

Methodology

The three main Research Questions are:

1. How did the NEA come about?
2. What were the outcomes of the NEA in the first two years of operation?
3. What were the outcomes for three selected activities (one from each NEA activity category: extra-curricular learning and training; preparation for employment; and community contribution)?

An interpretive study based in the constructivist paradigm was chosen as the most appropriate way to answer these questions. The research approach was case study using action research strategies with naturalistic methodological procedures. Table 4 below summarises the key features of the methodology.

To elaborate, constructivist research assumes that human beings do not discover knowledge separate from themselves; they make or construct it when in the social world (Flick 1999, 31; Schwandt 1994, 125). They do this by inventing concepts, models and schema to make sense of experience (Crotty 1998, 42-43). They then modify these constructions in the light of new experience (Coghlan & Brannick 2005, 130-31; Schwandt 1994, 126). The ontology of the constructivist paradigm is relativist (Crotty 1998, 63-5) and the epistemology is subjectivist (Lincoln & Guba 2000, 5). Relativist ontology recognises that there are multiple realities which are dependent on the persons or groups holding the constructions (Denzin & Lincoln 1994, 13; Guba & Lincoln 1994, 110-111) and their various perspectives (Schwandt 1994, 125).

The study is described as interpretive because I drew on my own knowledge and experience to present my understanding of the experiences of the research participants, an activity often referred to as meaning making (Glesne 1999, 157; Guba & Lincoln 2005, 197). This approach was chosen because for qualitative research in the constructivist paradigm it was more appropriate than a positivist approach which assumes a fixed, measurable reality (Denzin & Lincoln 2005, 7; Glesne 1999, 5;). Indeed, many researchers do not separate interpretivist and constructivist paradigms because they see social realities as constructed by participants and value a variety of perspectives of those realities rather than reducing multiple interpretations to a norm (Denzin & Lincoln 2005, 22; Glesne 1999, 5; Holstein & Gubrium 2005, 484). The

articulation of my meaning making, henceforth referred to as sense making was informed by Coghlan and Brannick (2005) as described in the introduction to *Column 1* (see page 1.1 below).

Table 4 Summary of methodological features.

Method-ological Features	Theoretical Framework	General Features	Particular features of this study
Research paradigm	Constructivist	Enquiry aim is to achieve understanding; knowledge and truth are created, not discovered.	Aim is to investigate the context, development, implementation and outcomes of the New England Award during its first two years of operation.
Ontology	Relativist	Recognition of multiple realities, all meaningful even if conflicting.	Ten separate groups of participant and non-participant observers involved as well as other baseline, process and values data.
Epistemology	Subjectivist	Investigator and object of investigation closely linked.	The researcher is the founder of the program and is closely involved in it.
Research approach	Case study using critical action research	Process and outcomes of a particular case. Research carried out by practitioner into own practice with the aim of improvement.	The NEA is the particular case. The researcher is the manager of the program.
Method-ological procedures	Multi-method approach	Naturalistic, qualitative methods of data collection; understanding of different contexts; interpretive analysis. Theory is generated through interpretation of participants' multiple experiences.	Survey, interview, focus groups; archival research.
			Discourse analysis and coding using Nvivo software.

In this study the multiple realities are the views of ten groups of individuals selected according their differing associations with the NEA and varying degrees of 'insiderness' (Kemmis & McTaggart 2000, 590), thereby reflecting different 'realities' of the NEA. Subjectivist epistemology means that the investigator and the object of the investigation are interactively linked and the findings are created as the investigation proceeds

(Denzin & Lincoln 1994, 14; Guba & Lincoln 1994, 111). This is certainly the case in this study. I am the researcher and also the instigator and Manager of the NEA and as such have played a pivotal role in its development and implementation. This is why action research is appropriate.

Because this study confines itself to the NEA which is one particular program and able to be bounded, it is a case study, a design which fits well with constructivist epistemology (Stake 1994, 242). As a research design, case study draws attention to what can be learned specifically from the single case (Stake 1994, 236; Stenhouse 1988, 49). When the aim of research, particularly in studies in education, is to study process as well as outcomes with a particular interest in context and discovery, the interpretive case study offers an appropriate and effective design. The NEA as a case study can be readily defined in terms of boundaries, people, roles and functions as described by Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2000, 182-183). Stake includes in case study 'both the process of learning about the case and the product of our learning' (1994, 237).

Accordingly this study investigates the context, development and implementation of the NEA as well as its outcomes. It is dictated by both intrinsic and instrumental interest (Stake 1994, 237). As a case it is interesting in itself because the subject in question is an innovative program. It also provides insight into a particular issue which in this instance is the development of graduate attributes through extra-curricular activity. All of Hitchcock and Hughes' (1995, 317 cited in Cohen et al. 2000, 182) hallmarks of case study are present in this study: rich description of events relevant to the case; chronological narrative relevant to the case; blend of description and analysis of events; focus on individual actors within the case; and involvement of the researcher.

Case studies are considered by many researchers to be an ideal mechanism for understanding and interpreting observations of educational phenomena (Cavanagh 1992, 147; Merriam 1990, 2; Stenhouse 1988, 49). They can be exploratory, descriptive or explanatory (Cohen et al. 2000, 182-83; Hakim 2000, 59). However, a commonly raised drawback of case study is that while it may provide rich insights into specific situations, it is often difficult from which to generalise (Schofield 1990, 202). Indeed Stake (1994, 240-243) points out that it is up to the reader to make the generalisations. It is the case study researcher's role to assist readers by constructing the case to enable the latter to draw their own conclusions.

Nonetheless, insights into educational practice gained via case study have the potential to influence policy and practice in the particular field, the achievement of which is often an original objective of the research, as indeed it is in this instance. This is particularly so with action research, considered by some to be a type of case study (Stenhouse 1988, 49) and by others to be a research approach in its own right (Coghlan & Brannick 2005; Cohen et al. 2000; Kemmis 1988; Merriam 1990) although others would say that it is more than a methodology (Kemmis & McTaggart 1988).

So, the design of this case study is based on the principles of action research. Action research has been described as ‘research carried out by practitioners into their own practices’ (Kemmis 1988, 42) and ‘the application of fact finding to practical problem solving in a social situation with a view to improving the quality of action within it, involving the collaboration and cooperation of researchers, practitioners and laymen’ (Burns 1998, 346). Key features of action research are its participatory and collaborative nature (Grundy 1987, 145; Hakim 2000, 10; Reason & Bradbury 2002, 1) and the high level of involvement of both the researcher and the subjects (Kemmis 2002, 91; Schein 2002, 230). More specifically, it is described by Lewin (in Kemmis & McTaggart 1988, 8) as a spiral of steps each of which is composed of planning, action and the evaluation of the result of observation, and reflection on the observations. These steps are repeated as often as necessary or relevant or possible in the circumstances so that they become cyclic. Kemmis and McTaggart (1988, 8) advise that the process should begin with a general idea for improvement or desire for change which comes out of a reconnaissance. The action research subsequently embarked upon offers an effective way to learn from experience and make that experience accessible to others. It is a form of educational research which offers a means to conduct critical inquiry into educational work, informed by and informing the general aim of improvement.

Action research in a case study has been chosen as the most effective choice of methodology here because of the researcher’s close relationship with the subject of the study, the need for evaluation and change during its rapid development and implementation and the stated aim of sustaining changes and improvements (Kemmis 2002, 92; Kemmis & McTaggart 2000, 569) by establishing the NEA as a long term, core program of the University. Indeed some view case study as a step in action, beginning in a world of action and contributing to it (Zuber-Skerritt 1992, 133).

