



Frequently Asked Questions

Nuclear-Powered Submarine Student Pathways

Program Objectives

Why is the Government providing additional Commonwealth supported places (CSPs) under this measure?

The Australian Government will invest \$128.5 million to support 4,000 commencing Commonwealth supported places (CSPs) over the next four years to develop a pipeline of highly-skilled STEM graduates who will strengthen Australia's sovereign capabilities, and support Nuclear-Powered Submarine (NPS) Program initiatives, industry and the economy.

Of these places, 800 (200 each year from 2024 to 2027) will be allocated to South Australian universities in line with the public announcement of the Commonwealth and South Australian Government Cooperation Agreement in March 2023.

The 4,000 places will be specifically targeted to deliver graduates from STEM disciplines, including accredited engineering, mathematics, chemistry, and physics to grow Australia's excellence in STEM disciplines.

How many CSPs will be supported under this measure?

The Government has committed to provide 4,000 additional places. This is a one-off allocation of 1,000 commencing places each year from 2024 to 2027 only.

200 CSPs each year from 2024 to 2027 are required to be allocated to South Australian providers in line with the Commonwealth and South Australian Government Cooperation Agreement.

These places are non-ongoing and funding for this measure is expected to be terminated by 2030.

This program is designed to deliver funding for Commonwealth supported places and does not include research funding. The Australian Submarine Agency (ASA) will engage with the higher education sector separately on any potential future ASA-related research partnerships.

Eligibility Arrangements

Who is eligible to apply for an allocation of these additional CSPs?

Only higher education providers listed on Table A of the *Higher Education Support Act 2003* will be eligible to receive an allocation of places.

Higher education providers who are not a Table A provider are not eligible to apply.

Which students are eligible to be allocated additional CSPs under the NPS Pathways measure?

CSPs under the NPS pathway measure are required to support increased access, participation and success of students in foundational engineering and science courses. Any domestic student enrolled in an approved course commencing in a relevant year is able to be allocated an NPS Pathways CSP.

However, providers are particularly encouraged to establish recruitment and support mechanisms that aim to increase participation and success of students from under-represented and educationally disadvantaged groups. This includes:

- First Nations students
- students with disability
- students from low SES backgrounds
- students from regional, rural, and remote areas
- first in family to study at university; and
- women studying in non-traditional areas.

Why aren't all higher education providers eligible to apply and why is eligibility limited to those with an existing allocation of ongoing CSPs?

These CSPs are non-ongoing and target a range of subject areas which are typically delivered by Table A universities.

Eligibility to receive funding under this measure has therefore been limited to Table A universities.

What level of courses can be delivered using this funding?

Places will be allocated to bachelor level courses only.

Postgraduate and sub-bachelor courses (including undergraduate certificates, diplomas, advanced diplomas and associate degrees) will not be considered.

Are combined Bachelor/Masters programs eligible?

Only the bachelor component of a combined Bachelor/Masters program would be eligible to receive funding. Providers are permitted to use funding to enrol a student in a CSP in the Bachelor component, but would be required to fund the Masters component under their existing MBGA. Providers would only receive funding for the duration of the bachelor component.

Providers should specify the Bachelor components of the applicable courses in the 'Course proposals' tab of the application pack and provide sufficient detail as part of the selection criteria to support these types of courses.

Can providers use this process to apply for medical CSPs?

No, applications for medical CSPs will not be considered.

Do courses have to be new offerings to be eligible for an allocation of additional CSPs?

No. Providers are welcome to request additional CSPs for existing course offerings, as long as they are targeted towards new commencing students and meet all the eligibility requirements - particularly how the courses will directly support the Australian Submarine Agency workforce requirements as outlined in the Guidelines.

Providers are welcome to apply to deliver new offerings so long as the courses are accredited and meet all eligibility requirements.

Can providers enrol students in these additional CSPs on a part-time basis?

Yes, there are no restrictions regarding a student's study basis in respect of the additional places. If students have not completed their course by the end of 2030, when funding for this measure is expected to terminate, providers will be required to continue to support students in CSPs using their MBGA.

Can places be used for enabling, non-award, or postgraduate courses?

