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**HIGHER EDUCATION QUALITY ASSURANCE
POLICY AND PRACTICE IN THE MALDIVES:
A CASE STUDY FROM A SMALL DEVELOPING NATION**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
in
Education

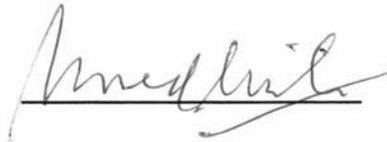
at Massey University, Palmerston North,
New Zealand

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2008

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research, except where due acknowledgment is made, and contains as its main content, work that has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ahmed Ali Maniku', is written over a horizontal line.

Ahmed Ali Maniku

ABSTRACT

This thesis comprises a case study of quality assurance policy and practice in the emerging higher education sector of the Maldives. The policy analysis is extended to incorporate a *glonacal* perspective, allowing analysis of quality assurance policy issues from the global, national and local contexts. In order to illuminate the analysis in the Maldives' primary case study, two secondary less intensive case studies are presented of quality assurance processes from a New Zealand polytechnic and the University of the South Pacific. Documentary evidence and semi-structured interviews from Key Informants form the main evidence base for the study. Data analysis is facilitated using NVivo.

The thesis argues that the upsurge in quality assurance in higher education is primarily legitimated within a neoliberal discourse. Urged by transnational organisations such as the World Bank, there is widespread policy convergence in quality assurance. Whilst neoliberalism has had partial effects in the case of the Maldives, the study reveals that neoliberal ideology and the associated strategies of marketisation, privatisation, human resource development and managerialism have shaped quality assurance policy processes in varying degrees in the three cases. Findings in this study contribute to a fuller understanding of quality assurance policy processes in a small developing nation context: a perspective largely missing from current debates on the subject.

The findings confirm that a combination of global, national and institutional factors influenced quality assurance policy processes in the Maldives. From the global context, globalisation and internationalisation of higher education trends affect quality assurance policy. At the national level, the desire for higher quality education found expression in the state's reassertion of its role in protecting public interest in regulating the sector through formal quality assurance. The social demand for international comparability has also led to a growing trend of transnational quality assurance practices. The creation of the Maldives College of Higher Education was shown to be the principal impetus in quality assurance development. This national college played a lead role in developing a quality assurance model that tends to promote a regulatory compliance to quality. The study argues for a more inclusive model that acknowledges external compliance but also seeks to assure quality of teaching and learning leading to improved student outcomes.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This thesis is the product of a long journey. I am indebted to a number of people for their blend of friendship, support and guidance, which has sustained me throughout this exciting and at times trying personal journey.

I would like to acknowledge the contribution of Professor Tom Prebble, chief supervisor during the first year of my study, for his guidance and support in defining the parameters of this study. I am especially grateful to Emeritus Professor John Codd, who took over as chief supervisor from the second year onwards, for his invaluable advice and scholarly guidance which has greatly contributed in shaping this thesis. His patience, gentle but firm steering, generous feedback and consistently positive encouragement are highly valued. I am equally grateful to Professor Wayne Edwards, who continued as my second supervisor throughout the study, for his advice, encouragement and support in many ways; especially for stepping in as chief supervisor in the final stage after the untimely demise of Professor Codd soon after the submission of the thesis for assessment.

My deep appreciation is extended to the New Zealand Government's International Aid and Development Agency (NZ Aid), for the scholarship that enabled me to pursue my PhD programme at Massey University. I am grateful to Sylvia, Sue and the rest of the International Student Support team for their continued support and friendship. I would also like to thank the Graduate School of Education and the School of Educational Studies at Massey University for the financial support to undertake fieldwork in Fiji and to attend a conference in Wellington. I thank Tracey Pinfold, Rosie Honeyfield, Jenny Rive, Toni Floyd and Sharon Homburg for accommodating the many office requests. Thanks are also due to the library staff for their friendly services, various training and support. My thanks to Professor Richard Harker, for organising and conducting a training session on SPSS software and also to Dr. Mary Simpson and Dr. Bill Anderson, for their training session, which introduced me to NVivo qualitative data analysis software.

I am grateful to the Government of Maldives for allowing me the study leave to undertake this programme of study. I am equally grateful to Dr. Hassan Hameed, the Rector of the Maldives College of Higher Education (MCHCE), Professor Neil Baumgart, and Dr. Ralph Rawlinson (two consultants at MCHCE) for their advice, support and encouragement during this research project. Special thanks are also due

to the MCHE, the ABC College (New Zealand) and the University of the South Pacific for granting me permission to conduct part of my research in their respective institutions. I owe a particular debt to all those who willingly gave up valuable time to complete the survey or to be interviewed by me.

My gratitude is also extended to my father and mother, my relatives, friends and colleagues, who provided me constant support and inspiration that kept me going. Special thanks to my wife Shakira, son Hassam and daughter Haifa for enduring and tolerating these four years, uncomplainingly but always supportively.

LIST OF COMMONLY USED ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AAU	Academic Audit Unit
ADB	Asian Development Bank
APNZ	Association of Polytechnics New Zealand
AQMS	Academic Quality Management System
AUQA	Australian Universities' Quality Agency
BTEC	Business and Technology Education Council
CMS	Centre for Maritime Studies
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
EFTS	Equivalent full-time student
EQR	External Quality Review
FET	Faculty of Engineering and Technology
FHTS	Faculty of Hospitality and Tourism Studies
GATS	General Agreement for Trade in Services
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
GCE	General Certificate of Education
HEI(s)	Higher Education Institution(s)
HOD	Head of Department
INQAAHE	International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education
ISO	International Standards Organisation
ITE	Institute for Teacher Education
ITO	Industry Training Organisation
ITP Quality	Institutes of Technology and Polytechnics Quality
ITPNZ	Institutes of Technology and Polytechnics New Zealand
KI(s)	Key Informant(s)
MAB	Maldives Accreditation Board
MCHE	Maldives College of Higher Education
MNQF	Maldives National Qualifications Framework
MOE	Ministry of Education
MPND	Ministry of Planning and National Development
MUHEC	Massey University Human Ethics Committee
NPM	New Public Management
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NZAAU	New Zealand Universities' Academic Audit Unit
NZQA	New Zealand Qualifications Authority
NZVCC	New Zealand Vice-Chancellors' Committee
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PBRF	Performance Based Research Fund
PDO	Planning and Development Office
PQC	Pre-qualifying Criteria
QA	Quality Assurance
QMS	Quality Management System
SSC	State Services Commission
STEP	Statements of Tertiary Education Priorities
TEC	Tertiary Education Commission
TEI(s)	Tertiary Education Institution(s)
TQM	Total Quality Management
UK	United Kingdom
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
USP	The University of the South Pacific

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Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Quality assurance (QA) policy has been a central focus in higher education in both developed and developing countries in the last two to three decades. As a policy prescription, QA is often framed in terms of global imperatives. Consequently, in the context of globalisation, QA policies and practices in higher education present a number of common trends amongst nation states. However, these commonalities also exist with contextually specific differences, together with tensions arising from the dynamics of global, national and local policy processes at work.

This thesis is a study of QA policy and practice in the emerging higher education sector of the Maldives, from a *glonacal* (global, national and local) perspective. It describes and analyses the actual policy development in QA and explains what was done, why, and with what effect. It also examines the contextual factors that shaped the policy, during a period of intense change in the Maldivian higher education sector. In doing so, the thesis explores the significant issues of implementing external and internal QA in higher education from the perspectives of Key Informants (KIs).

The past decade witnessed the creation of the Maldives College of Higher Education (MCHE), which was the first public higher education college, the establishment of the Maldives Accreditation Board (MAB), and the introduction of the Maldives National Qualifications Framework (MNQF). The MNQF also included QA policy requirements for the higher education sector. It is relevant to note that the Government of Maldives (GOM) has publicly declared its policy intention to elevate this institution to university status, indeed the first in the country.

This educational policy analysis case study is framed within a context of globalisation and internationalisation. To supplement and expand the study of QA in higher education in the Maldives - given that it has only one main (public) institution - comparisons are made with other higher education institutions (HEIs). The 'case' of QA policy development in the primary case study from the Maldives is examined, interpreted and explained in the light of data gathered from its site as well as from the

two secondary case studies which are embedded within the overall study. The secondary case studies, which come from a well-established polytechnic in New Zealand and from the University of the South Pacific (USP), will complement the basis that frames QA in higher education within a globalising policy environment. The secondary case studies help to draw on international experiences, in order to gain fuller understanding of the issues related to QA policy and practice. To that extent, this research is also comparative in nature.

This initial chapter is intended to outline and explain the research problem, and the rationale and purpose of the present study. In addition, the chapter also presents the perspectives brought into the study by the researcher. The chapter concludes with an outline of the structure of the thesis.

1.2 The Research Problem

In the Maldives Government intervention in QA in higher education first came about with the establishment of the College¹, which was created in October 1998 by the amalgamation of six different post-secondary education and training institutions, separately administered by five different government ministries. All these institutions had a variety of mostly ad hoc QA practices at the time of the merger. These included internal institutional practices and other practices arising from formal linkages with overseas educational institutions. Government intervention came in the form of a nationally regulated system of course approval and accreditation, which was a model increasingly being adopted in a number of countries (Barnett, 1994; Genis, 2002; Harman & Meek, 2000; Lamarra, 2003; Lenn, 2004; Leong & Wong, 2004; Proitz, Stensaker, & Harvey, 2004; Stella, 2002).

The establishment of the MAB in the year 2000 and the subsequent introduction of the MNQF in 2001 marked the commencement of formal QA within Maldivian higher education. It was declared that QA would be provided through the following policies:

- (i) Qualifications recognised through the MNQF must meet or exceed specified quality benchmarks;
- (ii) A course leading to a qualification in the MNQF must meet the Pre-Qualifying Criteria (PQC), which sets the minimum quality standards acceptable to the MAB;

¹ Throughout this thesis the word College with a capital C refers to the MCHE.

- (iii) It is mandatory for Bachelor, Master and Doctoral degrees to undergo accreditation. (Maldives Accreditation Board [MAB], 2001, p. 7).

In this study, the MNQF policy instrument and specifically the above-mentioned policy requirements are collectively referred to as the Government 'policy on QA in higher education' or 'policy ensemble': in short 'the policy', which this study will examine. The 'policy ensemble' appears to be influenced by a number of local factors, in addition to external factors. Analysis of these local factors alone, it is contended, would result in limitations to understanding outside the level of practice. Furthermore, since the 'policy' came about together with the establishment of the MCHE, it is pertinent to discuss the 'policy' processes in addition to what happens at the level of policy implementation at this College.

The implementation of the 'policy' has encountered a number of problems. Since its inception, the MAB has so far not been able to fully implement the QA processes. No course has undergone accreditation at the time of this study. The weak implementation of the national model could have partly contributed towards the adoption, and in some cases the continuation, of transnational QA arrangements in MCHE and also other HEIs in the Maldives. In HEIs in the Maldives, QA practices appear to be simultaneously dictated by the requirements of overseas academic linkages, which often arise from stakeholder (students, parents and employers) expectations for international recognition of qualifications. These various QA policies and practices, as far as the MCHE is concerned, appear to make heavy and sometimes conflicting demands on the institution and its staff. In particular, some of the systems from abroad appear to be ill-fitted to the culture and resources of this small developing nation (SDN). There is little empirical evidence that the current QA practices are having the desired impact, in terms of quality improvement of the core activity of the institution, that is, teaching and learning. Specifically, QA 'policy' and practice, both at the national level and at the level of practice at MCHE, embody a pattern more consistent with the discourse of bureaucratic managerialism, whilst the essential discourse of quality improvement is largely missing. Furthermore, the conditions that are generally taken for granted for successful QA in more developed higher education systems appear to be lacking in developing countries' institutions. This would be in some respects true in the case of the MCHE. This characterisation does not in any way deride the innovative efforts for quality improvement undertaken by the MAB and the

MCHE, which can be regarded as nothing short of a major educational reform in the last decade.

In summary, based on a preliminary assessment of the policy ensemble in the Maldives, it could reasonably be assumed that the policy agenda was essentially driven by considerations external to the core activity of teaching and learning. This may result in practices that promote a culture of compliance and accountability, which are embedded in the discourse of managerialism, rather than educational improvement which emphasises the improvement of teaching and learning. The central aim of this study is to test these assumptions in order to gain a fuller understanding of both external and internal QA issues that are pertinent in an emerging higher education system.

1.3 Rationale for the Present Study

Examination of the policy shifts in higher education in developing countries indicates an acceleration of efforts to incorporate QA policies in their higher education systems. The historical, cultural, political and socio-economic factors that propelled developed countries to introduce QA policies and mechanisms in their countries are markedly different from those in developing countries. Nevertheless, in general the technologies and systems adopted in developing countries resemble in many ways those that have their genesis in more mature higher education systems. In more developed systems, a neoliberal rationality appears to have underpinned the emphasis towards QA policies in higher education (Codd, 2005; Olssen, 2002; Peters & Roberts, 1999; Winch, 1996). Accordingly, these policies in more developed higher education systems have led to practices that tend to be translated into sophisticated systems of compliance, accountability, monitoring, 'steering from a distance', and surveillance (Vidovich, 2002a; Vidovich & Porter, 1999). Such a notion of quality is more consistent with a prevailing climate of outcomes-driven economic rationalism (Marginson, 1997), that is sensitive to market forces and the 'evaluative state' (Dill, 1998). Hence this is problematic in higher education if these pragmatic goals conflict with strategies to promote a culture of improvement of the core activities of teaching and learning at an institutional level. This policy analysis study argues the need for a more inclusive QA framework that acknowledges the need for compliance within an external quality management environment but also seeks to assure quality of teaching and learning leading to improved student outcomes.

The appropriateness and ultimately the success of attempts to impose QA models in HEIs in developing countries, that have less mature systems of higher education, will depend in large measure on the ability to re-define these models. Therefore, the challenge for SDNs, such as the Maldives, will be the re-definition of quality models in higher education in the specific socio-cultural, political, economic and educational context, together with an appreciation of their position in an increasingly globalised world where ‘knowledge as a driver of growth’ (World Bank, 2002) has become more important than previously.

This situation calls for a new enquiry: an enquiry such as Bradley (2005) proposes, in order to search for the “processes of construction and reconstruction of the quality agenda nationally and institutionally” (p. 9). It is argued that an in-depth policy ‘case study’ of a newly emerging HEI in the Maldives can be utilised to query the current purpose of QA policies and the internal and external imperatives that shape their adoption. Such a study is also needed to focus on the challenges that HEIs face in adopting globally dominant policies. Comparisons with other case studies from the international scene will provide additional insights and advance such an enquiry.

As more developing countries with varying socio-economic, cultural, political and indeed educational backgrounds are increasingly adopting globally dominant QA policies in their higher education systems, an examination of their experiences is worthy of empirical investigation to identify factors related to their effectiveness. Such studies can contribute more broadly towards improvement in theory, policy and practice.

The leading role of the state in the provision of higher education and the embryonic stage of higher education development in the Maldives could in one sense be regarded as a favourable policy environment for the establishment of QA mechanisms. In a resource-constrained SDN, the adoption or adaptation of educational policies that have been tried and tested in other established systems is entirely consistent with a pragmatic desire to rapidly develop its system. Knowledge accumulation is increasingly being projected to as a major driver of economic as well as social development (World Bank, 2002). This nexus of globalisation and knowledge (Ozga, 2005), coupled with a lack of focus on the local policy context (Steiner-Khamsi, as cited in Yang, 2006) and reinforced by steering from the macro-global/Western policy environment, makes the development and enactment of QA policy in a small and emerging higher education system inevitably problematic.

The intended effects in terms of quality improvement of the core activities of teaching and learning at the institutional level are arguably different, since such macro policies are reconstructed in quite unique and contextually specific ways at this micro level. As a policy ‘case study’, this research is focussed on how QA policies from the global (macro level) move through a national (meso) level and are then reconstructed at the micro (site and operation) level within the public HEI in the Maldives. The tensions and issues arising from the global, national and local dynamics in policy processes are explored.

1.4 Aim and Purpose

The overall aim of this study is to explore and understand issues and problems relating to the development and implementation of QA policy, in the specific local context of public higher education in the Maldives. The specific purposes of the study are:

1. to explore the development of quality assurance policies and the issues related to their implementation in higher education systems in both developed [Western] and developing countries;
2. to analyse the quality assurance policy processes in Maldivian higher education from a glonacal perspective;
3. to analyse the extent to which quality assurance policies are implemented effectively and the obstacles encountered at the level of practice, exemplified by the MCHE; and
4. to make recommendations for improving quality assurance policy and practice in Maldivian higher education.

1.5 Research Questions

In relation to the problem statement and the specific purposes identified for the study, the following serves as the key research question of the present study:

How does the newly emerging higher education system in the Maldives assure quality amidst a rapidly globalising quality assurance policy environment?

To assist operationalising the study, two sets of research questions were formulated. One set of questions focused on the secondary case studies while the other set focused on the primary case study. The principal and the two subsidiary questions relating to the secondary case studies are:

1. What lessons can be learnt from the practice of QA in selected overseas HEIs for the development of QA policy and practice in the Maldives?
 - 1.1 What issues does ABC College, New Zealand, face in assuring quality within a centrally regulated national QA system in New Zealand?

- 1.2 What issues does the USP face in assuring quality through its external linkages and how well do these practices fit in with the USP's institutional QA policy?

The two principal questions and the respective subsidiary questions relating to the primary case study from the Maldives are:

2. Why and how did QA policy emerge in the Maldives' higher education sector?
 - 2.1 What policy influences contributed to the development of QA policy?
 - 2.2 What internal and external (including global) contextual factors influenced the QA policy requirement in the Maldives' higher education sector?
3. How does QA operate in the emerging Maldivian higher education sector and in particular at the MCHE?
 - 3.1 What are the obstacles encountered in implementing national QA policy nationally and at the MCHE?
 - 3.2 What QA practices exist in MCHE and how is QA carried out at MCHE?
 - 3.3 What benefits/challenges arise from following the national QA policy requirement at MCHE?
 - 3.4 How have these policies impacted on academic quality at the MCHE?

1.6 Steps to Steer the Study

The following steps are formulated to steer the research process:

1. Analyse the development of QA policies and associated practices and issues related to their implementation in higher education systems in both developed [Western] and developing countries - using documentary evidence and a case study from New Zealand and a case study from the University of the South Pacific.
2. Conduct an analysis of the policy expressed through the national requirements for QA in higher education in the Maldives.
3. Assess the obstacles to QA.
4. Analyse the benefits, issues and problems of operating QA at the MCHE.

1.7 Theoretical and Methodological Orientation

Concurrent with the upsurge in interest in QA, 'globalisation' has also risen to prominence in education discourses and policy debates. Some scholars suggest that the two may be closely linked (Vidovich, 2004). Several researchers even contend that it is becoming increasingly difficult to fully comprehend educational policy and practice without referring to the globalisation processes (Crossley, 2000; Currie & Newson, 1998; Welch, 2000). A close examination of the international comparative education literature reveals the convergence of a number of educational aspects on a

global scale (Mok, 2005; Roberts, 2001; Schugurensky, 1999). Mok (2005) contends that the rhetoric of education policy changes and reform have become remarkably similar across different education jurisdictions. Accordingly, recognition of the importance of 'context' (Codd, 1988; Held et al., as cited in Ozga, 2005), within which policy problems are constructed, requires careful scrutiny (Taylor, Rizvi, Lingard, & Henry, 1997). The theories of 'globalisation', as one strand of the theoretical perspective in this study, will be discussed in detail in Chapter Two.

The study is thus situated within the perspectives of educational policy analysis and globalisation. Many have argued the usefulness of multiple theoretical explanations when undertaking policy analysis studies (Ball, 1993; Henry, 1993). The study adopts the policy cycle approach proposed by Bowe, Ball and Gold (1992) and in particular the policy trajectory study approach espoused by Ball (1993). The *glonacal* (global, national and local) concept, arising from the "*glonacal agency heuristic*" proposed by Marginson and Rhoades (2002), is employed in the analysis of QA policy processes in the context of globalisation. Vidovich (2002a) argues for the usefulness of a modified policy cycle approach in education policy analysis studies. This study is therefore based on theoretical eclecticism, which takes a modified policy cycle approach from a *glonacal* perspective. The research is primarily focussed on an in-depth case study from the Maldives, conducted at the MCHE.

The study is also comparative to the extent that insights on selected aspects of QA policy are drawn from two secondary (less intensive) international case studies. The New Zealand case study is deemed relevant and useful, not only because of New Zealand's lead in experimenting with matters of quality in tertiary education but also due to the New Zealand higher education system's historical links with the higher education developments in the Maldives. Traditionally, and to a large extent even now, Maldivians travel abroad for higher education and New Zealand has provided a popular venue. In more recent times, this linkage provided a basis of 'policy borrowing', with regards to higher education QA, where the Maldives introduced a national QA regulatory system, partly modelled on the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) model that emerged in the latter half of the 1990s (Baumgart, 2002a). The case study of the USP, though not a national institution, is deemed useful for comparative reference of a regional institution that serves peoples who share similar 'frame factors' (Hopkin, 2004) as that of the people of the Maldives. Furthermore, the USP is also a HEI that offers a wide range and mix of programmes.

The USP has recently introduced a formal QA policy (Planning and Development Office [PDO], 2004).

1.8 Terminology

This thesis adopts the UNESCO definition of 'higher education' as approved by its General Conference in 1993 which states: "higher education includes all types of studies, training or training for research at the post-secondary level, provided by universities or other educational establishments that are approved as institutions of higher education by the competent State authorities" (UNESCO, 2005). This definition is also consistent with the broad definition of 'tertiary education' used by OECD. The OECD defines 'tertiary education' as "a level or stage of studies beyond secondary education. Such studies are undertaken in tertiary education institutions, such as public and private universities, colleges, and polytechnics, and also in a wide range of other settings, such as secondary schools, work sites, and via free-standing information technology-based offerings and a host of public and private entities." (Wagner, as cited in Holm-Nielsen, 2001, p. xx). For this reason, whilst acknowledging that there are historical and conceptual differences between the two terms of 'higher education' and 'tertiary education', this thesis treats the two terms as essentially the same but prefers to use 'higher education'.

1.9 Structure of the Thesis

This thesis explores issues and problems of QA in higher education, as a policy case study. It locates the study within globalisation processes. This chapter provides the background to the research problem by identifying the key research question and the specific questions that provided the focus of the inquiry.

A review of literature is presented in the first part of Chapter Two. The second part of that chapter presents the theoretical perspectives, drawn from that literature, brought into the study. The eclectic theoretical framework adopted for this research involves a modified policy cycle framework (Ball, 1993; Bowe et al., 1992; Vidovich, 2002a) together with the *glonacal* perspective, as espoused by Marginson and Rhoades (2002). The theoretical perspective also takes note of interpretive theory, which enables a micro level focus at the higher education institutional level, and critical theory which enables a macro level understanding of the influences behind the adoption of globally dominant QA policies. The concept of a policy cycle is useful to link the micro and macro levels of analyses.

Chapter Three presents the research methodology and the analytical approaches undertaken. A case is made for the use of two secondary international cases in two different countries, in addition to the Maldives' primary case study. The research is designed as a qualitative multi-site case study with a single focus on the phenomenon of QA in higher education. The data analysis process in this study is aided by the use of qualitative data analysis computer software called NVivo.

Chapter Four presents an overview of the three contexts of the study. The context within which the QA policies emerged in the three sites is examined. The Chapter also presents a summary of the QA policy that exists in the three contexts.

Chapter Five presents the results from two secondary cases of this research; namely, the ABC College and the USP. This chapter identifies QA-related common themes worth exploring in the primary case study.

Chapter Six presents the results from the primary case study. The results reflect the QA policy influences at the global, national and local (institutional) levels. The dominant discourses influencing QA are also examined.

Chapter Seven presents the discussion of policy issues through a set of analytical categories derived from the thematic analysis of the case studies. The final chapter, Chapter Eight, summarises the main conclusions of the study. It also makes recommendations to strengthen QA in the Maldives higher education context. The chapter concludes with suggestions for future research in QA in emerging higher education systems, particularly in small developing states.

1.10 Conclusion

This chapter has provided the context within which QA has risen to prominence as a key policy domain in contemporary higher education. The trends in Western countries and how developing countries followed suit, in adopting and/or adapting QA policies, has been discussed. The globalisation process has led to a number of similarities in educational policy making. As a result, QA policies in many countries appear to have many commonalities. The research problem, as it relates to emerging Maldivian higher education, was stated as: the QA policy agenda was essentially driven by considerations external to the core activity of teaching and learning and this may result in practices that promote a culture of compliance and accountability, which are embedded in the discourse of managerialism, rather than educational improvement

which emphasises the improvement of teaching and learning. A review of literature on 'quality' and 'QA,' from a range of both developed and developing country contexts, is the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter Two

LITERATURE REVIEW

AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is twofold. First, it reviews the literature on quality assurance (QA) in higher education. Second, it presents a conceptual framework for the study of QA policy processes. The chapter is divided into six sections. The first section addresses the problematic nature of defining quality and QA in higher education. The second section reviews the factors influencing the development of QA policy in the developed countries. Section three addresses the factors influencing the developing countries in introducing QA policies and practices. The fourth section presents a selection of QA policy instruments or methodologies as some have classified them, identifying their key strengths and limitations. The fifth section identifies and discusses a number of emerging themes from the literature on QA policy and practice relevant to this study. The last section presents a conceptual framework for this study based on the themes that emerged from the literature review and the purpose of this study.

2.2 Quality and Quality Assurance in Higher Education

2.2.1 Defining Quality

'Quality' is a concept long associated with the manufacturing sector. Over the years, it has had different constructions put on it. Although the theories of quality emerged in the United States through American thinkers, the application of quality concepts were initially mastered by the Japanese in their production sectors (Beckford, 2002). The ideas of statistical quality control and quality management, from leaders in the field such as W. Edwards Deming and Joseph M. Juran, were enthusiastically adopted by the Japanese and contributed to their re-emergence as a major industrial nation. Other leading contributors to the quality movement were Armand V. Feigenbaum and Philip Crosby in the USA, Kaoru Ishikawa, Shiego Shingo and Genichi Taguchi in Japan, and John S Oakland in Britain (Beckford, 2002; Dale, 1994). More recently, organisations throughout the world have begun to embrace the theories and practices

of quality, and quality initiatives in the public sector are being actively pursued by many national governments.

Introducing QA policies in higher education presupposes an implicit understanding of 'quality'. A single definition of 'quality', however, does not appear to exist in the literature. Discussions vary from the 1970s Pirsig's (1974) acknowledgment, which reflects the complexity of disentangling the meaning of quality, to the 1980s Christopher Ball's (1985) simple answer to a frustrated question, and subsequently to Harvey and Green's (1993) relative and somewhat definitive answers through five discrete ways of thinking about quality. As Pirsig (1974) stated:

Quality . . . you know what it is, yet you don't know what it is. . . . But some things *are* better than others, that is, they have more quality. But when you try to say what the quality is, apart from the things that have it, it all goes *poof*. . . . If no one knows what it is,, then for all practical purposes it doesn't exist at all. But for all practical purposes it really *does* [emphasis in original] exist. (p. 184)

For C. Ball's (1985) question, 'What the hell is quality?', the answer lies in 'fitness for purpose'. Harvey and Green (1993) categorise different conceptions of quality under five headings:

- Quality as exceptional (something special and linked to excellence);
- Quality as perfection (consistent or flawless outcome);
- Quality as fitness for purpose (fulfilling a customers' needs or desires);
- Quality as value for money (return on investment); and
- Quality as transformation (enhancement or empowerment of students).

The above grouping covers a wide range of meanings, from traditional notions of quality as 'excellence' to the more recent insights of 'zero defect' (perfection), mission orientation and consumer orientation ('fitness for purpose') and, finally, in the transformational notion of quality, through to the question of what higher education is about (Westerheijden, Brennan, & Maassen, 1994). Governments tend to give priority to the populist notion of value for money through demands in the public sector for efficiency and effectiveness. Central to the concept of a value-for-money approach to quality is the notion of accountability (Harvey & Green, 1993). Others have later added to the five conceptualisations. These include quality as 'threshold' and quality as 'enhancement or improvement' (Campbell & Rozsnyai, 2002). Thus quality can be said to be subjective and also multi-dimensional.

Higher education systems are characterised by multiple actors or stakeholders, which include policy makers, managers, teachers, researchers, students, support staff,

government agencies, employers, parents, academic and professional organisations. The different stakeholders or interest groups in higher education have different priorities and their focus of attention could be quite different. While governments may talk of graduating as many students as possible with reduced costs and qualifications of international standards, employers may focus on knowledge, skills and attitude. For the students of higher education quality may be linked to personal interests, individual development and preparation for a position in society (Vroeijenstijn, 1995). They are also concerned with the process of education. Furthermore, the academic staff may emphasise “good academic training based on good knowledge transfer and a good learning environment and a good relationship between teaching and research” (Vroeijenstijn, 1995, p. 13). As Westerheijden et al. (1994) contend, “nothing detains these actors from choosing their own definition of quality” (p. 17). Moreover, they note that those who dominate in higher education systems, depending on their power, coalitions and policies, are also known to influence the prevailing definitions of quality.

With particular reference to developing countries, Beeby (1966) defines quality as “the concern with a reasonably efficient, on-going class programme” (p. 9) and argues that it occurred at the classroom level, in the market place, and in the wider society (pp. 10-12). Although Beeby’s thesis focussed on the school sector, his observations about the nature of educational quality in developing countries appear to be relevant to the post-secondary sector as well.²

The above discussion of attempts at defining quality suggests several possibilities. First, although the debate and concern with quality in higher education has been widespread, a specific and single definition of quality is problematic. In one sense it is not even desirable. As Green (1994) argues, “there is no single definition of quality that is right to the exclusion of all others” (p. 17).

Second, the most commonly used definition amongst the above seems to be ‘fitness for purpose’, which is an instrumental approach to quality. According to this definition, if education fulfils its purpose, then it is quality education. Institutions can

² Beeby’s thesis on the quality of education in developing countries was one of the main subjects of discussion and analysis of this researcher’s previous study conducted between 1990 and 1991. Hence, it was decided not to re-visit this discussion in detail in this research.

define their purpose, in their mission statements and demonstrate quality through the achievement of these. However, stakeholders can define purposes differently.

Third, the conceptions of quality evolve and emerge as the contexts in which higher education systems operate change. New research and new understandings will also contribute to these conceptual changes. There are various parties involved directly and indirectly in higher education. Each of these parties defines quality in accordance with the objectives set by themselves. As Vroeijenstijn (as cited in Harvey & Green, 1993) argues, “the interpretation of the concept of quality depends on the person who sets the objectives” (p. 23); it is ‘stakeholder-relative’. The objectives may run parallel, but they can also be conflicting. For this reason, Harvey and Green (1993) suggest that “at best, we should define as clearly as possible the criteria that each stakeholder uses when judging quality and for those competing views to be taken into account when assessments of quality are undertaken” (p. 28).

Fourth, central to the debate on quality in higher education is the issue of the extent of suitability of utilizing concepts derived from the profit-oriented manufacturing sector and applying these to higher education, which is essentially a public service sector. The profit-oriented sectors talk in terms of ‘customers’ and ‘customer satisfaction’. In higher education systems, “there are many groups which could be defined as ‘customers’ of higher education and . . . their requirements are sometimes in conflict” (Baldwin, 1994, p. 130). Customers may include the student, the employer, society at large, or the government paying the costs of higher education, or the academic peers (Van Vught, 1996). In addition, the multiple variables interplaying within a HEI suggests viewing it as a complex network of inputs, transforming processes and outputs.

2.2.2 Conceptualising Quality Assurance in Higher Education

As the concept of ‘quality’ is seen to be multifaceted, the term ‘quality assurance’ also appears to be difficult to conceptualise. It appears to have entered the new policy discourse of higher education through the manufacturing and business sector of the Western (industrialised) countries (Lim, 2001). Quality assurance was about ensuring that standards were specified and met consistently for a product or service. Therefore, beginning in the 1980s, the dominance of economics, which surrounded the policy environment in Western governments, provided the ideological foundations on which to build quality, both in higher education and other public sectors. The changing

trends of market ideologies (Bates, 1996) of neoliberal or 'New Right' governments, in some developed countries during the 1980s (Bridges & McLaughlin, 1994), have certainly contributed to the importation of new concepts from the world of business into higher education.

As the debate and interest in quality in higher education grew, newer definitions and meanings of QA grew. Frazer (1992), drawing from the business sector, highlights a broader continuous improvement view of QA where everyone involved contributes to and strives for quality. In this conceptualisation he emphasises the importance of understanding, using and feeling the ownership of the system in place. According to Harvey and Green (1993) QA is about "ensuring that there are mechanisms, procedures and processes in place to ensure that the desired quality, however defined and measured, is delivered" (p. 19). It is not about specifying the standards against which to measure or control quality (Harvey & Green, 1993). According to Vroeijerstijn (1995) QA may be described as "systematic, structured and continuous attention to quality in terms of quality maintenance and quality improvement" (p. xviii). In the 1990s the drift towards QA was clearly evident in most of the developed countries. The shift also implicitly assumed that if mechanisms exist, then quality can be assured. Harvey and Green (1993) also pointed out that in the 1990s there was the danger of defining quality "in terms of the existence of suitable mechanisms of QA" (p. 20). This was especially true of the fascination with quality systems from the for-profit sector such as the seeking of British Standards (BS 5750) in the non-university higher education sector in the UK (Sallis & Hingley, 1991). However, Harvey and Green (1993) argue:

BS 5750, or any other stamp of approval of assurance mechanism tells you nothing about the quality per se only that there are processes in place in the institution for monitoring quality. (p. 20)

Harman (1998) explains QA from a management perspective as follows:

Quality assurance refers to the systematic 'management and assessment procedures' adopted to ensure achievement of specified or improved quality, and to enable stakeholders to have confidence in the management of quality and the outcomes achieved. (p. 346)

Generally the term 'quality assurance' is understood to refer to all the policies, attitudes, actions and procedures directed to ensuring the maintenance and enhancement of quality (Lim, 2001; Woodhouse, 1999). This term is easier to conceptualise with respect to country-level practices in QA. National studies on quality and QA provide some distinct conceptualisations of QA. Notions of 'control'

(Van Vught, 1996) and ‘compliance’ (Barrow & Curzon-Hobson, 2003; Weir, 2001) tended to dominate the early QA initiated in most countries. In the European context it has been observed that in the continental tradition as distinct from the British tradition, quality control is exercised through control mechanisms of input, process and output. These forms of governmental control appear to have assured that the level and quality of higher education in Western Europe is much more homogenous, and on average higher than, for example, in the United States (Van Vught, 1996). The first QA systems created within Europe (e.g. in UK, France, the Netherlands and Denmark), according to Ottenwaelter (2001) reflected the diversity of the higher education systems to which they were applied and also the size of the countries concerned. In the early British tradition state control was much less than in the continental model. The British HEIs, therefore, enjoyed more power and autonomy through their charters and were free to develop their own forms of quality control.