There are some dangers in being too closely involved in research to the extent that one's 'insiderness' can compromise the study (Wolcott 1985, 199), or more specifically, the results may be shaped by the interests and perspective of the researcher (Hakim 2000, 63). However, with care, this can be more than compensated for by the understanding a perceptive inside researcher can bring. For Coghlan and Brannick (2005, 7) the total immersion of the researcher in the research setting as both an actor and an agent of change is an important ingredient of action research and essential to improvement.

Another danger of case study is while it may produce lots of information about the way groups of people interact, it may not necessarily point the way ahead to improvement (Wolcott 1985). When educational research is undertaken with improvement in mind, mechanisms need to be built into the research to safeguard this objective. In this case, imposing the broad action research steps described below and making them an integral part of the case study ensured that this critical component of the case study was not lost. Moreover, action research is essentially a grass roots approach to solving a problem which offers its participants an opportunity to instigate 'bottom-up' evidence-based change.

To explore the relationship between the actual and the possible in education is a form of critical enquiry (Marsh 1992, 136). Critical theory holds a view of what behaviour in a social democracy *should* entail (Carr & Kemmis 1986, 132; Eisner 1991, 85; Guba 1990, 24-34; Lakomski 1988, 54; Nisbet 1990, 139; Smith 1990, 180). Its purpose is to understand not only situations and phenomena but to change them for the betterment of the group (Coghlan & Brannick 2005, 7). This is an example of what Habermas refers to as the 'emancipatory interest'; which Grundy (1987, 18) defines as 'autonomous, responsible action based on prudent decisions' informed by knowledge. An emancipatory interest generates critical theory. When such changes are enshrined in policy, the research can also be described as policy-oriented research (Nisbet 1990, 139) and the results of this research are intended to influence policy. Moreover, critical theory recognises the political and ideological contexts of much educational research (Smith 1990, 179-183). Interestingly, some forms of action research are viewed by some as the embodiment of critical educational enquiry (Carr & Kemmis 1986, 179; Kemmis 1988; Kemmis & McTaggart 2000, 584-585).

For the purposes of this study action research was carried out over a two year period as summarised in Figure 4 below, page 33. The general idea for improvement or change

preceding the first step (Kemmis & McTaggart 1988, 8) was the researcher's realization that participation in extra-curricular activity, in addition to the formal curriculum, could contribute to the development of the graduate attributes and the notion of institutional recognition of this development as described in *Column 1* (page 1.3). Coghlan and Brannick (2005, 32) call this the diagnosis stage, designated stage one in Figure 4.

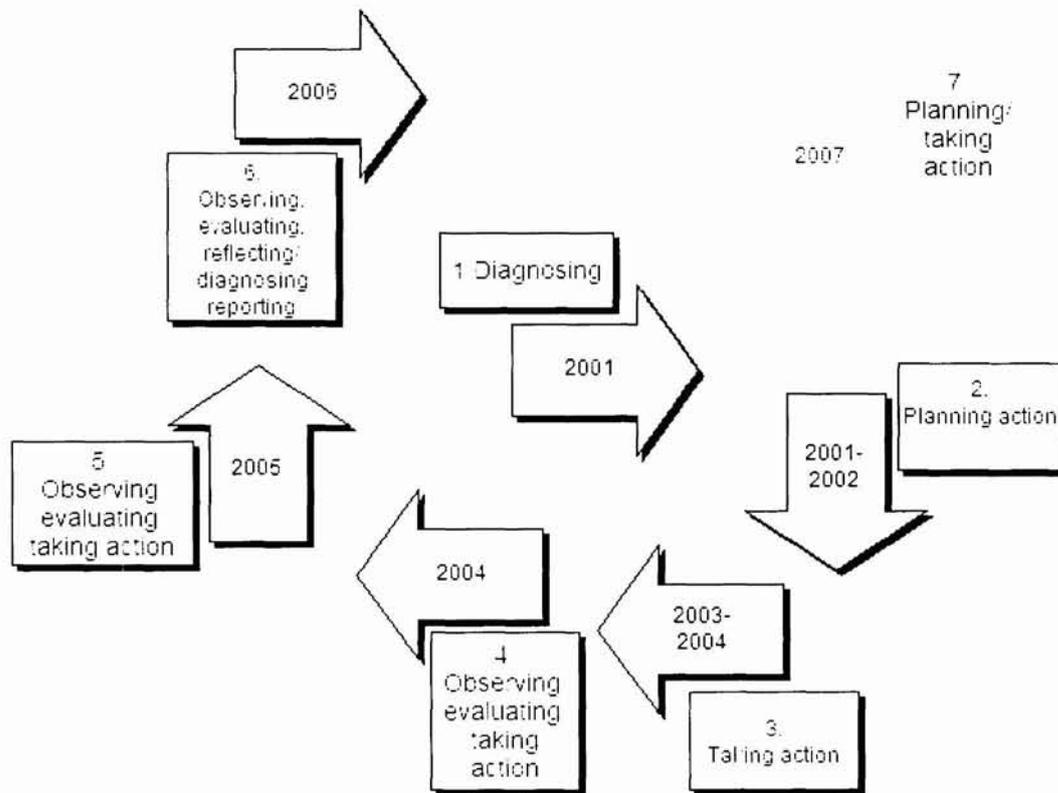


Figure 4: The action research cycle based on Kemmis & McTaggart (2005, 564) and Coghlan & Brannick (2005, 22)

The next step in the cycle, the planning step (Coghlan & Brannick 2005, 32; Kemmis & McTaggart 2000, 595), was the formulation of the idea and seeking and receiving University approval of it. This was followed by the development of the idea into a concrete set of rules and procedures and the implementation of the program. This constituted the planning action and taking action steps (Coghlan & Brannick 2005, 32; Kemmis & McTaggart 2000, 595) of the action research cycle, designated stages two and three for the purposes of this study in Figure 4 above. There then occurred a spiral of cycles of observing, evaluating and taking further action (Kemmis & McTaggart 2000, 595). These are designated as two stages (stages four and five) in Figure 4 above

because, although they were continuous throughout the two year period, there were two clear groups of participants as described below. All participants were both the 'researched' and the 'researched for', an important component of participatory action research (Wadsworth 1997, 61-2).

The next step, the evaluation and reflection step (Coghlan & Brannick 2005, 34; Kemmis & McTaggart 2000, 595-96) designated stage six in Figure 4 above, involved observing and evaluating the outcomes of the program from a variety of perspectives with the view to providing the evidence required to mount a proposal to the institution to embed the program into its core offerings. Throughout this process the enquiry was informed by the general aim of improvement. The eventual possibility of providing an information base for future decision-making was kept to the fore as a critical element. The outcomes of stage six are contained in the three *Columns* of the *Portfolio*.

The major outcome of stage six was my report to the Vice-Chancellor on the NEA pilot period. This report was requested by the funding Vice-Chancellor but became even more crucial when she retired and was succeeded by a new Vice-Chancellor. The formulation of this report required reflection on the outcomes of the NEA in terms of the initial objectives of the program. Hence there is a link between stage six and stage one, the diagnosing stage, an important element of action research which is recursive in nature (Kemmis & McTaggart 2000, 598-589). Because it contains a lot of material already reported in the *Columns*, the report to the Vice-Chancellor is not included in full in the *Portfolio*.

