have declined from 29% in 2021 to 25% in 2022, and this year, they stand at 21.6%.

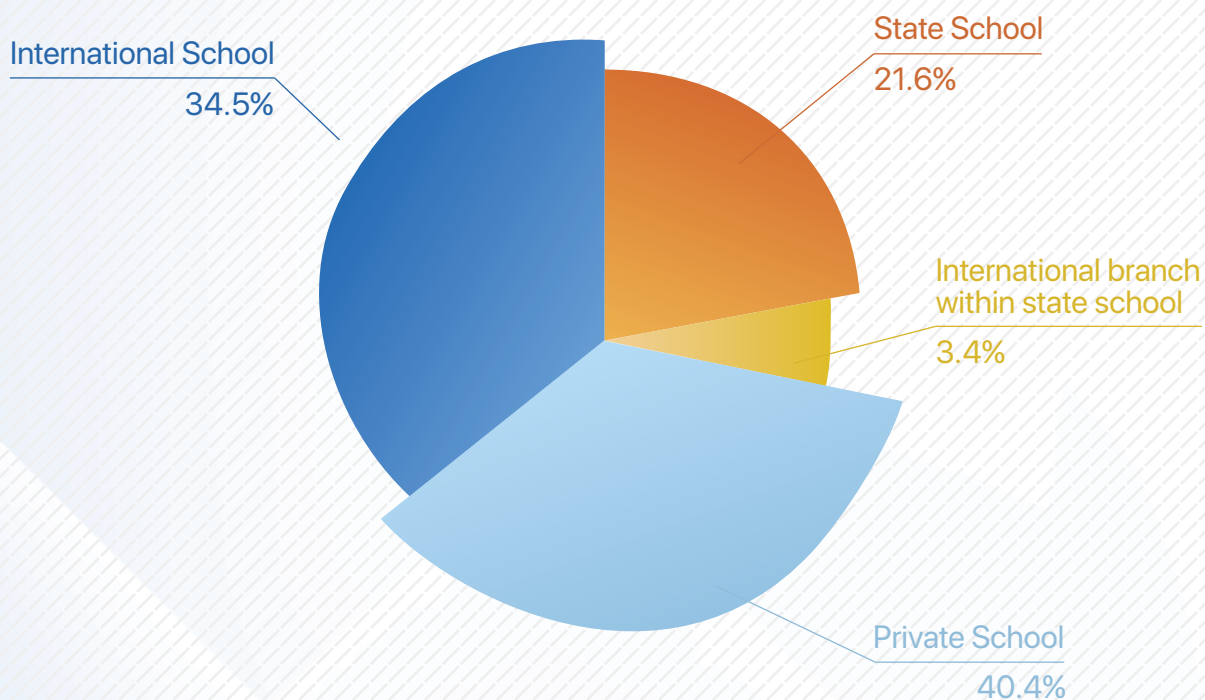


Chart 2: Chinese school types

2. Planned overseas study entry points

Years 9, 10 and 12 remain the most popular entry points for Chinese school students coming to the UK, with 14+ the major entry year group. Our figures show that the traditional British Prep School market has limited customers although there has been some growth here, numbers rising from 7% three years ago to 11% this year. However, it may not be wise for schools to invest heavily in this section of the Chinese market as returns have been quite low. The fact remains that those seeking the widest possible choice of senior school are likely to benefit from younger entry points in Years 6, 7 and 8. Indeed, parents may see a smoother pathway from traditional UK Prep Schools offering excellent resources for rapid English language acquisition.

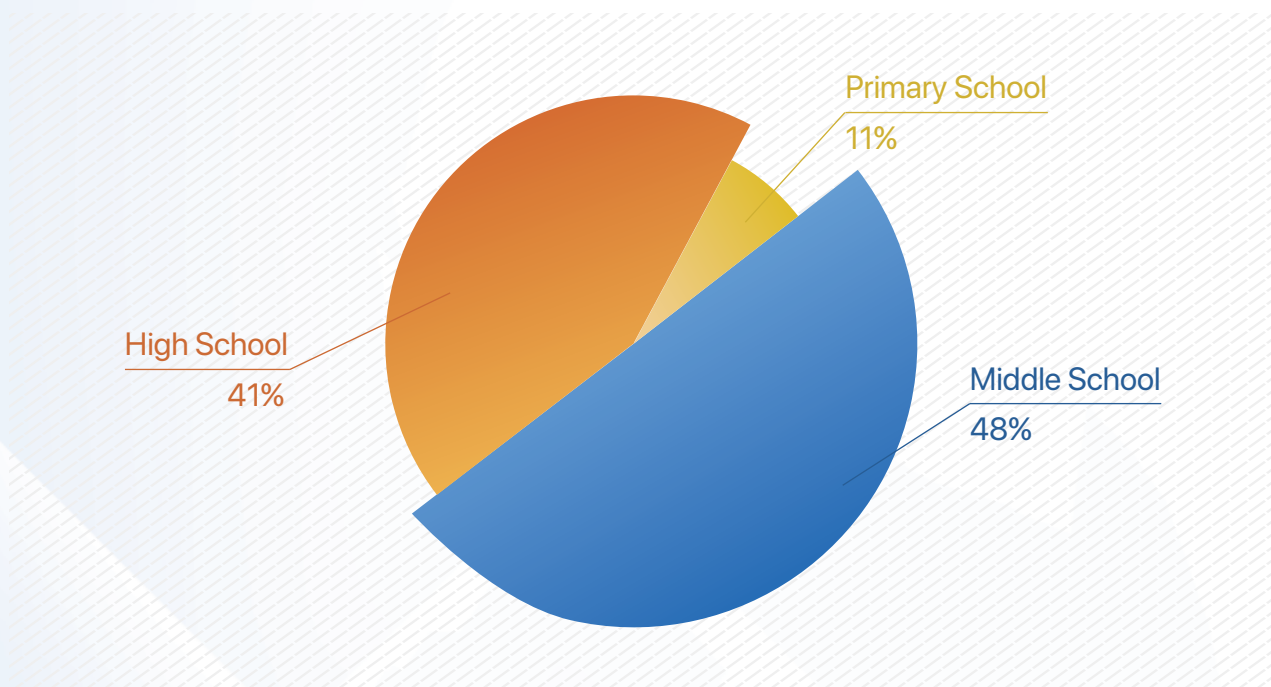


Chart 3: Planned overseas study entry points

Chinese education age system:

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

3. Top reasons for studying abroad

Our report found, once again, that the overwhelming reason Chinese parents chose to send their children to study internationally was the offer of a well-rounded education. There was also a strong response to pressure felt within the current Chinese education system. This has clearly increased significantly; the 2021 figure of 41% rising to 73% in 2023. The opportunity to enter a top world university was also a key factor, figures rising from 33% in 2021 to 50% in 2023.

Clearly this chart shows the parents responding to our survey are less satisfied with the current Chinese education system and searching for alternatives to satisfy their children’s educational aspirations.

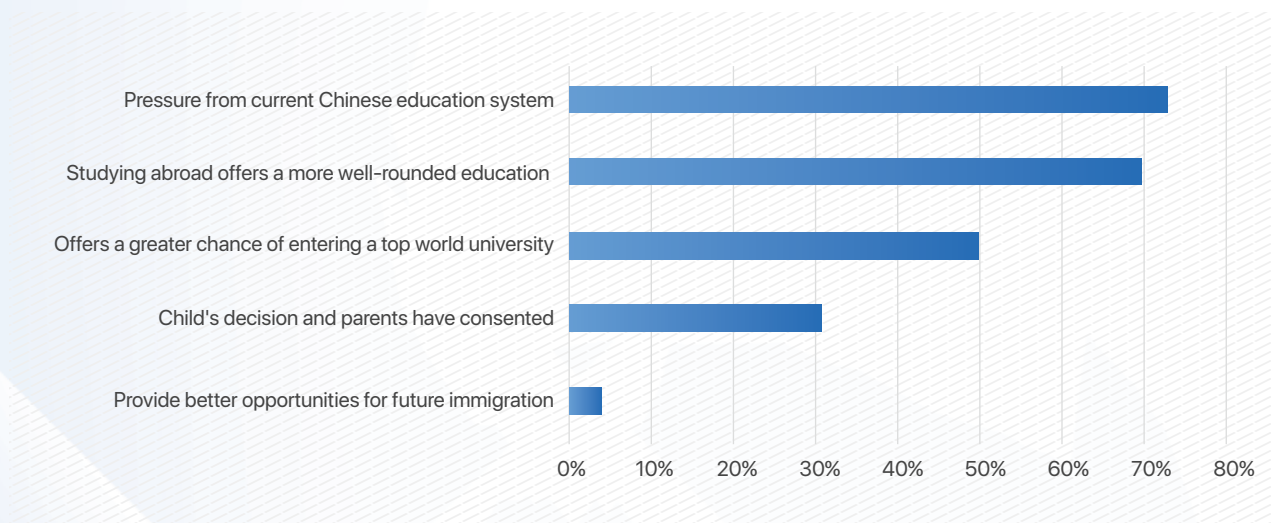


Chart 4: Reasons for studying abroad

4. What influences parental considerations regarding studying abroad?

The best age and timing for the start of study abroad is consistent with results from the past two years. Once again we see choices strongly related to the child's own wishes (71%) and how independent he/she is (76%). Parental wishes appear to be a much less obvious driver (20%).

The cost of boarding education is significant for about 25% of the respondents and this represents a slight decline on figures from previous years (33% in 2021 and 36% in 2022).

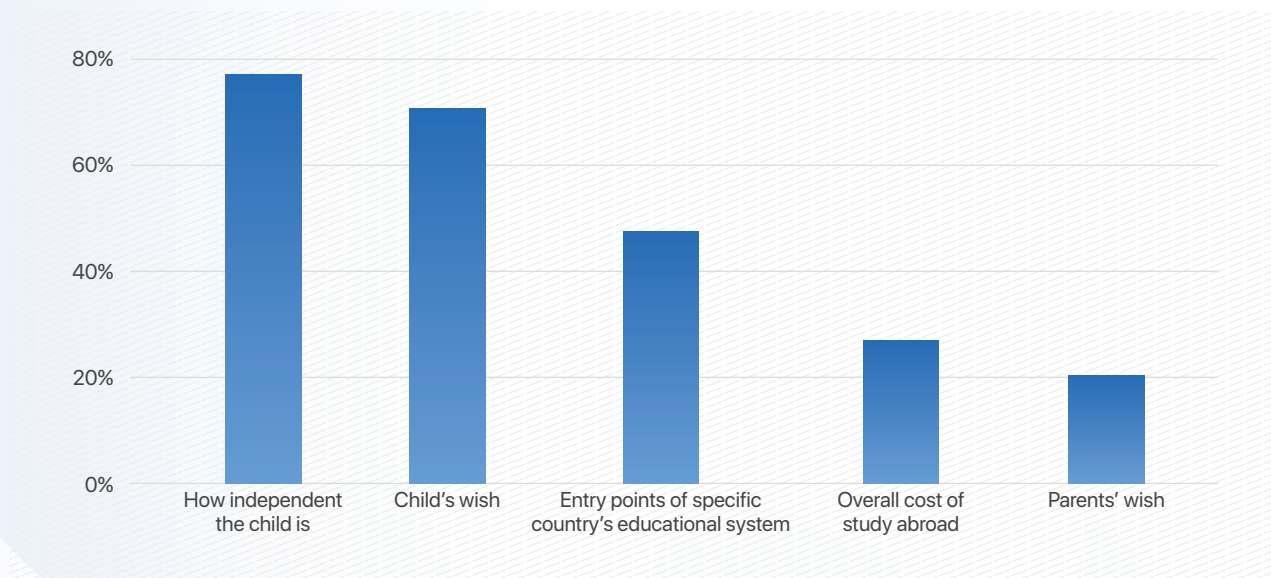


Chart 5: Parental considerations

The specific age entry points to a country's education system seem to play a key part in parental considerations (up from 35% last year to 45% this year), as do the requirements of the Chinese education system.

5. Preferred study destinations

Once again the UK and US are the two most popular study destinations from our survey. This is not surprising as the survey was mainly answered by parents already focused on these countries or with children already in the system. There was no significant percentage change in the desirability of any of the other countries compared with last year's survey.

It can be noted that Singapore was highlighted as a 'hot' destination country for Chinese 'high net worth families' to emigrate to after the reopening of China post COVID. However, according to our survey the demand is very much in line with last year's results.

We removed the least popular university destination countries in the previous survey (Japan and Germany) and replaced them with Hong Kong, due to recent changes in the situation there. Unsurprisingly 22% of parents chose Hong Kong as their child's destination which is now ranked just behind the UK and US. Certainly the UK is well positioned for this shift of university destination, as the education system here is widely adopted in Hong Kong. Students studying in the UK therefore have an advantage in being admitted to Hong Kong University.

