

Engage with China Scholarships FAQ 2026

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1. Introduction

This is an entirely informal document that aims to capture useful information for parents of pupils applying for an Engage with China scholarship due to travel to one of our partner schools in China in August 2026 to study their A-level of IB studies.

2. Background and School Context

2.1. How many Engage with China scholars are already in China?

The Engage with China Scholarship programme was founded in 2023 with a cohort of 10 pioneering scholars. Since then the programme has grown enabling a total of 44 scholars to enjoy their A-level education at our partner bilingual schools across China. Our first cohort graduated in 2025 securing university places at Oxford, Cambridge, Durham, LSE, Leeds and other Russell Group universities and University of New York. The graduating cohort 2026 have all received offers to their first choice of universities. various cities around China with 44 to date.

2.2. Do the Engage with China Partnership Schools have any affiliation with schools in the UK?

SCBS Pudong and AISL Harrow Haikou are affiliated with and have close engagement with their 'parent' schools in the UK but are separate entities. Management, senior leadership teams and teachers include Chinese, British and other native English speakers.

ISA Group is Chinese-owned and does not have any affiliation with a UK school.

2.3. What are the schools like and what do they have on offer in terms of facilities, subjects and extra-curricular?

Engage with China staff have visited each campus and conducted a familiarisation visit. This has involved meeting with senior staff members, observing classes, meeting with pupils, taking a tour of the facilities and spending time with teachers and scholars.

Most of our partner schools emphasise the STEM subjects.

2.4. Does the school allow students to meet family/ friends when in China?

Yes, subject to:

- Avoiding impact on academic studies
- Obtaining formal parental consent

3. Joining the School & First Days

3.1. Do the scholars start at the same time as other students?

The scholars start *the week before* the rest of the school for an induction week. This is to enable them to orientate themselves and includes:

- A "dry run" of their normal week
- Signing up for extra-curricular activities
- Visit to the local hospital / clinic for a mandatory medical
- Setting up banking, SIM card and online shopping functions
- An introduction to the local area

- Learning about boarding arrangements, their house etc
- Getting to know their tutor
- A chance to get over their jetlag before formal classes begin.

3.2. Is there a student handbook?

Yes - Pupil handbooks will be given to each scholar to be signed by them and their parent(s).

3.3. Is there a packing list?

Schools may provide such a list but we advise that scholars take a minimal amount as they are likely to purchase items during their time in China. School shoes are a must and we advise 2-3 sets of 'home clothes' and a coat. Check with the Host School if this needs to be black or another colour. We find that most pupils are comfortable remaining in school uniform or PE kit throughout the day without the need for multiple home clothes.

If a scholar requires additional clothing, these are readily available via online shopping platforms in China, are very cheap and delivered quickly – sometimes in a matter of hours.

3.4. Will the school share a “key contacts” list?

Yes – likely to include housemistress, school office etc.

4. Exams, Results etc

4.1. Are there published A-level results for the EwC partner schools?

Scholars take the international A-level courses. These are modular exams taken throughout the course of their two-year studies. Support is given for revision and test papers as well as university application tutoring and advice.

The IB is now also on offer at our new partner schools in Guangzhou and Wuhan – currently recruiting for August 2026.

Our partner schools are at various stages of growth and so most have published A level results already but not all.

4.2. How many A-level subjects are taken?

All students will take four A-Levels selected from a range of options following discussion with the Director of Studies.

4.3. What A-level / IB subjects are on offer?

This will depend on the campus / individual school so please check. There tends to be an emphasis on STEM subjects.

Please note that geography, history, politics and religious studies cannot be taught in China.

4.4. Do all students study Chinese?

Yes - All students study Chinese as a core part of the bilingual timetable (c. 6 periods per week) to achieve an HSK qualifications.

4.5. What exam boards are used for International A-Levels?

- [Cambridge](#)
- [Edexcel](#)

4.6. Are international A-levels different?

International A Levels (IAL) are considered comparable in difficulty to UK A-Levels though may go into slightly more depth in specific areas.

