

# Secondary School Exchange Scholarship

## Notes to Applicants

### About

The English-Speaking Union is an international membership organisation and educational charity that promotes mutual understanding, and fosters friendship and exchange throughout the world. Since 1928, the ESU has offered thousands of young people the once in a lifetime opportunity to spend a year in a private US high school, after A-levels.

A Secondary School Exchange Scholarship is a gap year with a difference. Scholars study a range of subjects including some that don't feature in a British school syllabus. Many scholars take the opportunity to study subjects they dropped at GCSE, or to go into more depth in their chosen degree subject, without the added pressure of A-levels. The study skills that can be gained from the exchange have proven to be beneficial at University: American teaching emphasises independence of thought, and discussions play a large part in the classroom. SSE is also as much a cultural exchange as an academic one. Host schools offer an extensive range of extracurricular activities and facilities, as well as American rites of passage such as spring break, prom, and graduation. Your independence, wider outlook and increased maturity will be of benefit to you at university and in your future career.

"I have gained a greater understanding of the cultural differences between the UK and US. I've also made some friendships that'll likely last my entire life". Secondary School Exchange Scholar, Memphis University School.



Scholars will join a whole host of alumni who have gone on to make notable contributions in a variety of fields, including pop singer, KT Tunstall; Sir Ian Blair, former Metropolitan Police Commissioner; Sir Richard Dearlove KCMG OBE, former head of MI6; and the actor and comedian, Dawn French.

## Eligibility

The ESU welcomes applications from all young people that meet the following criteria:

- You must have completed your A-levels (or equivalent) before departing and be intending to study at a UK university on your return. Your place does not need to be confirmed or deferred, and some scholars reapply during their scholarship year.
- Applications from students intending to study at a US university at undergraduate level will not be accepted.
- You must have a minimum of 3 Grade Bs at A-Level or equivalent (predicted)
- You should be under 19 years of age when you take up the scholarship.
- You must be a British or Irish Citizen and have studied/be studying A-levels (or equivalent) at a school in the UK.

## What does a scholarship cover?

Each scholarship covers the cost of board and tuition at a private high school, worth \$40,000-\$65,000. Scholars will be a fully-fledged student at their host school for the duration of their stay, with access to all of the school's facilities and activities. If successful, the ESU requires a non-refundable administration fee of £400.

Scholars and their families are responsible for all additional costs including travel, insurance (health and travel), and day-to-day expenses, amounting to approximately £2500-£5000. These costs depend on several factors including where a school is situated, how much additional travelling a scholar does, how a scholar spends their free time, and how closely the scholar keeps to their budget. For example, some take the opportunity to travel extensively, which will add to the overall cost of living. Equally, some schools are located quite a distance from a main city, requiring more travel upon arrival, but fewer opportunities to spend while on campus.

The ESU offer means-tested financial assistance to scholars that would otherwise be unable to take up their scholarship. Grants are given in the range of £250 - £4500. The ESU will also offer a Full Award to one successful applicant, based on need, to cover all additional costs.

Many scholars use the summer holidays to save money for their time in the US.



# How to apply

Here is your step-by-step guide to completing the application process:

Applicants are required to complete an online application form together with a personal statement, detailing why you are suited to and interested in an SSE scholarship. The personal statement is the most important part of the application.

## Personal Statement Guidelines:

Your statement is the most important part of your application. It gives you the opportunity to introduce yourself, and demonstrate why you are suited to, and interested in an SSE scholarship. Your personal statement must be no longer than one side of A4, and should be in a .pdf, .doc or .docx format ready to upload to the online form. You don't need to answer all of the following questions, but they are worth bearing in mind:

- Why are you applying? What interests you about American life/politics/culture? What do you expect to gain from the scholarship? Academically, culturally, socially etc.
- How will a US school benefit from having you on roll?
- Are you the kind of person who sticks with things and perseveres even when a situation is challenging or stressful?
- Are you a flexible person who finds it easy to adapt to a new environment with new rules and expectations? If you are given a scholarship but none of your preferences are available will you still be able to adapt?

The applicant, parent/guardian and headteacher must all sign a conditions of scholarship form.

The applicant's parent/guardian must fill in a medical form.

The applicant's headteacher, form tutor or head of year must complete a confidential reference form and reference, and include a copy of the student's transcript. It is the responsibility of the applicant to make sure that your confidential reference is emailed to the ESU by the deadline. References sent by the applicant themselves must be signed by the referee.

If applying for means-tested financial assistance, the applicant and parent(s)/guardian(s) must complete the financial assistance form and include proof of income for parent(s)/guardian(s).



The main application form should be submitted online on the Survey Monkey platform. You should also use this platform to upload your personal statement, conditions of scholarship form, and medical form. Applications for financial assistance (if applicants wish to apply for financial assistance) and confidential references must be emailed separately to [education@esu.org](mailto:education@esu.org).

