



AUSTRALIAN VETERANS'
CHILDREN ASSISTANCE TRUST

2021 Pre-Budget Submission to expand the Long Tan Bursary Scheme

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Patron His Excellency General the Honourable David Hurley AC DSC (Retd)

Evidence to support expanding the Long Tan Bursary Scheme

The Australian Veterans' Children Assistance Trust (AVCAT) has been successfully administering and managing the Long Tan Bursary Scheme (LTBS) funded by the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) since its inception in 2001. The tasks, guidelines and compliance between DVA and AVCAT is governed by a Services of Agreement and Operational Guidelines. In 2020 DVA expanded the LTBS in recognition of the data and evidence of need provided by AVCAT. This meant that an extra thirteen (13) applicants received a Long Tan Bursary (LTB). Even with this expansion, thirty (32) eligible applicants did not receive a LTB. **In 2021, eighty-six (86) applicants have been assessed as eligible for a LTB, however the current funding is for thirty-seven (37) LTBS. This means that forty-nine (49) applicants will not receive a LTB.**

During the recent application process, AVCAT regularly updated DVA and Minister Chester's office with data and evidence detailing the need and requesting more funding to meet the demand for eligible LTB applicants. As well, information has been provided regarding the COVID -19 impact on scholars and applicants.

The volunteer Chair of AVCAT's National Selection Committee, Ms Karen Blackwell, and the other committee members who have been involved in assessing applicants for 10-15 years, have noted the following about the current applicants:

- the financial need of applicants is high to very high.
- the deservedness assessment and scores highlight the severe health problems of the veterans.
- academically the applicants are choosing or have chosen suitable courses of study.

AVCAT's rigorous independent assessment process results in a **Final Score out of 25** for each applicant - 10 points for Financial Need, 10 points for Academic Potential and 5 points for Deservedness. High final scores indicate high financial need, great potential to complete a chosen course of study and overall worthiness of an applicant. The following are the details of the eligibility criteria:

- Financial assessment considers all family or applicant (if independent) income/assets and liabilities and eligibility to receive Centrelink payments.
- Academic assessment considers academic results to date, ATAR score where relevant, potential to undertake the chosen course/s of study, reference from an academic referee or employer and work-related/voluntary experiences.
- Deservedness assessment considers personal and familial circumstances that could represent disadvantage to the applicant. i.e. veteran, applicant and family health conditions, familial circumstances, family structure, number of dependent children, effects of divorce, single parent family, family/domestic violence, family dysfunction, substance abuse or alcoholism and the effects of Defence service on the veteran and family.

Final Assessment Scores (out of 25) for the last 2 years are as follows:

YEAR	Eligible applicants assessed	Highest Score/25	Lowest Score/25	Range	Average Score/25	Bursaries funded
2019/20	82	22.57	12.80	9.77	17.18	50
2020/21	86	22.92	15.71	7.21	18.85	37

Data for 2020/21 indicates a higher average score and a lower range compared to the 2019/20 data. The higher average score shows an increase in the overall need and worthiness of the applicants. The lower range in 2020/21 also indicates there is a higher concentration of applicants who are unable to be separated which is further evidence of the increased worthiness and deservedness of the applicant cohort.

In addition to quantitative data, personal statements from the applicants such as the ones below are a constant reminder of the intergenerational health effects of military service and the continued and growing need for a supportive path to further education for children and grandchildren of veterans. The following are extracts from applicants' personal statements:

My father and I are estranged. He was very violent and particularly aggressive. Not having a father available to me as a child has affected every aspect of my life although I'm only conscious of this when I reflect on my relationships and how my mental health has suffered over the years. (Eligible Long Tan Bursary Applicant 2021)

My grandfather suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder and alcohol addiction as a result of his experiences in the war. Because of this, my father's childhood was often traumatic and domestically violent. As a result of childhood trauma, my father has become severely ill with mental health issues (PTSD, manic depression, bipolar, anxiety) and has spent a significant amount of time in a mental health facility. Recently, I have had to relocate from Brisbane back to Perth to take on caring responsibilities for my two younger siblings as my mother works full-time and my father is not currently in a position to care for them. (Eligible Long Tan Bursary Applicant 2021)

