

TERTIARY SCHOLARSHIP & LOANS BOARD

NATIONAL TOPPERS SCHOLARSHIP SCHEME (“NTS”) GUIDELINES AND POLICIES

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/concerned, do not rely on this document. Instead, review the law yourself or consult your attorney.

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NATIONAL TOPPERS SCHOLARSHIP SCHEME – GUIDELINES AND POLICIES

A. OVERVIEW OF THE SCHEME

1.0 INTENT

- 1.2 The intent of this policy document is to provide information to the applicants, awardees and the general public on the procedures for applying, receiving scholarships and to serve as a guide for facilitators of the process.
- 1.3 It is envisioned that this policy will serve as a framework from which reflective assessment and innovative thinking will emerge and informed decisions are made by the applicants and recipients of the National Toppers Scheme Award.
- 1.4 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.
- 1.5 This guide should be used in conjunction with the other relevant laws, policies and guidelines of the Board and the Fijian Government.

2.0 WHAT IS NTS?

- 2.1 These are full scholarships awarded to the top ranked students who have completed their Year 13 or equivalent foundation studies in a year preceding the award year.
- 2.2 The Scholarship is awarded only in fields which fall under the national priority areas established by the Fijian Government. Students must first obtain an offer letter from a Higher Education Institution of their choice to be confirmed for NTS.
- 2.3 NTS awards are mostly awarded for studies at a locally approved Higher Education Institution. However, a limited number of scholarships may be awarded for overseas studies in national priority areas for programs not offered locally on an annual basis.

3.0 NUMBER OF NTS AWARDS

3.1 Currently there are 970 NTS Awards. This consists of 950 local awards and 20 for overseas studies.

3.2 The number of awards per academic year is subject to changes as announced in the national budget.

4.0 FIJIAN GOVERNMENT'S PRIORITY AREAS

National Toppers Scholarship – Local Award Scheme	No. Of Awards
Tourism: Bachelor of Commerce in Hotel Management/ Hospitality and Tourism Management. NEW: Tourism and Management	30
Engineering: Bachelor of Engineering: Civil Engineering (including Hydrology, Hydraulic Engineering, Road Engineering), Electrical/Electronic Engineering, Energy Engineering Mechanical Engineering, (Including Mill Engineering), Chemical Engineering, Honours Degree in Civil, Mechanical or Electrical Engineering	90
Mining and Milling: Bachelor's Degree: Mining (Including Rock Mechanics, Geology); Mill Engineering.	15
Medicine and Health: MBBS: Bachelor's Degree: Oral Health, Dental Surgery, Dietetics, Biomedical, Engineering, Dermatology, Nursing, Public Health, Medical Lab Sciences, Physiotherapy, and Pharmacy. NEW: Medical Imaging Science	260
Agriculture, Fisheries & Forests: Bachelor's Degree: Agriculture (majors in: Pathology, Entomology, Agricultural Engineering, Biosecurity, Quarantine, Agribusiness, Agriculture Marketing), Veterinary Sciences, Forestry, Fisheries, Aquaculture, Fish Technology, Food Technology).	50
Technology: Bachelor Degree: Networking, Software Development, Programming, Library Sciences, Media and Journalism, Information System. NEW: Computing Science, Information Technology, Applied Computing	50
Social Sciences: Bachelor's Degree: Social Work, Social Policy, and Policy Administration. NEW: 10 awards for Degree in Psychology and Counselling	25
Environment/ Marine Science: Bachelor's Degree in: Environmental Science, Environmental Management (Including in Mining) and Meteorology. NEW: Climate Change, Marine Management	50
Land/Town Planning: Bachelor's Degree: Land Surveying, Urban and Regional Planning, Real Estate and Property Management, Geo-Spatial Engineering, GIS/Land Acquisition. NEW: Real Estate and Property Valuation	40
Commerce: Bachelor of Commerce: Accounting, Economics, Finance, Official Statistics, Project Planning & Management, Property Management and Valuation, Occupational Health and Safety, Information Systems, Professional Accounting. NEW: HRM and Industrial Relations, Public Administration and Management	240
Education: Bachelor of Education: Primary Ed, Secondary Ed. (Science, Technology, TVET, Mathematics, Physics, Food& Textiles, Home Economics, Special Education, Commerce, Social Science, Languages, Counseling, Computer Sciences).	50
Special Areas – Diploma and Certificates: Marine Studies (Nautical Sciences & Engineering), Culinary Arts, Mining, Land Surveying, Aviation (Aircraft Maintenance	50