They are often viewed as more flexible due to their modular structure.

This is characterised by spreading exams over two years and the ability to retake individual units.

From the student perspective this can make IALs feel more manageable.

5. Extracurricular

5.1. Do parents need to pay for music lessons?

While your child can join school music activities at no charge (e.g. bands etc) there may be a charge for 1:1 music tuition. The cost is typically on a par with the cost of lessons in the UK. Do check with the school / EwC for your particular campus.

5.2. Can my child take music exams whilst at their school in China?

Yes, the school can assist with this.

5.3. What sports are available?

Football, basketball & swimming are routine. Arrangements can be made for other sports if the students express an interest. Please note that, culturally, sport has not been such a focus for Chinese families as the academic side of education, so there may not be lots of teams. Sport is, of course, a great way to meet and make friends and it is hoped that our EwC Scholars will foster a love of sport and encourage their Chinese peers to be more proactive in this area.

5.4. What school trips will be available?

The school routinely provides opportunities to the students and actively encourage students to recommend trips that will suit their areas of interest.

5.5. Will the school offer the Duke of Edinburgh awards scheme?

Provision of DofE varies across the schools. If this is of interest to applicants, please get in touch.

5.6. When will we know about events planned for “short holidays”?

Details of these trips are still being defined ahead of the start of the next academic year (and potentially open to student input). The school will inform parents as these opportunities are confirmed (e.g. to enable parents and students to decide on travel arrangements).

5.7. Are the term dates “fixed in stone”?

At the time of writing the term dates are subject to change as they are still to be approved by the local authorities. Likely flight date to China will be week commencing 24 August).

5.8. Do the schools support Extended Project Qualification (EPQ)?

Yes most schools believe this provides an opportunity for students to study subjects that are not a direct match for A-Level qualifications (e.g. that relate to university courses that may be of interest).

6. School Supplies, Uniform etc

6.1. Does the school provide uniform?

Yes – they provide uniform but not casual clothes. Uniform includes:

- Coat, blazer, tie, sweater, 2 trousers/skirts; 5 shirts.
- General sports kit plus specialist team kits as required.

6.2. Should we consider the climate?

Yes – summer is hot and humid and lasts longer than in the UK. It may be uncomfortable as scholars adjust to the climate

6.3. What if the uniform doesn't fit or my child grows out of their uniform?

Schools will ensure that new uniform is provided.

6.4. How does laundry work?

There is a weekly laundry service included.

6.5. Does the school provide shoes?

No - Your child will require plain black school shoes to go with their uniform and shoes for mufti (i.e. neither are provided by the school).

There will be opportunities for your child to buy new shoes if they need them when they come home in the major holidays.

6.6. What about pocket money?

Parents can provide pocket money directly to their child to cover incidental expenses, mobile phone plan, treats etc when they travel to China.

It is recommended that your child opens a local bank account for this purpose after they arrive. The school will help to facilitate this but is dependent on obtaining the resident permit (see section below) and the school will help with this.

Experience with previous scholar cohorts to China would recommend that parents provide £200-£300 at the outset for pupils to take with them (i.e. to put into their bank accounts when they arrive) as bank transfers can sometimes be complicated and take time.

7. Visas, Passports etc

7.1. Does my child need a visa?

Yes – you will need to obtain an X1 visa for your child from the [Chinese Visa Service Center](https://www.visaforchina.cn/LON3_EN/qianzhengyewu) in the UK. [https://www.visaforchina.cn/LON3_EN/qianzhengyewu]

You will need to complete the visa application online and be accurate with the information provided.

At the time of writing:

- Once approval is given, you will need to travel to the visa centre in person and leave your passport there for three days (express service) or five days (normal service).
- You will then need to return to collect your passport and complete final admin. Alternatively you can pay for the passport to be sent in the post.

Please note that the HR department at the schools will provide all of the documentation to help and guide scholars through the process and scholar families should wait for all this detail before making any application themselves.