At times I can only describe my father as a powder keg waiting to explode, at these times everybody is on edge and try not to say or do anything to cause him to explode. It seems anything can set him off at these. I do put most of this down to his PTSD. In many ways I wish that I had a much closer relationship with my father, but I do know that he has done the very best that he could, and I appreciate everything that he has done for me in my life. (Eligible Long Tan Bursary Applicant 2021)

Funding request

Based on the LTB application data from the last 3 years, that is, **52 in 2019 compared to 121 applicants in 2020 and 122 applicants in 2021**, it is obvious that 37 LTBs in 2021 will not meet the demand. **AVCAT requests that the number of LTBs funded in 2021 be increased to 50+**. Two funding requests are detailed below, one request is for 13 additional LTBs and the other request is for an additional 23 LTBs.

Background information on DVA funding

AVCAT's operational/administration budget for 2021 is \$472,685, of which the DVA Administration Fee contribution is \$354,244, which equates to 74.9%.

Revenue for the other 25% of operational costs is provided through the administration fees from sponsors, donations and bank interest.

As indicated, AVCAT will incur extra expenses due to the increased number of applications from children and grandchildren of Vietnam Veterans for the LTBS, **52 applicants in 2019 compared to 121 applicants in 2020 and 122 applicants in 2021.**

Additional administration funding for 2021 is as follows:

- 13 Long Tan Bursaries to increase the number to 50 LTBs = \$19,448 (\$1,496 per bursary).
- 23 Long Tan Bursaries to increase the number to 60 LTBs = \$34,408 (\$1,496 per bursary).
- Additional staff time (promotion, assessment, website) 1.5 days per week = \$20,500
- Other administration costs including audit fees, increase to assessors' fees due to the increased number of assessments = \$3,000; IT costs = \$2,000

TOTAL FUNDING REQUESTED FOR 13 additional Long Tan Bursaries is as follows:

13 Long Tan Bursaries = \$52,000
 Admin fee = \$ 44,948
TOTAL = \$ 96,948

TOTAL FUNDING REQUESTED FOR 23 additional Long Tan Bursaries is as follows:

23 Long Tan Bursaries = \$92,000
 Admin fee = \$59,908
TOTAL = \$151,908

Governance and management of AVCAT

AVCAT is governed by a Board of Directors, the Chair being appointed by the Australian Government's Minister for Veterans' Affairs. The operations of AVCAT are the responsibility of the Chief Executive Officer (CEO). The CEO is assisted by a small team of 5 part time staff (3 full time equivalent) and 2 independent assessors who are contracted annually.

The AVCAT Board consists of six member organisations who are the principal national ex-service organisations. AVCAT is a Company Limited by Guarantee. Each of the member organisations appoints a Director and the nominating organisation, appoints an Alternate. The Repatriation Commission has the right to appoint a person to be a member but has chosen not to at this stage.

The Board has two committees: Finance, Audit and Risk Committee and the National Selection Committee. All Directors have governance experience as well as a deep understanding of matters associated with the health and wellbeing of veterans and their families who are in deserving circumstances.

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The volunteer Board Directors and the volunteer members of the National Selection Committee are respected in their fields of expertise. They are extremely effective in the governance of AVCAT as well as being cost effective as no sitting fees are paid.

AVCAT is also supported by a pro-bono lawyer who willingly provides assistance.

Overview of applicants and scholars

The eligibility criteria outlined in the current DVA Services of Agreement forms the basis of the assessment process. The final recommendations for the recipients of Long Tan Bursaries are made by the volunteer members of the National Selection Committee on behalf of the AVCAT Board at the culmination of the assessment process. The recipients for Long Tan Bursaries are approved by the Repatriation Commission.

