General Guide

What the CSC is actually funding, the eligibility rules, and how to build one coherent thread across the whole form.

180	3	6	Free
AWARDS FOR 2027/28	SCORED CRITERIA	DEVELOPMENT THEMES	TO READ & DOWNLOAD

01 SECTION 1

What the Commonwealth Shared Scholarship is actually funding

The Commonwealth Shared Scholarship is not the same scheme as the Commonwealth Master's Scholarship, even though both are run by the Commonwealth Scholarship Commission (CSC) and both fund a Master's year in the UK. The difference is in who pays and how the places are created.

Under the Shared Scholarship, a UK university first **bids** to the CSC for scholarship places on specific courses it names. The CSC currently expects to allocate **around 180 new Commonwealth Shared Scholarships for 2027/28**. A university may bid for up to ten scholarships, spread across up to eight individually named courses, and the CSC says it will give preference to bids for at least two awards, though a bid for one is still considered. This is why you cannot simply apply to "any course you like": you can only be considered for a course that a university has already successfully bid to put forward, and that list changes every year.

Once a university's bid is approved, the CSC and the university **share the cost** of each scholarship, which is where the name comes from. The CSC pays your tuition fees (capped at £22,500), your approved return airfare to the UK, a thesis grant, a study travel grant, and a contribution to a TB test if you need one. The university pays your stipend: £1,712 per month, or £2,000 per month if the university is in the London metropolitan area, for the normal 12-month award. If you have a child under 16, you may also receive a child allowance, currently £622 per month for the first child and £154 per month for the second and third.

Two restrictions follow directly from this funding model, and both catch applicants out every year:

- **One-year taught courses only.** The scholarship funds a one-year, full-time, taught postgraduate course. It does not fund research degrees, part-time study, or courses that run longer than a year. MBA courses are supported only in exceptional circumstances.
- **The subject must be demonstrably developmental.** Universities are only allowed to bid for courses whose subject matter aligns with the CSC's development themes (Section 4 below). A technically excellent course that cannot be connected to development will not have been bid for in the first place, or will be a weak fit for your Development Impact answers.

What this means for your application: your course and university are not really "your choice" in the way they would be for a self-funded Master's. You are choosing from a published list of courses a university has already committed to supporting, and your job is to show, convincingly, why that specific course is the right place for you to close a specific gap.

---

02 SECTION 2

Who it is for, and the eligibility checks that end an application first

Run through these before you write a single word, because the CSC disqualifies incomplete or ineligible applications before anyone reads an essay.

- **Citizenship or refugee status.** You must be a citizen of, or have refugee status in, an eligible Commonwealth country, and be permanently resident there.
- **Academic qualification.** By September 2027 you must hold either a first degree of at least upper second-class (2:1) honours standard, or a second-class (2:2) degree plus a relevant postgraduate qualification (usually a Master's).
- **Not already based in a high-income country.** You must not have studied or worked for one academic year or more in a high-income country, and you must not currently be living or studying in one.
- **Financial need.** You must be unable to afford to study in the UK without this scholarship. This is a declaration you make directly on the form, before you can proceed to the rest of the application.
- **Availability.** You must be available to start your course in the UK by the start of the UK academic year in September 2027.
- **No age limit.** Unlike some other scholarships, the CSC sets no upper age limit for Shared Scholarship applicants.

Previous Commonwealth Scholarship. If you have already studied at Master's level in the UK, or previously held a Commonwealth Scholarship at Master's level, you are not eligible to hold a second one. Check this before you invest time in the application.

The CSC also runs due diligence checks on every potential Scholar before confirming an award, covering things like unspent criminal convictions and Politically Exposed Person (PEP) status. These do not automatically disqualify you, but you must answer honestly and consent to the checks, or you cannot proceed with the application.

03 SECTION 3

The three criteria the panel actually scores

The CSC states that Shared Scholarship applications are assessed against three criteria. The exact weighting between them is not published, so treat all three as essential rather than trying to guess which matters most.

CRITERION	WHERE THE PANEL READS IT	THE QUESTION BEHIND IT
Academic merit	Transcripts, qualifications, references, publications and prizes, the personal statement where you explain any gap or dip	Can this person succeed on a one-year UK taught Master's?
Quality of the research proposal	Study outline, detailed plan of study, keywords, award objectives	Is the plan for this specific course clear, realistic, and well-matched to a non-specialist reader?
Potential impact on development	Development Impact statement (four parts), career plans, voluntary and leadership answer	Will this person change something that matters at home, and can that change be checked?

Notice what is missing from this list: there is no separate criterion for "need an employer reference" or "have relevant work experience", even though the form asks for both. Academic merit, the research proposal and development impact are the three things that are actually scored. Your employment history, publications and references exist to support those three criteria, not as a fourth one.

