

FROM BUGGER ALL TO THE BEGINNING OF ANYTHING

THE BACHELOR OF ARTS IS A DEGREE FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

The BA is more relevant now than it has ever been, according to a study of over 300 students, staff, alumni and organisations in New Zealand.



Once dubbed the degree that led to “Bugger All”, the study squashes this notion and shows the significantly high quality and value of arts qualifications in contemporary society. With the average person undertaking five to eight different jobs throughout their working life, the need for people to develop strong transferable skills such as the ability to communicate effectively, problem solve, think critically and examine issues is crucial.

The longevity of success no longer relies on a single vocational degree that will serve you for the next 50 years. Instead, what’s needed now is an education that teaches you to think about the world in new ways, to ask the right questions and generate a mindset that is prepared for lifelong learning.

The study involved interviews and surveys with current and past Bachelor of Arts students, as well as over 200 business executives in the Wellington region. Professor Richard Shaw, Director BA External Connections, led the study and says the results demonstrate that there is increasing evidence – both within New Zealand and internationally – that a BA is the perfect degree for a world that is rapidly changing.



“These days, employers are looking for problem-solving skills, the capacity to think independently and an ability to research and make sense of complex issues. These ‘soft’ or transferable, skills are not only critical to a modern, open economy – they are at the heart of the BA,” says Professor Shaw, of Massey University’s College of Humanities and Social Sciences.

As a result of the study, Massey University’s Bachelor of Arts has been refreshed. Changes to the degree, including a new core curriculum, have been developed to ensure the degree stays abreast of seismic societal and technological changes and challenges of the 21st century. New core topics will be vital in addressing critical notions of citizenship, both in New Zealand and globally – notions that underpin the ways we operate and succeed in educational, cultural, business, economic and political spheres in these turbulent, contemporary times.

“It is our hope that the core will provide a heart for the BA. We are the only university in New Zealand to be offering a curriculum of this type, and we are confident in its ability to produce graduates that are ready for the world now and in fifty years time. It really is the beginning of anything,” says Professor Shaw.

The core includes five papers, which are spread out over the course of the degree. Students can study a BA from anywhere in the world, or internally at Massey’s Manawatū and Auckland campuses.

Although the initial study has finished, the College of Humanities and Social Sciences is committed to ensuring the conversation continues.

“We know that in order to remain relevant, we need to keep listening to what is happening in our businesses and communities. We want to deepen and strengthen our relationships with employers and students by inviting them to have their say” Professor Shaw adds.

In his unique new role as Director BA External Connections, Professor Shaw is responsible for championing the BA and expanding Massey’s connections with key individuals and organisations, including opinion shapers and prospective students both in New Zealand and abroad. As far as he is aware, the role is the only one of its kind in New Zealand.

“The BA has received a lot of flack over the years. It is up to us to change the narrative, to ensure people know the value it adds particularly to a society that is becoming increasingly service sector focused,” he says.

Professor Richard Shaw lectures in politics and is Associate Head of the School of People, Environment and Planning. His research focuses on the nature of Cabinet government, public sector reform and new public management. He completed his PhD in Politics in 2002.

“It is our hope that the core will provide a heart for the BA. We are the only university in New Zealand to be offering a curriculum of this type, and we are confident in its ability to produce graduates that are ready for the world now and in fifty years time. It really is the beginning of anything,” says Professor Shaw.
