



Linking Paper

Introduction

This is an action research case study of the context, development, implementation and outcomes in the first two years (2004-2005) of a program designed to promote and recognise extra-curricular activity and achievement of on-campus students at The University of New England (UNE). The program is called the New England Award (NEA). I was the leading figure in its establishment and its first manager.

Purpose and rationale of the study

The NEA was introduced in 2004 with seed funding for three years in the form of a Vice-Chancellor's Strategic Initiative Grant. Its primary aim was to support UNE's Graduate Attributes Policy through the promotion and recognition of extra-curricular achievement by students as a means by which the UNE graduate attributes could be developed. A secondary aim was to promote the special UNE on-campus experience. The aim of this study was to apply action research principles to the development and implementation of the NEA; to investigate the outcomes of the NEA from the perspectives of all stakeholders; and to make a recommendation to UNE administration about whether the program should continue to be funded beyond the initial pilot period. This was always a requirement of the seed finding but became more critical to the NEA when the funding Vice-Chancellor retired and was succeeded by a new Vice-Chancellor whose views about the ideas underpinning the NEA and its aims and objectives were unknown. Thus the work outlined here is ideally suited for the Professional Doctorate at UNE which is based upon the notion of research-led improvement in the professional workplace. The end product of the study is a portfolio as advocated by Maxwell and Kupczyk-Romanczuk (in press).

Description of the Portfolio

The organisation of the portfolio is based on Maxwell and Kupczyk-Romanczuk's (in press) analogy of a classic temple (Figure 1). The temple consists of an over-arching

pediment or roof representing this linking paper which provides coherence to the overall portfolio and is, in Walker's (1998, 94) words, 'the intellectual and conceptual glue' that holds the portfolio together. The pediment is supported by the peristyle which is the row of columns at the front of the temple. My temple has three sets of columns in the peristyle as in Figure 1, below. They represent the three sets of research questions. Each column set has two or three components which are based on the research sub-questions. The foundation upon which the temple is built is my professional experience in the field of the study which gave rise to the action research project and work carried out prior to the commencement of the study. The foundation and the sets of columns are substantiated by a set of Supporting Documents. When referred to henceforth, the names of the parts of the portfolio will be placed in italics.

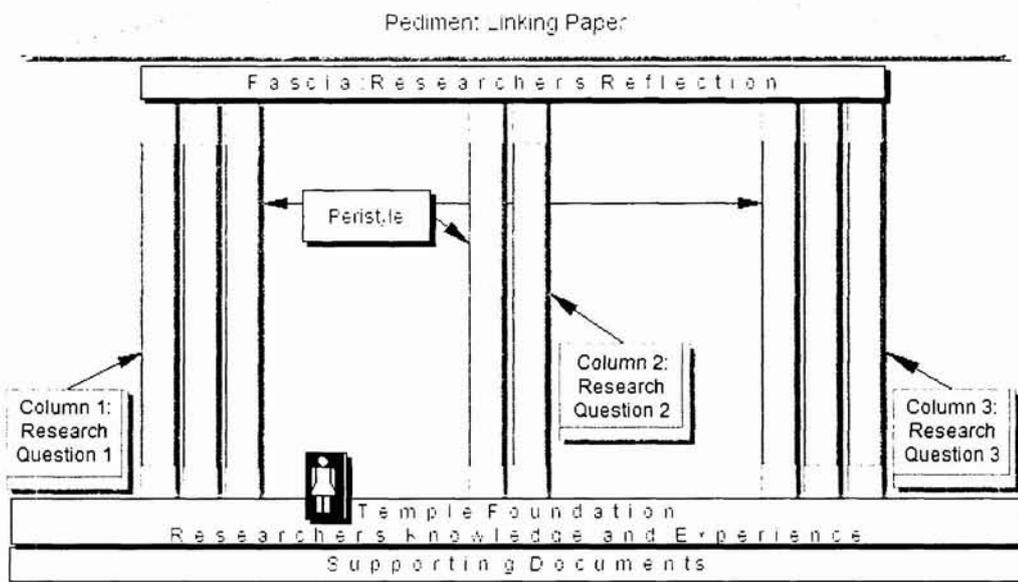


Figure 1 : The Temple as an analogy for the doctoral portfolio (after Maxwell & Kupczyk-Romanczuk in press)

The writing in the portfolio is loosely based on Coghlan and Brannick's (2005, 124-133) recommendations in relation to doing research in one's own organisation. This section is the *Linking Paper* or pediment of the temple and it contains the purpose and rationale of the research, the research questions, a description of the parts of the portfolio or columns of the temple, directions for how to read the portfolio, a literature

review of the graduate attributes movement and the methodology. The conclusion to the *Linking Paper* contains a summary of the findings of the study (described in detail in the three *Columns*) presented within a framework based on the initial aims of the study and considerations that emerged during the study from both the action research and the literature.

The *Linking Paper Conclusion* also contains my reflection on what I learned from the overall experience of the research project. It forms the fascia of the temple, as in Figure 1 above, because it sits below the pediment but is supported by the columns of the temple. It contains self-reflection on my role in the NEA story from its inception through to the results of the final outcome of the research - the recommendation to UNE administration about the future of the NEA beyond its pilot period. It comprises the meta-learning that took place in terms of premise reflection, described by Coghlan and Brannick (2005, 26) as inquiry into underlying assumptions, in this case my own as a participant observer in the action research, which affect attitudes and behaviour, and their impact on the study.

The list of *References* and a set of *Supporting Documents* are presented separately to the *Linking Paper* and the three *Columns*.

Research Questions and Portfolio Design

The central research questions of the study relate to the context, development and implementation of the NEA and the outcomes of the NEA. The context, development and implementation make up one column set of the temple as in Figure 1 above. The outcomes of the NEA were assessed generally in terms of the outcomes for the main stakeholders: the students, the providers of the extra-curricular activities; and the University. These contribute to the second column set. Outcomes were also assessed through in-depth investigations of one example of each of the three NEA activity categories. These contribute to the third column set. The three central questions and their sub-questions and their related column sets in the temple peristyle are set out in Tables 1 to 3 below.

Column set 1 is an account of what took place. Its three sections are the *NEA Context, Development and Implementation*. It covers the broad and local contexts of the study, the factors leading to the decision to establish the NEA between 2001 and mid 2003 and its subsequent development and implementation between mid 2003 and the end of 2005

in response to Research Question 1 and sub-questions (Table 1 below). It complies with Coghlan and Brannick’s (2005, 128-9) advice about keeping the story and the ‘sense-making’ separate and distinct. *Column 1*’s supporting documents consist of excerpts from official University documents, samples of correspondence and minutes, and other relevant material, all of which have been amended to protect the identities of individuals, with the originals secured in my research archive.

