



Tertiary Scholarship & Loans Board
Building A Smarter Fiji

NATIONAL TOPPERS SCHEME (“NTS”) GUIDELINES AND POLICIES

VERSION 2/MAY 2017

Disclaimer

This policy document and guidelines contain information that is current at the time of publication and may be changed based on any changes to the policies and requirements of the Fijian Government. Visit www.tslb.com.fj for updates and further information. Where your legal rights are involved/concern, do not rely on this document. Instead, review the law yourself or consult your attorney.

NATIONAL TOPPERS SCHEME –GUIDELINES AND POLICIES

A. OVERVIEW OF THE SCHEME

1.0 Intent Statement

- 1.1 The intent of this policy document is to provide information to the students and the public on the procedures for applying, receiving scholarships and to serve as a guide for facilitators of the process.
- 1.2 It is very much hoped that this policy will serve as a framework from which reflective assessment and innovative thinking will emerge and informed decisions made by the applicants and recipients of the National Toppers Scheme Awards.
- 1.3 The policy statement, principles and guidelines captured in this document are neither prescriptive nor exhaustive and serve to provide guidance for achieving compliant, efficient and effective administration of the National Toppers Scheme that is integrated with the strategic and operational activities of the Board and other policies governing the functions of the Board and staff conduct. This Guide should be used in conjunction with the other policies and guidelines of the Board and the Fijian Government.

2.0 What is NTS?

- 2.1 These are full scholarships only for the top ranked students who have completed their Year 13 or equivalent foundation studies in a year proceeding the award year.
- 2.2 The Scholarship is awarded only in fields which fall under the priority areas established by the Fijian Government. Students must first receive an offer letter from a Higher Education Institution of their choice to be confirmed for NTS.
- 2.3 NTS Scholarships are only offered for Studies at a locally approved Higher Education Institution. No Overseas study is funded under NTS

3.0 NUMBER OF NTS AWARDS

- 3.1 Currently there are 630 NTS Awards.
- 3.2 However, the exact number of awards and the distribution per priority area will be determined on annual basis.

4.0 FIJIAN GOVERNMENT'S PRIORITY AREAS

1. Tourism

- ✚ Bachelor of Commerce in Hotel Management.

2. Infrastructure

- ✚ Bachelor of Engineering: Civil Engineering (including Hydrology, Hydraulic Engineering, Road Engineering), Electrical/Electronic Engineering, Energy Engineering Mechanical Engineering, (Including Mill Engineering), Chemical Engineering.

3. Mining and Milling

- ✚ Bachelor's Degree: Mining (Including Rock Mechanics, Geology); Mill Engineering.

4. Medicine and Health

- ✚ MBBS: Bachelor's Degree: Oral Health, Dental Surgery, Dietetics, Biomedical, Engineering, Dermatology, Nursing, Public Health, Medical Lab Sciences, Physiotherapy, and Pharmacy.

5. Agriculture, Fisheries, Forestry

- ✚ Bachelor's Degree: Agriculture (majors in: Pathology, Entomology, Agricultural Engineering, Biosecurity, Quarantine, Agribusiness, Agriculture Marketing), Veterinary Sciences, Forestry, Fisheries, Aquaculture, Fish Technology, Food Technology).

6. Technology

- ✚ Bachelor Degree: Computer Sciences, (Networking, Software Development Programing), Library Sciences, Information System, Media and Journalism.

7. Social Sciences

- ✚ Bachelor's Degree: Social Work, Social Policy, and Policy Administration.

8. Environment/Marine Science

- ✚ Bachelor's Degree in: Environmental Science, Environmental Management (Including in Mining), Meteorology, Applied Computing.

9. Land/Town Planning

- ✚ Bachelor's Degree: Land Surveying, Urban and Regional Planning, Real Estate and Property Management, Geo-Spatial Engineering, GIS/Land Acquisition.

10. Commerce

- ✚ Bachelor of Commerce: Accounting, Economics, Finance, Official Statistics, Project Planning & Management, Property Management and Valuation, Occupational Health and Safety.

11. Education

- ✚ Bachelor of Education : Primary Ed, Secondary Ed. (Science, Technology, TVET, Food& Textiles, Home Economics, Maths, Physics, Special Education, Commerce, Social Science, Languages, Counselling, Computer Sciences).

12. Special Areas of High Priority –Diplomas and Certificate.

- ✚ Marine Studies (Nautical Sciences & Engineering), Culinary Arts, Mining, Land Surveying, Aviation (Aircraft Maintenance Engineering and Avionics), Early Childhood Education, Forensic Science, Fashion.