Conceptualisations of QA as ‘quality assessment’³ seems to have entered QA models at a later date (Bauer, 1994; Brennan & Shah, 2000b; Scot, 1994; Silver, 1994; Vroeijenstijn, 1994). Likewise for conceptions of QA as ‘accountability’ (Harvey & Newton, 2004; Hodson & Thomas, 2003), and ‘improvement’ (Anderson, Cuellar, & Rich, 2003; Chambliss, 2003; Commons, 2003; Gosling & D’Andrea, 2001; Graham & Barnett, 1996; Harvey, 2002; Leckey & Neill, 2001; Munasinghe & Jayawardena, 1999). In a review of QA approaches from a number of countries, Harvey (1998) states that:

The rapid changes taking place in higher education are tending to lead to a convergence towards a dominant model for quality. This model is one of delegated accountability. Central to this process is the emphasis placed on quality as a vehicle for delivering policy requirements within available resources. (pp. 237-238)

In the United States, QA is conceptualised as accreditation (Eaton, 2001; Lenn, 1992). However, the use of this term is not the same as it is used and applied in other countries. Accreditation in the US “is a peer-driven, consultative process culminating in a judgment about whether or not an institution or programme is [*sic*] may be designated as accredited” (Eaton, 2001, p. 104). ‘Accreditation’ is generally associated with processes to determine whether an institution, faculty or programme

³ ‘Assessment’ is used with reference to evaluation of specific education activities. The terminology of assessment has been used fairly commonly in Europe, in particular in the U.K.

meets certain threshold criteria (Massy, 1997). Accreditation criteria are frequently pre-set. Evaluations are made against these pre-set standards.

Until recently, in the Australian scene, the baseline for a QA framework lay in the establishment of both public and private universities as self-accrediting institutions. In this set up, academic boards and governing councils of institutions had major responsibilities for the quality of educational provision, which included academic standards (Skilbeck & Connell, 1998). However, over the last 15 years, Australia has moved towards a national system of QA, where external evaluation and review entails a major shift in perspective (Candy & Maconachie, n.d; Harman & Meek, 2000). The setting up of the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) in 2001 was the cornerstone of the new QA framework.

Quality assurance of tertiary education in New Zealand focuses on the quality of qualifications and that of the providers. Four quality approval agencies⁴ decide whether tertiary providers and qualifications meet appropriate quality standards. The NZQA holds the QA role for all institutions with the exception of the university sector. It also has responsibility for course approval and accreditation for all degree qualifications offered by providers other than universities. The Academic Audit Unit (AAU) independently formed by the NZVCC, audits university qualifications.

South Africa, which is undergoing many reforms in the education sector, is embarking on a new QA system. The system recently piloted is similar to that in some other countries and is based on a combination of evaluation and external validation through peer review (Jacobs, 2001; Strydom & Strydom, 2004).

In summary, it can be concluded that concerns with quality “have led to a great increase in activities external to higher education institutions” which are known as “external quality review” (EQR) (Woodhouse, 1999, p. 30). This has consequently given rise to the establishment of EQR agencies. During this process shifts in the relative balance of power amongst governments, institutions and faculties in the regulation of QA systems have also been observed (Roberts, 2001; Woodhouse,

⁴ These agencies are: the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA); the Committee on University Academic Programmes (CUAP), which is a standing committee of the New Zealand Vice-Chancellors' Committee (NZVCC); the New Zealand Polytechnic Programmes Committee (NZPCC) – changed to Institutes of Technology and Polytechnics Quality from 2004 – ; and the Colleges of Education Accreditation Committee (CEAC) (Ministry of Education, 2000).

1996). Roberts (2001) argues that governments have played a dominant, controlling role in many countries. At times, this control has been exerted through funding policies and in other situations governments have a regulatory role, through mediating the interests of the market and academia. However, in other systems they only play a 'steering role' to a number of options. In general, developing countries tend to experience a great deal of state control in QA systems.

The next two sections review the factors that influence the development of QA in both developed and developing countries respectively.

2.3 Factors Influencing Quality Assurance Policy Development: The Developed Countries

Over the last three to four decades, the higher education landscape worldwide has experienced significant changes. These changes include major policy shifts and structural reforms (Enders & Fulton, 2002; Gornitzka, Kogan, & Amaral, 2005; Harman, 2005; Kogan & Hanney, 2000; Williams & Cummings, 2005). The literature in this field offers a number of insights into the nature of these changes and the factors that have contributed to them, together with their impact and the ways in which different countries have responded (Altbach, 1992, 1999, 2004; Barnett, 2005; Daun, 2002; Gordon, 2002; Harman, 2005; Heyneman & DeYoung, 2004; Kogan, 2002; Kogan & Hanney, 2000; World Bank, 2000). Whilst the patterns of change and the ways in which different countries responded varied, these changes were common to most, if not all, higher education systems all over the world.

The most striking changes, within which QA appears to have come into focus in Western higher education systems, are: massification; the changing patterns of funding; marketisation and privatisation in higher education; the changing role of the state; and the rise of new public management (NPM) and accountability (Altbach, 2001; Codd & Sullivan, 2005; Crossley & Holmes, 1999; Daun, 2002; El-Khawas, 2005; Gift, Leo-Rhyme, & Moniquette, 2005; Gornitzka et al., 2005; Knight, 2002; Neave, 1988; Perellon, 2001; Scott, 1998; Van Damme, 2002; Williams & Cummings, 2005). All these changes have taken place within the powerful force of globalisation and within a context of opportunities as well as potential threats (Fitzsimons, 2000; Holm-Nielsen, 2001; Rizvi & Lingard, 2000; World Bank, 2002). Each of these changes will be examined in the following sections.

2.3.1 Massification

In Western countries, debates relating to the expansion of higher education emerged in the post second world war era, particularly in the late 1950s and early 1960s (Teichler, 1998, 1999). According to Altbach (1999), the most notable and distinguishing characteristic of these changes, during the last decades of the 20th century, was the phenomenal growth of higher education systems in all countries. These changes appear to have continued into the early years of the new millennium. Researchers identify the expansion of the system as the key factor behind many other policy changes, particularly in British higher education (Kogan & Hanney, 2000). Clearly, there has been a shift in the so-called 'elitist' model of higher education, towards mass expansion of enrolments leading to what became known as 'massification' of higher education (Teichler, 1998; Trow, 1970, 1972).

This expansion was first experienced, most dramatically, in the United States, followed by Europe (Trow, 1972). According to Trow, most higher education systems in the Western world were moving (or at least were predicted to move) from an 'elite' to 'mass' and then to 'universal' higher education. Elite systems enrolled fewer than 15 percent, mass systems enrolled anywhere between 15 percent and 40 percent and universal systems enrolled over 40 percent of this age group (Trow, 1970). Whilst some scholars contest these figures (Kogan & Hanney, 2000), Barnett (2005) contends that the classification itself may have served a useful purpose in depicting that the mass higher education system was an intermediate stage, placed between the elite and universal systems.

This expansion developed with significant variations. The rapid expansion in most Western countries did not follow through in all countries from elite, to mass to universal as predicted by some commentators. This was partly due to the economic slow down and partly due to changing demographics which slowed down the expansion of higher education in some Western countries. Lately, expansion has occurred in more diversified forms, with enrolment of new age groups of students and also an increasing number of students from developing countries.

2.3.2 Marketisation and Privatisation in Higher Education

Within the discourses of neoliberalism, 'economic' policies with a focus on the 'possessive individual' and 'competition' underpinned the policy-making framework in the public sector. In the 1980s, economic theories of the day also heavily influenced

higher education policies in many capitalist states (Codd, 2005b; Marginson, 1997). This 'ontological shift' (Dale, 2000), where education is subjected to the language and the alleged logic of neoliberal economics, gave rise to policies that forced the application of market processes in higher education.

Markets take on several meanings in higher education. Firstly, there were imperatives to privatise what some considered as an overprotective public sector and thereby force its activities to be competitive (Kogan & Hanney, 2000). Using economic arguments, this led to an operative system based on supply and demand and it aimed to generate optimum returns on investments. The market metaphor also meant competition amongst HEIs, in addition to competition for limited resources. An increasing number of institutions competed within common catchment areas for student enrolments. The market was also seen as the prime mechanism for the pursuit of efficiency (Bates, 1996).

Furthermore, as observed by Altbach (1999), a case for private initiatives in higher education also advanced within the 'market' approach to higher education. Consequently, new 'for-profit' institutions, providing a range of post-secondary education, emerged in many countries. The quality within this for-profit sector varied considerably. These developments posed serious challenges in the assessment of quality or standards and they have again accelerated the development and enactment of QA policies and related systems.

Randall (2002), with respect to the United Kingdom's Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA), points out that it was the shift to mass higher education and the increasingly global market for qualifications which heavily shaped the QA system designed by that Agency. Within an ever-increasing global market, Randall (2002) contends that countries have begun to realise the economic benefits to be gained from providing trans-national education. This has led to the development of 'frameworks' for higher education qualifications, which provide a basis for an international currency of qualifications.

2.3.3 Changes in Patterns of Funding

Until the 1980s, higher education expansion in Western countries was allied with strong government commitment to finance the system. This trend was in keeping with the notion of higher education as a 'public good'. The prolonged economic crisis and the economic collapse of the welfare state in Western capitalist states triggered the rise

of neoliberal ideologies associated with the New Right doctrines. This phenomenon has been described variously by different commentators (Peters & Roberts, 1999). In Australia, it is referred to as 'economic rationalism' (Marginson, 1993). In New Zealand, the more commonly used term is neoliberalism. In the British context, the phenomenon has been discussed within the debates on 'New Right'⁵ (Giddens, 1994). Within the scope of this thesis, these terms have been used as essentially equivalent, since the underlying principles are basically the same. Concurrent with these significant changes there also occurred changes in the perspectives with regard to overall public spending and the welfare state. These perspectives became instrumental in the application of the neoliberal economic theories which became influential in shaping public policies, including those of higher education.

With the relocation of education in the market place and the 'economizing of education,' (Ozga, 2000) supported by several studies undertaken through the World Bank in the 1990s (World Bank, as cited in Ozga, 2000), higher education began to be viewed as mainly a 'private good' benefiting the individual more than society as a whole (Altbach, 1999). This change in thinking precipitated the shifting of the burden of financing higher education on to individual users, which resulted in students and/or their families having to meet a higher proportion of the costs involved. Thus, a progressive reduction of government funding per equivalent full-time student (EFTS) for higher education became apparent in most OECD countries during the 1980s and through the 1990s.

Increasing concern for efficiency has also altered the patterns of funding higher education. With reduced funding from governments, HEIs were expected to meet the additional requirements through more efficient use of their resources. The changing expectations of parents and employers, coupled with the heightened expectations and growing concerns from the state for greater 'efficiency and quality', 'value for money' and 'public accountability', subjected these institutions to an unprecedented level of external scrutiny (Mok, 2005). This has resulted in organisational changes within the institutions and it has also triggered further expansion of the system, through the establishment of a private sector in higher education. Tertiary education institutions

⁵ This term appears to have been used with different connotations. Some writers have used the term to refer to an alliance of interests, comprising market liberals and political conservatives. Others have used it when referring to an uneasy blend of conservatism, liberalism and right-wing economics (Olssen, Codd, & O'Neill, 2004, pp. 134-135).

faced increasing demands from their local communities, not only to accommodate newer groups for studying but also in terms of achieving higher quality. In turn, these changes have accelerated the emergence of the debate on QA (Neave, 1988).

2.3.4 *Changing Role of the State*

In the Western context, the change in patterns of funding has also led to transformations in the role of the state in the organisation of higher education systems. With the adoption of market approaches in Western countries, there has been a shift from the more interventionist form of government, based on the Keynesian paradigm (Apple, 2000), to a less intrusive form of governance. These changes depict parallels with the emergence of the 'evaluative state' (Neave, 1988, 1998). This tends to limit the commitment of the state in higher education provision and replace it by the market. As Neave (1998) argues:

. . . the rise of the Evaluative State is accompanied by two major shifts in the timing, purpose and location of evaluation in the process not only of policy-making, but also 'policy adhesion'. . . . The second is a clear shift towards *a posteriori* evaluation. . . . *a posteriori* evaluation seeks to elicit how far goals have been met, not by setting the prior conditions but by ascertaining the extent to which overall targets have been met through the evaluation of 'product'. . . [it] works through the control of product, not through the control of process'. (pp. 10-12)

Thus the changing role of the state in institutional autonomy was a shift from 'process control' to 'product control'. This shift in focus is away from questions of provision and access, social equality and equity. It redefines the purpose of higher education not in relation to individual demand, but in keeping with the perceived needs of the market. The consequence of this shift is the 'steering' of higher education more closely towards national priorities. Marginson describes this modified relationship between the government and the HEI as a neoliberal paradox of 'steering from a distance' (Marginson, 1997).

Arguably, these newer forms of governance of HEIs have not reduced the involvement of the state in higher education: they have only modified its role and the relationship. Dale (1997) argues that the three main governance activities of funding, regulation and delivery have been restructured. According to Mok (2005), the role of the state has been restructured to become "more involved in performing the roles of enabler, regulator, quality controller, facilitator, and coordinator of services" (p. 298). In turn, these changes produced 'tighter' controls of what emerged from HEIs. The characteristics of the Evaluative State perhaps thus represent a powerful challenge to

presumptions of professional control over higher education. It certainly represents an advancement in managerial controls over the individual academic.

In view of the financial constraints of the nation states, new non-state actors come into play in the funding and provision of higher education. From this perspective, it is pertinent to observe that the market, the local community and the civil society now are involved increasingly in the financing and provision of education.

The 1980s and 1990s witnessed the influence of neoliberalism and the adverse consequences of the market models applied in education. Towards the end of the 1990s, the competitive market approach in education, at least in the case of New Zealand according to Codd (2005a), seemed to have given way to accommodate a more cooperative, more inclusive and more equitable education system, thus heralding a new phase of political and economic reforms. This new phase, or what has come to be known as 'Third Way politics', according to Giddens (1998, 2000), offers an alternative, both to the neoliberalism of the 1980s and 1990s and to the interventionist welfare state. The 'Third Way' approach to higher education policy, with its attendant emphasis on 'knowledge economy and society' is quite specific to New Zealand. This 'Third Way' rejects both the market principles of neoliberalism and state domination of the 'old style' socialism of the Keynesian welfare state (Codd, 2005a). On the one hand 'Third Way' emphasises the renewal of the civil society, inclusiveness and social responsibility but on the other hand it also embraces individualism, economic freedom and globalisation. Critics of Third Way rhetoric argue that it is only a 'softer' version of neoliberalism (Callinicos, as cited in Codd, 2005a) because it remains committed to the neoliberal agenda embedded in globalisation. Whilst Third Way politics in New Zealand has some wider relevance to New Labour policies in Britain, the view of many analysts is that it is little more than a means of managing neoliberalism (Codd, 2005b; Roberts, 2005).

2.3.5 New Public Management and Accountability

Managerialism has an ideological base to it (Bates, 1996). It is the incorporation of the theories and techniques of business management and the 'cult of excellence' into public sector institutions (Ball, 1998). Under the wave of new public management

(NPM) or 'new managerialism'⁶ that swept across most of the developed countries in the 1980s, performance targets and quantifiable outputs, often seen in private sector management, were being applied in the public sector. There was greater emphasis on management skills and professional skills were de-emphasised. In higher education, as Weir (2000) argues, this meant a challenge for the collegial nature of academic work that underpinned the traditional view of quality assurance. The NPM model emphasised the operation of a public sector in a similar way to private sector organisations, the assumption being that the private sector organisations were run more effectively and efficiently and arguably with higher quality.

The changes that occurred in relation to the rise of the evaluative state were largely based on models consistent with the NPM. With models of NPM there were increasing concerns with accountability. In the Australian context, it is noted that the use of performance indicators (PIs) as a basis of funding, which was proposed during the 1980s, triggered a 'revolution' in increased accountability (Vidovich & Currie, 1998), heralding a new culture of 'performativity' (Lyotard, 1984). These two scholars maintain that, in the 1990s, the accountability agenda of the government was cleverly transformed from quantitative to qualitative assessments and from PIs to the notion of quality, merely "to make it more acceptable to the academics and to achieve greater consistency within the culture of universities" (Vidovich & Currie, 1998, p. 197).

Historically, HEIs in the US functioned with a significant degree of autonomy and this has meant less external scrutiny (El-Khawas, 2005). However, from the 1980s, institutions were increasingly required to demonstrate their performance through a whole array of indicators beginning initially with student assessment and moving on to periodic reports and indicators in several areas of institutional operation. By the late 1990s, shifts were evident towards 'performance-funding' and 'performance-budgeting'. Based on this shift, from a 'hands-off' approach to an 'information-reporting' approach over the last two decades, El-Khawas (2005) concludes that the US higher education policy-making environment, both at state and federal level, has moved closer to an interventionist model, in which accountability has assumed a dominant role.

⁶ Throughout this thesis, the term 'managerialism' is used to mean essentially the same as NPM, and 'new managerialism'.

In some of the more developed systems of higher education, it is alleged that the aim of governments, in establishing national quality regimes, is to gain greater control over the activities of higher education (Harvey, 2002; Ramsden, 2003; Vidovich, 2001). As Macintyre (2004) argues, “quality assurance is an aspect of the mass higher education system, a device for improving the efficiency and effectiveness of large, complex institutions that are vital to the nation’s needs” (p. 21). This notion of QA, Macintyre also argues, has led the universities on a path of unrelenting pursuit of excellence, thus imposing a regime of continual improvement. Macintyre claims that such regimes inevitably lead to disturbing experiences, where quality becomes managed by auditors, suggesting that QA is after all an artificial exercise with a corrosive tendency.

In summary, the trends discussed above, though not exhaustive, individually and in combination contributed to the renewed interest in quality in higher education. The pursuit of quality in higher education though is not new. Quality assurance schemes for higher education understandably emerged first in the developed countries, as a response to significant changes in their higher education systems. Given the predominance of economic theories underpinning these changes, it is not surprising that QA models adopted in Western higher education systems have their genesis in the manufacturing sector (Barnett, 1992). The translocation of these ‘quality models’ to education have been contested on the grounds of their neglect of the specific cultural context of HEIs (Houston & Studman, 2001). Extending his argument against the adoption in higher education of a business model of quality, Barnett (1992) reminds us that QA, as the implementation of systems, regulations and procedures, constitutes a checklist approach to maintaining quality. In higher education, Barnett (1992) concludes that, “such a single-minded check-list approach to safe-guarding quality is misguided, ineffective and pernicious” (p. 119).

Different countries have articulated different and specific rationales for establishing QA agencies. Whilst some governments claim their drive to QA is driven by accountability concerns, together with mechanisms to lead improvement, others claim to protect institutions in a competitive environment (Harman, 1998). Other policy objectives, such as facilitating regional recognition of qualifications and mobility of professional labour and improving the management and planning capacity of institutions, have also been advanced. However, Vidovich (2001), with reference to the Australian context, argues that the public discourse about quality has been used to

gain greater control over the higher education sector. Similarly, Harvey (1999) contends that external quality monitoring activities do not sufficiently engage with the students' experience of learning. Based on several observations from studies undertaken in both developed and developing countries, Harvey (2002) concludes that "external quality monitoring is primarily to ensure accountability and conformity" (p. 260).

Hodson and Thomas (2003), drawing mainly upon experiences in the United Kingdom (UK), conclude that QA procedures, with their emphasis on compliance and accountability, lead to an institutional culture that is in danger of alienating academic staff, to the detriment of the whole system. They take a more middle-of-the-road attitude and suggest that, if QA systems are to recognise the increasingly diverse culture of future higher education systems, then compliance will need to be balanced by a greater emphasis on encouraging innovation and self improvement on the part of individual staff members.

2.4 Factors Influencing Quality Assurance Policy Development: The Developing Countries

The developing countries have also witnessed unprecedented changes in their higher education systems in the past few decades. Some of the salient factors that influenced the rise of QA policies and systems in developing countries are: (1) uneven progress and the need for effectiveness; (2) crisis in higher education; (3) lowering of national barriers and; (4) the role of transnational agencies. Each of these factors will be discussed next.

2.4.1 Uneven Progress and Need for Effectiveness

The developing countries have also witnessed a rapid expansion of their higher education systems. This expansion has transpired with greater differentiation of HEIs into new forms and in conjunction with an increasing recognition of the importance of knowledge for social and economic development (World Bank, 2000). However, progress has been uneven and sharp contrasts remain across and within higher education systems in these countries. Whilst movement to mass higher education is a reality and enrolments in developed countries have reached in some cases over 80 percent (World Bank, 2000, 2002), the developing countries seldom enrol more than 25 percent of the 18-24 age cohort (Lemaitre, 2002). The average higher education enrolment for developing countries was only 9 percent (for 1995) and 9.8 percent (for

2001) (Hopper, 2007, April; World Bank, 2002). Furthermore, Frazer (1994) points out that the expansion of higher education in many countries had not brought the prosperity some promised it would. In Frazer's words:

There are well-known examples of developing countries that undertook massive expansion of higher education only to discover that there were many unemployed, underemployed, or misemployed graduates who were disillusioned and often a focus for discontent. In other countries, employers complain about the inability of graduates to contribute to their enterprises. (p. 102)

Thus the unequal progress has generated demands from within and outside higher education for greater effectiveness. From outside higher education this has led to demands for the quality of courses to be exposed. From those within, there was "an urgency to check, change if necessary and demonstrate the value of their courses" (Frazer, 1994, p. 102).

2.4.2 Crisis in Higher Education

Technological development and the impact of information technologies, the pervasiveness of the internet, and the possibilities that open up with distance and on-line education are well known. However, many of the students in developing countries do not own computers or have access to the internet (Lemaitre, 2002). Whilst there are exceptions, the quality and relevance of research, teaching and learning has continued to decline in public HEIs in developing countries. According to a World Bank study, overcrowded and deteriorating physical facilities, limited and obsolete library resources, insufficient equipment and instructional materials, outdated curricula, unqualified teaching staff and poorly prepared secondary students still plague the developing countries (World Bank, 2000). Similar conditions can be found in many new private HEIs that have mushroomed in several of these countries. Lack of full-time qualified lecturers is an important factor resulting in poor quality education in both public and private institutions in these countries. Formidable new challenges have arisen for developing countries, as a consequence of the rapid and chaotic expansion and under-funding of public systems, whilst the for-profit private sector only focuses on short-term, market driven needs, thereby raising issues of quality. Hence, the developing countries operate in a much more difficult and complex environment, in so far as quality improvement of their higher education sector is concerned. Not only do they have to assure quality, they must also develop the conditions that make quality possible (Lemaitre, 2002).

Faced with a 'crisis' in higher education, the developing countries also started to address the quality imperative, drawing principally on the experiences from developed countries. The 1990s have witnessed a great increase in the establishment of formal QA agencies in several developing countries. More recently, the smaller states of the world have followed suit. In the Caribbean, Belize, Guyana, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Barbados, St Kitts and Suriname are reported to have established national systems to monitor higher education providers (Gift et al., 2005) and for the smaller Eastern Caribbean states the establishment of one agency for the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) region is under active consideration. In the Asia and Pacific region [in addition to Australia, New Zealand and Japan], several countries including China, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Korea, Malaysia, Mongolia, Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam have established national QA bodies within the last decade (Lenn, 2004).

Lim's (2001) study, which is one of the few studies that interrogates the relevance and usefulness of QA systems within contemporary HEIs in developing countries, concludes by cautioning developing countries not to establish sophisticated QA systems, such as those seen in developed countries. The reason for this, according to Lim (2001), is the lack of many of the conditions required for the successful implementation of QA programmes. These QA programmes, Lim (2001) argues, need to be "modified to suit the conditions prevailing in developing countries, by being simple in design, modest in expectations, and realistic in requirements" (p. 81).

2.4.3 Lowering of National Barriers

Concern for quality has also arisen due to the lowering of national barriers to entry in both developed and developing countries (Frazer, 1994). This has come about through political changes, significant increase in travel and the electronic communications revolution. Consequently there has been a great increase of students involved in higher education both within the countries and abroad. More and more students have access to a diversified range of courses within the country while others became capable of travelling to other countries for the purpose of higher education. This increased mobility of students "produced a need to understand the equivalencies of qualifications, the standards reached and the values to be attached to credit for something learnt in one country to be transferred to another" (Frazer, 1994, p. 102).

Thus a compelling need to establish equivalencies of qualifications and to validate both local and overseas qualifications has been generated.

2.4.4 The Role of Transnational Agencies

Transnational agencies, such as the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank (ADB), Commonwealth Secretariat and UNESCO, have actively promoted and financially contributed to the rise of the QA movement in the developing countries (Commonwealth Secretariat, 1988; UNESCO and Commonwealth Secretariat, 1997). Aid projects have supported the establishment of national QA agencies. It is therefore not surprising that many of the developing countries have established 'accreditation' agencies, in keeping with the policies espoused by powerful multilateral agencies with financial leverage.

Furthermore, other international and regional organisations have contributed in significant ways to the internationalisation of the policy-making environment, with regards to QA in higher education. The International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE), founded in 1991 by representatives of some 20 national QA bodies, increased to more than 190 members by 2007 (Craft, 1992; INQAAHE, 2007). In addition, a number of regional associations for QA agencies have recently emerged. The most firmly established of these is the European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQAHE), which was founded in 1999, whilst the most recent ones include the Network of Central and Eastern European Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (CEE Network) and the Asia Pacific Regional Network, established in 2003.

These movements at the international level, it can be argued, serve to facilitate the much anticipated liberalisation of trade in services through General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS)⁷. These are designed to serve the interests of the neoliberal construction of the 'market' and the so-called 'knowledge economy'. It could be observed that these are not necessarily the prime interests of higher education systems

⁷ During the Uruguay round of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), which lasted from 1986 to 1994, the General Agreement for Trade in Services (GATS) was agreed. The GATS allowed the World Trade Organisation (WTO) to set the rules and regulate the international trade in the services sector, including intellectual property and education. This agreement sets the rules of international competition in services and facilitates the establishment of international market in education, opening up national education systems to the global education market (Singh, 2002; Knight, 2002). This has substantial consequences for education policy in nation states.

in many developing countries which still remain at the early stage of their establishment.

Nevertheless, QA in higher education is also a reality in developing countries. It has taken different forms in different countries. The next section reviews some of the better known approaches and methodologies of QA.

2.5 A Critical Review of Quality Assurance Methodologies

Literature on the developments in QA points to great variety in methodologies. This literature also shows a “significant degree of borrowing by national systems of higher education from others” (Harman, 1998, p. 347). With respect to QA methodologies Harman (1998) states:

While the methodologies employed in various QA reviews and assessments vary considerably, most depend on one or a combination of a limited number of key methodologies. (p. 353)

This section critically reviews some of the common QA methodologies employed in higher education. The key methodologies that could be identified from the literature are: (1) self-studies or self-evaluation, (2) peer review and audits, (3) the use of relevant statistical data and performance indicators, (4) student surveys, (5) accreditation, and (6) use of industry-based frameworks.

2.5.1 Self Evaluation

Self-evaluation (or self-study) refers to the study of institutional processes and practices by members of the respective institution. This practice has proved to be both effective and cost-effective (Donaldson, as cited in Harman, 1998). According to Donaldson, the self-study concept was first developed in the US in relation to institutional and courses accreditation. However, this methodology has now become an important feature of many QA systems. Harman explains the positive features of self-study as follows:

They are cost effective, since the main work is done internally, often few additional resources being necessary. They usually achieve a high degree of ownership since key staff are involved and such involvement increases the chances of substantial improvements being achieved. The overall process of review or assessment is made less threatening when emphasis is placed on self-evaluation. (p. 353)

Studies indicate that self-study is employed as a methodology in a number of countries, for instance India, South Africa, New Zealand, Australia, Turkey (Billing, 2004; Billing & Thomas, 2000; Stella, 2002; Strydom & Strydom, 2004). Self-study is

also known to be valuable to use in combination with other methodologies, for example peer review and audits.

The methodology of self-study and by extension the self-regulatory approach presupposes the notion of the existence of a self-critical academic community among HEIs. This would imply that HEIs can themselves monitor their input, processes and their output. Yet, according to Harvey (1998) it is this very notion of 'self-criticism' that politicians become sceptical about and desire 'hard' statistical data. Self-regulation through self-evaluation is "imbued with amateurism and a sense of 'playing the game'" (Harvey, 1998, p. 242). In such a context the game rather than the result may be emphasised. This undermines whatever strength may be attributed to this process. It could prove to be a useful methodology, if the process involves "open dialogue and helpful feedback" (Harvey, 1998, p. 242). When self-evaluation is made part of a compulsory monitoring process of HEIs where judgments are reached, especially about aspects such as funding, there is "disinclination to be open about weaknesses and a tendency to overstate strengths" (Harvey, 1998, p. 242). A lack of openness can make the dialogue more difficult and consequently the self-evaluation process becomes a defensive account rather than an opportunity to explore future improvements. Nevertheless, the self-regulatory model by far suits the academy, as it is seen far less threatening than a central, professional inspectorate, for example.

2.5.2 Peer Review and Audits

Peer review is a well-established academic process in higher education. In its traditional format, peer review generally involves a visit by a group of well-regarded academics in a particular field to undertake an assessment (Harman, 1998). In recent practice other experts, such as persons from industry or business, have been included in peer reviews. This is especially the case in reviews of professional programmes or disciplines.

Auditing in higher education appears to have its genesis in the UK (Massy, 2004). Changes in the regulation of public life, following election of a Conservative government in 1979, posed particular challenges to universities, which until then had enjoyed a high degree of self confidence in terms of their excellence (Williams, 1992). Issues of quality, standards and accountability became major issues for debate and action. Normally, audits are performed through a series of steps involving self-evaluation and the preparation of a performance portfolio by the auditee, the

establishment of the audit panel together with a portfolio meeting, an audit visit by the panel and preparation of the report. In the US tradition, academic programme review is essentially “a comprehensive evaluation of a curriculum leading to a degree” (Bogue & Hall, 2003, p. 112). This review will ordinarily involve the acquisition of historic, current and projected data on the programme’s purpose, the resources used and needed and an evaluation of performance (Bogue & Hall, 2003).

Audits, Harvey (1994) states, “in effect, check that QA procedures work” (p. 2). Quality audits, as they were called in some countries, for example the UK, do not make any judgment about standards, teaching quality or resources. Their principal task is to audit the system the institution has in place. However, they also provide suggestions of good practice in relation to QA. Australia and New Zealand have followed more or less in the same tradition as Britain and have established academic auditing within their HEIs (Carroll, 2003).

Academic review and audits have some advantages. The process is said to have the ability to identify unnecessary duplication of programmes. The study itself can give rise to an opportunity to examine general issues usually unnoticed in the routine management of institutions. Depending on the evaluation panels or committee, the study could produce supportive and helpful dialogue for quality improvement. Audits (in UK) opened up, for the first time, the old universities to external scrutiny at an institutional level.

Peer reviews are thought to be not good at finding out what is really going on. Peer-review teams mainly make judgements based on what they are told and tend to look for discrepancies in the story. Both programme review and audits have been regarded as expensive. Dill (2000) with reference to audits in the UK and other countries, notes that “unlike accreditation or subject assessments, however, academic audits make no attempt to comprehensively revise an institution’s or program’s resources and activities nor to directly assess the quality of teaching or learning” (p. 128). If this is the case then, audit is about conditions and processes and not about outcome.

2.5.3 Use of Statistical Data / Performance Indicators

Statistical data, often referred to as ‘performance indicators’ (PIs), are problematic (Harvey, 1998). Harvey questions the suitability and validity of the use of PIs on the grounds that “it is rarely clear about what or about whose performance they provide indicators” (p. 243). He goes on to ask:

What, for example, does an increase in percentage of 'good' degree classifications tell us about quality? Does it indicate that the student learning performance has improved? Does this mean that the teaching staff have performed better, or are the students learning more despite the teachers? Or does it mean that academic standards have fallen? Similarly, what does the employment rate of graduates within the first six months after graduation tell us about the performance of the institution? (p. 243)

The benefits that might accrue from improving, collecting and processing statistical measures to make them into really meaningful PIs is outweighed by the cost that would accrue (Yorke, as cited in Harvey, 1998). In short, Harvey (1998) concludes that the "so-called performance indicators are invariably simplistic, convenience measures that bear no relation to any notion of quality" (p. 243).