AVCAT is currently responsible for the administration and management of recipients of Long Tan Bursaries and sponsored scholarships. As at December 2020, there were 104 recipients of Long Tan Bursaries and 145 recipients of sponsored scholarships. The sponsored scholarships are mostly funded by ex- service organisations and individual donors.

Applicant and scholar data

Total number of applications

2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
253	283	295	374	256	264	279	285	267	215

Number of applications from children and grandchildren of Vietnam Veterans

2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
87	76	55	85	50	50	56	52	121	122

Number of new Long Tan Bursaries and sponsored scholarships offered

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Long Tan Bursary	56	50	50	42	56	35	40	37	37	50	37
Sponsored scholarships	20	20	20	34	34	32	71	48	50	48	46

Number of scholars at the start of each academic year

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Long Tan Bursary	148	146	134	136	138	131	130	117	111	104	TBC
Sponsored Scholarships	38	39	48	66	67	77	117	134	155	145	TBC

Marketing, promotion and IT support

AVCAT continues to develop appropriate promotional strategies to ensure that children and grandchildren, of Vietnam Veterans are well aware of the availability of the Long Tan Bursary. Our marketing and promotion strategies increasingly focus on aspects of eligibility for the Long Tan Bursary. In this way we ensure that only those who are eligible actually apply, thus facilitating more efficient processing of applications. Online activities continue to be essential for AVCAT to successfully carry out its purpose.

Facebook

Presently AVCAT has 1577 'likes' and 1788 followers on Facebook, an increase from 1129 'likes' and 1212 followers since January 2020. We continue to strategically 'boost' posts to further increase AVCAT's social network reach. We average 6,500 views a month on AVCAT's Facebook posts. Many people interact with these posts, by clicking on them and going to the AVCAT website or commenting on the post itself.

LinkedIn

There are 342 in AVCAT's LinkedIn network. The aim with LinkedIn is to build the AVCAT Alumni Network. AVCAT plans to use the alumni network for funding more scholarships.

AVCAT's Website

The AVCAT website has had 64,357 page views in 2020. The average user views 1.8 different pages on the AVCAT website before exiting the page. Audience statistics show 77% of users are returning to the AVCAT website to view updates. Key messages are announced across AVCAT's social media platforms to promote the LTB and information about the application process.

AVCAT Alumni Network

The Hon Darren Chester MP launched the AVCAT Alumni Network later in 2020. Three hundred former scholars were contacted that resulted in 132 people completing a survey. The key findings of the survey are:

- AVCAT scholarships and the Long Tan Bursary (LTB) help create intergenerational change in the children and grandchildren of Australian ex-serving veterans.
- AVCAT scholarships have a positive ongoing impact on the life of the scholar.
- AVCAT scholarships and the LTB have a positive impact on the family and wider network of AVCAT scholars.
- AVCAT scholarships make a critical difference in building hope and confidence in scholars.
- AVCAT scholarships and the LTB create a sense of pride for the scholar, the veteran, and their family.
- More than 50% of AVCAT scholars go on to further study or professional development.
- The financial pressure for AVCAT scholars to complete their tertiary studies is very significant and many struggle with managing the ever increasing financial pressure.

Other promotional activities

AVCAT has established long-lasting relationships with many ex-service organisations and their members, especially those that support Vietnam Veterans, their children and grandchildren, at both state/territory levels and nationally. These relationships facilitate the marketing of the Long Tan Bursary through the magazines, newsletters and websites of these ex-service organisations. AVCAT's CEO is also invited to attend congresses, forums and conferences that many of the ex-service organisations coordinate with the specific purpose of promoting the work of AVCAT including the Long Tan Bursary Scheme.

Assessing applicants against the eligibility criteria

The process for assessing all applications received by 31st October each year is rigorous and reflects a high level of accountability, fairness and due diligence.

The capability of assessors illustrates their experience and expertise in the areas of education (both secondary and tertiary), analysis of financial information to assess need and a keen understanding of welfare and veteran needs. Each applicant can be assured of a fair, thorough and consistent assessment. As more assessments need to be done due to the inclusion of grandchildren, more funding is required for the independent assessors.

