

China Scholarship Council ‘Rules’ – translation and notes

15/11/2023

Background

The China Scholarship Council is a part of the Chinese Ministry of Education. It is the main vehicle through which the Chinese government funds Chinese students’ study abroad. It also funds foreign students studying in China.

The CSC funds at least 650 Chinese PhD and postdoc students per year in the UK.¹ Typically, the CSC funds their living costs, while tuition fees are covered by the British university at which they are studying.² The CSC selects recipients.

Sometimes, British universities acknowledge that CSC scholarships are preferentially awarded to students applying to study a particular area. For example, Lancaster University states that: “Although applications may be made for all subject areas, CSC priority when considering applications is given to supporting the following subject areas: Environmental Science, Mathematics and Statistics, Engineering (including Electrical and Electronic Engineering), Accounting and Finance, Economics, Business and Management”.³ The majority of awards are for students of science, reflecting the CSC’s stated desire to support “urgently needed talents serving major national strategies, important industries, key fields, major projects, cutting-edge technologies, and basic research.”⁴ The CSC is, in this respect and in others, a tool of Chinese statecraft.

Growing concerns

The terms and regulations CSC applies to its scholarships and the demands it makes of recipients have recently begun to come under increased scrutiny. In January 2023, Swedish newspaper *Dagens Nyheter* published a news report on private student contracts associated with CSC programmes. The report was based on an internal investigation at Sweden’s prestigious Karolinska Institute, which had learnt of these contracts after issues with CSC recipient students. A version of the contract is available online, translated into English, published by the Centre for Security and Emerging Technology of Georgetown University.⁵ Karolinska Institute told UKCT over email that they had verified the translation and used it in their internal investigation.

According to the translation, under the terms of the contract, recipients must nominate two guarantors to sign contracts with the CSC. The guarantors, usually close relatives, will be obliged to repay the whole scholarship, with possible extra financial penalties, should the

¹ These figures are from an analysis shared with the author and since published by Civitas at <https://www.civitas.org.uk/content/files/The-Strategic-Dependence-of-UK-Universities-on-China-.pdf> Civitas identified 646 scholarships per year from universities that stated the number of scholars received, with an average of 25 per university, and a further 11 universities that did not specify the number of scholars received.

² <https://www.civitas.org.uk/content/files/The-Strategic-Dependence-of-UK-Universities-on-China-.pdf>

³ <https://www.lancaster.ac.uk/study/fees-and-funding/scholarships-and-bursaries/china-scholarship-council/>

⁴ <https://cset.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/CSET-China-Scholarship-Council.pdf>

⁵ <https://cset.georgetown.edu/publication/the-china-scholarship-council-an-overview/> and https://cset.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/t0133_subsidized_study_abroad_agreement_EN.pdf

recipient breach the contract with CSC. A variety of actions can constitute a breach, including the following:⁶

- “Engaging in acts that damage the national interest”.
- “Failure to complete the course of study without a legitimate reason”.
- “Unauthorized termination of study abroad and early return to China”.
- Failure to return to China to work after completing the study period.

Amongst other things, the contract also commits the recipient to “regularly submit” a formal “Situation Report” (called the *Study/Research/Training Situation Report for Personnel Studying Abroad* 出国留学人员学习/研修情况报告) to the relevant Chinese embassy or consulate, and “participate in annual PhD student reviews” there.

Examples of completed forms online suggest they offer a technical description of the research in which scholarship recipients are involved. An online announcement from January 2019 by the Chinese consulate in Belfast even suggests recipients should report important papers published, patents obtained, and inventions made by those they work with at British universities.⁷

Karolinska Institute is one of several Swedish universities and one German university to have since paused or terminated cooperation with the CSC, citing threats to academic freedom and the risk of “industrial espionage”.⁸

CSC Rules

UKCT is now publishing a translation of the *Rules for the Selection of 2023 China Scholarship Council Overseas Study Abroad Funding Recipients* (2023 年国家留学基金资助出国留学人员选派简章, see Appendix 1), which are publicly available.⁹

Several terms are worth highlighting because they potentially present several ethical, commercial, safeguarding and legal issues for universities.

