

Application for Participation in the Mandarin Language Assistants Programme

Background

The New Zealand-China Free Trade Agreement Upgrade (2022) continues to allow Mandarin Language Assistants (MLAs) to temporarily work in New Zealand to facilitate the teaching and learning of Mandarin and to raise the quality of Mandarin language provision in New Zealand schools.

The New Zealand Ministry of Education and Confucius Institute in Auckland (CI) are part of this initiative with the Institute responsible for selecting, allocating and managing the incoming MLAs. Responsibilities also include providing MLA orientation and on-going professional and personal support; providing support to respective lead teachers in schools; and monitoring their progress during the school year.

The role and contribution of Mandarin Language Assistants

The role of an MLA is to assist the classroom teacher in teaching more effectively through providing information and insight into Chinese language and culture and modelling accurate pronunciation and intonation.

The Mandarin Language Assistants can:

- bring, through their presence, the target language and culture to the classroom;
- provide opportunities for students to interact with a native speaker, stimulating genuine classroom communications;
- assist teachers in the classroom and/or make small group work possible for more effective teaching;
- assist teachers to enhance students' language and cultural knowledge;
- enable more students to take part in individual conversations in the target language and
- assist with the preparation of up-to-date resources using authentic language.

More information on how MLAs work in practice can be found at <https://ci.ac.nz/chinese-in-schools/mla-prog/>.

Funding

The Chinese International Education Foundation (CIEF) and Centre for Language Education and Cooperation (CLEC) in China will fund the international travel costs and living allowances for the MLAs for their placement year. Successful New Zealand schools are responsible for the MLAs' health insurance costs and homestay accommodation arrangements. It is expected that the accommodation provided should be clean, comfortable and convenient to travel to schools, etc.

The MLA/CLEC will contribute up to \$350/wk towards their homestay accommodation expenses. Costs above this amount will be covered by the participating schools.

Eligibility

All schools are eligible to apply to host an MLA, either individually or in partnership with neighbouring

schools. This year, we highly encourage schools to partner with each other in hosting an MLA, who can assist with new or established Mandarin programmes.

Please note that, due to the limited number of available MLAs, not all applications can be approved automatically. CI will evaluate all applications in a fair and transparent manner; however, it reserves the right to make the final decision on each application. Also, CI does not recommend the lead teacher acting as the homestay host.

Selection criteria

Priority is to be given to schools that can demonstrate:

- a partnership with neighbouring schools so that the MLA can support language programmes at a number/pathway of schools;
- a demand for, and commitment to, the teaching and learning of Mandarin;
- how the MLA programme will complement current and previous initiatives the school has accessed for Mandarin programmes;
- how, and the extent to which, the placement of an MLA will support the development of their language programme, including student progression and achievement and staff capability;
- how the MLA will be supported in the school and
- how their language programme will be developed and sustained following the conclusion of the MLA's placement.

The placement of MLAs will take into account the need for distribution on geographic grounds as well as across primary, intermediate and secondary schools within the Confucius Institute's region spanning from Northland to Waikato. Schools that have not had an MLA for more than three years are particularly encouraged to apply.

Expectations

Successful schools are expected to:

- sign an agreement with Confucius Institute in Auckland regarding the roles and responsibilities of each party to ensure the MLA programme runs smoothly and
- make commitments to developing a sustainable Chinese programme in their school.

How to apply

Visit CI in Auckland website <https://ci.ac.nz/events/expression-of-interest-mandarin-language-assistant-2026/> and complete the Expression of Interest form online.

Successful schools will be notified at the beginning of Term 4, 2026. The principals/lead teachers of the successful schools will be **expected to attend a workshop** either in late application year (November 2026) or early following year (February 2027) for background information and expectations of the programme.

Subject to the approval of their visa applications by Immigration New Zealand, the MLAs are usually expected to arrive in New Zealand at the end of January or early February, and go to their homestays after a week's orientation with CI in Auckland. Schools will need to make alternative arrangements if orientation and homestay dates do not fit in with their school term.

Contact

For further information, please contact Xiaolu (Rebecca) Wang, xiaolu.wang@auckland.ac.nz.

Note: the MLA programme will be available only if MLAs are able to do so in accordance with China and NZ regulations/border controls. Changes may arise at short notice.