



New Colombo Plan Scholarship Program 2023 Round Advice to Applicants

The 2023 New Colombo Plan (NCP) Scholarship Program Guidelines outline 2023 round eligibility requirements, assessment criteria and how funding will be allocated to successful applicants. Applicants must read these Guidelines on [GrantConnect](#) before starting an application.

Applicants should also familiarise themselves with the sample 2023 scholarship agreement, which is also available on GrantConnect.

Key changes in the 2023 round

Updates to the 2023 NCP Scholarship Program are reflected in the 2023 Guidelines and aim to ensure consistency with the Australian Government's requirements for grant administration. These updates include:

- Reference to clarify the role of the contractor as the first point of contact for applicants and Australian universities on administrative matters, including eligibility for the NCP Scholarship Program, nominations, applications and candidate interviews (section 2.7).
- Reference to the contractor's role in arranging police checks for each applicant (section 4.2).
- Clarity on requirements related to internships where a scholar who is currently employed with an organisation must not undertake an internship with that organisation (section 5.3.1).
- A new requirement for applicants to provide a current CV outlining the applicant's work experience, community engagements and extra-curricular interests (section 7.4f).

Host location eligibility

NCP scholarship programs cannot proceed in a host location or region within a host location for which the *Smartraveller* advice is 'Do not travel' or 'Reconsider your need to travel'" (see section 5.5.4 of the Guidelines).

Some host locations may still be listed as 'Do not travel' or 'Reconsider your need to travel' during the application period due to the health risks from the COVID-19 pandemic. Some host locations were already set at 'Do not travel' or 'Reconsider your need to travel' prior to COVID-19 due to safety risks. Applicants are strongly discouraged from proposing programs in a host location, or region within a host location, for which *Smartraveller* recommends "Do not travel" or "Reconsider your need to travel" for reasons in addition to the health risks from the COVID-19 pandemic. This distinction is made clear in *Smartraveller*.

Travel cannot proceed to such locations if that travel advice remains in place at the scholar's time of departure.

Lessons learned from previous NCP scholarship rounds

The following general feedback, drawn from comments of assessors who considered each application, may assist applicants in preparing their written application.

Criterion 1: Academic excellence at the tertiary level

Higher scored responses

- demonstrated a dedication to academic achievement, learning and development, and were supported by concrete examples and strong academic references. These responses have included demonstrated creativity, innovation, strong communication skills, problem-solving skills, and critical thinking skills. Some examples may include participation in a competition or a project that required a high level of innovation or problem solving.
- provided evidence of commendations, awards, scholarships, internships, or acceptance into selective academic programs etc, and highlighted how these opportunities developed the applicant's critical thinking skills.

Lower scored responses demonstrated limited achievement beyond standard student experiences or did not make a good case for the applicant's communication skills, higher-order cognitive and critical thinking skills and engagement in learning.

Criterion 2: Leadership and engagement in the community

Higher scored responses

- gave examples of sustained community engagement
- demonstrated longer-term leadership that developed a program/activity/organisation from conception to implementation; and
- showed an effective ability to engage other stakeholders and influence outcomes.

Lower scored responses only outlined participation, without explaining how the applicant contributed to enhanced community outcomes and/or utilised their leadership skills.

Criterion 3: Adaptability and resilience

Higher scored responses

- demonstrated strong self-awareness and identified strategies that applicants used to overcome a range of challenges to achieve success in their academic studies and/or personal life.
- demonstrated insights applicants gained from dealing with challenging situations and consideration of the way in which these would apply to their proposed NCP program, including their ability to thrive in a cross-cultural environment.

Lower scored responses demonstrated limited self-awareness regarding personal growth and development in the face of challenging circumstances, or little understanding of coping mechanisms to adapt or show resilience.

Criterion 4: Ability to contribute to the NCP strategic objective and outcomes

Higher scored responses:

- demonstrated linkages between the applicant's proposed program and the NCP objective and outcomes,
- clearly explained how their interests, proposed program and NCP outcomes intersected
- provided well-considered examples of where/how people-to-people and institutional relationships could be fostered during their time offshore

- demonstrated a broad range of strategies to promote the NCP and the scholar's experiences to a range of stakeholders, both while overseas and as an active alumni member after return to Australia.

Lower scored responses demonstrated limited understanding of the NCP objective and outcomes.

Referees

In previous rounds, some referee reports did not add value to information contained in the applicant's own written application. As referee reports are a critical source of information for the selection process, applicants should try to choose referees that have a good knowledge of the applicant's strengths in relation to the assessment criteria.

Applicants should allow sufficient time for referees to provide a considered report. Further information for applicants, referees and Australian universities regarding the referee report process is provided in the [Guide to Referee Reports in New Colombo Plan Online \(for Applicants and referees\)](#) [PDF 630 KB] | [\[Word 1.39 MB\]](#)

Other considerations

Where applicants are similarly meritorious at both the application and interview stages, preference may be given to applicants proposing longer periods of study and/or an internship/mentorship and/or longer periods of language training. This aligns with the NCP's objective to give scholars a long-term, immersive and comprehensive experience in the Indo-Pacific region. The longer an applicant's program, and the more elements their program includes, the richer their experience is likely to be.