- Applicants must “Support the leadership of the Communist Party of China and Socialism with Chinese Characteristics; love the motherland; be a person of good moral character; abide by the law; maintain a sense of responsibility to serve the country, serve society, and serve the people; and have a correct world view, a correct outlook on life, and correct values.”
- “The applicant's institution must also perform a rigorous review of the applicant's political ideology, professional ethics and teaching style (or conduct and research style), etc., and provide a written evaluation of the applicant's performance in these areas”.

⁶ <https://www.dn.se/sverige/kinas-hemliga-avtal-med-studenter-i-sverige-kraver-lojalitet-med-regimen/>

⁷ <https://archive.vn/4KtPm>

⁸ <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20230720113914406>

⁹ A standalone translation, along with the original Chinese version, is also available on UK-China Transparency's website, see <https://ukctransparency.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Translation-original-text-of-Rules-for-the-Selection-of-2023-China-Scholarship-Council-Overseas-Study-Abroad-Funding-Recipients.pdf> The Chinese source text is widely available online. It can be found by searching for ‘2023 年国家留学基金资助出国留学人员选派简章’

- “Students studying abroad should, in accordance with the China Scholarship Council Overseas Study Abroad Funding Qualifications and related materials, complete registration procedures at the Chinese embassy or consulate in their host country within 10 days of arrival and should adhere to all requirements of the specific embassy or consulate.”
- “Funding recipients should also voluntarily accept the guidance and management of their institutions and embassies or consulates abroad, and they should regularly submit reports to their institutions.”

Changes to the *Rules*

Some of the most problematic terms of the *Rules* are innovations of the Xi Jinping era during which, scholars agree, China has become markedly more authoritarian:

- Until 2013, recipients had to “accept the management” of the *education section* of the relevant embassy.¹⁰ In 2013, this was changed to “accept the management” of the embassy as a whole.¹¹ In 2017, this was changed to “accept the guidance and management” 指导和管理 of the embassy, which is the current wording.¹² The word ‘guidance’, here, has strong connotations of direction.
- The requirement that recipients “adhere to all requirements of the specific embassy or consulate” was totally absent until 2017.¹³
- Until 2019, there was a general requirement for recipients to have ‘good political qualities’. There was no mention of the CCP. From 2019 a requirement to support the CCP was inserted alongside a general rewording of this section.¹⁴
- Until 2019, there was no mention of Xi Jinping. From 2019, the first article of the *Rules* begins: “Thoroughly implement Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era”.
- Until 2020, there was no requirement for any evaluation of applicants’ politics. In 2020, the wording requiring a “rigorous review of the applicant’s political ideology” was inserted.¹⁵

British students

The CSC also funds an unknown number of British students’ study in China. The number was reportedly 151 in 2013/2014, but no updated figures are available.¹⁶ It is likely that selection of British scholars also involves some political vetting, and this could have an impact on the study of China in the UK, given the importance of study *in* China to scholars’ early career

¹⁰ See 2012 version of the *Rules*, <https://archive.vn/815R1>

¹¹ See 2013 version of the *Rules*, <https://archive.vn/rMeBp>

¹² See 2017 version of the *Rules*, <https://archive.vn/YfdKx>

¹³ See footnotes above

¹⁴ See 2019 version of the *Rules*, <https://archive.vn/AMad0>

¹⁵ See 2020 version of the *Rules*,
<https://web.archive.org/web/20200323024917/https://www.csc.edu.cn/article/1710>

¹⁶ <https://bacsuk.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/BACS-2022-23-Funding-Report.pdf>

Ramifications

The Equality Act 2010 makes it unlawful to discriminate on the basis of belief, which the Act defines as a “protected characteristic”.¹⁷ According to the Equality and Human Rights Commission:¹⁸

“The Act does not prohibit the setting and applying of admissions criteria, but such criteria must not discriminate against applicants with a particular protected characteristic [...]”