An application of the use of statistical data for quality assessment has been the use of ranking and ratings of institutions and/or academic programmes. Frequently, in many instances, the media is in the forefront in the ranking of HEIs⁸. Ranking and ratings of educational institutions assumes that quality is in limited supply (Bogue & Hall, 2003). Hence, only a limited number of institutions can be rated at the top level. Ranking and ratings involve the public disclosure of academic institutions in a league table, based on data on performance across a variety of indicators.

Generally universities are ranked, drawing on statistics produced by various national level agencies and the universities themselves. The university rankings, also known as league tables outside the US and produced by various publishers, differ in their format, content, and methodology. In spite of all the differences, however, the rankings suggest that a common approach to measuring quality in higher education is emerging globally (Dill & Soo, 2004). The continued publication of rankings is also indicative of the increasing national and global demand for consumer information on academic quality, following the worldwide expansion of access to higher education.

Although rankings and ratings have been subjected to varying degrees of criticism, some HEIs acknowledge their rank and see it as an important factor in their

⁸ In 1983, a major US media group, *US News and World Report (USNWR)*, first published a report on "America's Best Colleges" and it continues to publish these rankings on an annual basis (Bogue & Hall, 2003; Dill & Soo, 2005). Following this, Canadians have also published *The Maclean's Guide to Canadian Universities* since 1991. This tradition of rankings has been taken up since then in the UK with the first edition of *The Times Good University Guide (The Times)* in 1993. Other leading and established commercial rankings of HEIs include: *The Good Universities Guide (Australia) (GUG)* and *The Guardian University Guide (UK)*; and the *Asiaweek* (Dill & Soo, 2005; Provan & Abercromby, 2000)

recruitment and marketing. The ratings also appear to provide some insight for secondary school students in their task of choosing universities. For those who provide funds, the rankings may offer some measure of judgment. For those who appear on the rankings (particularly in the higher percentiles) such lists will offer the satisfaction of national recognition and perhaps it will lead to enhanced enrolment attraction. Thus, it offers better prospects for marketing.

Although ranking may offer some market oriented short-term benefits, it contributes little to a programme's self knowledge or its efforts for improvement (Bogue & Hall, 2003, pp. 68-69). The direct benefit to potential students cannot be deduced from the rankings. The reliability and validity of ratings is also an issue since a variety of variables including how the questions are asked can affect the results.

2.5.4 Student Surveys

There appears to be a concerted effort to focus on the student as the principal 'customer' in higher education. A great deal of research has focused attention on the students and student services (Baldwin, 1994; Barrow & Curzon-Hobson, 2003; Cliff, 1994; Randall, 2002). Student surveys (or follow-up studies as they are referred to in the US) are predicated on the importance of seeking feedback from students (as customers and clients) to determine their satisfaction. Since students are the only ones who can provide a viewpoint from the immediate receivers' perspective, it must be seen as a significant dimension to assess quality. Survey studies are undertaken at various stages of the students' experiences whilst studying in the institutions and thereafter. They normally include the gathering of student development and satisfaction indicators measured either by test results and the usual demographic and scholastic records maintained by institutions, or as self-reported student attitudinal responses.

Student feedback questionnaires are used by many HEIs at the present time. It has become common-place in many countries and HEIs for students to fill in feedback questionnaires at the end of every semester (Kember, Leung, & Kwan, 2002). Survey studies can ascertain student needs and identify areas for immediate attention /remediation that affect students. They also offer information to: (1) management about new directions of change, and (2) prospective employers regarding the employability of graduates.

Gathering data from large samples of the student population (current or former) can be tedious and time consuming and possibly even expensive (although administration of a questionnaire could be less expensive compared to interviews). Even if data analyses are conducted in a timely manner and feedback is reported to all those involved (including those who teach, manage and administer), there is little research evidence to show that student feedback actually improves the quality of teaching. On the contrary, research undertaken by Kember et al. (2002), at a Polytechnic University in Hong Kong, reported that “there is no evidence that use of the questionnaire was making any contribution to improving the overall quality of teaching and learning of the departments, at least as perceived by the students” (p. 411).

2.5.5 Accreditation

In general accreditation refers to an evaluation by an authorised body of whether an institution or an educational programme qualifies for a certain status (Brennan & Shah, 2000a). This status may have implications for the institution itself (e.g. permission to operate) and/or its students (e.g. eligibility for grants) and/or its graduates (e.g. qualification for certain employment). The accreditation decision is frequently based on the results of an evaluation process. Likewise, evaluation can be undertaken without any direct link to accreditation.

Accreditation has also been described as a public statement that a certain threshold of quality has been achieved or surpassed (Campbell et al.; Kristofferson, Sursock & Westerheijden, as cited in Harvey, 2004a). However, Harvey (2004a) argues that accreditation is more about minimum standards than about the quality of the process. Accreditation could be of two types — institutions or programmes. Institutional accreditation is usually based on an evaluation of whether the institution meets specified minimum input standards, such as staff qualifications, student intake and teaching /learning resources.

Accreditation in the US was a response to the historical *laissez-faire* policy, which resulted in a wide variation amongst colleges and universities (Bogue & Hall, 2003). The US accreditation is based on peer review and it is a non-governmental, voluntary, self regulatory approach to quality assessment and enhancement (Lenn, 1992). This approach to accreditation clearly reflects the divergent and semi autonomous character of higher education in the US, where a number of agencies or constituencies were initially involved in the accreditation process. This included institutional accreditation

agencies, specialised accreditation bodies and the colleges and universities themselves.

A notable benefit of accreditation is that it provides some assurance to the educational community and the general public and their agencies that an institution has clearly and appropriately defined its educational objectives. Accreditation may also foster excellence in post-secondary education, through development of criteria and guidelines for assessing educational effectiveness. It may also provide encouragement (in some cases) of institutional improvements for educational endeavours, through continuous self-study and planning.

Commentators also note a number of challenges to accreditation endeavours (Bogue & Hall, 2003; Harvey, 2004a). Accreditation places more emphasis on minimum standards and less on continual re-evaluation, experimentation and improvement. There appears to be an over emphasis on standards that continue to stress numbers, procedures and processes, whilst neglecting results such as student achievement or goal attainment. It does not indicate whether any specified standard is being achieved or not. This contributes to a lack of stimulus for high quality within institutions. The accreditation process is seen as complex and often demanding and in some cases it requires simplification without compromising effectiveness. Furthermore, the public lacks an understanding of what it means to be accredited. They also lack awareness regarding the quality of the individual institutions which attain accreditation status.

2.5.6 Industry-based Frameworks of Quality

Several studies, especially in the US, reveal that many HEIs have explored and attempted the adoption of industry-based quality frameworks for quality improvement activities. These frameworks are essentially based on concepts of Total Quality. Three such methodologies or approaches to QA that have entered higher education through the business sector are: (1) Total Quality Management (TQM), (2) ISO 9000 Standards, and (3) the Baldrige Award.

2.5.6.1 Total Quality Management

TQM has entered higher education through the production systems of the corporate world, principally from the manufacturing industry. TQM in essence is about “increasing customer service, improving the quality of goods and services, and involving people in their work” (Flood & Jackson, 1991, p. 15). With the success it

has gained in the industrial sector, through concepts and practical applications advanced by leaders such as Deming and Juran, the philosophy of TQM has been attempted in a number of HEIs in the 1990s in the US, with varying degrees of success. In UK higher education the adoption of this approach has been slow. However, some studies from the UK report on benefits from a TQM approach similar to institutions in the US (Kanji, Tambi, & Wallace, 1999). TQM offers a broad range of tools and espouses a total systemic approach to quality. It calls for the involvement of all employees of an organisation with the aim of bringing the customer into focus.

Lewis and Smith (1994) offer a total quality approach as the answer to the opportunities (or threats) of falling standards, the loss of public confidence, the widening gap between learning outcomes for graduates and employer requirements and increasing concerns with access to American higher education. Lewis & Smith (1994) take total quality beyond the traditional notions of quality, which have been expressed as the degree of conformity to a standard. For these scholars, total quality “is a set of philosophy by which management systems can direct the efficient achievement of the objectives of the organisations to ensure customer satisfaction and maximise stakeholder value” (Lewis & Smith, 1994, p. 29). In short, it could be argued that TQM has evolved from a process using statistical tools to a management philosophy and a structural system.

The National Quality Survey, undertaken in the UK during 1990, revealed that colleges had chosen a variety of routes for their QA systems (Sallis & Hingley, 1991). Some had embarked on the ‘total quality’ route, whilst others devised their own systems. A third group was found to be following the British Standards (BS) 5750 route.

Discussing TQM in the New Zealand polytechnic context, Cliff (1994) observes that “the application of TQM to education institutes has been seen as a way of satisfying the multiple demands of external stakeholders and educationalists working within institutions” (p. 45). This model also adopts a compliance approach where the Ministry of Education, as the main provider of funding to polytechnics, is “mostly concerned with resource allocation utilisation and less with the quality of the educational outcomes or service quality” (Cliff, 1994, p. 47).

Based on the results of the survey mentioned previously, Sallis and Hingley (1991) conclude that “both TQM and BS 5750 may be too complex for colleges who want to

use QA as a means of improving aspects of the delivery of the curriculum". They further note that TQM and BS 5750 are expensive and that TQM is a top-down management-led development. Studies conducted in the US, Malaysia and the UK on the implementation of TQM in HEIs reveal that the role of leadership was the most important factor to promote this methodology in institutions (Kanji et al., 1999; Kanji & Thambi, 1999). TQM is associated with managerialism where management is often contrasted with leadership. A fully committed Chief Executive Officer (CEO), it is said, is necessary under TQM to make this overly managerial approach work.

TQM has been criticised for its emphasis on processes and not enough on results and a failure to achieve changed attitudes and culture. It is argued that such borrowed concepts cannot be superimposed easily on a higher education system so vastly different in objectives, values and complexities. In a scathing critique, Baldwin (1994) elaborates on the colonisation aspect and states that the "university culture is being colonised by the interrelated cultures of business, industry and advertising" (p. 125). The imposition of a "foreign language on a culture is to impose a foreign world view" (Baldwin 1994, p. 125). Noting the inappropriateness of concepts from the newly emerged quality movement, Baldwin (1994) further alerts to the danger of the invasion of the quality movement into higher education as follows:

The danger is that the important, timeless issue of how well things are done becomes confused with a specific, recent management system which may well be a passing fad, and ignorant people will assume that universities have never been concerned before with 'quality'. (p. 127)

The initial excitement over the promise of TQM as an approach to QA in higher education now appears to be "more subdued and guarded" (Bogue & Hall, 2003, p. 183). TQM's fitness for higher education continues to be challenged. TQM's popular discourse which oversells its success stories, its overly prescriptive nature of approaches and the Taylorist view of bureaucratised practices does not fit the vastly different organisational milieu of HEIs. With a distorted version of quality, TQM does not fit the purpose of advancing quality of higher education (Houston, 2007).

2.5.6.2 ISO 9000 Standards

The ISO 9000 standards were originally conceived for companies in the manufacturing sector. Since the 1990s it has spread to other sectors including the higher education and training sector (Van den Berghe, 1997). The term *ISO 9000* refers to a set of quality management standards. An important feature of ISO 9000

standards is its structure, which gives a consistent set of procedures, elements and requirements that can be applied universally. The standards present a number of requirements for registering a quality system of an organisation for the purpose of QA.

Although the standards are generic, some commentators do not consider all elements of the standard directly applicable to education (Lewis & Smith, 1994). The standards are not meant to certify the quality of a product or a service or whether one is better than another (Lamprecht, as cited in Izadi, Kashef, & Stadt, 1996). The standards relate to an organisation's quality system; albeit a *documented* quality system. The ISO 9000 standards provide both general and contractual agreements for meeting quality requirements. Many countries have adopted the ISO 9000 standards and adopt specific names to it: BS 5750 in Britain, AS 3900 in Australia, Q90 in the US. These national equivalents are essentially the same, although minor changes may occur due to translations. A number of HEIs in the UK and in the US have experimented with ISO standards (Izadi et al., 1996; Storey, 1994; Stott, 1994). They report mixed results. Debates on the degree of its suitability and applicability in higher education still continue.

The ISO standards can be said to be primarily concerned with descriptive documentation rather than the value of the actions themselves. The detailed nature of documentation required to compile a thorough assessment of what happens in a HEI and what does not happen, can consume a considerable amount of time, energy, effort and expense (Hinchcliff, 1994). Higher education cannot afford to expend that time and energy. It would be better off to utilise these energies for activities directly related to the improvement of teaching and learning rather than on meticulous form filling.

2.5.6.3 The Baldrige Award

The US quality system known as the Baldrige Award uses basic concepts of business excellence. The model consists of criteria that are built upon core values and concepts that reflect "embedded beliefs and behaviours found in high-performing organisations" (NIST, 2004, p. 4). The Baldrige Award criteria provide a model of excellence against an ideal benchmark rather than threshold standards. Organisational conformity with the benchmark is then assessed by experts and reduced to a score out of a possible maximum of one thousand points. The goals of the Baldrige Award are customer satisfaction, customer retention, and gaining market share which corresponds to student satisfaction, student retention, and student recruitment in the

academia (Heizer & Render, as cited in Izadi et al., 1996). These goals clearly endorse a market-oriented zeal to maximise profit and stay in business. Higher education is invariably reduced to a business where 'delighting the customer' takes precedence. As was discussed earlier, the fundamental issue with respect to higher education is the inability to precisely identify the customer. HEIs have responsibility to a number of groups. Students as customers distorts the relationship of student with teacher. The notion of a single client group for education is problematic (Winch, 1996). Furthermore, in education it is not obvious that the immediate clients of education, the students, are consumers in the sense that one who purchases a product is. Education is a much more complex process-oriented activity than a product or a service that is usually considered in a business. Education systems, unlike a business activity, are involved in the creation and transmission of values, whether implicitly or explicitly (Winch, 1996).

A trial version of the Baldrige Criteria for education was introduced in 1995 in the United States. Its purpose was to interpret the generic principles and conceptual framework of performance excellence to the specific context of education. This education version of the model can be considered as an attempt to transfer concepts of TQM and performance excellence from the profit-oriented industrial sector to the service sector of education. The organisational uniqueness in HEIs is lost in its attempt to focus on the universal commonality of beliefs and practices and therefore behaviours found in business organisations. The Baldrige Education Criteria has all the hallmarks of situating education in the market place as do other industry-based approaches. It embodies the assumption that educational institutions function competitively in market situations. It predetermines the interrelationships and outcomes of an organisation. An education process can hardly perform in a predetermined model. This award system is, therefore, a glaring example of the corrosive effects of marketisation on higher education.

2.6 Emerging Themes of Quality Assurance Policy and Practice

2.6.1 The Quest for a Universal, Global Approach to Quality Assurance

Based on emerging similarities in QA practices amongst several European countries, Van Vught and Westerheijden (1994) describe the emergence of a 'general model' of quality assessment. The elements of such a model have been identified by them as (1)

a national co-ordinating body, (2) institutional self-evaluation, (3) external evaluation by academic peers, and (4) a published report. These researchers suggest that there is a 'general model' into which individual national systems may converge. A later World Bank paper on the challenges of QA also identifies the emergence of consensus, particularly around core elements of an approach to QA (El-Khawas, DePietro-Jurand, & Holm-Nielsen, 1998),

However, more recent studies contest the practical applicability of the general model. An OECD study from 14 countries found the following:

There are major differences between institutions and between countries, related to both contextual factors and the methods of assessment used.

(Brennan & Shah, 2000b, p. 348)

This conclusion challenges prior thinking on international convergence of QA systems and the applicability of a general model. Based on international comparisons from this study, Brennan and Shah (2000b) conclude that the general model of QA espoused by Van Vught and Westerheijden (1994) is most applicable to medium-sized and less diverse higher education sectors and those with a tradition of state regulation. Furthermore, they observed that the absence of sufficiently large academic communities to provide objective peers appears to be a practical difficulty encountered by small countries, that attempt to operate an objective and expert process of peer review.

Over the last two and a half decades, the higher education sectors in a number of countries have witnessed a number of new initiatives towards quality enhancement (Bastick, 2001; Maassen, 1997; Roberts, 2001). These initiatives have been in response to ongoing changes in form, function and composition of the higher education sector. In many countries a combination of growth in student numbers and a reduction of public resources have led to calls for greater accountability in the education sector. Quality assurance is a subject that has received intensive scrutiny, both locally and internationally (Newton, 2004; Roberts, 2001). Concerns are now focussing on "developing an international approach to quality" (Harvey, 2004b, p. 65). According to Harvey (2004b), these are mainly due to globalisation in higher education, the growth of transnational education and increasing pressure for international recognition of qualifications.

The literature on QA in higher education reports little consensus on the purpose and goals of external QA regimes (Neave, as cited in Billing, 2004). According to Kells

(1995), there exist a spectrum of purposes, from 'improvement' through 'public assurance' to 'government goals, targeting resources, and 'rationalisations'. Based on a number of studies in the European context (see studies by Frazer, 1997; Kells, 1995; Neave, 1991; Vroeyenstijn, 1995; Wahlen, 1998), Billing (2004) summarises the purposes of external QA as follows:

- Improvement of quality,
- Publicly available information on quality and standards
- Accreditation (i.e. legitimisation of certification of students),
- Public accountability: for standards achieved, and for use of money
- To contribute to higher education sector planning process. (p. 115)

The convergence of elements within QA systems appears to be greater in the European context than in the wider, global context. Within Europe, whilst variations do exist, the following have been found to be common in European studies.

- a national agency to co-ordinate and support quality assurance within institutions which is independent of government;
- self-evaluation as the vital focus of the external quality assurance process;
- external peer review to explore the self-evaluation with the HEI (normally by a site visit);
- public reports of these evaluation activities;
- no direct relationship of the results of external quality assurance to the funding of HEIs;
- the importance of transparency of external processes, of internal quality care in the institutions; and
- follow-up process after the report. (Billing, 2004; Maassen, 1997; Vroeyenstijn, 1995; Wahlén, 1998 and Donaldson et al., Van Vught & Westerheijden, as cited in Billing, 2004).

On the basis of comparison of QA regimes from a number of countries from Europe, Latin America, Australasia, Asia, Africa and North America, Woodhouse (1996) and Harman (1998) also report on convergence of additional elements beyond those common features mentioned above. Billing (2004) reports these additional features as follows:

- Effective quality assurance processes internal to the higher education institution.
- support of self-evaluation by standard quantitative data of effectiveness of performance.
- distinctions between the levels of aggregation evaluated, which may be programme, subject, department/faculty or institution. (p. 117)

Frazer's (as cited in Billing, 2004) study of QA features in 24 European countries showed that they all claimed to evaluate teaching quality. Among them 14 countries

claim to assess research while 22 countries claim to evaluate at the institutional level (Billing, 2004, p. 117). Frazer's study also reports that all external evaluations commenced from self-evaluation (except in one country), and that supporting statistics are prescribed by the central agency, except in seven countries. Frazer's study also notes with concern that the meaning of self-evaluation was becoming distorted by the pressure of accountability (Billing, 2004, p. 118).

Whilst such commonality exists, an extensive survey, which included 590 European universities, found "a lack of a clear and internationally recognised model in order to introduce an integrated system for quality management" (Gandolfi & Von Euw, as cited in Billing, 2004, p. 120). The number of variations reported included variations regarding national agencies responsible for QA, the level and focus of assessments, self evaluations, peer reviews and the publication of reports and funding links (Billing, 2004). In the context of Western Europe, Billing (2004) contends that "while a snapshot at one time may show diversity of QA", it could also be "a part of a pattern of converging on the 'Evaluative State' from different directions" (p. 119) (see Section 2.3.4).

In a review of legislative arrangements for QA in 12 Central and Eastern European countries (CEE), the European Training Foundation (as cited by Billing, 2004) found that, except for two, all countries had QA agencies. The constitutions and powers of the agencies understandably varied considerably among the countries. The system in place seems to be compatible with the 'Van Vught and Westerheijden model' of QA. Most countries had legal provisions that emphasised accreditation with varying references to evaluation and/or improvement. The review also found that among the 12 countries, there was "some confusion as to the purpose of QA. . . . A specific need in relation to the purposes is a clarification of the difference between accreditation and evaluation" (European Training Foundation, as cited in Billing, 2004, p. 118). The CEE countries reviewed were at different stages of development from state control of all aspects of higher education to more autonomous HEIs accompanied by accountability mechanisms. The report stated that:

A framework of state control through accreditation is not necessarily the best context for the achievement of improvement goals and in the long run, serious consideration of a self-regulating potential of a professional organisation (higher education institution) will be required. (European Training Foundation, as cited in Billing, 2004, p. 119)

According to Billing (2004), 'the general model' of EQA is a starting point to map out deviations, and the variations in systems are "determined by practicalities, the size of the higher education sector, the rigidity/flexibility of the legal expression of QA (or the absence of enshrinement in law), and the stage of development from state control of the sector" (p. 113).

The above-mentioned studies tend to demonstrate the emergence of a number of core elements of QA regimes, despite the absence of a dominant global approach.

2.6.2 Portability of Quality Assurance Systems

There have been a number of studies concerning attempts to transport QA systems across countries resulting in less positive outcomes. Japan, for instance, borrowed a QA system from the UK for its non-university sector (Turner, Baba, & Shimada, 1999). Despite borrowing systems from the UK, the Japanese QA system remains bureaucratic and rigid. Moreover, when the Japanese implemented these QA systems, the elements of the partnership approach practised in the UK, such as sharing values and advising and supporting them, were absent.

In many countries, there are pressures to set up QA systems for the higher education sector. In developing countries, these pressures often come from internationally funded projects (e.g. the World Bank, European Union and the Asian Development Bank (ADB)) (Asian Development Bank [ADB], 1998; Lenn, 2004). A useful summary of the limited literature on this topic of transferability is provided by Billing and Thomas (2000). After reviewing the Turkish experience of establishing QA systems, based on the UK model, Billing and Thomas (2000) conclude that transferability is not a straightforward activity and there are a number of factors that influence the transfer of systems across different cultures. Barnett (1994) also reports on an unsuccessful experience attempting to introduce a quality system into a New Zealand polytechnic, based on a model of reasoning dominated by a Western approach to improvement. He goes on to report the later successful introduction of a revised system, based on a standards-based approach drawn from United Kingdom's Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) and the New Zealand Nursing Council, coupled with a review process modelled on institutional accreditation of Community Colleges in California (Barnett, 1994). These experiences highlight the importance of cultural adaptations of models borrowed from other countries.

The experiences of adopting models from other countries have also been bitter in some of the former Soviet Union countries. Tomusk (1995) notes the dissolution in Estonia of the Soviet styled centralised and authoritarian QA system and its replacement by ready-made Western European models. He questions the feasibility of such a move. Based on the Estonian experiences, Tomusk (1997) finds that these new procedures “were not internalised by the academic community and not related to the character of the particular higher education system” and that this “led to the recovery of the former concentration of power at the highest possible level” (p. 173). Tracing the East European quality movement over a decade, Tomusk (2000) recalls the incompatibility of the ‘fitness for purpose’ mantra applied in Western European countries with the East European context of QA initiatives. However, Tomusk (2000) contends that recent projects on performance indicators show a promise of achieving convergence of East and West “by a radical decontextualization of the Western approaches” to QA (p. 175).

According to Dolowitz and Marsh (1996), “policy transfer, emulation and lesson drawing all refer to a process in which knowledge about policies, administrative arrangements, institutions etc. in one time and/or place is used in the development of policies, administrative arrangements and institutions in another time and/or place” (p. 344). Policy transfer can be ‘voluntary’ or ‘coercive’. The literature identifies six main categories of actors involved in policy transfer. Smith et al., (2002), studying the Americanisation of UK higher education contend that “translation of US policy ideas and practices was far from straightforward and was invariably conditioned by a range of structural, cultural and political barriers” (p. 443).

2.6.3 Need for Contextually-specific Approaches to Quality Assurance

The need for contextually specific approaches to QA can be better appreciated through an examination of similarities and variations within systems. Selected national systems from both developing and developed countries are briefly reviewed below.

In the Chilean higher education sector, external QA came about as an unavoidable consequence of a decade of privatisation and de-regulation (Lemaitre, 2004). The decade 1980 - 1990 was one of expansion for the higher education sector, when the number of institutions dramatically increased together with significant rise in enrolments. During this period regulation was left to the market and the public system stood still. The first external QA resulted from a compulsory licensing scheme put in

place during 1990. This scheme reviewed proposals for the establishment of all new private institutions. With the massification of higher education in the nineties, the Chilean higher education scene witnessed double standards, in which highly supervised private institutions and largely unsupervised public universities and newly autonomous private institutions operated. This double standard in higher education led to the 'second landmark' for external QA in Chile. In 1998 a National Commission for Accreditation was established and was "charged with designing an accreditation process and carrying it out" (Lemaitre, 2004, p. 92).

The Hungarian Accreditation Committee (HAC), established under the country's first Higher Education Act in 1993, was responsible for accrediting all HEIs and programmes in Hungary that offered state-recognised degrees (Rozsnyai, 2004). The process of accreditation was launched in 1995 in a pilot phase involving three universities and three colleges from the 89 HEIs throughout the country. Rozsnyai notes that the Hungarian approach to accreditation focuses solely on the quality of the degree programmes, although the unit of accreditation is the institutions and the process is seen to be conducting 'institutional accreditation'. This appears to be deliberate, according to Rozsnyai for two main reasons: (1) Leaders and administrators in HEIs have had no chance "to hone their managerial skills" (p. 130) after regaining autonomy following decades of state control; and (2) teams generally consist of academics whose expertise was to judge the quality of the educational provision. After a decade of evaluating the process of accreditation, Hungary appears to be poised for its second cycle of accreditation with a number of changes in its approach.

India, which has the world's second largest system of higher education, has also completed a decade of a formal national system of external QA (Stella, 2002, 2004). The National Assessment of Accreditation Council (NAAC) of India was established in 1994 and charged with the formidable task of institutionalising a national system for external accreditation in a diverse and federally operated system. According to Stella (2004), the Indian model incorporates elements of all three approaches to QA, namely "assessment, accreditation and academic audit" (p. 120).

In the Commonwealth Caribbean, most institutions, with the possible exception of the University of Belize have "opted for the peer review and external examination model of QA along with the grafting of some of the standard elements of accreditation systems" (Miller, 2002). As such, most Caribbean HEIs are known to use hybrid

systems of QA, with a bias towards peer review of staff and student achievement. In large measure, therefore, the QA systems of the Commonwealth Caribbean still operate mainly within the academic community of the British Commonwealth. Increasingly, links have been established with the academic communities within the Americas (Miller, 2002).

The foregoing review highlights the necessity and importance of maintaining contextually specific QA approaches even though core elements of the dominant QA practices are adhered to.

2.6.4 Necessary Conditions for Quality Assurance

Drawing from the experiences of developed and developing countries, Lim (2001) argues that an [instrumental] approach to QA can only work if a number of conditions are met. In most HEIs, in developed countries, these conditions are taken for granted. The conditions necessary for a successful QA approach are identified by Lim (2001) as the following:

- the presence of academically qualified staff;
- the need for academics to be employed in one full-time job in one institution;
- the presence of adequate physical, electronic and administrative support services;
- the appointment and promotion of staff to be based on academic merit and not on political or social conditions;
- the presence of a fair degree of academic freedom. (pp. 105-108)

Lim (2001) further argues that, in most universities in developing countries, there are significant differences between the necessary and sufficient conditions for QA to work and the actual conditions present. This suggests that the application of QA in these universities will be wasteful. Moreover, imposing a QA system on top of existing systems does not necessarily produce better results. This does not mean that developing countries cannot adopt QA systems. Lim (2001) calls for a QA system that suits the prevailing conditions. More specifically, he argues that a QA system for developing countries “should have less ambitious missions for universities, different emphases on university functions and their objectives, simpler quality management plans and systems and simpler internal and external audit systems” (p. 124).

2.6.5 Impact of Quality Assurance

A fundamental question in relation to the development of QA policy and systems in higher education is whether they have any impact on the quality of higher education

itself, in particular the quality of teaching and learning. Some studies have documented that QA systems, at least in systems that have had extensive experience in evaluation, have caused academic institutions to give greater attention to issues of effective teaching and learning (El-Khawas et al., 1998). In some systems, degree completion rates have also improved as student services and advising have received more attention. Quality assurance systems that focus on institutions, such as those in France, have reported that institutional management has improved, strategic planning has been strengthened and programmes have become more responsive to changing needs. El-Khawas et al's review of QA shows in Indonesia (for example) considerable success of an emerging process intended to encourage internal programme review and revitalisation.

Analysing the impact of a national quality audit of the Swedish HEIs, Wahlén (2004) concluded that "audits have resulted in the development of policy and structure of institutional quality work but that cultural change at the departmental level is modest" (p. 139). It is also reported that in the Swedish context more recently introduced programme and subject assessments have clearly impacted on the basic unit level. These innovations are also reported to contribute to more effective, but perhaps more standardised, QA work at the institutional level.

From studies conducted in the Swedish higher education system, Nilsson and Wahlén (2000) show that cultural change has occurred in HEIs from the 'Swedish model' which could be regarded as extremely process-oriented. However, results accounted for are "in terms of improved processes within the institutions and not in terms of improved 'products,'" Nilsson and Wahlén (2000, p. 17) state. They conclude that in order to have stronger impact, the emphasis should be more on results rather than on preconditions and process. Based on a comparative study of higher education systems in New Zealand, the UK, Hong Kong and Sweden, Dill (as cited in Wahlén, 2004) concludes that audits have helped to develop QA systems.

The OECD study mentioned previously (Brennan & Shah, 2000b), based on 36 case studies from 14 countries, confirms that quality assessment has an impact. The nature of the impact differs as quality assessment differs between institutions. The study identified the impact at four different levels of the institutions, through three different mechanisms. The four levels are system, institution, basic unit and individual. The mechanisms impact through rewards, changing policies and structures, and through changing higher education cultures.

Askling (as cited in Wahlén, 2004) contends that “external evaluation is only one of several factors influencing institutional quality and internal monitoring” (p. 141). One effect of external quality monitoring, Askling maintains, is an “increased awareness of the importance of strategic institutional management” (Wahlén, 2004, p. 141) and consequently there is a need for “an effective institutional infrastructure.” (p. 141). The improvement-oriented model of external quality monitoring has also been noted as having stimulated the establishment of routines for quality management and infrastructures for quality enhancement (Askling, as cited in Wahlén, 2004).

A recent study by Carr, Hamilton, and Meade (2005), which investigated the influence of an external quality audit on university performance in a New Zealand university, concludes that “effectiveness evaluations have a stronger foundation when combined effects of university governance and management initiatives and government initiatives together with EQA [external QA] are examined” (p. 11). In other words, since these effects overlap and at times even work against each other, it was impossible to isolate the independent effects. In addition to external QA, there are other external influences impacting on the universities in New Zealand, namely, the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) and the Performance Based Research Funding (PBRF). TEC impacts upon university performance through its influence on the universities’ internal processes. TEC has the potential to exert more leverage than external QA through its manipulation of resource distribution methods (Carr et al., 2005). The recent PBRF, which was similar to the Research Assessment Exercise in the UK, has led universities to introduce new policies and processes to maximise their PBRF outcome and this has the potential to result in competition between New Zealand universities. Codd (2006) challenges the political rhetoric that clouds the New Zealand PBRF as “primarily designed to encourage and reward research excellence” and maintains that the PBRF, in the context of New Zealand higher education policy, is still “an ideological instrument for the purpose of creating a market in research” (p. 16). Although quality appears to be the stated policy intention, Codd (2006) argues that this neoliberal representation of the PBRF cannot claim a great deal by way of ‘highest possible quality’ within the higher education sector. External QA has a powerful initial role as a catalyst, as well as a validation role for university led reform (Carr et al., 2005).

A study on effectiveness of university evaluations in Japan, concluded that evaluations, undertaken by the Japanese National Institution for Academic Degrees

and University Evaluation, “led to the improvement of universities’ educational and research activities” (Saito & Hayashi, 2005, p. 97). However, a considerable burden was identified which led to apathy regarding evaluation amongst other university staff and also the general public.

Moon (as cited in Woodhouse, 2002) reports that staff in a UK university setting felt that formalised quality management procedures imposed from above or outside have little effect on the quality of the learning experience. This type of quality management “generates cynicism, confrontation and resistance to change” (Woodhouse, 2002). Staff reported that other means, such as student feedback and regular meetings at programme level were more helpful to quality than such formal procedures. This supports the view that an external review is more effective when it is seen to be secondary to the internal processes of the institution itself.

It has been suggested that external quality monitoring may be effective in the short run in “getting quality on the agenda of institutional management” (Harvey, 1998, p. 248). This short-term impact fails to ensure a longer-term ongoing response for quality improvement. As Harvey (1998) stated:

In practice, rather than having a transformative impact, external quality monitoring creates an initial shock reaction but that it rarely translates into a process of ongoing improvement. (p. 248)

While some studies have focussed on the institutional context (Newton, 1999, 2003), other studies have researched the impact on academics (Newton, 2000, 2002). However, only a few studies appear to have been undertaken on the impact of external QA on student experiences (Harvey, 2002; Harvey & Newton, 2004; Horsburgh, 1998, 1999). Horsburgh (1998) considered the effect of quality monitoring on the improvement and enhancement of student learning at former Auckland Institute of Technology (AIT). Quality monitoring processes had quite a narrow impact on student learning. Overall analysis confirmed that, for quality monitoring to have an impact on student learning, the emphasis must be on curriculum, learning, teaching and assessment. Until there is much stronger empirical evidence available, policy makers need to be cautious about making excessive claims for the effectiveness of national QA regimes. This caution seems particularly appropriate when models are being crafted in developing countries with small and often under-resourced higher education sectors.

The next section presents the conceptual parameters of the study based on the themes that emerged from the above review of literature. The section ends with the conceptual framework of this research.