Table 1: Research Question 1 and sub-questions/Column set 1

1. How did the NEA come about?	1.1. What contextual factors led to the decision to establish the NEA?	1.1.a. What were the internal and external factors that led to the creation of the NEA?
		1.1.b. What opportunities were identified?
		1.1.c. How were these opportunities to be addressed by the NEA?
		1.1.d. Is the NEA innovative?
	1.2. How was the NEA developed?	1.2.a. Who was involved?
		1.2.b. How did it occur?
		1.2.c. What was developed?
	1.3. How was the NEA implemented?	1.3.a. How was the NEA promoted to students?
		1.3.b. What roles and structures supported the implementation of the NEA?
		1.3.c. How did the rules and procedures, roles and structures, change during implementation and why?

Column set 2 is about stakeholder outcomes of the New England Award. It has two sections: outcomes of the NEA for students and outcomes for the University in response to Research Question 2 (Table 2 below).

Table 2: Research Question 2 and sub-questions/Column set 2

2. What were the outcomes of the NEA in the first two years of operation?	2.1. What were the outcomes for student participants?
	2.2. What were the outcomes for the University?

Column set 3 is about NEA outcomes focussing on the experiences of student participants in one example of each of the three NEA activity types: extra-curricular learning and training; preparation for work; and community service. The example of extra-curricular learning or training is a non-credit bearing student leadership course that runs each semester at UNE. This example was chosen because I am its coordinator

and therefore had unimpeded access to the students involved. Part-time work experience, both paid and voluntary, is the selected example of the second activity type because it was the most commonly undertaken activity for this category. The selected example of the third activity type is participation in a peer support program at UNE. This example was chosen because it is coordinated from within the work team that I manage which allowed me easy access to the students. Research Question 3 and sub-questions are set out in Table 3 below.

The column sets are henceforth referred to as *Columns 1, 2 and 3*.

Table 3 : Research Question 3 with three sub-questions each containing additional sub-questions/Column set 3

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).	3.1. What do students gain from extra-curricular training such as the Student Leadership Program?	3.1.a. Why do students take on extra-curricular training such as the Student Leadership Program?
		3.1.b. What do students gain from participation in the Student Leadership Program?
	3.2. What do students gain from part-time work?	3.2.a. Why do students choose to participate in part-time work?
		3.2.b. What do students gain from paid and voluntary part-time work?
	3.3. What do students gain from participation in community activities such as peer mentoring?	3.3.a. Why do students participate in community activities such peer mentoring?
		3.3.b. What do students gain through participation in community activities such peer mentoring?

An additional product of the study is my official report to the Vice-Chancellor on the NEA's first three years of operation with recommendations for its future. This was a condition of the original seed funding which supported the development and implementation of the NEA. That report was presented to the Vice-Chancellor in October, 2006, a time that coincided with the release of the draft UNE Strategic Plan 2007-2010 (*Achieving Regional and Global Impact 2006*). The report contained three recommendations which were based on the findings of this study. The recommendations are described in the conclusion to the *Linking Paper* (page 54).

My understanding of an Ed. D. portfolio is that its parts may be read in any order, given that the relationship between the parts, as described above with the temple analogy, is understood. That is the case with this portfolio. However, if one would prefer to read

the portfolio like a thesis then I recommend that the three *Columns* of the *Portfolio* be read after the *Methodology* and before the *Linking Paper Conclusion*. The *Supporting Documents* are placed at the end after the *References* but should be looked at as directed in the *Portfolio*. Figure 2 encapsulates this particular order of reading.

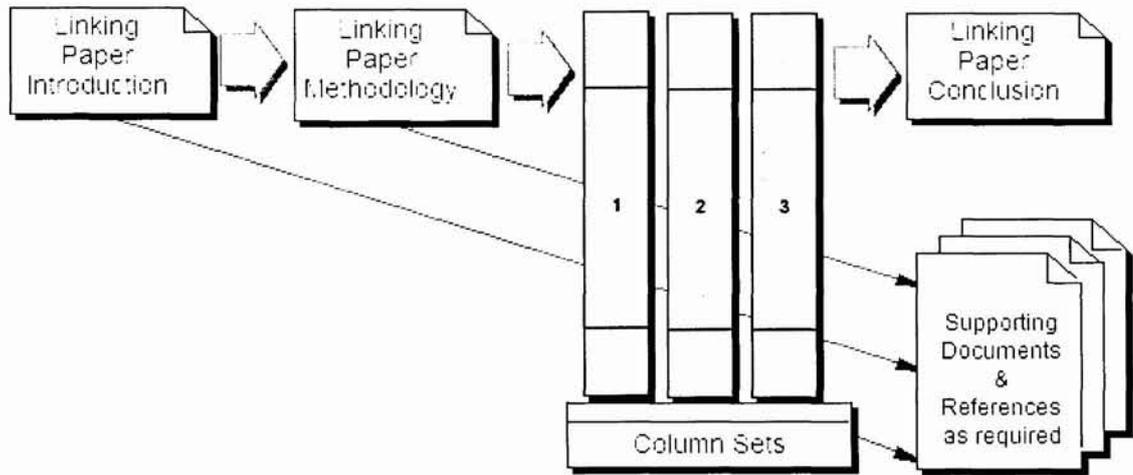


Figure 2 : Recommended order of reading of the Portfolio

The time-frame of the research and the portfolio structure are summarised in Figure 3 below. The study took place between 2001 and 2006. The timing of the development and implementation of the NEA is indicated, as is the timing of the stages of the action research, described below (page 32), and the primary data sources.

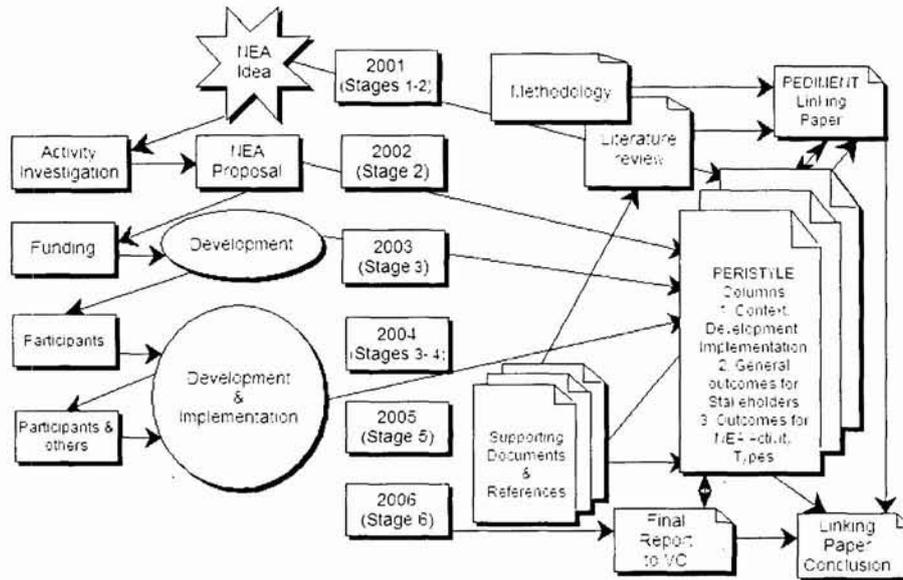


Figure 3: The time-frame of the action research case study and the portfolio structure