The three areas of assessment are financial needs, academic potential and deservedness. The applicants' documents and evidence are assessed against specified criteria and given a score out of 10 for financial need assessment, a score out of 10 for academic assessment and a score out of 5 for deservedness, with a total score out of 25. A confidential assessment summary is written in support of each applicant. It summarises the demographic information of the applicant; the veteran's service; the applicant's degree of eligibility; the financial need details and score; the academic potential and score; the family and health details regarding deservedness and score.

The confidential assessment summary is used as a basis for short-listing applicants and making recommendations for Long Tan Bursaries to the Repatriation Commission.

The need for the protection and safe storage of confidential, sensitive and personal information is well understood by all staff, assessors and members of the National Selection Committee. Since DVA's IT support has ceased, AVCAT now contracts IT support which will need to be increased in line with the systems required for efficiency and effectiveness.

The new client information system allows scholars' information to be more efficiently stored so that staff can access the relevant information online when they are saving relevant documents and providing support to the scholars. All personnel are aware of their responsibilities in regard to the Privacy Policy.

Scholars and the impact of COVID-19

The data from the 2020 Mid-Year and Annual reviews indicates that COVID-19 had immense impact on scholars in 2020. COVID-19 has been mentioned in approximately 95% of scholar letters to sponsors and DVA.

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In reviewing the letters, these themes emerged on the effects of COVID -19:

- increased mental health concerns.
- reduced study loads.
- difficulties with online learning.
- inability to complete practical components and assessments like lab work, hospital/medical placements.
- little or no support from the university/TAFE college.
- the need to return home having moved onto campus for study.
- loss of employment.
- lack of motivation, enjoyment and social interactions.

On the positive side scholars mentioned:

- the benefits of geographic and flexible study options.
- how proactive universities and lecturers have been in accommodating the COVID-19 issues.
- increased opportunity to explore new interests and skills such as baking, writing and music.
- unexpected learnings in telehealth and educational pedagogy.
- more time to focus on university studies as volunteering, hobbies and sport were put on hold.

The complexities and challenges with online learning were particularly evident with comments ranging from:

- a total inability to adapt and complete course work leading to failed results.
- the need to constantly manage issues with the internet and technology necessary to access classes and complete online exams and assessments.
- the need to finance upgrades for hardware and software.
- general educational disengagement.

Most of our scholars have risen to the challenge, remained agile and adapted to the changing advice from their educational institutions and kept their studies on track.

Following is a selection of quotes from LTB scholars supporting the analysis:

"I failed two units this semester. This year was absolutely awful for me and these have been the most difficult six months of my entire life. I really struggled initially when everything went online, and as I fell behind a bit in those initial stages, everything snowballed in my effort to try and catch up. COVID was the causation of this and the stress of this semester has been terrible, to the point I consulted with both online and the university counselling. I am excited to start fresh this semester and prove to myself that I haven't lost my ability to work hard and stay on top of things."
Hannah LTB scholar

"Since COVID season has set in, I have been unable to work at my usual job in hospitality,. Because of this AVCAT payments have been paramount. Looking for a new job in this climate is also very difficult so having the extra money is really nice for the financial security in these uncertain times. Hope everything gets better soon. I've decided to invest some of my AVCAT money into computer hardware, as I will be running a lot of programs at home on my computer for my degree, which I would have otherwise done at university. This definitely helped me last semester (having a powerful

computer), but online learning definitely has its drawbacks. For one, I am clearly less engaged than I otherwise would be, however I believe I performed well last semester and made the most of the opportunity. Looking forward for things to go back to normal. " Thomas LTB scholar

"This semester I maintained my high academic performance despite the challenging circumstances. I achieved a final grade of "high distinction" in one subject and "distinction" in another. This would not have been possible without your support." Claire LTB scholar

