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Supporting military veterans in higher education

they bring unique strengths and perspectives that benefit the learning of all students

By **ANDREW HARVEY** and **LISA ANDREWARTHA**

Students who are military veterans are strangely invisible within Australian universities. By contrast, much of the growth of the US higher education system after World War II was driven by the [GI Bill](#), which continues to cover tuition fees and costs of living for student veterans at public universities. In the UK, [universities are encouraged](#) to sign up to the Armed Forces Covenant and provide scholarships and support for their student veterans.

The need to support student veterans is moral, economic, and pedagogic. The [Australian Defence Veterans' Covenant](#) was created to recognise the unique nature of military service, and employers offer benefits and discounts to veterans through it. Extending this recognition to higher education would be both logical and laudable. We also know that those who serve in the Australian Defence Force have relatively low rates of suicide, but after transitioning from the ADF the [risks of suicide](#), disability, and unemployment rise substantially.

Equally though, [our research](#) has found that veterans have skills and qualifications that are often under-acknowledged by universities at admission. Indeed, we found that veterans typically bring unique strengths and perspectives that benefit the learning of all students. Research on inclusive excellence by [Jeff Milem and colleagues](#) highlights that the quality of learning improves when diverse perspectives are present and beliefs are challenged. Recognising prior learning and skills, and creating veteran-friendly campuses, are in the interests of all students.

Since our initial report, a handful of Australian universities have developed veterans' support programs, providing tailored admission pathways, flexible timetabling and study arrangements, and peer networks supported by the [Australian Student Veterans Association](#). Translating these efforts into a sector-wide commitment is the next policy challenge, alongside a Commonwealth commitment to track and support student veterans.

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