# Designing and delivering online learning for students based in China

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## 1. Introduction

The core principles for designing online learning for students based in China are the same as those that apply for developing any effective online learning.  For general guidance on planning and adapting to delivering teaching online please refer to the following training resources and information the University has developed:

* The [Digital Practice website](https://digitalpractice.leeds.ac.uk/) gives a range of guidance to support you to teach and assess online.
* The “Adapt Your Teaching for Online Delivery” course provides detailed guidance on how to plan and develop effective online learning.

This guide is intended to highlight some of the key challenges online learners in China may be likely to encounter and to suggest strategies and approaches that can be incorporated into your online learning to help mitigate these challenges.

## 2. Challenges for online study in China

There are specific challenges associated with delivering distance learning that are not unique to China but should be considered when developing online learning courses where some or all students may be located there. Important considerations include:

* **Internet speed and performance** – the performance of online systems can be significantly impacted by the variable standard of internet connections and bandwidth in China. Factors can include the region in which students are based, who their internet service provider is, and the times at which students access the network. Internet service providers in China may also use techniques that impact specific activities online: e.g. restricting bandwidth for video streaming or privileging access to sites that are hosted in China.
* **Availability of online technologies and resources** – a variety of online services are actively blocked in China (e.g. Google, YouTube, Wikipedia, Twitter, many news websites).  Other services may be available but may be unfamiliar to students compared to local alternatives.
* **Online study for EFL students**– studying online presents challenges and opportunities for non-native English speakers that are different to those they encounter in face-to-face study. If a large proportion of the online learning cohort share the same non-English language this can present additional challenges.
* **Expectations and attitudes towards online learning**– perceptions of online learning can vary internationally. Students from China may have limited experience of online study and may have expectations about the level of synchronous activity and ‘face-to-face’ tutor time that diverge from common practice in online learning in the UK. Strategies that are common in online learning, such as peer assessment and the use of Open Educational Resources (OERs), may also be less familiar to learners from China.
* **Time difference between the UK and China** – the 7-8 hour time difference between China and the UK is an obvious but important factor that can inform the experience of students participating in online courses. If a large proportion of the online learning cohort are in the same time-zone this can present additional challenges.

## 3. Selecting systems for delivering online learning in China

Most of the University’s standard supported systems for online learning can be accessed in China, i.e. there is no evidence that they are actively blocked by the Chinese authorities. However, the quality of internet connections within China can vary considerably, and all University systems for online learning will be impacted where students have internet bandwidth issues.

The ability to improve the underlying performance of systems where there are poor internet connections is limited. However, the extent of the impact on the online learning experience can be managed and mitigated. In particular, experience from online courses the University has delivered to students in China has demonstrated that careful planning, selection and use of systems can significantly improve the online learning experience for students.

### 3.1. Communicating and interacting with students

#### Virtual Classrooms

The University will be providing the following three virtual classrooms to support taught student education this academic session:

* Blackboard Collaborate - While this is the University’s preferred virtual classroom, testing has shown that it does not work well for students in China and should therefore not be used.
* Microsoft Class Teams - An integration between Minerva and Microsoft Teams has been implemented. Teaching staff can request the creation of a ‘Class Team’ which has staff and student enrolments which automatically, and continually, mirror the Minerva enrolments. Class Teams benefit from Microsoft Teams features, including good performance in China, but also bring learning and teaching focused functionality.
* Zoom - The University has an Enterprise licence for Zoom Meetings which can be used in teaching and learning delivery where staff feel that it will provide a high-quality student experience. The solution is integrated via single sign on improving the security of Zoom sessions.

For advice and guidance on the use of these systems in learning and teaching, please visit the [Virtual Classrooms](https://digitalpractice.leeds.ac.uk/teaching-learning-online/virtual-classrooms/) page on the Digital Practice website.

#### Minerva

Minerva is not blocked in China and in most online modules staff and students will continue to use Minerva to send announcements, access key resources, and to manage online assessments and assignments.

The discussion board tool in Minerva can be used to provide a space for students and teaching staff to communicate. However, the Minerva discussion boards are best suited for very structured communications and do not offer functionality (e.g. ‘tagging’ individuals and groups of users in replies) that facilitates more flexible online communication and social learning experiences. On slower internet connections, the speed at which the Minerva discussion boards updates may also impact online discussions where users are posting regularly or simultaneously.