No, funding for places can only be used for bachelor level degrees and for courses in the nominated target subject areas, or approved courses which support Australia's capabilities in STEM disciplines required by the Australian Submarine Agency enterprise.

Demand driven funding already applies to First Nations students. How will this measure benefit First Nations students?

Providers are encouraged to submit applications to support increased opportunities for First Nations students as a part of strategies to increase access, participation and success of students from underrepresented backgrounds more broadly.

However, demand driven funding will continue to apply for First Nations students enrolled in eligible NPS Pathways courses and they will not be eligible to be considered as additional students for the purposes of gaining access to NPS Pathways CSP funding.

Application Process

What is required in the application?

Providers will be required to identify requested numbers of places sought for proposed courses.

Providers will also be required to submit a written statement against five criteria outlining how requested places will address NPS Pathways program objectives including, supporting the nuclear workforce and related sectors and meeting student demand.

Will providers be able to apply for commencing places in later years?

Providers are required to apply for places for delivery across all program commencement years (2024–2027) through this application process.

The application submission will require providers to specify the requested places sought for each commencement year for each course.

There will be no additional application process for new places for the 2025 to 2027 commencement years. However, the Department of Education and the Australian Submarine Agency may seek to reallocate CSPs between providers where recipients of CSPs are not able to deliver places in line with original allocations.

Applicants acknowledge that, if successful, there will be annual reporting requirements to evidence applicant efforts to increase, along with actual increases in the number of students in target study areas.

Assessment and Allocation Process

How will these CSPs be allocated?

Places must be allocated to increase graduates from STEM disciplines, including accredited engineering, mathematics, chemistry and physics beyond the provider's current enrolment levels.

Allocation of these places will be determined on a competitive basis that will consider the following:

- Delivery of places in STEM disciplines and areas that will meet the priorities of the Australian Submarine Agency (ASA) for future workforce needs and how an institution has demonstrable graduate results in those respective fields.
- Evidence-based strategies for maximising student academic success as well as graduate success rates for specific course fields.
- Membership of the Defence Industry Security Program.
- Provider capacity and student demand including the ability of the provider to deliver increased numbers of foundational engineering and science graduates.
- Student support and equity policies and programs in place to attract, retain and support students from under-represented backgrounds whilst studying, including wrap-around services and flexible learning modes, to improve academic participation and student success.

Who determines the allocation of places?

Applications will be assessed against criteria developed jointly by the Departments of Education and the Australian Submarine Agency (the Departments). The Departments will then make recommendations to the Minister for Education on proposed allocations of places for approved courses for individual providers.

Final allocations will be determined by the Minister for Education as per section 30-10 of the *Higher Education Support Act 2003*, following consultation with the Minister for Defence.

Who will undertake the competitive assessment process?

The Department of Education and the Australian Submarine Agency will undertake the competitive assessment process and make recommendations to the Minister for Education on proposed allocations of CSPs to providers.

How will providers be ranked in the competitive process?

CSPs will be allocated based on an assessment of the information detailed in the application and analysis of providers' performance based on data that is collected by the Department of Education.

Further details on the assessment process are provided in the Program Guidelines.

What is the anticipated timeline for the allocation of places?

Applications will close on 28 September 2023. Final decisions on allocations will be subject to decision by the Minister for Education. The Department of Education anticipates funding agreements will be updated towards the end of October.

Will there be any limitations applied to the allocation of the additional CSPs on providers?

Providers are not guaranteed to receive an allocation of CSPs under the NPS Pathways measure as a result of submitting an application. Further, providers who do receive an allocation of CSPs may not receive the full allocation of places for the courses they have requested. After providers have been ranked in the competitive process, the allocation of places will consider the following factors:

- How the allocation of places overall will meet the overarching objectives of the program in section 1 of the program guidelines, including the aim of growing Australia's excellence in STEM disciplines across the nation.
- The provider's aggregate score in the assessment process and ability to support NPS program objectives.
- High level of interest – if the total number of requested places is above 4,000, then high scoring applications will be prioritised over lower scoring applications. Depending on the level of oversubscription, high scoring providers may also be granted a higher proportion of their requested places compared to lower scoring providers, while some providers may not receive an allocation at all.
- Course priority, as ranked by the provider in their application. If funding is significantly oversubscribed, funding to successful providers may be based on the 'Course Priority' rank that the provider has given each course in line with consideration of NPS program priorities. In this instance, more places may be allocated to courses which the provider has ranked highly, and they may receive a lower allocation for the courses they have ranked lower.