Priority will also be given to applicants who can demonstrate a correlation across their proposed study, language and internship components.

Consideration will also be given to encouraging participation from students from a diverse range of backgrounds including, but not limited to, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students, students from a low socio-economic status background, students from regional/remote areas or universities, students who are first in their immediate family to attend university, students across the genders, female students studying in non-traditional fields, students with a disability, and students from a non-English speaking background.

Some NCP host locations may be more popular as study destinations than others. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) will seek to ensure a spread of scholarships across the range of host locations, where possible.

Frequently asked questions

Timing of release of academic results and official academic transcripts

Can the ILO submit a nominee's unofficial academic transcript if the official copy is not yet available at the time of nomination?

Yes. Where official transcripts cannot be provided by the closing of nominations, "unofficial" academic transcripts may be submitted at nominations – e.g. screenshots, with official transcripts to be provided by the applicant in their application.

Required documents

Why is a CV required as part of the NCP scholarship application?

A CV allows the applicant to provide more details on their achievements, beyond their assessment criteria responses, by highlighting their academic achievements/awards, work experience, community engagement activities and extra-curricular interests. The CV enables assessors to gain a clear picture of the applicant's achievements over time (for example, the length of volunteering and community engagement).

The CV also assists DFAT in matching NCP scholars with private sector sponsors (see Section 5.8.4.3 in the NCP Scholarship Program Guidelines).

Police checks

How will police checks be organised for the nominee/applicant?

All nominees are required to undertake a police check. DFAT's contractor will conduct police checks for each nominee following the closing of the nomination period.

In the nomination form, University International Liaison Officers (ILOs) must indicate that the nominee has provided consent for the contractor to conduct a police check.

The contractor will contact the nominee to seek further information and documents such as an Australian passport, driver licence or Medicare card.

Host location

Can my proposed host location in the application be different from that in the nomination?

Yes. The host location selected in the application will be treated as final.

Can a scholar commence their NCP scholarship program with an internship component at a secondary host location prior to their study component at their primary host location?

Yes. A scholar may commence their NCP scholarship program at a secondary host location for up to three months before relocating to the primary host location for the study component, subject to *Smartertraveller* advice at time of travel.

The scholar will need to provide confirmation of enrolment for their study component (at their primary host location) prior to departing Australia. The study component is a mandatory component of the NCP scholarship program.

The scholar will also need to ensure that the visa for the primary host location can be granted if they arrive there from the secondary host location (rather than from Australia).

Study component

If I have recently changed degrees or I am in the process of changing to another bachelor or bachelor honours degree, am I still eligible for the NCP scholarship?

Yes, you are eligible, provided your NCP scholarship study component will be fully credit-bearing to your new degree and meet all study component requirements outlined in section 5.2 of the NCP Scholarship Program Guidelines. As per section 7.4 of the Guidelines, your home university must provide a letter attesting to the feasibility of your proposed study component in relation to your new degree.

Do I need confirmation of enrolment at the host university when I submit my NCP scholarship application?

No, you are not required, in the NCP Scholarship application process, to provide confirmation of enrolment at your proposed host university. Please see section 7.4 of the Guidelines regarding attachments required for your study component.

If I am studying a double degree, would one letter attesting to the feasibility of my study component suffice or would I need a separate letter from each faculty?

While one letter is sufficient, if the units will be credit bearing to both degrees, then the one letter should be signed by both faculties (and the University International Liaison Officer) to confirm the feasibility of the proposed study component.

Can I study at a host institution that is an offshore campus of an Australian university?

One of the goals of the NCP program is for linkages to be established between Australian institutions and Indo-Pacific institutions students to have an immersive local experience at their host location, hence we would prefer that the applicant explores all possible locally-based host institutions first. If all such options are exhausted, the applicant may consider a host institution that is an offshore campus of an Australian university as a last resort. If the applicant chooses such a host institution, they must provide documentation that addresses the following in their scholarship application.

- a. there are no local host institutions in the proposed location that offer relevant courses that would receive credit from the home university, and
- b. the offshore campus offers a genuine local experience, where Australian students are the minority of the student body and students are taught predominantly by local and international academics.

Can scholars undertake two study components (i.e. each study component = one semester) at different host institutions and different host locations?

Yes, it is possible to undertake two study components during your NCP scholarship program, where each study component is a semester long.

You may undertake your study components in any of the following combinations:

- two study components at host institution A
- one study component at host institution A and a second study component at host institution B, where both institutions are in the same host location.
- One study component at host institution A and one study component at host institution B, where the host institutions are in different host locations.