Stage six also involved my reflection on both the action research and my own meta learning arising from the action research. Meta learning focuses on the content, process and their underlying assumptions and also the assumptions which govern attitudes and behaviour within organisations (Coghlan & Brannick 2005, 25-26). Meta learning may involve applying inter-disciplinary techniques (Coghlan & Brannick 2005, 27). The action research stages described above parallel the key stages of innovation as defined in the change process literature (Osborne & Brown 2005, 129-131): invention, implementation and diffusion. These stages and their dimensions became useful tools in the analysis of change resulting from the action research process, as described in *Column 1*. Stage six outcomes are encapsulated in the conclusion to this *Linking Paper*.

Stage seven, in Figure 4 above symbolises the next stage in the life of the NEA which is dependent on the impact of my report to the Vice-Chancellor, and possibly the beginning of another spiral of action research¹.

Data collection

The methodological procedures used in constructivist enquiry are concerned ultimately with generating theory as opposed to verifying it. Qualitative methods of data collection, which emphasise the collection of holistic information requiring an interpretive rather than a positivist approach to dealing with that information, are the most appropriate. Constructivist research has in the past been known as naturalistic research because it seeks to test the trustworthiness, credibility, transferability and confirmability of data in the natural world as opposed to the experimental (Creswell 1998, 154; Guba & Lincoln 1994, 105; Schwandt 1994, 128).

Concern with researcher objectivity is replaced with a focus on the role of subjectivity in the research process. Most of the main research approaches used in constructivist enquiry are used in this study, including participant-observation, interview and archival research, and involve various methods of analysing textual, verbal and other non-numerical data such as observational data, field notes, minutes of meetings, interview scripts and historical documents (Atkinson & Hammersley 1994, 248; Glesne 1999, 8; Harman 1999). The use of multiple sources of evidence is typical of case study (Hakim 2000, 61) and action research (Kemmis & McTaggart 2000, 580-1) and in contrast to quantitative procedures, these techniques are knowingly subjective and, therefore, interpretive in nature. In this study I am a participant-observer.

There is a lot of description in the qualitative research literature about types of data but little that provides new perspectives or approaches about kinds of data since LeCompte and Goetz (1984) used the terms baseline, process and values data. Baseline and process data are however commonly used tools in the study of organisational change and innovation (Osborne & Brown 2005). Description of data in this way has been a useful tool in this study. The first, baseline data, indicated in Table 5 below, is about context and setting, climate and environment (Osborne & Brown 2005, 92), essential in action

¹ This stage may also involve the extension of the NEA to off-campus students. This was the subject of a separate investigation and was an additional recommendation in my report to the Vice-Chancellor.

research. In this study there are two kinds of baseline data: the literature about graduate attributes presented in the *Literature Review* above (from page 8), and information about initiatives similar to the NEA both in Australia and overseas which is presented in *Column 1* (from page 1.14) in response to Research Question 1. Additional baseline data are the outcomes of the investigation of extra-curricular activities available to on-campus students at UNE carried out by me, described in *Column 1* (page 1.8) prior to the development of the NEA proposal, the proposal itself and related correspondence. Excerpts and samples of these data are included in the *Supporting Documents* with identifying features removed. All other correspondence to me and between others involved in the development of the NEA has been archived but not made public in order to protect the correspondents' privacy (Coghlan & Brannick 2005, 74-5; Zuber-Skerritt 1992, 132-3).

The second kind of data is process data (LeCompte & Goetz 1984) indicated in Tables 6 and 7 below. It is about what happens in the course of the innovation or intervention which provides data for assessing its impact and success. In this study the process data consists of minutes, correspondence and internal reports written about or related to the development and implementation of the NEA. Additional process data are obtained from participant observers and others through trend analysis of the surveys and interviews described below. Also, throughout the study I kept a detailed diary of events, as suggested by Orna and Stevens (1997) and Burns (1990) relating to the stages of development, the steps in the action research cycle and the progress of the research. This diary is henceforth referred to as my Project Diary. All of the process data contributes to the first column of the portfolio about the development and implementation of the NEA. Again, samples of process data, with the exception of correspondence other than my own, are contained in the *Supporting Documents*.

All baseline and process data sources for the first set of research questions and sub-questions, along with the corresponding parts of the portfolio in which each question is answered, are summarised in Tables 5, 6 and 7 below.

Table 5: The relationship between Research Question 1.1, data sources/kind of data and Columns of the portfolio

Research Question/ Sub-questions	Data Source	Data Type/ <i>Portfolio</i>
Research Question 1. How did the NEA come about?		
1.1. What contextual factors led to the decision to establish the NEA?		
1.1a. What were the internal and external factors that lead to the creation of the NEA?	Graduate attributes literature; UNE Graduate Attributes Policy; the UNE context; Experience elsewhere.	Baseline/ <i>Column 1-Part 1</i>
1.1b. What need was identified?	UNE on-campus experience.	Baseline/ <i>Column 1-Part 1</i>
1.1c. How was this need to be addressed by the NEA?	NEA Proposal.	Baseline/ <i>Column 1-Part 1</i>
1.1d. What makes the NEA innovative?	Literature on similar initiatives elsewhere.	Baseline/ <i>Column 1-Part 1</i>

In table 5 baseline data are featured.

Table 6: The relationship between Research Question 1.2, data sources/kind of data and Columns of the portfolio

Research Question/ Sub-questions	Data Source	Data Type/ <i>Portfolio</i>
1.2. How was the NEA initially developed?		
1.2.a. Who was involved?	Internal reports & correspondence; minutes; researcher's Project Diary.	Process/ <i>Column 1-Part 2</i>
1.2.b. When and how did it occur?	Internal reports, minutes & correspondence; researcher's Project Diary.	Process/ <i>Column 1-Part 2</i>
1.2c. What was developed? (rules and procedures)	Internal reports, minutes & correspondence; minutes; researcher's Project Diary.	Process/ <i>Column 1-Part 2</i>

Process data are most important for Research Question 1.2 (Table 6), as they are for Research Question 1.3 (Table 7 below).

Table 7: The relationship between Research Question 1.3, data sources/kind of data and Columns of the portfolio

Research Question/ Sub-questions	Data Source	Data Type/ <i>Portfolio</i>
1.3. How was the NEA implemented?		
1.3.a. How was the NEA promoted?	Internal reports, minutes & correspondence; researcher's Project Diary.	Process/ <i>Column 1-Part 3</i>
1.3.b. What roles and structures supported the implementation of the NEA?	Internal reports & correspondence; minutes; researcher's Project Diary; Student interviews; Surveys 1,2,3,4,5,6.	Process/ <i>Column 1-Part 3</i>
1.3.c. How did the rules and procedures, roles and structures change during implementation and why?	Internal reports & correspondence; minutes; researcher's Project Diary; student interviews and Surveys 1,2,3,4,5,6.	Process/ <i>Column 1-Part 3</i>

The third kind of data, values data, is indicated in Tables 8 and 9 below. It is information about the values of the primary participants, secondary participants and the policymakers. The latter are described as the financiers of the innovation by LeCompte and Goetz (1984, 39). In the study the primary participants are me as Manager of the program and participant-observer, student participants, members of the NEA Advisory Committee and university staff involved in the program. The secondary participants are university staff knowledgeable about the program but not directly involved in it and non-university staff involved in providing NEA eligible activities such as employers of students in part-time work. The policymaker was the Vice-Chancellor who provided the seed funding for the program and others in university management who have an impact on the continuation of the NEA.

The values data contributes to the outcomes of the NEA which are reported in *Columns 2 and 3* of the portfolio.