Engineering and Avionics), Early Childhood Education, Forensic Science, Fashion. NEW: 20 awards will be reserved for Counselling; 20 awards will be for the following areas: Special and Inclusive Education, Social and Community Work, Project Management, Geospatial Science, Organic Farming, Aquaculture, Horticulture, Animal Health and Husbandry while the remaining 10 awards will be for other special areas in this category.	
TOTAL	950
National Toppers Scholarship – Overseas Award Scheme	
Priority Areas	No. of Awards
NEW: Priority Areas of the National Toppers Scholarship Scheme that are not currently offered by a local institution. For example, Bachelor’s Degree in, Speech Therapists, Educational and Clinical Psychologists, Occupational Therapists, Nutritionists, Customs, Forensic Science, Meteorology, Forensic Accounting, Actuarial Science, Genetic Science and Molecular Biology, Biomedical Engineering, Architecture and Town Planning.	20

5.0 QUALIFYING INSTITUTIONS

5.1 The following local Higher Education Institutions qualify for the NTS awards for the programs 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

5.2 For overseas studies, applicants must secure a placement on their own prior to applying for the scholarship. The cost of the program and related expenses will be considered as relevant factors in deciding on the application.

B. SCHOLARSHIP TERMS AND CONDITIONS CONFIRMATION

1.0 Confirmation of the award is subject to the following conditions being satisfied:

1. Acceptance of the Provisional Offer letter and submission of the signed copies to TSLB;
2. Proper completion of Bond Form requirements and submitting the same to TSLB.

3. Offer letter for a place or evidence of registration or pre-enrolment at the chosen approved Higher Education Institution.
 4. The awardee must not be a recipient of any other scholarship/loans scheme.
 5. Confirmation of an account with a Bank/Registration for M-Paisa and E-Ticketing and provision of the relevant account details including account number to TSLB. All payments except for the tuition and related fees will be made to your nominated Bank account/M-Paisa Account.
- 1.1 The offer will be automatically cancelled if any or all of the above conditions is/are not fulfilled.
 - 1.2 All NTS Scholarship awardees must commence their studies from the first academic term of the HEI's academic year for which the offer is made. Failure to do so will nullify the award.
 - 1.3 A student cannot defer a scholarship to a later term or year.
 - 1.4 If the scholarship is not accepted within the specified date on the scholarship offer letter, the scholarship may be allocated to another eligible applicant.
 - 1.5 The scholarship cannot be transferred to another person(s) by the offeree.
 - 1.6 Should at any time, it is discovered that any information submitted on the Bond Form, Application Form, Change in Particulars Form or any other documents submitted is false, the award will be withdrawn/terminated immediately.

DURATION

- 2.0 The Scholarship 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 program of studies.
- 2.1 The awardee will have to bear the cost if the sponsored program exceeds the approved duration as per 2.1 above unless a written extension is granted by TSLB.
- 2.2 The exact terms and conditions of any extension approved by TSLB will be clearly stipulated in the appropriate Form(s).
- 2.3 The duration of the scholarship will be stated in the student's offer letter.

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

- 3.0 Any change in program/major/minor/institution must be prior approved by the Tertiary Scholarship and Loans Board in writing. Any approved change by the Board shall be completed within the duration specified by TSLB in the appropriate documentation(s).
- 3.1 TSLB will allow for the change in either the program/major/minor/institution once only during the continuance of sponsorship, provided that the change is requested by a student before the commencement of the second year of studies for non-medical students or before the commencement of the third year of studies for medical students.
- 3.2 Change in program from the awarded area of priority to another priority area will not be granted.
- 3.3 For any approved change in the program/major/minor or institution or any other change(s) to the condition(s) by TSLB, the awardee must enter into an amended bond agreement with the Fiji Revenue and Customs Service (“FRCS”).