The exact number of awards each year and for each priority area will be as per the budget allocation for each academic year.

7.0 QUALIFYING INSTITUTIONS

7.1 The following local Higher Education Institutions qualify for the NTS awards under the Fijian Governments priority areas:

- ✚ University of Fiji
- ✚ Fiji National University
- ✚ The University of the South Pacific
- ✚ Corpus Christi Teachers College
- ✚ Fulton University College
- ✚ Sangam Institute of Nursing
- ✚ Centre for Applied Technology Development

B. SCHOLARSHIP TERMS AND CONDITIONS

1. CONFIRMATION

1.1 Confirmation of the award is subject to the following condition being satisfied;

- I. Proper completion of Bond Form requirements and submitting the same to TSLB.
- II. Accepting the Provisional Offer letter and submitting the signed copies to TSLB;
- III. Proof that courses or subject being pursued this year are not repeat courses from previous years under any Scholarship or Loans Scheme.
- IV. Offer letter for a place or evidence of registration or pre-enrolment at the chosen approved Higher Education Institution.
- V. The awardee is not a recipient of another scholarship, whether partial or full.
- VI. Open an account with a bank and submit your account number with evidence to TSLB. All financial assistance except for the tuition fees, book allowances and hostel payments are released to you through your Bank account

1.2 The offer will be automatically cancelled if any or all of the above conditions is/are not met.

1.3 All NTS Scholarship recipients must commence their studies from the first academic of the HEI's academic year. Failure to do so will nullify the award.

1.4 A student cannot defer a scholarship to a later semester or year.

1.5 If the scholarship is not accepted within the specified date on the scholarship letter, your scholarship will be allocated to another eligible student.

1.6 If a student does not enrol and study in the first semester of the year that a scholarship is offered, the student will not be eligible for a scholarship and the scholarship will be terminated.

1.7 The scholarship cannot be transferred to another person by the person to whom the offer is made.

1.8 If at any time, it is discovered that any information submitted on the Bond Form, Application Form, Advisory Form or any other documents submitted is false, the awardee's award will be withdrawn/terminated immediately.

2. DURATION

- 2.1. The Scholarship award will be for a period equivalent to the minimum program duration of a student's choice at the respective Higher Education Institution OR as soon as a student completes the programme of studies, the earlier of the two.
- 2.2. The recipient will have to shoulder the cost at their own expense if the approved studies go beyond the approved period.
- 2.3. The duration of the scholarship will be advised in a student's offer letter. Not all scholarship durations are the same.

3. CHANGE IN PROGRAM/DEGREE MAJOR (S)/MINOR/INSTITUTION

- 3.1. Any change in program/major/minor/institution must be approved by the Tertiary Scholarship and Loans Board. Any approved change by the Board shall be completed within the duration not exceeding the duration specified the bond form from the initial semester of the award under the agreement.
- 3.2. For any approved change students will be liable to pay the difference in fees or any additional allowances.
- 3.3. Change in programs from the awarded area of priority to another priority area will not be granted.
- 3.4. At the very latest, shifting of course/transferring to another school may be allowed during the first year under the scholarship.
- 3.5. If request is approved, the student and the guarantor(s) shall sign the amendatory agreement which shall be made an integral part of recipient's scholarship agreement.

4. SCHOLARSHIP PRIVILEGES

- 4.1. During the regular academic year:
 - **School fees.** Tuition and other school fees based on the Statement of Account/Bill/Official Receipt payable directly to the Higher Education Institute.
 - **Book allowance.** Prescribed textbooks and essential school supplies to be paid to the Higher Education Institute at FJD1, 000.00 per academic year.

- **Accommodation and Meals:** Payable to students/Hostels etc at FJD2, 400.00 per academic terms for Semester based studies and at FJD2, 000 per academic term terms for Trimester based studies.
- **Monthly incidental allowance.** During actual study, for 4/5-month duration of an academic year at FJD100.00 per month.

4.2. During the summer/winter term:

4.2.1 TSLB can avail of financial assistance if you are required to enrol as per your curriculum of study for:

- **Tuition and other school fees only.**
- **No allowances will be paid.**

5. ENJOYMENT OF ANY OTHER SCHOLARSHIP AWARD

5.1 An award recipient cannot enjoy other government scholarships simultaneous with this scholarship or any other scholarship award that interferes with the recipient's contractual obligation under the NTS Scholarship.

