COMMONWEALTH STUDENTS' ASSOCIATION

23rd October 2026

CSA EXCELLENCE AWARDS 2026

INTRODUCTION

The Commonwealth Students' Association (CSA) is the single, official representative body for all student organisations across the Commonwealth's 56 nations. Established in 2012 at the 18th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (CCEM) in Mauritius, it unifies and represents the needs and aspirations of national student councils and other student organisations, bringing their concerns to the forefront of educational and global development. It is supported by the Commonwealth Youth Programme and headquartered at the Commonwealth Secretariat at Marlborough House, Pall Mall, London. The Commonwealth Students' Association represents students from across Commonwealth member countries and works to advance student interests through advocacy, partnerships, and programmes.

The CSA Excellence Awards 2026 is the Association's Annual end-of-year awards. They will honour people and groups who advanced education and student development across the Commonwealth this year. In addition, they cover two audiences: CSA's own staff and volunteers, and external nominees. These external nominees include students, institutions, student organisations and civil society organisations.

AWARD CATEGORIES

A. CSA Staff and Change Makers

Award	Who can enter	What it recognises	Nomination route
Executive Officer of the Year	Executive Committee Members, except	Leadership, delivery and teamwork across CSA projects	Self, Peer or the President nominates

Award	Who can enter	What it recognises	Nomination route
	the office of the President		
Outstanding Volunteer of the Year	All CSA volunteers	Commitment beyond assigned duties	Self or peer
Outstanding Campus Ambassador of the Year	Campus Ambassador Programme members	Growing CSA's presence on campus and across the social media	Self or peer
Outstanding Secretariat Intern of the Year	Secretariat Internship Programme interns	Quality of work and initiative	Supervisor
President's Special Recognition	Any CSA member or partner	Exceptional service, long-term commitment and excellence in delivery.	President's choice, no application
Presidential Taskforce Excellence Award		Commitment, teambuilding and excellent independent initiatives	President's choice, no application
National Coordinator of the Year (Campus Ambassadors Programme)	National Coordinators	Resilience and commitment to ambassadors' task and quality reporting mechanisms.	Self or Supervisor

Award	Who can enter	What it recognises	Nomination route
Regional Coordinator of the Year (Campus Ambassadors Programme)	Regional Coordinators	Resilience and commitment to ambassadors' task and quality reporting mechanisms	Self or Supervisor
Researcher of the Year Award	Researchers in the CSA	Most impactful and demonstrated history in excellent research, supporting the CSA's mission.	Self
The Cost of Inaction Campaign Advocacy Award	Consistent Campaigners	Outstanding efforts in promoting the CSA Cost of inaction campaign and advocating for quality education.	Secretariat nominates, no application

B. Students

Award	Who can enter	What it recognises	Nomination route
Commonwealth Student Leader of the Year	Enrolled students in any Commonwealth country	Leadership that improved student life or representation	Self or third party
Student Changemaker Award	Enrolled students in any Commonwealth country	A community or SDG project with measurable results	Self or third party

Award	Who can enter	What it recognises	Nomination route
Green Student Champion	Enrolled students in any Commonwealth country	Climate or environmental action, including Small Island States (SIDs) advocacy	Self or third party
Student Peacebuilder Award	Enrolled students in any Commonwealth country	Peace, dialogue or social cohesion work	Self or third party
Academic Achievement Award	Students in their 3rd or 4th year of undergrad or 2nd year of postgraduate degree who have achieved 100% grade in their cumulative GPA or weighted average.	Academic Excellence: 100% grade in any grading scale and a letter of recommendation forwarded by a professor via official university email to the CSA	Self and a letter of recommendation forwarded directly by a professor via official university email to the CSA

C. Institutions

Award	Who can enter	What it recognises	Nomination route
Student-Centred Institution of the Year	Universities, Colleges and Polytechnics	Policies that put students first, such as representation, support and affordability	Self or third party

Award	Who can enter	What it recognises	Nomination route
Inclusion and Wellbeing Award	Educational institutions	Mental health, accessibility or inclusion work for students	Self or third party
Higher Educator Excellence Award	Lecturers/Professors at Universities, Colleges and Polytechnics	Publicly documented work of supporting student development	Self
Teaching Excellence Award (Basic and Secondary Schools)	Teachers in Basic and Secondary Schools	Those who can provide publicly documented work of supporting student education and development	Self
Excellence in Quality Education Delivery Award	Any educational institution	Recognises outstanding commitment to delivering inclusive, equitable, and high-quality education that promotes effective learning, develops essential competencies, and empowers students to achieve their full potential.	Self

D. Student Organisations

Award	Who can enter	What it recognises	Nomination route
National Student Organisation of the Year	National Student Organisations	Advocacy wins, member growth and good governance	Self or third party
Student Union or Society Impact Award	Campus unions, clubs and societies	One high-impact campaign or project	Self or third party

E. Civil Society Organisations

Award	Who can enter	What it recognises	Nomination route
Education Partner of the Year	NGOs, foundations and CSOs	Sustained work that widened access to quality education	Self or third party
Student Empowerment Award	NGOs and CSOs	Skills, employability or leadership programmes for young people	Self or third party
Digital Learning Innovation Award	NGOs, CSOs and edtech social enterprises	Digital tools that improved learning or digital literacy	Self or third party

JUDGING CRITERIA AND SELECTION PROCESS

At least three judges will score each eligible nomination out of 100. They will use the same five criteria for every external category.

Criterion	Weight	Judges ask
Impact	35%	What changed, for how many people, and how do we know?
Innovation	20%	Is the approach new, or well adapted to its context?
Inclusion and reach	15%	Did it reach under-served or marginalised students?
Sustainability	15%	Will the work continue or grow after 2026?
Alignment with CSA values	15%	Does it advance student voice and the Strategic Corporate Plan?

Internal awards use the same weights. However, judges read Impact as a person's contribution to CSA's work. Peer nominations count as evidence, but the number of nominations does not decide the result.

Selection runs in four stages. First, the Secretariat checks each entry against the rules and contacts referees. Next, judges score every eligible entry, and the top three to five per category form the shortlist. Where scores are close, regional balance acts as the tie-breaker. After that, the panel meets to agree winner (s) per category and may name highly commended entries. Finally, the President confirms the results before the announcement.

The panel will mix CSA executive members, alumni, academics and partner organisations. Ideally, it should include judges from at least three of the five Commonwealth regions. Every judge signs a conflict-of-interest declaration. As a result, no judge scores an entry they have a link to.

Timeline Proposal

Nominations would run for three weeks, from 27 October to 17 November 2026. This leaves time for screening and judging before a virtual ceremony on Saturday 19 December 2026.

Stage	Proposed dates (2026)
Judges' recruitment	5 to 16 October
Concept approved	23 October
Nominations open	27 October
Nomination closes	17 November
Eligibility screening	18 to 22 November
Judging and shortlisting	23 November to 6 December
Shortlist announced	7 December
Virtual awards ceremony (Winners announced)	19 December

Recognition, Ceremony and Communications

Every winner receives a signed digital award certificate and a CSA Excellence Awards 2026 badge. They can display the badge on LinkedIn and in email signatures. In addition, CSA will feature each winner on its website and social channels. Shortlisted nominees will also receive a certificate of recognition.

We propose a full day virtual ceremony. This lets winners join from any time zone. Later, CSA could also honour winners in person at a regional convention or summit.

ENDS.