"Due to the COVID-19, nursing students have unable to practice in the lab, therefore we'll have extra classes after my 3 exams have done." Chin-Yun LTB scholar

"With one of my subjects I could not keep up as when the coronavirus scare happened. I started to fall behind and then started to panic, for myself and my father's health. In the end, I was not able to catch up." Alexander LTB scholar

"I moved back to my family to make living easier during the onset of the COVID pandemic. I found it difficult to readjust to the online learning environment quickly enough and didn't maintain the motivation to complete my coursework. I no longer had access to a room of my own to work in which I also found very difficult. I still wasn't sure if I wanted to continue my course at all since I didn't have any direct motivation to do so. The freedom to choose when I did work made it too easy to procrastinate. I am back in Brisbane with my own room which I find to be a much more productive space. I am now familiar with the university system and the online learning system and know what to expect for the coming semester." Jomai LTB scholar

"This last semester was a little confusing to get through due to the Covid-19 restrictions and learning adjustments but after a small period of time I was able to catch up and keep on track with my course requirements." Leah LTB scholar

"Thus far it has certainly proven to be a year unlike any other. In March 2020, my course moved face to face on campus to online delivery and will continue this way for Semester 2 2020. Like many of my peers I am missing the social interactions and connection my study provides." Keryn LTB scholar

"A different adversity was the way our education was delivered. The switch from having thirty people in a classroom to two hundred and fifty people online was an interesting experience. In addition to this, the major change from face-to-face learning to online learning was a difficult experience. Whilst I just got used to learning at University, I had to quickly adjust to learning at home. Although these adversities seem quite difficult, it has been an interesting learning experience." Brayden LTB scholar

"Due to covid-19 I lost my causal income and because of the money from the bursary I didn't have to worry about trying to find another job during the pandemic. This meant I could stay safe and study from home and give all my focus to my subjects. Even though the classes were mostly online which was a different way of learning, I was very happy with my results." David LTB scholar

"...big improvement and a mark that I am proud of, despite all the setbacks COVID-19 has brought." Amber LTB scholar

"Covid-19 period - when work was reduced, the bursary helped to pay rent and other direct expenses required." Mitchell LTB scholar

"I found the initial shift to online learning quite confusing and difficult however I truly value and appreciate how flexible and proactive the university have been at accommodating the current climate." Madeline LTB scholar

Evaluation and continual improvement

There are a number of processes, internal checks and controls, which are in place to ensure that the work of AVCAT is continually monitored, evaluated and improved wherever possible. The governance, financial monitoring and implementation of risk policies are undertaken by the Board and its Committees. As well, AVCAT's management is committed to continuous improvement through regular reviews of the internal and external audits of its processes, risk management procedures, daily work routines and by the provision of feedback through the reporting process to DVA as outlined in the Services of Agreement. AVCAT's client information system manages the individual interactions and support to each scholar.

The CEO is also required to report on an annual basis to the Trustee of the Quality Fund (a major sponsor) as to the maintenance of 'quality' in all that AVCAT undertakes including the processes, policies, promotion and level of transparency and accountability in all facets of the organisation.

Biannual monitoring is undertaken as part of the ongoing review of recipients' academic progress and their circumstances. There is also an annual review carried out at the conclusion of the application and selection process each February, of both the actual application documents, and the selection process. This includes reviewing the methodology, assessment processes and benchmarking utilised during the process. AVCAT maintains relevant statistics to monitor outcomes in a comparative format.

Financial management

AVCAT has maintained a very good reputation of over 30 years of funds management. We maintain strict financial management procedures for both bursary payments and administration funds for the Long Tan Bursary Scheme. AVCAT receives administration fees from the sponsors and donors and receives an annual payment from a Deed of Gift which ceases in 2021.

The Board has one committee which has separate oversight of financial and risk policies, the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee. All Directors are aware of their responsibilities and liabilities and receives regular updates from ACNC regarding good governance practices.