Table 8: The relationship between Research Question 2, data sources/kind of data and Columns

Research Questions/ Sub-questions	Data Sources	Data Type/Portfolio
Research Question 2. What are the outcomes of the NEA in the first 2 years		
2.1.1. What are the outcomes for student participants?	Surveys 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9 Employer interviews Vice-Chancellor interview	Values/ <i>Column 2- Part 1</i>
2.1.2. What are the outcomes for the university?	Surveys 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 Employer interviews Vice-Chancellor interview	Values/ <i>Column 2- Part 2</i>

Evaluation (values) data constitute the sources for Research Question 2.

Table 9: The relationship between Research Question 3, data sources/kind of data and Columns

Research Questions/ Sub-questions	Data Sources	Data Type/Portfolio
Research Question 3. What are the outcomes for three selected activities (one from each NEA activity category)?		
3.1. Category 1-Student Leadership Program		
3.1.a. Why Participate?	Literature; Survey 7; student assignments; Interview with VC.	Values/ <i>Column 3- Part 1</i>
3.1.b. What do students gain?	Survey 7 student assignments.	Values/ <i>Column 3 – Part 1</i>
3.2. Category 2-Work experience		
3.2.a. Why participate?	Literature; Survey 8	Values / <i>Column 3 – Part 2</i>
3.2.b. What do students gain?	Survey 8; Employer interviews	Values / <i>Column 3- Part 2</i>
3.3 Category 3-Peer Support Program		
3.3.a. Why participate?	Survey 9	Values/ <i>Column 3- Part 3</i>
3.3.b. What do students gain?	Survey 9	Values/ <i>Column 3- Part 3</i>

Values data again constitute the main sources to address Research Question 3.

Trustworthiness

Data collection of the process and values data was via focus group, postal survey, phone survey and interview of the various groups described above thereby allowing a multi-method approach (Kemmis & McTaggart 2000, 599; Wolcott 1988, 192) rather than reliance on a single instrument and/or data provider. The surveys and interviews were augmented by student writing in the form of journals and also my observations in my role as the Manager of the NEA as found in my Project Diary.

The range of participants allows for multi-source reliability to be built into the data as Schofield suggests (1990, 223). This, combined with a variety of data collecting procedures, described below, provides triangulation thereby reducing the likelihood of misinterpretation and improving trustworthiness and richness provided by multiple perspectives (Hakim 2000, 61; Leedy 1993, 143; Stake 1994, 241).

The study therefore complies with two of Coghlan and Brannick's four stipulations for rigour when carrying out action research in one's own organisation: it involved repetitious action research; and different views about what was happening were accessed. The remaining two of Coghlan and Brannick's (2005, 28) stipulations regarding rigour were achieved through my methods of analysis described below.

Instrumentation

The instrumentation consisted of nine surveys and two interviews all of which were approved by the UNE Research Ethics Committee (Supporting Document 1, page 5.1) and all participants were furnished with the requisite information regarding the research and its use by the researcher (Supporting Document 2, page 5.1). Additionally, analysis of the NEA journals of 29 students was carried out after receiving written permission from the authors as advised by the Chair of the UNE Research Ethics Committee (HREC) (Supporting Document 3, page 5.2) and the methods literature, for example Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000, 68-69).

This study was a form of program evaluation. Therefore program evaluation literature, particularly impact evaluation, was used to inform the development of the surveys. According to Owen and Rogers, impact evaluation should have four key outcomes: a) determining the outcomes of a program; b) determining whether the program has been implemented to plan and how implementation has affected outcomes; c) providing evidence to funders about the extent to which resources allocated to a program have

been used as intended; and d) informing decisions about the future of a program (1999, 264). All of these were elements of the project as set out above, (pages 3-5 in the description of the three *Columns*) and informed the development of the three research questions. Additionally, Owen and Rogers' definition of outcomes as benefits for participants which require qualitative evidence and observational data confirmed the choice of open-ended questions which allowed for a range of views. Because there were a range of participants, or stakeholders, who were beneficiaries of the NEA in different ways, multiple sets of evidence were sought from a range of participants, not just the student participants in the program (Weiss 1998, 5). Hence the nine surveys and two sets of interviews.

As well as open ended questions, there were also some Likert Scale questions in the surveys designed to elicit degrees of responses. In Surveys 1 and 2 (described below), the Likert Scales offered six degrees of agreement with certain statements plus a 'not applicable' option. These surveys were developed and received ethics clearance prior to a change of supervision (see *Acknowledgements* above page ii). In consultation with my second set of supervisors I decided to reduce the six point scale to a four point scale to simplify the choices for the respondents and to not offer the neutral option because on reflection it seemed superfluous in a question about degrees of agreement.

A further influence on the development of the surveys was that Surveys 7 and 9 were evaluation instruments for programs that I coordinate in my salaried position at UNE and which I evaluate on a regular basis. Indeed, these programs were selected to be part of the study because of my association with them as described above (pages 4-5). Rather than survey these groups more than once the survey questions related to this research were combined with survey questions related to regular program evaluation. Hence the inclusion of questions, including some seeking biographic data, which appear to be unrelated to the research or might seem to demonstrate inconsistency between the survey instruments.

Each survey and interview was designed for a particular target group (Czaja & Blair 1996, 13-18) and the questions were grouped to reflect the major research questions and sub-questions thereby clearly delimiting the issues as suggested in qualitative research literature (Cohen et al. 2000, 246; Czaja & Blair 1996, 76-86; Flick 1999, 49-50). This means that there were common questions across the surveys. Draft research questions of student participants were initially designed based on the researcher's knowledge of the

NEA. Then, to ensure that the questions were comprehensive, these questions were pre-tested (Czaja & Blair 1996, 93-95) with six students chosen randomly from the NEA registered students who were completing their degrees in 2004. Initially a gender balance was sought but in the end four male students and two female students were able to find the time during the lead up to Semester 2 exams to be interviewed. The students were asked a number of open ended questions (see Supporting Document 4, page 5.2), the answers to which were taped, transcribed and analysed, to ascertain if there were any other areas of concern or interest that indicated that the draft research questions needed to be modified. Two areas were identified. One was about the fairness of the relative 'worth' of NEA activities and the other was about the length of and need for the reflective journals. A question about the fairness of the recognition of NEA activities was added to the survey instrument. There was already a question asking whether the written requirements of the NEA were reasonable. Another about their actual value was added.

Similarly, the non-student surveys and interviews were pre-tested on the members of the NEA Advisory Committee to ensure their comprehensiveness and comprehensibility (Czaja & Blair 1996, 94-5). The wording of some questions was subsequently adjusted to improve clarity and the survey instrument was also reformatted to allow more space for open ended questions and for ease of use.

Survey 1 (Supporting Document 5, page 5.3) was designed to assist gather data in stage 4 of the action research cycle and to ascertain student outcomes and outcomes for the University as indicated in Table 10 below. It was posted in October 2004 to the fifteen students registered to complete the NEA that year (described in this study as the NEA Cohort 2005 because of their intended graduation year). Thirteen were returned. This was an 86% response rate. The response rate was high because as the Manager of the program I had had a lot of personal contact with the students. As the first cohort with limited completion time they required assistance with the planning of their NEA program and considerable support and advice with the way forward, particularly in relation to retrospective points claims (explained in *Column 1*, page 1.39). Thus, it is more likely that the high response rate was the result of goodwill rather than any feeling of compulsion. The HREC approved information accompanying the survey clearly stated that the survey was anonymous and that no students would be disadvantaged in any way.