04 SECTION 4

The six development themes and your SDGs

As with every CSC scholarship, your area of study must sit under one of six development themes, and the course you are applying for will usually have been approved by the CSC because it already fits one or two of them clearly. Use the theme names exactly as they appear on your form.

THEME	WHAT THE CSC SAYS IT SUPPORTS	TYPICAL EVIDENCE BASE
Science and technology for development	Applying scientific knowledge and skills to the needs and opportunities of low and middle-income countries, with reference to national or local priorities	Engineering, data, agriculture, environment, energy
Improving population health, health systems and capacity	Applied health policy and public health research, disease prevention, better management systems and infrastructure	Clinical, public health, health systems, digital health
Promoting innovation and entrepreneurship	Enterprise development and new value creation: start-ups, scale-ups, jobs, trade capacity	Business, finance, markets, youth and women's enterprise
Strengthening peace, security and governance	Open and transparent governance, mutual understanding, systems for defusing and resolving conflict	Policy, law, security, institutions, diplomacy
Strengthening resilience and response to crises	National capacity to handle disasters, pandemics, climate change and sudden economic or technological disruption	Climate, disaster risk, supply security, public health emergencies
Access, inclusion and opportunity	Inclusive access among historically disadvantaged groups, expanded educational opportunity, community outreach, access to decision-making	Education, social policy, gender, rural development, labour

Most courses fit two themes depending on framing, so this is still a strategic choice. **Choose the theme where your evidence is strongest, not the one that sounds most urgent**, then name it in a full sentence in Development Impact Part 1 and let it echo, without repeating, through your career plans.

The form also asks you to select up to three Sustainable Development Goals, starting with the most relevant. Only the first is required. Choose the goals your answers genuinely talk about, in the order your evidence supports them, rather than naming a third goal that does not appear anywhere in your evidence.

05 SECTION 5

What the form actually asks

The CSC Central form for Shared Scholarships has eleven tabs. Word limits below are from the live 2027/28 form. **CHECK** each limit in CSC Central before you finalise, because the system enforces them.

TAB	WHAT IT ASKS FOR	LIMIT
Details	Personal details, one UK institution, one course (both chosen from the approved list, not ranked preferences)	—
Academic	Up to 5 qualifications, education outside your home country and previous scholarships, up to 10 publications, academic distinctions and prizes	100 / 250 words
Professional Background	Sector and area of work, up to 5 employment entries with main responsibilities	100 words each
References	Three referees: your current or most recent employer, your most recent academic study, and a personal referee. A fourth only if you took a UK degree	—
Development Impact	Up to 3 SDGs, then a 4-part statement: development issues, applying new skills, expected changes, how impact is measured	200 / 100 / 250 / 100 words
Career Plans	Objectives during the award, 5-year career plan, long-term career plan	250 words each
Proposed Study in the UK	University application number, study outline, detailed plan of study, 3 keywords	125 / 300 words
Personal Statement	Personal statement, voluntary and leadership experience	500 words each

TAB	WHAT IT ASKS FOR	LIMIT
Checklist and Confirmations	How you heard about CSC, due-diligence questions, confirmations	—
Equity and Diversity	Optional, anonymised demographic questions, not seen by the panel	—
Attachments	Passport, transcripts, degree certificates, university offer letter, references	—

The one difference most applicants miss. Unlike some other CSC schemes, the Shared Scholarship form does not have a separate "contact with your proposed universities" question, and it does not ask you to rank three courses in order of preference. You name one institution and one course on the Details tab, full stop. Guide 4 in this series (Study Proposal) is written around that single-choice reality, not a ranked list.

06 SECTION 6

Mistakes that end an application before the essays are read

Eligibility. See Section 2 above. Re-check every line against the live form before you write anything.

No separate nominator. Unlike the Commonwealth Master's Scholarship, which usually runs through a national nominating agency, the Shared Scholarship has no separate nominating body. The **university itself** reviews everyone who applied to its bid-winning courses and sends its shortlist of nominees straight to the CSC, which then checks eligibility and confirms the award. There is no additional nomination step to track outside the university's own admissions and scholarship process.

Referees. Name three referees who can speak to both your capacity to benefit from the proposed study and your ability to deliver development impact afterwards: your current or most recent employer, your most recent academic study, and a personal referee who knows you in a personal rather than a professional capacity and is not related to you. If you have already taken a degree in the UK, add a fourth referee from that UK study. Your application is marked ineligible unless at least two references actually arrive.

Documents. Upload a scan of your passport or national ID, full transcripts for **all** higher education qualifications (merged into one file, with certified translations if not in English), your degree certificates (merged into one file), your university offer letter, and your references (merged into one file). Each file must be 10MB or smaller, in PDF, JPG or PNG. Missing any of these makes the application ineligible.

The course. You can only select an institution and course that appears on the approved list for that year. If your target course is not listed, it has not been bid for, and no amount of essay quality will make it eligible.