6. REVIEW OF AWARD

6.1. This Scholarship will be reviewed on an academic term to term basis and students will be immediately suspended or the award terminated if he/she::

- I. Fails to meet the required GPA , which is 3.0 or it's equivalence per each academic term;
- II. Fails to maintain and take full academic load as per the eligibility criteria for the Higher Education Institute for each semester/ trimester/penster during the duration of the program under the award;
- III. Is academically suspended/terminated by the Higher Education Institute;
- IV. Abandons his/her studies without the approval of the board;
- V. Is deregistered for any reason including disciplinary action instituted by the Higher Education Institute;
- VI. Changes programme / majors without the approval of the Tertiary Scholarship and Loans Board;

- VII. Provides false and misleading information to the Board with the objective of gaining financial advantage;
- VIII. Engages in any conduct during the period of sponsorship that brings disrepute to TSLB or the Fijian Government; or
- IX. Is required to repeat a semester/years' work in order to complete his/her programme.

6.2. The cost of any failed units already funded under the award or any existing award or scholarship re-attempted to enable the student to complete the program will be borne by the students themselves.

6.3. The Scholarship does not support foundation studies.

15.2 Should the award be terminated on the above grounds, amongst others or the student wish to terminate the award agreement, the student will be required to repay the monetary value the Fijian Government has utilised from the commencement date till the termination of the award together with the applicable penalty rate at the time of termination in one single payment or depending on the circumstances of each case on its own merit. The Board's discretion is unfettered.

7. ACADEMIC OBLIGATION AND GRADE DEFICIENCY

7.1. Grantees must fully comply with the GPA requirements at all times. The required GPA for the continuation of the award is 3.0 or above.

7.2. TSLB may recommend the continuation of the scholarship grant on a case by case basis for a graduating scholar or a scholar who fails to meet the grade requirement but in good academic standing during the preceding years of his/her scholarship.

7.3. Academic progress will be assessed each academic term, and within one or two weeks of the release of results to TSLB.

7.4. If your performance falls below the required average the procedure detailed below will be followed.

7.5. If you applied for and were granted special consideration (or if other extenuating circumstances apply), and this was approved by TSLB, no action will be taken and you will receive your scholarship payment as per usual.

Otherwise:

1. You will be notified in writing by TSLB that your performance is under review and that you are on probation. You will be paid whilst you are on probation.
2. If you meet the required minimum GPA in the term you are on probation, the probation status will be removed in the following term and you will be paid.
3. If you do not meet the required minimum GPA in the term you are on probation, your scholarship will be suspended in the following term. You will not receive payment while your scholarship is suspended.
4. If you meet the required minimum GPA in the term you are suspended, your scholarship will be reinstated in the following term and payments will resume. No retrospective scholarship payments will be made for the period of suspension.
5. If you do not meet the required minimum GPA in the term you are suspended, your scholarship will be terminated and no further payments will be made.

7.6. A maximum of one probation and one suspension will be considered during the award duration as stated in the offer letter.

7.7. Students whose NTS gets suspended are eligible to apply for TELS for the period under suspension as far as their GPA allows them to progress to the next term and are not on academic suspension by the Higher Education Institution.

7.8. In any of the cases above, should you wish to appeal the decision of the Board, you are required to appeal to the Solicitor General's Office in writing stating clearly the grounds for appeal within 14 days of receipt of this notification.

8. OBLIGATIONS OF GUARANTORS

8.1. Assume the civil liabilities that you may incur under the agreement, as well as civil liabilities which you may incur in favour of other persons;

8.2. Assume the obligation to pay whatever amount you shall be required to refund in the event that the student fails to comply with the bond requirements or if the scholarship is terminated in accordance with the provisions of the Scholarship Agreement.

9. DEFERRING SCHOLARSHIPS

- 9.1.** TSLB may consider deferment of a student's scholarship(s) if a student's attendance at the Higher Education Institute is affected for medical reasons, military deployment, national duties or other selected reasons, provided that a student meets certain criteria.
- 9.2.** For a student's scholarship(s) to be deferred, the student must attend at least one full-time year of studies prior to his or her departure and meet the minimum criteria for renewal of his or her scholarship(s) during the semester(s) he or she attends prior to leaving.
- 9.3.** Enrolment at another Higher Education Institute of acceptance of another award during the deferment period will result in an automatic cancellation of the scholarship.
- 9.4.** Deferment of studies without prior written approval from TSLB will be deemed as abandonment of studies and will result in an automatic termination of the award by TSLB.
- 9.5.** To request a deferral, a student should submit a letter/deferment of studies application form, prior to the departure requesting the scholarship be held for a specified period of time. The application must include when the student is leaving, when he or she plans to return, and the reason for the deferment request (evidence such as medical certificate etc. must be attached).
- 9.6.** TSLB's general policy is that scholarships can be held for up to two academic years and approval is dependent on the availability of remaining scholarship funds.
- 9.7.** No deferment of studies will be allowed for vacation purposes.
- 9.8.** The letter should be submitted to the TSLB Offices located in Suva, Lautoka and Labasa or by email scholarships@tslb.com.fj.