2.7 Conceptualising the Study

2.7.1 Policy Analysis Study

As stated in Chapter One, this study is designed as a policy analysis study. It is partly interested in understanding the genesis of QA policy in the Maldives and partly how this policy is implemented in the national higher education system. It is, therefore, pertinent to state how policy is understood in this study before presenting the conceptual framework of the study.

‘Policy’ in this study refers to public policy “meaning government generated policies which are developed and implemented through state bureaucracies” (Taylor et al., 1997, p. 22). Acknowledging that there are variations between nations, Bell and Stevenson (2006) contend that “the state has a key role in the provision and/or regulation of education services” (p. 8). Government policy, therefore, has considerable impact on shaping what happens in educational institutions, and the experiences of those who study and work in those institutions.

Defining the term ‘policy’ does not appear to be an easy task. Several scholars have attempted this. Ozga (2002) says that there is “no fixed single definition of policy” (p. 2). Referring to the vast literature on the subject, Taylor et al., (1997) contend that “the one thing all of these attempts have in common is their recognition that achieving such a definition is not an easy task” (p. 23). However, it is useful and “necessary to develop an understanding of policy that reflects the breadth and complexity that the reality of policy analysis entails” (Bell & Stevenson, 2006, p. 14).

One traditional conceptualisation of policy is to recognise that policy is systematic and not random. Such a view is offered by Harman (as cited in Taylor et al., 1997) who argues that policy is:

... the implicit or explicit specification of courses of purposive action being followed, or to be followed in dealing with a recognised problem or matter of concern, and directed towards the accomplishment of some intended or desired set of goals. Policy also can be thought of as a position or stance developed in response to a problem or issue of conflict, and directed towards a particular objective. (Harman, as cited in Taylor et al., 1997, p. 24).

For Harman, therefore, policy is goal-oriented and it is complex. It is also about the coordination of many courses of action. Others have conceptualised policy as a programme of action or set of guidelines that determine how one should proceed. Blackmore (as cited in Bell & Stevenson, 2006) presents such a definition as "... aims or goals, or statements of what ought to happen" (p. 14). These two definitions (Harman's and Blackmore's) emphasise policy as a product or an outcome. In this conceptualisation policy making is seen as a straightforward, technical and rational process. It presents a linear view of policy development where problems are identified and solutions developed, followed by implementation of strategies and interventions.

This linear, and apparently, logical view of policy process has several strengths. It can reflect the key influences of the principal actors in the policy making process (Bell & Stevenson, 2006). It can also provide an important spotlight on the internal workings of public administration due to its emphasis on the internal workings of policy making bureaucracies. Such an approach focuses on the identification of an ordered sequence of stages, or steps in the life of a particular policy (Heck, 2004; Williams & Cummings, 2005). The stages invariably include agenda setting, policy formulation, implementation, and evaluation (Heck, 2004) or origins, adoption, implementation and outcomes (Levin, 2001).

Such a notion, however, provides an inadequate model of what constitutes policy, and how policy is both shaped and experienced by those involved at all stages in the policy process (Bell & Stevenson, 2006). This linear view as reflected in Harman's definition gives the impression that there is general agreement during the generation of the policy. It also gives the impression that policy implementation is straightforward and unproblematic (Taylor et al., 1997, p. 24). This linear view may also imply that there is broad political consensus. In such an approach to policy making, the competing demands and expectations of different interest groups are reconciled. Furthermore, Bell and Stevenson (2006) state:

Conflict is acknowledged, but exists within tightly defined parameters. Power, is acknowledged, but it is rarely problematised. Sources of power are rarely discussed and little attention is paid to the (unequal) distribution of power. Similarly, the pluralist emphasis on institutional policy processes tends to privilege the generation of policy, but has less to say about implementation. (p. 16)

Such a conceptualisation lends itself to examine policy activity in terms of a policy stages typology.

Many scholars reject such an oversimplified way of viewing policy and recognise policy as both a product and a process (Taylor et al., 1997). For Taylor et al policy is a compromise which is struggled over at all stages by competing views. Policies are ongoing and modifications occur at various stages. The process is a continuous one. In such a conceptualisation, “policy involves the production of the policy text, the text itself, ongoing modifications to the text and process of implementation into practice” (Taylor et al., 1997, p. 25). Bowe et al., (1992) argue that policy making in its linear configuration, “fails to reflect the complexity and ‘messiness’ of policy formation and implementation” (p. 7). Accordingly, to Bowe et al., (1992) policy is both product and process and it is continuous and it is still made, and re-made, as it is being implemented. They state:

In a very real sense generation and implementation are continuous features of the policy process, with generation of policy ... still taking place after the legislation has been effected; both within the central state and within the [LEA and the schools]. (Bowe et al., 1992, p. 14)

Further, Bowe et al., (1992) contend that as policy is ‘made’ it is constantly being recontextualised and therefore rather than policy development as a linear process it should be seen as a cycle. Within this cycle, Bowe et al., refer to three inter related ‘policy contexts’, namely context of influence, context of policy text production and context of practice. Each of these three contexts has multiple arenas of action (both public and private) and each involves struggles. Ball (1994) has later added two additional contexts to the cycle. The first is context of outcomes and context of political strategy. In consideration of all these, Ball (1994) emphasises that:

Policy is both text and action, words and deeds, it is what is enacted as well as what is intended. Policies are always incomplete insofar as they relate to or map on to the ‘wild profusion’ of local practice. (p. 10)

Ball (1993) further draws an explicit distinction between ‘policy as text’ and ‘policy as discourse’. The conceptualisation of ‘policy as text’ is based on literary theory which sees policies as representations which are coded in quite complex ways. Thus Ball (1993) reiterates what Codd (1988) says; “for any text a plurality of readers must necessarily produce a plurality of readings” (p. 239). With texts viewed as products of struggle, contestation and compromises, policy effects cannot be easily predicted and solutions will be localised. In this conception of policy there is a strong element of agency.

The policy cycle conceptualisation appears to be appropriate for the study of the complex nature of policy formation. This model has also been known as policy

trajectory analysis whereby policy is traced from its inception, through implementation and to its practice. The policy cycle approach is seen to recognise the complexity involved in policy making and the contested nature of policy making. To understand policy it is necessary to examine the different contexts which define meanings.

2.7.2 Globalisation and Quality Assurance

The global context and the rhetoric of ‘global imperatives’ appear to more and more underpin policy prescriptions (Taylor & Henry, 2000; Taylor et al., 1997). Though a fashionable topic in educational policy analysis, there is no single agreed definition of the term ‘globalisation’. It is a complex concept frequently contested and often contradictory. Globalisation, according to Giddens (1994), is really about the transformation of time and space. It is “action at a distance” argues Giddens (1994, p. 41), which refers to the interconnectedness of economic, political and cultural activities across the globe.

Globalisation “is the flow of technology, economy, knowledge, people, values, ideas . . . across the borders” (Knight & de Wit, as cited in Gnanam, 2002, p. 95). It is a way of connecting to people across the world, knowingly or not (Hudson & Lome, 2004). Globalisation has, more than ever before, broken down time and distance. This breaking down of time and distance has impacted on every aspect of human lives, including higher education. It has eroded national boundaries and allowed freer movement of students, faculty and information (Roberts, 2001).

Many scholars draw attention to the coincidence of the introduction of concepts of QA into the discourse of education with the neoliberal reforms of the 1990s in Western countries (Codd, 2005b; Mollis & Marginson, 2002). Globalisation and education, Codd (2005a) argues, constitute the ‘dual mantras’ of Third Way politics, which essentially assign education to the central role in the alignment of economic and social goals (p. 9). Codd (2005a), with reference to recent analysis of New Zealand tertiary education policy agendas, challenges this unproblematic alignment of education and globalisation, citing the rapid increase in commercialisation of the New Zealand public education system. He concludes that policies, based upon the fundamentally flawed rhetoric of connection between education and economics, is resulting in a ‘crisis of purpose’ and warns of longer-term consequences “for the effective functioning and survival of democracy” (p. 15).

According to Gnanam (2002), to cope with globalisation, higher education systems need to reorient their structure and function through a process of 'internationalisation'. Internationalisation and globalisation are two distinct but related concepts. Globalisation is the cause and internationalisation is the effect in response, argues Gnanam (2002). Globalisation of economies has brought about greater mobility of knowledge workers and seekers across the world. This mobility depends on the quality and standards of the qualifications offered by educational institutions. Ensuring the quality and standards of educational supply will constitute the first step towards the internationalisation of higher education. This in turn involves the restructuring of the contents, duration, quality and standards of courses offered within the patterns of more popular higher education systems. It is clearly evident that many of the higher education systems in developing countries are patterned after their colonial masters. The Maldives was never colonised, except for a brief 15 years during the 16th century. However, because of its small size, together with its limited economy and its strategic geographic location in the middle of the Indian Ocean, the Maldives have always been exposed to the influences of the wider outside world.

It is in this context that national level external QA schemes have become important (Gnanam, 2002). Many countries have already established national QA agencies. In the Asia-Pacific region alone, more than 130 national QA agencies in about 100 countries have been established in the past decade and a half. With successful national level efforts and a series of international and regional activities, this region is said to have discovered the fruits of co-operation in assuring quality education at tertiary level.

With globalisation, recognition of qualifications has also become important. The term 'recognition' in the context of higher education relates to reciprocal understanding between two or more parties to accept the awards and qualifications of each other as equal or substantially equal to those of their own, for a variety of academic and professional purposes (Gnanam, 2002, p. 102). Recognition of qualifications can only become possible when mutual recognition of national external QA agencies comes about. Such successful models are now in operation on the American continent and in Europe.

2.7.3 Quality in Higher Education in Small Developing Nations: The Case of Maldives

This study examines issues related to higher education quality policy in a SDN. Small systems have distinctive characteristics and are not to be seen as miniature versions of large systems (Packer, as cited in Bray & Kwo, 2002). Smallness (in particular, scale), isolation and dependence aggravate the task of establishing and maintaining a quality assured higher education system. Attempts to mitigate these factors have often resulted in regional answers, particularly in the Caribbean and South Pacific regions, through establishment of regional institutions of higher education and other mechanisms of co-operation and collaboration (Crossley & Louisy, 1994). There is no other small island state in close proximity to the Maldives. Hence, a regional solution in higher education, similar to that which has occurred in the Caribbean and the South Pacific, has not been an option for the Maldives.

According to Bray and Kwo (2002), small systems tend to have considerable flows of labour, both of their own nationals and of expatriates. Expatriates are often recruited at considerable cost to meet needs which cannot be met from domestic sources. It is also said that small states tend to have weaker cultural centres of gravity and they are more willing than larger states to adopt foreign cultural norms. Hence, transnational QA regimes tend to operate in many small state systems.

In the context of globalisation, the convergence of educational policy agendas also appears to be a contemporary reality. Despite differences in the size, the stage of development and the social, cultural, political and economic contexts that shape national higher education systems in an increasingly globalised world, there are many international similarities in approaches to addressing issues of quality. From an educational policy perspective, developing countries, with either embryonic or emerging systems of higher education, are constrained by the tensions of policy processes at the macro (global) level on the one hand and the micro (institutional) level on the other hand. It is argued that, with dominating influences from the global arena, national and institutional QA policies, in the form of managerialism with its emphasis on efficiency, surveillance and accountability, engender a 'culture of compliance' and this militates against the cultivation of a 'culture of improvement' in the higher education sector. In particular the focus on the quality of teaching and learning is lost.

2.7.4 Conceptual Framework

Based on the foregoing discussion on QA, education policy and the growing influence of globalisation and its implication for QA in higher education, the perspective of policy adopted for the purpose of this research is based on the model proposed by Ball and his associates (Ball, 1993, 1994; Bowe et al., 1992) and further developed by Vidovich (2002a; 2002b; 2004; Vidovich & Porter, 1999; Vidovich, Yang, & Currie, 2004). Vidovich (2002a) in her presentation of ‘Expanding the Toolbox for Policy Analysis’, further developed Ball’s policy cycle theory by taking account of the criticisms against the model by Lingard (1996). Lingard extends Ball’s notion of the policy analysis from within a nation-state to the global context; a suggestion later conceded to by Ball (1997) himself. According to Lingard (1996), “understanding the global context would appear to be necessary to understanding the post-modern state and its relationship to contemporary educational policy developments at both national and local levels” (p. 68). Others have also emphasized the implications of globalisation for the nature of the nation-state (Rizvi & Lingard, 2000). Taylor et al., (1997) assert that “a consideration of globalisation factors needs to be incorporated into any policy analysis of national developments” (p. 59). A number of factors outside the country, in addition to local factors, have contributed to the development of QA policy in the Maldivian higher education. Hence, Vidovich’s (2002a) modification is accepted for the purposes of this study.

Vidovich’s second modification incorporates a state-centred constraint to a greater extent than was evident in Ball’s model. The modified approach according to Vidovich (2002a) (following Raab, 1994) is “state-centred to emphasise the central role often taken by governments in policy, but not state-controlled which implies a top-down implementation model” (p. 10). Dale (1989) has been an advocate of the state-centred position on education policy making emphasising the macro constraints operating on practitioners at the micro level. However, Dale’s position is criticised by Bowe et al., (1992) as being a ‘state-control’ approach for its detachment of policy generation from implementation. In the state-control model, there is normally a strong desire of a state government to exclude practitioners in policy construction (Bowe et al., 1992). Dale’s belief in the primacy of a state-centred approach was later reasserted by maintaining that “a focus on the state is not only necessary, but the most important component of any adequate understanding of education policy” (Dale, 1992, p. 388). The circumstances of the small state and the central role of the MCHE in local higher education and development did not justify excluding it in this important process of QA

policy development in the Maldives. In fact the MCHE played a key role in the policy construction phase. Hence, insofar as this particular policy, which this study focuses on, is concerned, the state-centred model does seem to apply, although the overall system can be seen as a top-down linear state control model. Hence, Vidovich's second modification of the policy model is also accepted for the purpose of this study.

Vidovich's third modification to Ball's policy cycle highlights more explicitly the interlinkages between different levels and contexts of the policy process (Vidovich, 2002a). This modification facilitates a balance between macro constraints and micro agencies. The modified policy cycle framework proposed by Vidovich (2002a) is provided in Figure 2.1. This framework includes a greater degree of state-centred constraint and focuses a little more on interconnections between contexts. The framework also represents the macro, the intermediate and micro levels of the policy trajectory.

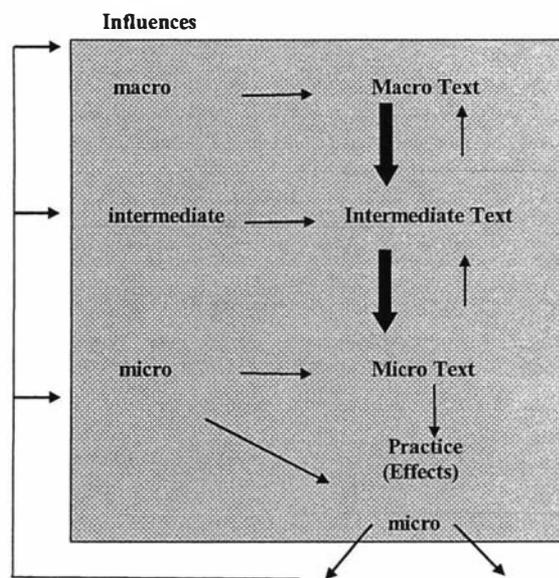


Figure 2.1 A modified policy cycle: Incorporating macro constraint and micro agency

Figure taken from Vidovich (2002a, p. 11)

Figure 2.2 expands on the modified policy cycle proposed by Vidovich (2002a). The framework adopted for the present study incorporates the *glonacal* (Marginson & Rhoades, 2002) perspectives to take account of the influences and ideologies that are located externally and outside the country, simultaneously with the national and the institutional influences. The glonacal perspective offers a useful framing for the dynamic interrelationships between global, national and local levels of policy making. The 'glonacal agency' heuristic which Marginson and Rhoades (2002) propose uses

the term globalisation to mean “becoming global” (p. 238). Researchers who have undertaken policy analysis studies utilising Ball’s policy cycle model and incorporating the glonacal perspective point to the usefulness of this approach (Allen, 2004; Fiocco, 2005). The glonacal model refers to the development of increasingly integrated systems and relationships beyond the nation state. In the prevailing context of higher education, QA is a phenomenon that appears to have such interrelationships beyond the nation states and institutional systems. In explaining the heuristic, these scholars state:

One of our aims is to advance the significance of studying *global* phenomena. Yet we do not see such phenomena as universal or deterministic in the effects; thus, we also feature the continued significance of the *national* dimension. Further, as we do not see either global or national phenomena as totalising in their effects, we feature the significance of the *local* dimension. For these reason we construct the term ‘*glonacal*’. [italics in original]. (Marginson and Rhoades, 2002, pp. 288-289)

Levels of policy process	Policy processes		
	Context of influence	Context of policy text production	Context of practice
Macro (global)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Influences located in the global sphere (e.g. International organisations, consultants, etc...) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discourses /ideologies in the global sphere (E.g. Globalisation, neoliberalism, managerialism, performativity, etc...) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Institutional responses for QA policies and their effects (E.g. global models, TQM, accreditation, etc...)
Intermediate (national / (macro/intermediate)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Influences within the national state (E.g. expansion of higher education, recognition of foreign qualifications) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discourses /ideologies within the nation state (eg. Discourse on control / Compliance, managerialism) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National QA practice (E.g. accreditation)
Micro (institutional)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Influences from within the HEIs (Eg. Merger of post-secondary institutions, development of home-grown degree courses). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> QA policy at the MCHE 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> QA practices at the MCHE and issues of QA for further development. (E.g. monitoring of teaching / transnational QA at MCHE)

Figure 2.2 Conceptual framework of policy cycle incorporating a glonacal perspective

Marginson and Rhoades further explain that the ‘agency’ in their ‘glonacal agency’ heuristic can mean two things: an organisation, or the ability of the people individually and collectively to take action (exercise agency). The first may refer to international organisations such as the World Bank, or national units such as Ministries of Education or local entities such as individual HEIs. The second reference

of agency can include international professional groups that shape policy at the international level as well as national level. There are also national groups such as Committees of Vice-Chancellors or business groups that influence national policy and local institutional practice. At the local level there are the academics and administrators that influence practice. In short, “at each level – global, national, and local – there are formal agencies and collective human actions” (Marginson and Rhoades, 2002, p. 289), involved in policy making. The arrows (Figure 2.2) indicate the direction of influences from one level to the other and also from one context to the other.

Marginson and Rhoades picture the glonacal agency heuristic as a set of interconnected hexagons in a three-dimensional space that form a constellation of agencies and agency. This gives rise to a complex interplay of different dimensions of the influence of organisational agencies and collective human actions which these scholars identify as: ‘reciprocity’, ‘strength’, ‘layers and conditions’, and ‘spheres’⁹.

The full heuristic of Marginson and Rhoades (2002) is not taken up in this study as it does not focus on the impact of globalisation processes per se. Additionally, because of the embryonic nature of the higher education system in the Maldives, certain dimensions of the heuristic do not appear to be currently applicable. However, many of the global trends in the development of QA appear to have some impact in the context of the development of higher education in the Maldives as well as the other two case study sites of this research, namely New Zealand and the USP. Hence, a glonacal perspective, though a limited one in terms of the Marginson and Rhoades model, was deemed appropriate for this study.

2.8 Conclusion

The literature reviewed highlights the fact that there is no simple and single agreed definition of quality in higher education. A number of definitions are identified in the literature. Quality may be largely dependent on specific national circumstances and it

⁹ ‘Reciprocity’ refers to the notion that influences flow in more than one direction, suggesting two way exchanges between all levels of from global to local. ‘Strength’ indicates both the magnitude and the directness of influence, in addition to resources at the disposal of agencies and agents. ‘Layers and conditions’ refers to resilient historical structures and practices of institutions, systems, and countries that impact on their influence and activity. ‘Spheres’ indicates the scope of influence (geographical and functional) of agents and agency (Marginson & Rhoades, 2002).

can change over time. For this reason, QA conceptualisation also differs, depending on the definition of quality which is adopted.

Quality assurance in higher education is seen as an area where a great deal of policy borrowing takes place. Many developing countries have modeled their QA systems on those practised in more advanced societies. Nevertheless, QA in practice is more context-specific. Hence, the search should be for models that can accommodate this contextual variability. Whilst QA, as a policy domain within higher education, is relevant to developing countries, research also shows that certain conditions must be met if QA systems are to work successfully in developing countries.

The impact of QA seems to vary within various segments of higher education systems. Some studies showed a positive impact at institutional level, whilst the impact at departmental level seems to be less. Studies have also raised concerns about the burdensome and bureaucratic nature of the increased workload for academic staff and how this could impact negatively on the quality of education, contrary to the very intention of introducing QA schemes.

It was also observed that globalisation has impacted on higher education through a greater convergence within the policy arena. This has been both advantageous and disadvantageous to developing countries, in terms of achieving quality within their higher education systems. The rapid increase in creating national QA bodies amongst the developing countries, in the last few years, highlights an urgency within these countries to achieve international standards and recognition of qualifications, partly in response to global forces that call for a knowledge economy.

The chapter also presented the elements of the conceptual framework adopted for this study. The policy cycle model suggested by Bowe et al. (1992) and Ball (1993, 1994) and as modified by Vidovich (2002a) has been expanded to incorporate a glonacal (Marginson & Rhoades, 2002) perspective. Data collection and analysis of the study was conducted within the framework of this expanded conceptual orientation. The next chapter presents the overall methodology of the study as well as reporting how data was collected and analysed.

Chapter Three

METHODOLOGY

Part I: Methodological Issues

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a discussion of the methodology used in the present study. Methodology is understood as the strategy that guides the actual design and conduct of the research plan. The chapter is presented in two main parts. Part I explores the methodological issues related to the theoretical perspectives that underpin the approach adopted for the present study. A justification to locate this study within the worldview of interpretivism and consequently the adoption of the qualitative research tradition is presented. The rationale for the study, both for the selection of a case study approach and for the selection of multi-site cases, is then outlined. The last section, under Part I, deals with the general ethical issues of research.

Part II presents the research process and deals with the practical and procedural issues of the study. The overall research design, design components, preparations for and the implementation of the data collection exercise, sources of data and data collection instruments, the participants involved, the study sites, the chronology of the study and the practical ethical considerations are discussed in detail. The final section discusses the methods of analysis adopted in the study. This section includes measures taken to establish the trustworthiness and authenticity of the study.

3.2 Purpose, Key Research Question and Research Orientation

This section restates the aim of the study and its key research question. The overall aim of this study was to explore and understand issues and problems relating to the development and implementation of quality assurance (QA) policy, in the specific local context of public higher education in the Maldives. Based on the overall aim and the specific purposes identified for the study in Chapter One (see p. 6), the following served as the key research question:

How does the newly emerging higher education system in the Maldives assure quality amidst a rapidly globalising QA policy environment?

At an early stage of writing the thesis, a decision was made regarding the style of writing to be adopted. Recently, an increase in the use of the first person voice in writing qualitative research projects has been observed. However, this style of writing is considered by some to reduce objectivity. As this researcher studied his own system of higher education, using a case study of the institution where he worked, prior to undertaking this study, it was considered essential to minimise unnecessary bias which might insinuate itself into the research and the thesis. Thus, it was decided to write most parts of the thesis using the third person voice, in an attempt to achieve distancing from the project. Nevertheless, critics question whether this sort of ‘scientific distancing’ can bring about objectivity because “rather than an actual separation of knowledge from the senses, all that is achieved is a denial of connectedness” (Keller & Grantowski, as cited in Stoecker, 1991, p. 96). Hence, in order to increase the ‘connectedness’ of this insider case study research, it was deemed appropriate to address certain issues (such as the rationale for selecting this study and the role of the researcher) from a more personal perspective. As such, it was decided to use the first person voice in writing parts of Chapter One and this present chapter.

Crotty (1998) offers a useful model to establish a research framework. The elements of the methodological framework are represented in Figure 3.1.

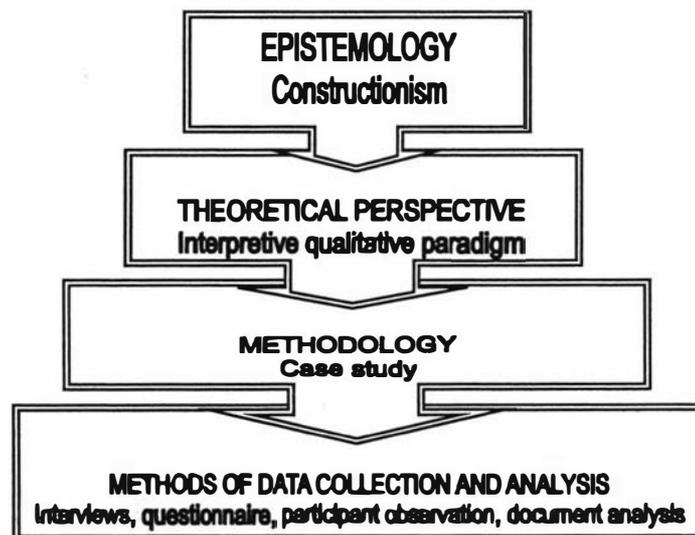


Figure 3.1 Elements of the methodological framework

Figure taken from Crotty (1998, p. 4) with content adapted to the present research.

Crotty poses four central questions that form the elements of a research design. These questions are:

- (i) What epistemology informs the theoretical perspective of the inquiry?
- (ii) What theoretical perspective lies behind the methodology in question?
- (iii) What methodology governs our choice and use of methods?
- (iv) What methods do we propose to use?

These elements are discussed in the following sections of this chapter.

3.3 Epistemology: The Theoretical Orientation of this Research

Epistemology comes from the Greek word ‘epistēmê’ which means knowledge. In the context of research, epistemology means the study of the nature of knowledge or how we know what we know (Lichtman, 2006). Traditionally, epistemology has concerned itself with criteria that allow for a distinction between what is legitimate knowledge and what is simply opinion or belief (Scott & Usher, 1999). Closely related to epistemology is the nature of ‘reality’ but more precisely with the nature of being or existence; in other words, ontology (Guba, 1990). Some scholars claim that there is a single reality, whilst others claim there are multiple perceptions of reality. This plurality of beliefs is at the centre of the so called ‘paradigm wars’¹⁰. The debates surrounding assumptions about the nature of knowledge and the nature of reality have remained diverse and controversial. In fact there are no fundamental beliefs held in common (Bredo, 2006) that authoritatively defines such philosophical issues. Instead, what has emerged amongst educational researchers is a “rich tapestry of rival views” (Clark, 1997).

Some authors make a distinction between two research paradigms, whilst others identify three and some differentiate more than three (Cohen & Manion, 1994; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000; Mertens, 1998). Mertens (1998) identifies three major paradigms of ‘positivism / postpositivism’, ‘interpretivism / constructivism’, and the ‘emancipatory’ paradigms¹¹. This threefold classification is the one associated with this present study. I believe that such a classification captures the essence of what the various belief systems have to offer, without extending the specific characteristics too far and without being too reductionist. However, it must be stated that whilst these

¹⁰ A paradigm here is taken as a set of interconnected assumptions about the world (Lichtman, 2006) or a basic set of beliefs that guide action (Guba, 1990).

¹¹ Guba and Lincoln (1994), in the first *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, presented four paradigms, namely ‘positivism’, ‘postpositivism’, ‘critical theories’ and ‘constructivism’. In their most recent debates, found in the third edition of the handbook (*The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*), Guba and Lincoln (2005) add a fifth paradigm, following Heron & Reason’s (1997) proposition of the ‘participatory’ paradigm.

paradigms are philosophically distinct, in research practice these distinctions are not always so very precise and clear-cut (Myers, 1997).

Over the last two decades, there appears to be more softening of the 'purist' standpoints on the paradigm controversies. Guba, in 1990, represented a purist position when he contended that "accommodation between paradigms is impossible" (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). However, in 2005, Guba and Lincoln express the real possibilities of paradigm accommodation and commensurability (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). The literature reports several studies that have been successfully undertaken, using complementary approaches which integrate both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2005; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). Despite the wealth of literature, the issue of the theoretical fit between methods and paradigms remains unresolved (Smith, 2006).

Following Crotty's model, this research utilises the epistemology of constructionism. In the constructionist view, Crotty (1998) explains, "meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting" (p. 43). Since meaning is not discovered but it is constructed, "different people may construct meaning in different ways, even in relation to the same phenomenon" (Crotty, 1998, p. 9). The epistemology of social construction of reality regards "people as creative interpreters of events who, through their actions and interpretations, literally make sense of their worlds" (Denscombe, 2003, p. 99). Aligning with the perspective of multiple perceptions of reality, this research accepts Crotty's view that:

All knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context. (Crotty, 1998, p.42)

The phenomenon of QA in higher education occurs in social contexts. The epistemological approach taken in this research endeavours to capture the perspectives of participants in three different HEIs, with particular focus on MCHC, the primary research site. The way in which QA policies are enacted and practised in the Maldives is socially constructed through the interpretations of the participants in the Maldives.

3.4 Theoretical Perspective: Qualitative Interpretive Orientation

'Theoretical perspective' is taken here to mean "the philosophical stance lying behind [the] methodology" (Crotty, 1998, p. 66). The theoretical perspective, according to

Crotty (1998), provides a context for the process involved and a basis for its logic and its criteria. The present research adopts the interpretive qualitative paradigm of research which “looks for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world” (Crotty, 1998, p. 67). According to Merriam (2002), the interpretive qualitative paradigm “exemplifies all the characteristics of qualitative research, . . . that is the researcher is interested in understanding how participants make meaning of a situation or phenomenon, [and] this meaning is mediated through the researcher as instrument” (p. 6).

The approach taken for this study lies in the acceptance of the importance of understanding and an appreciation of the influence of subjective interpretations and perceptions, in the process of the enactment of quality assurance policy. This approach focuses on how life is experienced in the everyday world. The phenomenological orientation is “particularly interested in how social life is constructed by those who participate in it” (Denscombe, 2003, p. 99). When the social world is socially constructed, the possibility of seeing things differently increases, thus giving rise to multiple perceptions of reality. Therefore, this theoretical position, which accepts social construction of multiple perceptions of reality, supports a predominantly qualitative research orientation, rather than a quantitative one.

Qualitative inquiry is an umbrella term for a wide variety of research approaches and presentations that share certain characteristics, including soft data collection and descriptions of people, places and conversations, where data are not generally analysed by statistical procedures (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Heck, 2004). This research orientation advocates no intervention and hence there is little or no disruption to the natural setting. According to Denzin and Lincoln (1994), qualitative research involves an interpretive and naturalistic orientation. Qualitative research does not generally set out to test hypotheses but it is undertaken to gain better understanding of behaviour or phenomena, from the subject’s own frame of reference. Qualitative research assumes that meaning is embedded in peoples’ experiences and this meaning can be generated through the researcher’s own perceptions.

Some scholars differentiate between quantitative and qualitative approaches to research and indicate that the notion of *quality* is essential to the nature of things Dabbs (as cited in Berg, 2001). Quality refers to the what, how, when and where of a thing – its essence and ambience. Qualitative research thus refers to the meanings, concepts, definitions, characteristics, metaphors, symbols and descriptions of things.

In contrast, quantitative research refers to amounts and measures of things. The question of which research approach is better, quantitative or qualitative, I believe, is a futile one. Both have merit, depending on the topic of study and what one intends to find out. The scope of this study does not allow a detailed exploration of the two research paradigms of quantitative and qualitative approaches. It would suffice to mention that, in recent times, an increasingly mixed method, involving both quantitative and qualitative approaches in the social sciences has been documented (Creswell, 2005).

3.4.1 Characteristics of Qualitative Research

Several authors present essential features or characteristics of qualitative inquiry (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, 2003; Bryman, 2001; Denscombe, 2003; Merriam, 1998). The following features can be distilled as being mentioned more frequently in the literature: naturalism, emphasis on process and the inductive nature of analysis and descriptive data. Each of these features is discussed below.

3.4.1.1 Naturalism

Qualitative research is conducted in the actual setting of the phenomenon. The data are collected from the authentic context of study, be it a school, a hospital, or a community. The researcher 'lives' in the natural setting, and he/she often becomes fully immersed in the context. It is in this way that the researcher is able to gain an understanding, through the eyes of the research participants. The social world is understood and interpreted through the eyes of the people studied. For Stenhouse (1979), "all description derives its form from falling into place within a perspective whose structural principle is inseparable from the point of view of the observer" (p. 8). Qualitative research is not undertaken to prove or test hypotheses but the heart of qualitative research work is an understanding of the social setting and all that it entails (Janesick, 2004).

According to Heck (2004), policy activity is a socially constructed endeavour. Therefore, he argues, "policy actions both shape and are shaped by the assumptions, values, beliefs, and goals of those who develop, implement, and are affected by them" (Heck, 2004, p. 215). In policy research, this makes it essential to understand the viewpoints of participants as they interact within policy domains, in order to produce policy actions. Thus, with particular reference to policy research, Heck (2004) invokes Everhart in suggesting:

... the essential quality that emerges from the analysis of phenomenon from the actor's perspective, as those phenomena develop within a context emphasising multidimensionality, can emerge only as the researcher participates in the ongoing events characteristic of that setting. (pp. 215-216)

In a naturalistic enquiry, gaining a broader understanding of the context is considered very important. The immersion of the researcher in the social actor's world enables the researcher to interact closely with the people, thus facilitating the comfortable opening up and revealing of some of the everyday meanings, which are often not revealed or seen by someone at a distance.

