

## Frequently Asked Questions: Applying to the MScR Sustainable African Futures Programme

To help you in your application, we have put together some frequently asked questions on the application process including: English language tests, qualifications, the interview process, references, entry tests and receiving an offer. Please read this document carefully before sending any questions by email.

### 1. Application Stage

#### What is the application and programme timeline?

10 December 2025 (10.30 UK time)	Applications open
2 February 2026 (5pm UK time)	Applications close
Mid-March 2026	Scholarships awarded
March-June 2026	Support provided through admissions processes, and once admissions confirmed support to apply for South African visa
September 2026	Pre-orientation program in South Africa and Online Academic program starts

#### Where do I apply for a scholarship?

The link will be made available on [this webpage](#) on 10<sup>th</sup> December 2026.

#### Which postgraduate degrees are covered on this scholarship?

We offer scholarships only for the Masters by Research (MScR) Sustainable African Futures.

No other academic programs at the University of Edinburgh are eligible for this scholarship. You are welcome to apply to any academic program but only the above program will make you eligible for a Mastercard Foundation scholarship.

#### How is disability defined?

Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others. - According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD).

### **How is displacement defined?**

Along with the Mastercard Foundation, we understand that there are many reasons why young people may be forcibly displaced. If this is part of your story, please articulate it in a way that feels authentic to you in your application. You may have a legal status or another experience of displacement that has created barriers to access to education. We will consider this as we review your application and will be proactive in creating scholarship opportunities for young people who have been displaced.

### **Who is a refugee?**

A refugee is any person who meets the eligibility criteria under an applicable refugee definition, as provided for in international or regional refugee instruments, under UNHCR's mandate or in national legislation. Under international law and UNHCR's mandate, a refugee is a person outside their country of origin who is in need of international protection because of feared persecution or a serious threat to their life, physical integrity or freedom in their country of origin as a result of persecution, armed conflict, violence, massive violation of human rights or serious public disorder.

### **Who is considered an asylum seeker?**

An asylum seeker is a general term for a person who intends to seek or is awaiting a decision on their request for international protection. When someone crosses an international border seeking safety, they often need to apply to be legally recognised as a refugee. In some countries, 'asylum seeker' is used as a legal term referring to a person who has applied for refugee status or a complementary international protection status and has not received a final decision on their claim. It can also refer to a person who has not yet submitted an application but may intend to do so. Not every asylum seeker will ultimately be recognised as a refugee, but every refugee is initially an asylum seeker. An asylum seeker may not be sent back to their country of origin until their asylum claim has been examined through a fair procedure. They are entitled to certain minimum standards of treatment, pending determination of their status.

### **What is temporary protected status?**

Temporary protected status involves the assessment of international protection needs based on circumstances in a country of origin, typically to expedite access to protection services in situations of mass displacement. However, the arrangement must meet minimum standards of treatment that reflect international refugee and human rights law obligations, and the intention is not to displace existing protection status determination instruments.

### **How is youth defined?**

Young people and youths are individuals between the ages of 15-35 years (According to the Africa Youth Charter).

### **Can I still be considered if I do not meet the criteria?**

Due to the large volume of applications and for transparency purposes, we are unable to extend any exemptions. You must meet all the eligibility criteria.

### **What documents do I need to apply for this Scholarship?**

Postgraduate entry: Your final official university degree certificate and final official transcript. You will need to have these to upload this as part of your application.

If you do not have these documents by the application deadline (2 February 2026), you will not be able to proceed with the application.

### **What is involved in the application process?**

In the first stage you will be asked a series of questions to determine whether you meet all the eligibility criteria for the scholarship. If you do not, you won't proceed to the next stage.

If you do meet the eligibility criteria, you will be invited to answer a series of short essay questions. These responses will then be submitted for review by the Scholarship Application Review panel to short list applications for a university admissions review.

### **What essay questions will I be asked in the application form?**

Once you have completed the eligibility stage of the application, you will be asked to complete the following essay questions (which should be 500-1250 characters long):

**Question 1:** The WESAF Program is set up to promote interdisciplinary research on areas related to sustainability on the African continent. How do your research interests link with this goal? You should include some ideas for the research you would want to conduct in relation to your research interests. *(TOTAL NUMBER OF CHARACTERS: 500 minimum to 1250 maximum)*

**Question 2:** We aim to award Mastercard Foundation WESAF scholarships to individuals who will benefit most from the opportunity. Describe how your academic and personal journey—including your achievements, challenges, and lessons learned—has prepared you to benefit from this programme. *TOTAL NUMBER OF CHARACTERS: 500 minimum to 1250 maximum)*

**Question 3:** The WESAF Program is aimed at creating a cohort of researchers who would be able to advance research capacity amongst African academics and higher educational institutions whilst grappling with the critical issues of sustainable development in their fields of interest. As a WESAF Fellow, how will you action this at your university, within your region or amongst your networks? Please give specific examples as they relate to your research interests and your particular university/network *(TOTAL NUMBER OF CHARACTERS: 500 minimum to 1250 maximum)*

**Should I apply to the scholarship or for admission to the degree first?**

If the MScR Sustainable African Future Mastercard Foundation Scholarship is the only scholarship you are interested to apply for in the University of Edinburgh, please apply for the scholarship only. DO NOT apply directly to the UoE admissions until invited to do so

If you are also applying for other scholarships at the University of Edinburgh, please apply directly for the degree programme of your choice as well as the MScR application.