7.2. Will parents require a visa for visiting their child?

At the time of writing there is a [visa waiver](#) for UK passport holders to visit China for up to 30 days for business, tourism, family/friends visit, exchange and transit purposes (but this does not cover students).

For passport holders from other countries a visa may still be required.

7.3. Will the school help with the visa application process?

Yes. The school will provide the letter of invitation to enable you to apply for the visa and other supplementary documentation.

7.4. Can my child get a local bank account?

Yes – to get a bank account your child will first need to be granted their residency permit after arrival. This will be organised by the school.

7.5. Where can I find information about applying for a visa?

A variety of information is available on the [UK Chinese Embassy site](#).

7.6. Should I renew my child's passport before they travel?

Your child needs a valid UK passport at all times during their stay.

For simplicity it is recommended that you renew your child's passport if it is due to expire before the end of the 2 years of the scholarship (or indeed soon thereafter).

7.7. Does my child need an "extra" visa after they arrive?

Yes:

- There is a requirement for all foreign students and visitors in China to register their temporary residence with the local Public Security Bureau (PSB) within 24 hours of arrival. This will be arranged by the school.
- After your child arrives, the school will arrange for them to obtain any required residency permit (within 30 days).
- Scholars will not be able to travel outside of the city until the above has completed.

8. Pastoral Care, Support Wellbeing

8.1. Who is available to support and advocate for my child?

Your child's tutor will be the key person overseeing your child's welfare and advocating for their needs... alongside their housemaster/ house mistress.

The school also has wellbeing counsellors on staff.

Schools also have safeguarding policies and access to a tutor who they will meet regularly.

8.2. How does healthcare work for the scholars?

The schools have a nurse who live on-site.

The scholarship includes private healthcare provided by the school that can be used if greater medical care is required (including hospitalisation).

School staff will accompany your child for the duration of any medical care.

You will need to purchase insurance to cover travel from the UK to China but once in-country the school's insurance will kick in.

8.3. What immunisations are required for China?

Immunisations are not generally required. For the latest information see [UK Government Entry Requirements](#) and [NaTHNaC](#) guidance.

9. Technology & Communication

9.1. How can my child get a local SIM card?

You can purchase an eSIM (eg nomad), before leaving the UK for temporary use. To obtain a local SIM card in China first requires a bank account (which depends on the residency permit being issued) and there are a reduced number of SIM providers available for foreign students.

SIM cards in China are likely to be at least slightly cheaper than those in the UK

9.2. Any guidance on mobile handsets?

Most mobile handsets work fine in China however due to the Firewall in China some Google phones experience issues.

When it comes to WiFi devices there have been reports that locally purchased devices can perform more quickly (but not to the extent that UK devices cause significant issues).

9.3. What about a VPN?

Your child may wish to use a VPN when in China to assist accessing services that are available in the UK however:

- There is no guarantee that services will work initially (if not available locally in China) or that they will continue to work.
- Any VPN would need to be installed before your child travels (i.e. unlikely to be possible while in China).
- Scholars will be able to access the school VPN during term time (when at the school site).

9.4. Does my child need a laptop?

Your child will need a device to use on school systems. A Mac or Windows laptop would be a suitable choice, however an iPad will also be sufficient.

9.5. Do we need to get specific software licenses for our child?

The schools provide the relevant software licenses required for your child's education.

These are typically focussed on the Microsoft 365 applications (e.g. Word, Excel, Teams etc).

Microsoft Teams is a key application used for communication in the school.

9.6. Should my child wait to buy devices when in China?

While some devices may be available at a discount in China you should consider whether this would impede the use of a VPN.

Experience shows that a VPN needs to be installed prior to arrival in China.

9.7. When can my child "phone home"?

Typically, children will contact their parents at the end of the school day (i.e. 20:00 UTC+8) however if this is not practical the schools may be able to be flexible on this timing.

9.8. Any special Software/ Apps that we need to consider?

It is recommended that students and parents install the WeChat App as this is commonly used and a vital part of everyday life in China, including facilitating payments for purchases, messaging and banking).