The primary host location is where the NCP scholar will undertake their most substantial study component and also spend the most time during their scholarship program. The total time spent at the primary host location must be longer than the total time spent at all secondary host locations combined. Also, the total duration of your NCP scholarship program must not exceed 19 months.

Honours students

I am in the final year of my bachelor degree and would like to undertake an Honours program for my NCP study component. However, enrolment into the Honours program will only open after the closing of the NCP scholarship application period. Am I still eligible?

You are eligible to apply for an NCP scholarship. We ask that you provide as much information on your proposed Honours program as possible at the time of your application e.g a provisional offer for an honours program conditional on your bachelor degree results; a confirmed honours supervisor, a proposed honours project, confirmation from your home university that your proposed NCP study component will be credit bearing to your home honours degree. The award of your scholarship will be conditional on your enrolment into an honours program at your home university.

Do I need to enrol at the host institution if I'm undertaking only a research-based Honours study component i.e. no coursework?

You do not need to enrol at the host institution if you are undertaking only a research-based Honours study component i.e. no coursework.

If you will be undertaking coursework as part of your NCP study component, you must enrol at the host institution, and ensure your home university credits the coursework units back to the home degree.

Referees

Is it permissible to nominate two academic referees?

Yes. It is permissible for both referees to be academic referees, as long as they can comment substantively across the assessment criteria.

Can I nominate a referee from high school?

You are required to nominate an academic referee who is able to comment substantively on the assessment criteria, particularly the criterion on academic excellence at the tertiary level. An academic from your university, rather than from your high school, will likely be better placed to comment on this criterion. However, you may nominate a personal referee from your high school if they are able to comment on the remaining criteria.

Does my academic referee have to be from my current home university?

Generally, yes. However, if, for example, your academic referee has recently left your home university, you may still nominate them, as long as they can comment substantively on the assessment criteria. If you have recently changed home universities, you may nominate an academic referee from your previous home university, provided they can comment substantively on the assessment criteria.

If I have changed courses at university recently, can I nominate an academic referee from a previous course?

Yes, provided they can comment substantively on the assessment criteria.

Does my academic referee have to comment on the non-academic related assessment criteria?

You should select an academic referee who can comment substantively on all assessment criteria wherever possible. However, if your academic referee is only able to comment on the academic-related assessment criteria, they can leave blank the response to the remaining assessment criteria. Your personal referee must be able to comment substantively on the remaining assessment criteria.

Students studying remotely or virtually may find it difficult to nominate an academic referee as they may have had very little interaction with academics on campus. What advice would you give?

In such cases, your academic referee may comment only on the first criterion (academic excellence at the tertiary level) and leave one or all of the other criteria blank (if they are unable to comment on them). Applicants should ensure their other referee is able to comment substantively on the remaining criteria.

Can referees save their draft report and complete it later?

The referee may save each completed section of the report and return to the report at a later stage. The referee does not need to complete the entire referee report in one session.

My referee has accidentally submitted their incomplete report. Is it possible for the referee to resume the report?

Referees cannot edit a report once it has been submitted. However, the applicant can remove the referee from their application (select the "Remove" button) and re-enter the referee's details. The referee will receive an email containing a new link and password to start a new report.

Internships

Do I have to confirm or lock in internships during the application stage?

No, any internships in your application do not need to be confirmed. However, we encourage you to conduct research, speak to NCP alumni, and make enquiries with potential internship host organisations on possible internship opportunities, and include the details of these potential internships in your application. You should demonstrate that you have given thought to possible internships and how they align with your study/career goals and the NCP program objective and outcomes.

The NCP Internship and Mentorship Network (website) will be available for scholars to identify internship and mentorship opportunities. It is not available to applicants.

Can I undertake an internship at a host location that is different from where I will undertake the study component?

Yes, you may undertake an internship at a secondary host location (subject to *Smartertraveller* advice), provided the total time spent at the primary host location is longer than the total time spent at all secondary host locations combined. Please state how your proposed program components will achieve your study/career goals and NCP program objective and outcomes.

Given that scholars need to commence their NCP scholarship program between 1 January and 15 December of the scholarship round year, is it possible to undertake a full-time internship at the host location from say mid December of the scholarship round year and only commence the study component in March of the following year?

Yes. For example, if you commence your NCP scholarship program with a full-time internship component or language training component on 15 December 2023, then the latest you may commence your study component is 15 March 2024.

As per section 5.1(a) of the guidelines, your study component must commence within three months of commencing your scholarship program subject to international travel restrictions.

Is there a limit to the number of internships I can undertake during the NCP scholarship program?

There is no limit to the number of internships you can complete provided they meet the requirements stated in section 5.3 of the Guidelines.

Visas

Do I need to find out about visas during the application stage?

No. You only need to seek advice regarding visas if you are awarded an NCP scholarship. If you are awarded an NCP scholarship, you will need to organise a visa for your host location by contacting the relevant diplomatic mission/s to seek up-to-date advice on the appropriate visas for your program.