A distinguishing feature of the professional doctorate is that its focus is upon the community of practice rather than the community of academia. Consistent with this is that its discourses will vary accordingly (Maxwell & Kupczyk-Romanczuk in press; R. Walker 1998). Parts of this portfolio move between traditional third person academic discourse and the first person narrative as advocated by Coghlan and Brannick (2005, 129). This is consistent with Lincoln and Guba's (2000, 166) description of the researcher's voice in constructivism as 'passionate participant'. However, I work in a university so my community of practice, or workplace, is in fact a community of academia so many supporting documents reflect this. They and the three Columns and Report vary in genre according to their intended audience and purpose within that context and within the wider community of academia which for publication purposes utilises a discourse which tends towards the 'disinterested scientist' (Lincoln & Guba 2000, 166) approach. This is not my discourse of choice for this type of study because I agree with Lee's (1998, 112) opinion that writers' views and validities can be silenced by the scientific writing model. The more formally written sections of the portfolio do, however, give voice to the research participants, described above, as advocated by Lincoln and Guba (2000, 183), by allowing them to speak for themselves.

Literature Review

According to Coghlan and Brannick (2005, 125), there are three context areas of action research projects within organisations: the broad general context at national and global level; the local organisational context; and the specific topic area. The first two contextual areas are covered in the relevant part of the first column of the portfolio in response to the associated research question about the context of the NEA. The present *Literature Review* provides the context of the specific topic area of graduate attributes and thereby provides background and a framework for the second and third columns of the portfolio which respond to the second and third research questions about outcomes of the NEA.

The 'outset' literature (Coghlan & Brannick 2005, 126) on graduate attributes focussed on the origins of the graduate attributes movement, different definitions of graduate attributes, implementation practices and the meaning of curriculum. During the course of the study, and as I read about challenges to traditional understandings of graduate attributes, I formed the view that the UNE Graduate Attribute Policy (described in *Column 1*, page 1.4) was in need of revision and this altered the shape of this *Literature Review*. I changed course to examine what exactly constitutes a useful description of desirable 'graduateness'. This necessitated a brief U-turn to compare attitudes held in the pre-graduate attribute era to my own and others' emerging views. Other 'emergent' literature (Coghlan & Brannick 2005, 130) included developments since the start of this project in the field of graduate attributes and the problem of quality assurance. Finally, as the research progressed further, it seemed that increased student satisfaction was emerging as an outcome of the NEA, so additional emergent literature, that is, the link between student satisfaction, engagement and retention, was investigated and is reported in this section.

Origins of graduate attributes

To understand what is meant by 'graduateness' in Australia in 2006, it is necessary to consider why Australian universities began to develop graduate attribute policies. It appears that these policies sprang from the generic skills movement in higher education, the origins of which are not a simple matter to trace. It has many roots, the most notable being the shift from elite to mass higher education in the 1970s and 1980s and the growth in accountability of higher education institutions.

The 'massization' of university education resulted in a changed relationship between higher education and society. Higher education became more inclusive rather than selective, its links with elite occupations became diluted and there was a general demystification of higher education as the student body became much more diverse (Leggett, Kinnear, Boyce, & Bennett 2004, 295; Parry & Debowski 2004, 12; Ramsden 1998, 9; Scott 1998, 113-115) and contained relatively fewer students than previously in possession of cultural capital or 'product of education', as defined by Bourdieu (Grenfell & James 1998, 21-22; Marginson 1997, xiv). As a result, retention, student satisfaction and successful outcomes for students have remained high on national policy agendas to the present time (Clegg, Bradley, & Smith 2006, 101). There was also increasing financial dependence of mass higher education systems, as they become larger, on the state and the state's resulting demands for greater accountability and value for money on behalf of tax payers and students. In addition, with a much more diverse student body, the curriculum had to respond to meet many more expectations including those of employers of graduates - that graduates be better prepared for the workplace through the development of generic or transferable skills (Meek & Wood 1998, 42). When, in the 1980s, economic conditions worsened, governmental interest in how education might increase young people's employability was further heightened (Leggett et al. 2004; Lovat & Smith 1995, 232). Gradually there developed closer links between political agendas and higher education, with particular emphasis on the role of the university in preparing graduates for the workplace (Candy, Crebert, & O'Leary 1994, 3-4). The Dawkins reforms in Australia, first mooted in 1987, confirmed the government's intention to make higher education more responsive to community demands and national priorities (Dawkins 1987, iii-iv; G. Harman & Meek 1998, 163). An early response in Australia to the issue of responsiveness and accountability of higher education institutions in terms of preparing graduates for life after university was the Australian Government's concern with developing life-long learners through higher education. In 1992, the Higher Education Council in its report *Achieving Quality* described desirable characteristics of graduates as 'skills, personal attributes and values which should be acquired...regardless of discipline or field of study' (Higher Education Council 1992, 20). Then, in 1993 the Higher Education Council commissioned a report to identify if and how undergraduate degrees lead to the formation of attributes which enabled graduates to become life-long learners in order to participate fully and

effectively in life after university. The key recommendations of the report were that the Higher Education Council (1) sponsor a national debate among the academic community, government policy makers, professional organisations and employer organisations about the purposes, content and structure of undergraduate education; (2) that life-long learning skills and attitudes form part of the core of undergraduate courses and be clearly articulated in course aims and objectives; (3) that universities be encouraged to develop policies related to developing life-long learners with appropriate strategies and resourcing; and (4) that they monitor and evaluate outcomes of these policies and practices (Candy et al. 1994, xv). This was possibly the catalyst for the beginning of the graduate attribute movement in Australian universities. Certainly life-long learning remains prominently on the lists of graduate attributes linked to most such policies today, including UNE's. This movement, however, was not limited to Australia.

The Dearing Report

In Great Britain, where similar changes were occurring in higher education in the same period, the generic skills/graduate attribute movement was strengthened by the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education's 1997 report *Higher Education in the Learning Society*, better known as the Dearing Report which addressed some fundamental aspects of higher education (Elliott 1999, 98) including the performance effectiveness of graduates in the workplace.