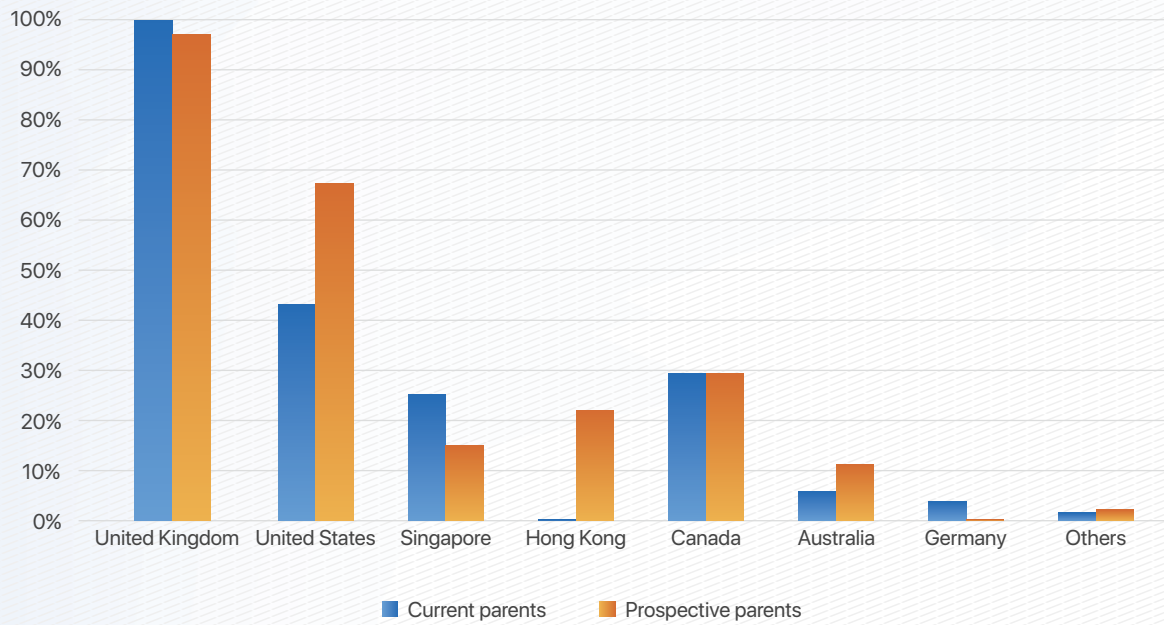


Chart 6: Destination choices

6. What matters most when choosing an international study destination?

The order of importance and percentages recorded are broadly similar to last year's figures. Security and safety of the country and the educational quality were identified as of major importance. Acceptance of international students also featured highly in choice of country. However this year's figure of 40% was substantially lower than two years ago (60%); perhaps an indicator of a more relaxed view of any adverse international prospects. Taken together with the greater importance of employment prospects and the country's possibilities for immigration (28% vs 12% in 2021) this suggests growing confidence and demand amongst Chinese parents.

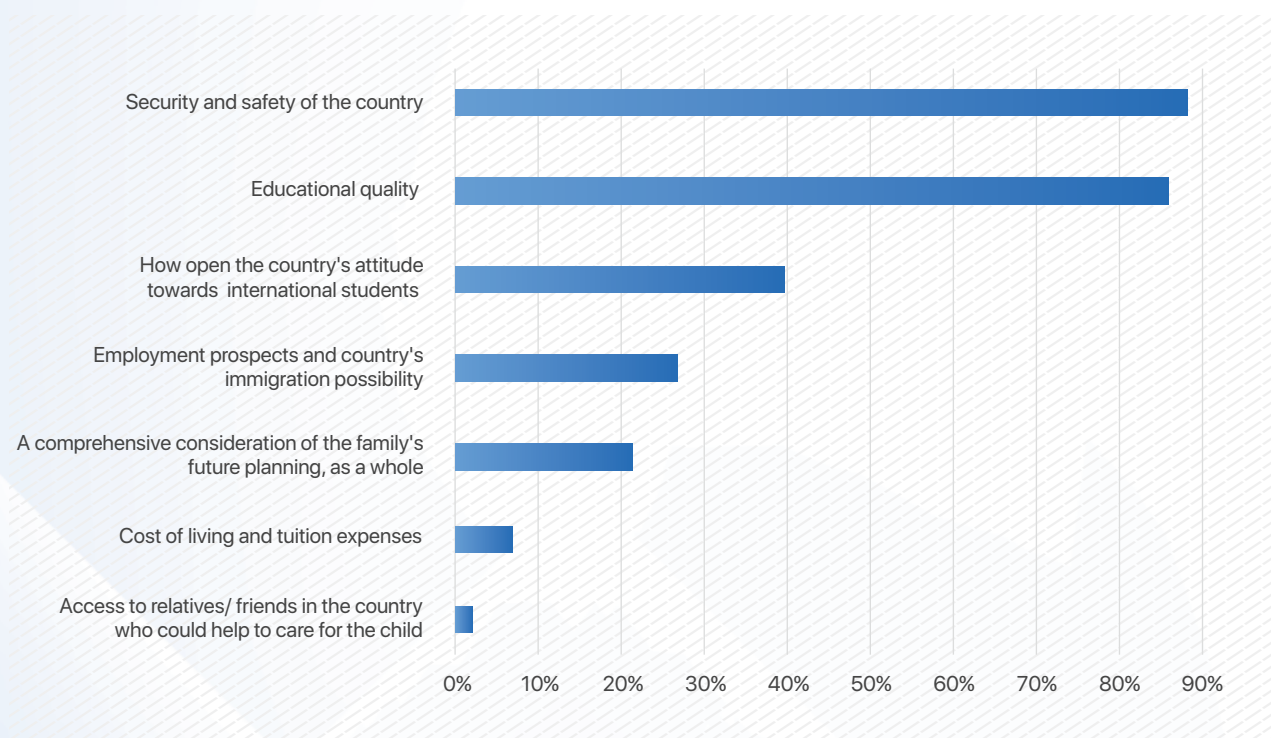


Chart 7: What matters most to Chinese parents



7. Key factors in choosing an international school abroad

Parents were asked to rank eight factors in order of importance when choosing a school abroad. Here again the results were very similar to last year's survey.

Finding the right match between the school and the child's abilities/talents was deemed essential, closely followed by experience in looking after international students and the school's academic standing. School facilities including boarders' accommodation was ranked not far behind.

This year we replaced the previous survey's least favoured option, geographical location of the school, with 'does the school provide dual application to British and American universities?'. Over half the parents rated this as either important (36%) or very important (18%). However it was still ranked the lowest amongst all the factors.

We can see that parents attach the greatest importance to finding the best match between the school and the child's abilities. Naturally this makes it essential for there to be an honest appraisal of the child's ability and potential, both academically and in a range of other attributes. The special character, strengths and weaknesses of each school must also be considered.

Parents need to understand that UK independent schools are all different from one another and offer a range of courses and study options. They need to understand something of the school's ethos and direction, not merely its academic league table position, which can be misleading.

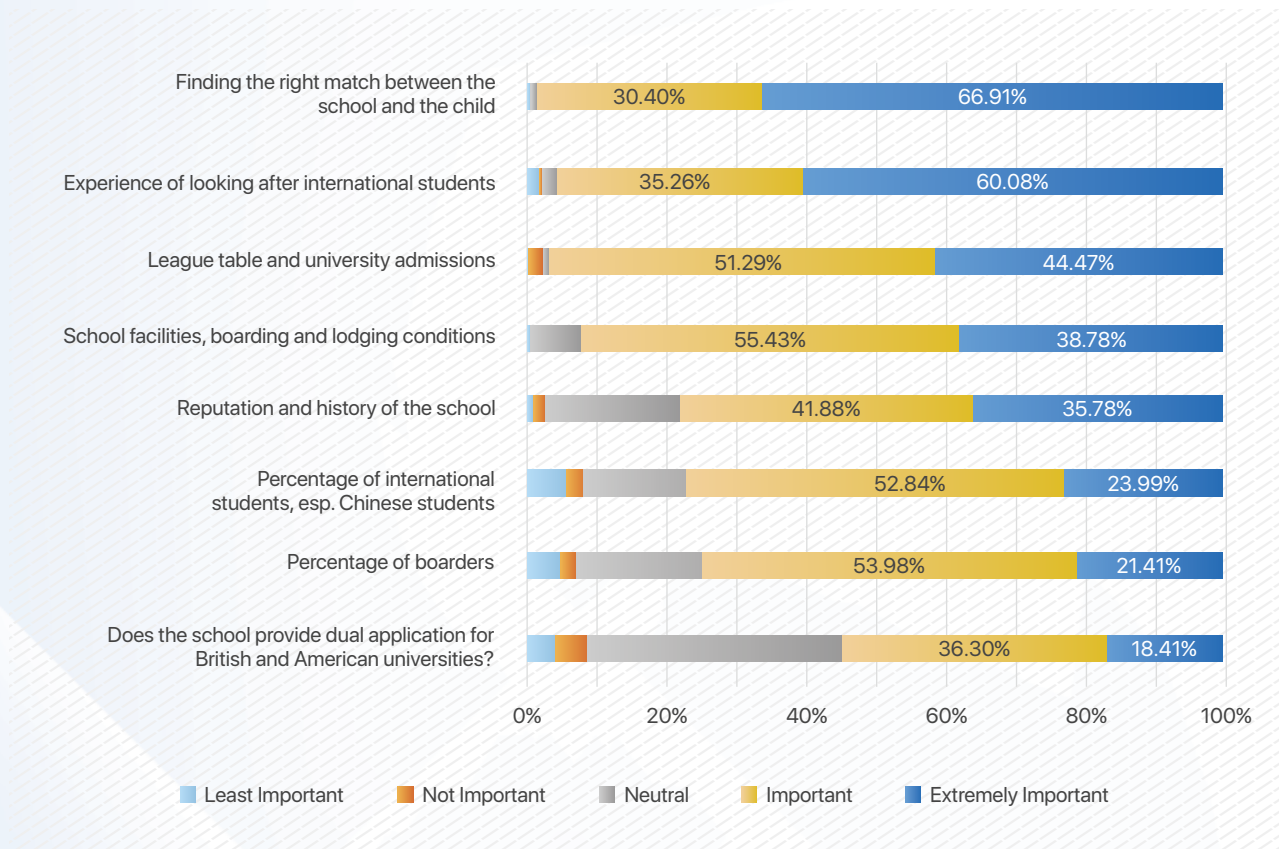


Chart 8: Key factors for school selection

8. Sources of information for international parents

The results here are very similar to last year's. Recommendations from educational agents were of even greater importance, moving from 74% in 2021 to 86.5% this year.

Thus the agent's advice can be seen as vitally important for the majority of Chinese parents as they recommend and make introductions to a variety of schools. It is essential therefore that only reputable and accredited consultants are used with sound knowledge of the schools they are recommending.

Official school web sites continue to be regarded favourably with 52.5% support, as were recommendations from friends and family (46.9%). Chinese parents were relying less on the information from domestic Chinese internet source, reducing from 33% in 2022, to 26% this year. Personal visits to schools remained broadly the same at 27%.

Evidence from our surveys would suggest that parents may take several years to search for schools, often making a short visit to the country in order to view five or six establishments. It is important for schools to be available to visitors during holiday periods as well as in term time. Participation in personalised international events can also be helpful in providing a rounded picture, with opportunities to question staff.

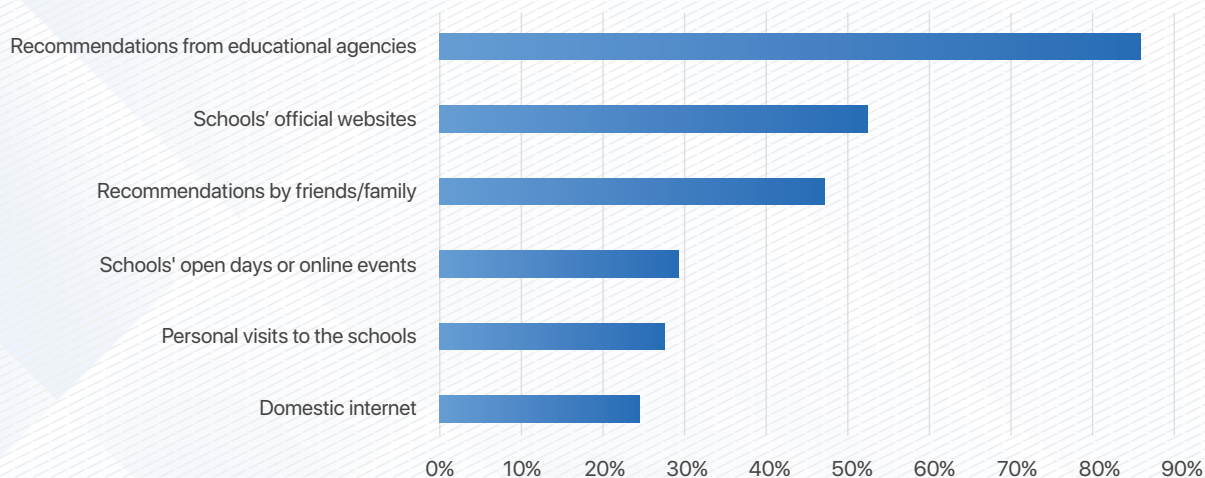


Chart 9: Sources of information for selecting UK schools

9. Most effective channels of communication in China

A new question was added this year to better understand the most effective channels by which to reach a Chinese audience.

Wechat public accounts are the most popular and important channels of communication, 56.7% of the survey group identifying their importance. This was followed by search engines, at 48% and webinar or live streaming services at 47%.

These results clearly demonstrate that in order to prompt interest in China, a different approach may be needed from elsewhere. Regional and local expertise may be essential for success. Online admissions fairs (28.8%) are very similar to traditional face to face admission events (31.9%) and confirm a wider adaptation of the online format in China over the past few years.