For online modules with students in China where there will be large volume of asynchronous online communication and where students need to collaborate and communicate online with one another in groups, etc., you may want to consider making additional use of Microsoft Teams that can be used alongside Minerva for online communication.  Microsoft Teams can be used for small group teaching (e.g. online live classroom sessions) and for discussions between students/staff (using Group Chat or Chat) [without setting up a dedicated Class Team](https://it.leeds.ac.uk/it?id=kb_article&sysparm_article=KB0014055).

##### More information

* [Putting your course on Minerva](https://digitalpractice.leeds.ac.uk/teaching-and-learning/guides-to-support-online-learning/putting-your-course-on-minerva/).
* Minerva [help information](https://www.leeds.ac.uk/vle/).
* Guidance on using [the Minerva discussion boards](https://www.leeds.ac.uk/vle/staff/collab/discussion/).

#### Microsoft Teams

Microsoft Teams supports instant messaging (IM), online discussions, collaboration and file-sharing. Teams is closely integrated with Office 365 and is available for all staff and students at the University.

Teamshas proven to be an accessible place for students in China to ‘chat’ with one another, communicate with tutors, ask questions and collaborate on projects.

New in 2020/21 is an integration between Minerva and Microsoft Teams that can manage a Class Team for a module in Minerva. The Class Team will not be available to students unless activated by a staff member. For [advice and guidance visit](https://digitalpractice.leeds.ac.uk/teaching-learning-online/virtual-classrooms/) the Digital Practice website. Teams can be used online in a web browser. However, to ensure the best possible performance, students should be encouraged to [download and install the Teams apps](https://www.microsoft.com/en/microsoft-365/microsoft-teams/download-app) that are available for all standard computer and mobile operating systems. This has the additional advantage that students may receive course communications and prompts more directly on their devices, encouraging them to more actively engage with the online learning.

Where Minerva and Teams are being used alongside each other for online teaching, it is important to ensure that students clearly understand how each should be used and for what activities.  In a Microsoft Team it is easy to provide a link to the corresponding Minerva module page, and in Minerva direct links can likewise be provided to the Microsoft Team.

##### More information

* [Watch this video](https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/videoplayer/embed/RWeokR?pid=ocpVideo0-innerdiv-oneplayer&postJsllMsg=true&maskLevel=20&market=en-us) to get an overview of Teams.
* A full manual on Teams is available [via this link](https://it.leeds.ac.uk/it?id=kb_article&sysparm_article=KB0012997) (top right corner of page).
* Information specific to Class Teams is available in an IT Knowledge Base Article.
* [Fill in this form to request a new Team](https://leeds.service-now.com/it?id=sc_cat_item&sys_id=a2d4f5b1db0033407189ae994b9619b2) - you can upload your student usernames and IT Services will add them to the Team for you.

#### Top Hat

Top Hat is a mobile voting tool that allows you to create online quizzes, discussions, tests and examinations for students. It is available to be used during live/synchronous teaching or asynchronously before or after teaching activities. In-class quizzes offer individual students immediate feedback on their knowledge and understanding of a topic, and offer teachers immediate feedback about the class’ understanding. In-class quizzes have also been used very successfully in a range of disciplines to challenge students’ beliefs and to stimulate debate.

The tool is integrated with Minerva, enabling synchronisation of class rosters from Minerva Modules to Top Hat and the import of marks from quizzes and polls to the Minerva Grade Centre. However, like other systems, Top Hat’s performance may, on occasion, be significantly impacted by variable internet speeds. Students can access Top Hat via the University’s Virtual Windows Desktop. Colleagues at the University have successfully used the [Virtual Windows Desktop](https://it.leeds.ac.uk/it?id=kb_article&sysparm_article=KB0014548) with students based in China.

