

Veterans' Affairs and Defence grant ACU more than \$240,000 to support veterans' transition from the military to university

Australian Catholic University (ACU) has received a grant of more than \$240,000 from the Office of the Minister for Veterans' Affairs and Minister for Defence Personnel under the 2019-20 Supporting Younger Veterans (SYV) grants program.

The grant – awarded to Prof Sandra Jones (PVC Engagement, ACU) and Mr Matthew Wyatt-Smith (CEO, Australian Student Veterans Association) – is to assist ACU to create a tertiary credit mapping framework to enable Australian Defence Force (ADF) veterans to have their service record assessed for Credit for Prior Learning when entering and undertaking university-level studies.

The SYV program aims to foster the ability of ex-service organisations (ESOs) and non-ex-service organisations to support the needs of younger veterans as they transition out of the Australian Defence Force (ADF), establish themselves into civilian life, and manage the challenges their ADF service presents through different stages of their post-military life.

The grant will support ACU's innovative Veteran's Entry Program (VEP) – a new pathway program launched by the university in 2019. The VEP made ACU the first Australian university to offer consistent entry requirements for veterans, regardless of state of residence and study.

VEP allows for adjustment factors following two years of military service. Veterans are eligible to receive a Selection Rank in QLD, NSW and ACT, using a table of equivalence for service undertaken in the different Forces. ACU Director, Portfolio and Program Management, Judy Laverty said, "The grant is an important enabler to support our veterans and increase ACU's impact through VEP."

The VEP reflects ACU's commitment to promoting the academic success, empowerment, and professional development of student veterans through advocacy and supporting resources. These initiatives aim to alleviate transitional issues for veterans and help them achieve their study and career goals. CEO of Australian Student Veterans Association, Matthew Wyatt-Smith said "the VEP significantly reduces the 'barriers of entry' for prospective Student Veterans who are seeking to undertake tertiary education post their military career. This program benefits both the veteran, regardless of rank, and society at large, as these exceptionally capable individuals will be empowered through higher learning to contribute to society through employment where tertiary education is a prerequisite."

VEP is part of ACU's wider Student Veterans Support Program (SVSP), which was established by the university in 2018 to support student military veterans as they make the transition from military to university life. SVSP aims to provide ongoing support to veterans, from applying and enrolling, to timetabling and orientation, as well as academic, counselling and financial support. ACU Pathways Director Marta Skrbis said, "ACU recognises unique challenges faced by student veterans during their transitioning from the defence force into academic life.

"SVSP is currently working on a comprehensive transition program, based on successful USA models. We are positive this will make a huge difference to the incoming student veterans. With the addition of the grant, SVSP is very well positioned to become the model of excellence in supporting student veterans to success in the Australian tertiary education."

Background to ACU's Student Veterans Support program (SVSP)

In early 2019, ACU partnered with the Australian Student Veterans' Association (ASVA), La Trobe University, Charles Darwin University and Western Sydney University on a major national project to increase access to and support of younger military student veterans in higher education.

The project built on findings from previous research by La Trobe University's Centre for Higher Education Equity and Diversity (CHEEDR) with the ASVA, which found that most student veterans were not identified within higher education institutions, and many felt marginalised and unsupported.

The Department of Veterans Affairs funded the national capacity-building project, 'From the Military to the Academy', which enabled ACU to develop a framework to bring together activities across the University to support current and future student veterans.

Through this framework ACU appointed its first Student Veteran Administration Officer who worked with staff across the university to develop a comprehensive program to support student veterans across all ACU campuses.

The SVSP has already made considerable progress in exceeding the goals of the funded project and has laid the groundwork for a smooth transition for military veterans enrolling in the Veteran's Entry Pathway (VEP) scheme for 2020.

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