3.4.1.2 *Emphasis on process*

Qualitative research is process oriented in nature. As such, the social world is viewed in terms of processes. Qualitative researchers attempt to examine events and meanings as they unfold and to understand the contingencies that influence the manner in which such events evolve (Everhart, as cited in Heck, 2004). The concern here is with the 'how', rather than with the outcomes or products of the research activity. How do people acquire certain habits? How are certain attitudes translated into daily activities, procedures and interactions? In policy studies, the employment of a qualitative approach is important, in order to understand how the policy may be interpreted and acted on by the people in that setting (Heck, 2004, p. 216). It is essential to understand the context in which a policy is developed and implemented (Anderson, 1990; Heck, 2004).

The emphasis on studying the process of events requires a less structured research orientation, rather than the imposition of predetermined formats (Bryman, 2001). Furthermore, in a natural setting, contextual situations can also change during the course of the inquiry. This can allow the researcher to change direction during the course of the investigation. Thus, in qualitative research a preference for a flexible approach to the inquiry can be easily adopted.

3.4.1.3 *Inductive analysis*

Qualitative inquiry primarily employs an inductive approach. This type of research avoids the development of the hypotheses first and then later testing them. Instead, it proceeds with inductive analysis and thus it builds abstractions, concepts, hypotheses or theories (Merriam, 1998). In this way, data collection, exploration of the data collected and the identification of patterns and interrelationships are paramount. The

process of early consideration of the collected data, refinement of the process and further data collection are distinctive features of qualitative research. Data or evidence is not searched to prove or disprove hypotheses posited before the research is initiated (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Any theory, that may emerge in qualitative research, is grounded in the data. Theory and tentative hypotheses may be the outcome of research in the inductive mode. The process of induction involves the drawing of generalisable inferences out of observations. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that not all qualitative research, using inductive analysis, results in theory (Bryman, 2001). Often, what is achieved could be little more than empirical generalisation. Qualitative research findings are typically in the form of themes, categories, typologies and concepts.

3.4.1.4 Descriptive form of data

Data in qualitative research frequently come from interview transcripts, field notes, minutes of meetings, records, audio and videotapes. All these sources generate data in the form of words (text) or images (pictures), rather than numbers (statistics), as seen in quantitative research. It is typical to gather a vast amount of data in descriptive form. Therefore, the researcher's role in collecting, analysing and presenting data becomes a critical consideration in the research process. Since qualitative data arise from the socially constructed nature of reality, as argued by Heck (2004), there is a special relationship between the researcher and what is studied.

On this point, it is instructive to observe Janesick's (2003) call for an early identification of the researcher's own biases and his/her articulation of their own worldview for the study. According to Janesick (2004), there is no value-free or bias-free qualitative research design (p. 56). This implies the need for the adoption of a more reflexive approach and also the need to give consideration to subjective disclosures, which can give voice to the researcher (Berg, 2007). Such disclosures, it is said, allow the reader to better understand the true face of both the researcher and the study results. I now turn to discuss the role of the researcher in the context of qualitative research.

3.4.2 Role of Researcher and Insider Research

A defining characteristic of most forms of qualitative research is that the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. The researcher is involved with the participants, in order to gather data. The researcher's immediacy to the

context also enables the collection of data through observation. Thus data could also be gathered through non-verbal sources.

The origin of the research presented here lies in the creation of a HEI by the Government of Maldives (GOM) to develop the provision of higher education in that country. This institution, the MCHE, was created through the merger of the then existing post-secondary education and training institutions in October 1998. I was then the head (as Director) of one of the constituent post-secondary institutions, the Institute for Teacher Education, at the time of the merger. I was able to contribute to the review study and project formulation, undertaken by a team of external (Australian) consultants financed by the Asian Development Bank (ADB), that led to the creation of the merger. From the day of the merger, I was also involved in the management of the newly created College as its Vice Rector in charge of academic affairs, including QA work. I was involved in this work during the first five years of the new College's establishment. The ADB project was simultaneously initiated with the creation of the MCHE, in order to establish and further develop its capacities. As part of this project, a number of overseas consultants were engaged to assist the MCHE to establish many of its academic functions, which included governance and planning, academic affairs, curriculum development in selected disciplines and QA. Additionally, the project mandated the establishment of an accreditation board, which would become the national focal point for external quality monitoring and assurance. I was a member of the accreditation board, from the time it was established until taking up this research in early 2004.

Thus, I left the country with the explicit intention to undertake research on the topic of QA, which was directly related to the work I performed. As part of the ADB project mentioned before, an overseas consultant assisted the MCHE, particularly in the area of QA and academic standards. I had the good fortune of working as the local counterpart to this experienced researcher, who was generally well accustomed to the local culture and people, in addition to understanding the education system, through his prior consultancy assignments in the country. During this period, I was able to share with the said consultant, an initial research idea together with some broad questions. Thus, it is pertinent to recognise that I did not enrol in the Massey University research degree programme without prior insights into the topic or indeed from a point of total unawareness of "the literature of theory and fact on the area under study" as Glaser and Strauss (1967, p. 37) originally recommended in their

theorising of Grounded Theory. I had worked alongside the consultant in developing and subsequently implementing a QA action plan at the MCHE. Glaser and Strauss later acknowledge, although in a footnote, that “the researcher does not approach the reality as a *tabula rasa*” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967/1995, p. 3).

Thus my prior professional experience was an invaluable source of information that guided my initial formulation and refinement of the research problem and questions. My professional encounters with international experts, my participation in MCHE Council, the Academic Board and the MAB (all policy making bodies) meetings, and the fortunate opportunities of attending consultations with higher officials, including ministers, deputy ministers and other senior executives, have provided me with tangible experience of policy formulation and implementation. Additionally, I have also benefited from study tours to other countries (Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal, South Korea, Malaysia, Thailand, New Zealand), in relation to higher education planning and QA and I have attended regional and international seminars and conferences. Insights from the international literature, including various countries’ case studies on the topic of QA, were also helpful in developing the research questions.

Issues relating to the role of the researcher in the research process can affect the credibility of the research findings. An accurate portrayal of the phenomenon under study ultimately rests with the researcher. As far as the primary case study site is concerned, I am certainly an insider researcher familiar with the setting. As discussed above, my close involvement with the emerging higher education sector in the Maldives, for a relatively long period of time, is both advantageous and problematic for this study. I am particularly aware of the issues of objectivity, impartiality and bias associated with working in a familiar setting. Objectivity is pursued in this study through the attention paid to the higher education context and circumstances surrounding the cases, in addition to the operational procedures adopted for the preparation, collection and analysis of the evidence which informs the report. Procedures adopted for this study are discussed in this chapter, whilst the context and circumstances are discussed in Chapter Four that follows, where the background contexts of the case study institutions are presented.

3.5 The Case Study Methodology

I have chosen case study as the research methodology (Crotty, 1998), for this present study, since I am particularly interested in exploring, illuminating, discovering, comparing, contrasting and interpreting ‘the case’ of QA in higher education. Researchers use the case study approach to explain, evaluate or understand the complexity of the social world. For this reason, it is a particularly well-suited approach for researching educational issues. Being a study of policy processes, the case study research strategy is considered a particularly suitable approach (Heck, 2004; Merriam, 1998).

Case study, which emerged in response to perceived inadequacies of the experimental and survey strategy, involves detailed description and analysis of individual cases. Case study has been described as “a spotlight on one instance” or “an in-depth, multifaceted investigation” (Denscombe, 2003; Feagin, Orum, & Sjoberg, 1991). Case study, as a generic term in research, appears to have a range of meanings and definitions. Some scholars tend to define case study as a *process* of actually conducting an investigation (Yin, 2003b). Others focus on the *unit of study* (Stake, 1995), whilst yet others define case study as an *end product* phenomenon within its real-life context, particularly when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 13). As an end product of an investigation, case study, according to Merriam (1998), is “an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single entity, phenomenon, or social unit” (p. 34). Whilst Yin’s approach leans towards the positivist paradigm, Stake’s (1995) conceptualisation of case study is in the interpretive paradigm. Stake (1995) describes case study as “the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances” (p. xi). More recently, Stake (2005) declares that “a case study is both a process of inquiry about the case and the product of that inquiry” (p. 444). Stressing the singular, Bassey (1999) explains case study as “study of a singularity conducted in depth in natural settings . . . to explore significant features of the case and to put forward interpretations of what is observed” (p. 47).

Stake (1995, 2005) distinguishes between three different types of case studies, namely, *intrinsic*, *instrumental*, and *collective* case studies. Intrinsic case studies refer to research into a particular situation or case. Such studies are undertaken for their own sake, not because the case represents other cases but because it illustrates a particular characteristic. The intention of the researcher is to better understand the case

for its uniqueness or ordinariness (Berg, 2007). Stake (1995), referring to intrinsic case study writes:

The case is given. We are interested in it, not because studying it we learn about other cases or about some general problem, but because we need to learn about that particular case. We have an intrinsic interest in the case. (p. 3)

Instrumental case studies refer to research into one or more particular situations, for the purpose of gaining insight or understanding of an external concern, theoretical question, problem or issue (Stake, 1995, 2005; Berg, 2007). The case itself is secondary and plays a supportive role. Explaining instrumental case studies, Stake writes:

We will have a research question, a puzzlement, a need for general understanding, and feel that we may get insight into the question by studying a particular case . . . this use of case study is to understand something else. Case study here is instrumental to accomplishing something other than understanding [the particular case]... (Stake, 1995, p. 3)

Stake (1995) considers it to be the approach of choice, when there is a need for general understanding. He goes on to state that:

The real business of case study is particularisation and not generalisation. . . . There is emphasis on uniqueness of the case and on understanding the case itself. (p. 8)

Collective case studies involve extensive study and analysis of many instrumental cases, with the aim of gaining better understanding of a phenomenon. They are distinguished from single case studies and are also known as multiple case studies, cross-case studies, comparative case studies, multicase or multisite case studies (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 2000).

For Yin (1994) and Winston (as cited in Berg, 2007) case studies could be either *exploratory* or *descriptive* or *explanatory*. Yin's account of these forms of case studies can be captured from the following:

An exploratory case study . . . is aimed at defining the questions and hypotheses of a subsequent (not necessarily case) study. . . . A descriptive case study presents a complete description of a phenomenon within its contexts. An explanatory case study presents data bearing on cause-effect relationships – explaining which causes produced which effects. (Yin, 1993, p. 5)

Merriam (1998) uses a slightly different but overlapping classification of case studies. For Merriam (following Lijpart, 1971) there are descriptive, interpretive and evaluative case studies. Descriptive case studies are narratives of a sequence of events,

rich in detail and atheoretical. In this type of study, the basic description of the subject comes before hypothesising or theory testing. Interpretive studies although rich in thick description, are used to “develop conceptual categories to illustrate, support, or challenge theoretical assumptions” (Merriam, 1998, p. 38) held before the start of data collection. Evaluative case studies combine, in addition to description and explanation, a judgement, which it can be argued is the essence of sound evaluation. Following Guba and Lincoln (1981), Merriam (1998) agrees that this type of case study weighs “information to produce judgment. Judging is the final and ultimate act of evaluation” (p. 39).

Within the academic community, case study has attracted opposition on the grounds of a ‘lack of rigour’, ‘little basis for scientific generalisation’, or leading to ‘massive unreadable documents’, to state some comments (Bassey, 1999; Yin, 1994). Such criticisms generally appear as a result of the definitional diversity and lack of consensus for terms such as, method or methodology, the case, rigour, validity, reliability, generalisability or subjective bias amongst researchers. This could also be simply because the general characteristics surrounding these terms remain poorly understood and the potential of case study methodology itself remains underdeveloped. Making a clear distinction concerning the type of case study and delineating ‘the case’ in the present study has been a problematic issue. Whilst writers advocate the importance of distinguishing between types of case study, determining these differences is complex, particularly when no fewer than twenty three different types, kinds and categories of case studies exist in the literature (Bassey, 1999; Hitchcock & Hughs, 1995; Merriam, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Stake, 1995, 2005; Stenhouse, 1984; Yin, 2003b).

Other criticisms of the case study approach relate to the credibility of generalisations made from its findings (Denscombe, 2003; Yin, 2003b). For this reason, case study researchers are advised to “demonstrate the extent to which the case is similar to, or contrast with, others of its type” (Denscombe, 2003, p. 39). Case studies, argues Yin (2003), are “generalizable to theoretical propositions and not to populations or universes” (p. 10). Case studies are also accused, albeit unjustifiably, of producing ‘soft’ data and providing descriptive accounts of the situation. They are considered by some as an approach “ill-suited to analyses or evaluations” (Denscombe, 2003, p. 39). Others have noted issues regarding the identification of the case or the unit of analysis (Atkinson & Delamont, as cited in Bassey, 1999).

Despite these criticisms and seemingly negative aspects of case study, many successful case studies have been reported in the literature (Yin, 2003a, 2004). Notable case studies have been conducted in a wide variety of fields such as sociology, political science, public administration, social work, business, journalism, economics, psychology, medicine, law and management (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Merriam, 1998; Merriam & Associates, 2002; Yin, 2003a, 2004). The case study approach has also been successfully used in education (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Merriam, 1998; Stake, 2005) and in educational policy research (Heck, 2004).

Existing literature lends further support for the adoption of case study as the approach for this study. Cohen and Manion (1980) assert that a case study researcher probes deeply ‘the multifarious phenomena’ that make up the unit of study. This study has addressed the complex phenomenon of QA and the way in which this policy has developed and been implemented. In the real life context of MCHE, the empirical investigation utilises in-depth interviewing, analysis of documents and feedback from a questionnaire, and the ‘lived experience’ of the researcher, as a staff member of the primary site of study.

3.5.1 Identification of the ‘Case’ in Case Studies

According to Merriam (1998), the “single most defining characteristic of case study lies in delimiting the object of study, the case” (p. 27). Whilst most researchers support the importance of a clear definition of ‘the case’, they differ as to whether this should be imposed by the researcher or be seen as evolutionary in nature. Yin (2003) implies researcher control over case definition, when he asserts that it should follow logically from the nature of the research questions and focus on the possession of characteristics of interest. Yin (2003) also supports the researchers’ intervention to produce a definition, rather than having it emerge from the participants or the social setting. This latter view is not supported within the context of the present study, where the researcher endeavours to be responsive to the ways in which the participants define the concerns, issues and questions. For Stake (2000) ‘the case’ is almost certainly a functioning specific and it is the prime referent in a case study. Yin, (2003) on the other hand, disagrees with this view. The case, according to Yin (2003), “can be some event or entity that is less well defined than a single individual” (p. 23). He further states that “case studies have been done about decisions, programs, the implementation process and organization change” (p. 23). Decisions, programmes and their implementation can be considered as parts within the overall policy process.

Merriam (1998) posits that a case could be “a person . . . ; a program; a group such as a class, a school, a community; a specific policy; and so on” (p. 27).

Whilst all these conceptualisations of case study and case were used to inform this research, of particular significance to the present study were Stake’s instrumental explanations of case study and Yin’s descriptive portrayal of a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context. The phenomenon of QA policy and practice, as they occurred in the Maldives and the MCHE, is studied and interpreted, through the views and perceptions of key participants associated with the institution. The ‘interpretation in context’ (Cronbach, as cited in Merriam, 1998) is the focus of the study. The analysis and interpretation of the QA policy in the Maldivian context is facilitated with an exploration of the same phenomenon, as they occurred in two other institutions, namely, the ABC College in New Zealand and the USP in Fiji. As the case pertains to a specific policy and not to an institution, the boundary of the case is less well defined than that advocated by some writers, for example Stake (1995), who argues for clearer boundedness.

The present study is predicated on an interpretive understanding of the phenomenon of QA. The study is designed to “optimize understanding the case rather than to generalise beyond it” (Stake, 2005, p. 443). The present study had a “qualitative concentration on the case” (Stake, 2005). Three specific case studies were undertaken, at three different sites, in order to investigate and further understand the case in one of these sites. Following Stake (2005), the choice of cases was made to “advance the understanding of [another] intent” (p. 445): in this instance, that of QA policy and practice. At the risk of getting into the danger, that was cautioned by Bassey (1999), of drawing comparisons amongst case studies, I consider the present study to be an instrumental case study with a detailed description of a policy process. The ‘case’ of ‘higher education QA policy and practice’ is studied, in order to gain greater insight into its related issues and problems, within the emerging higher education sector of the Maldives.

This study is not classified as a multiple case study or a collective case study (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003b), since the cases do not represent a similar (or dissimilar) collection of individual cases which may lead to the development of a theory about a still larger collection of cases. In other words, although three case studies were undertaken, the overall study was not meant to follow ‘replication logic’ (Yin, 2003b), which is analogous to multiple experiments. This study differentiates between the concepts of

primary and *secondary* case studies, within an overall case study design. A primary case study is the principal focus of the investigation, within which additional but related cases could also be included. A phenomenon occurring at the primary site of investigation is the principal interest of the researcher. Accordingly, an in-depth exploration of the phenomenon was undertaken at this case study site. As the researcher, I spent more time at the primary case study site, in order to gather an amount of data, which was more than I collected at the other (secondary) sites. Also, more people were interviewed at the primary site. There are essentially more research questions to be explored at the primary site and the findings of the study relate to the primary case study.

3.5.2 Data Collection in Case Studies

A case study approach allows and even encourages the use of multiple methods of data collection. Case studies can collect information through personal interviews and other methods which are also used in, for example, survey methodology. Sources of data for case study can include documentation, archival records, interviews, directed observation, a questionnaire, participant observation and physical artefacts. Multiple methods of data collection also strengthen triangulation of data in case studies, particularly when the number of cases studied are few or single. As case study researchers deal with large amounts of data, data reduction (the process of simplifying data to make it more manageable) and data display (the way in which data are organised) are also important considerations (Miles & Huberman, 1984). The specific sources of data for the present study are described in Part II of this chapter, under section 3.7.1 and 3.7.2.

3.5.3 Ethical Considerations

Although the general principles of ethics impact differently on the research strategy employed, the core of research ethics is to honour and maintain due respect for the integrity of all who participate in the research. Aldridge and Levine (2001), writing about the ethics of survey research, note that respect to respondents involve three key components, namely, informed consent, confidentiality and sensitivity. These are equally applicable and relevant in qualitative case study research. Informed consent involves obtaining permission to participate in the research, with the participants having received all necessary information regarding the study. A major responsibility, on the part of the researcher, is to provide information and clarification relating to

queries which may be raised by the participants. Informed consent is particularly essential if observations and participation amongst the respondents are involved. A degree of covertness, as some have argued (Punch, 1994), was not necessary in this research.

Assurance of confidentiality involves keeping information, given by or about an individual in the course of a research relationship, secure and secret from others. Confidentiality is seen as central to the maintenance of trust between researcher and participants. Confidentiality is a guarantee and hence participants have a right to remain anonymous and researchers are required to conceal the identity of research participants. The general principle is to be as reassuring as possible and not to mislead respondents. Ways of safeguarding participants' anonymity, even if codes or pseudonyms are used, must be given proper consideration (Delamont, 2001).

In case studies, where single or very few cases are studied, the problem of confidentiality and anonymity is more difficult to maintain. Pseudonyms have often been given to cases in case study research. However, due to their particularity, the case could be easily identified (for example, MCHE and USP), particularly by people from within the case boundary or by other educationalists or researchers. In single case or few case studies of organisations, it may, in fact, need not be confidential, since the case may also offer an enormous wealth of knowledge to others.

The use of language, particularly as regards race and ethnicity, sex and gender, age and disability (Aldridge & Levine, 2001), is also sensitive for case study research. The interview questions, whether on paper or orally asked, should be free of sensitive language. Since case studies involve collecting extensive data from people being questioned or observed, trying to obtain their cooperation in providing data must be elicited in respectful ways. Arrangements must be in place to agree for transfers of ownership of the recorded information and also for either identifying or concealing individuals and settings (Bassey, 1999). Another aspect is the arrangement for giving or obtaining permission to publish the case report. Information needs to be shared as to how the data supplied by participants will be used in any publication that may arise from the study. One also needs to be carefully guided by the avoidance of covert practices and the upholding of general ethical guidelines. Archiving case records and case reports in a proper and guaranteed manner is also an important aspect of ethics.

This research was undertaken within the ethical guidelines and procedures adopted by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee (MUHEC) and the Code of Ethical Conduct for Research, Teaching and Evaluations involving Human Participants (2004). Approval for this study was granted by the Committee, after the research satisfactorily met all their concerns regarding not causing harm to participants, the University and the researcher (see Appendix A). The details of how I set up my research under the ethical approval process are documented in Appendix B1.

Part II: The Research Process

In terms of conducting the whole research, three distinct but overlapping phases of activities can be distinguished. These phases are identified as: (1) pre-fieldwork; (2) fieldwork; and (3) post-fieldwork. The remainder of the chapter presents the activities of these three phases.

3.6 Phase one: Pre-fieldwork

The first phase involved the development of the proposal, the design of the study, gaining access to sites and participants and obtaining ethical approval. In terms of Crotty's (1998) model (see p. 64), phase one of this research would be placed in the third component of methodological framework.

3.6.1 Research Design

Research design is described here as the researcher's plan of how to proceed with an investigation. Such a plan can provide a structure for the inquiry itself, including the collection and analysis of data. Some authors view qualitative research as being loosely planned, without a detailed set of procedures (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, 2003). They advise against going into a study with hypotheses to test or specific questions to answer. Following Janesick (1994), Bogdan and Biklen (2003) argue that qualitative researchers "go off to study carrying the mental tools of their trade, with plans formulated as hunches, only to be modified and remoulded as they proceed" (p. 50). Bogdan and Biklen (2003) advise for a flexible and loosely scheduled plan. This research, however, does not subscribe to the too flexible 'hang loose' approach they advocate. There are others who conceptualise research designs in a different more structured manner (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

3.6.1.1 Design components

Recognising the emergent and unfolding nature of qualitative case study research, a more systematic approach, advocated by Robson (1993) and Stake, (1995) appears to be more appropriate. It is necessary to start the research somewhere. Hence, an approach where a plan is made, either explicit or implicit, is deemed essential to carry out a successful investigation. Therefore, the design for the present study is adapted from that advocated by Yin (1989) and it is represented in Figure 3.2. This overall plan outlines the operational procedures used to collect and analyse data, together with the sequence of and the relationship between these procedures. The following section discusses the various components of the research design.

The first component of the case study design is the identification of study questions or problems. This was discussed earlier in Chapter One. The second component is the study proposition. According to Stake (1995), it is useful to make use of issues as a conceptual structure, in order to direct attention to what should be examined.

The issues can result in an approach being developed to organise the key research question that connects the context of the case and the phenomenon of study. This in turn leads to the more substantive research questions and the topical questions that provide information about the different cases. The questions in this study were framed within the wider context of educational policy analysis and its rapidly globalising nature. The enquiry was structured around the themes of global, national and local policy dynamics.

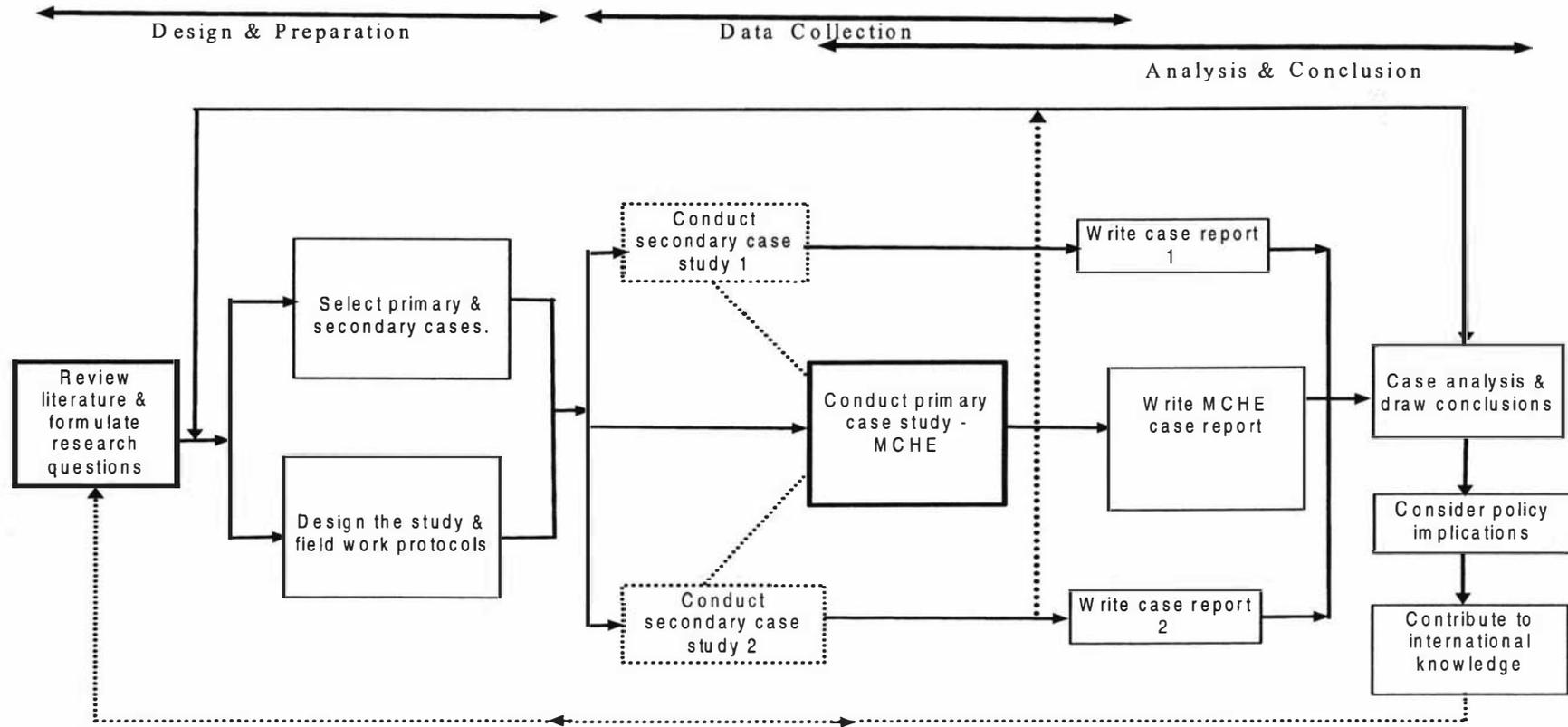


Figure 3.2 The Case Study Research Design

Figure taken from Yin (2003, p. 50) with content adapted to the present research

A focussed approach, which directs attention to what should be examined within the cases, was developed in the present study. This focussed approach, it is argued, need not be seen as going against the characteristics of qualitative research, discussed previously in Part I of this chapter. The focussed approach, emanating from prior reading and exposure to the phenomenon, does not militate against a flexible and open approach to the investigation. Instead, it provided an operational road map to implement the investigation within a limited time frame and also other practicalities, such as travel and financial considerations.

3.6.1.2 Selection of the cases: Multi-site case study

The third component of research is the selection of cases or units of analysis. In this study, the choice of cases was made on the grounds that the cases were expected to advance understanding of the phenomenon of QA and maximise what could be learned. In recognition of the complexity of the phenomenon being investigated, MCHE, the most familiar institution in my case, was selected as the primary case study site. Two secondary cases were undertaken prior to the MCHE in-depth study. These two secondary case studies were conducted as part of the initial data gathering, in order to contribute to the research proposition and to illuminate the design and conduct of the primary case study. I wanted to identify what I could learn from the experience of these HEIs in their engagement of QA.

The selection of the two cases, one from New Zealand and one from the South Pacific context, provided the balance and variety from a developed country context and a case within a developing country context. This allowed for the making of some comparisons to the primary site, from a global policy and practice environment. This also increased the richness of the data for analysis and thereby, enhanced learning and understanding. In short, the two secondary case studies were intended to illuminate the analysis and understanding of the phenomenon in the primary case study.

This research can be regarded as a multi-site case study with a single focus. One site was studied in more depth than the other two sites. The decision to study, in more depth, the site with more familiarity to the researcher was taken with the full awareness of the disadvantages and limitations of this type of strategy. This was a strategic decision that related to the scale and scope of the investigation. In so far as the universalising nature of higher education programmes is concerned, the focus on a single in-depth study at one site could be justified. Spindler (1982) supports such a

focus. Thus, the in-depth study of MCHE and its quality assurance experience, in its first eight years, stands in its own right as an individual case study. This enabled the researcher to gain deep and valuable insights into this complex phenomenon, which was already present in the complex environment of a multi-faculty, multi-campus, HEI, created through the merger of a number of institutions. Notwithstanding this, a generalisation concerning QA policy development and its implementation in higher education systems of SDNs is not intended in this investigation.

The New Zealand institution selected has had more than a decade of experience in implementing QA systems. During this period, it has gone through various phases of refinement to the procedures and processes involved. New Zealand has been documented as an early experimenter in QA systems at HEIs. On more pragmatic grounds, whilst the researcher was based in New Zealand the opportunity to study the system, from which the Maldives had already modelled its system (Baumgart, 2002a), was considered highly relevant. Therefore, it was deemed essential to examine the contextual considerations in New Zealand, which provided the rationale for its adoption of the particular configuration of QA policy in tertiary education. Additionally, the initial request to ABC College to gain access produced a positive reply and they welcomed the inquiry to their institution. The institution was a fairly well-established tertiary institution, founded over 90 years ago. The profile of courses conducted at ABC College was comparable with the portfolio of courses at MCHE, which include first degree, diploma and certificate level programmes.

The second site, the USP, shared contextual relevance to the Maldives, in that it is a HEI located in a SDN and serves a number of small states, which share a number of geographic, socio-economic and developmental features. However, the USP is a regional university and hence it will have far more complex issues in relation to its governance and administration, compared to a national institution, which is the case with MCHE. Nevertheless, on the one hand it could be argued that USP, being more distant to the immediate realpolitik of a nation state, is in a sense freer to concentrate on its academic and other programmes, than a national institution under the direct sponsorship of a government. The USP has been in existence for more than three decades. Right from the beginning and up to the present time, a central plank of USP quality assurance has been the use of external advisors. More recently the USP has also introduced, for the first time, a formal QA strategy. The USP case was also the most feasible option within reach of the researcher, since it is within a HEI in a small

state setting. The developments regarding QA in the Mauritian and the Caribbean region higher education systems were considered as possible alternatives, but were decided against, since travelling to these regions was not feasible from a practical and financial perspective.

The fourth component of the design is linking the data collection to the propositions. The fifth component is the interpretation of findings. These components are dealt with in the sections and chapters that follow.

3.6.2 Gaining Access

Negotiating entry to the field is a critical initial research activity. The issue of access can seriously affect the design, planning, sampling and even implementation of research (Wellington, 2000). Access to MCHC was assumed not to be a problem as I was on official study leave from that College. However, the other study sites were different.

My chief supervisor, during the first year¹² of my study, made initial enquiries with both the New Zealand institution and the USP, regarding the possibility of including these institutions in a study on QA. The responses were prompt and positive. This paved the way for me to confirm the two sites in the design of the study. From that point, a line of communication was opened for me to fill in the details of the study and to learn about the respective ethical requirements in each institution. Formal written permission was later obtained from the three institutions, in order to fully comply with the MUHEC ethical codes of research.

3.6.3 Selecting the Participants: Key Informants

A key task of the study was to identify participants who could best help in a deeper understanding (Merriam, 2005) of the QA phenomenon. I used purposeful sampling to select KIs, who were perceived as possessing the type of information needed to make a special contribution to the phenomenon studied or those who were knowledgeable in the subject matter under consideration (Alasuutari, as cited in Gubrium & Holstein, 2002). These participants were intentionally selected because they were believed to be 'information rich' (Patton, 1990) or 'knowledgeable citizens'. Choosing information rich participants requires the researcher to have knowledge of the situation studied.

¹² The chief supervisor for my research project changed after the end of the first year.

With respect to the secondary case study sites, I did not have knowledge concerning these institutions. Therefore, I used the type of purposive sampling described as homogenous sampling. According to Creswell (2005), in homogenous sampling the researcher purposefully samples individuals, based on their membership in a subgroup that has a defining characteristic. In the case of the ABC College, I met with the Research Coordinator, who was identified by the management as my focal point, to identify those staff members involved in quality management who worked within the institution. Participants from this common group were therefore identified for me and my focal point person informed the prospective participants first, prior to my initial contact with them. I later made my introductory contact by email and subsequently sent the invitation letter, information sheet and interview schedule.

Similarly, in the case of USP, prior to my arrival in Fiji, I requested my focal point person, the head of the Quality Assurance Unit, to identify a list of staff members who were involved in QA work in a formal sense within the university. I received a list of university staff, identified as the 'quality assurance network'. The list included heads of faculties, teaching staff and academic staff involved in administrative / managerial work related to QA within the university. As the number on the list was only 12, I decided to interview all the members in the network. In terms of the questions developed to explore at USP, this particular group and the sample size was justified. At USP, I eventually interviewed a total of 12 participants, although two of the participants were not in the network but they were recommended by some interviewees. Two members of the network were unavailable for interviewing. As one network member was based in a USP campus outside Fiji, this particular interview was conducted by telephone. This was made possible through the distance learning centre at the main campus in Suva.

MCHE, being the single largest HEI in the Maldives, represents the national higher education system in the country. In the case of the Maldives, because I was relatively familiar with the institutions and the potential participants, I used the type of purposive sampling that some identify as judgment sampling. This is also a technique whereby the researcher is able to identify participants, who are believed to possess knowledge about specialised interests and concerns and these people were integral to the phenomenon under study. According to Burgess (1984):

In field research informants are selected for their knowledge of a particular setting which may complement the researcher's observations

and point towards further investigation that needs to be done in order to understand social settings, social structures and social process. (p. 75)

In the Maldives, I had a fairly clear idea of who should be interviewed. However, in keeping with the other secondary cases and also respecting the customary way of working in the local context, I consulted the top management of MCHE, in order to obtain advice in identifying potential research participants. The final list of KIs, selected for interviews, was based on the advice I received. As per this advice from the management, the majority of my initial list of potential KIs was confirmed. Up to five new names were added to the list. The list included staff from the College in addition to other people from outside the College, who were related to matters of QA in one way or another. The KIs, with respect to MCHE, were either involved at the level of policy contribution (influence) or at the level of practice.