Admission. Apply to the university directly as well as through CSC Central. The two processes run in parallel but are not the same system, and a university cannot nominate you if you have not also applied for admission.

Form mechanics. Draft every answer outside the system and paste it in once you are happy with it. Save often: the form does not reliably preserve unsaved text if your session times out. You cannot edit an application after you submit it. Do not leave submission to the final hours before the 16:00 GMT deadline, since the system slows down under load and a late application is not accepted regardless of the reason.

Proofreading. Check the spelling of every institution, person, module and programme you name. If your answers mention a dozen proper nouns, a dozen spellings must be correct.

07 SECTION 7

The development-impact chain

Underneath every essay answer sits one sequence. It applies wherever you describe your plan, whichever tab you are writing in.

Problem, then why it persists, then your capability gap, then the study, then your route home, then the change, then the evidence.

LINK	WHAT IT ANSWERS	WHERE IT MOSTLY LIVES
Problem	What is wrong, how big, from global down to local?	Development Impact Part 1

LINK	WHAT IT ANSWERS	WHERE IT MOSTLY LIVES
Why it persists	Which policy, institution or incentive has not fixed it?	Development Impact Part 1
Capability gap	What can you not yet do?	Award objectives, study plan
The study	Which module, academic and method closes the gap?	Detailed plan of study
Route home	Which institution, partner and first pilot?	Development Impact Part 2, 5-year plan
The change	Outcome, baseline, target, date, beneficiaries	Development Impact Part 3, long-term plan
The evidence	Which indicator, from which source, checked by whom?	Development Impact Part 4

The link most often missing is the capability gap. Write it as a sentence beginning "I cannot currently" before you draft anything. If you cannot finish that sentence precisely, the study plan will read as generic.

08 SECTION 8

Evidence: the underlying rules

Replace claims with evidence

INSTEAD OF WRITING	WRITE ABOUT
"I am passionate about development."	What you have already done, with a number attached
"This is a world-class university."	The specific module, method or academic that closes your gap
"I will improve healthcare in my country."	The disease, the district, the target, the date and the measure

INSTEAD OF WRITING	WRITE ABOUT
"My project will empower women."	How many women, through which institution, with what change in income or access
"I will bring about a paradigm shift."	The practice that will be different, and who will do it

Baseline and target

A target without a baseline is a hope. Strong plans state where things stand and where they will be: a child labour rate of 6.7 per cent today and under 1 per cent in ten years, a pilot of 60 workers growing to 900, a diagnosis delay that falls by a stated share. Give the starting point from a named source, then the target, then the date.

Numbers and the precision rule

Use the exact figure, not the rounded one: 212,000 tonnes rather than "over two hundred thousand", 38,000 workers rather than "tens of thousands". A round number reads as an estimate and an odd one reads as something measured. **Never manufacture a number.** If a figure is a projection or your own estimate, say so. If your work has no metrics, use a checkable change of state: a protocol adopted, a partnership signed, a service that now reaches somewhere it did not.

Authenticity

Never inflate your role in a team achievement, invent a partnership, or promise an outcome you could not credibly deliver. Say what the team achieved and then state precisely what you contributed. A modest contribution described accurately reads as credible. A large one described vaguely reads as evasive.

09 SECTION 9

Strategic naming

Naming does two jobs. It makes a claim checkable, and it places you inside a professional world that can carry your plan out.

The rule: name the person, institution, rule or programme, and in the same sentence say what you will do with it or did with it. A name with a relationship or action attached is evidence. A name with nothing attached is a list.

WEAK, A LIST	STRONG, A WORKING LINK
"I will work with the government and NGOs."	"I will join the Provincial Child Protection Commission as a policy analyst and test the model in the district I come from."
"My country has policies on battery waste."	"The 2023 Battery Waste Management Rules recognise licensed recyclers only, so the workers who handle most of the waste cannot register."
"I admire Professor Calder's work."	"Professor Calder's policy-simulation methods will let me model how the Rules change if informal workshops can register as collection partners."

What is worth naming

- **The national plan, rule or programme** that already names your problem, by its title and year.
- **The institution you will join or build**, and the one you will build it inside.
- **Delivery partners**, with at least one who recurs across your answers.
- **One named flagship**: give the thing you will build a single proper name and use it consistently. One named programme reads as a plan. Five reads as a brochure.
- **Academic modules and academics**, from the current handbook, with the specific recent work that matters to you.
- **External selection**: fellowships, microgrants, committee seats and awards, with the body that chose you.

Density, and when not to name

Aim for roughly four to eight proper nouns in a 250-word answer, each attached to something you did or will do. Do not name beneficiaries, patients, children or anyone whose identity could be exposed. Use their role instead. Do not name an academic whose work you have not read, because a name you cannot discuss is a liability.