##### More information

* [Staff Introduction to Top Hat](https://leeds.service-now.com/it?id=kb_article&sys_id=a225697cdb833f408b6583305b961997)
* [Top Hat Staff Account Sign-up & Course Creation](https://leeds.service-now.com/it?id=kb_article&sys_id=d7a825b8db073f408b6583305b961926)
* [Top Hat and Minerva (Portal/VLE) Setup and Sync](https://leeds.service-now.com/it?id=kb_article&sysparm_article=KB0013681)

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### 3.2. Delivering online webinars

#### Zoom

Zoom is an online video and web-conferencing service that is now extensively used globally for online education. Zoom functionality includes breakout rooms, whiteboards, and the ability to conduct polls – although the availability of these features may vary subject to whether a meeting host is using a free or paid-for account.

There is evidence that Zoom has performed consistently well for students in China.  The Language Centre has used Zoom extensively for delivering online pre-sessional seminars for students in China and further improvements were made to the University’s Zoom account this term for use in China

For the best experience when using Zoom in China, students need to ensure they are logged in to Zoom via SSO using their University account. This will make sure that they connect to the China-located Zoom datacentres, which will make the audio and video smoother and more responsive.

##### More information

* [General guidance and conditions](https://it.leeds.ac.uk/it?id=kb_article&sysparm_article=KB0014475) for using Zoom for student education at Leeds.
* [University IT guidance](https://it.leeds.ac.uk/it?id=kb_article&sysparm_article=KB0014406) on using and securing Zoom.
* [Guide to educating using Zoom](https://zoom.us/docs/doc/Comprehensive%20Guide%20to%20Educating%20Through%20Zoom.pdf).
* [Best practices for securing Zoom virtual classrooms](https://blog.zoom.us/wordpress/2020/03/27/best-practices-for-securing-your-virtual-classroom/?_ga=2.51692847.784356911.1587990130-610756878.1584955799).

#### Microsoft Teams

Teams includes all the functionality that was previously available in Skype. It is possible in Teams to make one-to-one and group calls with staff and students and to schedule online meetings and live sessions. Sessions can also be recorded and shared.

In online sessions in Teams it is possible to share the screen for presentations. It is also possible for users to switch-on live English subtitling of discussions, which may be valuable for students with different levels of language proficiency.

. In cases where Microsoft Teams is already being used in an online course for online communication, it may be convenient to also use Teams for smaller online sessions, e.g. for calls and meeting with small groups or individual students.

##### More information

* General guidance to communicating online with students, [with links to more information about Teams](https://digitalpractice.leeds.ac.uk/teaching-and-learning/guides-to-support-online-learning/communicating-with-students-online/).
* View instructions on [using Teams for online calls and meetings](https://support.office.com/en-gb/article/meetings-and-calls-d92432d5-dd0f-4d17-8f69-06096b6b48a8?ui=en-US&rs=en-GB&ad=GB#ID0EAABAAA=Basics).
* Information on [using live captions in Teams meetings](https://leeds.service-now.com/it?id=kb_article&sysparm_article=KB0014557).

### 3.3. Online assessment

A range of options are available for delivering formative and summative assessment to students in China. When providing any online assessment, it is important to provide students with clear instructions as to what is required of them. Students are likely to be unfamiliar with this form of assessment, so it is recommended that a rubric should be published which sets out clear expectations for how the work will be evaluated. There should also be a clear process in place to support timely responses to student queries, both on the content of the assessment and the logistics. It should be made clear to students at what times support will be available.

Time-zone differences should be kept in mind when delivering online assessment, as should the possibility that internet connection speeds and bandwidth may impact the performance of assessment tools for students.  Synchronous assessments – such as an online test scheduled in a narrow time slot – are likely to present much greater challenges than alternative approaches to assessment.

The University’s guidance for online assessment recommends that for online open book examinations, students should have a minimum 48-hour period to complete the examination and submit via the assessment tools in Minerva (e.g. Turnitin, Gradescope, Top Hat).