3.7 Phase Two: Fieldwork

In terms of Crotty's (1998) model, phase two and phase three constitute the fourth component of his methodological framework (see p. 64). The fieldwork phase consisted of three separate data collection activities. The first fieldwork involved searching for general QA principles and procedures within New Zealand. The New Zealand fieldwork was carried out during July – August 2005. The activities included the following:

- (i) Interviewing nine KIs from the ABC College and the related QA bodies, who were responsible for managing QA matters;
- (ii) Analysis of documents related to QA in New Zealand tertiary education and at the ABC College in particular.

The second fieldwork involved a similar set of activities with respect to the USP. A total of 12 staff members from the USP were interviewed. A number of documents were also obtained from the university. The trip to Fiji was undertaken from the last week of September to the first week of October 2005. Two working weeks were spent in Suva.

The third fieldwork phase was undertaken in the Maldives from March to May 2006. This phase involved in-depth exploration of higher education QA issues in the Maldives. The specific activities included the following:

- (i) Interviewing 28 KIs from MCHE and its Council.
- (ii) Interviewing five senior officials from the Ministry of Education / Higher Education / MAB.

- (iii) Administering a questionnaire to all teaching staff members at MCHE, based in Male'.
- (iv) Attending meetings of the College Council, Academic Board and some of its committees.
- (v) Reviewing of documents such as strategic plan, operational plan, annual reports, minutes of College Council and Academic Board meetings, policy documents and consultancy reports related to academic (as different from administrative) matters and quality improvement.

3.7.1 Sources of Data

Data sources for the present study included the following:

- (i) Both published and unpublished literature relating to the development of QA in higher education in developed and developing countries and with reference, where appropriate, to developments in small states.
- (ii) Existing documentary evidence relating to the development of internal QA policies, practices and procedures within the MCHE. This included consultants' reports on academic standards and quality, evaluative reports (organisation, faculty, and programmes), College Council resolutions, Academic Board decisions, committee minutes.
- (iii) Interviews with appropriate KIs involved in the development, management and review of external (national) and internal (institutional) QA systems in the Maldives, New Zealand and the USP.
- (iv) Quantitative data from a questionnaire survey conducted with the academic staff of MCHE.
- (v) Information from surveys conducted, for example, student evaluations of teaching and graduate tracer studies at MCHE.
- (vi) Qualitative data directly relating to the policy developments and implementation of QA at national level and through in-depth interviews with key informants.
- (vii) Current and ongoing research into international 'quality' processes and practices, particularly within developing countries.

3.7.2 Data Collection Methods and Instruments

Four data collection methods were used throughout this study. Two of these were common to the three case studies, whilst two additional methods were used in the primary case study. The two common methods were interviewing and document analysis. In the case of the primary research site, data were also gathered through the administration of a questionnaire and participant observation. This reliance on pluralist sources of information, using a variety of techniques, is consistent with the case study approach chosen for this study. This is also congruent with the researcher's philosophical assumptions discussed earlier. The multiple sources of data also allow the researcher to validate and crosscheck findings (Patton, 1990).

3.7.2.1 Interviews

Interviews are considered to be a primary source of information in case study research. Interviews can provide useful information that otherwise cannot be obtained, since this technique provides the opportunity to describe events related to a phenomenon (Tierney & Dilley, 2002). According to McMillan and Schumacher (1997), interviews are essentially vocal questionnaires that differ from other forms of inquiry in that they involve direct interaction between the interviewer and interviewee. Case studies in the qualitative tradition often advocate such an open approach and in some cases may even prefer an unstructured approach (Warren, 2002). However, a more practical approach is the semi-structured or “general interview guide approach” as advocated by Patton (1990, p. 280). According to Gillham (2000), semi-structured interviewing is the most important form of interviewing in case study research. If conducted in a satisfactory manner, this type of interviewing can provide the richest single source of data. Semi-structured interview questions offer flexibility in the way questions are asked and responded to, as compared to more structured interviews. The ‘naturalness’ and the ‘flexibility’ of semi-structured interviewing, Gillham (2000) further elaborates, can also appear to be “deceptively simple” (p. 65). However, the key to success in semi-structured interviewing is thorough preparation.

Based on the research questions, an interview schedule was developed for each case study site. These schedules consist of general questions related to QA and a set of specific questions that correspond to the specific questions formulated for each study site. Table 3.1 provides the number and distribution of participants to the three research sites.

Table 3.1

Research Participants and their Distribution to Case Study Sites

Categories of interviewees	Secondary case study 1: ABC College	Secondary case study 2: USP	Primary case study: MCHE
Institutional quality managers	4	8	10
Central quality body staff/policy contributors	5	4	11
Academic (teaching) staff	-	-	12
Total	9	12	33

(i) Interviews for secondary case one. In the New Zealand case study, a total of nine academic ‘quality managers’ were interviewed. These included staff from the ABC College in addition to staff from relevant central and national level bodies involved in QA work in the tertiary education sector. These institutions include the NZQA, ITP-Quality, the Academic Audit Unit and the CUAP. The interview schedules for staff at the national level quality bodies were geared towards understanding the context within which QA evolved and operated, within the New Zealand tertiary education sector and their respective roles and functions, in relation to QA work. The interview schedules were therefore different for national bodies. Samples of these interview schedules are shown in Appendices C1-3.

(ii) Interviews for secondary case two. The USP, being an institution responsible for its own quality of programmes, had no comparative external quality validation body. Therefore, one set of interview schedules was prepared for participants from USP. This schedule of questions is included in Appendix D.

(iii) MCHE interviews. In the Maldives, semi-structured interviews were conducted with three groups: (1) academic (teaching) staff members of MCHE; (2) ‘quality managers’ including heads of MCHE faculties and managerial staff at MAB; and ‘policy contributors’ group consisting of members of the MCHE Council, participants from the MOE, Ministry of Higher Education, Employment and Social Security (MHEESS), Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) and the MAB were also interviewed. This latter group included what some regard as ‘elite’ members (Gillham, 2000; Odendahl & Shaw, 2002). The interview schedules for the three broad categories of participants are included in Appendix E1-3.

All the interviews were audio taped, except one from New Zealand, which was at the specific request of the interviewee. However, notes written by the researcher were later shared with and endorsed by this participant.

The interviews lasted between 45 minutes and one hour on average, with three interviews lasting about one and a half hours. They were scheduled at times and places most convenient to the interviewees. In the majority of cases, this resulted in interviews being conducted in offices, either at the interviewee’s desk or in meeting rooms within the institutions. Few interviews have taken place in institutional canteens or coffee shops, as suggested by some interviewees. These venues have proved to not be the most propitious places for interviews. The distractions from the

cacophony of surrounding voices made the recording quality poor and resulted in difficulties with the transcription work.

At MCHE, the researcher was assigned a separate office (with access to computer and telephone) for the duration of the fieldwork. Some of the interviews were held in this room. Being a small community known to each other, one would assume that the scheduling of meetings and interviews would be an easy task. This proved not to be the case in the Maldives. A few interviews had to be re-scheduled more than once, since participants were extremely busy and were called away for urgent meetings or assignments. This multi functional nature of work is a feature in SDNs. Staff are called away to various activities on rather an ad-hoc basis, without prior notice or at very short notice. Hence, a few interviews were conducted after official working hours during weekdays¹³. Some interviews were also held during the weekends at the work site of the interviewees. One interview was held at the residence of the participant. Three out of the thirty Maldivian interviewees provided answers in writing. In addition, there was the opportunity to clarify or pursue additional issues with these three respondents, a situation of which I made use. Furthermore, answers to interview questions were obtained through emails from three participants associated with QA / higher education in the Maldives, since these people were out of the country on study leave during the data collection period. Additionally, I met six other senior officials for general discussion of issues related to the research. None of these discussions were considered formal interviews. Hence, the discussions were not audio recorded. In total 33 transcripts (including email responses) from the Maldives provided the main formal evidence base for the primary case study.

All interviews in New Zealand and at the USP were conducted in English. Although all interviewee participants in the Maldives could converse in English, nine out of 33 participants preferred to speak in their vernacular, the Dhivehi language. In addition, four participants chose to speak bilingually, freely shifting between English and Dhivehi throughout the interview. All the Dhivehi interviews were translated into English during transcription. I personally transcribed all the interviews conducted. The most difficult set of interviews, both for translation and transcription, were the

¹³ It is a common practice for institutions (and also the majority of government departments) to remain open and work after 2.30 pm, which is the official finishing time for work. Official working hours in the government sector, under which the MCHE functions, were 7.30am to 2.30pm Sunday to Thursday: Friday and Saturday is the weekend.

bilingual ones. All transcripts were sent to the participants for verification and endorsement.

In the New Zealand case study, I achieved one hundred percent return of approval forms for the transcripts. In the case of USP, I received approval via email from all, except one participant. In the primary case study, I received endorsements of transcripts from 31 out of 33 respondents. This constituted an overall endorsement of 94 percent.

In the three HEIs in this study, there was a general awareness of the respondents' identities among the participants. Preserving the anonymity of research participants in small institutions and small communities is a problematic issue. Hence, an anonymous referencing style was followed for all participants. (See Appendix B1). However, due to the small number of staff involved in often quite specialised positions of work, it would not be very difficult to speculate about the identity of some respondents. This matter was acknowledged and mentioned in the research information sheet, which was initially provided with the introductory letter. Every effort was made to maintain the confidentiality of what was said during the interviews. No specific statement was used, which could be attributed to any one particular participant.

Thus, in three locations, a total of 54 interviews were conducted for this study. Through interviews, participants' "thoughts, values, prejudices, perceptions, views, feelings, and perspectives" were probed (Wellington, 2000, p.71). With a semi-structured interview schedule, the interviews in this research have been regarded as a "conversation with a purpose" (Dexter, as cited in Merriam, 1998, p. 71). It follows then, that the interviews in this study were not conducted to establish an inherent 'truth'. Instead, the interviewer recognises that there are 'multiple perceptions of realities' in social situations. A more primary aim was "seeking out the emic meanings held by the people within the case[s]" (Stake, 2000, p. 441). This is consistent with the epistemology of social constructivism and the interpretive qualitative research paradigm adopted in this study (Crotty, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Odendahl & Shaw, 2002; Stake, 2000).

The interview guides were not pilot tested in the traditional sense of using them in interviews with a selected group of informants, who were not included in the study sample. However, the set of questions were sent by email to two people associated with MCHE and another person, who was an overseas consultant to MCHE. They

were requested to comment on the clarity and appropriateness of questions posed. Two of the people contacted responded and the suggestions received, though minor, were incorporated into the interview guide. The set of questions sent to each participant, prior to the interview, contained core questions and specific questions. Thus each respondent was encouraged to discuss broad questions and also the specific aspects of the QA policy. The semi-structured interviewing approach allowed for the answers to be constructed by the respondents. Probes were used, based on the responses and issues and on the respondents' initiatives.

(ii) *Questionnaire.* A structured questionnaire (Appendix F) with four open ended questions was designed to be administered to all teaching staff within MCHE, who resided in Male'. At the time of data collection, this constituted 90 percent of the MCHE teaching staff. The remaining 10 percent resided in five campuses distributed in the atolls of the country. No attempt was made to reach this 10 percent and therefore the 90 percent was deemed to constitute a fair representation of views from amongst the teaching staff of the institution. Furthermore, the logistics and time available for fieldwork did not appear to be viable for reaching this 10 percent. This questionnaire, taking approximately 30 minutes to complete, was intended to obtain qualitative data from teaching staff, in order to gauge their perceptions about academic quality and QA and ways of improving quality. It was thought important to obtain views from the teaching staff, since they constitute people who actually implement policies that impact on academic quality.

Before administering the questionnaire, it was sent to four purposefully selected academic staff members of MCHE to obtain feedback. Two of them were experienced academic staff members, who have been in higher education for more than ten years, beginning even prior to the merger. The other two had recently joined the institution and they had been in the system for less than three years. The questionnaire was sent by email to these staff members after they were contacted by telephone. They were requested to: (1) identify questions that may pose any difficulty with comprehension and to comment upon the overall appropriateness of the questions asked, (2) to give specific feedback as to the clarity of questions asked, and (3) give feedback regarding layout and presentation. All four members responded with feedback, although one responded after the given three-day time frame. All these academic staff members indicated that the questions / statements were clear and appropriate. No changes were suggested to the format of the questionnaire. One member suggested a slight alteration

of wording for two statements. This amendment was made before the questionnaire was printed for distribution.

3.7.2.2 Documents

Documents are considered to be a valuable (Creswell, 2005) and ready-made (Merriam, 1998) source of information in qualitative research. Documents consist of both public and private records obtained about a site or participants or a phenomenon under investigation. These can include a wide range of written, visual and physical material relevant to the study (Creswell, 2005; Merriam, 1998).

For this research, the majority of documents collected were those in the public domain in the research sites. Additionally, unpublished documents in the form of minutes of College Council meetings, Academic Board meetings and reports submitted by consultants were made available to the researcher by request to the MCHE. Some documents, which were in limited circulation at the USP, were also made available to the researcher during the field visit to USP. In case study research, documents are believed to be valuable in corroborating and augmenting evidence from other sources (Yin, 1989). In addition to obtaining a general background to the institutions, their overall aims, programmes and profiles, the following three specific questions were used to interrogate the documents collected:

- (i) What is government / institutional policy for QA in higher education?
- (ii) How are the institutions (MCHE, ABC College, and USP) implementing their QA policies?
- (iii) What challenges do the institutions face in achieving quality through their QA policies?

3.7.2.3 Participant observation

Participant observation was the fourth method of inquiry and was employed only at the primary case study site. According to Creswell (2005), observation is “a process of gathering open-ended, first-hand information by observing people and places at a research site” (p. 211). Within the context of MCHE, participant observation could be described as having taken place in two separate phases. The first phase was the period of fulltime employment of the researcher in the institution prior, to the intensive two-month fieldwork (that is prior to taking up this research). During this period, insights were gained from working with an external consultant on the QA component of a larger institutional development project and from the researcher’s total immersion in the life of the College. This assisted with the initial identification of the research problem and the subsequent framing of the research questions. The observations from

this first phase were neither structured nor formally written down. Admittedly, the observations were also neither explicitly covert nor overt. Louisy (1997), in her research based in her own tertiary institution, finds the type of observation that emerges from the total immersion in the management of the institution, to be helpful to “confirm or contradict issues which arose either in the literature or within the College itself” (p. 93). My experience in this study confirms her report.

The second phase of observation took place during the two-month intensive period of actual fieldwork planned for formal data collection. This was the period when all the interviews at the primary study site were undertaken. Observation was limited and took the form of attendance at planned meetings at MCHE. According to Vulliamy (1990), educational case studies incorporating, what Walker (as cited in Vulliamy, 1990), calls, “condensed fieldwork”, has been conducted and it includes limited observation that departs from the classic and “comprehensive scale of participant observer [mould] favoured by conventional ethnographers” (Vulliamy, 1990, p. 14). I attended meetings of the College Council, the Academic Board and the Dean’s Committee. Data that arose from such observations was intended to supplement, challenge or substantiate data which had emerged from the interviews, documents and returning questionnaires. This could be seen as another effort at strengthening the validity and reliability of the present study.

3.8 Phase Three: Post-fieldwork

The last phase of the study involved the data analysis stage. In practice, this phase overlapped with the phase two activities of data gathering. Being a qualitative study based largely on interviews, data analysis actually began quite early, at the same period as the interviews. The next section elaborates on data analysis and interpretation.

3.8.1 Data Analysis and Interpretation

Data analysis is the least developed and hence the most difficult and problematic aspect relating to case studies (Tellis, 1997). Data analysis in case study research, is not something that stands apart, as a separate phase of research, following data collection. On the contrary, it is integrally related to the whole enquiry. Specifically in case studies, data collection and analysis occur as an iterative process, where the researcher moves between the literature and field data and back to the literature again (Zucker, 2001). Maintaining ‘vigorous interpretation’ during data collection is

identified as an important function in case study research. Conclusions are drawn on the basis of observations and other data. Nevertheless, to view case study as making assertions and interpretations, whilst data is being collected, is ill conceived. It portrays case study as a strategy that hastens the drawing of premature conclusions. For Stake (1995), “good case study is patient, reflective, willing to see another view of the case. An ethic of caution is not contradictory to an ethic of interpretation” (p. 12).

It is generally accepted in the literature that there is no best system of analysing qualitative research (Janesick, 2004). Miles and Huberman (1984, 1994) claim that “there are no canons, decisions, rules, algorithms or even any agreed upon heuristic in qualitative research to indicate whether findings are robust” (p. 230). Writers have yet to refute this claim. However, Miles and Huberman (1994) emphasise that qualitative analysis needs to be documented as process, particularly for the purpose of “auditing any specific analysis” (p. 12). They have proposed a model of data analysis which appears to be popular amongst qualitative researchers. According to their model, data analysis is represented as “three concurrent flows of activity: data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing/verification” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 10). These processes occur before, during and after data collection. Miles and Huberman’s (1994) interactive framework for considering data analysis, Figure 3.3, was used as a basis for data analysis in this study.

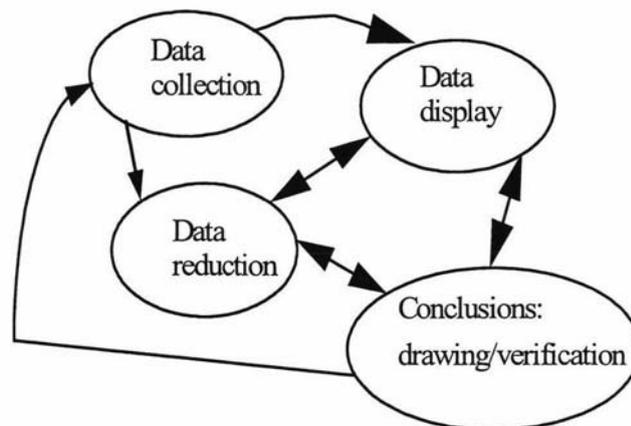


Figure 3.3 Components of data analysis: Interactive model

Figure taken from Miles and Huberman (1994, p. 12)

In the present study, the three case studies were sequenced in a manner to ease data collection and analysis. A period of three months elapsed between the first and second secondary case studies. A period of five months passed between the fieldwork for the second secondary case study and the final fieldwork of this research conducted in the

Maldives. Hence, initial clustering, categorisation and thematic grouping of data were carried out as the data were being collected and interviews were transcribed in each case study. I was able to move on from one fieldwork context to the other after completing all the transcriptions and conducting partial analysis. Thus, continuous conceptual categorisation took place.

Initial identification of themes was undertaken manually, following Miles and Huberman (1994) method of finding patterns and developing conceptual themes. Miles and Huberman (1994), suggest a set of 13 'tactics' for the generation of meaning from the data. These tactics, from a descriptive to an explanatory level are:

1. Noting patterns and themes
2. Seeing plausibility (making initial, intuitive sense)
3. Clustering (conceptual grouping to see connections)
4. Making metaphors (figurative grouping of data)
5. Counting (to see what is there)
6. Making contrasts and comparisons (by clustering and distinguishing observations)
7. Partitioning variables
8. Subsuming particulars into the general
9. Factoring (identifying thematic commonalities)
10. Noting relations between variables
11. Finding intervening variables
12. Building a logical chain of evidence
13. Making conceptual/theoretical coherence (usually through referent constructs in the literature). (pp. 245-261)

Furthermore, a useful guideline to follow during the iterative reading process, which sought to discover meaning and identify themes, was the schema suggested by Gibbs (2002). This guideline, presented below, suggests 12 things to look for.

1. Specific acts, behaviours – what people do or say.
2. Events – these are usually brief, one-off events or things someone has done.
3. Activities – these are of longer duration than acts and often take place in a particular setting and many have several people involved.
4. Strategies or tactics – activities aimed towards some goal.
5. States – general conditions experienced by people or found in organisations.
6. Meanings – what directs the participants' actions?
7. Participation – peoples' involvement or adaptation to a setting.
8. Relationships or interaction – between people, considered simultaneously.
9. Conditions or constraints – the precursor to, or cause of, events or actions and situations that restrict behaviour or actions.
10. Consequences – what happens if ...
11. Settings – the entire context of the events under study.
12. Reflexive interventions – the researcher's interventionist role to generate more responses as data. (pp. 64-65)

As a first step, based on the methods suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994) and with the list suggested by Gibbs (2002) kept in mind, in order to gain a thorough level of familiarity and understanding, I read each transcript several times. This iterative reading of the transcripts helped to make sense of what was said and facilitated in the identification of initial concepts and ideas for possible themes. The key word or words expressing the concept were written down in the margin. This list included recurrent ideas and concepts.

As a second step, by scanning within each data type, looking at differences and similarities, gleaning out underlying and recurrent concepts, clustering related concepts and grouping and developing conceptual constructs, the researcher was able to provisionally identify several closely related tentative themes. A sample list of the types of concepts that emerged during the first and second step of data analysis for ABC College data and USP data are provided in Appendix G and H respectively.

As a third step, keeping the list of tentative themes in the forefront, I carefully read the transcripts again, to identify passages of texts which exemplified the themes. These passages were underlined. This process was followed manually with the transcripts, in each of the three case studies. A sample of pages from an interview transcript, with this manual analysis, is included as Appendix I.

The analysis of the data of the primary case study also followed the above three steps. The essential difference was that the themes that emerged from the secondary case studies were used right from the start in the analysis of the primary case study. The identification of tentative themes for the primary case study was further assisted by the themes identified in previous studies and relevant literature reviewed. Frederick (2005), in her case study of NZQA, and Fiocco (2005) in her *glonacal* study in Western Australia, identified themes such as: international/global factors; vulnerabilities of smallness of size of landmass and population; regional integration; movement of knowledge, skills and services; expansion of the education market; marketisation; and commodification of education, as education policy influences. A number of these themes were adapted in this study, based on the emergent themes of the secondary case studies, in addition to the literature review, in order to form tentative themes to code the data. Other themes were created from the participants' responses and through the researcher's synthesis of data and meaning identification. In such cases, themes were allowed to emerge directly from the research data, without

any attempt to impose an interpretation based on any pre-existing theory, which is advocated by grounded theorists (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

The tentative lists of themes for the three groups of interview participants from MCHE are provided in Appendices J1-3. In relation to the academic staff questionnaire, this technique was applied to the answers given by respondents to the four open-ended questions. The tentative list of themes from the questionnaire is included in Appendix K1. This manual identification of themes, from each of the four groups resulted in several themes. The product of combining the tentative themes of the four groups from MCHE is presented as Table 6.3 (see Chapter Six). This list of tentative themes constituted the thematic framework that served as the list of nodes for the purpose of coding in the NVivo programme.

3.8.2 Quantitative Data Analysis

Based on the numbers verified by the respective MCHE faculties, questionnaires were sent out to a total of 116 academic staff members working in Male'. A total of 59 (51%) were filled and returned. Data from the questionnaire were analysed using descriptive statistics. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 14 and Excel 2003 were used to analyse the survey results of the questionnaire. They were reported as either frequencies or percentages of the total number of respondents. The results were intended to complement the respective qualitative themes discussed, rather than presenting them as stand alone quantitative analysis. Hence, where appropriate, data tables are provided in Chapter Six. Appendix K2 provides the aggregate responses to MCHE academic staff questionnaires statements. Although this study did not intend to report on a faculty-level analysis of the questionnaire responses, a table of such an analysis is included as Appendix K3, since this is envisaged to be of some use for future MCHE work.

3.8.3 Use of NVivo in Data Analysis

All data were initially analysed manually. At a late stage of data analysis the computer software NVivo was used to facilitate the process. For the remainder of the transcripts [and also later with the manually analysed transcripts] the process of identifying passages of text, which exemplified the themes, was undertaken using the qualitative data analysis software NVivo. This process was also an opportunity to further refine some of the themes initially identified manually. An illustration of the process of coding is shown in Figure 3.6, with sample screens from NVivo.

1. Passage of text identified for a given concept

2. Text selected, node identified and coded using the Coder palette

3. All passages coded under a given node are brought together in node browser

Figure 3.4 Node identification and the NVivo coding process using the Coder palette

These themes essentially served as the nodes for the purpose of coding with NVivo. Coding within the NVivo programme entailed a “process of identifying the passages of text that exemplify a certain idea or concept and then connecting them to a node” (Gibbs, 2002, p. 59). A node, in the language of NVivo, is shorthand for an idea or

concept and refers to the place where reference to the text passages may be kept, along with the nodes' name or definition.

Thus a node is not just a label: it is the concept or idea that exemplifies data, its location and its description. Working around these two basic functions of supporting the “storing and manipulation of texts or documents” and supporting the “creation and manipulation of codes, known in NVivo as nodes” (Gibbs, 2002, p. 16), the NVivo is a versatile and relatively efficient example of a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software.

The NVivo tools extend further beyond these two basic functions and generate node trees, linking passages to additional nodes, documents and memos, assigning attributes to documents and giving descriptions to nodes (see Appendix L1 for a sample page of the Nvivo node tree of this study). Furthermore, the software has multiple search options and a capability to create models. Appendix L2 provides a sample node coding report, which proved to be very useful [to exhaust all texts pertaining to a particular theme] during the stage of data analysis, interpretation and write up.

Once the themes were finalised, a process of re-clustering, based on the theoretical framework of this study, was undertaken. This process will be further discussed in Chapter Six, with reference to the thematic tables.

3.8.4 Adapting Validity and Reliability for Qualitative Research

Validity and reliability, in their traditional sense, are associated with quantitative epistemology. Scholars have argued that such criteria to judge research ‘quality’ are problematic for research based on a different worldview. Bassey (1999), for instance, argues that “a case study is a study of singularity which is chosen because of its interest to the researcher (or the researcher’s sponsor). . . . It is not chosen as a ‘typical’ example in the sense that typicality is empirically demonstrated, and so issues of external validity are not meaningful” (p. 75). Hence these terms are said by some to be unsuitable for qualitative research. Many scholars call for a new set of criteria to determine ‘quality’ in qualitative case study research. For Janescik (1994) validity “has to do with description and explanation, and whether or not a given explanation fits a given description. In other words, is the explanation credible? (p. 216). Similarly, reliability is viewed as “a fit between what they (qualitative

researchers) record as data and what actually occurs in the setting under study, rather than literal consistency across observations” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 36). Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that when a dialectical methodology, oriented towards the production of interpretation is employed, concepts such as validity, reliability and objectivity, should be replaced with trustworthiness and authenticity. This study was concerned with issues of trustworthiness. Authenticity, which deals with a set of issues concerning the wider political impact of the research, such as fairness and agency, was deemed less applicable to this study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) further translate trustworthiness into credibility, transferability, confirmability and dependability.

3.8.4.1 Credibility

Establishing credibility of research findings involves ensuring that the research was conducted according to the canons of good practice. For Bryman (2001) credibility is equivalent to internal validity in quantitative research. Credibility can be achieved by the congruence of results from the many information collection techniques used by qualitative researchers (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982). This may include interviews, participant observations, checking transcriptions and other information with participants. Submitting initial interpretation and information analysis back to the participants is seen to be important for confirmation that the investigator had correctly understood the social world (Bryman, 2001). Bryman notes the use of two techniques for achieving credibility: respondent validation and triangulation.

Although analytical interpretation and conclusions were not sent back for respondent validation, all transcriptions were sent for endorsement from participants. In this study credibility was dealt with mainly by employing triangulation. Triangulation is defined as the employment of a number of methods to analyse a study with the hope that the methods result in data collaboration and congruence (Denzin, 1970). Denzin and Lincoln (2000) suggest triangulation at the level of data, method, investigator and theory.

In this study, triangulation was undertaken at the level of data and methods. At the level of data sources, data were triangulated between policy and other documents collected from the field and interview transcripts and international literature on QA in higher education. At the level of methods, triangulations were achieved between documentary analysis, interviews and survey analysis.

3.8.4.2 Transferability

Since qualitative case study research entails the in-depth study of one or a few cases, findings from such research tend to be contextually bound. Stake (1995) also observes the difficulty of generalising findings across social settings and states that “case studies seem a poor basis for generalizations. . . . The real business of case studies is particularization” (p. 86). However, Guba and Lincoln (1985) argue that transferability of research findings can be achieved through production of what Geertz (as cited in Bryman, 2001) calls thick descriptions. Rich and thick descriptive accounts of the context for the study and the individual cases can enable others to compare situations elsewhere and make judgments. If there is to be transferability, however, “the burden of proof lies less with the original investigator than with the person seeking to make application elsewhere” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 298).

This study attempted to provide as much detail and description as possible, relating to the three contexts of study and the QA policies and practices in the three case study sites.

3.8.4.3 Dependability

Dependability is the substitute criterion for reliability in quantitative research. As replication, in the traditional quantitative research sense, is not appropriate in qualitative research, Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose the adoption of an audit process. This involves keeping complete records of all phases of the research process, including research problem, selection of participants, field notes, interview transcripts, data analysis decisions, etc. in an accessible manner (Bryman, 2001). An independent auditor or a peer would be able to examine the research process to establish the extent to which proper procedures have been followed.

In this study, issues of dependability were managed by keeping a purposeful and reasonable record of all phases of the research process. This included the following: different research proposals; interview schedules; interview tapes and transcripts; field notes; minutes of meetings with supervisors; letters seeking permission and approval to undertake research in the institutions; official research visa/permit to Fiji; and statistical data gathered from the three case study sites.

3.8.4.4 Confirmability

Objectivity, as achieved in quantitative research, is not possible in the same way in qualitative research. However, as Guba and Lincoln (1985) argue, it is important to ensure that the researcher has not overtly allowed personal values to sway the conduct of research and consequently the findings of an enquiry. This can be achieved through establishing confirmability.

Confirmability in this study was established by triangulation of data and method.

3.9 Conclusion

This chapter has described the methodological approach taken to consider the key research question: How does the newly emerging higher education system in the Maldives assure quality amidst a rapidly globalising QA policy environment?

This key question, translated into three principal research questions, was considered within a multi-site case study. An intensive in-depth primary case study was undertaken in the Maldives, whilst two less intensive secondary case studies were undertaken in New Zealand and at the USP. A multi method approach, including interviews, documentary analysis, survey questionnaire and 'condensed' participant observation were used to gather data. Analysis was shaped by the framework of a globalising QA policy environment and educational policy analysis. Both manual methods and NVivo software were used in data analysis. Measures taken to achieve quality of the research included steps to ensure trustworthiness and authenticity. Trustworthiness was ensured through steps taken to establish credibility, transferability and dependability.

The next chapter presents the contexts of the three case studies.

Chapter Four

THE STUDY CONTEXTS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a brief background to the local contexts and the main quality assurance (QA) developments in each of the three case study sites. A more extensive review of the New Zealand context is undertaken, since New Zealand has been a leader in qualifications and QA reforms in the world. Hence, it has more experience to offer, in terms of useful lessons to other systems at early stages of development in QA. New Zealand also provided a unique example of a situation where external neoliberal influences and managerialism has provided the ideological basis of the QA reforms. The other two sites of study were relatively new to formal QA in higher education. The chapter is divided into three parts. Part one provides the New Zealand context. Part two presents the USP context and part three provides the Maldives and the MCHE context of QA development.

Part I: The New Zealand Context

The New Zealand case study was undertaken in one of the 19 Institutes of Technology and Polytechnics (ITPs) in the country (ABC College, 2007b). It is a regional polytechnic and it is identified by the pseudonym of ABC College. The institution's QA systems operate within the national policy and system for QA. Firstly, a brief examination of the essential external influences on QA in New Zealand higher education (or tertiary as it is more commonly known in the New Zealand context) is provided followed by an overview of the current QA system. The last section of this part provides a brief description of the ABC College.

4.2 The Macro (external) Influences on Quality Assurance in New Zealand

Many of the New Zealand reforms in tertiary education, including those specific to QA, are the product of the reforms that had their genesis in the broader public sector reforms, which began in the 1980s. The Fourth Labour government, elected in 1984, has been identified as being responsible for bringing about revolutionary changes within the entire education landscape of New Zealand. These substantial reforms were

based on policy advice to the government, that was heavily influenced by key bodies of administrative and economic theory (see Middleton, Codd, & Jones, 1990; Olssen & Matthews, 1997). Commentators identify four main bodies of knowledge that were particularly influential in shaping New Zealand's public sector reforms and subsequently the higher education sector as well. These were Public Choice Theory, Agency Theory, Transaction-Cost Economics and the New Public Management (NPM)¹⁴ (Boston, Martin, Pallot, & Walsh, 1996). The Treasury was the chief institution that advocated these ideas and it was also responsible for translating them into specific policy proposals. Each of these main theories will be briefly considered in the following sections, in order to examine how they have influenced and impacted on tertiary education QA reforms in New Zealand.

4.2.1 Discourse of Neoliberalism and Managerialism

4.2.1.1 Public choice theory

Public choice theory is based on the central assertion that all human behaviour is dominated by self-interest (Boston et al., 1996). On this basis, public choice theorists hold the view that the instrumentally rational *homo economicus* model of human action, used in the economic theory for building up models, is just as applicable to the actions of individuals within organisations (Heywood, 2002; Winch, 1996). Accordingly, individual "people should be treated as rational utility maximisers of all their behavioural capacities" (Buchanan, as cited in Boston et al., 1996, p. 17). The 'public' character of public choice theory stems from its concern with the provision of the so-called public goods: goods that are provided by the government, rather than the market, because their benefit cannot be withheld from individuals who choose not to contribute to their provision (Heywood, 2002).