As app registration relies on validation by another user installing this early (from the UK) is advised. The schools can also help with this, if necessary.

It is also recommended to instal Alipay as this is another widely used payment option. Both apps require users to 'bind' a UK bank card PRIOR to departure to China. Monzo bank cards seem to work well for young people.

10. Emergency & Contingency

10.1. Do the schools have emergency plans?

The schools have emergency plans in place with corresponding contingencies and communication plans.

It should be noted that, in the current state of international affairs, China is a comparatively stable and safe place which avoids some of the risks facing other nations.

This, for example, is exhibited by the greater variety of air routes available to the national carrier (Air China).

10.2. Can I learn about changes to UK Government info regarding China?

You can subscribe to email [notifications](#) from the UK government. The school also receives alerts for changes that may affect the school or students and will keep parents informed of pertinent information.

11. Staff Retention

11.1. What is staff retention like at international / bilingual schools in China?

Staff retention is good and better than many schools. Staff members are generally engaged for 2 or 3-year contracts.

12. UK Benefits, University Fees etc.

12.1. Does the scholarship affect UK Child Benefit?

<The following information is still subject to ratification>

Regulation 21 (1) (A) of the Child Benefit (General) Regulations 2006 says:

“Children temporarily absent from Great Britain shall be treated as in Great Britain for the first 12 weeks of any period of absence”

This means that when your child is overseas and in full time non-advanced education, child benefit entitlement continues for the first 12 weeks of any absence.

This is not restricted to full time education in the UK.

Thus A-levels at our partner schools count as “full time non-advanced education”.

If you receive child benefit (i.e. have not opted out because of High Income Child Benefit Charge aka HICBC) then this means you can receive child benefit for the first 12 weeks that your child is away.

This “12 weeks” can restart each time they return to the UK.

In practice (if you claim child benefit) this means:

- You should inform HMRC (by phone) each time your child leaves the UK to attend school in China for more than 12 weeks (i.e. for a 4-week period there is no need to tell HMRC)
- If you have informed HMRC then, when they, come back (e.g. after 15 weeks) you will need to make a new claim.

We hope this new claim will be a simple process (based on information already provided and the child already being verified) *however this is yet to be confirmed.*

All this assumes you will be sending your child money each month totalling *at least* the child benefit amount.

Reiterating: Engage with HMRC on the phone... do NOT do this online.

12.2. Will my child be classed as an international student for UK universities?

If your child *had* stayed in the UK for A-levels and thus would have been classed as a UK student then don't expect this to change due to their scholarship.

Each university uses the government regulations to make their own decision about "home fees" status (as opposed to being classified as an international student).

A key requirement for "home fees" is being "ordinarily resident".

If the primary reason for being overseas is full-time education (e.g., attending a boarding school), this period is typically "disregarded" (i.e. not a change of residence).

When assessing "ordinarily resident" universities might look for reassurance that the student has not "severed ties" with the UK.

This should be easy for example:

- An accessible home base in the UK (e.g., a family home).
- Regular and habitual travel back to the UK during holidays.
- Active links like UK bank accounts, GP registration, or utility bills.

Parents should think carefully before taking action that would undermine the conclusion that their child's residence abroad is:

"a temporary absence and that the UK remains their true "habitual home"

If you are not a UK citizen then other criteria may apply but, on its own, the scholarship is unlikely to change "home fees" status of your child.

Please note that Student Finance and universities are separate entities. We have experienced only one incident of a student being denied finance – but this was overturned at appeal.

Scholars can request a letter from the school confirming that they have been away for the purposes of education. As long as parent(s) are paying tax in the UK and can prove payments and residency in the UK then this should not be an issue.

13. Engage with China (EwC)

13.1. What is the role of EwC in the Scholarship programme

Engage with China is a registered UK charity with the aim to build China literacy in UK schools and to equip the next generation of leaders to understand China's language and culture. EwC founded the scholarship programme in 2023 with one school in Changzhou and this was then expanded across the school group in other cities including Hangzhou and Nanjing.