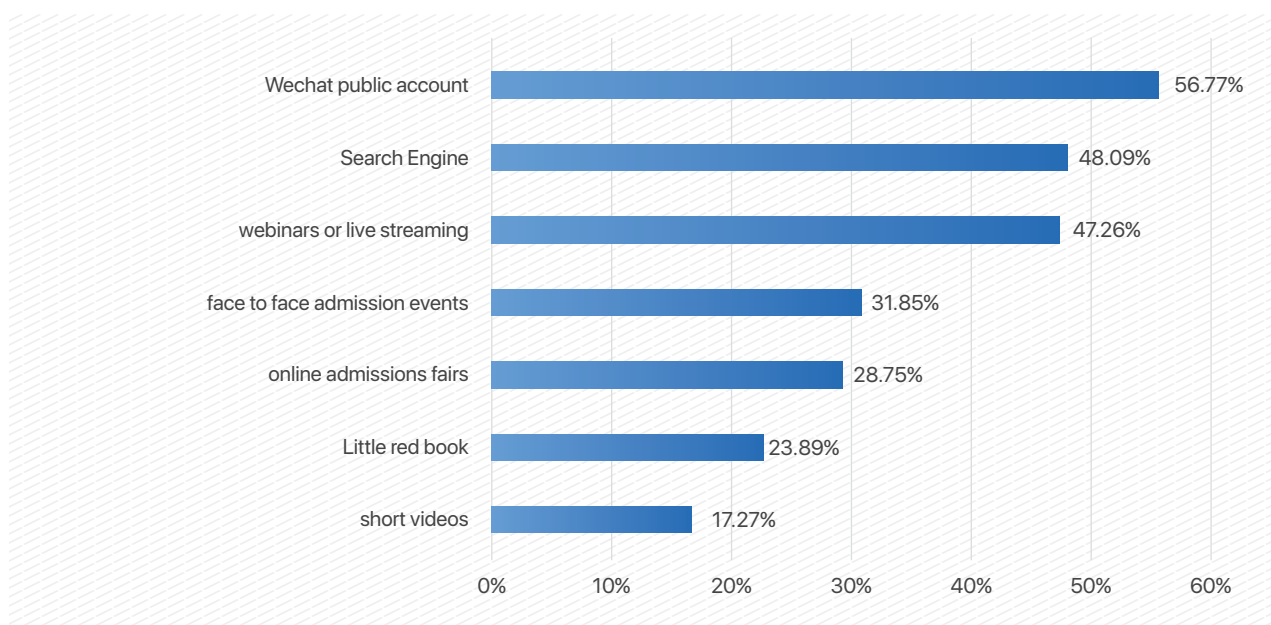


Chart 10: Effective channels of communication in China



Section B

Prospective parents

1. How prospective parents apply to UK schools

When asked how prospective parents were planning to apply for their children to study abroad, 86% said they would make the application through an educational agent. This was a 15% increase on 2021, whilst by contrast only 10% of Chinese parents would make a personal application. This, when combined with our finding about the chief sources of information parents use when looking abroad, confirms a picture of reliance upon the work of agents.

It is increasingly clear from our surveys, that agents have been playing a more and more important role in the admission process. UK schools need to be aware of this trend and work more closely with agents.

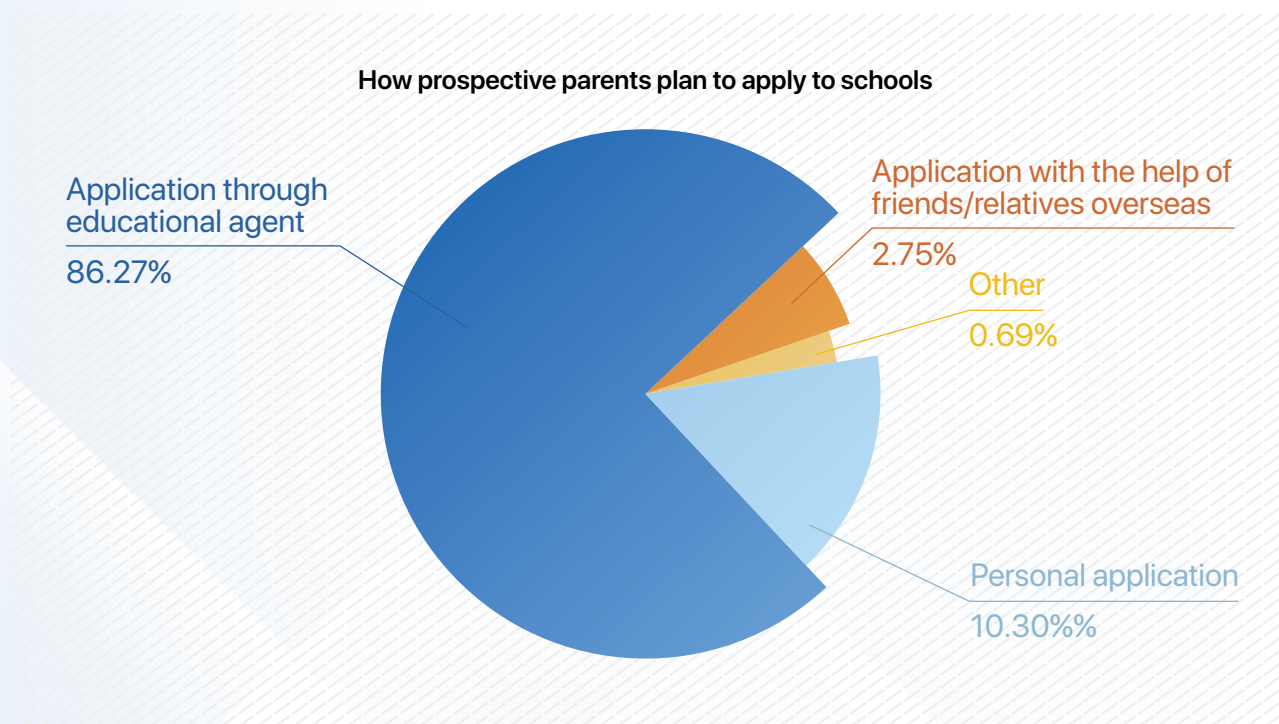


Chart 11: How Prospective Parents make the application

2. Choosing an agent

Finding a fully professional agent has become essential if parents are to achieve a successful school placement for their child. Experience suggests there are no short cuts and the best agents are well trained and able to provide a range of bespoke services. They also have a deep understanding of a range of different school settings.

Good schools aim to work with one or more trusted agents who demonstrate the best credentials. It goes without saying that agents will have visited a range of schools and developed a clear understanding of their special characteristics. The best agencies will be very knowledgeable about the schools they recommend, and may offer an ongoing service, possibly including guardianship.

Certification by the Boarding Schools' Association is highly recommended and provides an assurance of quality to BSA boarding schools that they are dealing with consultants and agents who have the highest standards in recruitment, safeguarding and student placement.

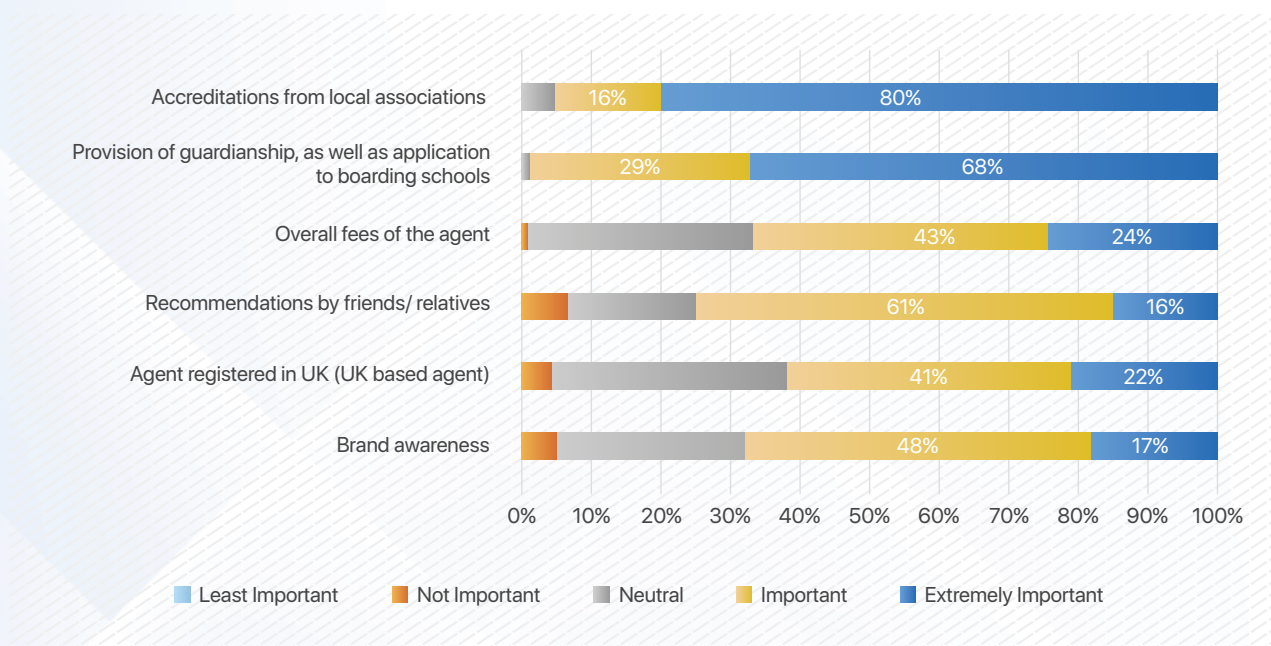


Chart 12: Key factors for choosing an agency - prospective parents

3. Other factors affecting the child's decision to study abroad

This is a newly introduced question aiming to understand the impact of recent domestic Chinese and foreign economic situations, and the changing educational environment, on parents' decision-making.

Generally speaking the current situation causes many uncertainties. China's weakening economic situation caused 20% of parents to postpone study with another 40% taking a wait and see approach, whilst 8% said they would pull forward their plans.

Changes in the Chinese educational environment are certainly triggering uncertainty, but seem to be having the effect of pushing more parents to bring forward their plans to study abroad as opposed to postpone them (30.7% vs 3.4%). On the other hand, changes in the international situation are not very clear with 47% taking a wait and see approach.

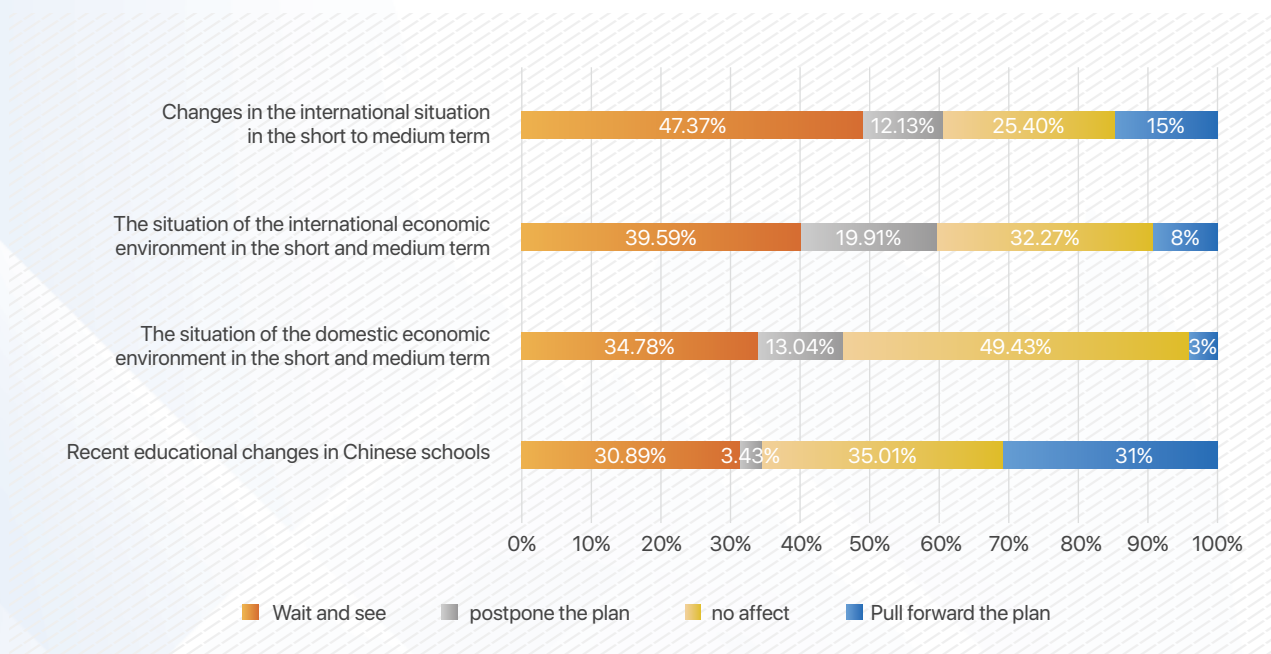


Chart 13: Other factors affecting the child's decision to study abroad

4. Possible educational changes in the UK

This is a newly introduced question regarding the current heated discussion taking place about independent education in the UK. Here we seek to understand how a variety of possible measures, if implemented, would directly or indirectly affect the child's decision to study abroad.

On the positive side, a relaxation of UK working permit visas or immigration policies would be greatly welcomed and could be a deal-maker for 20% of families. Another 46.5% of families would be influenced in favour of study in the UK if this took place.