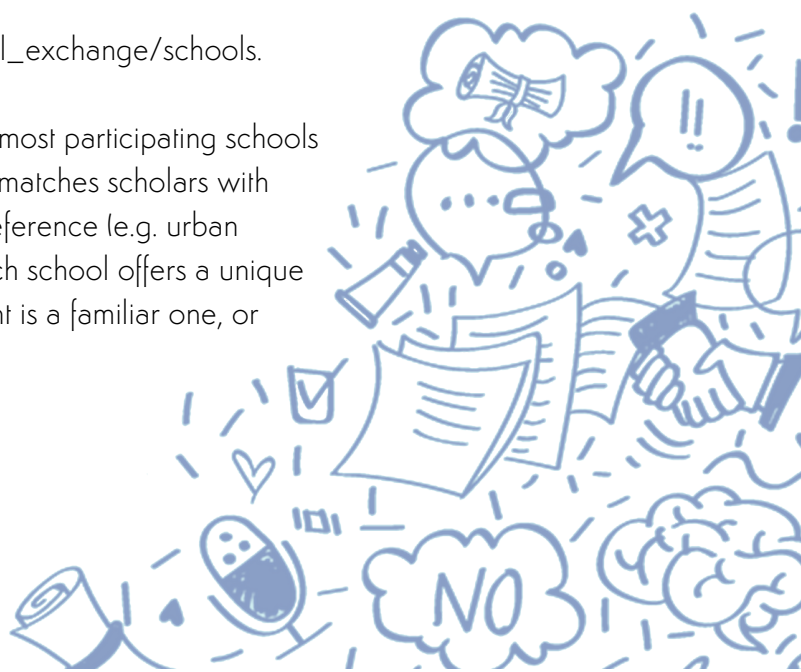
We would strongly advise you to have your completed personal statement, conditions of scholarship form and medical form ready before you begin your online application form. You will need to upload all of these files directly to the online platform when applying. All forms and weblinks can be found at [www.esu.org/sse](http://www.esu.org/sse) and on the Survey Monkey platform itself.

## SSE Application Timeframe Overview

1. September - Applications Open
2. November - Applications Close
3. December - Shortlisted applicants sent invitation to interview at Dartmouth House, London
4. January - Interviews
5. February - Places confirmed by ESU UK and matching commences with ESU US and host schools
6. February-May - Scholars matched with their host schools in the US. If successful at interview in January, your application will be forwarded to a committee of headteachers from participating host schools. Please note that acceptance at both stages is necessary for a place to be allocated. Successful applicants are likely to be asked to attend a Zoom interview with their proposed host school during this period.
7. August-early September - scholars depart to the USA to commence their Secondary School Exchange year. Please note that US term often starts at the end of August, so if successful at interview please do not book holidays for late August, as many schools are inflexible with their term dates.

The ESU awards approximately 12 scholarships each year. All candidates will be informed of the outcome of their application. A full list of participating US host schools can be found at [www.esuus.org/esu/programs/secondary\\_school\\_exchange/schools](http://www.esuus.org/esu/programs/secondary_school_exchange/schools).

Please note that not all schools host annually, and most participating schools host just one scholar per academic year. The ESU matches scholars with schools, but applicants are invited to state their preference (e.g. urban single-sex). Preferences cannot be guaranteed. Each school offers a unique and valuable experience, whether the environment is a familiar one, or entirely new.



## What makes a strong application?

The purpose of the scholarship is to develop new academic and social skills, have opportunities to travel, take part in extra-curricular activities and meet life-long friends, as well as to stretch yourself academically, learn to share ideas with others and also challenge your ideas and preconceptions. More importantly, this is an opportunity like no other to learn about yourself and what you can achieve.

Applications are assessed on the following basis:

- Academic ability, potential, and commitment to your studies, as well as a focus on personal and academic development.
- An interest in the US: its life, politics and culture.
- Ability to make a contribution to your host school, whether that be through academia, sport, the arts, or a combination.
- Flexibility, confidence, and a willingness to throw yourself in at the deep end.

## What is expected of you?

- Scholars should commit to the full term of their scholarship (3-terms - 9 months)
- Flexibility, confidence, and a willingness to throw yourself in at the deep end.
- Embrace the idea of being an ambassador for your school, the ESU and the UK more widely.
- Ensure that a wide range of young people, from diverse backgrounds, have the opportunity to take part in the SSE, by giving presentations to schools and local ESU branches. The ESU is able to provide relevant details upon the scholar's return to the UK.

## More information and support

If you would like more information about the SSE, or would like an informal chat before applying, please contact [education@esu.org](mailto:education@esu.org) or call the ESU Education team on 020 7529 1565.

We look forward to receiving your application - and good luck!