The West Committee

Meanwhile in Australia, the West Committee had been set up in 1996 to undertake a broad evaluation of the higher education sector and to identify options for the financing of higher education teaching and research (Harman 1999, 222).

One of the West Committee's terms of reference was to 'develop a comprehensive policy framework...that will allow universities to respond creatively and flexibly to change, and to ensure that the sector meets the needs of students, industry and society in general' (Johnson 1998, 145). The Committee's Discussion Paper *Learning for Life* (1997) reported, amongst other things, that amongst the business community there was dissatisfaction with the capacity of universities to meet labour market needs (Harman 1999, 226). It advocated that universities should instil in students a culture of lifetime learning and provide industry with advanced skills (Department of Employment Education Training and Youth Affairs 1997, 3-4). It went on to call for a new policy

and financing framework built on principles such as promotion of quality and accountability with the assessment of quality focussed on achieving educational outcomes (Department of Employment Education Training and Youth Affairs 1997, 5). It did not however, contrary to expectations raised by the 'Learning for Life' title of both its discussion paper in 1997 and final report in 1998, devote much space to specifying the types of skills that graduates should acquire (Marginson 1998, 157).

However, by this time, the graduate standards movement was already in full flow in Australia largely as a result of the developments described above, but it clearly received a boost from the Dearing Report which is mentioned in most of the relevant literature as having the effect of reinforcing the emerging importance of generic skills in Australia (Bath, Smith, Stein, & Swann 2004, 314; Leggett et al. 2004, 295; Rogers & Mentkowski 2004, 350) and also the West Committee. This movement sought to identify notions of 'graduateness' (Elliott 1999, 18) with one of the first attempts being by Candy et al (1994, 124) who recommended that 'all undergraduate programs should encourage, amongst other things, the broadening of the student, and the progressive development of certain generic skills'. Many universities began to develop and implement graduate attribute policies through the 1990s. UNE's Graduate Attribute Policy dates from 1998.

While the graduate attribute movement gained momentum in Australia, the debate about the purposes of higher education, while surpassed by events, remained contentious in some quarters (Crossman 2005, 23; Harman 2005, 80). Many academics argued that preparing students for mere work was not their business (Bath et al. 2004, 314; Chanock 2004, 5; Maslen & Slattery 1994, vii) or were perplexed by the prospect (Ramsden 1998, 351); others believed that while certain skills and attributes were desirable in graduates they were acquired more through osmosis than direct instruction; others questioned the notion of transferable skills believing that skills cannot be divorced from context (Candy et al. 1994). Possibly the most controversial aspect was the rising influence of employers of graduates who continued to be quite loud in their call for university graduates to possess skills and attributes transferable to the workplace. They had clearly received government support in that call as governments came to realise that economic progress was linked to an appropriately skilled and flexible workforce (Rogers & Mentkowski 2004, 350). Economic rationalism was affecting higher education. Interestingly, not unrelated to this was the emergence of the Professional

Doctorate in Australian universities in the 1990s, as recommended in the Dawkins Green Paper (Dawkins 1987, 70-71), with its emphasis on training professionals in applied research in professional contexts (Maxwell 2003, 279; Pearson 1999, 270).

Influence of employers

Through the 1980s employers had become influential and their expectations of the university graduates that they employed came to carry much more weight than ever before in Australia. This was partly a result of mass university education which made it much more difficult for employers to distinguish between its graduates (Nunan 1999, 1). Candy et al (1994) compared employers' requirements of graduates and their performance in the workplace. While the data showed that graduates were consistently advantaged in the job market, there was considerable employer dissatisfaction with graduate performance in the workplace, especially in relation to graduates' personal, transferable skills such as communication skills (1994, 9). It was becoming clear that to maintain their advantage in the labour market, universities needed to place greater emphasis on the development of students' generic skills (Candy et al. 1994, 9; Rogers & Mentkowski 2004, 350).

This was further reinforced by the West Committee's recommendations in 1998 which were consistent with market deregulation and a decline in the role of public funding (Marginson 1998, 157). This in turn empowered student and employers and students' demands became more attuned to employers' demands of higher education (Barr 1998, 181).

The influence of employers has continued unabated (Allen Consulting Group 2004; Nelson 2003, 10-11). There is no escaping the fact that employers of graduates expect that graduates are able to demonstrate skills and attributes in addition to discipline knowledge and related expertise (Barrie & Prosser 2004, 244; Bowden, Hart, Trigwell, & Watts 2000, 5; Candy et al. 1994, 62; Goldsworthy 2003,1; Kapoor 2003, 215; Leece 2005, 73; Ronayne 2003, 21). There are still calls being heard from employer groups for universities to produce more employable graduates (Wimshurst, Wortley, Bates, & Allard 2006, 132). For example, 'Employers are concerned about the lack of skills regarding creativity, initiative, oral business communication and problem solving among graduates' (Maiden & Kerr 2006, 1). The Business Council of Australia said in their March 2006 report that its research showed that businesses remain concerned

about the ability of education and training systems to provide people with capabilities such as communication, teamwork, problem solving, ongoing learning, creativity, cultural understanding, entrepreneurship and leadership (Business Council of Australia 2006, 14). It appears that employers are increasingly seeking workers equipped for the new knowledge economy with the ability to be innovative and responsive to change, amongst other competencies.

University graduates themselves have appeared to have heeded and responded to employers' expectations to a surprising degree. Research by Golding (1995 cited in Golding, Marginson & Pascoe. 1996, 10) and Millican (1995 cited in Golding, Marginson & Pascoe. 1996, 10) has shown that there is more movement from higher education to Tertiary and Further Education (TAFE) than the other way around, despite it appearing counter to expectations. Motivation for this includes the desire to supplement a general higher education with more specialised vocational education which has been designed collaboratively with industry and employers (Golding, Marginson et al. 1996, 11) and also a perceived need for generic skills (Golding, Marginson et al. 1996, 13).

The influence of employers is now widely acknowledged by universities (Crisp 2003; King & Nunan 2003). This parallels the Federal Government's interest in this area. Most rationales accompanying universities' published material about their Graduate Attribute Policies refer to employers' expectations. However, despite this, many graduate attribute policies in Australia also contain skills and attributes that will enhance graduates' ability to contribute to areas of life after university, in addition to the workplace, such as citizenship. This is a significant differentiation between approaches taken by institutions of higher education in Australia and Great Britain. The latter have largely concentrated on preparing graduates for the workforce (Barrie 2004, 262). The New England Award addresses both elements and in fact emphasises citizenship skills through its community contribution category of activities.