Similarly a reversal of the decline in accepting independent school students for Oxbridge admission would have a very significant result. Indeed, if Oxbridge were to reverse the recent years' decline of accepting students from fee paying schools, it might help 20% of families to make the decision to study in the UK, whilst positively influencing a further 56%.

A converse result would be brought about if the UK government decided to apply VAT onto independent school tuition fees. Here it appears that 8.7% would apply to study in a different country and another 60% would feel a negative impact on their decision making.

Reducing the length of the Post-Study Work (PSW) visa, which permits international graduates to continue residing in the UK for one to two years to search for employment after finishing their education, would adversely affect families' decision-making. 20.8% of individuals would consider studying in a different country, while an additional 37.3% would be influenced negatively. Merely 2% hold a positive outlook on this matter.

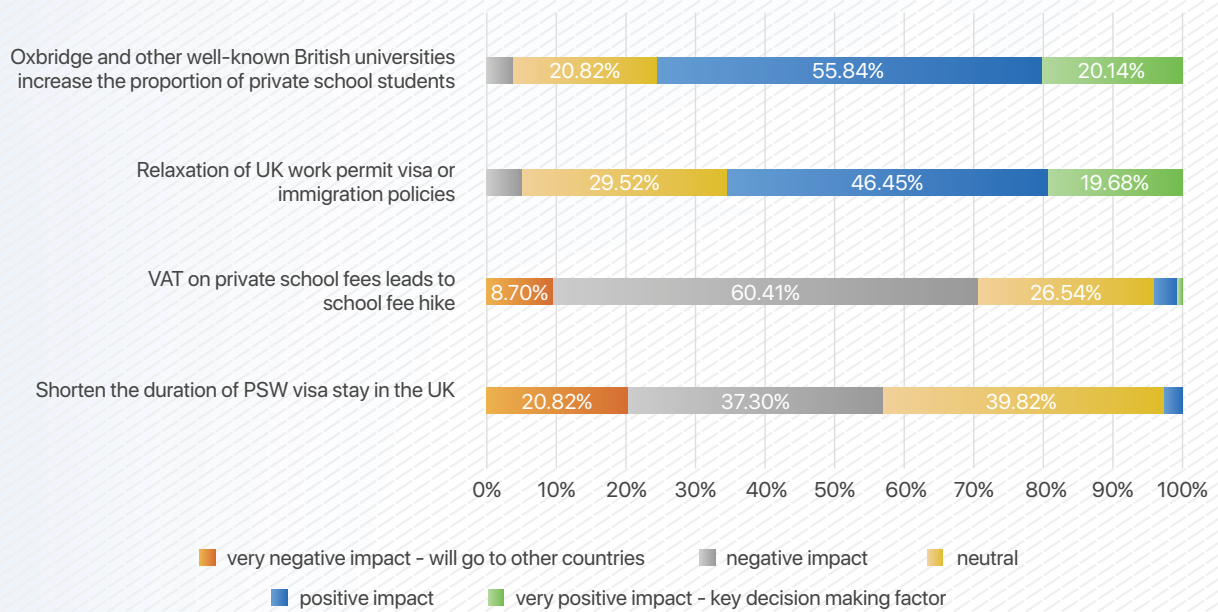


Chart 14: Impacts of possible educational changes in the UK



...ribed at ... latitude, 52° 35.2'. Foucault Pendulum: designed in 1851 by French physicist, Jean Foucault, it is

5. Length of preparation period for study in UK schools

The duration of preparation time for study in UK schools is very similar to last year for current parents, whilst preparation of two years or more in advance has increased among prospective families. This increase from 26.5% to the current 38.9% may indicate that parents are becoming more aware of the importance of starting earlier and preparing earlier. It may also be reasonable to assume that recent travel restrictions have delayed many parents' ability to explore options abroad.

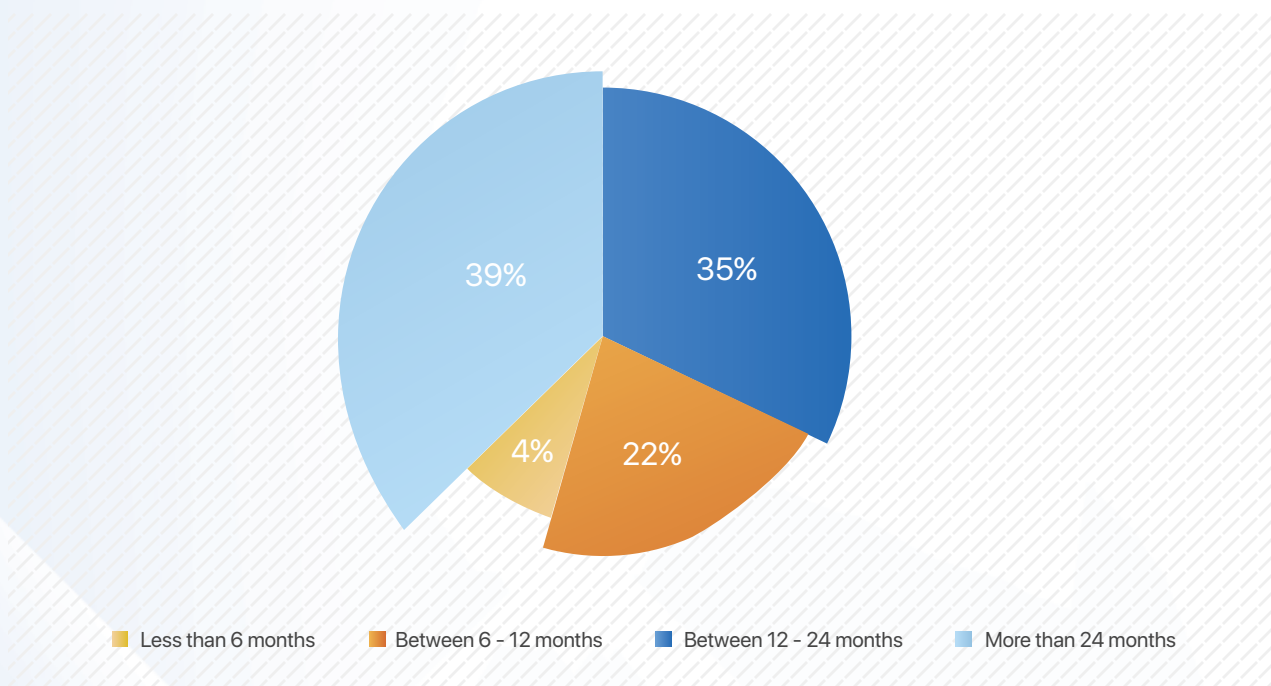


Chart 15: Length of preparation for UK schools by prospective parents

6. Concerns of prospective parents about children studying abroad

Prospective parents were invited to select three areas which most concern them. Once again the safety and security of children was identified as by far the biggest concern facing Chinese families (86%). This was followed by the possibility of racial discrimination and bullying (65%). A third potential challenge identified by parents was an inability to keep up with their child's mental development and thought processes (47%).

Our surveys suggest that there is often a gap between what concerns parents most and the reality parents find once their children have settled into UK schools. It will take time to get used to new food, accommodation and distance from home. Good schools and agents will be seeking to reassure families before they arrive and provide helpful feedback from experience. Careful preparation will inevitably need to be made both by schools and families so that any anxiety can be reduced.

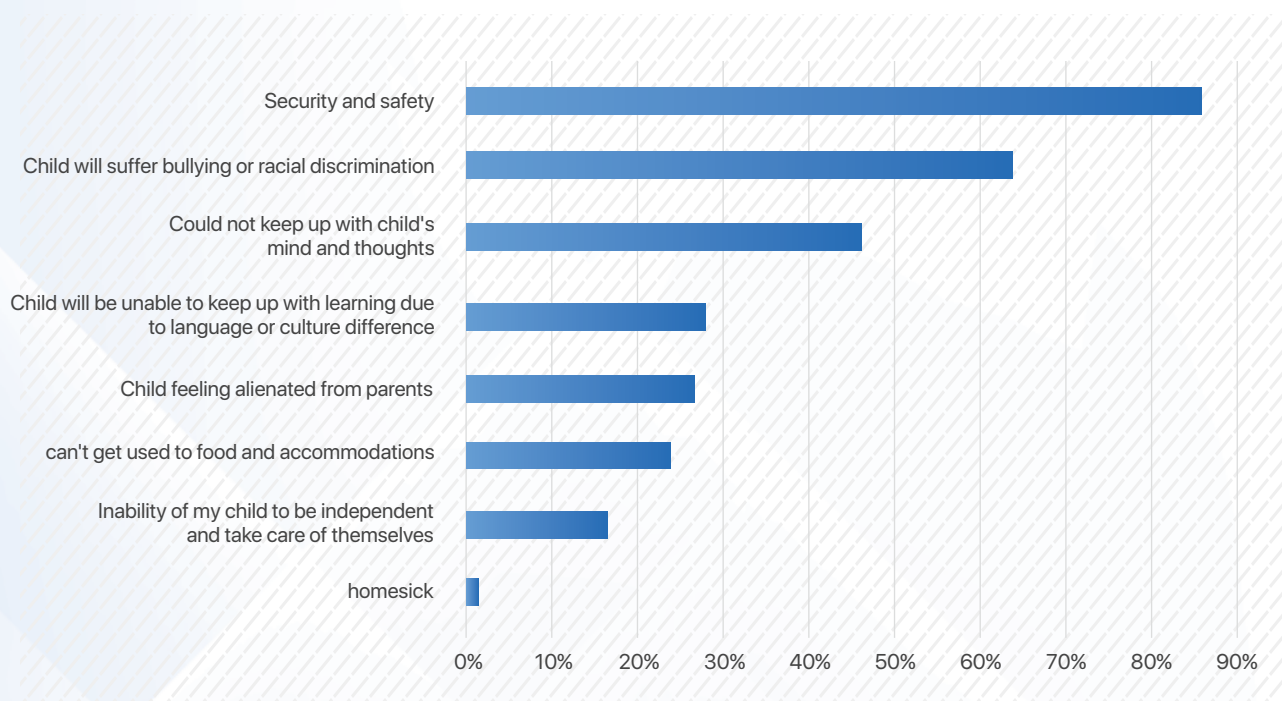


Chart 16: Biggest concerns about study in the UK - Prospective Parents

7. Preparing for UK boarding school education

Our survey demonstrates that both prospective and current parents value a thorough preparation for their child before entering boarding school in the UK. Their preparation usually covers a wide range of academic subjects and extracurricular activities. English improvement (79%), interpersonal and social skills (52%) and background knowledge of British culture (47%) remain the top three categories amongst prospective parents. English improvement (95%), STEM subject knowledge (46%), British cultural background (40.5%) and Humanities subjects (39%) are the top four categories amongst current parents.

Schools and agents are encouraged to support students as best they can in these areas and certainly parental choices will be influenced by a sensitive approach to international student needs. This would seem to be an area requiring further careful analysis in a number of schools.

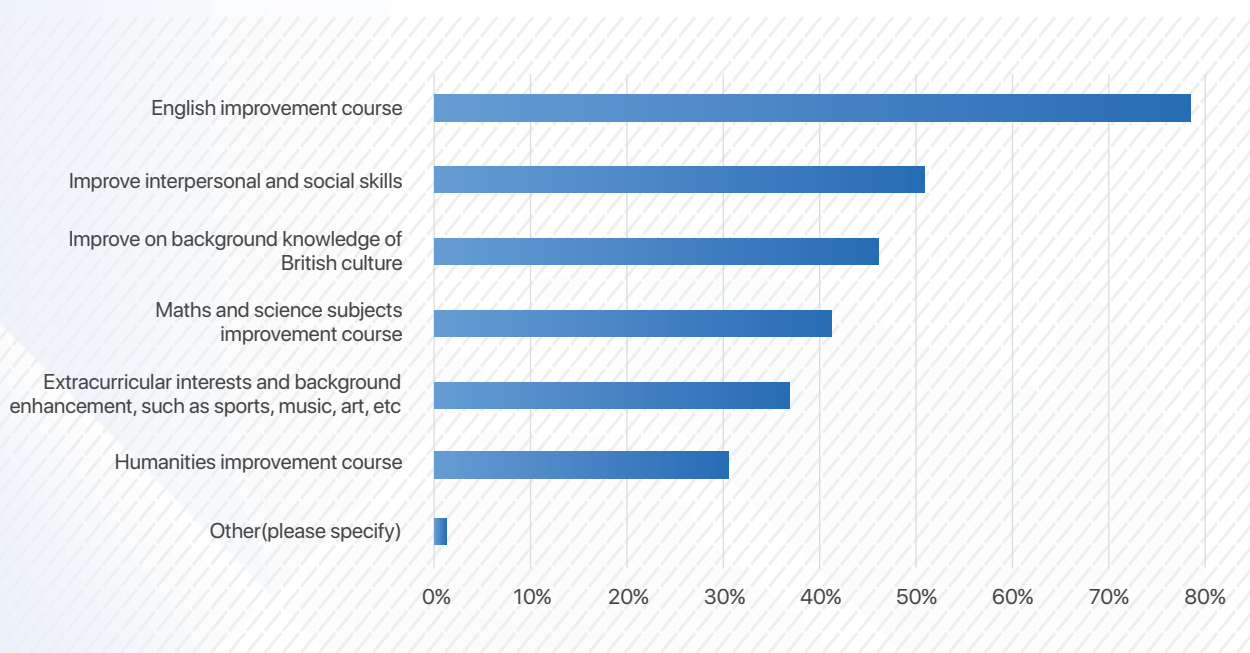


Chart 17: Preparing for UK boarding school system - Prospective Parents

8. Possible improvements to student support prior to their entering UK schools

This open ended question asked prospective parents what improvements they would like to see in their child's experience before going forward into UK boarding schools. Here it is obvious that there will be a great variety of responses and it is only possible to mention a few examples. Many of the responses centred around pastoral and emotional care, together with reassurance over health and safety issues. Parents would also like to see more detailed communication about students' daily life and activity.