The university admissions process is separate to the CSC application process – scholarships are awarded to those who have already been admitted to study at a university. The CSC application process, however, is clearly discriminatory on the basis of belief, sanctioning those with political beliefs contradictory to those of the CCP. The fact is that British universities award scholarships to recipients selected via CSC processes.

Furthermore, CSC terms that relate to ongoing ‘good behaviour’ – such as the requirement stipulated in the CSC contract not to engage in acts that damage China’s “national interest”, and the requirement in the ‘Rules’ to support the CCP – may also constitute discrimination as defined by the Act, in as much as recipients may find their CSC support withdrawn or be threatened with withdrawal should they express certain beliefs in certain ways.

There are serious legal and ethical risks involved should British universities continue to recruit and to pay the tuition fees of students recruited and treated in this way.

The Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023 and its precursor, the Education Act (No. 2) 1986 oblige universities to take steps to protect freedom of speech and academic freedom for all members. The obligations and lines of command enshrined in CSC programmes – particularly the requirement that recipients “accept the guidance and management” of diplomats, and the jeopardy involved in the guarantor system – means that CSC recipients may also present a risk to other university members. Again, this poses serious ethical and legal risks for universities involved in CSC programmes.

The “guidance and management clause” may also have a bearing on matters relating to intellectual property and research security, as may the fact that CSC recipients are obliged to submit regular technical reports to the Chinese state.

In sum, the facts presented here should help inform universities’ evaluations of the legal and ethical risks of cooperating with CSC programmes, in particular as it may touch on academic freedom, freedom of speech, intellectual property and the university’s commercial interests, research security, safeguarding, and the university’s values more broadly.

¹⁷ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents> is a text of the Act.

¹⁸ <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/back-to-the-classroom-the-equality-act-2010-and-education-bodies.pdf>

Appendix 1.

Rules for the Selection of 2023 China Scholarship Council Overseas Study Abroad Funding Recipients

2023 年国家留学基金资助出国留学人员选派简章

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Rules for the Selection of 2023 China Scholarship Council Overseas Study Abroad Funding Recipients

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Chapter I: General Provisions

Article 1: Thoroughly implement Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, provide talented personnel to comprehensively build a modern socialist country, create a platform for cultural exchange between China and foreign countries to build a community with a shared future for mankind, and help state-sponsored study abroad play a greater role in the opening-up of education in the new era.

Chapter II: Selection Plan and Main Programmes

Article 2: 25,000 applicants will be selected to study abroad in a variety of countries

Article 3: Funding recipient categories and duration of study

1. Senior research scholars: 3–6 months
2. Visiting scholars: 3–12 months
3. Postdoctoral fellows: 6–24 months
4. Postgraduate students pursuing a doctorate: typically 36–48 months
5. Doctoral students who receive joint training (those who go abroad to conduct research while pursuing a doctorate in China): 6–24 months
6. Postgraduate students pursuing a master's degree: typically 12–24 months
7. Master's students who receive joint training (those who go abroad to conduct research while pursuing a master's degree in China): 3–12 months
8. Undergraduate students pursuing a bachelor's degree: typically 36–60 months, subject to relevant programme regulations
9. Undergraduate transfer students (those who go abroad for study, capstone projects, or internships while pursuing a bachelor's degree in China): 3–12 months

Article 4: Duration of study and duration of funding

The duration of study is generally determined by the academic calendar of the target programme, the individual application, and the duration of study specified by the foreign acceptance letter (or invitation letter) submitted at the time of application.

The duration of funding is generally determined by factors such as the individual application, the foreign acceptance letter (or invitation letter) submitted at the time of application, the maximum duration of funding specified by the project, and expert review.

Under normal circumstances, the duration of study is the same as the duration of funding, but there is no requirement for the two to be congruous. The specific duration of study and duration of funding are subject to the admission documents and shall be determined at the time of admission.