Table 10 : Survey 1 (NEA Cohort 2005) and Survey 2 (NEA Cohort 2006) -Relationship between survey questions and Columns of the portfolio

Column	Survey 1/2 Questions
Column 1 (Stage 4 action research cycle)	1,2,3,4,7,8,9,10
Column 2 (Outcomes: students)	5,6,10,11,12,13,14,15,16,17
Column 2 (Outcomes: UNE)	18

Survey 2 (Supporting Document 5, page 5.3) was the same survey as Survey 1 (see Table 10 above) and was sent the following year in October 2005, to the next cohort of students registered to complete the NEA in 2005 (NEA Cohort 2006). There were 76 students registered in this group but as six had already received Survey 9 (described below), 70 surveys were posted. Just 22 were returned. This is a relatively poor response rate of 31%. However, just 25 of the 70 completed the NEA in 2005. It could be that those least likely to complete the NEA were also the most likely to not fill in and return the survey. Unfortunately this also indicates that possibly useful information about why these students were unable to complete the NEA was not forthcoming. Another possible reason for the poor response was that I was less well known to this group owing to the appointment of a project assistant who took responsibility for the day-to-day coordination of the NEA and related student matters as described in *Column 1* and consequently less goodwill was developed. This survey assisted in stage 5 of the action research cycle as well as ascertaining student outcomes and outcomes for the University.

Survey 3 (Supporting Document 6, page 5.7) was sent in October 2005 to ten students who had been registered to complete the NEA in 2005 but who notified the NEA Office that they did not intend to complete the requirements before the annual deadlines. Four returned the survey giving a response rate of 40%. The survey was designed to elicit feedback to inform stage 5 of the action research and to ascertain student outcomes, if any, in spite of the non-completion, as indicated in Table 11 below.

Table 11: Survey 3 (of NEA non-completers) - Relationship between survey questions and Columns of the portfolio

Columns	Survey 3 Questions
Column 1 (Stage 5 action research cycle)	5,6,7,8,9,10, 11,12,13
Column 2 (Outcomes: students)	1,2,3,4

Survey 4 (Supporting Document 7, page 5.10) was sent to nine members of NEA Cohort 2005 who graduated in the Autumn ceremonies in 2005, one year after their graduation (March 2006). The other four of the thirteen successful members of NEA Cohort 2005 (see *Column 1*, page 1.74) graduated in the Spring ceremonies and were not surveyed. Six returned the survey giving a response rate of 66%. The remaining three proved difficult to locate. This survey was designed to elicit feedback to inform stage 5 of the action research and to ascertain student outcomes and outcomes for UNE as summarised in Table 12 below.

Table 12 : Survey 4 (NEA graduates after one year) - Relationship between survey questions and Columns of the portfolio

Columns	Survey 4 Questions
Column 1 (Stage 5 action research cycle)	7,8,11
Column 2 (Outcomes: students)	1,2,3,4,5,6
Column 2 (Outcomes:UNE)	9,10

Survey 5 (Supporting Document 8, page 5.14) was sent to the twelve major on-campus NEA activity providers in September 2005. This survey was designed to elicit feedback to inform stage five of the action research and to gather feedback about student outcomes, outcomes for the University and outcomes for their areas of the university as set out in Table 13 below. Ten were returned giving a response rate of 83%.

Table 13 : Survey 5 (Activity Providers) - Relationship between survey questions and Columns of the portfolio

Columns	Survey 5 Questions
Column 1 (Stage 5 action research cycle)	18,19,20,21,22,23
Column 2 (Outcomes: students)	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11
Column 2 (Outcomes: UNE)	12,13,14,15,16,17

Survey 6 (Supporting Document 9, page 5.18) was sent to three executive staff, the four Deans of Faculty and 12 Heads of Schools within the Faculties in October 2005. The Vice-Chancellor, as initial funder of the NEA was surveyed and also asked additional questions (Supporting Document 10, page 5.21). There were eleven surveys completed, a response rate of 55%. This survey was designed to assist with stage 5 of the action research and to gather feedback about student outcomes and outcomes for the University as set out in Table 14 below.

Table 14: Survey 6 (UNE staff & management) - Relationship between survey questions and Columns of the portfolio

Columns	Survey 6 Questions
Column 2 (Outcomes: students)	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11
Column 2 (Outcomes: UNE)	12
Column 1 (Stage 5 action research cycle)	13

Survey 7 (Supporting Document 11, page 5.22) of students who participated in the Vice-Chancellor's Student Leadership Program (VCSL) was at first sent to 24 students who completed the VCSL in Semester 2, 2004 and Semesters 1 and 2 in 2005 who were registered for the NEA but were not members of the NEA Cohort 2006. It was sent at the end of Semester 2, before the exam period. The response rate was poor, possibly because of the timing, so the same survey was sent to ten members of the NEA Cohort 2006 who had completed the VCSL in the previous three semesters with apologies for sending a second survey. As this group had received Survey 2 one month previously, they were asked to fill in only those questions that pertained to the VCSL and not the general NEA questions that they had seen before. In the end there were 12 surveys

returned giving a response rate of 35%. To avoid any possibility of overlap and therefore skewed data, only the data relating specifically to the VCSL and not that derived from the general NEA questions were used in the study. This survey therefore contributed only to particular outcomes in relation an example of an NEA Category 1 activity (see *Column 3*, page 3.2), as set out in Table 15 below, and not to the second action research cycle, outcomes for the University and general outcomes for students as originally intended.

Table 15: Survey 7 of participants in the Vice-Chancellor’s Student Leadership Program - Relationship between survey questions and Columns of the portfolio

Columns	Survey 7 Questions
Column 3 (Outcomes: Category1 -Why?)	1,2,3,4,5
Column 3 (Outcomes: Category1-Benefits)	6,7,8,9,10,11

Survey 8 (Supporting Document 12, page 5.27) was sent in November, 2005, to thirteen of the 37 students who had claimed NEA points for work experience in 2004 and 2005 as an example of the second NEA activity category but who were not members of the NEA Cohort 2006. Again the response rate was low so an additional thirteen students from the NEA Cohort 2006 were sent the survey, again with apologies for the second survey. These students were asked to fill in only the questions pertaining to work experience and not the general NEA questions to avoid overlap. The remaining four had already been sent two surveys (Surveys 2 and 7) so were not included in this group. Seventeen were returned giving a response rate of 65%. The survey was designed to assist in the second action research cycle and to gather feedback about why students were involved in part-time work and what benefits they gained, as well as general NEA outcomes for students and outcomes for the University. However, to avoid any possibility of skewed data, only the data relating specifically to work experience and not any derived from the general NEA questions were used in the study, as set out in Table 16 below.

Table 16: Survey 8 of NEA students involved in part-time work, both paid and voluntary - Relationship between survey questions and Columns of the portfolio

Columns	Survey 8 Questions
Column 3 (Outcomes: Category 2 -Why?)	1,2,3,4,11
Column 3 (Outcomes: Category 2 -Benefits)	5,6,7,8,9,10

In addition, the employers and supervisors of the 37 students who had claimed NEA points for work experience described above were interviewed about their perceptions (see Supporting Document 13, page 5.33, for the interview schedule). These 37 students had been employed or supervised by 33 different people. (Three worked for SportUNE in different capacities, two in customer service and one as a pool attendant/lifeguard; two worked for a local bread chain as sales assistants; and two worked for a local clothing chain, one as a sales assistant and one as an assistant manager.) Of the 33 employers/supervisors, 23 agreed to be interviewed giving a response rate of 70%. Of those that were contacted but not interviewed, none actually declined but pressure of work, lack of confidence about ability to contribute and in one case, poor English skills, resulted in friendly termination of the interview. In general, those that were most keen to be interviewed were experienced employers and those that were less keen were inexperienced young people in assistant manager positions in retail and food chains. In three instances the managers who had signed for the NEA points were no longer in their positions and the matter was not pursued with their replacements.