10. NON-COMPLIANCE CASES

- 10.1.** A non-compliance case refers to a scholar who has not submitted the following required periodic reports to TSLB for two (2) consecutive academic terms or the same is not submitted by the HEI's due to the student not enrolling for the required units:
1. Official grades
 2. registration form or certificate of enrolment

3. Request for leave of absence/Deferment of Studies
4. Other pertinent documents

10.2. A non-complying student may be suspended for the period he/she stopped reporting (no more than 2 academic terms). A non-compliance status beyond two (2) academic terms will result in termination of the award.

10.3. A Non-Compliant student may appeal for the reinstatement of his/her scholarship during the suspension period.

10.4. If after evaluation of a student's academic records, his/her scholarship can be reinstated, his/her financial privileges shall resume only effective the semester his/her scholarship is reinstated. His/her financial assistance is forfeited during the semesters he/she did not report.

10.5. A student who has stopped studying for more than two academic terms and the award is not reinstated shall be considered to have wilfully abandoned the scholarship; thus, he/she shall be required to refund the total financial assistance he/she received as a student plus the applicable penalty rate at the time of termination.

11. ENROLMENT OF SUBJECT LOAD PER ACADEMIC TERM

11.1. NTS scholarships require undergraduate students to enrol in the full subject load of the program of study as per the academic regulation of the Higher Education Institute.

11.2. Scholarships will disburse as long as they meet all of the requirements for the award and are enrolled in at least the required full academic load or credits.

11.3. Students must also remain enrolled in at least the required full academic load. If a student has dropped enrolment below the full load requirement, the scholarship may be cancelled.

11.4. If a student wishes to reduce his/her enrolment and want to keep the scholarship, the student will need to notify TSLB in advance by submitting a written request, with current documentation that supports your request.

11.5. The following requirements must be submitted by the student to TSLB if he/she wishes to withdraw from a unit(s) after the normal withdrawal period (without any penalty by the HEI) of the HEI's:

- Letter from the Course Coordinator/HEI clearly highlight the student's academic progress till the point of planned withdrawal. The letter must include the students course work marks/grades;
- Medical Report indicating that the student is not able to continue with the studies if the planned withdrawal is on medical grounds;
- Any additional documents which TSLB may require on a case by case basis.

11.6. If the request to continue with the scholarship while studying on reduced enrolment load is approved , the student will continue to receive scholarship entitlements for a period of not more than the duration on the students offer letter.

11.7. A student's scholarship duration will not be extended, even if continuation of the scholarship during reduced enrolment study is approved.

11.8. A study load of less than 50% of the allowable units in an academic term is deemed to be a part-time load and may lead to the termination of the award and/or payment of the allowances on a pro-rata basis.

11.9. If a student wishes to completely withdraw from the HEI or from a unit after payment of tuition and/or allowances for the academic term, any TSLB scholarship will be cancelled from the students account and the student will be required to refund the payments already made to TSLB before any withdrawal is authorised.

12. EXTENSION OF SCHOLARSHIP

12.1. The Tertiary Scholarship and Loans Board reserve the right to extend or terminate the award if it deems it necessary to do so.

12.2. Recipient's general conduct on campus, academic performance or any other report that will be received from the Institution will be considered in deciding on the extension or termination of the award.

12.3. Any approved extension of the award will be for tuition only and no allowances will be paid.

13. BOND

13.1. Award recipients are required to sign and undertake to serve the Fijian Government for duration of studies multiplied by 1.5. The following should be carefully noted.

- I. The bond documents (2 sets) must be completed and guaranteed by two working persons residing in Fiji (minimum income of FJD10,000 per annum) and who should be in the position to repay the sum of money should the student fail to comply with the terms of the award. In case the recipient cannot find a guarantor, he/she needs to provide a statutory declaration to put himself/herself as the guarantor.
- II. It is important that guarantors fully understand their responsibilities and obligation towards the agreement.
- III. A third person must witness the signature. The award recipient and the guarantor should not witness each other's signature.