When institutions operate within a market model, it is argued that "the desires of the individual become subordinated to the maximisation of utilities for the organisation" (Winch, 1996, p. 20). Where market disciplines do not apply, for example as in a public education system, Winch (1996) further argues that, according to public choice theory:

... such individual 'rent-seeking' behaviour will not serve the ostensible purposes for which the organisation exists. In practice employees will work

¹⁴ NPM is regarded more as a body of practice, rather than a particular theory.

to aggrandise their own positions and to secure advantages for themselves and the bureaucracy for which they work. (pp. 20-21)

On the basis of these theoretical positions, New Zealand Treasury officials recommended policies that reduced the role of the state and increased the market approach across the spectrum of the public sector. The tertiary education sector was not spared the impact of such policies. Subsequently, the 1990 amendment to the Education Act 1989 made it possible, for the first time, for education providers other than universities to award degrees, thus ending the binary divide or any distinction, at least legally, between vocational and general education. The aims of the amendment aligned with public choice theory, to the extent that they were designed to give institutions greater autonomy by limiting government intervention (Weir, 2001). Tertiary education institutions (TEIs) had the freedom to make academic, operational and management decisions, as long as they were consistent with the national interests and within the broad economic and social reforms and the demand for accountability. However, the way in which institutions were to meet accountability dramatically changed. After the Act was amended, accountabilities, previously within the realm of professional expectations and practices, became external demands from QA agencies. Accountability to stakeholders became paramount. The tertiary education sector witnessed new systems of public accountability being created, through the establishment of QA authorities and the development of a National Qualifications Framework (NQF). (See Section 4.2.3, p. 112).

4.2.1.2 Agency theory

Agency theory asserts that social and political life is understood as a series of “contracts” (Boston et al., 1996, p. 18). Within this contractual relationship, one party is referred to as the ‘principal’: the other party as the ‘agent’. One major implication of agency theory is in the redefinition of relationships amongst individuals, agencies, organisations and institutions (Scott, 2001). The agent undertakes to perform tasks on behalf of the principal. In exchange for these tasks, performed under the contract, the principal agrees to reward the agent in a mutually acceptable way.

Agency theory was influential in the thinking behind the setting up of contractual relationships between TEIs as ‘agents’ and QA authorities – essentially government entities – as ‘principals’. This has resulted in increasing costs for tertiary providers, in the area of compliance to external QA authorities for quality standards, through mechanisms such as reporting and monitoring visits. As Weir (2001) argues, TEIs are

required to bear the costs of proving their compliance to external QA authorities, through mechanisms such as reporting and monitoring visits and through standards established by the institutions themselves or set by the external QA bodies. Whether the standards are set by the institutions themselves or the external QA bodies, invariably there appears to be a preoccupation of agents to efficiently fulfil the wishes of the principal (Weir, 2001). In the case of QA bodies (such as the NZQA and Institutes of Technology and Polytechnics Quality (ITP Quality)), agency theory focuses on these bodies or their agents (education providers) monitoring QA systems (moderation, accreditation, auditing), which are in place to ensure that providers comply with previously stated agreements.

4.2.1.3 Transaction-cost economics

Whilst agency theory focuses on the selection and motivation of agents, transaction-cost economics (TCE) “deals largely with the optimal governance structures” (Boston et al., 1996, p. 21) or alternative institutional arrangements. Efficiency and effectiveness are evaluated, particularly in terms of associated costs and benefits. As in the case of agency theory, TCE assumes that individuals (principals and agents) are essentially self-interested and opportunistic.

In the tertiary education sector, a number of principles of TCE have been applied. Before the establishment of the NZQA, one assumption, for instance, was that the administration of qualifications was not cost-effective, because several approval agencies co-existed simultaneously under different identities (Department of Education, 1988; Frederick, 2005; Probine & Fargher, 1987; TLG, 1994). The NZQA, it was argued, would increase cost-efficiency and accountability, by reducing the number of administrative agencies and by addressing the perceived issues of ‘falling standards’ and ‘rising mediocrity’ (Butterworth, 1998; Olssen & Matthews, 1997).

4.2.1.4 New Public Management

The other influence on the public sector reforms was the strand of New Public Management (NPM). Under the wave of NPM, in the 1980s, performance targets and quantifiable outputs, often seen in private sector management, were being applied in the public sector. There was greater emphasis on management skills and professional skills were de-emphasised. The devolution of management control came about in conjunction with the development of improved reporting, monitoring, and accountability mechanisms (Boston et al., 1996). In tertiary education, as Weir (2000)

argues, this meant a challenge for the collegial nature of academic work that underpinned the traditional view of QA. The NPM model emphasised the operation of a public sector in a similar way to private sector organisations, the assumption being that the private sector organisations were run more effectively and efficiently and arguably with higher quality. NPM concepts gave way to greater autonomy for Chief Executives of TEIs, and there were changes to accountability mechanisms and performance-based salary packages. These features entail anything except greater central control and top-down implementation (Schick, as cited in French, 2001). NPM also stresses responsiveness to customers.

Thus, it could be reasonably concluded, that the far-reaching legislative and policy changes, which occurred in the 1990s in New Zealand, had their origins in the broader economic theories underpinning the reforms and key policy documents of the 1980s. Agency theory and public choice theory underpin market competition. The Education Amendment Act (1990) and the Industry Training Act (1992) allowed the free market system to operate in education. The distinctive advantages which markets have over State regulation were advanced. Under the framework of reforms, New Zealand tertiary education experienced the market arrangements of “competition, choice, price mechanism and profit motive” (Harrison, 2004).

4.2.2 Reviews and Reports

According to Philips (2003), the motivation for qualifications reform in New Zealand was marked in the 1980s by a series of reports commissioned by successive governments. These reports were seeking to reform the many bodies and inconsistent procedures controlling the diverse range of qualifications available and the barriers affecting many students. These reports include *Hercus-Young Report 1984*, *Learning and Achieving 1986*, *The Green Paper 1986* (on New Zealand vocational education and training system), *The Tertiary Review and Watts Report*, *The Probine-Fargher Report* (1987), *The Picot Report* (1988), *The Hawke Report* (1988), *Learning for Life Two* (1989a), amongst others. In an earlier study, where a number of these key documents were reviewed, Selwood (1991) too, came to a similar conclusion. Through a careful investigation of documents, substantiated by interviews with key informants involved in policy making, Selwood (1991) concludes that the setting up of the NZQA is mired in contradiction. The paradox, according to him, is the essentially centralist nature of the Qualifications Authority and its emergence during a period characterised by devolutionary rhetoric. The scope of this thesis does not

permit a detailed examination of all these documents. However, it would suffice to say that consistent with the discourse of managerialism, that was already taking hold of the wider public sector reforms, the review reports referred to above suggested that education be managed through a corporate management model.

4.2.2.1 *The Scottish connection and the 'Hawke Agenda' in tertiary quality assurance*

Another external influence, in the policy making environment of New Zealand tertiary education sector in the late 1980s, can be identified as the lecture tour of Mr Tom McCool, the Chief Executive of the Scottish Vocational Education Council (SCOTVEC). During McCool's two-week visit, he made a number of formal presentations concerning the *Scottish 16+ Action Plan*¹⁵. The features of the SCOTVEC model – modular programmes of study, a single national certificate, assessment based on specified criteria, a range of entry and exit points, credit accumulation and closer links between providers – were received with great enthusiasm in the lectures/workshops held throughout New Zealand (Smithers, 1997; Lythe as quoted in Selwood, 1991).

Having created such an environment, the Government in March 1988 established a Working Group on Post Compulsory Education and Training (PCET) to draw together the findings of a number of previous reports (Butterworth & Tarling, 1994; Malcolm & Tarling, 2007; Smithers, 1997). Specifically, the group's¹⁶ task was to "identify what decisions are required from Government and to suggest what those decisions should be" (Hawke, 1988, p. 3). The working group's report was known famously as the '*Hawke Report*', which was released to the public in its entirety on 26 September 1988.

The *Hawke Report* (1988) proposed a National Educational Qualifications Agency (NEQA) that "would be a small body of part-time members, and would be essentially a co-ordinating body for three distinct sub-agencies" (p. 54):

¹⁵ McCool was invited by the New Zealand Government, following a series of visitations to Scotland from New Zealand officials, including the Minister of Education. During Tom McCool's two-week visit to New Zealand, 18 formal presentations were made to an invited audience of 600, in four main centres.

¹⁶ The convenor and chairperson of the group was Professor Gary Hawke, an economist and Director of the Institute of Policy Studies, Victoria University. The remainder of the eight members in the working group were government officials from various departments and ministries.

- the National Vocational Qualifications Board (NVQB) for vocational qualifications;
- a Secondary Education Qualifications Board (SEQB) for qualifications in the secondary schools; and
- a National Academic Awards Body (NAAB) for degree level courses. (Hawke, 1988, p. 54)

According to Butterworth and Tarling (1994), Hawke clearly went beyond the published brief of the Working Group. The recommendations offered by the report were anything but sweeping. Similarly, Codd (2002) argues that the *Hawke Report* contributed to the neoliberal policy solution of exposing the tertiary education providers to market forces and in turn to “introduce a competitive commercial environment in which higher education would be treated like any other commodity” (Codd, 2002, p. 33; 2006). The *Hawke Report*, Codd (2002) further asserts, adopted an ‘across the portfolio’ approach to post-secondary education and training, and had proposed “a radical restructuring of the whole PCET sector which would remove from the universities their independent legislative status and place them under parliamentary statute as all other providers of post-compulsory education and training” (p. 33). Although universities in New Zealand were successful in retaining the protection of the term ‘university’ and in achieving an independent role in programme approval and QA, they did not succeed in averting the central thrust of the Hawke agenda.

Hawke’s selective interviews and total lack of an effective consultation process, coupled with the relatively brief timeframe that was provided for comments to the report, generated considerable debate and controversy, both within and outside the tertiary sector and this included the media. No doubt a report that could fundamentally alter the character of TEIs, particularly in terms of their QA and accountability mechanisms, should deserve no less. The report, it has been claimed, has been, in both its development and implementation, increasingly shrouded in secrecy (Butterworth & Tarling, 1994).

4.2.3 Establishing the NZQA and the Development of the NQF

According to Smithers (1997), “following consultation on the *Hawke Report*, and clearly influenced by the SCOTVEC model, the government brought out a policy paper, *Learning for Life: Two in 1989*” (p. 5). This policy paper accepted the

proposals for a NEQA¹⁷. Subsequently the Education Amendment Act (1990) created a new body in the name of the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA). The NZQA was entrusted with the responsibility for QA in the tertiary education sector, but this excluded the university sector¹⁸. The polytechnics were required to follow processes and requirements laid down by the NZQA. At a later date, the NZQA and NZVCC, delegated authority to their associated bodies, in order to implement QA within tertiary education providers. A key task of the NZQA was the introduction of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). The Education Amendment Act, 1990, introduced a single regulatory framework for all TEIs.

The most significant development, in assuring quality in institutions such as ABC College, has been the development of the NQF. The NQF, according to NZQA (1991a, 1991c, 2007), is the basis for co-ordinating and integrating a coherent, flexible, post-compulsory education and training sector. A unified system was developed with the intention of breaking down the artificial binary division between academic and vocational education (Smithers, 1997). The NQF was developed with the concept of common building blocks¹⁹ distributed over eight levels placed over a single, 'harmonised' qualifications framework. Each level arbitrarily represents progressively more complex or difficult outcomes required of learners (NZQA, 1991a, 1991c, 1993). All learning, whether academic or vocational, was organised into units, which were described in terms of outcomes. This new system was intended to be flexible and was designed to maximise transferability of: existing knowledge to fresh but related challenges; skills from one domain to another; and qualifications within and between different institutions (Roberts, 1997, pp. 165-166). Whilst all the polytechnics, three of the five colleges of education and the majority of the PTEs

¹⁷ The policy paper identifies the role of this new body as: "to co-ordinate national secondary school qualifications, national vocational qualifications and national advanced academic qualifications" (Ministry of Education, 1989b, p. 44).

¹⁸ The responsibility for quality in the university sector was delegated to the NZVCC. In any case, the universities had earlier expressed their opposition to close involvement with the proposed NEQA. The NZQA was also required under the legislation to consult with the NZVCC, before establishing policies that would refer to universities.

¹⁹ The building blocks, which were the 'units of learning', eventually came to be known as 'unit standards'. Qualifications were to be obtained by the aggregation of unit standards. An eight-level framework was initially established by the NZQA with Level 1 being the lowest and equal to School Certificate (a national certificate attained at the end of year 11) and Level 8 the highest at post-graduate qualifications. Levels 1-4 led to National Certificates, whilst Levels 5-6 included post school qualifications and covered a range of learning from pre-employment level to diplomas. Level 7 was assigned to initial degrees, whilst higher degrees and higher certificates and diplomas, including masters and doctoral degrees, were assigned level 8 (NZQA, 1991a, 1991b; 1993).

were, by 1997, accredited to offer some unit standards, none of the universities became involved in the NQF.

The rhetoric underpinning the introduction of reforms of New Zealand qualifications has been a complex combination of government, bureaucratic, business and educational influences (Roberts, 1997, p. 165). Many have argued against the instrumentalist logic embodied in the NQF and particularly the inappropriateness and unsuitability of such atomised learning in the university sector (Blackmur, 2002, 2004; Codd, 1997; Hall, 1994; NZVCC, 1994). The NZQA intended to remove the distinction between the vocational and academic modes of education. It was alleged that the emphasis on skills, relevant to the world of work, which was advanced by employers and politicians, influenced the NZQA discourses and practices. Codd, McAlpine and Poskitt (1995) portray tensions between 'educational' and 'political' approaches to assessment. They consider the former as involving greater professionalism in education, whilst the latter embodies the New Right discourse of accountability, managerialism and market forces – the 'marketisation imperative'. Hence, it is clearly evident that these policy reforms in qualifications have been fraught with controversy, since they were driven by contradictory and competing objectives.

Amidst an atmosphere of discord and stalemate and in order to resolve these issues, the Tertiary Lead Group (TLG) was set up by the Minister of Education in 1994. The TLG was charged with the challenging task of 'how' to incorporate degrees into the national qualifications framework (TLG, 1994). Subsequently, the TLG unanimously recommended that all degrees be incorporated into a single harmonised qualifications framework. Their report also recommended the setting up of a Tertiary Qualifications Co-ordinating Committee and a Tertiary Action Group (TAG), to advise the NZQA Board on the implementation of the single harmonised qualifications framework. The TAG in turn recommended that all qualifications and their component parts be expressed in terms of learning outcomes (TAG, 1996). Under the modified NQF regime, provider qualifications would be part of the future structure but would be required to meet three 'quality' criteria: (1) have level and credit specificity, (2) provide an assurance of quality, and (3) have clearly specified outcomes (Hall, 1997). In March 2001, after extensive consultations with the NZVCC, the Association of Polytechnics New Zealand (APNZ) and the Association of Colleges of Education in New Zealand (ACENZ), the NZQA Board agreed to expand the NQF and establish

the Register of Quality Assured Qualifications, now commonly referred to as 'the Register' (NZQA, 2003).

4.2.4 Recent Developments

4.2.4.1 The Register of Quality Assured Qualifications (2003)

The Register is a comprehensive list of all quality assured qualifications in New Zealand. This Register, considered one of the most significant advances in recent years in New Zealand qualifications reform, aims to:

- identify clearly all quality assured qualifications in New Zealand;
- ensure that all qualifications have a purpose and relation to each other that students and the public can understand;
- maintain and enhance learners' ability to transfer credit by the establishment of a common system of credit; and
- enhance and build on the international recognition of New Zealand qualifications. (NZQA, 2003, p. 2)

The Register incorporates both qualifications registered on the NQF and other qualifications, based on criteria such as QA of the qualification by a quality approval body and there is also an increase in the number of levels from 8 to 10 for classifying qualifications (see Figure 4.1). The NQF, comprised of unit and achievement standards, continues to be a key subset of the Register (Davies & Burke, 2005; NZQA, 2003, 2007).

In both the NQF and the Register, the levels depend on the complexity of learning and they do not equate with the time (years) spent in learning. The purposes for which the NQF and the Register were developed correspond similarly in terms of classification and thus provide information (creating pathways), regulation (control and compliance) and comparability (both locally and internationally) (Frederick, 2005).

The major difference between the NQF and the Register is that the latter has an expanded set of levels, from 1 to 10, whereas 1 is the lowest level and least complex in terms of learning requirements and 10 is the highest and most complex in terms of learning requirements (see Figure 4.1).

10	Doctorates
9	Masters
8	Postgraduate Diplomas and Certificates, Bachelors with Honours
7	Bachelors Degrees, Graduate Diplomas
6	Diplomas
5	
4	
3	Certificates
2	
1	

Figure 4.1 The Ten-Level Qualifications Framework (Qualifications and Titles)

Figure taken from NZQA (2003, p. 2)

Another difference is the building block. Unlike the NQF, where smaller components in the form of unit standards can be registered, the Register requires the registration of whole qualifications only. Therefore, for each qualification there must be a statement of learning outcomes. The registration criteria are intended to ensure that “quality assurance of qualifications is consistently applied; people can compare qualifications; and people can make informed choices about which qualification pathway they will pursue.” (NZQA, 2003)

From 2001, polytechnics such as ABC College were able to provide learning at all levels of the Framework, including degree level programmes. According to NZQA (1991b), units of learning enable polytechnics to offer more flexibility in choice and career paths for their students.

4.2.4.1 A ‘Third Way’ in higher education quality assurance?

The education reforms, that commenced in the late 1980s in New Zealand under the influence of neoliberal thinking, continued in the 1990s, with a strong influence from the discourse of economics (Codd, 2005). During the 1990s, education became more market oriented and this brought elements of commercialisation and competition to the forefront. In higher education, the system experienced “a policy regime characterised by higher (but subsidised) fees, means-tested student allowances, and a government-funded, income-contingent loans scheme based on the principles of user-pays and targeted social assistance” (Peters, 1997, p. 233). According to Peters (1997), this particular policy mix, which was introduced into tertiary education, reflected a fundamental shift from the political philosophy of the early 1980s: a shift

from social democratic values to one based on the neoliberal view, which emphasised individual responsibility. National economic interests became the central focus in determining education policy. Thus, in the 1990s, tertiary educational policies were similarly framed in neoliberal terms.

In November 1998, the then National Government produced a *Tertiary White Paper* which proposed a new tertiary education quality regime. However, at the end of 1999, when the Labour-led coalition government was elected, there was a change in policy direction. The ideas for a new overarching agency [Quality Assurance Authority of New Zealand] (QAANZ Report, 1999) were dropped and the NZQA's continuation was re-confirmed, albeit with an "overarching role in relation to qualifications and QA in post-compulsory education" (Philips, 2003, p. 296).

More recently, the neoliberal ideological orientation appears to have been moderated. A central concern of the Labour-led Government has been to reform the previous administrations' "competitive model in tertiary education [that] had led to unsatisfactory outcomes in terms of both the quality and the appropriateness of the skills produced" (Office of the Prime Minister, as cited in Strathdee, 2005, p. 6). A 'Third Way' is now in place and education stands prominently in Third Way priorities.

In terms of structural changes that affect QA in the sector, a new single central steering body named the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) was established for the whole tertiary education system (Tertiary Education Commission [TEC], 2007a). This former market model is now juxtaposed with a highly bureaucratised system, in which 'steering instruments' have become forms of micro management, surveillance and control. The two main steering instruments of this new millennium, tertiary education system are the 'charters' and 'profiles' (TEC, 2007b). The TEC requires all publicly funded providers to negotiate a charter that will describe the distinctive characteristics of the provider. This charter also requires that the organisational vision, mission and goals for a medium-to-long term period are stated. As in the corporate sector, charters have essentially become instruments of accountability. The TEC also requires providers to present profiles for all recognised tertiary education providers, whether they are publicly or privately funded. This profile provides comprehensive information concerning each provider and is used for monitoring performance and maintaining accountability (Codd, 2002). A New Zealand education sector review undertaken in 2005, based on feedback from TEIs, observes that whilst the process of

developing charters and profiles had been useful for their own internal planning purposes, they were also regarded as a costly compliance exercise (State Services Commission [SSC], 2005).

Shortly after the election of the Labour-led Government into office in 1999, a new agency – the Tertiary Education Advisory Commission (TEAC) – was formed as part of the government strategy to commence a comprehensive review of the sector. The Government proposed new reforms in tertiary education, with the overall objective of making the tertiary education sector more flexible and relevant to the needs of the economy. The TEAC subsequently produced four reports strategising the future direction of tertiary education. Following these reports, the Government released the *Tertiary Education Strategy* (TES) document, which outlines six priority goals for the sector, from 2002 to 2007 (Ministry of Education, 2002). The Government periodically issues Statements of Tertiary Education Priorities (STEP), as part of a wider Tertiary Education Strategy²⁰.

STEP 2005-2007 continued to balance economic and social priorities, although the balance appears to tilt in favour of the economic (Zepke & Leach, 2006). STEP 2005-2007 introduced accountability measures, in order that tertiary providers and central QA bodies “sharpen the focus of their QA arrangements on effective teaching and learning ... prioritising improved learning outcomes as part of quality assurance processes” (Ministry of Education, 2002, p. 10). A recent review (Ministry of Education, 2006, p. 15) showed that the broad nature of the TES and the STEP makes it difficult to assess the strategic relevance of the provision of tertiary education. The Review also showed that the TEOs have seen the implementation of the TES as “largely mechanistic, through profiles and charters, rather than influencing thinking about change” (Ministry of Education, 2006, p. 14).

Lately, the way forward for tertiary education appears to involve the three key policy elements: (1) defining the ‘distinctive contributions’ of different types of tertiary education institutions; (2) the introduction of a more centralised funding mechanism; and (3) the development of robust QA and monitoring systems, that focus on outcomes (Cullen, 2006, pp. 2-3). The Government appears to have noted some of the negative effects of reforms during the 1990s and seeks to rectify these with new policy

²⁰ TES 2007, incorporating STEP 2008 – 2010 has been released in 2007 (Ministry of Education, 2007).

initiatives. This is indicative of the fact that the earlier emphasis on an ‘across the portfolio’ approach has not worked in the New Zealand tertiary education system. One of the effects of the reforms, argues Dr. Michael Cullen, Minister for Tertiary Education and also Deputy Prime Minister, is that organisations pushed their boundaries without sufficient reference to each other and hence the “understanding of the distinctive contributions of each part of the sector was at risk of being lost” (Cullen, 2006, p. 3). In view of this fact, the Government is expected to set baseline expectations concerning what Tertiary Education Organisations should focus on and what outcomes they should achieve. No doubt, the universities will continue to provide research-led degrees and post-graduate education and to undertake research, disseminate knowledge and promote learning.

In summary, the forgoing discussion has examined the macro education policy making context, within which QA policies and structures emerged in New Zealand. The discussion provided a brief insight, through an historical perspective, of the influences that contributed to the changes in New Zealand. It was demonstrated that policies were influenced by a wider agenda of economic restructuring and public sector reforms. Other factors include the ideological shift to the political Right and the quest for accountability within bureaucracy. Boston (1991) associates a group of reform-minded policy analysts, who were familiar with the theoretical literature of the new institutional economics, as an influential factor for these changes. The review also showed how the new qualifications authority came into being, amidst great tensions arising from the wider institutional and national context of public sector reforms. The NQF and its contentious ‘unit standard’ model were identified as the key elements within the qualifications reform. Quality and QA processes in tertiary education institutions parallel these macro policy developments.

4.3 Current Quality Assurance Systems in New Zealand Tertiary Education

Under the Education Act 1989, the NZQA (or in the case of universities, the NZVCC) is the body primarily responsible for QA matters in the tertiary education sector. The NZQA’s broad QA functions are outlined in section 253 (1) of the Act. Appendix M provides a summary of the current QA system in the New Zealand tertiary education sector. The table in this appendix includes QA bodies, together with their respective functions and their corresponding tertiary providers, as they existed in 2006. Given the current qualifications framework, these include: overseeing the setting, monitoring

and review of standards for national qualifications on the NQF and the policies and criteria for the approval of non-national courses; and registration (where relevant), course approval and accreditation of providers to deliver an approved course or award credits on the NQF (SSC, 2005).

All QA functions, in relation to universities, are the responsibility of the NZVCC, and these are performed by the Committee on University Academic Programmes (CUAP), which is a standing committee within NZVCC. Under the provisions of the Education Act 1989, NZQA has delegated responsibility for QA within the Institutes of Technology and Polytechnics (ITPs), up to and including undergraduate degrees, to the Institutes of Technology and Polytechnics (ITPNZ). These delegated powers are operated by the Institutes of Technology and Polytechnics Quality (ITP Quality), which is an independent committee of ITPNZ that has been operating as a Quality Assurance Body (QAB) since January 2003. The NZQA has also formally delegated QA powers, for Colleges of Education (up to sub-degree level), to the Association of Colleges of Education New Zealand (ACENZ), whose powers are operated on its behalf by the (Colleges of Education Accreditation Committee) CEAC.

The NZQA retains responsibility for performing QA functions relating to degree programmes outside universities (except for undergraduate degrees delivered in ITPs). This function is undertaken by the Approval, Accreditation and Audit Group (AAA) within NZQA, which effectively operates as NZQA's QAB. The legislation requires the delegated Quality Assurance Bodies (QABs) to comply with the criteria and policies established by NZQA for the exercise of its functions and powers. QABs are audited against their effectiveness with regard to the conditions of the delegation and a set of audit standards.

The QA process consists of three key elements: (1) registration; (2) course approval and accreditation; and (3) the monitoring and audit of QA standards (SSC, 2005).

4.3.1 Registration of Private Training Establishments (PTEs)

Private Training Establishments (PTEs) in New Zealand are required to be registered²¹, in order to be eligible to receive government funding, which is

²¹ In New Zealand, schools, polytechnics, universities, colleges of education and wananga do not need to be registered since they have been established under the Education Act 1989. The Industry Training Organisations (ITOs) are recognised under the Industry Training Act 1992.

administered by TEC. Registration is also a requirement, in order to award NQF credits for qualifications listed on the NQF and to offer international students approved courses or courses of over three months duration (SSC, 2005). Registration is undertaken by the NZQA. Registration of a PTE indicates that it is capable of providing high quality education and training in a sound and safe learning environment. Registration usually occurs before the provider has commenced operations. Hence, a further quality audit is undertaken within 12 months of registration, to ensure the provider is complying with the quality standards (SSC, 2005).

4.3.2 Course Approval and Accreditation

The second major QA process involves course approval and accreditation. Approved tertiary courses must satisfy the gazetted criteria, following consultation where required. The criteria for course approval differ, depending on whether the course is at sub-degree or degree level. However, “generally speaking, an approved course is one that meets the requirements of clear and consistent aims, content, learning outcomes and assessment practices” (SSC, 2005, p. 60). The course approval stage also assigns a credit value. This credit value is used to determine the Equivalent Full Time Student (EFTS) value for TEC funding purposes and the level of the course on the NQF. In order for a tertiary education provider to offer approved courses or assess against unit standards registered on the NQF, it must also meet the requirements for accreditation established by NZQA. Accreditation is required for the delivery of each approved course or (in the case of national qualifications) to assess against a particular field on the NQF (SSC, 2005). Under the Education Act, the NZQA has wide powers for the accreditation of providers wanting to offer courses. The NZQA may also issue compliance notices and registration and/or accreditation may be revoked if non-compliance persists.

4.3.3 Monitoring and Audit of Quality Assurance Standards

In addition to meeting the course approval and/or provider accreditation requirements for individual courses, tertiary education providers are required to demonstrate on-going compliance with overarching QA standards, relating to all aspects of the development, delivery and assessment of education and training (SSC, 2005). Providers have to put in place a quality management system, which demonstrates the necessary policies, procedures and review mechanisms to maintain the quality

standards. Providers are expected to meet the goals and objectives of the quality standards, as they relate to the teaching and learning activities. Providers are generally audited by the respective QAB every one to three years (depending on performance) against the QA standards, in order to maintain ongoing registration, accreditation and course approval. In addition, the NZQA or a delegated QAB may monitor a particular course or category of courses, where there are concerns about quality.

4.3.4 Quality Audit Approach

An audit is not deemed to be a QA process under the Education Act. Accordingly, the NZQA's legislative responsibility continues to be the approval of courses and provider accreditation. For QA purposes, the move towards a quality audit approach is clearly evident in the New Zealand higher education system. Despite the move towards such an approach, which vests greater responsibility in the assessments of academic boards, the ultimate responsibility for external QA continues to rest with the NZQA, NZVCC (for universities) and the delegated QABs.

With respect to the government administered polytechnic sector, ITP Quality has taken an audit approach since 2000. Since September 2005, the NZQA has also introduced new differentiated procedures for course approval and provider accreditation (SSC, 2005). These procedures make a distinction between the type and level of information TEOs must provide to the QA body, in order for them to demonstrate compliance with criteria for course approval and provider accreditation. Providers with a good audit history, particularly with regard to course development, delivery and review in that field, are not required to provide direct evidence that all the criteria for course approval and accreditation have been met. Rather, they are required to provide a higher level of detail, thus providing evidence that the academic board has followed the appropriate quality management system (QMS) processes and applied the necessary quality standards.

4.4 The ABC College

The ABC College is a New Zealand multi-campus tertiary institution founded as a Technical Institute over 90 years ago (ABC College, 2007b; Dougherty, 1999). In 2005, the ABC College had an overall student population of over 22,000, including over 6,000 EFTS. The ABC College's recent annual reports show a steady increase in enrolments. Under New Zealand legislation this institution is classified as a polytechnic. The institution offers a wide range of degree, diploma and certificate

courses at its campuses. Programmes range from foundation courses to post-graduate degrees. The programmes at the ABC College are oriented towards a vocational and applied focus (ABC College, 2007a). It responds to regional skills and economic development needs and strengths.

With the TEC playing a leading role in funding tertiary education in New Zealand and also a revised STEP, the ABC College has faced unprecedented challenges in the last few years. A student-driven funding environment currently prevails, creating challenges for the institution in the competition for students. The current and short-term focus, presented in its profile²², signals further gains in enrolment, on-line provision of courses, internationalisation and development of newly acquired campuses (ABC College, 2005). The current profile of the ABC College outlines (for the College's stakeholders and the TEC) the overall plan the ABC College will be working to during the period 2006-2008, in order to achieve its strategic goals and aspirations. The ABC College sees its mission as one that is geared "to provide its communities with universal access to applied education and training services that are relevant to the twenty-first century work and social environment" (ABC College, 2005, p. 13). The ABC College believes that "quality improvement and assurance processes are essential to striving for excellence in education" (ABC College, 2005, p. 14). At the time of this research, the ABC College was engaged in a major new programme of *e-learning* initiative, whereby it aims to transform most of its educational programmes to distance learning formats. The ABC College has also launched offshore NZQA-approved programmes and it takes pride in its increasing student satisfaction survey scores.

The Academic Statute of the ABC College is considered the principal basis of its Academic Quality Management System (AQMS)²³. This is the legal instrument that provides the authority for the institution to award its qualifications. Hence, it provides the framework for the processes and accountabilities for academic QA within the institution (ABC College, 2005).

²² All tertiary education institutions in New Zealand are required to submit to the government a 'Profile' which documents their short to medium term objectives and planned changes.

²³ AQMS is outlined in a manual consisting of core policies which enable the institution to operate effectively and efficiently.

A range of both informal and formal QA processes is practised within the institution. The informal methods, which may include lecturers' informal reviews with students, are not documented or monitored in any formal sense. The range of formal QA processes implemented at ABC College is governed by a set of elaborate policies that are documented and made available to the staff concerned on the institution's intranet. These formal QA processes will be discussed under the themes that emerged from the case study data presented in Chapter Five.

Part II: The USP Context

4.5 Introduction to the USP

The University of the South Pacific is a leading provider of higher education in the South Pacific region, which is composed of a number of small island states. The USP is regarded as an international centre of excellence for teaching and research on all aspects of Pacific culture and environment. It serves 12 member countries from the region, namely, the Cook Islands, the Fiji Islands, Kiribati, the Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue, Samoa, the Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu (USP, 2006).

The USP's three main campuses are located in Fiji, Samoa and Vanuatu. Twelve other smaller campuses are also distributed amongst the other member countries. The USP is a multi-modal university, offering programmes through the conventional mode, in addition to distance education. It offers courses both on campus and by distance and also flexible learning (DFL) in a variety of modes, including print, video-broadcast, face-to-face and online. For its students, the USP's satellite network, USPNet, serves as a gateway for interaction, information, research and higher learning. According to the USP website, "collectively the university's Campuses are located across 33 million square kilometres of ocean covering five different time zones" (USP, 2006).

As a regional university established in 1968, accountable to member countries, the institution has developed various mechanisms for ensuring the quality of its educational programmes. Over the years, the university has accumulated a wealth of knowledge in meeting and maintaining standards. Historically and geographically, the USP is well placed to draw from the educational establishments of New Zealand and

Australia, two countries with longer and more established traditions of higher education.

4.6 Historical Context of the USP

The establishment of the USP in 1968 cannot be divorced from the historical traditions of higher education development in the South Pacific and it is also related to geo-political interests that prevailed in the region. Hence, a brief overview of this historical context, in which the USP was established and evolved, is undertaken in this section.

Higher education in the Pacific Islands resulted from a historical tradition of theological education which had remained in the region for over a hundred years, since the arrival of the first London Missionary Society, that established its own schools (Crocombe, Baba, & Meleisea, 1988). This was followed by a period that witnessed the introduction of medical education. The Rockefeller Foundation, in the late 1920s and 1930s, financed the establishment of the Central Medical School in Suva, Fiji, with the aim of training doctors for the South Pacific islands. The early beginnings of theological and medical education, whilst they could be seen to have served useful purposes in themselves, could also be seen as motivated by other objectives where “the most talented islanders were drawn into tasks which oriented them away from political, commercial and other ambitions, and kept the public amenable at the same time” (Crocombe et al., 1988, p. 21).