Will the additional CSPs be tied to the specific courses they were allocated to?

Yes, places will be allocated to providers in respect of specific courses as nominated in the application and can only be used to enrol students in those courses. Details in relation to the additional CSPs, including which courses they are able to be used for, will be detailed in each provider's Commonwealth Grant Scheme funding agreement.

Have certain numbers of places been reserved for specific courses or fields of study?

No. The allocation of places will be based on merit in relation to each provider's application, and demonstrated capacity and commitment to delivering against the priorities of the Australian Submarine Agency and ability to grow Australia's excellence in STEM disciplines.

What data will be used to gauge provider's capacity for additional demand?

The Department of Education's assessment of provider's capacity will consider 2018–2023 enrolment data, which includes estimates for 2023, and whether providers are estimated to be over or under-enrolled in 2024. Providers are free to provide evidence of steps being taken to increase enrolment and retention in STEM fields as part of the grant application process.

NPS target course areas

Which study areas are eligible to receive an allocation of places under this measure?

Places will only be allocated to courses which deliver STEM graduates which will grow Australia's capabilities in STEM disciplines that support the Australian Submarine Agency enterprise workforce requirements.

This includes, but is not limited to, courses and occupations in:

- Physics
- Chemistry
- Material Science
- Naval Architecture
- Mathematics
- Mechanical Engineering
- Electrical Engineering
- Chemical Engineering
- Nuclear Engineering
- Nuclear Science

South Australian universities may also apply for places in the following fields:

- Psychology
- Computer science
- Management

Funding

Are the additional CSPs being funded on an ongoing basis?

No, the 4,000 additional NPS Pathways CSPs are for CSPs commencing from 2024–2027 only.

Depending on applications received, it is anticipated that 1,000 places will commence each year from 2024 to 2027, with at least 200 CSPs each year being allocated to South Australian universities.

Places are non-ongoing and funding for the measure is expected to terminate in 2030.

Funding will be allocated to providers for each respective commencing place in the approved course, pipelined for the duration of the course based on the standard 75 per cent costing methodology.

The use of a 75 per cent pipeline is consistent with the provision of additional Commonwealth supported places.

Will these additional CSPs be included in the provider's base Maximum Basic Grant Amount (MBGA)?

No, funding to deliver the additional places will be a separate allocation of funding to be specified in the provider's Commonwealth Grant Scheme funding agreements. This will be reflected in the funding agreements consistent with approach used for additional short course funding and equity places funding under the 20,000 additional CSPs measure.

Funding distributed as part of this measure will be subject to reconciliation processes in future years. While the funding will be included in a provider's total MBGA, it does not fall under a provider's base MBGA and therefore the CPI indexation under the Higher Education Continuity Guarantee will not apply.

Does a university need to exhaust its full MBGA before utilising these places?

Providers are encouraged to maximise their full MBGA as part of enrolment strategies. To ensure funding efficiency, the Department will reconcile funding to first account for universities' full utilisation of their MBGA ahead of reconciling funding provided as part of an allocation of additional places. This approach applies for 2024 and 2025 where the Higher Education Continuity Guarantee (HECG) is in place. From 2026, the HECG will not be in place and all funding will be reconciled based on student enrolments.

Can a university receive funding if they are delivering under their total funding cap as a result of a shortfall in designated places only?

Providers must first use all available funding under the base MBGA for higher education courses. Since the base MBGA does not include funding under the MBGA for designated higher education courses (medicine), providers can receive funding if there is a shortfall in designated courses only.

Why is the Department using a 75 per cent costing methodology for the pipeline?

This methodology is consistent with previous allocations of funding, such as Innovative Places, National Priority Places and the 20,000 additional CSPs measure.