The duration of funding declared by an applicant may not exceed the duration of study stipulated by the foreign institution or the maximum duration of funding stipulated by the programme for which they are applying. In addition, if the duration of funding declared by an applicant is shorter than the duration of study specified by the foreign institution, the duration of funding is generally determined according to the duration declared by the applicant. It cannot, however, exceed the maximum duration of funding specified by the programme for which they are applying.

Article 5: Main projects

1. The Chinese government plans to sponsor 2000 senior research scholars, visiting scholars, and postdoctoral projects. Categories include senior research scholar, visiting scholar, and postdoctoral fellow.

2. The National Construction High-level University Postgraduate Programme will sponsor 10,600 applicants. Categories will include doctoral students (3800) and doctoral students receiving joint training (6700). In addition, the Doctoral Advisor Short-term Overseas Exchange Programme will select 100 applicants, all of whom will be categorized as senior research scholars.

3. The College and University Cooperation Programme (Young Key Teachers Overseas Training Project) will sponsor 1000 applicants. Categories will include visiting scholars and postdoctoral fellows.

4. The Industry Sector and Local Cooperation Programme will sponsor 2190 applicants, 1100 of which will be Special Western Region Talent Training Programme or Local Cooperation Programme participants. Categories will include senior research scholars, visiting scholars, and postdoctoral fellows. The remaining 1090 applicants will participate in the Industry Sector Cooperation Programme.

5. The International Organisation Talent Training Programme will sponsor 900 applicants, 550 of whom will be International Organisation Internship Programme participants. Categories will include interns, visiting experts, etc. 100 applicants will participate in the College and University International Organisation Teacher Study Abroad Programme, all of whom will be categorized as visiting experts. The remaining 250 applicants will participate in the International Organisation Reserve Talent Training Project

and will be categorized as master's degree students or master's degree students receiving joint training.

6. The International Regional Issues Research and Foreign Language High-level Personnel Training Programme and Government Exchange Scholarship Programme will sponsor 2310 applicants. Categories will include senior research scholars, visiting scholars, postdoctoral fellows, doctoral students, doctoral students receiving joint training, master's degree students, master's degree students receiving joint training, undergraduate students pursuing bachelor's degrees, and undergraduate transfer students.

7. The Special Artist Training Programme will sponsor 200 applicants. Categories will include visiting scholars, postdoctoral fellows, doctoral students, doctoral students receiving joint training, master's degree students, and master's degree students receiving joint training.

8. The Dedicated Rural Revitalization Talent Training Programme will sponsor 300 applicants. Categories will include visiting scholars, master's degree students, and master's degree students receiving joint training.

9. Overseas Cooperation Programmes will sponsor 5500 applicants. Overseas Cooperation Programmes refer to programmes that sign agreements with foreign institutions and are reviewed and funded by both China and the foreign institution, such as the CSC Cambridge Scholarship, the Sino-German (CSC-DAAD) Postdoc Scholarship Program, and the International Cooperative Program for Innovative Talents.

Chapter III: Funding Coverage

Article 6: Funding generally covers travel expenses for one international round trip and a scholarship for the specified duration of funding. The scholarship covers food, accommodation, registration fees, bench fees, transportation fees, telephone fees, books and supplies, health insurance, communication fees, one-time placement fees, visa extension fees, petty cash, handling fees, academic activity subsidies, etc. Tuition assistance may be provided to some individuals depending on the specific provisions of the programme. Specific funding methods, funding criterion, etc. are subject to the admission documents.

Chapter IV: Application Requirements

Article 7: Basic requirements for applicants

1. Support the leadership of the Communist Party of China and Socialism with Chinese Characteristics; love the motherland; be a person of good moral character; abide by the law; maintain a sense of responsibility to serve the country, serve society, and serve the people; and have a correct world view, a correct outlook on life, and correct values.

2. Have a good professional foundation and demonstrate development potential, abide by academic ethics and academic standards, exhibit outstanding performance in both work and study, and maintain both an enthusiasm and sense of duty to return to China after completing one's studies to serve in the building of the nation.

3. Maintain People's Republic of China citizenship and do not apply for or accept permanent residence abroad. Be at least 18 years of age at the time of application.