Some parents said they would like more information about the application process for international students which could improve their chances of being accepted. Help with preparation for entry examinations was also mentioned by some, as was course selection. Application timetables and the number of places available was regarded as helpful.

Another point of concern to prospective parents was how their children would adapt to their new school. More information would be appreciated about the life of the school, the food and the accommodation. It was felt this would shorten the initial adaptation process when students join the school. Some parents would like to see schools taking a greater interest in knowing about their child's personality and characteristics and not just their academic grades. Advice about where they might improve was also deemed helpful.

9. The responsibilities of guardianship agencies

Our survey suggests that prospective parents understand little about what guardianship really means or entails. In fact there was a reduction in knowledge from 54% last year to 34% in 2023. Over this period there has clearly been a shift from good understanding of guardianship to having heard about it which may well be accounted for by the fading focus on COVID. However, the overall awareness of the need for guardianship has stayed at a higher level than when we started the surveys in 2021. This suggests a need for schools and agents to focus on a deeper understanding of guardianship amongst prospective parents.

Combining this increased parental awareness with a change in the National Minimum Standards in England must surely encourage schools to consider establishing much closer working relationships with accredited, reputable guardianship organisations.

Cultural understanding is also very important and schools may consider working with a dedicated guardianship organisation which specialises in different regions of China, to better cater for the needs of the students and parents from that region.

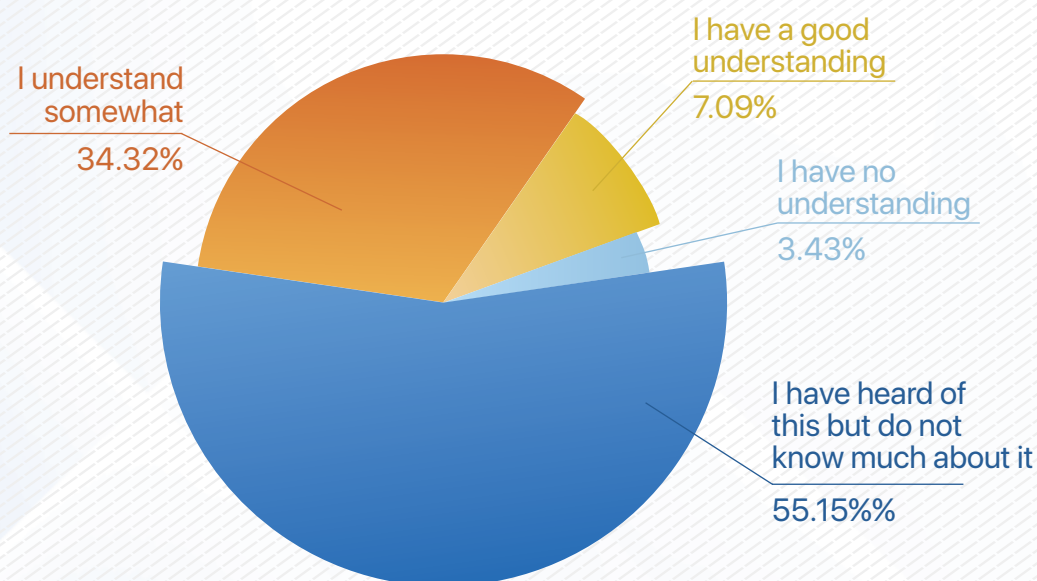


Chart 18: Awareness of guardianship - Prospective Parents

10. Selecting a guardianship agency

Parents were asked to choose three important factors which would influence their choice of a guardianship agency.

Assurance around the certification of the guardianship agency (86.7% vs 74%) is still of primary importance to prospective parents whilst the cost of the service appears of least concern. The agency's ability to understand the cultures of both countries and ability to communicate effectively was also highly valued (55%). Sufficient student numbers (52%) and guidance over future university entrance plans (43%) was also highly prized.

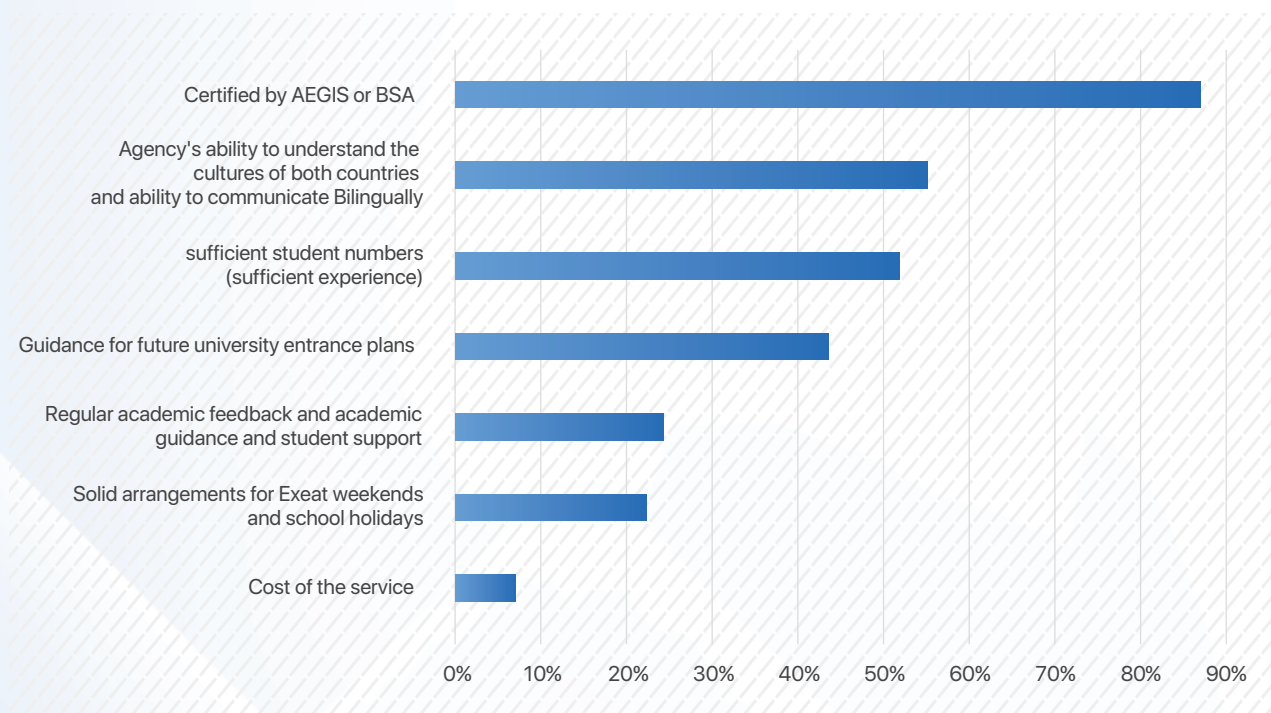


Chart 19: Important factors for Prospective Parents choosing guardians



St Mary Calne



Wells Cathedral

Section C

Current Parents

It was pleasing to note that 456 parents responded to questions in this section.

1. Year of entry to UK Schools

77% of current parents had children with over a year's experience in UK boarding schools, whilst the remaining 23% had children who entered UK boarding schools in September 2022. This compared with 65% in the first group and 35% in the 2021 survey.

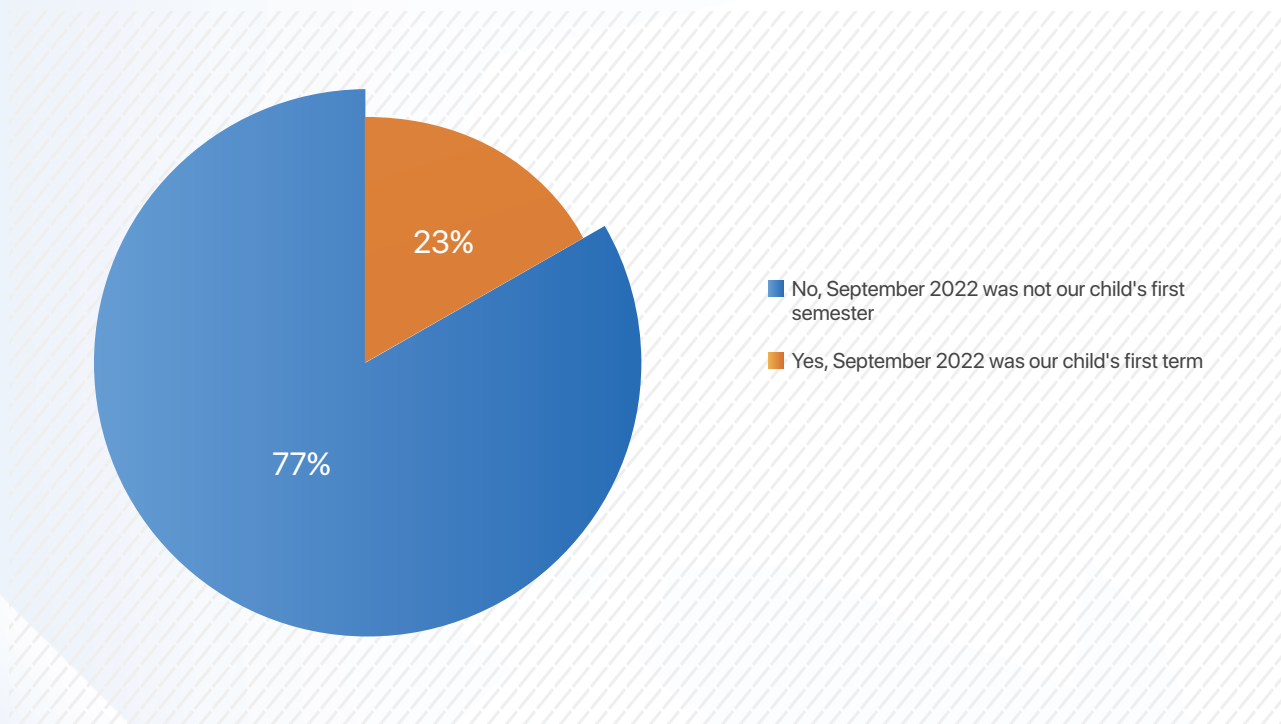


Chart 20: Year of entry to UK boarding school

2. UK school entry points

18% of current parents had children who entered UK schools in the youngest age category (up to 13+) which was broadly in line with previous years. 36% had children who enrolled in Year 9 (13+), whilst there was a marked increase in those choosing years 10 or 11 (33% as opposed to 27% in 2021). This upward age of entry may be to do with previous Covid travel difficulties or possibly affordability and therefore a delay in the year of entry. 13% had joined UK schools at 16+, a figure broadly in line with previous years.

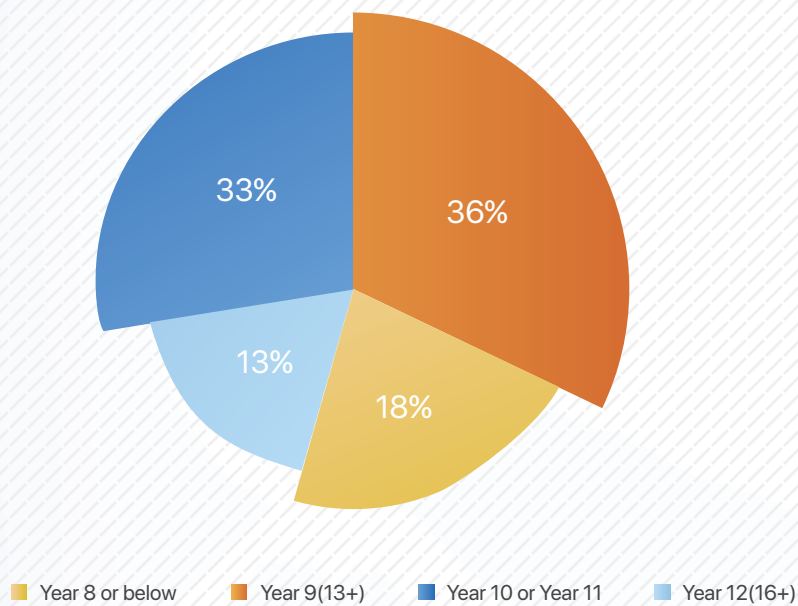


Chart 21: UK school entry points - Current Parents

3. How current parents applied to schools

88% of current parents had made their application to UK schools via an educational agent, whilst only 10% had made personal applications. This compared with 86% in the 2022 survey and 78% in 2021. This clearly shows a growing reliance on specialist agents for support with this important process.

