

New Colombo Plan Scholarship Program - Advice to applicants

The 2021 New Colombo Plan (NCP) Scholarship Program Guidelines provide information on the 2021 round including eligibility requirements, assessment criteria and how funding will be allocated to successful applicants.

- You must read the Guidelines on [GrantConnect](#) before completing an application.
- Applicants should consider the Guidelines together with the Sample 2021 Scholarship Agreement available on GrantConnect
- [Key changes to the 2021 Round](#)
- [Lessons learned from previous rounds to assist applicants for the 2021 round](#)

Key changes in the 2021 round

For the 2021 Scholarships round, a number of enhancements have been made to the 2021 Scholarship Program. These are reflected in the Guidelines, and aim to ensure consistency with the Australian Government's requirements for grant administration and reflect new policies in Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and the NCP. These updates include:

- a clearer articulation of the NCP strategic objective and outcomes
- information on reasonable accommodation to facilitate participation of applicants with a disability (section 2.4)
- information about processes when applicants consider they have a strong case for proposing to undertake their scholarship program at a host location listed in Smartraveller as 'Reconsider Your Need to Travel' (section 2.6 and 5.5)
- a requirement for scholarship recipients to register on the Smartraveller website if a crisis page on the website is activated during a major overseas incident at the scholar's overseas location (section 2.6)
- reference to the new NCP Media and Publication Guidelines and the NCP Student Code of Conduct which will be included in the 2021 NCP scholarship agreement to be signed by scholarship recipients (section 2.6)
- advice that applicants are eligible to propose programs in NCP host locations for which they *previously* held citizenship or permanent residency. However, applicants remain ineligible to apply for host locations where they are *current* citizens or permanent residents (section 4.1)
- advice that applicants must not be an employee of the branch of DFAT that administers the NCP, to avoid conflict of interest (section 4.1)
- advice that police checks must not be dated earlier than 1 May 2020 (section 4.2)
- advice that part-time internships may be undertaken concurrently with a full-time language training (section 5.3.1)
- clarification that language training must be undertaken face to face (section 5.4)
- change in the weighting of each assessment criteria to better reflect the NCP strategic objective and outcomes (section 6.1)

- a requirement for scholars to adhere to DFAT’s Preventing Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment (PSEAH) policy (section 10.3)
- a requirement for scholars to adhere to the [University Foreign Interference Taskforce - Guidelines to Counter Foreign Interference in the University Sector 2019](#) (section 10.3)

Lessons learned from previous rounds to assist applicants for the 2021 round

The following general feedback on responding to the assessment criteria might assist universities in nominating applicants, and applicants in preparing their written application.

Criterion 1: Academic excellence at the tertiary level

In past rounds, higher scored responses demonstrated a dedication to academic achievement, learning and development, and were supported by concrete examples and strong academic references. Higher scored responses provided evidence of commendations/ awards/ scholarships/ internships/ 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

In past rounds, higher scored responses demonstrated a diversity of community engagement or 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 outlined participation only, without demonstrating how the applicant’s engagement contributed to enhanced community outcomes and/or utilised their leadership skills.

Criterion 3: Adaptability and resilience

In the past, 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. Higher scored responses 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 a lack of self-awareness regarding personal growth and development in the face of challenging circumstances, and little understanding of coping mechanisms to adapt or show resilience in response to change.

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 identifying how their interests, proposed program and NCP outcomes intersected, and providing well-considered examples of where/how people-to-people and institutional relationships could be fostered. Higher scored responses demonstrated a broad range of strategies identified by applicants to promote the NCP and scholar experiences to a range of stakeholders, both

while overseas and as an active alumni member after return to Australia. Lower scored responses demonstrated little understanding of the NCP objective and outcomes.

In some cases, referee reports did not provide additional value to information provided in the applicant's own written application. As referee reports are a critical source of information for the selection process, applicants should choose referees carefully, ensuring that they have a good knowledge of the applicant's abilities 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 \(for Applicants and referees\) \[PDF 630 KB\] | \[Word 1.39 MB\]](#)

The interview questions reflect the assessment criteria. Applicants are strongly encouraged to prepare and practice for their interviews ahead of time. A number of universities have assisted students by running mock interviews or including an interview in their nomination process.

Where applicants are similarly meritorious at both the application and interview stages, preference is 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 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 representation from diverse student groups 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 locations are more popular than others. While there are no caps on the number of scholarships awarded per host location, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) will seek to ensure a spread across host locations. In the 2020 round, the locations for which the greatest numbers of applications were received were Hong Kong, Singapore, China, Japan and the Republic of Korea.

We strongly discourage applicants from proposing programs in a host location, or region within a host location, for which the Australian Government's [Smartraveller](#) travel advice recommends 'Do not travel' or 'Reconsider your need to travel' (except where the travel advice may be short term e.g. due to an unforeseen adverse event). We note that travel cannot proceed to such locations if that travel advice remains in place at the time of departure. Where the Smartraveller travel advice is raised to 'Do not travel' or 'Reconsider your need to travel' for a host location during the application process or while a scholar is on program, DFAT will work with the scholar to identify an alternate host location if required.

Thank you for your interest in the 2021 round of the New Colombo Plan Scholarship Program.