4. Have good physical and mental health.
5. Meet the China Scholarship Council Overseas Study Abroad Funding foreign language requirements and the language requirements of the host country and host institution.
6. Meet any other specific requirements of the applicant's selected programme.

Article 8: Applications from the following individuals are not currently being accepted

1. Those who have received full funding from scholarships abroad.
2. Those who have been approved for state-sponsored study abroad and who are within the designated period of validity.
3. Those who have applied for a state-sponsored study abroad programme but not yet been accepted.
4. Those who have been approved for state-sponsored study abroad but stopped pursuing their programme without prior approval from the China Scholarship Council and for whom less than five years have passed, or those who have been approved for state-sponsored study abroad but stopped pursuing their programme with prior approval from the China Scholarship Council and for whom less than two years have passed (excluding those who applied for revocation of their study abroad approval due to the pandemic).
5. Those recipients of China Scholarship Council Overseas Study Abroad Funding who have not yet performed two years of service after returning to China. Any special provisions of the individual programme shall also be adhered to.

Chapter V: Selection Method

Article 9: Following the principle of "openness, fairness, and impartiality", selection is made on the basis of "individual applications, institutional recommendations, expert review, and merit".

Article 10: Applicants shall submit application materials in accordance with the procedures, schedule, and requirements specified by the programme for which they are applying, and applicants shall be responsible for the authenticity of all submitted materials.

Article 11: The applicant's institution must review their application materials and has the right to reject applications that contain falsehoods or inconsistencies or do not meet application requirements. The applicant's institution must also perform a rigorous review of the applicant's political ideology, professional ethics and teaching style (or conduct and research style), etc., and provide a written evaluation of the applicant's performance in these areas in the institution recommendation column of the main application form.

Article 12: Those who meet application requirements shall apply in accordance with the prescribed procedures and methods. The China Scholarship Council will organise the reviews and determine admission based on relevant programme requirements. Applicants can log in to the state-sponsored study abroad management information website

(<http://apply.csc.edu.cn>) to view their admission status. Admission letters are sent to the applicant's current institution.

Article 13: Main programme application and admission schedule

1. State-sponsored senior research scholars, visiting scholars, and postdoctoral projects: Applications can be submitted from April 10-30, 2023, and results are announced in June.

2. National Construction High-level University Postgraduate Programme: Doctoral students can apply from March 10-31, 2023, and results will be announced in May (some Sino-foreign cooperation agreements/projects require admission results to be verified with foreign partner schools/institutions, which will slightly delay announcement dates). Doctoral students receiving joint training can apply from May 10-31, and results are announced in July.

3. Young Key Teachers Overseas Training Project: Applications can be submitted from September 10-25, 2023, and results are announced in November.

4. Industry Sector and Local Cooperation Programme:

① Special Western Region Talent Training Programme and Local Cooperation Programme (including approved local innovation subproject participants): Applications can be submitted from May 1-15, 2023, and results are announced in August.

② The Industry Sector Cooperation Programme shall be implemented in accordance with corresponding programme regulations.

5. International Organisation Talent Training Programme:

① International Organisation Internship Programme: Companies or individuals in contact with applicants can apply at any time throughout the year, and results are announced monthly. Cooperation programmes between the China Scholarship Council and relevant international organisations will be announced every year following the provision of positions by the international organisations, and results are announced at various times throughout the year.

② International Organisation Talent Training Programme: applications for cooperation pathways at the given organisation can be submitted from September 1-15, 2022, and approved projects are announced in November; candidate applications can be submitted from April 1-10, 2023, and results are announced in June. China Scholarship Council cooperation pathways will be established according to agreements.

③ College and University International Organisation Teacher Study Abroad Programme: The first round of online registration runs from April 10-30, 2023, and results are announced in June. The second round of online registration runs from September 10-30, 2023, and results are announced in November.