* Turnitin is accessible to students in China via Minerva and can be used for the submission of written course work.
* **Gradescope**is also available via Minerva and can be used to create, deliver and mark a range of summative and formative assessment types, including typed responses, STEM formulae and diagrams, programming/coding assignments, and multiple-choice assessments. Gradescope assessments can be time limited.
* **Top Hat** can be accessed via Minerva and offers a wide range of question types that allow you to create online quizzes, discussions, tests and examinations. The Top Hat Test function enables remote proctoring of summative exams, this will ensure that students cannot navigate away from the Top Hat Test content or open other apps or browsers on the device used to access their test. Staff will invigilate the test to ensure that it runs correctly. However, like other systems, Top Hat’s performance may, on occasion, be significantly impacted by variable internet speeds. Students can access Top Hat via the University’s [Virtual Windows Desktop](https://it.leeds.ac.uk/it?id=kb_article&sysparm_article=KB0014548). Colleagues at the University have successfully used the Virtual Windows Desktop with students based in China.
* **Microsoft Forms** and the **Minerva Test Tool** can be used for low stakes/formative quizzes and assessments.
* There are a range of options for incorporating both recorded and live presentations as part of the assessment within online courses. Using presentations is an approach that can have benefits, for example in contributing to the overall academic integrity of online assessment. However, consideration should be given to the challenges students with poor connections may encounter in engaging with synchronous events or uploading larger video files.  [Detailed advice is available here.](https://digitalpractice.leeds.ac.uk/teaching-and-learning/online-assessment/presentations/)

#### More information

* Extensive and up-to-date guidance on online assessment options is available [on the Digital Practices website](https://digitalpractice.leeds.ac.uk/teaching-and-learning/online-assessment/).

### 3.4. Sharing lectures, screencasts and videos

#### Mediasite

Mediasite is the University’s standard solution for managing and distributing lecture capture recordings. Screencasts and other videos can also be uploaded to Mediasite. Mediasite is accessible from China and closely integrated with Minerva.

 Automatic captioning is now available in MediaSite on a trial basis and may be particularly helpful for non-native English-speaking students studying online. Details on how to transcribe a lecture in Mediasite [are available here](https://it.leeds.ac.uk/it/?id=kb_article&sysparm_article=KB0013843).

You can add individual lecture captures to the ‘Media’ section of your Minerva module by attaching the module in <https://mymedia.leeds.ac.uk/>.  [Here are the instructions to do this](https://it.leeds.ac.uk/it/?id=kb_article&sysparm_article=KB0011831).

#### Microsoft Stream

All Leeds staff and students have access to Microsoft Stream. Stream can be accessed outside of Minerva and is closely integrated with Microsoft Teams. Videos uploaded to Stream will be automatically captioned and these captions can be edited where required.

Some online learners in China have reported that they have found it quicker to playback videos in Stream than Mediasite, and easier to access videos directly in Stream than to go via Minerva.

If you are teaching students in China online you are encouraged to consider using Stream as well as Mediasite to share video content – especially if you are using Microsoft Teams as you online classroom.

##### More information

* This video tutorial provides guidance on [sharing videos in Stream and OneDrive](https://mymedia.leeds.ac.uk/Mediasite/Play/4216e52eec5d4384b081cab6a7bd1c731d).
* It is advised that you [use Channels in Microsoft Stream](https://docs.microsoft.com/en-us/stream/portal-create-channel) to collect videos in one place.
* Guidance on how to [download content from Mediasite](https://it.leeds.ac.uk/it/?id=kb_article&sysparm_article=KB0012106) so it can be uploaded to Stream or made available for download.

#### Making videos available for download

For users in China with poor bandwidth, streaming videos from any site may be challenging – especially during periods when their network is busy. Where this is the case, students may find it easier to download videos to watch later.  Video files can be uploaded to OneDrive and/or Minerva and shared with students to download.

It will help students who need to download videos if the video file size is reduced. If you want to reduce the file size of your MP4s, you can do this by downloading a piece of free software called Handbrake, which can re-encode videos to different sizes and formats. Choosing the "Very Fast 480p 30" conversion setting in Handbrake can reduce video file sizes by up to 80%.

##### More information

* This video tutorial provides guidance on [sharing videos in Stream and OneDrive](https://mymedia.leeds.ac.uk/Mediasite/Play/4216e52eec5d4384b081cab6a7bd1c731d).
* [Download Handbrake here](https://handbrake.fr/downloads.php) and watch this short tutorial on [reducing the file size of videos](https://youtu.be/Zm7Jbgy8frU).
* Guidance on how to [export content from Mediasite](https://it.leeds.ac.uk/it/?id=kb_article&sysparm_article=KB0012106) so it can be made available for download.