Graduate attribute policies

While graduate attribute policies are now common in Australian universities, the notion of university students graduating with certain abilities is not new. At the inauguration of the University of Sydney in 1862, Cardinal Woolley described typical graduates of that university as having, amongst other things, 'formed the habit of thinking at once with

modesty and independence' (Woolley 1862, in Candy et al. 1994, iv). What has changed is that the development of generic skills has been an *explicit target* of tertiary education as a result of the economic, social and political factors described above. Before that generic skills may have been expected to emerge during the study of university disciplines but there was no real commitment to developing university-wide approaches to their development involving curriculum design and teaching and assessment strategies (Gibson 2003).

Generic skills have been defined as the skills, abilities and personal attributes which can be used in a wide range of activities, both in and out of employment, and that are not specific to disciplines or subjects that have been studied. Often called transferable skills for this reason, they are generally considered to be important because they are empowering and enabling, and they are often inter-related as in the case of interpersonal skills and communication skills. A wide variety of terms is used to refer to generic skills but they appear to be most commonly known as graduate attributes. This is the term that is used by UNE and that will be used henceforth in this portfolio.

The UNE Graduate Attributes Policy lists communication skills, global perspective, information literacy, life-long learning, problem-solving, social responsibility, and teamwork (The University of New England 2005). All of these are fairly standard components of graduate attribute policies. Other common ones are cross-cultural understanding, global leadership, citizenship, critical judgment, ability to work autonomously and management skills. Some graduate attribute policies specify categories of capabilities and qualities such as learning to learn, professional and personal attributes rather than lists of individual skills and attributes (Barrie 2004, 269; Chanock 2004, 3-4; Deakin University 2003; Flinders University 2001; Gardner & Martin 2003, 2; Leggett et al. 2004, 301; Macquarie University 2005; Milton 1999; Nunan 1999, 5; University of South Australia 2005a; University of Wollongong 2005).

In addition to the continuing debate about whether universities should indeed be responding to external pressures in this way, particularly from the employment and business sectors, there are several factors that appear to be complicating the graduate attribute agenda. There are concerns about a possible lack of shared meaning and wide variation in the way particular skills and attributes are defined; whether most graduate attribute policies go far enough in order to adequately prepare graduates for their future; and concerns about quality assurance.

Vocabulary

Variable vocabulary has been used to refer to graduate attributes (Bowden et al. 2000, 4; Jones 2002, 3; Our Universities: Backing Australia's Future 2006, par 60; Sumsion & Goodfellow 2004, 330; Watts 2003, 16). An early reference to generic transferable skills was contained in the 1990 Higher Education Council document *Higher Education: The Challenges Ahead*:

the particular abilities acquired through higher education introduce a level of transportability and adaptability of skills that is particularly useful in developing the knowledge base of a modern society, especially one with dynamically changing patterns of work. The skills ... are of long lasting value and transferable beyond the confines of a single study (Higher Education Council 1990, 1).

The use of a wide variety of terms, such as graduate attributes, graduate qualities, generic attributes, core capabilities, professional skills and transferable skills, to refer to graduate attributes, has also been questioned by Barrie and Prosser (2004, 243). This seems to me to be less of an issue than the attempts of some universities, including UNE, to whittle down their individual definitions of 'graduateness', possibly in the name of clarity, that has resulted in tight, inflexible, one-size-fits-all lists of discrete skills and attributes that leave little room for creative application and incremental growth within the real world of the university curriculum.

Barrie and Prosser (2004, 243) also point out that in addition to a possible lack of shared meaning across the variety of terms used to describe generic skills, there is also variation in the way particular skills and attributes are defined. It is possible that the lack of shared meaning and definition arise from the inter-connectedness of graduate attributes and the difficulty of categorising them on the one hand, and paradoxically, the ease with which they are transferable between categories on the other.

Most of the skills and attributes named in graduate attribute policies can be loosely categorised as *learning skills*, *personal skills*, *professional skills* and *citizenship skills*. Often the learning skills are described more generally as learning how to learn and life-long learning skills. The personal skills usually encompass communication and interpersonal skills but often also include personal attributes such as having a global perspective; a commitment to social responsibility; critical judgement; and ethical and social understanding. However, categorisation varies. Sometimes the latter are categorized as citizenship skills. Also, some skills and attributes such as team skills, critical thinking and problem solving, are variously described as personal or

professional. Other commonly listed professional skills are management; organisational and planning skills; leadership; and information literacy (Calvert 2003; Flinders University 2001; Gardner & Martin 2003; Macquarie University 2005; The Deakin Guide 2005; University of South Australia 2005a; University of Technology Sydney 2006). My view is that the actual categorisation matters less than the existence of broad categories. Categories of skills and attributes allow for more flexibility and adaptability to different contexts during and after university. For example, the UTS' introduction to its graduate attribute policy says:

Unlike some universities which describe a common set of attributes across all courses, the UTS graduate profile framework describes a very broad common profile and takes the view that specific attributes are best developed in relation to the professional and disciplinary contexts of each course. This enables Faculties to take responsibility for graduate profiles so that they describe the attributes which are most important for graduates from their professions and disciplines (University of Technology Sydney 2006).

UTS's graduate profile consists of interconnected categories of *learning to learn attributes*, *professional attributes* and *personal attributes*. The learning to learn category is comprised of skills in the knowledge literacy domain and the autonomy domain. The knowledge literacy domain includes the ability to gain access to and critically assess knowledge, and links primarily to professional attributes. The autonomy domain refers to the ability to learn independently and links primarily to personal attributes. The professional category is comprised of skills in the technical, communicative and contextual domains. The personal category is comprised of skills in the responsive and citizenship domains (University of Technology Sydney 2006).

This type of flexibility also appears to be the objective of a research-led revision of the University of Sydney's graduate attribute policy as reported by Barrie (2004). He identified three holistic overarching attributes: scholarship; global citizenship; and life-long learning. Below this sit five clusters of personal attributes, cognitive abilities and skills of application which are discipline-based (2004, 268-70). This approach allows for different disciplines to interpret graduate attributes in their own contexts within a broad framework of human capabilities. Again, this allows for more flexibility in adoption than lists of discrete skills. Additionally, there is an emerging school of thought that contends that personal attributes and qualities are just as valuable as (Barrie 2004; Rooke 2003), or even transcend, skills and capabilities in importance because graduates need to be prepared to respond to an unknown future (Barnett 2004, 254).

