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Credit where it's due for Australia's war vets

Student veterans will receive a leg-up thanks to an initiative that will provide credit for prior courses in the Australian Defence Force towards Australian Catholic University courses.

ACU's commitment to be the destination university for veterans and their families has led to the development of the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) project which aims to support those transitioning out of the military by formally acknowledging rank and training completed during their service as part of the application process.

The credit mapping framework will effectively slash the duration and cost of a degree, and have the potential to launch confident, skilful and job-ready veterans sooner into their new careers.

RPL for Veterans was funded by the Department of Veterans' Affairs and ACU will be the first university in Australia to offer the service to ADF members. The project was launched today (August 31) at an online event attended by Governor General, and former Chancellor of ACU, Sir Peter Cosgrove, and the Hon Andrew Gee, MP, Minister for Veterans Affairs and Minister for Defence Personnel.

"Our veterans stood for this country, and now we are honoured to stand for them," ACU Vice-Chancellor and President Professor Zlatko Skrbis said.

"I am delighted to say that it is now much easier for veterans to navigate the enrolment process and get recognition for prior learning they deserve. In short, we are putting our staff, our know-how and campuses in service to veterans, their families and the communities that they belong to."

Empowering veteran success has never been more important. Research commissioned by the Department of Veterans' Affairs and conducted by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare found there were 419 known suicides – one every two weeks - of serving, ex-serving and reserve defence personnel between 2001-17.

Sergeant Krystal Brown has served more than two decades, both in the regular army and Army Reserve. Typical of many of her colleagues she perceived herself as another cog in the military machine, no more or less deserving of help than anyone else.

“I was building a new career and wanted to start from scratch,” the ACU student midwife said. “But once I got into my course, I thought I’ve done chunks of this before. I should get RPL.

“I’ve done the time. Get it recognised.”

Krystal received 10 credit points towards the unit Justice and Change in a Global World and is now open to the possibility of pursuing a MBA, for which she could potentially receive 90 credit points in RPL.

“I don’t know if I’m up for that, but with a Masters available it’s suddenly appealing. It’s like I’m super sizing my opportunities,” the mother-of-three said.

ACU acknowledges the challenges involved in moving from the ADF into tertiary education. Transitioning out of the military can be difficult for many veterans, with high rates of unemployment and mental health issues.

Undertaking higher education is an internationally recognised pathway from the military to civilian life.

The Australian Student Veterans Association was a collaborative partner on the initiative and chief executive Matthew Wyatt-Smith said the mapping framework, to be shared with all Australian universities, would increase the value proposition of a tertiary degree.

“When you’ve got to keep a roof over your head and commit to three-four years of fulltime study, that can be a daunting prospect,” he said.

“But with recognition of military service, that might accelerate your qualifications to two years fulltime or three years part-time. That shifts the decision-making needle significantly.”

ACU will assess the student veteran’s record of service to determine if they are eligible for specified or unspecified credit in RPL. More than 40 ACU degrees are eligible for RPL through this scheme.

In recognition of their service to country and community, ACU will grant transitioning ADF members' credit for the Core Curriculum unit, Justice and Change in a Global World. This credit is available for most undergraduate degrees.

RPL is among a bundle of ACU programs designed to smooth the transition of veterans into civilian life.

The Veteran Transition Program (VTP) and Veteran Entry Program (VEP) address the need for post-service career pathways for Defence personnel, while more than 141 student veterans across nine campuses have the opportunity to tap into the Student Veteran Support Program (SVSP).

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