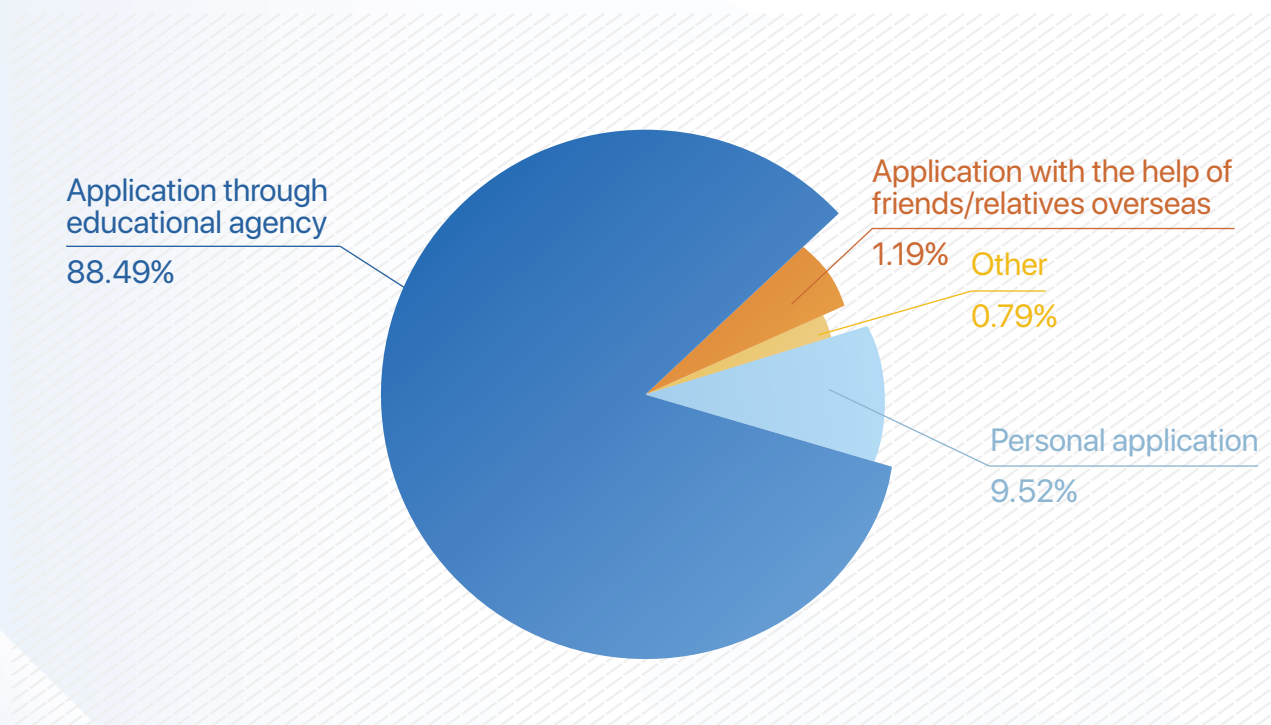


Chart 22: How current students applied to schools

4. How current parents selected an agent

Current parents who applied through an agent identified the accreditation and professionalism of their chosen agent as very important, and the provision of guardianship as almost as important (97% vs 90% in 2021). The viability of overseas boarding seems increasingly dependent on high levels of reliable in-country guardianship support.

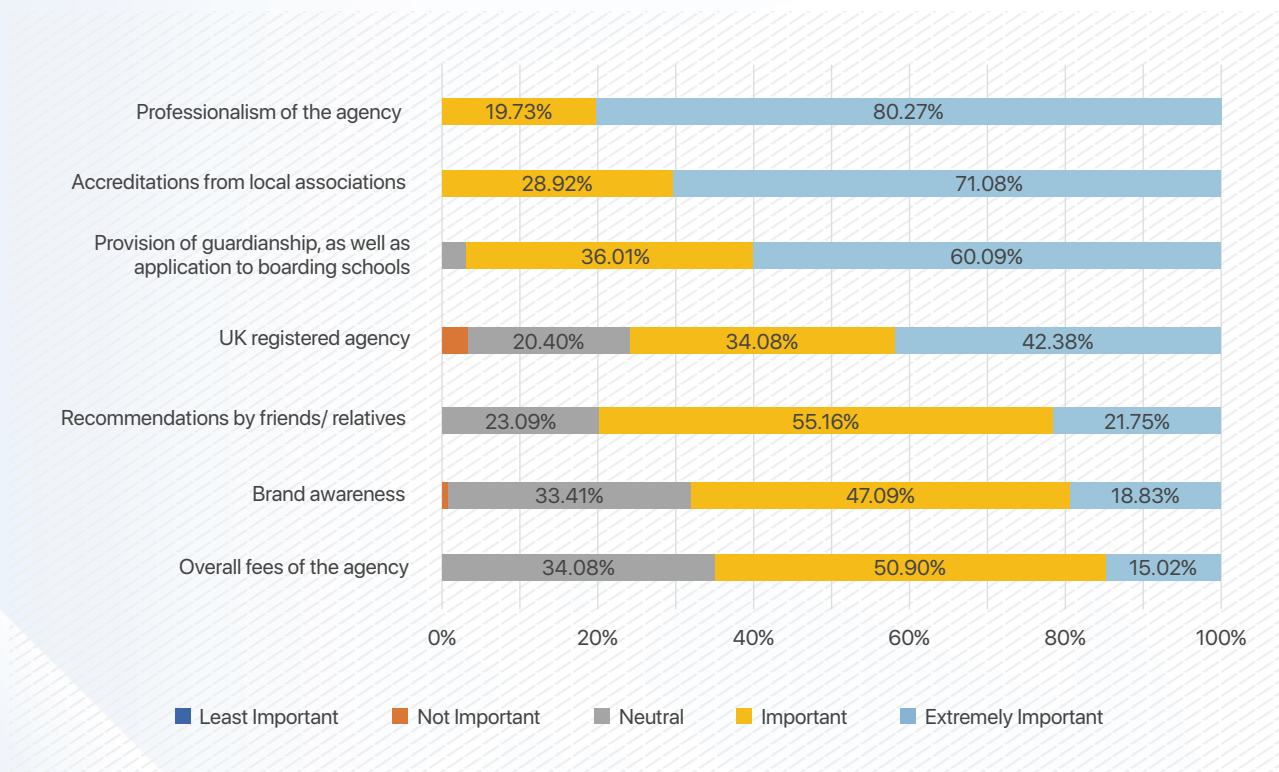


Chart 23: Key factors for choosing an agent - Current Parents

5. Length of preparation period

The period of preparation for entry to UK schools identified by current parents has changed slightly. There was a marked increase in the category recording less than six months (32% vs 23% in 2021). This year 43% recorded 6-12 months of preparation as opposed to 46% in 2022 and 44% in 2021, whilst 25% of parents stated that they had prepared for over twelve months compared with 33% in 2021.

These figures suggest that parents are delaying decisions over future schooling, or perhaps not recognising the need to prepare thoroughly over a period of time.

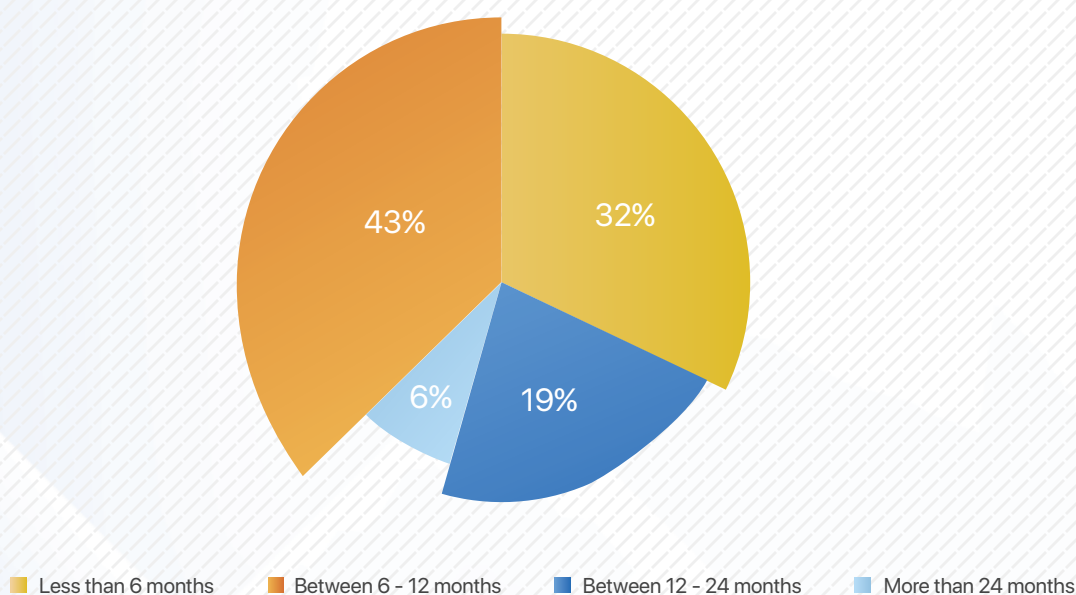


Chart 24: Length of preparation for UK schools by Current Parents



Downe House School



Roedean School

6. Biggest challenges faced by current families

Security and safety remains the single biggest challenge that children face in studying abroad. However it is interesting that concerns of this nature have fallen by 10% over the past three years (72.59% vs 84.68% in 2022). Concerns over racial discrimination and bullying have also been reduced (39.69% in 2023 vs 57.91% in 2021). These are encouraging statistics which we hope to see falling further in the coming years. Concerns over food and accommodation also fell from 34.68% in 2022 to 19.74% this year. However, 30% of current parents felt that their children were unable to keep up with their learning due to language or cultural difficulties. This must be a key area for both schools and parents to address.

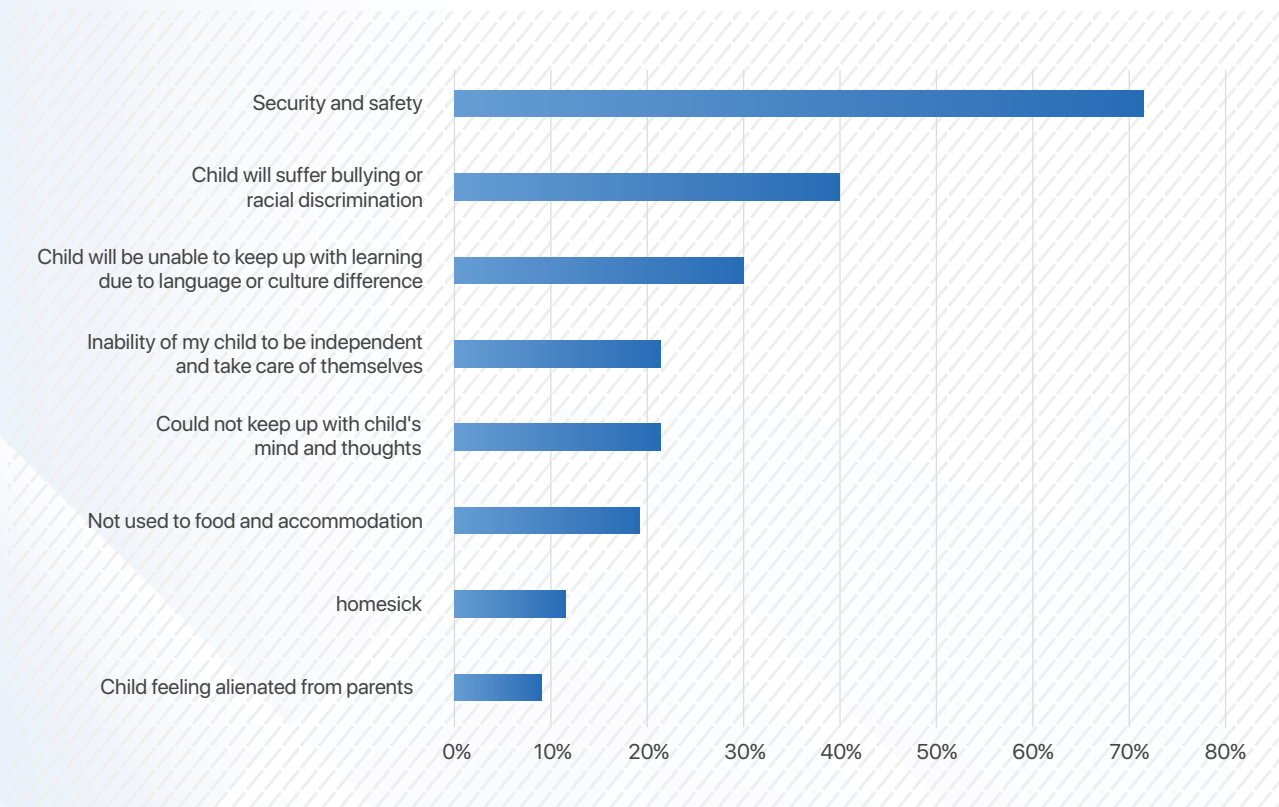


Chart 25: Key concerns of Current Parents

7. Changes seen in the child

The biggest changes seen by current parents in their children at UK schools remain in the area of self-reliance. This year 85.70% said they have seen increased levels of maturity and greater independence. This represents a 17% increase on 2021.

58% identified independent thinking as a positive benefit of studying in the UK, whilst 42% were pleased to see increased empathy and tolerance of others. Lower down the order, 6.8% of parents felt their relationships with their children had deteriorated but 13.82% said boarding in the UK had improved their relationships. These figures remain broadly consistent with earlier years.