More information on how to apply can be found on each individual degree programme web page, which can be found on the [University degree finder](#).

**I have applied for other Mastercard Foundation scholarship programs, can I submit the same application for all?**

All Mastercard Foundation scholarship programs have similar, although not identical, eligibility criteria. We would encourage you to take your time to tailor your application to each individual institution and think carefully about why you would like to study at each institution you're applying to and shape your responses accordingly.

**Do I need to take an English language test?**

Ideally all applicants will be able to demonstrate a level of English language competency that will enable the candidate to succeed in their studies, regardless of their nationality or country of residence. However, supports may be offered to offer holders who are slightly below the required IELTS band to help them reach the necessary admissions requirement, but all applicants will need a foundation in English to be eligible.

Depending on where you did your undergraduate studies you may be required to undertake an English language test as part of the admissions process, unless you already have a valid English language test that meets the university's minimum requirements.

There will be no fee for this test for Mastercard Foundation WESAF applicants, and all testing takes place via video or web link. The English test assesses applicants on reading, writing, speaking and listening. Additional English language support may also be provided where applicable.

Please note this only applies to this specific program at this University. For other scholarships at the University of Edinburgh, or for other Mastercard Foundation Scholars Programs at other Universities, it is possible you will need an English language qualification prior to receiving an offer of admission.

### **What happens during the review of applications period?**

Each submitted application is read and assessed by representatives from across the University of Edinburgh and University of Witwatersrand. This includes a further assessment undertaken by Admissions staff at the University of Edinburgh to determine the academic suitability of each application.

### **I have completed and submitted the application, when will I hear back?**

We aim to notify all short-listed applicants of the outcome of their application by mid-March 2026.

If you are successful, the outcome will be a conditional offer of scholarship pending your admission to the University of Edinburgh.

Over the following weeks, the WESAF team at Edinburgh will support and guide you so that your offer becomes unconditional. Common conditions linked to an offer can be the confirmation of your university qualification, and successfully demonstrating your English language proficiency.

### **Do I have to pay for the application fee to my degree programme if applying for a Mastercard Foundation WESAF scholarship?**

Your degree programme application fee will be waived **ONLY** if you are accepted to the Mastercard Foundation WESAF programme - please do not contact Fees or the Admissions office to request a waiver. If you are successfully awarded the Mastercard Foundation WESAF scholarship, the team will support your application to your degree programme and the application fee will then be waived. If the Mastercard Foundation WESAF scholarship is the only scholarship you are applying to at the University of Edinburgh, you do not need to apply to your degree programme as part of your application to the Mastercard Foundation WESAF programme, you will be supported to apply to your degree programme, if you are awarded the scholarship.

If you are applying to multiple scholarships at the University of Edinburgh, please check the scholarship application requirements as some may request that you apply for the degree programme as well as the completing a scholarship application (whereas Mastercard Foundation WESAF doesn't, as explained above). If this is the case, you will have to pay for the application fee to your degree programme. You will only be refunded if you are awarded a Mastercard Foundation WESAF scholarship.

### **When will I hear about the result of my application?**

We aim to notify all short-listed applicants of the outcome of their application by mid- March 2026.

If you are successful, the outcome will be a conditional offer of scholarship pending your admission to the University of Edinburgh.

Over the following weeks, the team at Edinburgh will support and guide you so that your offer becomes unconditional. Common conditions linked to an offer can be the confirmation of your university qualification, and successfully demonstrating your English language proficiency.

## **2. Offer stage**

### **Is my offer binding?**

We expect applicants who accept their offer to take up their place on the MScR Sustainable African Futures Program. Once your offer is unconditional the scholarship and admission to the University of Edinburgh is binding.

### **What happens during the Confirmation of Admission to the University of Edinburgh period?**

We will notify shortlisted applicants by mid-March whether they have successfully been offered the scholarship.

As much as we are confident you will also gain admission to the University of Edinburgh, for most applicants, the offer is still conditional at this stage and could still be subject to the conditions mentioned above.

Once you have received your confirmation of admission, we will invite you to apply for a visa to South Africa to attend the Pre-orientation program at the University of Witwatersrand. The costs to attend the pre-orientation program are covered as part of the scholarship.

### **What do I do if I have a question which is not answered above?**

Please ensure you have read all the guidance provided to you via this website and the application form. If you are still unable to find an answer to your query, please contact the team at [mcfsp@ed.ac.uk](mailto:mcfsp@ed.ac.uk). For questions relating to the wider WESAF program please contact the Wits team at [wesaf@wits.ac.za](mailto:wesaf@wits.ac.za)