

UNE L&T Symposium 2026 – Presentation Synopsis

1. Title of Presentation:

From Proposal to PhD: Building an HDR Pipeline Through AI-Integrated Assessment

2. Presenter(s) Name(s) and Affiliation(s):

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3. Main Takeaways:

Takeaway 1: Where small class sizes, online delivery, and competing life commitments make traditional groupwork logistically prohibitive, "AI teams" offer a pragmatic alternative that preserves collaborative skill development while authentically integrating generative AI.

Takeaway 2: Deliberately scaffolding assessment to mirror early HDR candidature (proposal writing, budgeting, viva voce defence) demystifies the pathway to Honours and PhD study, with first-offering evaluations averaging 4.7/5.0.

4. Application in Educational Contexts:

Teaching Methods:

- Lecturers can enable flexible group assignments with AI-team projects where each student operates as project lead, critically evaluating and refining AI-generated outputs against primary literature.
- Structured prompt-refinement documentation can be embedded into any discipline's workflow, teaching students to interrogate AI outputs rather than passively accepting them.

Assessment:

- A mandatory viva voce paired with unrestricted AI use during the creative process ensures academic integrity while encouraging authentic, deep engagement with content.
- Scaffolded deliverables – research gap identification, formal proposals, budgets, and timelines – provide multiple assessment touchpoints that mirror genuine research practice and grant writing.

Student Engagement:

- Students reported the project-oriented task offered freedom to develop ideas that "could become a thesis or a business," driving intrinsic motivation and ownership.
- The "PhD supervisor lite" mentorship model gave students practical insight into academic research life, with one student calling it "the most inspiring unit" at UNE.

Curriculum Development:

- The AI-team framework is discipline-agnostic and can be adapted into any capstone or final-year unit seeking to integrate AI literacy with research skill development.
- Embedding HDR-pipeline elements into undergraduate curricula creates a structured recruitment pathway, helping students recognise and prepare for postgraduate research opportunities.

5. Valuable Sources and References: N/A currently

6. Weakness and Area for Future Research:

Weakness: The first offering had a small cohort (n = 6, 50% survey response rate), limiting the generalisability of evaluation data and preventing robust statistical analysis of learning outcomes. Some students appeared to be overwhelmed by choice.

Future Research: Subsequent iterations with larger cohorts should incorporate pre/post AI-literacy measures and track HDR conversion rates to quantify the pipeline's effectiveness longitudinally.