

Aberdeen University

The Confucius Institute at Aberdeen University was founded in 2013 as a partnership with Wuhan University.

A post on the Wuhan website gives details of the recruitment process for staff at the Aberdeen Confucius Institute.¹ A recruitment form attached to the post, which UK-China Transparency has reproduced and translated, states that applicants must:

- Provide details of their “political characteristics” and “ethnicity”
- Promise to abide by the laws of the PRC (while abroad)
- Promise not to have a child whilst working in the UK
- Be evaluated by a Communist Party Committee
- Have their current employer give a reference detailing their:
 - “Political attitude”
 - Ability to comply with CCP *Discipline for Foreign Affairs* (外事纪律) guidelines

The *Discipline* guidelines demand, amongst other things, that individuals “act in strict accordance with the CCP’s policies in all foreign activities” and “strictly implement the request and report system” (the system is referred to as 请示报告制度).² In CCP terminology, this refers to the system whereby CCP members pass information to their superiors: it mandates authoritarian practices such as peer surveillance, peer intimidation and informing.³

Separately, UK-China Transparency has also reproduced and translated a notice about recruitment for the role of Chinese co-director of the Aberdeen Confucius Institute.⁴ This states that applicants must:

- Be not more than 58 years old
- Abide by PRC laws (while abroad)
- “Proactively resist any speech or behaviour that brings harm to friendly collaboration between China and the foreign country”
- “Maintain close communication with the Chinese Embassy or Consulates (in the foreign country)”

In a partly redacted response to a Freedom of Information (FOI) request, Aberdeen University released a briefing about the threat of “undue influence by the Chinese government” produced for members of its governing body in 2019. The briefing states that “there is no evidence” of “external negative influence from any state” at the University and that:

“Whilst it is acknowledged that there have been issues around Confucius Institutes elsewhere (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-china-49511231>), particularly in the US, to date relations between the University and the Institute have been exceptional”.

In response to an FOI request asking whether staff at the Confucius Institute or the Institute itself have to obey Chinese law in the UK, or whether Aberdeen University has signed agreements to this effect, the University stated:

“We do not have information regarding a requirement that Staff from the PCR at the University’s Confucius Institute have to abide by Chinese law on campus within our agreement.”

¹ <https://archive.vn/PfjJ5>

² See Baidu Baike, <https://baike.baidu.com/item/党的外事纪律/9640843>

³ See, for example, <https://archive.vn/unmso> This CCP announcement from 2019 states that the ‘request and report system’ is “an important way for our Party to maintain political discipline”.

⁴ <https://archive.vn/10ckh>

In response to a Freedom of Information (FOI) request asking about the legal status of staff at the Confucius Institute and whether it has received advice on this matter, Aberdeen University stated:

“Chinese language teachers and the Co-Director are recruited via our partner institution in China. They hold honorary status at the University of Aberdeen. Honorary title holders are not employed by the University of Aberdeen and have no entitlement to remuneration. [...]

The Chinese language teachers and the Co-Director are sponsored and funded by the Centre for Language Education and Cooperation UK (CLEC UK) and not by the University of Aberdeen. We have therefore not sought specific legal advice regarding the legal status of these roles as they are not employed by the University.”