This group, the employers, was the least knowledgeable of all the survey recipient groups about the NEA and were the most likely to need explanations and prompts. Semi-structured interviews were therefore used for this reason because they are known to elicit more fully expressed viewpoints (Flick 1999, 76). The interview schedule was designed to gather feedback about the benefits to students of part-time work from their employers' perspectives; general NEA outcomes for students and for the University and to assist in the second action research cycle as set out in Table 17 below.

Table 17: Interview of the employers of NEA students involved in part-time work, both paid and voluntary - Relationship between survey questions and Columns of the portfolio

Columns	Interview Questions
Column 3 (Outcomes: Category2 Benefits)	1,2,3,4
Column 2 (Outcomes: Students)	5,6,7
Column 2 (Outcomes: University)	8
Column 1 (Stage 5 action research cycle)	9,10

Survey 9 (Supporting Document 14, page 5.64) was sent to all 85 students who had participated as trained supporters in UNE’s tUNE-in Peer Support Program as an example of a Category 3 activity. This occurred in June 2005 as part of the annual evaluation of that program. Additional questions for tUNE-in Supporters who were also registered NEA students were incorporated into this survey. Six of these were known to be in the NEA Cohort 2006 so were not sent Survey 2 later in the year to avoid survey fatigue in this group, as described above. Twenty surveys were returned giving a poor response rate of 24%. Fourteen of these were from NEA registered students out of a possible 29 which is a much higher response rate of 48%. The survey was designed to gather feedback about why students were involved in the peer support program as an example of NEA Category 3 activities and what benefits they gained from the experience, as set out in Table 18 below.

Table 18: Survey 9 of student participants in a peer support program - Relationship between survey questions and Columns of the portfolio

Columns	Survey 9 Questions
Column 3 (Outcomes: Category 3- Why?)	5,6,7,10,11,19,20
Column 3 (Outcomes: Category 3 -Benefits)	13,14,15,16,18,21

Analysis

The qualitative data were managed and analysed using QSR NVivo software. All of the results for each of the nine surveys and three sets of interviews were typed up by me, prepared for Nvivo and then imported into an Nvivo project. Tree parent nodes were established for each survey, each with child nodes corresponding to the survey

questions. Each individual answer in each document was coded initially to the tree child node corresponding to the question being answered. After that each child node was browsed and recoded as grandchild nodes named according to emerging themes. The responses to similar questions in different surveys were coded similarly where possible. For example, in Survey 1 there was a question about the value that students derive from being engaged in extra-curricular activity. The answers fell into three categories or themes: personal development, skills development and seeking to get involved or engagement. Four other surveys contained a similar question so the responses were coded to the same three categories as in Survey 1. When a response necessitated a new category it was coded accordingly and used if needed henceforth. This pattern was repeated as each of these surveys was coded. Other data sources such as student interviews and students' reflective journals were coded to free nodes named after existing or emerging themes.

Each question in each survey had already been organised into a table displaying the research questions and corresponding components of the portfolio to which they contributed, as set out in Tables 8-16 above. The corresponding child and grandchild nodes were then able to be grouped into Nvivo sets of data to match the tables. Each Nvivo set therefore delivered a useful shortcut to nodes and documents representing multiple data sources for each research question which allowed for straightforward manipulation of the data.

Any questions seeking data about outcomes in relation to graduate attributes were deliberately limited to asking specifically about the UNE Graduate Attributes of which all student participants and UNE staff were supposedly already aware. There were also open questions about any 'other' skills and attributes, such as those that sat outside the UNE graduate attribute list and were better defined as personal qualities, so that the questions were not suggestive of possible sought after answers but generative. These were coded to free nodes. There were also instances of additional data, usually values data, generated from specific questions particularly open ended interview questions. These data were also coded to free nodes, which were then assigned to the NVivo sets which corresponded with the research questions.

Because NVivo keeps each individual transcript intact, relational aspects of participants' responses were not lost and relevant characteristics and contexts were able to be tracked through the NVivo attribute function. This was particularly useful when

analysing employers' responses because they were a particularly disparate group whose individual characteristics had a significant bearing on their responses. Employers were grouped according to whether they were experienced or inexperienced employers and also according to their comfort with the subject.

Within their respective Columns, the results are further analysed using tools borrowed from evaluation research literature (Owen & Rogers 1999; Weiss 1998), interlevel dynamics (Coghlan & Brannick 2005); innovation theory (Osborne & Brown 2005) and the process approach to the study of change and development (Poole, Van de Ven, Dooley, & Holmes 2000, 91-111). Therefore, Coghlan and Brannick's (2005, 28) third and fourth stipulations for rigour when carrying out action research in one's own organisation were also met: that my own assumptions and interpretations were continuously challenged through content, process and premise reflection; and my interpretations and diagnoses were grounded in scholarly theory.

For readers wishing to read this Portfolio in a linear fashion, it is recommended that the three *Columns* are read at this point, prior to the *Linking Paper Conclusion* which begins on the next page.

Linking Paper Conclusion

The NEA project began in 2001. This study began in mid-2003. The aims of the study were to explore the context and development of the NEA, to apply action research principles to its development and implementation and to complete an investigation of the outcomes of the NEA for students and for the University with a view to making recommendations to the institution about the future of the NEA. These were not the only outcomes of the study. I also learned a lot about the action research process itself and about an entirely new (to me) reporting genre. There was one final outcome of the project and that was the institution's response to my recommendations.

Context, development and implementation

The experiential learning which took place throughout the process of development and implementation and which also informed that process, is described in *Column 1* (from pages 1.25 and 1.38 respectively). This stage in the life of the NEA was marked by both positive and negative events. Analysis of the experience in the light of the process approach to change and development, interlevel dynamics and innovation theory enhanced my understanding of the underlying causes of the challenges that were experienced and my appreciation of the milestones. These were identified in *Column 1* of the portfolio. The action research also ensured that through constant and iterative reflection on the process of change, continuous improvement took place and the program under scrutiny, the NEA, benefited enormously from that process.

Outcomes of the NEA

Information about the outcomes of the NEA was both rich and diverse as a result of the action research in which multiple sources of data were used. The results are presented in *Column 2* and *Column 3* of the portfolio. They were analysed according to evaluation research principles in terms of the primary aims of the NEA and four main considerations that emerged during the study.

Aims of the NEA

The primary aims of the NEA were to support the UNE Graduate Attributes Policy and to promote the special UNE on-campus experience. It appeared to do both to a certain extent.

The results of the study showed that UNE Graduate Attributes were developed and practised through extra-curricular activity, under the auspices of the NEA, to varying degrees. Communication skills, teamwork, problem solving and social responsibility were the most frequently cited attributes developed through extra-curricular activity that was part of the NEA, followed by life-long learning. Information literacy and global perspective were the attributes least developed through extra-curricular activity. No students said that they did not develop any of the graduate attributes through their experience of the NEA. The study also showed that the NEA did have the effect of promoting the on-campus experience but largely to students already active in extra-curricular activity. As the study was confined to students who had limited completion time for the NEA and therefore needed to be already active in extra-curricular pursuits prior to the launch of the NEA, this outcome is not surprising. Further research involving students who registered for the NEA during their orientation, or soon after beginning their studies, is required to ascertain the real extent to which the NEA promotes involvement in the UNE on-campus experience.