6. International Regional Issues Research and Foreign Language High-level Talent Training Programme: The declaration period for the National and Regional Research

Personnel Support Project Programme runs from early November to December 15, 2022, and approved projects will be announced in February 2023. The declaration period for approved project personnel runs from March 10–20, and results are announced in June. The declaration period for individual applicants to the National and Regional Research Talent Support Project runs from March 20–30, 2023, and results are announced in June. The declaration periods for the Rare Languages Personnel Support Project and the Rare Languages Teacher Improvement Project run from March 20–30, 2023, and results are announced in June.

7. Government exchange scholarships are awarded in accordance with relevant regulations.

8. International Cooperation Training Programme for Innovative Talents: Project applications can be submitted from October 1–20, 2022, and approved projects are announced before the end of January 2023; The first round of candidates can apply from March 1–10, 2023, and results are announced in May; the second round of candidates can apply from September 1–10, and results are announced in October.

9. Special Artist Training Programme: The application period runs from March 10–31, and results are announced in May.

10. Dedicated Rural Revitalization Talent Training Programme: Project applications can be submitted from September 1–15, 2022, and approved projects are announced in November; candidates can apply from April 1–10, 2023, and results are announced in June.

11. Foreign cooperation programmes shall be implemented in accordance with corresponding programme regulations.

Chapter VI: Dispatch and management of scholarship recipients

Article 14: The applicant's institution shall bear primary responsibility for the management of its own personnel.

Article 15: Scholarship recipients must be dispatched within the time period specified by their study abroad approval materials. Study abroad approval will be automatically revoked for those who fail to leave during the designated time period.

Article 16: Methods of obtaining "compensation for violation of signed agreements" for recipients studying abroad: Before leaving, recipients planning to study abroad are required to sign the State-sponsored Study Abroad Agreement; this agreement takes effect after it is reviewed and approved by the China Scholarship Council. They must also apply for a special state-sponsored study abroad bank card; apply for and obtain their passport, visa, and International Travel Health Certificate; and go through the Ministry of Education Study Abroad Service Centre and Ministry of Education Shanghai Pre-departure Training Centre for Overseas Students to complete tasks such as booking plane tickets and obtaining a State-sponsored Study Abroad Registration Certificate (for details, please refer to the Instructions for Studying Abroad).

Article 17: Students studying abroad should, in accordance with the China Scholarship Council Overseas Study Abroad Funding Qualifications and related materials, complete

registration procedures at the Chinese embassy or consulate in their host country within 10 days of arrival and should adhere to all requirements of the specific embassy or consulate.

Article 18: While abroad, funding recipients should abide by the laws and regulations of the host country, all relevant stipulations for China Scholarship Council Overseas Study Abroad Funding Recipients, and all relevant provisions of the State-sponsored Study Abroad Agreement. Funding recipients should also voluntarily accept the guidance and management of their institutions and embassies or consulates abroad, and they should regularly submit reports to their institutions.

Article 19: After students complete their studies abroad, they should, according to schedule, return to China to fulfil their service obligations. They must register their return information on the state-sponsored study abroad management information website within three months of their return. Undergraduate transfer students are not required to return to China to complete a service period.

Article 20: When students studying abroad write, publish, or publicly share papers, research projects, or research findings related to the funding they receive, they must add a note stipulating "this research is/this paper is/these findings are funded by the China Scholarship Council".

Chapter VII: Supplementary Provisions

Article 21: These rules apply to the selection of 2023 state-sponsored study abroad recipients. Any special provisions of individual programmes shall also be adhered to.

Article 22: If students studying abroad fail to adhere to these rules or violate any national laws or regulations and are held criminally responsible in accordance with the law, if their violation of public order or failure to respect local customs has serious adverse effects, or if they commit a serious act of academic misconduct or otherwise severely fail to adhere to regulations, and if the details of the incident are verified during either the selection and admission stage or during the duration of the state-sponsored study abroad agreement, China Scholarship Council has the right to take measures such as rejecting the application, revoking approval, terminating funding, and recovering compensation for breach of contract.

Article 23: China Scholarship Council is responsible for the interpretation of all rules listed in this document.