Keen to foster educational access and to enable more young people to enjoy this unique and life-transforming educational opportunity, EwC has since partnered with more schools across China paving the way for real growth for this experience. Once scholars have started at the school, the day-to-day relationship is with the school and the school acts in loco parentis.

EwC role includes:

- Marketing and promotion of the scholarship
- Relationship management and on-going liaison with partner schools
- Managing the initial stages of the recruitment process

- Participation in online interviews
- Responsive to questions successful candidates may have
- Support with the on-boarding process
- Pre-departure scholar event either in-person or online
- Group scholar communication
- Regular check-ins with scholar families
- Advocacy for scholars
- Alumni network
- Further educational, volunteering or work opportunities as they arise

13.2. Will there be any events before the scholars travel to China?

A pre-departure cultural workshop will be held – either online or in person to:

- Give scholars the chance to meet
- To learn some more about what to expect
- Discover more about what China is like
- Team building.

It is hoped that a scholar day out will take place in mid-August in the that A-level results are published (week commencing 10 August).

This will be a chance for returning scholars to meet with new ones. While it is hoped that this will be repeated this year details are yet to be confirmed.

Travel to the event – likely in London – and associated costs for the day to be borne by the scholar's family (c. £45) to include lunch.

13.3. What is the fundraising goal for scholars?

EwC asks that all scholars make a donation of £250 prior to departure to China (as a contribution to administrative costs associated with the scholarship placement).

The trustees of the charity encourage all scholars and their families to aim to raise £2,000 each in total by the end of their two-year scholarship.

This is typically through fundraising events / activities and parental involvement (e.g. local events, sponsored walk, philanthropy, advocacy resulting in corporate donations etc).

EwC is a small charity which hopes to expand the scholarship programme to enable more young people to benefit from the opportunity.

Raised funds would also ensure the growth of an alumni network and associated benefits, work experience opportunities, access to events and networking etc.

13.4. Does EwC expect other things from scholars?

EwC would expect scholars to:

- Make the most of the opportunity and to give back where they can. This may take the form of volunteering in the school (perhaps reading in the kindergarten) or at an Engage with China event back in the UK
- share regular bulletins and photographs with us so that we can celebrate scholar milestones and achievements and offer support where issues or concerns arise.
- Adhere to EwC code of conduct and to that of the host / partner schools.

- Be a role model for other pupils at your host scholar and when out on trips. Look out for cultural differences and nuance and be guided by local Chinese peers to know what sort of behaviour is acceptable.
- EwC will ask each Scholar and their parents for consent to join a Scholar WhatsApp and WeChat group for ease of communication prior to departure, at the airport on the day of departure and for ease of liaison during their studies abroad.
- EwC would also like to keep in touch with Scholar parents through a quarterly catch-up to ensure that any concerns are being met, to check on pupil progress and to find out how parents and any siblings are coping.

13.5. In an emergency should I contact EwC?

While Engage with China will endeavour to help where possible, the partner / host school will always be the primary contact (i.e. as they oversee your child's welfare and best placed to provide updates, advice and communicate other information).

Parents and Scholars are encouraged to utilise EwC as a channel for communication, particularly if there are issues where the charity can act as an advocate or if there are issues arising that do not seem to be being resolved by the school.

EwC would particularly like to know if there is anything pertaining to safeguarding (including bullying or racism) and where the scholar feels they need a 3rd party to support them.

13.6. Is EwC a charity?

Yes – it is a registered UK educational charity (Charity Number 1184881) established in 2018 with a vision to build China literacy in UK schools.

Patrons include:

- Lord Green of Hurstpierpoint, former Chairman of HSBC and Minister of Trade for Trade & Industry
- Sir Anthony Seldon, educator and historian
- The Rt Hon Sir Vince Cable, former Leader of the Liberal Democrats.

The EwC Scholarship programme is a key initiative of its work and the first cohort started in China in August 2023.

14. Document History

| Document Name | Summary of Updates |
|--------------------------------|--------------------|
| EwC Scholars FAQ March 2026_v1 | First draft |
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