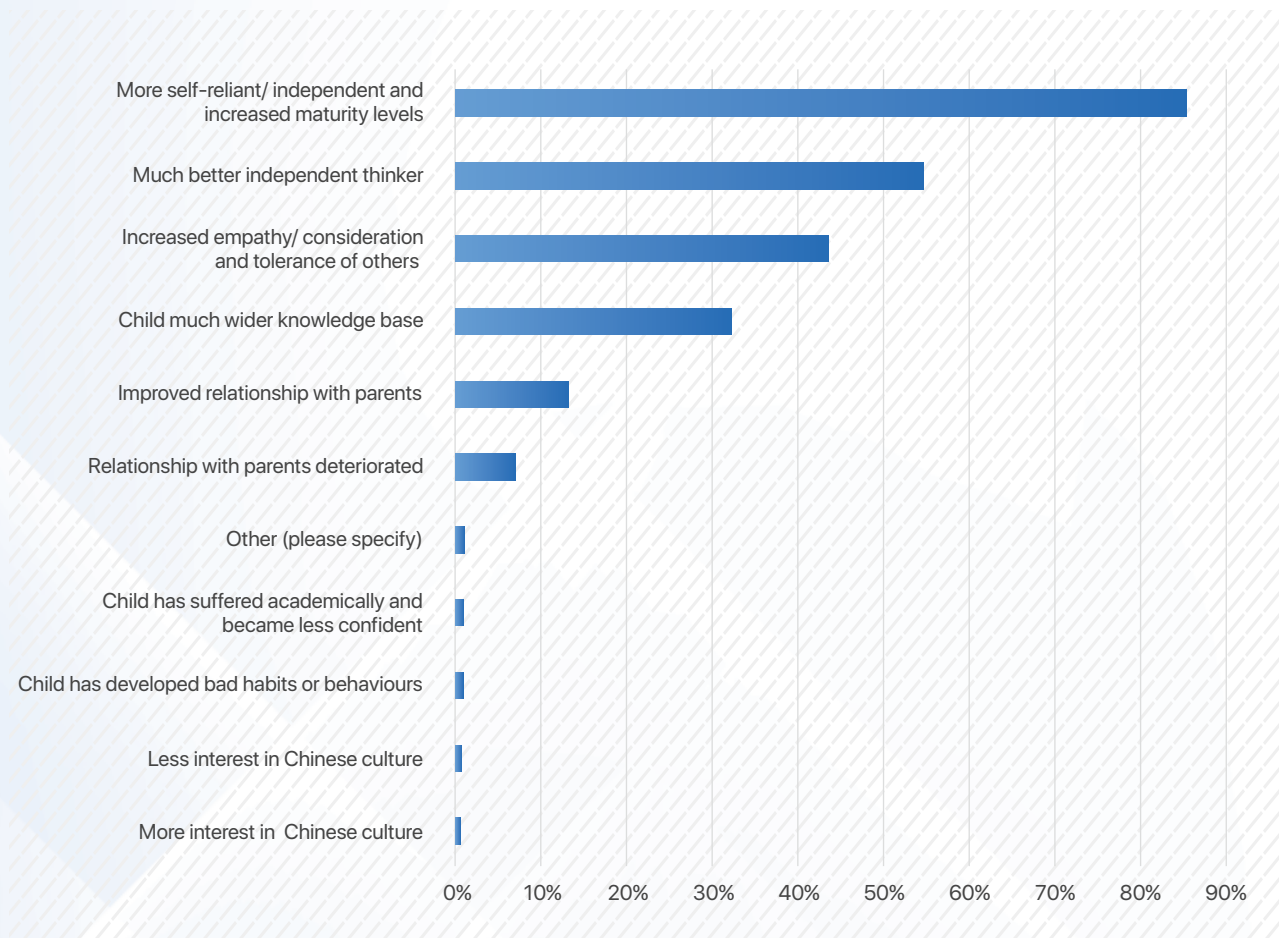


Chart 26: Positive benefits of studying in the UK - Current Parents

8. Preparation for UK boarding education

Current parents see improvement in English language as key to success (95%) and identified this as the vital priority in preparing for the UK boarding school system. Improvement courses in maths and science were also rated as significant (46.23%). Developing the child's background knowledge of British culture (40.40%) and improved knowledge of the humanities was also important to 39.09% of parents. This all suggests that there is much more work that could be done in preparing children for entry to UK schools.

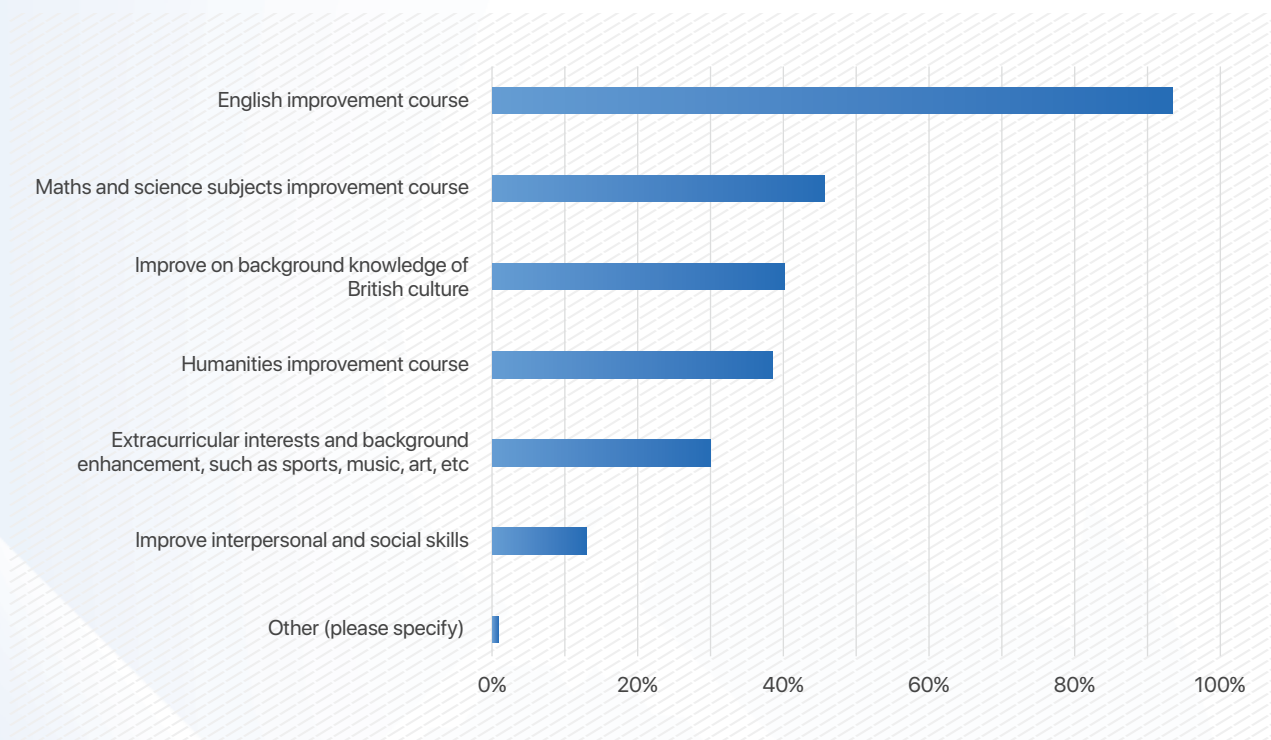


Chart 27: Preparing for the UK Boarding school system - Current Parents

9. Satisfaction with schools

The most impressive areas of UK boarding schools were pastoral care of students and the school's extra-curricular programme of activities. This was closely followed by campus safety, accommodation and school environment. The quality of communication with parents and the academic atmosphere in schools was less highly rated. Schools need to look carefully at these areas and take steps to reassure parents who feel out of touch with their child's progress.

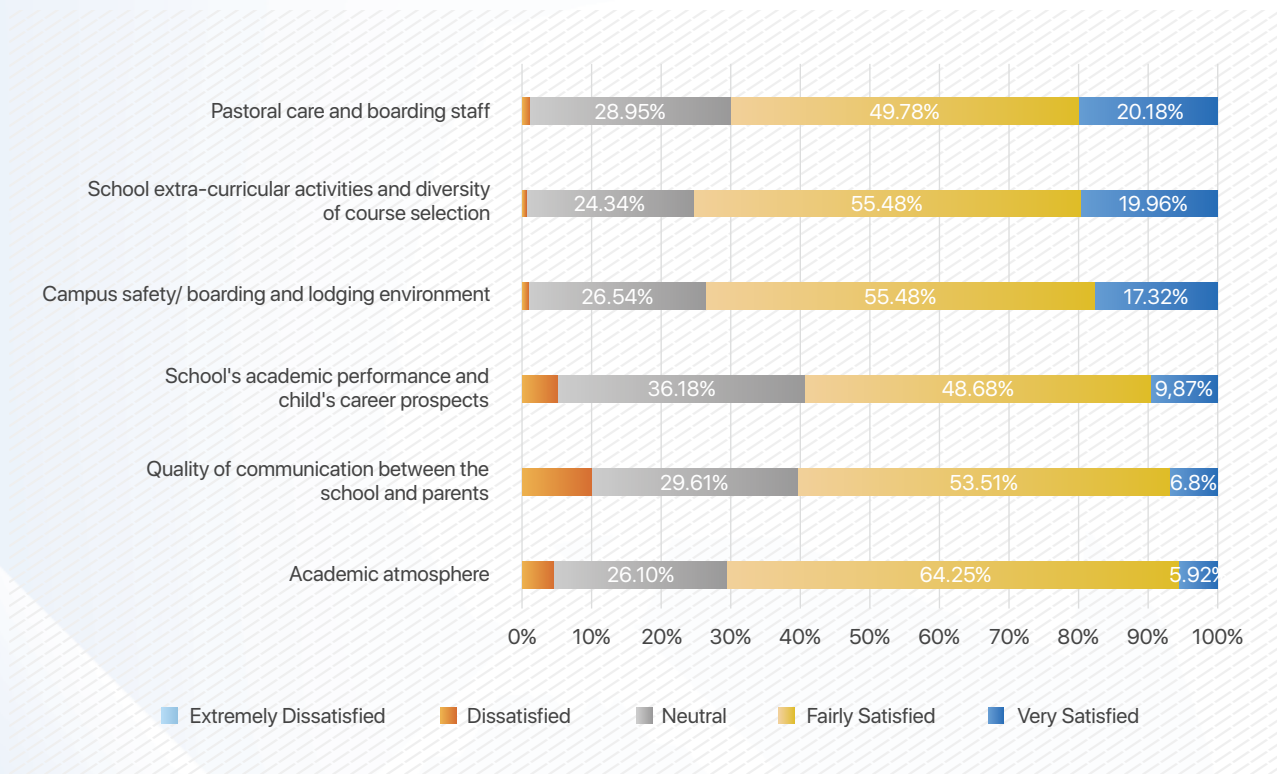


Chart 28: Current Parents' satisfaction level

10. How schools could improve

Current parents were asked about how schools could improve further and make helpful changes.

Academic support and focus was often mentioned as was the quality of teaching, leading to Oxbridge entry. Communication with parents in Chinese was also seen as an important matter. The cultural changes were identified by some with a desire to see schools helping students to like their schools more. Here again we see a request for schools to do more in the whole area of induction. Parents were keen to see their children adapting to school life as soon as possible so they can flourish happily and healthily.

The relationship between teachers, students and parents emerged in several requests. This was expressed in the desire for greater continuity and stability amongst teachers as well as their overall quality.

Some parents expressed a strong desire for their children to be allowed to stay in school during exeat weekends without incurring any extra charge. They also wanted schools to cultivate the child's ability to be independent.

11. Awareness of guardianship agencies

Understanding amongst current parents over the responsibilities and functions of guardianship agencies remains an area of weakness, and 44% had little or no clear idea about this.

The percentage of these with little or no clear idea of guardianship has grown by 16% over past three years and must surely be an area for greater publicity, where schools and agents should work together to raise awareness among parents.

