

EDUCATION AND TRAINING BENEFIT POLICY

- The Education and Training Benefit (ETB) was implemented in 2018 to respond to a mandate letter commitment to create an education benefit that would provide full support for the costs of up to four years of college, university, or technical education for Veterans after completion of service.
- The ETB includes up to \$96,549.95 (annually indexed to Consumer Price Index) of formal funding for post-secondary programs.
- To be eligible for formal funding (to a maximum of \$96,549.95), a program must lead to the completion of a degree, diploma, certification or designation from an educational institution on Employment and Social Development Canada's master list of designated institutions.
- A short course funding stream up to \$6,034.36 is also available for those who are interested in completing courses or programs of personal interest that do not meet the criteria noted above.
- The Department is currently reviewing program eligibility criteria and stakeholder recommendations to determine any potential program improvements.

WHEN PRESSED:

Q1 – What is the intent of the Education and Training Benefit (ETB)?

The Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence's 2015 mandate letter directed the creation of a Veterans' education benefit that would provide full support for the costs of up to four years of college, university or technical education for Canadian Forces Veterans after completion of service.

In response, VAC created the ETB to help veterans successfully transition from military to civilian life, achieve their education and future post-military employment goals, and better position them to be more competitive in the civilian workforce.

As an additional measure, VAC created a short course funding stream of up to \$6,034.36 that enables Veterans to complete courses that relate to personal interest and career development.

Access to formal funding requires the granting of a formal credential (e.g. degree, diploma, certification for an industry, etc.). This is in contrast with a certificate of completion, or courses that prepare a participant for an exam or test administered by a third party.

Q2 – When was the last time VAC reviewed the ETB?

VAC's Audit & Evaluation Division completed an evaluation of the ETB and the Career Transition Services program which was published in October 2022. It found that the ETB was meeting Veterans' expectations and determined that eligibility was appropriate, and that the program did not seem to be incentivizing CAF members to release. From a financial perspective, the evaluation observed that client uptake and expenditures are forecasted to continue to rise.

The evaluation recommended that VAC undertake efforts to review the regulated maximum amount available for ETB short courses (\$6,034.36) and consider whether costs of licensing exams and fees should be included.

VAC has conducted internal policy analysis on the matter and is considering options.

The ETB regulations were reviewed in 2024 as part of VAC's Regulatory Stock Review Plan 2024-2026. No amendments were recommended.

Currently, VAC continuously reviews its programs and associated data/analysis to address feedback received from various stakeholders respecting eligibility criteria and potential evolution to the benefit.

Q3 – Why do certain drone courses not meet the criteria for formal program funding?

In order for formal or technical program funding to be authorized, the program must lead to a diploma, degree, certification or designation, according to the *Veterans Well-being Act*. With respect to drone courses in question, they are not offered by trade, vocational, or specialized technical training schools as they are typically understood. They also do not award recognized credentials based on assessments of a minimum standard of knowledge.

In particular, the courses relating to drones are typically three or four day sessions that do not qualify an individual to work in the commercial drone industry following completion. Instead, the courses submitted for formal program funding to date prepare participants to complete a Transport Canada-administered test to receive a license to operate a drone in Canada.

This is similar in nature to preparatory courses to receive one's general driver's license or a license to operate a recreational water craft.

The program must also be offered from a designated educational institution that is on Employment and Social Development Canada's Master List of Designated Educational Institutions. Applications for drone courses submitted for formal program funding have not been on this list. The list is updated regularly and contains all of the educational institutions where students are eligible to receive Canada Student Loans.

This criteria has been established for formal and technical program funding to ensure that the disbursement of funds is in alignment with existing, accepted Government of Canada policy related to educational institutions that are recognized.

Q4 – Does VAC fund the purchase of drones, materials, or other equipment?

As it relates to formal program funding, ETB funds are to be paid for education and training costs charged by an educational institution and any expenses, including living expenses, incurred by the Veteran while enrolled at the institution. If there are funds left over after tuition, fees, materials and other mandatory costs are paid, they are intended to be used to cover other costs including books, supplies and contribute to costs of living during the term of study.

Regarding short courses, the ETB Terms and Conditions stipulate that Veterans may use ETB funds provided based on the actual costs of the course as verified by an invoice or registration form from the institution or organization. Fees may include materials that are a mandatory requirement for participation in the course. The ETB policy further states that payments will be made for actual costs charged directly by the institution or provider.

The Department is reviewing the terms and conditions by which formal funding is approved. In the meantime, Drone Course programs will continue to be approved under the short course stream or the formal stream should they meet existing eligibility criteria.

BACKGROUND

The ETB was implemented to create a new education benefit that would provide full support for the costs of up to four years of college, university, technical education for Veterans after completion of service. The ETB was implemented in 2018 and includes up to \$96,549.95 (annually indexed to CPI) for post-secondary program training that would lead to a degree, diploma, certificate or certification. The funds are intended to cover education costs such as tuition, required course materials as well as materials or fees that are part of the program.

A short course funding stream is also available to Veterans who are interested in completing courses of personal interest. This stream of funding includes up to \$6,034.36 (annually indexed to CPI) which may be used for short courses designed for self-fulfillment and career or personal development and enable Veterans to pursue passions, hobbies, and interests.

The ETB is a relatively new and growing program. It has evolved consistently since it came into force in 2018, and VAC has been positively reactive in accommodating reasonable requests from stakeholders.

In 2019, legislation was updated to make Supplementary Reservists eligible for the benefit.

In 2021, the policy was revised to include technical education programs of shorter duration under formal program funding. Programs falling into this category are career-focused, intensive, and many involve a combination of classroom and hands-on learning. To be eligible, the program must meet all criteria applicable to formal program funding with the exception of duration (not required to be twelve weeks within fifteen week period). If the program does not meet the necessary criteria for full program funding, it may still qualify for short course funding.

In 2022, VAC Audit and Evaluation completed an evaluation which found that the ETB is working well. Eligibility was determined to be appropriate, and based on Veteran feedback, it was determined to be meeting expectations.

The ETB regulations were reviewed in 2024 as part of VAC's Regulatory Stock Review Plan 2024-2026. No amendments were recommended.

VAC continuously reviews its programs and associated data/analysis to address feedback received from various stakeholders respecting eligibility criteria and potential evolution to the benefit.