## 4. Strategies for online learning where internet performance is poor or inconsistent

Delivering an online course where a proportion of the students have poor or inconsistent internet bandwidth can be challenging for teaching staff and students. However, there are a number of strategies that can be adopted to manage these challenges and deliver a successful online learning experience.

In online learning, poor internet performance typically presents most challenges for synchronous online activities, such as live webinars or narrowly scheduled assessments.  Live online classroom sessions will always require a more consistent standard of network connectivity than asynchronous forms of online activity, and sessions that are scheduled for a very specific timeframe give students less opportunity to work around network issues – for example by accessing course materials at times when their local network is less busy or downloading materials in locations where they have a ‘good’ connection.

Live communication and synchronous activity will often be an important and valued component of an online course, and the advice is certainly not to avoid these kinds of sessions entirely. With planning and preparation, however, it is possible to manage the balance between asynchronous and synchronous activity within an online course, ensuring an online learning experience that is more accessible for students who would otherwise have found it challenging to engage.  Shifting the balance between synchronous and asynchronous learning activity can also contribute to making the course more accessible for students across different time zones and for ESL students.

### 4.1. Prepare students for online study

It is essential to give students an opportunity to prepare for studying online either before their online course begins, and/or as part of an online course induction. Creating space to practice, seek support, and get comfortable with online learning, will allow students and staff to address questions and issues arising in a less stressful way than can be the case after teaching begins.

 Important steps include:

* **Communicate the basic requirements** – a baseline level of internet access and equipment is necessary for any online learning experience. These will vary subject to the programme but consistent access to a broadband-level internet connection, a desktop or laptop computer, a headset/microphone, and webcam are typically minimum requirements.  The requirements for studying online should be clearly communicated to students before the online course begins, so they have an opportunity to take any steps necessary to ensure they are prepared to study.
* In this example a Microsoft Form has been used to [create a simple self-diagnostic](https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=qO3qvR3IzkWGPlIypTW3y6Z79K_svVxOthxO7tiLf2FUMkdOSFBFMlpWWFNPS1QzSDRZNExFUE9WRS4u) review for students preparing for an online course.
* **Provide guidance for setting-up and using software**– students should be given clear instructions for any software or online tools they need to install or access for their online course. Where possible, students should be encouraged to set-up and begin familiarising themselves with these key tools before their online study begins. Students can be provided with links to relevant guidance on the University’s IT support pages, Minerva help website, etc.; and information should be provided on where students can get support and advice.
* **Plan an online course induction**– the first stages of your online course should make sure to allow time for students to develop their familiarity with the online learning experience and the tools they will use. Icebreaker type activities and self-contained ‘web quest’ research tasks are common approaches that give students an opportunity to get comfortable learning online without the additional pressure of feeling they are ‘missing out’ or ‘falling behind’ in their core learning if they encounter initial challenges.

The University of Leeds offers a free online FutureLearn course ‘[Preparing to Learn Online at University](https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/preparing-to-learn-online-at-university)’ that provides general advice for students on how to learn online.

### 4.2. Ensure learning materials are available asynchronously in a variety of forms

It is important to ensure that as much of the course learning materials as possible are available to students asynchronously, preferably in a range of formats. This approach will also make the online course more accessible for a range of student needs, including those of ESL learners. Advised approaches include:

* **Record any presentations or lectures as videos instead of making these ‘live’ events**– lectures and presentations can be easily self-recorded using Mediasite’s Desktop Recorder or directly in Powerpoint and then shared with students. Presentations and discussions can also be recorded directly in Collaborate or using Microsoft Teams.
* Using Mediasite Desktop Recorder: [written guide](https://it.leeds.ac.uk/it?id=kb_article&sysparm_article=KB0012956) and [video tutorial](https://mymedia.leeds.ac.uk/Mediasite/Play/62b55d2c06c143b182c9f293d0e02fec1d).
* Using Powerpoint to record a slideshow: [written guide](https://www.teachucomp.com/record-a-slide-show-in-powerpoint-tutorial/) and [video tutorial](https://web.microsoftstream.com/video/480c4b48-4350-437b-b5ea-99c047b9e30b).
* **Provide slide-sets, lecture notes and video transcripts**– captions, transcripts, lecture notes and Powerpoint slides can help learners who have challenges viewing videos or need additional support to engage with them.  Videos that are recorded using Powerpoint can be [automatically subtitled](https://support.microsoft.com/en-gb/office/add-closed-captions-or-subtitles-to-media-in-powerpoint-df091537-fb22-4507-898f-2358ddc0df18?ui=en-us&rs=en-gb&ad=gb), and videos that are uploaded to Stream or Mediasite can be automatically captioned. The quality of captions will vary but it is possible for auto-generated captions to be edited.
* **Make other files and handouts available for download** – files should be provided in Minerva and/or Teams for students to access and download. Some students may want to download a number of course files at the same time, e.g. in periods when they have access to a faster internet connection.  This can be supported by ensuring course files are available well in advance and are arranged for ease of access and download.

