

Frequently Asked Questions – New Colombo Plan Semester Program (2027 Round)

What are the key changes to the NCP Semester Program in the 2027 Round?

Applicants should always read the NCP Semester Program Guidelines in full to ensure an understanding of the objectives and application processes for each round. Key changes to look out for in the 2027 NCP Semester Program Guidelines include the following:

- An additional selection criterion to allow applicants to demonstrate how student recruitment and pipeline planning will be undertaken for projects
- Removal of Hong Kong as a standalone host location. Hong Kong projects can be submitted under China (including Hong Kong and Macau).

Can projects be proposed for non-priority host locations?

Yes. DFAT will accept high-quality applications for all eligible host locations in the Indo-Pacific, as outlined in section 5.5 of the NCP Semester Program Guidelines.

Priority in the selection processes for the 2027 NCP Semester Program will be accorded to projects that will be undertaken in the priority host locations, languages and sectors outlined in section 6.1 of the Guidelines.

Do all applications need to include language learning?

No. Applications do not need to include a language-learning component to be eligible, however all applicants must still respond to the language focus question in the selection criteria.

Applications that clearly support learning of other Indo-Pacific languages (other than English) may also be more competitive, depending on how they address the criteria.

The Guidelines refer to a ‘Language Target’. What is this and how can a Semester project meet the language target?

To deepen Australia’s Indo-Pacific capability and Asia literacy, the NCP has a language target. In the 2027 round, the language target for the entire NCP is 40 per cent of participants undertaking language intensive programs.

For Semester projects, programs that meet the definition include –

- a) at least 50 per cent of study unit/s (either 1 or 2 semesters of study units) are to study the official or commonly spoken language (other than English) of the host location, or
- b) at least 50 per cent of study units are delivered in an official or commonly spoken language (other than English) of the host location.

Applicants will be asked to estimate the number of hours, or the percentage of study load that will be spent on structured language learning while students are on program. This will also be confirmed as part of completion reporting for successful projects.

Responses to Selection Criterion 2 on how the application meets the language focus of the Semester Program will contribute to the applicant's overall score – projects that meet the language target will be given the highest priority.

DFAT recommends that applications for language-focused programs meeting the language target should be submitted as a distinct application and not part of a broader application incorporating language and non-language programs, to maximise an application's chance of success.

Can applicants request a lower student grant amount?

No. Applicants cannot request a lower student grant amount to increase the number of grants sought.

The individual student grant value is fixed for the 2027 NCP Semester Program round at \$15,000 for 1 semester and \$24,000 for 2 semesters. The grant is intended to act as incentive to mobilise students and to support their participation in the program by covering international travel and in-location living costs.

Can Semester projects include study, internships or both?

Yes. Projects may include study, internships, language learning or a combination. DFAT does not prioritise study over internships, or internships over study.

Applications will be assessed against the selection criteria, including alignment with program priorities and project quality.

The Semester project must be credit-bearing or otherwise count towards the completion requirements of the student's undergraduate course.

What is DFAT looking for in the student pipeline response?

Applicants should explain how there is sufficient student demand for the number of student grants sought for the proposed Semester project. The response should show how the proposed project connects to an identifiable student cohort and how the university will support recruitment before departure.

A strong response would provide clear evidence that the university can recruit the number of students proposed in the application and fully expend the student grants sought. This could include information on relevant course enrolments, embedded course pathways, expressions of student interest, past participation in similar projects, existing exchange or study abroad demand, student cohort size in relevant feeder coursework, or links to degree structures that support semester-length overseas study.

What host institution support is required at the application stage?

Applicants must provide evidence of support from each proposed host institution.

An exchange agreement may be provided, but it is not the only acceptable form of evidence. Other evidence, such as a letter or email of support, may be accepted if it

gives DFAT sufficient assurance that the project can be delivered at the host location.

Can my application be for multiple priority sectors?

Yes, but the application should remain specific and coherent.

If an application includes multiple priority sectors, applicants should explain how each sector aligns with the project. Selecting multiple priority sectors without explaining the project's alignment to each sector may weaken the application.

Can we include multiple project lengths (1 and 2 semesters) in the one application?

Applicants can only select either 1 or 2 semesters as the length of the project in a single application. Applicants must submit separate applications for programs of different lengths.

Can applicants nominate a transnational education institution headquartered in a third country as the host institution?

Transnational education partners can only be approved as host institutions when they are Australian offshore campuses, and able to offer a genuinely immersive experience for participating NCP students.

Lessons for writing a strong NCP Semester Program application

- **Be specific about the project design.**
Explain what students will do, where they will do it, for how long, who will support delivery, and how the activities will produce outcomes. Specificity in line with NCP's priority areas for selection makes for stronger applications.
- **Show how students will build Asia capability.**
Identify concrete gains: language proficiency, workplace skills, professional accreditation, sector knowledge, cultural literacy, employability, networks or future Indo-Pacific engagement.
- **Treat language learning as a core design element.**
Strong applications show the students' starting proficiency, the amount and type of language learning, and how it supports future regional engagement.
- **Use work-integrated learning where it is genuine.**
Placements are stronger when they are linked to course or accreditation requirements, and connect to the Australian Government's priority sectors in that host location.
- **Show that partnerships are operational, not aspirational.**
Explain what host partners actually do, such as delivering language teaching, sourcing placements, supervising students, coordinating cultural programming or supporting future collaboration.

- **Demonstrate a pathway beyond the funded semester.**
Strong applications explain how the project supports future study, internships, research, employment, alumni engagement or sustained regional partnerships beyond the NCP.

Case studies – Strong NCP Semester Program applications (2026 Round)

Case study 1: Indonesia engineering internships, consortium delivery and work-integrated learning

This semester-length project supported Australian engineering students to undertake 10-12-week internships across Indonesia. It was designed as a work-integrated learning (WIL) project, embedding students in Indonesian organisations to apply engineering skills to real-world challenges in clean energy, sustainable infrastructure, low-emission transport, water systems and manufacturing optimisation.

The project design included a strong wraparound model. Students began with an intensive language and culture week, followed by further Indonesian language classes during the placement period.

The project aligned strongly with NCP Semester Program priorities. It was delivered in Indonesia, included Indonesian language learning, and aligned with priority sectors including Infrastructure, Climate and Energy and Technology and Innovation.

A key strength was the consortium arrangement, involving multiple Australian universities and Indonesian partners. This gave the project scale, sustainability and strategic value beyond individual placements.

While the project did not meet the language target, it was scored as one of the higher Semester projects for Indonesia – as a work-integrated learning project, it demonstrated a quality and meaningful combination of strategic alignment, work-integrated learning, consortium delivery, language exposure and sectoral relevance.

Case study 2: China language immersion and advanced China capability

This semester-length project supported a targeted cohort of Australian undergraduates to undertake intensive language study in China. It was designed for students with high-intermediate Chinese language skills who demonstrated interest in China-related study, research, culture or affairs.

The project was strong because its purpose was clear: to build advanced Chinese language proficiency and deeper China capability through sustained in-country study.

The proposal targeted students at a specific point in their learning pipeline. Rather than offering introductory exposure, it focused on students already positioned to benefit from full-semester immersion and progress toward advanced proficiency. It also used Shanghai meaningfully, framing the city as a place where students could experience China's language environment, institutional context, business links and cultural life first-hand.

This application performed strongly because it made the language-learning case extremely clear. It showed a defined student cohort, a genuine language acquisition pathway, a strong host-location rationale in Shanghai, and a clear link between semester-length immersion and Australia's need for advanced China capability.