AVCAT operates internet banking for all current account transactions with approval by two delegated authorities, usually 2 Board Directors or a Board Director and the CEO. This procedure is required for any transaction. The comprehensive internal controls and high level of accountability by

the CEO and Finance Manager are overseen by the Board through the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee.

The Board monitors AVCAT's financial viability for current and future operations. AVCAT's financial viability is demonstrated by the Annual Financial Reports and the prudent budgeting undertaken each year by the Board and Management. Copies of Annual Financial Reports are provided to DVA each year and are available on AVCAT's website.

Quality assurance is underpinned by the internal governance structure, the annual audit provided by Grant Thornton, the strict compliance to the reporting policies and processes required by AVCAT's

Constitution, the Services of Agreement and the Deed of Gift overseen by the appointed Quality Fund Trustee. We comply fully with requirements of the Australian Taxation Office, Australian Charities and Not-for-Profits Commission (ACNC).

Another factor contributing to the financial and management viability of AVCAT is the combined knowledge and skills in the areas of financial liabilities and corporate governance. As well, AVCAT is highly respected by the ex-service community and other stakeholders. Board Directors, staff and volunteers are university graduates and some hold Masters Degrees and PhD's. All relevant staff hold current Working with Children Checks.

Insurances

As part of AVCAT's risk management strategy, the appropriate level of insurance cover to properly protect its interests and personnel is maintained and reviewed regularly. Insurance cover is paid annually in October and includes public and product liability insurance being up to \$10,000,000 per claim, professional indemnity insurance being up to \$5,000,000 per claim and workers' compensation insurance as prescribed by NSW State Law.

Conclusion

There is strong evidence of the need to expand the Long Tan Bursary Scheme. Supporting young Australians hit hard by COVID-19 will have an impact on the need for more tertiary education support, including for children and grandchildren in the veteran community.

Young people have been disproportionately impacted by job losses due to the COVID-19 pandemic because of the industries they work in, such as hospitality, retail, arts, and recreation. These industries employ 45% of young people.

In addition, the opportunities for paid employment for 2020 school leavers has also dropped drastically with the percentage of Australian job advertisements in April 2020 was down more than 50% on the same time last year.

However, from a human capital perspective the COVID-19 job crisis (and likelihood of more young people seeking unemployment benefits) presents a unique opportunity to increase the investment in education and skills training and improve long term career prospects for when the economy recovers, and the labour demand picks up.

Universities Australia reveals certainty for Year 12 students is crucial and that, "Australia needs as many of our Year 12s as possible to get a university education so they can contribute to Australia's economic recovery as our future skilled workers, researchers, entrepreneurs and innovators." ¹ and we know "University provides an excellent path to a good job. A university qualification is one of the best investments you can make. Younger women with a university degree still earn almost \$14,000 a year more on average, and younger men \$12,000 more than school leavers."²

¹ Universities Australia (2020) 'Certainty for Year 12 students Vital' 7/04/20 accessed 30/6/20
<https://www.universitiesaustralia.edu.au/media-item/certainty-for-year-12-students-vital/>

² Universities Australia (2020) 'Uni Reform Package Boosts Participation, But Further Study Of Detail Needed' 19/06/20 accessed 30/6/20
<https://www.universitiesaustralia.edu.au/media-item/uni-reform-package-boosts-participation-but-further-study-of-detail-needed/>

The latest 'How's Life In Australia' 2020 OECD report found that people with a tertiary education are doing better in terms of their wellbeing in a range of indicators including; long term unemployment, having a say in government, earnings, feeling safe, perceived health and life satisfaction.

It has been and will remain a challenging and worrying time for tertiary students. **It is evident that the benefits of tertiary education is well supported, and we know that during difficult economic times, the demand for university and TAFE places rises. Relief from financial stress due to the regular scholarship payments is also essential during this time.** Therefore, AVCAT is seeking increased support and funding of the Long Tan Bursary Scheme for vulnerable young people in the veteran community so they can avoid youth unemployment. Governments need to invest in developing the education and skills of young people to help drive Australia's post-pandemic economic recovery.

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