### 4.3. Plan your online learning to manage the balance between asynchronous and synchronous activity

#### Making effective use of asynchronous online learning

In addition to maximising the number of learning resources that are available asynchronously, there are range of techniques that can be used to more generally adapt the online learning experience so that students are able to engage more flexibly with the online course.

Group chats, discussion boards and collaborative documents are all tools that can be used to facilitate online engagement and learning while minimising barriers for students who have bandwidth, time zone, or similar challenges.  Microsoft Teams in particular offers a range of tools that allow flexible online communication, and it can be used for online discussions, text-based Q&A sessions, assignments, and collaborative tasks.

##### More information

* The University’s “Adapt Your Teaching for Online Delivery” course provides detailed guidance on how to plan and develop effective online learning.

#### Planning and managing synchronous learning

In a well-planned online learning course, synchronous live sessions should be reserved for situations where tutors and students really need to see and hear each other in real time to accomplish the relevant learning objectives.

Planned synchronous sessions should make the most out of the potential to connect with students. This will normally mean using live sessions for both tutors and students to have a meaningful dialogue with one another: for example, using breakout spaces for collaborative activities and providing immediate feedback on learning. A webinar used to deliver a one-to-many lecture followed by questions would be better replaced with a pre-recorded video followed by a discussion forum activity.

When holding synchronous events with students who are based in China and may encounter bandwidth challenges, there are several steps you can take to ensure that session runs as smoothly as possible.

* Make sure all webinar participants have received guidance on how to set-up the best possible connection (e.g. using a wired connection, minimising the use of video, etc.). This information should be sent well ahead of the session, so students have time to prepare.
* Where students are new to online webinars, take time to orientate students within the webinar software and remind them how best to participate: for example, reminding students they can use the chat window to post questions. It can be important to also reassure students that if they drop-out of a session they should try to re-join, and that if they continue to experience issues it is not the end of the world, a recording will be provided, etc.
* Record synchronous events so that students can catch-up if they encounter challenges and so all participating students can review if they wish. Teams and Zoom both offer cloud-based recording that can be downloaded and moved to Mediasite. If you are recording a session, please advise students at the start that the session is being recorded and remember to delete the recordings at the end of the module.
* In addition to recording the event, consider other fallbacks in the event an online session presents challenges for some or all learners: for example, by holding a follow-up online Q/A in Microsoft Teams if students did not get an opportunity to engage in the live session.

### 4.4. Encourage student communication and feedback

Throughout the online course it is important to ensure students can communicate and give feedback, so students feel supported and any challenges can be identified, investigated and appropriate advice given.

As well as standard module feedback processes or direct communication with tutors there are additional ways you can encourage students to communicate challenges.

* In Microsoft Teams or Minerva you can set-up a dedicated channel or discussion forum where students are invited to share technical and other challenges. This can allow other learners to provide peer support and advice if they have encountered similar challenges.
* Microsoft Forms provides an easy way for students to submit feedback and comments. For example, in some situations it may be helpful to set-up a standard form to gather feedback after a live session.
* Make sure that all students are provided with clear information on contacts for different kinds of questions and issues.

## 5. Additional pedagogical and course delivery considerations for online learning in China

### 5.1. Expectations of online learning

Recent research has highlighted the level of investment in online education in China and the emphasis the Chinese authorities have placed upon advancing e-learning.  Practical experience of online education will nonetheless vary among students, and it is likely that many learners from China will not have any significant experience of learning online. In planning online learning for students from China it is therefore important to ensure that induction materials and other support are available, and that students receive clear guidance not just on the use of online tools and systems but more generally on expectations for how to learn effectively online.