SCHOLARSHIP PRIVILEGES

4.0 The local Scholarship will cover the following:

- ✚ Tuition: Tuition and related 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 at the rate of FJD1, 000.00 per academic year.
 - ✚ Accommodation and Meals: Payable to students/Hostels etc. at FJD2, 400.00 per academic term for Semester based students and at FJD2, 000 per academic term for Trimester based students.
- 4.1 For NTS overseas scholarship, tuition and academic related expenses, international travelling costs (return), annual stipend (will differ from one country to another), and any other costs as deemed necessary by the Board will be covered.
 - 4.2 TSLB reserves that right to review and change the award privileges from time to time without any prior notice.
 - 4.3 TSLB may avail financial assistance if the awardee enrolls for summer/winter classes within the sponsorship duration.

ENJOYMENT OF ANY OTHER SCHOLARSHIP AWARD

5.0 The awardee cannot enjoy any other scholarship (s) simultaneously with the NTS Scholarship.

REVIEW OF AWARD

6.0 The Scholarship will be reviewed on a term to term basis and the award will be immediately suspended or terminated if the awardee:

- I. fails to meet the required GPA, which is 3.0 or it's equivalence per academic term;
- II. fails to maintain and take full academic load as per the eligibility criteria of the Higher Education Institute for each academic term within the duration of the program;
- III. is academically suspended/terminated by the Higher Education Institute.
- IV. abandons the study;
- V. is deregistered for any reason including disciplinary action instituted by the Higher Education Institute;
- VI. changes program/majors/minor/institution without the prior written approval of TSLB;
- VII. provides false and misleading information to TSLB with the objective of gaining financial advantage;
- VIII. engages in any conduct that is likely to bring disrepute to TSLB or the Fijian Government and;
- IX. is required to repeat consecutively a term/years' work in order to complete the program.

6.1 The Awardee must apply for financial assistance under the Tertiary Education Loans Scheme ("TELS") for repeat of any course(s) failed after 1 August 2017. The cost of any subsequent repeat of course(s) will be borne by the awardee.

6.2 TSLB will fund for the remaining non- repeat course(s) during any period in which the awardee is required to subsequently repeat course(s)

6.3 The Scholarship does not support foundation courses which are not part of the approved program for NTS funding.

6.4 Should the award be terminated on the grounds as specified in 6.0 above, amongst others or the awardee decides to terminate the award, the total amount expended by the Fiji Government till the date of termination of the award with the applicable penalty rate at the time of termination must be repaid in one single payment or under any other arrangement with the Fiji Revenue and Customs Service ("FRCS"). FRCS's discretion is unfettered.

6.5 Should the awardee wish to appeal the decision of the Board, the appeal must be submitted to the Solicitor-General's Office in writing stating clearly the grounds for appeal within 14 days of the receipt of the written notification from TSLB.

ACADEMIC OBLIGATION AND GRADE DEFICIENCY

7.0 The awardee must comply with the GPA requirements at all times. The required GPA for the continuation of the award is 3.0 or above per academic term.

7.1 TSLB may recommend the continuation of the scholarship grant on a case by case basis for a graduating awardee or an awardee that fails to meet the grade requirement but has been in good academic standing during the preceding years of the scholarship.

7.2 In case the awardee's performance falls below the required average the procedure detailed below will be followed:

7.2.1 Where application is made and approval granted for special consideration (or if other extenuating circumstances apply), no action will be taken and the awardee will receive the scholarship payments as per usual.

Otherwise:

1. The awardee will be notified in writing by TSLB that his/her performance is under review and that he/she is on probation. The awardee will be paid whilst on probation.
2. Should the awardee meet the required minimum GPA in the term he/she is on probation, the probation status will be removed in the following term and he/she will be paid.
3. Should the awardee fail to meet the required minimum GPA in the term on probation, the award will be suspended for the following term. The awardee will not receive payments while on suspension.
4. Should the awardee meet the required minimum GPA in the term on suspension, the award will be reinstated for the following term and payments will resume. No retrospective scholarship payments will be made for the period of suspension.
5. Should the awardee fail to meet the required minimum GPA in the term on suspension, the award will be terminated and no further payments will be made.