Personal qualities

In recent years traditional understandings of graduate attributes have been challenged, most radically by Barnett (2004) who has suggested an alternative conceptualisation of university pedagogy embracing personal or human qualities rather than the need for knowledge and skills. He believes that current notions of generic skills do not adequately meet the need to prepare students for an unknown future. His view is that in a rapidly changing world it is impossible to know what skills and attributes will be needed by graduates in their futures (Barnett 2004, 247). This view was foreshadowed by Candy et al (1994, 15):

Each year, tens of thousands of Australians make a brief but significant appearance on the stage...For a brief instant, the new graduates can pause and revel in their attainment before turning towards whatever the future might hold for them. None knows for certain just what that future will be: the only thing they can be sure of is that their learning – far from being over – is really only just beginning.

It is being confirmed by contemporary government rhetoric: 'The new century is generating a need for 'emerging' skills and knowledge that have not been previously a focus of higher education' (Our Universities: Backing Australia's Future 2006, par 69).

Consistent with these views, Barnett (2003; 2004) proposes that it is not knowledge and skills that will assist graduates to prosper in an unknown world but rather a way of being that is characterized more by self-confidence and the ability to 'launch themselves forth in a world that will furnish responses that cannot be entirely anticipated' (Barnett 2004, 253). Barnett sees this ability as springing from self-belief, self-confidence and self-motivation (2004, 254). It goes beyond acquisition of knowledge and skills. He proposes that university curricula should therefore be three tiered encompassing 'understanding (knowledge), acting (skills) and being (self)' (2004, 254) in order to prepare graduates adequately for an increasingly complex world. For Barnett certain human qualities are more important than knowledge and skills, qualities such as carefulness, thoughtfulness, humility, criticality, receptiveness, resilience, courage and stillness (2004, 259). Most graduate attribute policies contain skills and attributes corresponding to Barnett's first two tiers but not always the third tier – *being*, essential according to Barnett for an unknown future because it encompasses these human qualities.

Both Barnett (2004) and Barrie (2004) have stressed the importance of desirable attitudes in graduates. Barnett speaks of attitudes about life and about being which

might be called wisdom. Barrie speaks of graduates' attitudes or stances towards knowledge, towards the world and towards themselves. In relation to attitudes, Candy et al (1994, 52) long ago described as desirable in a graduate the ability and preference to serve the community and assume community leadership and preference for a dispassionate intellectual approach to problem analysis and decision making. This is consistent with the philosophy at Alverno College in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, USA, one of the pioneers of generic skills teaching, where ability is defined as multi-dimensional and consisting of complex combinations of skills, motivations, self-perceptions, attributes, values, knowledge and behaviours (Alverno College 2005; Rogers & Mentkowski 2004, 348).

This is not inconsistent with recent calls from employers for graduates who are responsive to change and the need for innovation. Some universities are responding. Student qualities such as being creative, innovative, entrepreneurial, collaborative, flexible, self-motivated, self-managed and having a capacity for reflexivity are increasingly being included in discussion about the purposes of higher education (Coldstream 2003, 10; Rooke 2003, 245) and finding their way into universities' graduate attribute policies (Boud & Tennant 2006, 294). This movement, which sees desirable graduate attributes as more than a set list of skills and more as broader sets of attributes and attitudes, has resulted in some change in other Australian universities, in addition to University of Sydney, as described above. For example, prior to November 2005, Deakin University described its Graduate Attributes in terms of *discipline-specific attributes*; *generic attributes* and *citizenship skills* (The Deakin Guide 2004). It has since reorganised the same attributes into categories called *knowledge and understanding*, *skills* and *attitudes* (The Deakin Guide 2005). What was categorised under discipline-specific attributes – acquisition of and ability to work with a systematic body of knowledge, based on the highest standards of scholarship and research; an understanding of the related professional, industrial and social contexts; and the ability to identify, gather, retrieve and operate on textual, graphical and numerical information – is now distributed between *knowledge and understanding* and *skills*. The skills previously defined as *generic* are now largely defined as *skills* with the exception of life-long learning capacity which is now categorised as an *attitude*. And what were previously defined as *citizenship skills* - awareness of ethics, social responsibility and cultural sensitivity; international perspectives and competence in a global environment -

are now *attitudes* with the exception of an understanding of the principles and applications of sustainable development which is now categorised as *knowledge and understanding*.

Another example of a graduate attributes list which is more than a set of skills is Flinders University's which lists six personal qualities believed to be desired by employers: personal impact; self motivation; quality orientation; adaptability; resilience and relating to people including relationship building and networking, empathy, tact and diplomacy (Flinders University 2001), all of which are 'ways of being' (Barnett 2004, 253).

Ironically, Barnett (2004) and Barrie's (2004) views are also not inconsistent with others who object to higher education being increasingly geared by economic rationalism and the demands of the workplace and employers. Typical of these is Heath (2000, 43-44) who believes that the contemporary university has been subsumed by the needs of the economy rather than the needs of people as citizens. That preparation for good citizenship is an important function of university education remains a firm belief for many involved in higher education (Andreoni 1998, 40; Austen 2007, 29; Crossman 2005, 23; D'Agostino 1998, 3; G. Harman 2005, 83-85; Heath 2000, 43; Phillips 2007, 9; Taji 1998, 23).

Traditional notions of 'graduateness'

It is important to remember, however, that what appears to be a move towards broader and more inclusive definitions of 'graduateness' is, in fact, not a new phenomenon. The introduction to the Dearing Report states:

The purpose of education is life-enhancing: it contributes to the whole quality of life. This recognition of the purpose of higher education in the development of our people, our society, and our economy is central to our vision (National Committee of Enquiry into Higher Education 1997, 7).

Dearing supported the view that that one of the main purposes of higher education was:

To inspire and enable individuals to develop their capabilities to the highest potential levels throughout life, so they can grow intellectually, are well-equipped for work, can contribute effectively to society and achieve personal fulfilment (National Committee of Enquiry into Higher Education 1997, 72).

Going back further, in the early post-Dawkins era in Australia, Ramsey defined higher education as an experience which should change a person positively in a personal as well as academic and vocational sense (Ramsey 1988, 21). In fact, well before any of the events described here, a 1967 interview survey conducted at the University of

Melbourne indicated that students clearly rated their personal and social development higher than professional training when asked what they believed the aims of university education should be (Little 1970, 76). Indeed, in the conclusion to that study, the researcher said that what university students were preparing for was hard to define and might not exist (Little 1970, 175) thus foreshadowing Barnett's (2004) concerns. Earlier than that, an extensive survey of undergraduates and graduates of the University of Sydney showed that approximately two thirds expressed agreement to the proposition that 'achieving a degree should be secondary to the overall development of the undergraduate' (Philp, Debus, Veidemanis, & Connell 1964, 49). Furthermore, neither Cardinal Woolsey's ideal university graduate nor Cardinal Newman's aim to 'cultivate in students the values of civilised reflection' (Maslen & Slattery 1994, 245) from a century earlier differ greatly from this belief. More recently though, it appears that traditional assumptions that higher education was committed to imperatives of citizenship and civic leadership have been eroded by the demands of the marketplace (Giroux cited in Holst 2002, xi). And, it is as if, in the rush to develop graduate attribute lists, many universities have been influenced by the economic rationalist agenda and have lost sight of traditional values.