Emergent considerations

As described in the *Literature Review* (from page 8), emergent literature raised three additional considerations relevant to the study. One was a recent trend towards broadening graduate attributes to include desirable human or personal qualities that would better prepare graduates for an unknown future. This also raised a question about the relevance of the UNE Graduate Attributes Policy as it existed then and as it presently exists. The other two considerations were about quality assurance and the link between student engagement and satisfaction with their university experience. A fourth consideration, related to the second objective of the NEA, arose during the study. That was, that the NEA had the potential to become a marketing tool for the University (see Column 1, page 1.11). Each of these emergent considerations will be addressed in turn.

Quality assurance

The development of the NEA included carefully crafted rules and procedures to ensure that NEA students had the means to set goals for their personal development and were required to reflect upon and articulate their personal development and achievements, as described in *Column 1* (from page 1.32). The outcomes for some students as described in *Column 2* (page 2.17) were an endorsement of those particular rules and procedures.

It was also evident that inherent in this approach was built-in quality assurance through the goal-setting and reflective components of the program.

All of the participants in the study valued goal setting as a clear benefit of the NEA with the students and the activity providers rating it the highest. Also, while not all the students rated the reflective component highly presumably in part because of the time and work involved, the 40% who did rate it as worthwhile appeared to have a clear grasp of its objectives and an unequivocal appreciation of the benefits to be derived. These benefits included the ability to self-assess and make judgments about one's own learning and experiences and they were evident in all of the journals examined, despite many of their authors' inability to appreciate them.

Student satisfaction

Another clear outcome of the NEA was the opportunity it presented for engagement with the University community and the local community through involvement in community activities. It also acted as an incentive for many to increase participation in extra-curricular activity. These results are described in *Column 2* (from page 2.49) and *Column 3* (from pages 3.5, 3.20 and 3.39). Contribution to community was seen as an important objective throughout the development of the NEA as described in *Column 1* (page 1. 26). Community involvement and extra-curricular activity are key factors in how and why students engage with their institution as discussed in *Column 2* (page 2.11). Engagement is a well known ingredient of student retention. It is therefore reasonable to assume that the NEA has the ability to positively impact on retention, an important contemporary issue for universities. Further research is required to investigate the validity of this assumption.

Desirable personal qualities

In addition to the UNE Graduate Attributes, the NEA also clearly encouraged the development and enhancement of other desirable attributes, attitudes and ways of being, such as confidence, sense of justice, responsibility, capacity to form social networks, leadership ability, flexibility, receptiveness and thoughtfulness, as discussed in *Column 2* (page 2.26) and *Column 3* (page 3.40). These qualities are increasingly being included in the graduate attributes literature as being highly desirable. This finding reinforced my belief that grew throughout the study that the UNE Graduate Attributes Policy, with its narrowly defined list of skills and attributes, was outdated and in need of review. My report to the University on the pilot period of the NEA (described page 54 below)

therefore contained a recommendation that the policy be rewritten to support the development of three broad categories of skills and attributes encompassing learning skills; professional capabilities; and personal qualities (see Supporting Document 15, page 5.39). This would better reflect the student development opportunities that exist at UNE, both within the formal curriculum and through extra-curricular activity, and it would also allow for more creativity and greater flexibility for adaptation to different disciplines and contexts. The currently listed seven UNE Graduate Attributes would be subsumed into the broader list so that existing programs and strategies supporting the policy would remain relevant.

Potential marketing tool

That the NEA had the potential to be an effective marketing tool for the University was also a clear outcome of the study. It was believed by all participants that the NEA signals commitment to value-adding to traditional degrees through recognition of student development. This was achieved through a range of non-academic activities that present diverse opportunities for personal and professional growth, and the accumulation of cultural capital. Additionally, the NEA promoted the development of good citizenship skills through community involvement. Both these aspects enhanced the employability of UNE's graduates and hence the reputation of the University. These outcomes are discussed in *Column 2* (page 2.61).

Report to the University

In general, the NEA not only plays a role in supporting the UNE Graduate Attributes Policy but it is consistent with, and responsive to, the factors described in the literature as giving rise to the graduate attribute movement: increased emphasis on student satisfaction and successful student outcomes and the need to respond to the expectations of employers of graduates. It is also consistent with recent trends towards recognising the value of sensitive, responsible, community-minded citizens prepared for an unknown future.

In October 2006, in my report on the pilot period of the NEA, I made the case to the University that the NEA is not only a valuable award to UNE on-campus students in terms of enhancing their employability in the world beyond university, but also of value to the institution as a demonstration of its commitment to value-adding to the student experience and in promoting the wide range of experiences that it offers, as a small,

regional university. To avoid repetition just the executive summary of the report (Supporting Document 16, page 5.41) and relevant excerpts are presented in the *Portfolio*.

The report recommended, in addition to a revision of the UNE Graduate Attributes Policy as described above, the continuation of the NEA for on-campus students and the extension of the NEA to off-campus students based on the outcomes of this study. The recommendation about the inclusion of off-campus students in the NEA included specific suggestions for how to adapt the three NEA categories of activity to suit the off-campus context (see Supporting Document 17, page 5.42).

Reflection on the study

For self-reflection on the course of this study to be meaningful I need to place myself fully in the NEA picture by explaining my role in the genesis of the NEA; my meta-learning during the course of the study of the NEA; and why I chose this particular portfolio design to report the study.

Why I embarked on this project

As described in *Column 1* (page 1.6) the seeds of the NEA idea were planted in my mind when on study leave in the United Kingdom in 2001. At the time I was not seeking knowledge about graduate attributes development in particular. I was there in my capacity as manager of UNE Academic Skills Office which is UNE's student learning support provider. My intention was to collaborate and share resources with colleagues doing similar work. However, in the course of my meetings and discussions I became aware of the three programs, described in *Column 1* (page 1.14), which sparked my interest. As described, these programs later became models for the NEA.

To explain why my interest was then ignited and became a consuming passion for the next five years I need to reveal more about myself. I love working at UNE. I am not only an employee of UNE, I am a proud graduate of UNE. I was an undergraduate at UNE in the early 1970s and 35 years later I can vouch for the truth of the current UNE advertising slogan 'UNE experience stays with you for life' (see *Column 1*, page 1.6). Also, I know that my four adult children, who have each attended different universities, agree that the one who attended UNE had not only the broadest 'university experience' but had formed the strongest network of friends. I have also observed that the interpersonal skills and confidence of my UNE graduate daughter also developed

significantly more during her undergraduate years than that of her siblings. Clearly there were other factors involved in this but I am unshakeable in my belief that the extra-curricular activities that she became involved in at UNE played a large role in her personal and professional growth.

I am passionate about UNE not only because of my and my family's experiences. I have observed students blossom at UNE and achieve in ways they would never have anticipated when they enrolled. I have known countless students for whom UNE was not their first choice university but who became hooked on the experience and the huge range of social, cultural and sporting activity. I know that UNE alumni are a strong and devoted diaspora.