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

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

OBLIGATIONS OF GUARANTORS FOR OVERSEAS TRAVEL RELEASE

- 8.0 Assume the civil liabilities that may be incurred under the bond, as well as the civil liabilities which may be incurred in favor of another person(s).
- 8.1 In the event that the awardee fails to comply with the overseas travel bond, the guarantor will be held liable for the debt, including any applicable penalty.

DEFERMENT OF THE AWARD

- 9.0 TSLB may consider deferment of an award if the attendance at the Higher Education Institute is affected for medical reasons; military deployment, national duties or any other reason(s) as deemed appropriate by TSLB,
- 9.1 For an award to be deferred, the awardee must attend at least one full-time year of studies prior to the proposed deferment and meet the minimum criteria for renewal of the award during the academic term (s) attended prior to the application for deferment.
- 9.2 Enrolment at any other Higher Education Institute or acceptance of another award during the deferment period will result in an automatic cancellation of the award unless prior written approval from TSLB is obtained.
- 9.3 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.
- 9.4 To request for a deferral, the awardee must submit the appropriate form(s) along with all relevant documentations.
- 9.5 TSLB's general policy is that awards may be deferred for periods up to one academic year and approval is dependent on the availability of remaining scholarship funds.
- 9.6 No deferment of studies will be allowed for vacation purposes.

NON-COMPLIANCE CASES

- 10.0 A non-compliance case refers to an awardee who has not submitted the following required periodic reports to TSLB for two (2) or more consecutive academic terms or the same is not submitted by the HEI's due to the student not enrolling for the required units:

- ✓ Official grades
- ✓ Enrolment reports
- ✓ Request for leave of absence/Deferment of Studies
- ✓ Other pertinent documents

- 10.1 A non-complying awardee may be suspended for the period he/she stopped is in breach of 10.0 above (no more than 2 academic terms). A non-compliance status beyond two (2) academic terms will result in termination of the award.
- 10.2 A Non-Compliant awardee may appeal for the reinstatement of his/her scholarship.
- 10.3 For cases where after evaluation of an awardee's appeal the scholarship may be reinstated, financial privileges may resume only effective from the academic terms the scholarship has been reinstated. The financial assistance is forfeited during the academic terms(s) of non-compliance.
- 10.4 An awardee that has stopped studying for more than two academic terms shall be considered to have willfully abandoned the scholarship; thus, will be required to refund the total financial assistance received as a student plus the applicable penalty rate at the time of termination.

ACADEMIC LOAD PER TERM

- 11.0 The awardee must enroll in the full academic load of the sponsored program as per the academic regulation of the Higher Education Institute.
- 11.1 Allowances will be paid based on the academic load and if the awardee is enrolled for fewer courses than required, allowances will be paid on a pro-rata basis.
- 11.2 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.
- 11.3 TSLB reserves the right to pay the allowances in one or more batches.
- 11.4 Should the awardee intend to withdraw from the HEI or from a course after payment of tuition and/or allowances for the academic term, the award will be withdrawn and the awardee will be required to refund the payments already made before any approval is authorized by TSLB.

- 11.5 Should the awardee wish to reduce the academic load while maintaining the scholarship, prior written approval must be obtained from TSLB.
- 11.6 The following requirements must be submitted by an awardee to TSLB if an awardee wishes to withdraw from a course(s) after the normal withdrawal period (without any penalty by the HEI) of the HEI's:
- I. Letter from the Course Coordinator/HEI which clearly highlights the academic progress till the point of planned withdrawal. The letter must include the course work marks/grades;
 - II. Medical Report indicating that the awardee is not able to continue with the studies if the planned withdrawal is on medical grounds; and
 - III. Any additional documents which TSLB may request on a case by case basis.
- 11.7 In case the request to continue with the scholarship while studying on a reduced enrolment load is approved, the awardee will continue to receive scholarship entitlements for a period of not more than the duration of the offer letter or as per the terms and conditions of any subsequent extension(s) approved by the Board.