In higher education specifically, online education programmes have expanded considerably in China in recent years. However, there is evidence to suggest that online education can still often be regarded as a lower quality alternative to face-to-face modes of learning.  An important factor in this regard may be the emphasis students from China often place upon the authority, expertise and reputation of teachers and tutors as part of the learning experience.  In an online context this can translate to an expectation that teachers and tutors should be a clearly ‘present’ and visible part of the online learning experience, whether directly in synchronous face-to-face contexts, or asynchronously in discussions, ‘live chats’ and feedback.

The importance of concepts of authority in Chinese educational culture can likewise inform attitudes to the resources and materials that may be provided in an online course. The use of Open Educational Resources (OERs) and other freely available resources (e.g. YouTube videos) is commonplace in online courses. This approach may initially be less familiar to learners from China, and additional contextualisation may in some cases be helpful to reinforce why “free” resources are a component of the online learning.

Peer assessment and collaborative assignments more generally are well-established techniques that are frequently utilised in online learning. For students in China however, being invited to review, give feedback and mark their peers’ work may be something they have had little previous experience of doing and could be a source of concern. When incorporating peer assessment into an online course, careful consideration should be given to how these activities are scaffolded and in clearly modelling and communicating how they should be approached.

#### More information

* The University’s “Adapt Your Teaching for Online Delivery” course provides detailed guidance on how to plan and develop effective online learning.

### 5.2. Blocked or difficult to access resources

The Chinese government actively blocks access to a number of resources that are commonly used for online learning, including YouTube, Google, Twitter, and the websites of many non-Chinese media organisations. Sites that are not formally blocked may also be difficult for students to access for other reasons, e.g. because they perform poorly for students with poor bandwidth.

Many students in China will mitigate these challenges by using VPN services to side-step these restrictions. However, the use of VPN services is discouraged by the Chinese authorities and it would be inappropriate to assume students in China will have access to a VPN or to actively encourage their use.

There are a range steps you can take in online courses to address challenges arising from online resources it may be difficult for students in China to access:

* Sites such as [Comparitech](https://www.comparitech.com/privacy-security-tools/blockedinchina/) can be used to help check whether a specific website is blocked in China – but be aware that these sites may not be entirely up-to-date or accurate.
* Where access to an online resource may be blocked, consider whether it is possible to provide the information in an alternative form. For example, if the key resource is a news article, can the key points of the article be summarised? Or can a copy of the resource be incorporated into the course materials? (The University’s policy and good practice regarding copyright should always be consulted.)
* Where it is possible to do so, it can be helpful to suggest a selection of different sources a student could access rather than relying upon single online resource. For example, if you recommend that students view a YouTube video, are there other websites, online articles or resources that the student could be advised to alternatively access and which cover the same information?
* In online research tasks, ‘webquests’ or the equivalent, it is important not to assume that students in China have access to sites such as Google or Twitter. Try to frame activities like this more generally (“use your preferred search engine”). In some circumstances it may be helpful to reference the Chinese alternatives to blocked sites and resources. Some key examples include:

| **Site** | **Chinese alternative site** | **Hyperlink** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Google | Baidu | <https://www.baidu.com/> |
| YouTube | Tudou | <https://www.tudou.com/> |
| YouTube | QQ / Tencent Video | <https://v.qq.com/> |
| Twitter / Instagram | Sina Weibo | <https://www.weibo.com/> |
| Twitter / Instagram | WeChat | <https://www.wechat.com/> |
| Facebook | Renren | <http://www.renren.com/> |

### 5.3. Managing communications

* When planning a course for students who are based in China, the 7-8 hour time difference will need to be taken into account. In most cases, running a webinar at 8:00am or 9:00am UK time is advisable.
* In online courses where many students are participating in China, there are often indications that students have established a parallel communication group in an online Chinese platform such as WeChat. In most cases this is no different than students on a course setting-up a private Facebook or WhatsApp group, but it is something tutors should be conscious of when approaching student communications or planning online assessments.

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