Nevertheless UNE struggles to fill its university places each year because, in part, it is not one of Australia's 'sandstone' universities and it is not located in a city or on the coast. However, UNE is the oldest regional university in Australia and has a long and proud tradition of offering an alternative entry pathway to students that is not based on secondary school results. The School Recommendation Admission Scheme (SRAS), which recognises that existing final year school assessment is not necessarily the best measure of potential success at university and provides an alternative based on teachers' recommendations, was established in 1972. It operates by direct contact between UNE and the individual schools that choose to participate. For many thousands of young people, especially those from disadvantaged educational backgrounds, this has been their only chance of a tertiary education. It also means that on arrival many of our students do not possess the same levels of 'cultural capital' as their counterparts in the sandstone universities, as discussed in *Column 1* (page 1.20) and *Column 2* (page 2.12).

When I began to think about an institutional award for achievement in extra-curricular activity while in the UK, my commitment to UNE, my appreciation of the UNE experience, my knowledge of our student demographic and my belief in the value of 'the UNE experience' intersected. The notion of the NEA grew rapidly in my mind. I could see that it was a way of legitimising student activities that were under-appreciated by the UNE community. The extra-curricular opportunities at UNE available to students were so taken for granted that their potential for student development and the accumulation of cultural capital were mostly overlooked. It became my ambition to see the idea of an institutional award through to fruition. This was at times an arduous and difficult task as described in *Column 1*.

Meta-learning

Coghlan and Brannick (2005, 25) describe action research as two cycles operating in parallel. One is the core cycle described in this study (see *Methodology* from page 33) and the other is the reflection of the researcher about what is being learned from the action research process, or meta-learning. Mezirow (cited in Coghlan & Brannick 2005, 25) identifies three useful categories of reflection: content, process and premise. Content reflection is about the issues; process reflection is about what happens; and premise reflection is about underlying assumptions. My meta-learning in terms of content and process reflection is largely captured in the boxed reflection sections in the *Portfolio*, as described in *Column 1* (page 1.1). Most of my meta-learning in terms of premise reflection is similarly placed in the boxed sections of the three *Columns* and also in the *Linking Paper Conclusion*. However, during the study I also questioned the assumptions underlying the premises of the study. For example, in presenting ‘holistic’ education as desirable I was assuming that it was superior to ‘narrow’ academic education. Many would be critical of the notion of a holistic university education. My reflections also revealed to me that the premise that personal qualities such as self-belief, self confidence and self-motivation (described in the *Linking Paper*, page 17) are desirable is faulty because those qualities are not necessarily good in themselves. There are many historical figures who possessed these qualities but are not known for their good deeds. These same qualities can be abused.

The most significant meta-learning that took place during the study was about how to achieve the right balance between being the researcher and also a key participant in the study, even though action research by definition involves immersion of the researcher in the subject of the research, as discussed in the *Methodology* (from page 31). In this study this meant dealing with the tension that arises from attempting to objectively assess a product while at the same time being the chief product champion. I wanted the NEA pilot to succeed. I wanted the NEA to become an ongoing feature of UNE. I was clearly biased about the NEA but at the same time was attempting to carry out open-minded action research. I didn’t always succeed. My writing often veered into undisguised advocacy which I then had to carefully rephrase so that it was objective and conclusions were based in evidence only. I had to try to remain conscious of the dangers of ‘insiderness’ (discussed page 29 above) and being a ‘passionate participant’ (discussed page 7 above) at all times and to avoid allowing my interest to shape the

results. I had to strive to construct a case that allowed others to draw their own conclusions.

I am aware that there remain some conclusions that require follow up research but do believe that this is because of the small sample sizes of the stakeholder groups that participated in the research rather than underlying bias on my part. That and also the fact that the student participants in the study were students that were already (and necessarily so as described in *Column 1*, page 1.39) actively involved in extra-curricular activity. Further research is required to ascertain if indeed the NEA promotes participation in extra-curricular activity of students with no previous experience of it.

A positive outcome related to being a participant-researcher was that the study enabled me to deal more philosophically with the frustrations experienced during the development and implementation of the NEA. This was the result of enhanced understanding of events through the 'sensemaking' (described in *Column 1*, page 1.1) presented in *Column 1*. In other words, my meta-learning about organisational change, innovation and program evaluation refined my ability to steer the NEA through its pilot period. Hopefully this knowledge will also assist me in the next phase of the NEA described below.

The organisation of the portfolio

Initially the organisation of the portfolio presented a massive hurdle. In my work as a learning advisor I have assisted many PhD students, particularly those from non-English speaking backgrounds, with the organisation of their dissertations. I am very familiar with the typical structure of dissertations. However, as an EdD student, and perhaps because of my exposure to countless dissertations, I wanted to take advantage of the opportunity to present my research in a non-orthodox way. However, I had difficulty deleting the picture of a standard dissertation from my mind. It was not until I read the yet unpublished work of my colleagues Maxwell and Kupczyk-Romanczuk which likens a portfolio to a 'temple' (as described in the *Linking Paper*, page 2) that I was able to see the way forward. I enjoyed utilising the 'temple' metaphor. At times I struggled with the notion of the 'columns' supporting the 'pediment' because it often seemed to be the other way around. However, I am glad I persevered because I believe this approach has worked. I also enjoyed the challenge of taking the path less travelled. Another benefit is that it has made the process of extracting publications (as mentioned

in the *Linking Paper*, page 7) quite straightforward. I have five near-ready papers based on the two parts of *Column 2* and the three parts of *Column 3*. One was presented at a national conference in late 2006 and another has been accepted for presentation at an international conference in 2007.

Coghlan and Brannick's (2005) publication on carrying out action research in ones' own organisation was another invaluable resource during the course of the study. I constantly acted upon their advice, particularly about how to re-craft a story from narrative into themes and how to apply and present sensemaking techniques. There remain aspects of *Column 1* that resemble narrative but overall it is very different to the first draft which was a chronological story based on my Process Diary. However, it was the original story writing which acted as a catalyst to synthesis and analysis. It was also therapeutic.

Outcomes of the project

In October 2006 I presented my report on the NEA pilot period, as described above. In December 2006, my recommendations were considered by the UNE Council which endorsed the NEA as an ongoing feature of UNE. The Council also accepted my recommendation that the NEA be extended to off-campus students, as described above (page 55). In addition the Council confirmed that the NEA would continue to be a feature of graduation, retaining the new procedure adopted at the spring 2006 ceremonies, described in *Column 1* (page 1.35). My recommendation about revision of the UNE Graduate Attributes Policy was referred to the UNE Teaching and Learning Committee. On February 15, 2007, the draft UNE Teaching and Learning Plan 2007-2010 was released for comment. It contained an item (1.31) suggesting that the current Graduate Attributes policy be replaced with a broader framework (UNE 2007, 3), based on my suggestion described above (page 54). The UNE Council also suggested that the time was right to secure publicity about the NEA and its expansion.

In early 2007 I am busy meeting my next set of NEA obligations. Extending the NEA to off-campus students across Australia involves establishing completely different processes and procedures for the monitoring of community-based activities.

Unfortunately the UNE Council was unable to commit funding to this endeavour which means that it will partly displace core business of my role as Manager of the Academic Skills Office, an eventuality which may result in a recurrence of some of the difficulties

experienced earlier, described in *Column 1* (page 1.43). Thankfully the funding for the Project Assistant has been guaranteed.

I am also arranging the requested media publicity for the NEA. I am hugely disappointed that while in the beginning the NEA was an innovative program within the Australian context, in both the relative and absolute senses (see *Column 1*, page 1.21), it is now no longer absolutely innovative within Australia. This means that a great public relations opportunity for UNE has been missed but the ability to promote UNE as a university which provides an environment which is rich in experiences that support the personal and professional development of students, and also recognises and rewards that development, as discussed in the *Linking Paper Conclusion*, remains.

I am happy with the outcomes of the study.