EXTENSION OF SCHOLARSHIP

- 12.0 The Tertiary Scholarship and Loans Board reserves the right to extend or terminate the award if it deems it necessary.
- 12.1 The awardee'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.
- 12.2 Any approved extension of the award will be on terms and conditions as determined by the Board.

BOND

- 13.0 An awardee is required to sign and undertake to serve the Fijian Government for the duration of studies multiplied by 1.5. The following are relevant:
- I. The bond documents (2 sets) must be completed and guaranteed by the obligor.
 - II. A prescribed person on the bond form must witness the signature.

13.1 An awardee's tuition and/or allowances will not be paid until TSLB receives the bond agreement and offer letter, duly and satisfactorily completed.

SERVICE IN THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI

14.0 Immediately after graduation, the awardee must render service in the country:

- I. On a full-time basis, preferably in their home region, in line with the sponsored field of training; and
- II. For a minimum period, equivalent to the length of time he/she benefited from the scholarship multiplied by 1.5

14.1 The awardee may work either in a government agency (priority), industrial establishment or private company (Upon written approval from TSLB) in the country.

14.2 In the rendition of the service, the awardee must be locally employed or employed with a business legally registered in and physically present in the country for the service to be credited.

ACCOMMODATION

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

LISTING WITH IMMIGRATION

16.0 Upon the confirmation of the award, the awardee's name will be listed in the Department of Immigration controversial list by FRCS.

16.1 The awardee's name will remain in the controversial list until the bond period has been fully served.

REQUIREMENTS UPON COMPLETION OF STUDIES

17.0 Upon completion of studies, the awardee must submit and keep TSLB updated on the following:

- I. Program Completion Letter from the Higher Education Institution;
- II. Complete Academic Transcript and Certificate upon Graduation; and

- 17.1 The awardee must immediately submit to FRCS, a copy of the employment contract or appointment letter for the purpose of bond service monitoring.
- 17.2 Bond clearance letter will be issued by FRCS upon production of evidence by the awardee for the completion of the years of service required.
- 17.3 For any change(s) in employment, notification in writing must be submitted to FRCS.

PERMISSION TO TRAVEL ABOARD

- 18.0 The awardee must obtain prior written clearance from FRCS by meeting all requirements should he/she wish to travel abroad during the bond period by giving at least 14 days' advance notice.
- 18.1 No travel release will be granted during an academic term unless the application is driven by compassionate or compelling circumstances as approved by FRCS.
- 18.2 The awardee must provide two suitable local guarantors with an annual minimum income of FJD10, 000.
- 18.3 The guarantors will undertake to pay the full sum owed by the awardee together with any interest or penalty accrued should the awardee fail to return to Fiji on the date stipulated on the Guarantee of Bond (Overseas Travel) Form.

COMMUNICATION/CORRESPONDENCE

- 19.0 TSLB/FRCS will send all correspondences regarding the Scholarship to the email address (es) or other contact details as per the awardees' application form.
- 19.1 Should the awardee change any contact details, including the email address (es) post the application, during the period of studies or post-graduation until such time he/she has fully served the bond, TSLB and FRCS must be notified of the change(s) in writing.
- 19.2 By accepting the offer and entering into a bond agreement, the awardee also authorizes TSLB/FRCS to obtain any relevant information about him/her from the HEI, employer, FRCS/TSLB 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 Tertiary Scholarship and Loans Act 2014.

19.3 In case(s) the awardee fails to respond to requests for information by TSLB by the due date(s) the scholarship may be suspended or terminated.

SCHOLARSHIP EVENTS

20.0 Should the awardee attend any scholarship events, photos at the event (along with the awardees names), may be forwarded to TSLB to be used for TSLB promotional purposes.

20.1 In case the awardee does not wish the HEI to forward or use the events photos, the awardee must notify TSLB in writing prior to the event.

AMENDMENT(S) TO THIS POLICY

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

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