Quality Assurance

Some see the emergence of graduate attributes as a response to the quality movement (Barrie 2005; Cummings 1998; Jones 2002), in addition to the reasons described above. This view is reflected by the Australian University Quality Agency (AUQA) and government calls for institutional accountability, reporting of data on student outcomes (Department of Education, Science and Training 2002; Wimshurst et al. 2006, 131-132) and agreed indicators of performance capable of yielding nationwide and global comparisons (Meek & Wood 1998, 42). Underlying this accountability is the connection between economic futures and the success of education at all levels in the eyes of governments (Carlson, Macdonald, Gorely, Hanrahan, & Burgess-Limerick 2000, 103). Additionally, mass higher education, as described above from page 9, and almost universal post-school education meant that previous levels of public funding for higher education became unsustainable. New options for funding and increased use of market mechanisms to achieve efficiencies were needed along with an expansion of the role of private funding and the private sector (Barr 1998, 179-180; Harman 1999, 219-220). With the shift in power to the consumer encouraged by the West Committee, described

above on page 10, came increased emphasis on quality assurance (Marginson 2002, 118-19; Peters 2002. 150).

A recent manifestation of this is the criteria for the Learning and Teaching Performance Funds which are outcomes based (Parry & Debowski 2004, 12). In relation to graduate attributes the quality movement has, according to Bath et al. (2004), resulted in universities focussing on curriculum mapping to identify the existing and potential opportunities for the development of their respective espoused graduate attributes but it is questionable if there is a true alignment between what is projected, what actually happens and what students experience (Bath et al. 2004, 314; Rogers & Mentkowski 2004, 347-8). Probably the only real test would be pre-entry and post-exit testing as proposed by the Australian Council for Educational Research (Bath et al. 2004, 314). However, as Bath et al. (2004, 314) point out, the ability of this approach to measure properly embedded graduate attribute development would be problematic. Similarly, assessment within the classroom is not a completely satisfactory answer either because of the difficulty of measuring most graduate attributes when fully contextualised (Bath et al. 2004, 315; Higher Education Council 1992; Jones 2002). According to Bath et al. (2004, 325) the answer lies in regular review and renewal processes to ensure that the planned, enacted and experienced curriculum are aligned according to all stakeholders so that teachers' perspectives and expectations are the same as students' experience and perceptions (Bath et al. 2004, 325). It is students' experiences and perceptions that are a core feature of the NEA.

Implementation of graduate attribute policies

The development of graduate attributes through extra-curricular activity in addition to within the formal curriculum, as in the case of UNE's NEA, is different from most other universities which have focussed their graduate attribute development in the formal curriculum. Indeed, while individual universities have adopted varying lists or sets of desirable graduate attributes, they have embarked on similar processes for their implementation. That is, the expectation, backed by official policy, that the required outcomes will be achieved through the formal teaching and learning process whereby academic staff will interpret, redefine and promote the attributes within a discipline context. As a result much has been reported of frameworks developed, problems, progress, assessment and outcomes of the teaching of graduate attributes within the formal curriculum (Barrie 2004; Bruce & Middleton 1999; Chapman 2004; Gardner &

Martin 2003; Lines 2003; McLoughlin & McCartney 2000; Muldoon 2000; Muldoon & Buckland 1998; Nunan 1999). However far less attention has been paid to the potential that the non-formal tertiary curriculum, more commonly referred to as extra-curricular activity, has for the development of graduate attributes. This is in spite of the fact that students who find time to engage in extra-curricular activity while at university are making a very positive impression on some influential graduate employers (Marshall 2005, 3).

Curricular/extra-curricular

What is meant by extra-curricular depends on what is meant by curriculum. Lovat and Smith (1995, 7) present twelve different definitions of curriculum which are dependent, as they and others (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman 1996, 26), point out, on the user's ideology about education and the world which in turn is influenced by the historical/social/economic/political context. Of those, the two that best match the use of the word in this study are 'the curriculum is a syllabus, a course of study or subjects' (Lovat & Smith 1995, 10), a definition prevalent in the early 1970s and 'curriculum is the planned learning experiences of students for which the school is responsible' (Lovat & Smith 1995, 10), a view prevalent in the late 1980s. These two definitions span the evolution of understandings of curriculum from consisting only of subjects or disciplines (Lovat & Smith 1995, 13) and their content to include those things plus processes thereby moving beyond intention only, to implementation. Today, these definitions may be problematic to educational theorists, particularly those involved in schools because of the recognition of the hidden curriculum and its importance there.

In the context of higher education in which the use of the word 'curriculum' generally conforms to the above definitions, it is apparently less contentious. 'Curriculum' mostly means the formal curriculum or syllabus, its intention and process, the successful experience of which results in a university degree. In the tertiary sector this formal curriculum has been described as 'planned curriculum' meaning the goals, learning outcomes, assessment program and learning activities planned for students and the 'enacted curriculum' being the process and content of the learning experienced by students (Candy et al. 1994, 97; Gardner & Martin 2003, 2). This is a relatively recent development in higher education which used to comprise subjects that reflected individual academics' research interests with little attempt to ensure these subjects

formed a coherent sequence with identifiable aims and objectives and other key curriculum constructs (Candy et al. 1994, 97).

Most universities have had the planned and enacted curriculum in mind when developing their graduate attribute policies and most of the literature surrounding graduate attributes is centred on accounts of such practice (Alverno College 2005; Bruce & Middleton 1999; Candy 1999; Chapman 2004; Cryer 1998; Cummings 1998; Key Skills in Higher Education Dissemination Project 2000; Kuisma & Wong 1999; Leggett et al. 2004; Marshall 2003; McLoughlin & McCartney 2000; Tempone & Martin 2000). However, learning which results from university experiences that are not part of the formal curriculum is extra-curricular. This is common usage worldwide. Ironically, activities at university which have been traditionally referred to as extra-curricular because they sit outside the formal curriculum, would, in combination with the formal curriculum, fall within another definition of curriculum, 'the educational experience, the educational journey' (Lovat & Smith 1995, 10; Pinar et al. 1996, 27) or 'the learning which takes place under the auspices of the (institution)' (Maxwell 1998, 9). The New England Award is about educational experience and its existence is rooted in that broader view but uses the language of the view that defines curricular and extra-curricular activity as separate and distinct.

