



### University of New England

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<b>Vignette title and details</b>	<p>The New England Award</p> <p>Development of graduate attributes through extra-curricular activity including work-based learning.</p> <p>From one year to duration of degree.</p> <p>Undergraduate and postgraduate students eligible.</p>
<b>Discipline</b>	Multi –disciplinary.
<b>Employment sector</b>	Multi-sector
<b>Student numbers</b>	400
<b>Optional/compulsory</b>	Optional.
<b>Credit bearing</b>	Non credit bearing.
<b>Assessment</b>	<p>Informal assessment by providers of extra-curricular activity.</p> <p>Self assessment through reflective journal writing.</p>
<b>Payment</b>	None.
<b>Number of staff involved</b>	One academic staff member with some administrative assistance. Providers of extra-curricular activity, both on- and off-campus, provide in-kind assistance.
<b>Weblink</b>	<a href="http://www.une.edu.au/nea">www.une.edu.au/nea</a>
<b>Key Words</b>	extra-curricular activity; graduate attributes; personal/professional development; work experience; voluntary work

## Overview

The New England Award (NEA) was established in 2004 by the University of New England (UNE). Its primary aim was to recognise and reward student development, particularly of the UNE Graduate Attributes, through extra-curricular activity carried out concurrently with academic studies. Extra-curricular student development opportunities are made available to students through cross-campus and external collaboration with a range of organisations.

The award was introduced to harness the wide range of student development opportunities available on campus and in the nearby town of Armidale for internal students. In 2008 it was extended to external students who are encouraged to identify their own opportunities for voluntary work and community service.

## Structure of program

There are three categories of NEA eligible activities: extra-curricular learning and training; professional development; and contribution to the university and local communities. Students must engage in activities in each category. The latter category involves collaboration between the university and external organisations such as Lifeline, RSPCA; Cancer Council; Camp Quality; St John Ambulance; National Trust and community service clubs such as Lions and Rotary.

For internal students there is a list of eligible activities available on-campus and in the nearby town of Armidale. Students may apply to have other activities added to the list. For external students there is a list of activity types to allow for differing opportunities in different communities. Activities are allocated a points value based on the type and duration of the activity. Students must achieve 1,000 points to be eligible for the NEA.

Student participants are required to register for the NEA; plan and arrange their own activities; inform the providers of the activities that they will require confirmation of satisfactory participation; record their activities and related personal and professional development in an e-portfolio; submit a 5,000 reflective journal based on their NEA experience and finalise an application for the NEA, with evidence of completion of all requirements. Participants must be registered for a minimum of one academic year prior to the completion of their studies.

## Special features

The special features of the New England Award:

- The way in which it complements curriculum based graduate attributes development and provides opportunities for real world application of theoretical approaches to graduate attributes and classroom-based practice.
- It encourages students to reflect upon and understand the benefits of extra-curricular activity. Our research shows that students believe that the value of participating in the NEA are about the positive effects of encouragement and goal setting; being focused on skills development; the social value of the NEA experience; and the value of the reflective component. Student feedback about skills development has mentioned communication skills, people skills, leadership skills, time management skills, organisational skills and self discipline. Some students have said that the NEA encourages them to be more involved than in the past. For example: *It has drawn my attention to my extra-curricular activities and led me to avenues I might not have done otherwise. It has increased my social awareness, motivated me to attempt things I had previously put off.* Others have said that the NEA has resulted in a broader university experience. There has also been feedback about the beneficial aspects of the NEA requirement that students keep a record of their activities such as: *Involvement in NEA has both encouraged me to engage more fully in extra-curricular work, and to keep a record of the activities. I would normally have done without such a record.*
- The very positive light in which employers of graduates have viewed the program. Employers have commended the way that the NEA encourages the development of life skills which in turn enhances employability. They have acknowledged the benefits related to recognition of effort and the encouragement factor of the NEA. Employers have also commented on the value-adding to degrees and the intrinsic worth of extra-curricular activity. Typical responses from employers are: *Recognition that extra curricula activities are as important as academic goals for the 'well-rounded' student;* and *The documentation is sanctioned by the University, portable and tangible so that employers should have confidence in the validity of its worth.*

## Future work

The UNE Council has embraced the NEA as a worthwhile initiative in terms of student development, enhancing the University's mission to produce highly employable graduates and also a marketing tool. However, the Council requires that the recipient numbers be limited to maintain a level of prestige for the award which is conferred at graduation. This is contrary to the original intention of the award which was to encourage extra-curricular activity, especially community participation and voluntarism. The solution to this dilemma has been to offer a two-tiered award. As of 2008, all students who complete 1,000 points worth of activities may receive a New England certificate. Those who achieve 1,000 points PLUS a credit GPA in their academic studies PLUS complete the reflective journal, are eligible to receive the NEA at graduation.

Another issue is the support of external students who are currently expected to be more pro-active than internal students in identifying suitable opportunities for appropriate extra-curricular activity. We have recently established an online discussion forum for external students to swap and discuss ideas for community contribution and volunteerism including supporting each other in generating their own activities.

## Additional Insights

A clear benefit for NEA students of the recording and reflective requirements of the NEA has been their increased ability to articulate their personal and professional growth through extra-curricular experiences; their self assessed growth in confidence and self-esteem; and their increased understanding and appreciation of a well-rounded student experience. Overall, NEA students have demonstrated good citizenship while also increasing their employability.