If funding cannot be delivered for the required commencing year (2024 to 2027), can funding be rolled over to be delivered in the following year? Can commencing students be enrolled beyond 2027?

Providers should utilise the funding they have been allocated in respect of each particular year. Providers are encouraged to discuss with the department as early as possible if funding cannot be used as allocated for the relevant 2024-2027 commencing years. Funding cannot be rolled over and be used for later years and reconciliation processes will apply.

If a student initially enrolled in one of these CSPs transfers to a new course, can their enrolment still be supported using funding from the NPS Pathways measure?

Providers may continue supporting students who transfer to another course as long as the new course is approved to receive funding through the allocation process.

Funding cannot follow the student if they transfer to a new course which has not been approved to receive places under this measure. Instead, the provider will be required to fund the cost of this CSP as part of funding provided through their MBGA. The provider can enrol another student in that CSP using the residual funding provided that the new student commences in a relevant program year (2024–2027).

This will need to be reported as part of the additional reporting requirements listed above.

Will providers need to submit a reallocation request to the Department of Education if they would like to move funding between two approved courses?

Providers who are listed as Table A in the *Higher Education Support Act 2003* will be able to use the funding allocated to them under this measure as a funding envelope. While the approved courses will be listed in their funding agreement, the funding agreement will not specify the amount of funding tied to each course, so long as it is part of the list of approved courses it will be eligible to be included among funding allocations. Providers will be required to report student enrolment data through the additional reporting process associated with this measure.

How will the Department determine funding for courses with units which sit across different Fields of Educations?

Funding will be determined based on the primary FOE of the course only. Providers are encouraged to work with the department to provide a further detailed breakdown of FOEs for courses, with potential for two FOEs to be approved.

Reporting

Will there be additional reporting requirements associated with the allocation of additional NSP Pathways CSPs?

Yes. The Department of Education will track the progress of providers in meeting the objectives of the measure.

This will include additional reporting, where providers will be required to report the CHESN (element 488) and USI (element 584) of students enrolled in these places. This is to ensure the places are being offered to commencing students and for approved courses only.

As has been the case with National Priority Places, Innovative Places, and CSPs under the 20,000 additional CSPs measure, it is expected that universities will separately report enrolments in these courses in their estimates.

How will the Department determine that there has been an increase in the number of places in eligible courses?

Determinations of increases in places will not be based on provider forecasts. Instead, determinations will be assessed based on provider's enrolments against previous years with providers needing to demonstrate an aggregate increase in the number of commencing students in approved courses relative to 2022/2023.

If this requirement is satisfied, all enrolments in approved courses will be considered eligible for inclusion among the provider's funding allocation up to the value by which the provider has delivered in excess of its MBGA.

Following the application process, the Department will approach each provider that has been allocated places to determine appropriate benchmarks that can be used to track and demonstrate an increase in enrolments and attainment in approved courses.

At times, the Department of Education and/or the Australian Submarine Agency may seek further information from providers to clarify course participation and retention for the purposes of determining payment eligibility in instances of doubt.

How can providers determine whether students are from under-represented backgrounds?

One aim in the allocation of additional CSPs under this measure is to increase participation in target study areas among students from under-represented equity groups. Proxy indicators such as a student's current or past address do not necessarily define whether a student is from a low SES background. Providers are encouraged to consider individual student's disadvantage when determining their eligibility for these places. This will remain a matter for the provider's discretion.

Providers will be required to submit information in relation to students enrolled under NPS Pathway places funding through estimates processes. Standard reporting requirements, including the reporting of USIs, will be used to ensure that funding is used in respect of commencing students only and to track success in achieving skills and equity objectives.

Australian Submarine Agency Specific Requirements

Membership and adherence to Defence Industry Security Program (DISP)

In order to receive an allocation of CSPs under the NPS Pathways measure, Applicants must demonstrate their membership and adherence to the Defence Industry Security Program (DISP). Clear illustration of enhanced security arrangements to demonstrate capability to safeguard sensitive research, technologies and capabilities early in the research and innovation cycles will also be viewed positively.

Questions on the program and application process can be submitted via email to NPSpathways@education.gov.au.