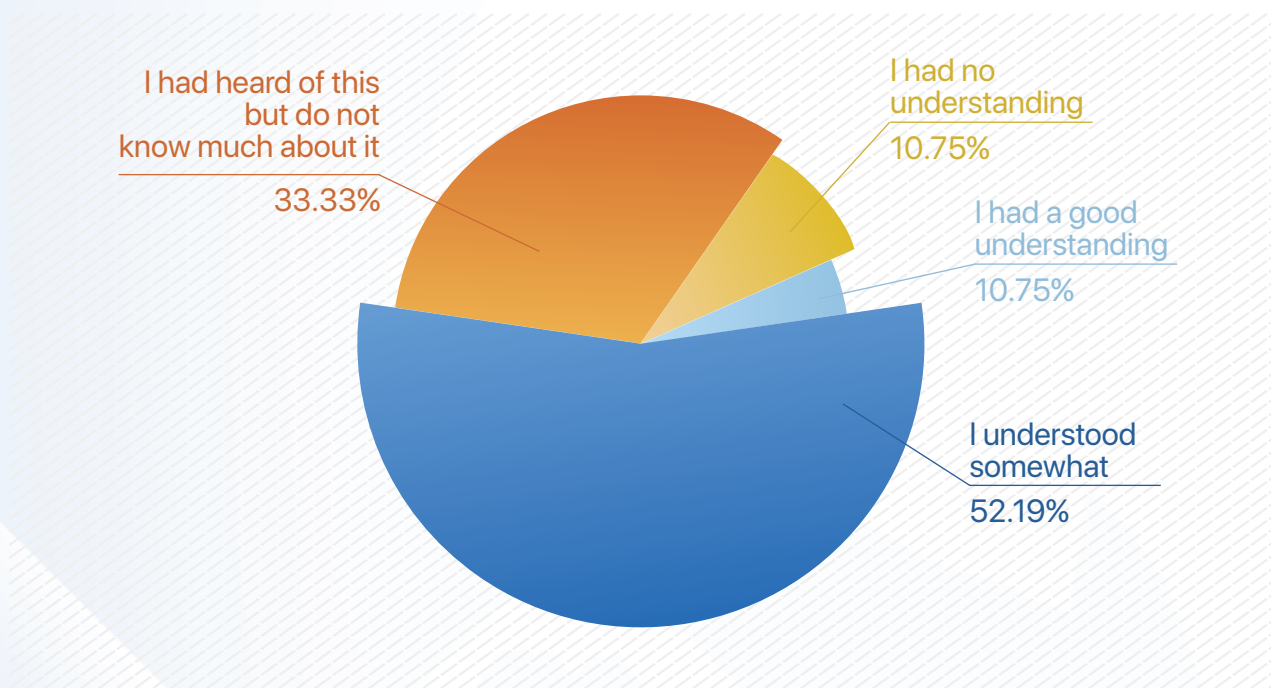


Chart 29: Awareness of guardianship before Current Parents chose their guardians

12. Choosing guardians

Current parents identified certification with AEGIS and BSA as the most important factor in choosing a guardianship agency (78.51%). The ability of the agency to understand the cultures of both Britain and China and the ability to communicate bilingually was also highly favoured (61.62%). Rising considerably in the order of importance this year was the guardianship agency's ability to provide guidance over future university entrance plans (54.17% vs 17.35% in 2021).

These statistics suggest far greater focus is now being given by parents to onward progression and the linkage between school and university.

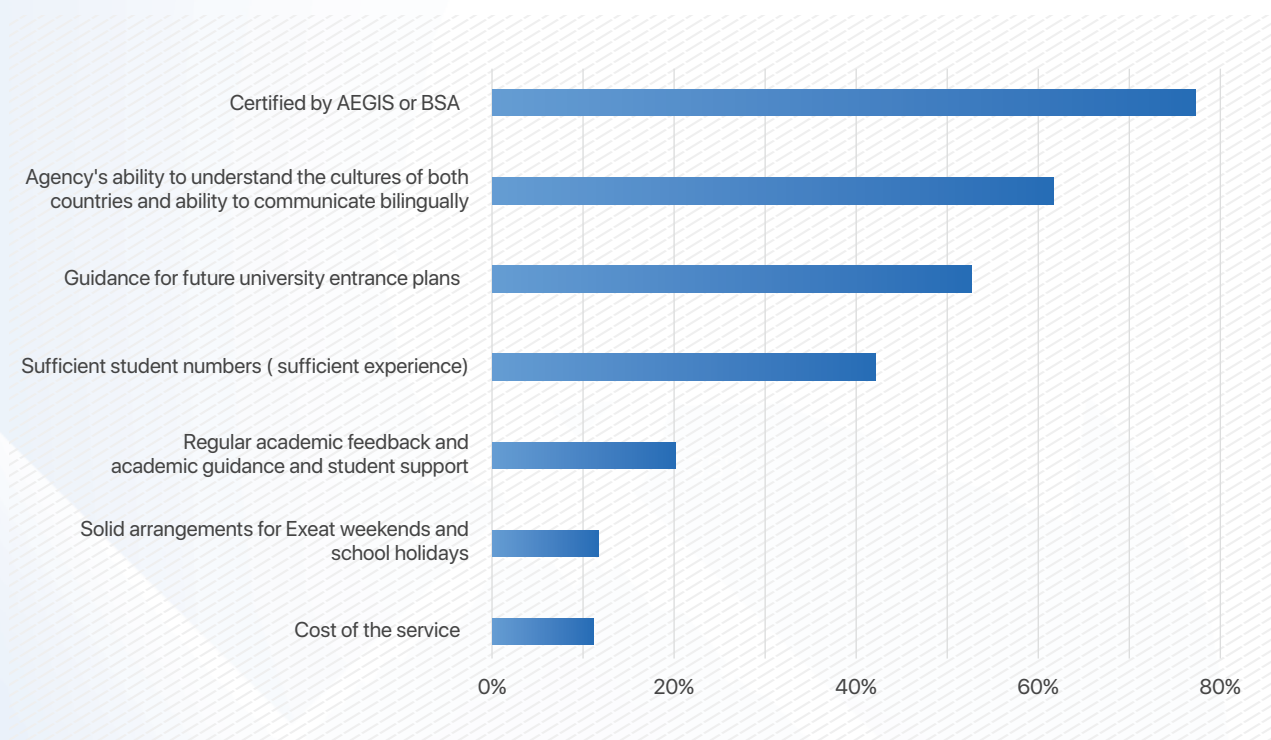


Chart 30: Important factors for Current Parents choosing guardians

13. Most valued services provided by guardians

Parents placed greatest value on the guardian’s ability to deal with emergency situations (84.65%) and this service was very much in line with previous years. Communication between school and parents with provision for academic support was placed second in the list with 67.32%, up by 17% on the previous year. The professionalism of the guardianship agency staff (46.93%) and the facility for parents and children to easily make contact with guardians was also much valued. (44.74%).

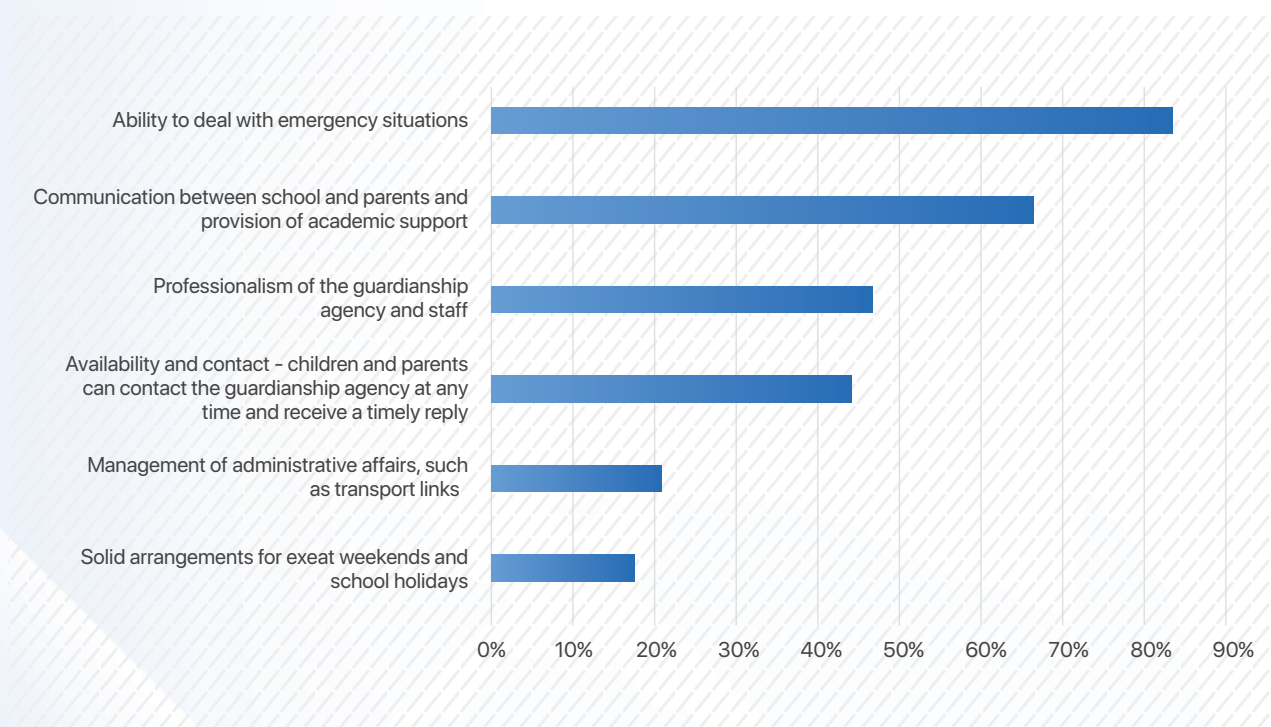


Chart 31: Most valuable guardianship services - Current Parents

14. Changes in guardianship

Current parents taking part in the survey were given the chance to comment on their child's guardianship scheme.

Here there was a general request for more involvement and better communication, helping parents to make complex arrangements in order to support the child in many different ways.

Better communication was also requested with teachers, including guidance over university application planning, pre-examination course advice and other academic matters. For some it was simply the ability to reply more promptly to emails.

Much is expected of guardians, not least their ability to act effectively in place of parents. This included helping the child to become more independent.

It is important to note that a substantial group of the parents in our survey were very pleased with their child's guardians and happy to keep things as they are.



Conclusions and recommendations

The positive contribution made by Chinese students within UK boarding schools is now well-known and welcomed. It is good to know that this positive relationship goes two ways and to read the responses of 967 mainland Chinese parents who have made the huge commitment to send their children to school in the UK. The 2023 report is divided into sections so that we are able to see separately the answers both of parents whose children are already in our schools and of those who are strongly considering placing their children into our education system. It is also useful that 26% of the survey answered last year's survey, as this gives an indication of changes in opinion.

It is clear that the UK boarding sector remains highly regarded and, despite the difficulties of the last few years, parents greatly appreciate the high levels of professionalism and care shown to their children. 73% of responses said that they had chosen a UK school so that their child could benefit from a well-rounded education and that percentage was up from 41% in 2021. An understanding of all that a British boarding education can offer does not mean however that Chinese parents are less ambitious than before: 50% say that a top driver for their decision is to enable their child to get into a top global university and that percentage is up from 33% in 2021.

71% of Chinese parents say that the decision to send their child to a British boarding school is based on their child's own wishes, and 76% that the timing is predicated on the child's level of independence. In this context it is interesting to note that the number of parents choosing to send their child to boarding school at prep level has gone up from 7% in 2021 to 11%.

Our sector is increasingly aware that we operate in a global market place with international parents choosing from several other destinations. Parents in all three years of our survey chose security, safety and acceptance of international pupils as the major drivers for choosing a destination. It is extremely pleasing to note that these are not such issues as they were in our previous surveys, having decreased as parental worries from 85% to 73%. Additionally, concerns about food and accommodation have decreased from 35% to 20%, although schools will still wish to take note of these figures.

So what are the increasing concerns for parents? These divide into two categories: those concerns which schools are able to help with and those that are beyond our power to control, at least as individual institutions. In the first category we have:

- 44% of current parents had little or no idea about the responsibilities and functions of an educational guardian. Knowledge of guardianship overall has reduced from 54% last year to 34% this year. This may be due in part to the fading focus on Covid but with the recent changes to the NMS there is clearly a need for schools to play their part in explaining (and arguably enforcing through their policies and procedures) the need for every international pupil to have an active BSA certified guardian. Schools need to be satisfied that they are fulfilling their obligations to the children in their care. Likewise schools on the UKVI register of student sponsors must be sure that they are fulfilling their duties
- 30% of parents felt their children were unable to keep up in school, owing to language and cultural difficulties. Schools may need to refresh their admissions, pre-sessional and induction procedures as well as considering training of academic and pastoral staff with teaching and integration strategies for non-native speakers
- Individual answers to open questions suggest that parents with children already at school here would value more and better communication from schools and also would like schools to allow international pupils to stay in school for exeat.

However there are other issues that schools cannot so easily influence. The new questions in this year's survey show clearly the concerns that political developments, in both the UK and China, cause to current and potential parents and the effect they have upon their decisions:

- We already knew from our previous surveys that graduate employment and immigration prospects were high on the list of reasons for choosing the UK. 12% of parents stated this in 2021 but that figure is 28% this year
- Additionally, 21% of Chinese families state that reducing the length of the Post-Study Work visa, which permits international graduates to continue residing in the UK to search for employment, would lead them to consider studying in a different country. A further 37% said it would negatively influence that decision. Conversely, any relaxation in UK immigration policies would be a key factor for 20% of respondents in choosing this country for education and another 46% would be positively influenced to study here.
- Meanwhile the perceived decline in Oxbridge admissions from independent schools was important to 20% of parents and would influence the decision of a further 56% on which country they choose for their child's education
- Finally, the addition of VAT onto schools fees would impact the decision making of 60% of parents, with 8.7% saying it would make them choose another country for their child's education.

In conclusion, the development of trusting partnerships between schools, parents, pupils and guardians remains the objective. Great communication, making use of technological advances, enables high levels of access and participation amongst parents and guardians. Continued school commitment to personal service, and individual attention to detail, is always appreciated. We must also bear in mind as a sector that we do not exist in a vacuum. The economic and political environments in both the UK and China will affect the parental decision making process. Universities and schools are strongly interconnected in this regard.



Areas for further consideration

How are schools in China changing?

What kinds of pressure are students under in their current settings in China and the UK?

How do Chinese families gain an accurate picture of study opportunities at UK schools?

Do schools offer study courses preparing students for possible future entry?

Will the chosen school be able to provide appropriate academic, pastoral and logistical support for the international student?

Are agents fully in touch with current school standards and specialisms before they advise parents?

What are the differences between the various school types and the curricular experiences they offer?

Are numbers of international schools growing in China and do they lead mostly to international university entrance?

How well prepared is the student for the broad UK curriculum? How easy will they find it to access language based subjects?