13.2. Award recipient's tuition and/or allowances will not be paid until TSLB receives the bond agreement, duly and satisfactorily completed.

13.3. The award recipient's bond period will be 1.5 times the duration of studies under the Scholarship.

14. PERIODIC REPORTS DURING THE DURATION OF STUDIES

14.1. It will be the responsibility of the student to provide TSLB certified copy/official copy of the following:

1. **Registration form** – submitted within two weeks at the beginning of the new academic terms if the same is not submitted by the HEI's.
2. **Report of grades (in all the subjects you are enrolled in)** – submitted at the end of the academic terms if the same is not submitted by the HEI's.
3. **Advisory Forms** – include any plan for travel/s abroad; changes, if any, in field of study, school, home address, civil status, legal guardian, comments which may be relevant to your study, and such reports that may be required from time to time.
4. **Program Audit Certificate**- at the end of each academic year, before 30 December of each academic year.

15. TERMINATION OF SCHOLARSHIP

15.1 TSLB reserves the right to terminate your scholarship if you:

1. Fail to maintain the grade requirements; or

2. Fail to comply with any of the terms and conditions of the Scholarship Agreement.
- 15.2 Upon the termination of the scholarship, the recipient shall refund the total financial assistance received as a scholar together with the applicable penalty rate at the time of termination.

16 SERVICE IN THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI

- 16.1 Immediately after graduation, the recipients shall render service in the country:
- i. On a full-time basis, preferably in your home region, along your field of training; and
 - ii. For a minimum period equivalent to the length of time you enjoyed the scholarship.
- 16.2 The recipient can work either in a government agency (priority), industrial establishment or private company (Upon written approval from TSLB) in the country.
- 16.3 In the rendition of the service, the recipient must be locally employed and physically present in the country for your service to be credited.
- 16.4 After a recipient has completed his/her service obligation, he/she must **submit certification/s of employment covering the number of years required of the recipient** for TSLB will issue you a final clearance.

17 ACCOMMODATION

- 17.1 All accommodation arrangements shall be the responsibility of the student. TSLB will not be involved in any way.

18 LISTING WITH IMMIGRATION

- 18.1 Upon the acceptance of this offer and the submission of the duly signed bond form, the award recipient's name will be listed on the watch list of the Fijian Immigration Department.
- 18.2 The award recipient's name will remain on the controversial list unless the bond period is fully served.

19 REQUIREMENTS UPON COMPLETION OF STUDIES

19.1 Upon completion of studies under the award, the recipient must submit and keep TSLB dated on the following:

- I. Program Completion Letter from the Higher Education Institution;
- II. Complete Academic Transcript and Certificate upon Graduation;
- III. Original Copy of the Bank Statement for the duration of sponsorship used for the receipt of the allowances;
- IV. Employment Contract letter (s) until the bond is fully served. Bond clearance letter will only be issued upon production of evidence by the award receipt of the required years of service. For any change(s) in employment, notification in writing must be sent to TSLB.

20 PERMISSION TO TRAVEL ABOARD

20.1 Students must obtain written clearance from the Board by meeting all requirements should they wish to travel abroad during the bond period by giving at least 10 days prior notice to the Board.

20.2 No travel release will be granted during an academic term unless the application is driven by compassionate or compelling circumstances. Not including in the compelling circumstances are travel for holidays or leisure and pleasure.

21 COMMUNICATION/CORRESPONDENCE

21.1 TSLB will send any correspondence regarding a successful application or any other issues relating to the application and the award to the email address or other contact details you put on your application.

21.2 If you change any contact details, including your email address post the application, during your studies or post-graduation until such time you have fully served the bond, you must advise TSLB of the change(s).

21.3 Please note that if you do not respond to requests for information by TSLB by requested dates your scholarship may be terminated or suspended.

22.0 SCHOLARSHIPS EVENTS

22.1 If you attend any scholarship events, photos of you at the event (along with your name and scholarship), may be forwarded to TSLB to be used for TSLB promotional purposes.

22.2 If you do not wish the HEI's to forward or use these photos, you must notify TSLB in writing prior to the event.

22.3 By accepting the offer and entering into a bond agreement, a student also authorizes TSLB to obtain any relevant information about the from the HEI, employer, FRCA and any other relevant person(s) or entities until the bond requirements are fully completed for the performance of the functions of TSLB under the Act

23. AMENDMENT(S) TO THIS POLICY

23.1 TSLB reserves the right to change this policy from time to time.

23.2 TSLB may make changes to these Terms and Conditions without notice.

DRAFT