Earlier progress in this area was made in Great Britain largely because of recommendations made in the Dearing Report (Currant & Mitton 2000a, 7). Recommendation 20 of this report proposed that institutions of higher education develop a progress file which should consist of two elements: a transcript which records student achievement and a means by which students can monitor, build and reflect upon their personal development. Responses of the University of Leeds, Bradford University and the University of York to this recommendation were early models for the development of the NEA. These and three other similar international programs are described in *Column 1* (see page 1.14).

Australian universities have been generally slower to adopt the practice of officially recognising extra-curricular achievement and its potential for personal and professional development, and indeed the accumulation of cultural capital as defined above (page 9). While the benefits of university education have traditionally been seen as resulting from the whole university experience, not just the academic side of it, recognition has been more ad hoc. For example, Australian universities have traditionally awarded 'blues'

for sporting achievement and certificates of participation, completion or recognition of outstanding effort in extra-curricular activity. At UNE the residential colleges have been typical of other university colleges and historically honoured students who have made outstanding contributions to college life through awards of different kinds. Ambitious students have collected these certificates and awards to include in their resumes. So, the general value of such activities has been recognised but their specific value in terms of graduate attributes and personal and professional development has been largely overlooked, or at least not formalised in the graduate attribute sense. Also, while certainly worthwhile and often quite prestigious, these awards are selective and limited rather than open to all and they do not encourage students to actively plan their personal development, set goals, record their progress and reflect on their skills development through the experience like the NEA does.

There are now two other Australian initiatives which are similar to the NEA. Macquarie University launched their Global Leadership Program in 2005 (see *Column 1*, page 1.19) and the University of New South Wales announced in late 2006 that it would begin issuing certificates which recognise students' contributions to the university outside formal study in 2007 (see *Column 1*, page 1.19). A third is currently being planned at the University of Southern Queensland (K. Stapleton, General Manager, USQ Student Guild 2007, pers. comm. March 21).

What is inherently different about the development of graduate attributes through extra-curricular activity, as is the case with the NEA, is that extra-curricular activity is not initially about graduate attributes and it mostly does not pretend to be. Nor are its providers or organisers required to ensure that graduate attribute development is indeed an outcome. That it is, or may be, an outcome, is one of the assumptions underpinning the NEA but the onus is on the students to ascertain if indeed it has occurred. It is the students' experience and perceptions that supposedly provide the validation. The testing of this hypothesis is an integral part of this study. If it is true, then the problem of quality assurance is minimised when graduate attribute development is measured and assessed in this manner. This is confirmed by Rogers and Mentkowski (2004, 348) who believe that the concept of ability is an accessible idea that enables students to connect what they know with what they are able to do, as occurs in the NEA.

Student satisfaction and retention

In Australia, approximately one third of students who begin university studies do not graduate and approximately half of those drop out in their first year (Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs 2000, 2; McMillan 2005). There is a great deal of evidence that students who are at risk of dropping out of university are affected by a range of factors (McInnes & James 1995; Tinto 1987; Yorke 2001). According to Tinto (1998), whose work in this field is considered to be seminal, integrating first year students into the college community (in the American sense) is crucial to student success and retention. Integration operates on several levels and involves paying attention to social as well as academic needs of students. For this to occur students need to develop a strong affiliation with both the academic environment and in their social setting outside the classroom (Benseman, Coxon, Anderson, & Anae 2006, 150-151; Clegg et al. 2006, 102-103; Nora 1993, 235 cited in Krause 2001; Rivers 2005, 3). Social interaction in the learning process not only enhances the quality of learning but also contributes to students' sense of belonging within the learning community and to their sense of competency. Social interaction outside the learning process, but as part of the university experience, strengthens this sense of belongingness and connectedness to the learning community (Astin 1993; DeShields, Kara, & Kaynak 2005; Kraemer 1997; McMillan 2005; Nagda, Gregerman, Jonides, von Hippel, & Lerner 1998; Pascarella & Terenzini 1991; Tinto 1987). Indeed studies of high school students have found that there is a clear relationship between student engagement through participation in extra-curricular activity and retention and that this type of engagement can be influenced by school administrators through policies that explicitly encourage participation (Fullarton 2002, v-vi). There seems to be no reason why this finding would not be relevant in the tertiary sector. There is a belief that a high quality university experience occurs in circumstances where there are rich opportunities for extra-curricular activity (Markwell 2006). What is known is that the importance of social interaction at university, in terms of student retention and the value of it occurring very early on in the transition process, is huge (Fidler & Moore 1996, 14; Nora 1993 cited in Krause 2001; Levin & Levin 1991; National Resource Centre for the First Year Experience and Students in Transition 2001; Tinto 1993).

Summary of trends

The graduate attributes literature provides the background to this study of the New England Award. One of the roots of the graduate attributes movement in Australia was the shift from elite to mass higher education which resulted in a much more diverse student body which cannot be assumed to have the same levels of cultural capital as previously. Other roots were increased accountability of institutions of higher education, the growth of economic rationalism and the associated increased influence of employers of graduates. Notions of 'graduateness', which had previously been broad, appeared to become mostly narrowed and limited as a result of the graduate attribute movement and associated graduate attribute policies which stemmed from economic rationalism, employer power and government intervention. However, they have recently begun to broaden again to encompass a range of personal qualities. Additionally, most universities have required that their graduate attribute policies be implemented within the formal academic curriculum. Very little attention has been paid to the potential of extra-curricular activity to assist in the development of graduate attributes as in the case of the NEA.

This background provides the framework for the outcomes of this study of the NEA which are summarised in the conclusion to the *Linking Paper* and presented in detail in the second and third columns of the portfolio. The outcomes are reported as primary outcomes of the study, in terms of the original objectives or core ideas of the NEA, and also as secondary outcomes in the light of three other considerations that arose from emergent literature as described above (page 8). Those considerations are concerns about quality assurance; the link between student engagement and satisfaction, and retention; and the belief that personal qualities are as important as specific skills and attributes in preparing graduates for the future. The latter gave rise to my belief that the NEA had the potential to support the development of personal qualities and as well as the UNE Graduate Attributes, a core NEA objective (as described in *Column 1*). Related to this and also to the outcomes pertaining to the core objective about the UNE Graduate Attributes, was my growing certainty that the UNE Graduate Attributes Policy, described in *Column 1* (from page 1.4) was in need of revision.

These secondary outcomes are henceforth referred to as related emergent ideas or considerations, but are not less important than the primary outcomes. They are reported in the second and thirds columns of the portfolio. How the NEA came about and the

role of the action research in its implementation is reported in the first column. The columns of the portfolio and their components are more fully described in the *Methodology* which follows.