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(FORUM 4)

Commonwealth Shared Scholarship

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About the scholarship

The Commonwealth Shared Scholarship (CSS) is one of many scholarships provided by the commonwealth scholarship commission and is fully funded by the UK government and host universities. The scholarship is just for commonwealth developing nations. It is limited to a one-year master's program in the UK.

Application Process

First-hand information about the list of host universities, courses and deadline for application with regards to the CSS can be gotten via the application link. Before applying for the CSS on the Commonwealth Electronic Application System (EAS), you should already hold a conditional or an unconditional offer of admission from a university under the scholarship. So, your **first application is to the host university**. Be sure to read the requirements stipulated by each university you have chosen concerning the CSS. Some universities give priority to certain countries, knowing this could aid your choice of university. After you get your offer and, eventually, get nominated by the school, then you can now apply to EAS; there you would be asked to write **four essays** (Personal Statement, Home country Benefit, Future career and voluntary/leadership experience). The application link is as follows: <http://cscuk.dfid.gov.uk/apply/shared-scholarships/>

Tips on How to Secure the Scholarship

- In preparing for this scholarship, it is never too late to start but it helps to have started your preparations months before the scholarship opens. This allows you to: fully understand the application process, look at the stories of other scholars and how they got the scholarship and minimize the time you would spend researching on the scholarship when it opens.
- All courses offered and their host universities are already uploaded on the commonwealth shared scholarship page. While choosing your course, be realistic; choose courses relating to your background. It could either be professional, or academic background. This gives you more grounding in defending in your essays.
- In choosing a school, you need to get your priorities straight. Are you looking to do your masters in one of the top schools in the world? Or are you just looking to do your masters in a developed nation? In my case the latter was more important than the former, and it's not because I did not believe I could not get into those top schools, but I knew they would have tonnes of applicants and very limited spots. Be strategic in your approach. If you want to go for the big-name schools, do that, and give it all you've got. Don't compromise in any of the essays and sure you would get it.

The Ideal Personal Statement and Essay

A personal statement is an essay you write to show your readiness for a graduate program both in terms of skills and character. It is the opportunity to sell yourself to the admission committee; thus, you should discuss more about your **strengths** and **accomplishments** as well as **experience(s)** related to your intended programme of study. The statement should also contain the following key elements (if available): your **high grades, work experience, awards, reason for choosing the UK** as well as the university, the **modules** you will be taking, what you hope to do with the skills acquired, knowledge gained and degree you will be awarded after the programme.

Do not use the same personal statement you used in securing an offer letter from the university for your application on the CSS EAS. The requirement of commonwealth personal statement is different. When talking about your experience, link it to: how it motivates you to study for a Master's degree, how it has shaped you, and how it makes you want to do better for your home country. Let your essay provide a reflection that you're

a part of Nigeria's future in your field. Ensure you place significance on the short essays as much as the longer ones. Be clear, explicit and specific whilst expressing your short and long term career goals.

Avoid presenting cases of "being from an economically disadvantaged background" without the attendant discussion of your achievements despite such background, or how you overcame the challenge.

Note that the university will assess your essay and if all requirements have been fulfilled, they nominate you for the CSS. Your essays will be reviewed by the CSS, although there's almost no chance of rejecting you once the school has nominated you. However, for some schools, the commonwealth scholarship commission do not assess the essays at all. When nominated, they just check to make sure you fulfil all conditions.

Writing Award-Winning References

There is a guideline which the commission will send to the mail of the academic referee you submit. Tell them to read and write according to that please. Better still, you can create a trial account in the EAS for a rough application (perhaps to a school and or a programme of which you do not plan following up with) whereby you fill in a friend's email or yours as referee email just so you can be well aware of what is required. Write accordingly and address the points as contained in the reference guideline and forward to your referees that they may write the letter properly for the purpose of your real application.

An ideal reference letter will address the following:

- ✓ How deep your relationship is and in what capacity? This should include the classes they took you, supervision, field practical, research thesis supervision and so on.
- ✓ How long they have known you.
- ✓ Your attitude backed up with examples.
- ✓ Their conviction about how you will survive a rigorous training environment like the UK based on what you have done in Nigeria.
- ✓ Your leadership experiences they know or teamwork or volunteering.

References carry so much weight, so give your referee close marking to write something so good and satisfactory.

Benefits of the Scholarship

It has both financial and non-financial benefits and as with other international scholarships, it expands your international exposure. You meet professionals in your field and beyond. CSC also organise many self-development programs that one can take advantage of.

The scholarship covers **tuition fee**, **Monthly stipend** of £1084, Payment of your **airfare** to and from the UK and a warm **clothing allowance** upon arrival in the UK. As for those who will be studying within the London metropolis, there will also be a **Thesis grant**, and for single mothers, there's a monthly stipend for the first three children.

Generic Questions and Answers

Q. Is it part of the scholarship terms and condition for scholars to return to their home country immediately after studies in UK?

A. Yes it is, although nothing stops you from returning to the UK afterwards.

Q. Can someone with a masters from a Developing Country indicate that while applying for another masters with CSS?

A. yes, I indicated that I was on an MSc program back when I was applying.

Q. Can one use the same essay format for all schools applied to?

A. Yes, the same format, although different essays should have slightly different contents; being that the courses you would be applying for would be different. However, in the case whereby you will be applying for the same courses at different schools, each essay should be distinct and fine-tuned so as to align with what the respective schools are looking for.

Q. Can one apply for CSS even when on another scholarship in the UK?

A. Terms and conditions of the scholarship says you must not be on another scholarship simultaneously.

Q. Does the CSS cover accommodation and living expenses?

A. commonwealth gives a stipend that is more than enough to cover living expenses—accommodation inclusive.

Q. Can one apply to more than one school for nomination under the CSS?

A. yes, as many as possible.

Q. must I secure an admission first from the host universities before applying for the scholarship?

A. You can do both simultaneously, however, you must be admitted before you can be considered for the scholarship.

Q. Will have to submit different application on CSS for the different schools I applied to?

A. yes, and for different courses too.

Q. Are standardized English tests like TOEFL/IELTS required, or can an MOI be accepted?

A. it depends on the school. Some will require proof of English test while others might just require a WAEC certificate.

Q. For people applying to many schools, how can we manage the referees we have?

A. Unless nominated, a prospective student won't be asked for referees. Moreover, only 3 references would be needed regardless the number of schools or programme you are applying to.

Q. what are the chances if one doesn't have as much papers or publications as required?

A. It is not a compulsory requirement. I did not have any back when I applied.