

# **The New England Award**

## **A Case Study of the Context, Development, Implementation and Outcomes of the New England Award in its first two years**

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## **Abstract**

This was a case study of the context, development and implementation of the New England Award (NEA) and an evaluation of the outcomes in its first two years of operation. The NEA was introduced at the University of New England (UNE) in 2004 for on-campus students. Its primary aim was to support UNE's Graduate Attributes Policy through the promotion and recognition of extra-curricular achievement as a means by which the UNE graduate attributes may be developed. A secondary aim of the Award was to promote the special UNE on-campus experience. The objective of the study was to make a recommendation to the university administration about whether the program should continue to be funded beyond the initial pilot period. I was the leading figure in the establishment of the NEA and its first manager and as such played a pivotal role in its development and implementation.

The Literature Review covered the broader context of the study including an exploration of notions of 'graduateness', the birth of the graduate attributes movement and related developments in Australia and elsewhere. These recognise that graduate attributes can be developed through participation in extra-curricular activity to complement the more common curriculum-based approach. The Literature Review reflected a change in my own view about graduate attributes which occurred during the course of the study and which had implications for my final recommendations to the University.

The study was essentially an interpretive one within the constructivist paradigm. Action research was chosen as the most effective methodology because of my close relationship with the subject of the study and the need for evaluation and change during its rapid development and implementation. The views were sought of ten groups of stakeholders selected according to their differing associations with the NEA. They were the first two cohorts of NEA graduates; NEA graduates one year after graduation; students who commenced the NEA but did not complete it; the providers of the extra-curricular activities; senior university staff; employers of students; and student participants in one example of each of the three NEA activity categories of extra-curricular learning and training; preparation for employment; and community contribution. Other data sources included an interview with the Vice-Chancellor of UNE plus student journals, related correspondence and meeting minutes, and my project diary. The final product of the study is a portfolio of work, the components of which vary in genre according to the intended audience and purpose of each.

The study assisted in the development of the NEA, particularly the fine-tuning of processes and procedures. It highlighted organisational and human resource issues that adversely affected the smooth implementation of the program. It also assessed the program after implementation in terms of its original objectives showing that the individual UNE Graduate Attributes can, to varying degrees, be developed and practised through extra-curricular activity and that therefore the NEA is supportive of the UNE Graduate Attributes Policy to a certain extent. Additionally, other desirable personal qualities are also developed. Students value and appreciate institutional recognition of their extra-curricular achievement and feel that their employability is enhanced. The study also showed that the NEA has the potential to succeed in its other aim of promoting the UNE on-campus experience. Based on these findings my final report to the Vice-Chancellor recommended the continuation of the NEA beyond its pilot period as a core feature of the University and its extension to off-campus students.

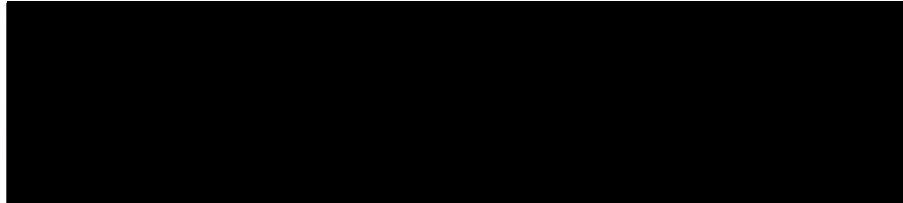
Additionally I recommended that the UNE Graduate Attributes Policy be revised to feature broad categories of capabilities and personal qualities rather than discrete skills and attributes, to allow for creative interpretation and adoption of the policy, to better reflect the opportunities available to on-campus students at UNE and to further promote the UNE on-campus experience.

The essence of the study was that extra-curricular activity at university, in tandem with formal curriculum, provides an abundance of opportunities for student development, especially in regional universities like UNE at which the majority of on-campus students live either on or very close to the campus. Additionally, students benefit from institutional recognition of extra-curricular achievement and in return the university has more engaged and satisfied students. This study of the NEA provided insight into how such a program was implemented and the difficulties encountered. It also highlighted the advantages to be derived for all stakeholders through the harnessing of the broader university experience.

## Certification

I certify that the substance of this portfolio has not already been submitted for any degree and is not currently being submitted for any other degree or qualification.

I certify that any help received in preparing this thesis, and all sources used, have been acknowledged in this thesis.



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