The British, French and Americans all contributed their share to the setting up of higher education projects in the South Pacific. Some of these projects led to the establishment of universities.²⁴ The post second world war period of decolonisation also saw great enthusiasm for higher education. As Crocombe et al. (1988) noted, “universities were an inevitable by-product of the new international tide of independence and opportunity” (p. 28).

²⁴ The University of Papua New Guinea was established by Australia in 1966: the University of Guam by the US in 1963 and the University of French Polynesia by the French in 1988. Other influences in the region included the sending of Melanesians from West New Guinea (Irian Jaya), which was a Dutch colony, to the Netherlands and the setting up of the Indonesian Cenderawasih University in Irian Jaya, when it was taken over by Indonesia in 1962. In the northern Pacific islands closer to Japan (Okinawa), there were several universities teaching in the Japanese language, although they were controlled by the US until 1972. In the Far East, Easter Islanders went to the University of Chile in Santiago and were taught in Spanish. In the south, Norfolk and Lord Howe Islanders went to Australia (Crocombe et al., 1988).

It is possible that because of the special nature of the establishment of this regional university, the USP has, from its inception, maintained relations with a number of other tertiary institutions. These linkages include relationships with post-secondary institutions within Fiji itself, the Pacific Island States and also metropolitan universities, particularly in Britain, Australia and New Zealand. The USP, in a similar way to the University of Papua New Guinea (UPNG) and the University of Guam (UOG), appointed, from the beginning, internationally distinguished external examiners from around the world. These measures were seen as essential to counter cynicism and opposition within the communities served by these new Pacific HEIs. This also “spurred staff and students to stronger commitments to the maintenance of standards” (Crocombe et al., 1988, p. 28). Staff were also recruited from a wide range of countries, but mainly from the Commonwealth members and the United States. The USP was initially conceptualised along the model of the University of the West Indies (UWI), which was set up to serve the United Kingdom’s (UK’s) existing and former Caribbean colonies and it was linked to the University of London for accreditation. This was the UK’s model for higher education, initially envisaged for the Pacific Islands.

The establishment of the USP has important historical linkages and connections with the United Kingdom and New Zealand.

At the outset, it was to be a regional sub-university, for the training of teachers and technical personnel (Crocombe et al., 1988). The institution was to be established at the Royal New Zealand Air Force flying boat base at Laucala Bay, Suva, Fiji. However, with interest, particularly from Fiji, to widen the scope of the institution to more than a secondary teacher training college and to provide for other forms of higher education, discussions were held which resulted in a joint mission from Britain and New Zealand. Australia was also invited to join this enquiry into the various suggestions for higher education in the South Pacific. The Joint Mission led by Sir Charles (later Lord) Morris, who was Vice-Chairman of the Inter-University Council of Higher Education Overseas, London and a former Vice Chancellor of the University of Leeds, visited the Pacific towards the end of 1965 (USP, 1969). The Morris Report, which was issued in 1965, recommended the establishment of an autonomous University of the South Pacific at Laucala Bay, to serve the English-speaking people of the South Pacific Region.

The Morris Mission paid special attention to aspects of quality, in respect of the university they proposed. Their report states:

In our conception of such a university we have in mind two main principles, both of which we hold to be of cardinal importance. The first is that in the whole field of higher education, whether in degree courses or diploma courses, the highest quality must be ensured in teaching and in student achievement. The second is that all courses of instruction, both for degrees and for diplomas, must be so designed as to take well into account both the interests and aptitudes of the students of the Region and also circumstances and needs of the countries concerned... (as cited in Aikman, 1988, p. 36)

Subsequent to the publication of the Morris report, the Inter-University Council appointed Sir Norman Alexander CBE, retired Vice Chancellor of Ahmadu Bello University, Nigeria, as the Academic Planner, to draw up a detailed plan for the development of the University (Aikman, 1988, p. 36). With the New Zealand Government's agreement to hand over their Royal New Zealand Air Force base to the Government of Fiji and with financial contributions from the British Government, the USP was finally set up in 1968. The University opened for pre-degree courses on 5 February 1968 with 160 students. Dr. Colin C. Aikman, Professor of Jurisprudence and Constitutional Law and Dean of the Faculty of Law of Victoria University, Wellington, was appointed the first Vice Chancellor of the USP.

The mission of USP is defined in its charter, which states:

The objects of the University shall be the maintenance, advancement and dissemination of knowledge by teaching, consultancy and research and otherwise, and the provision at appropriate levels of education and training responsive to the well-being and needs of the communities of the South Pacific. . . . (as cited in Crocombe et al., 1988, p. 47)

By the early 1980s, the University had recorded a substantial growth and diversification of its courses and programmes. Student enrolments had increased to about 5,000 in formal qualifications-oriented programmes, which included courses through the University Extension services. This was equivalent to more than 3,000 full-time students. However, by this time, there were worrying signs in terms of quality since the university could not maintain its recruitment of staff. There was also a disturbing regress in the ratio of teaching staff to students.

4.7 Recent Developments at the USP

The USP has grown substantially in enrolments, in addition to its programmes and their levels. The University is at the centre of tertiary education activities in the

region, thus fulfilling its regional role for which it was established nearly forty years ago. It works closely with the national HEIs and offers them professional and technical support, whilst actively competing with universities outside the region (PDO, 2002; USP, 2004). Close cooperation is maintained with a number of institutions. Arrangements for cross crediting are in place with the Fiji Institute of Technology, Fiji College of Advanced Education, PNG University of Technology, Solomon Islands College of Higher Education and the National University of Samoa. The relationship with the Fiji School of Medicine (FSM) is by far the most advanced, in that FSM meets all the costs of training whilst USP, which sets the required standards, awards its degrees to FSM graduates (PDO, 2002).

During the 1990s, when quality became an over-riding global theme in higher education, developments in the USP also reflected these trends. Demands for quality improvement and QA at the university have come in varying forms and magnitude from many sources, including member governments, aid donors, business communities and several university committees. For the first time, the *USP Strategic Plan*, adopted in 1998, identified the need to have a comprehensive quality management system in place within the USP. This plan stated that:

Within the next three years, the University will consolidate its quality assurance effort into a quality management plan for the USP as a whole. (PDO, 2002, p. 49)

In 2003 the USP appointed its first Quality Assurance Manager (USP, 2003) and adopted its new Quality Strategy in 2004. The USP Quality Strategy encompasses a whole institution approach to quality involving the design, implementation and continuous improvement of all the university's processes and activities that ensure a quality learning environment (PDO, 2004). It is largely informed by internationally accepted good practice, which according to USP is that "quality assurance activities provide higher education institutions with a means of verifying the extent to which academic standards are comparable with those of other institutions, and by meeting the expectations of stakeholders in the communities they serve" (PDO, 2004, pp. 10-11).

The secondary case study of the USP will examine the development of QA at USP and focus on the role of its external linkages for QA, in relation to its overall institutional QA policy and practice. A particular purpose of this component of the

study was to draw useful lessons, particularly from external QA policies and practices, in order to illuminate the study of QA policy and practice at the MCHE.

Part III: The Maldives Context

4.8 The Maldives: A Brief Introduction

Prior to presenting the analysis of data from the Maldives case study, it is pertinent to provide a brief background to the local context, since the requirement and need for QA is partly generated from factors associated with this context. This will require an understanding of the historical background from which the various influences on local higher education have emerged.

The Republic of Maldives is an archipelago of 1192 coral islands set vertically across the equator in the middle of the Indian Ocean. These islands, of which only 199 are continuously inhabited, are small and low-lying where the highest point is no more than two metres above sea level. Global warming and sea level rise have consequently become major environmental concerns. The Maldives are believed to have been settled by Aryan immigrants from Southern India and Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) in the 4th and 5th Century B.C. (Bell, 1883/2004). According to Bell, some records also indicate that inhabitants settled there as far back as 500 B.C. The geographic location of the Maldives places it in the centre of the major sea routes between the Middle East and East Asia, including China. Thus, contact with Arab and Persian traders, who travelled the Indian Ocean, grew over time. This exposure eventually led to the acceptance of the Islamic faith by King Kalaminja, in 1153 A.D. According to Bell (2004), the official declaration of Islam as the state religion resulted in efforts to remove earlier Buddhist influences and take necessary steps to firmly establish the new religion of Islam throughout the islands. Centuries of monarchy gave way to a republican form of government in 1968. The language of the Maldives is Dhivehi, with its roots in Sanskrit and other Indo-European derivatives. A unique script called *Thaana*, with a strong Arabic influence, has been used for writing for several centuries. The population of close to 300,000 (based on the 2006 Census) are dispersed amongst 199 islands, with one third of them having less than 500 inhabitants.

For centuries, Maldivians have endured a subsistence living dependent on fishing and agriculture. More recently, fishing and tourism have played major roles in the economic development of the country and similarly communication and service sector businesses have made gains in economic importance.

4.9 Development of the Maldives Accreditation Board (MAB)

4.9.1 Purpose

The MAB was set up to ensure uniform and high standards within post-secondary education in the Maldives. The MAB uses the Maldives National Qualifications Framework (MNQF) (see Appendix N) as a mechanism to achieve two key outcomes, namely, to:

1. Facilitate the development of a QA mechanism for the post-secondary education sector.
2. Provide a framework for recognition of qualifications offered in the Maldives and abroad. (MAB, 2001b)

The MAB has the responsibility to validate the quality of courses and their corresponding awards offered by both government and private providers. According to the MNQF, it is mandatory for Bachelor, Master and Doctoral degrees to undergo accreditation. This framework also accommodates Certificate (I, II and III), Advanced Certificate and Diploma and Advanced Diploma courses, whilst encompassing both Further Education and Higher Education courses.

4.9.2 Membership of MAB

The MAB was set up under the Ministry of Education (MOE) by a Presidential letter²⁵. At the time of this development, MCHE functioned under the Office of the President. Hence, the MAB was organisationally quite independent of the MCHE. Chaired by the Minister of Education, the MAB had 11 members. Six members were appointed for their academic expertise and senior leadership roles and a further four members were appointed for their expertise in various fields of the education sector.

4.9.3 Accreditation Process of MAB

The proposed model of accreditation to be followed in the Maldives involved a two-stage process. The two stages would include first the obtaining of prior approval to

²⁵ Under the Constitutional powers vested in the President of the Maldives, the President can establish departments and other statutory bodies through official directives, decrees or letters.

commence a programme, followed by the actual accreditation process as the second stage. The proposed process was to be as follows:

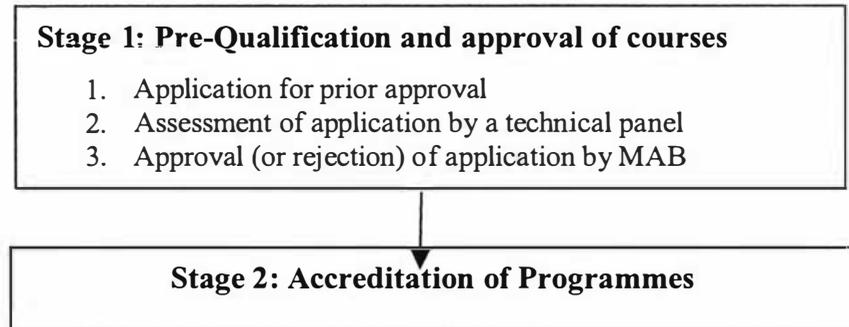


Figure 4.2 The Approval and accreditation process of MAB

Figure generated from interview notes and MAB (2001b).

At the first stage, the higher education provider sends an application for course approval. This approval is required to be obtained prior to commencement of teaching. No provider can begin teaching a programme, leading to an award in the MNQF, without first obtaining this approval. The submission of the course document would follow a template provided by the MAB. This template requires details of the course structure and course content, in addition to policies and procedures in a number of aspects and includes: the academic load defined through credit hour and credit points; entry qualifications; instruction and academic staffing; examinations and assessment and student withdrawal; student records; and the institutional and managerial capacity of the course provider. Each of the above mentioned areas need further points detailing the requirements for submission. The guidelines also included a format for the preparation of subject outlines. This format required the identification of the curricular content planned for each lecture / tutorial session (MAB, 2001).

Once an application for course approval is received, a panel appointed by the MAB reviews the course document. The panel would normally consist of three professionals from the subject areas. Individual subject outlines may be sent to peer reviewers for their comments. Subject outlines may be revised on the basis of comments from these subject matter experts. Approval to start a course is given, based on the assessment of the panel. Once a course provider commences the teaching of an approved course, the MAB reviews the progress of course delivery through a process of observation, document analysis, and staff and student interviews (Mohamed, 2005). This stage, which comes in-between the two main stages of the model, has been found to be in operation for private providers only. The Government provider, the MCHE, is

exempted from this process of observation and review of course delivery. This can be construed as either an application of double standards for private and public institutions or the recognition of the strength of internal QA mechanisms at the MCHE.

In theory, full recognition of the course would be achieved when it is accredited. This stage would then constitute the second stage in the process of accreditation. The details of how actual accreditation would take place were expected to be developed by the Board. However, at the time of this study, six years into the operation of the QA model in the Maldives, it has not yet reached the stage of actually accrediting courses.

4.10 The MCHE

Until recently, in the absence of a broad profile tertiary education system, a number of separate postsecondary institutions were set up to serve the vocational and technical education needs of the country in the areas of health, education, tourism, technology, the maritime industry, management, administration, public and private accountancy, Islamic studies and justice (Asian Development Bank, 1998). These institutions evolved into a disjointed system through the initiatives of a number of ministries, in relation to their respective activities and functions. The Maldives College of Higher Education grew out of the amalgamation of these uncoordinated institutions of postsecondary education (Maldives College of Higher Education [MCHE], 2003).

The post-secondary institutions, that were amalgamated, have operated for various durations ranging from 10-30 years. They have offered vocational and technical courses at certificate and diploma levels. This is reflected in the courses that the MCHE continues to offer at the present time. Table 4.1 provides a profile of the level of courses offered by MCHE in 2003 and 2006.

Table 4.1

Courses Offered by MCHE by Level (March 2003 and 2006)

Year	Total offered	Certificate	Advanced Certificate	Diploma	Advanced Diploma	Bachelor Degree	Post Graduate
Totals (2003)	66	41	9	12	2	2*	1 ⁺
Totals (2006)	90	13	28	24	8	10	3 ⁺

Note. * This includes a Bachelor of Business/Information Systems franchised from Middlesex University in the UK (first 2 years only). + This includes a Masters programme in the hospitality area from Birmingham University, UK. From MCHE.

In 2003, MCHE offered only two degree programmes of which one was an overseas degree programme conducted on a franchised basis. One programme was a postgraduate programme, again a foreign programme launched through the assistance of the Asian Development Bank (ADB), for upgrading staff from one particular faculty of MCHE. This programme was also open to other private candidates. The other 60 plus programmes were at sub-degree level. The number of programmes at degree level has increased since 2003. In 2006, MCHE offered ten degree programmes and (except for one) all were locally developed programmes. Lower level courses and postgraduate courses have also increased, which reflects the changing demand for education and training.

Furthermore, the staff profile shows significant differences amongst the faculties. Whilst some faculties have a high proportion of graduate staff amongst their academics, the majority of staff in the other faculties hold sub-degree level qualifications (see Table 4.2).

Table 4.2

Number of MCHE Academic Staff and Qualification Levels: 2002 and 2006

Year	Total no. of Staff	Less than First Degree	1st degree & PG Diploma	Masters Degree	PhD
Totals (2002)	116	54	31	31	0
Totals (2006)	140	34	60	45	1

Note. Table excludes staff from the Centre for Open Learning and it does not include part time lecturers, who often reflect a similar academic profile to that of the fulltime staff. PG = post graduate. Some discrepancy observed in the 2006 total figure provided by the Central Administration of MCHE, reported here, and the total numbers reported by respective Faculty/Centres during questionnaire administration. From MCHE.

As of 2006, only one faculty included a staff member with a doctorate qualification. Nearly 65 percent of the academic staff had qualifications of either less than a first degree or a first degree and only 35 percent had Masterate and higher level qualifications.

The MCHE operates within a socio-cultural environment underpinned by Islamic values and it is a traditional society, giving way to the modern influences of globalisation. The traditional and Islamic value systems prevailing in the country may be seen to lie in tension with the Western models of liberal higher education systems. However, with the introduction of the British model of English medium education, leading to General Certificate of Education (GCE) from the London University

Examination Board, the Maldives has had an open attitude to Western systems of education. This overseas examination continues today with a changeover to Cambridge examination at the ordinary level in 2001. Also, the Faculties of the College have had institutional linkages with universities in Western countries. The majority of MCHE staff were educated in Western universities. Furthermore, MCHE has had a number of institutional linkages with Australian and British universities. The educational links between the Maldives and the Commonwealth countries arise from the country's historical status as a British protectorate (Bray & Adam, 2001). According to Bray and Adam (2001), this historical connection also explains the strong place held by the English language within Maldivian society and its education system.

Despite the Sixth National Development Plan (2001-2005) of the Maldives, which identified the "transformation of MCHE into a university" (MPND, 2001) as a national goal, the issue of transformation was, until recently, received within the MCHE community with much indifference and scepticism. The issue of transformation has at times been prefaced with a question relating to the desirability of such a move (MCHE, 2003). The uncertainty, indeed the confusion regarding transformation amongst the College community, was unequivocally removed when the President of the country announced at the December 2005 graduation ceremony that the government had decided to transform the College to a university by 2007. Realisation of this goal has had major imperatives in terms of managing the change process, particularly in regard to QA.

The MCHE is comprised of six faculties and two centres. Four of the six faculties are engaged in transnational QA activities from various institutions in different countries. These activities range from: conducting franchised courses; conducting internationally recognised model (maritime training) courses; teaching set curricular and conducting overseas exams; conducting BTEC approved courses; and course development and delivery in collaboration with overseas universities (see Appendix O for a full list of international linkages of MCHE). These programmes, in addition to overseas QA obligations, are also simultaneously required to meet the national accreditation requirements.

The primary case study reported in Chapter Six considers some of the issues of QA policy and its implementation both nationally and at the MCHE. The principal mechanism for QA in higher education is approval and accreditation. There is no

specific policy document outlining a rationale for the policy itself, as can be seen in some countries (e.g. Australia and New Zealand). Quality assurance policy in the Maldivian context is generally taken to be what is required to be practised: the practice being approval and accreditation. To date, only two documents, in the form of two booklets have been published by the Maldives Accreditation Board / Ministry of Education: one outlines the Maldives National Qualifications Framework (MNQF) and the other relates to pre-qualification criteria and application for course approval (MAB, 2001a, 2001b). The MNQF document states the three specific QA policies as quoted in Chapter One.

4.11 Conclusion

This chapter has provided the contextual background to the three case studies undertaken in this research. The New Zealand context shows the powerful external influences within a wider agenda of economic restructuring and public sector reforms that impacted in QA development in New Zealand. Discourses of neoliberalism and managerialism, with their quest for accountability within bureaucracy, provided additional rationale for QA, at a level that could be labelled as major reforms by world standards. The examination of the New Zealand context also showed the contesting nature of education policy making and how the NZQA came into being, amidst great tensions arising from the wider institutional and national context of public sector reforms. The ABC College, in line with government policy, has fitted into a highly centralised national QA system that operates for the benefit of the polytechnic sector.

The demands for quality at USP appear to have come from the imperatives of fitting into globally dominant QA practices, brought about by the powerful forces of globalisation. The University is in the early phase of implementing a new Quality Strategy. However, since its inception, the USP has had policies and procedures that maximise and assure quality, particularly through its transnational QA mechanism of External Adviser system.

The Maldives has a relatively small higher education system, which is in its early phase of development. Nevertheless, it is a rapidly expanding higher education system, principally offered through the MCHE and a growing number of private institutions. The decision to establish a national accreditation board and to institute an external QA mechanism, almost simultaneously with the establishment of MCHE, is noteworthy.

The next two chapters will present the case studies on QA within the three contexts presented in this chapter. Chapter Five will present the two secondary case studies; from New Zealand and the USP. Chapter Six will present the primary case study from the Maldives.

Chapter Five

PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

THE SECONDARY CASE STUDIES

Part I: ABC College

5.1 Introduction

As stated at the outset, the aim of this study is to explore and understand issues and problems relating to the development and implementation of quality assurance policies from a glonacal perspective, in the specific local context of public higher education in the Maldives, exemplified by the Maldives College of Higher Education (MCHE). The secondary case studies were undertaken to identify quality assurance (QA) issues that could illuminate the analysis and understanding of QA policy and practice at the primary case study site. The inclusion of cases from other countries in this study also recognises the globalised nature of quality policy in higher education.

This chapter is presented in two parts. Part I presents the case study of the ABC College in New Zealand. The current QA practices of the ABC College were analysed, in relation to the evolving national QA policy framework, using documentary evidence and interview data.

Similarly, Part II of this chapter presents the case study of the USP. The QA policy process at USP is conceptualised within its historical establishment and its regional focus. The university's newly introduced QA strategy was examined, in order to assess how, in particular, the external QA practices fit in with the institution's overall quality strategy. The chapter closes with the identification of common themes from the two secondary case studies.

5.2 Major Themes from ABC College Case Study

The data gathering for this secondary case study focussed on the ABC College's strengths and challenges with respect to assuring quality within a centrally regulated national system. Instead of presenting the case study findings in a simple categorical typology of strengths and challenges, it was deemed that a more meaningful and perceptive approach would be to present and discuss the findings under themes

emerging from the data. The interview data (supported by relevant official documents from the ABC College and national agencies) revealed a number of emergent themes, Table 5.1. The themes were necessarily delimited to the scope of the specific research questions (stated above) and the questions prepared for the semi-structured interviews.

The themes were arrived at through content analysis of interview transcripts through a process of iterative reading, identifying recurrent concepts, clustering related concepts and grouping and developing conceptual constructs (see Chapter Three, pp. 97-99). These themes are grouped under two main groupings: external QA and internal QA. ‘External’ and ‘internal’ are with reference to the institution, and broadly reflect the theoretical framework which has an external (global and national) dimension and an internal (local/institutional) dimension.

Table 5.1

Major Themes from the ABC College Case Study

External quality assurance

- i. National quality assurance discourses
 - Compliance with standards
 - Consistency
 - Accountability versus improvement
 - Competition
- ii. Role of the state
- iii. ‘From front-end accreditation to back-end auditing’
- iv. Globalisation influence on quality assurance policy

Internal quality assurance

- v. Quality management, bureaucracy and dynamic tensions
 - Role of leadership
 - Cost of time
 - vi. Learning and teaching
 - Programme development and moderation
 - Evaluation and monitoring
 - Staff development and awareness
 - vii. Student engagement: Survey and student evaluation
 - viii. Impact on learning and teaching
-

5.3 External Quality Assurance Themes

Over the last one and a half decades, external QA requirements have evolved and adjusted to the legal requirements within New Zealand. Amendments to the Education Act 1989 and subsequent policy changes have contributed to a regime of compliance-oriented accountability systems in tertiary education. These systems continue to grow

or constantly undergo revision. The data from interviews and official documents revealed the following themes related to external QA.

5.3.1 National Quality Assurance Discourses

ABC College recognises that its obligation for quality comes through the Education Act (1989), which calls for the tertiary education sector to “strive to ensure the institution attains the highest standards of excellence in education, training and research” (ABC College, 2005, p. 14). As such, educational excellence is considered an integral approach to organisational performance within the ABC College. Whilst recognising that the College has multiple stakeholders, ABC College considers that quality is one component of ‘excellence’ required in the Act and that quality is largely determined by the extent to which its services successfully meet the needs of its students and other stakeholders and this includes value for their money. A review of ABC College documents revealed that the Institutes of Technology and Polytechnics New Zealand (ITPNZ) definition of quality as ‘fitness for purpose’ was embraced within the notion of quality held by the College (ABC College, 2005). With respect to national QA, the following discourses could be detected from the data: compliance with standards; consistency; accountability versus improvement; and competition.

5.3.1.1 Compliance with standards

The ABC College has had a formal academic quality management system (AQMS) for a long time. Their AQMS is a “documented system of policies and procedures designed to provide confidence to customers/clients that products/services will be delivered consistently and reliably” (ABC College, 2005, p. 15). This documented system provides the framework for academic QA within ABC College. The AQMS is a living dynamic document, which is continually revised. At the time of this research, the Institution had revised its AQMS and brought out its seventh version. This continual revision of the Institute AQMS demonstrated an ongoing commitment to improve its effectiveness and consistency of application. It also showed the institution’s attempts to align quality demands with national standards. A Key Informant (KI)²⁶ from the Institution confirmed the compliance-oriented nature of the QA system as follows:

²⁶ Key Informants interviewed for the ABC College case study were all at managerial positions related to some aspect of the QA system, either at the Institution itself or at a central QA agency.

The major emphasis, certainly up to now, has been making sure that we do in fact comply with the ITP NZ standards. The standards after all are there to check the interests of the students, as well as to ensure the quality of the programmes we deliver. (MQ01-ABC)

The same participant recounted the desirability of the compliance-oriented standards-based system:

It's good for two major reasons. Firstly, it provides those standards that we can measure ourselves against. And [secondly] by having an organization that represents all of the institutions, it's much better than developing our own in isolation. (MQ01-ABC)

This desirability is a view expressed by the majority of the KIs. Asked if a highly regulated centralised system is desirable, another KI articulated that, "having a standard system is the way to go" (MQ04-ABC) because "we are being consistently judged against our peers. So other institutions around the place have *exactly* [emphasis of the KI] the same standards" (MQ04-ABC).

Compliance with standards also ensures that the standards and eventually the certificates are the same throughout the country. A QA system that required a high degree of compliance was deemed excellent. The following reason was offered in support of this claim by one KI:

It does ensure that if I study here or at Southland or wherever, if they are all ITP Q accredited institutions, the standard should be the same. It's the same thing with the unit standards from NZQA. The systems there are robust enough to make sure that if you get a particular national certificate or particular unit standard from anywhere in the country, it should be the same. (MQ06-ABC)

However, a centralised compliance-oriented QA system is not also without its challenges. In individual polytechnics, the burdensome nature of working in such a system was voiced by one participant as "significant". The participant continued:

There are significant reporting mechanisms that we have to report to TEC in terms of enrolments, attendance, success . . . that sort of thing. And more and more that funding is linked to those sorts of results. . . . Obviously it forces organisations like ourselves into reasonably sophisticated mechanisms to actually capture and report that information. (MQ01-ABC)

In order to cope with these reportings, the Institution was using large data bases. Whilst this is "no bad thing" (MQ01-ABC), it comes at a significant cost, stated this participant. Rising cost is a major issue especially from the student perspective, since students appear to contribute a significant amount, "usually as much as the Government," in terms of cost to their own education (MQ01-ABC).

It is apparent that compliance to nationally defined standards, within the polytechnics sector, was a key aspect of the sector's QA policy and practice. Nevertheless, most participants agreed that these standards were minimum standards and that it was open to the institutions to interpret them. One participant summed up this view as follows:

They [ITP Q standards] are less prescriptive now. . . . We had a little bit of an amendment last year and although they give you some idea and some guide, the great thing about it is that it is open to us to interpret. We can put our flavour to it. (MQ04-ABC)

The ABC College has chosen to adopt the ITP Quality standards. These are minimum standards that one would expect a good quality organisation to maintain. Polytechnics, if they desire, can improve on those standards (MQ09-ABC). One participant, associated with the development of standards, reiterated the importance and usefulness of the ownership of the standards by the polytechnic sector. In other words:

It wasn't an outside organisation, like ISO, telling them what standards they should adopt. The polytechnics sector itself did it. There were a lot of consultations. . . . The polytechnics developed 12 standards and they own the standards. . . . So that was a very positive thing to have done. (MQ09-ABC)

5.3.1.2 Consistency

Closely aligned to compliance with standards is the concept of consistency. Many participants expressed the fact that the standards-based QA system brought about consistency amongst the programmes offered by polytechnics. This was also regarded as one of the main strengths of the sector. Consistency, as one participant added, "offers realistic goals for us to achieve" (MQ04-ABC).

The standards also offer consistency for students who travel around the country. Due to this consistency, it was revealed by one participant that, "students can generally transfer" between institutions (MQ06-ABC). The recognition of prior learning, this participant continued, "is not always clear but certainly if you are in the NZQA system, and if you have got a unit standard you can transfer to anywhere across the system" (MQ06-ABC). Thus a primary benefit of consistency was that it offered ready portability of qualifications, an important element of the QA debate in the sector.

5.3.1.3 Accountability versus improvement

The debate about what is effective, from a QA perspective, regarding an accountability-led model versus an improvement-led model, appeared to be an

enduring one. It is a “very fine line” between these two models, contended one participant (MQ02-ABC). This KI elaborated on this point as follows:

Obviously the NZQA has a legislative responsibility to ensure compliance. On those aspects, I think the accountability-led model can work very well. But I think there are parts and they are probably at the programmes level, there is a place for promotion and a more developmental model. Let’s face it; an audit model is looking at things that are wrong. No matter how you try to promote it, that’s really what you are doing. Okay, you’re trying to seek evidence that they have met the standards, but in doing that you are by default looking for things that show that they haven’t met the standards. And it depends on the attitude of the auditor, as to how well they can glean the ‘smoke screen stuff’. (MQ02-ABC)

It is not a question of which one model is to be selected for QA in higher education. Excerpts from the ABC College interviews appear to indicate that there is a place and role for both the accountability-led model as well as the improvement-led model. In particular, in higher education, “accountability must not be reduced to comparing action with externally imposed targets and demands, other than appropriate demands arising from the educational needs of the society” (MQ07-ABC). As observed by one participant, “I don’t think there is any one absolute correct model. But I think we need to perhaps be looking more towards a more blended approach” (MQ02-ABC).

5.3.1.4 Competition

Tertiary education in New Zealand, as in many other countries, has in recent years become more competitive. In the past, “education was an extremely collaborative sector within the country and we have moved into quite a competitive arena”, contended one KI (MQ01-ABC). For ABC College this creates a ‘dynamic tension’ or a ‘healthy friction’. It is striking the balance between collaboration and competition that has become important, since “there are advantages to be gained from both” (MQ01-ABC).

As a regional polytechnic, ABC College was also in competition with other tertiary education institutions (TEIs). The Institution had 240 programmes and only 12 of these award degrees. This point was further contextualised by a KI as follows:

So we are all in quite good competition now. Whereas before the private providers were offering the lower level programmes. So the students can feed into polytechnics and universities now. (MQ05-ABC)

Quality in education has become important due to competition, both nationally as well as internationally. One KI claimed that;

It's a competitive market out there, so we've got to provide the best quality education that we can for our students so that we can attract others, both nationally and internationally. (MQ04-ABC)

5.3.2 Role of the State

The second main theme that emerged from the data was the 'role of the state'. The role of the state, relating to QA in New Zealand, has been previously covered in Chapter Four (see Section 4.2, pp.105-118). Hence, this theme will not be further explored here. It was clearly evident that the state had a direct and quite an active role in bringing about the QA regimes within the tertiary education sector. As far as the polytechnic sector is concerned, the state's role has evolved from that of direct management of institutions, in the past, to greater devolution of management of institutions at the present time.

For many years the Government administered the polytechnics. The change in policies during the 1990s actually decentralised the management of these institutions, but the Government still retained QA as a central regulatory activity. In fact, QA was further strengthened at the central level as the Government increased its regulatory role. In New Zealand the reforms which have occurred since 1999, did not do anything to change the QA and accountability emphasis in the tertiary sector. Developments tend to show that there has been an increase in central control and planning. One participant provided evidence of some amount of control based on past experience and stated that:

I've worked in quality management, probably for about 10 years, and I've seen 2 or 3 systems in place. There is a small amount of control. I mean, they decide on what the quality standards are going to be. (MQ04-ABC)

However, this participant was quick in noting that a degree of control was also maintained by the institution. It was stated that:

As I said before we control them because we put our flavour in. I guess it's our approach to them that makes them successful. If our management wasn't supportive as they are, then there could be some problems because they could be seen as quite prescriptive and controlling. But, no, I think it's the management's attitude and also it's the way we've picked them up and run with them. We see them as being successful.

One central agency participant contested the notion of government control and perceived that it afforded protection for students rather than exercising control for its own sake. According to this participant:

The state does not necessarily control tertiary education through QA. The state provides funding (through taxpayers money) and more and more

individuals are now participating in tertiary education. . . . Many see this as life long learning. Hence, it is important and quite appropriate for the Government to be involved in tertiary education quality. The funding provided must be accounted for. Hence, quality assurance is instituted to actively promote high quality and protect the learners, not to control tertiary education. (MQ03-ABC)

Greater centralisation, in terms of planning, negotiations for funding or even curriculum monitoring does little to improve the quality of education. The approach, whereby the Government sets the QA framework and becomes the supervisor, is consistent with that which has emerged in many developed countries. This ‘steering from a distance’ approach, in New Zealand tertiary education, in one sense implies what Harman (1998, p. 338) considers to be a greater measure of trust by the Government. Interestingly, the trust accorded to HEIs by the Government is often combined with a higher level of mandated accountability in monitoring institutional performance, particularly in terms of outcomes. However, such narrow and reductionist models of accountability, Codd (1999) argues, have fostered a “culture of distrust” within educational institutions (p. 45). This, according to Codd (1999), is a “culture in which trust is no longer taken to be the foundation of professional ethics” (p. 45). Reducing professional accountability, therefore, to a form of managerial practice and control where trust withers, and obedience and conformity thrive, is highly problematic in HEIs.

5.3.3 ‘From Front-end Approval and Accreditation to Back-end Systems Check’

One of the recent major changes in the polytechnic sector was the introduction of audits in 2000. Previously, the functions of ITP Quality were limited to the approval of programmes and accreditation of polytechnics. The reason why audits developed in the polytechnic sector is notable and “quite interesting” as explained in detail by one participant. It is useful to quote this participant at some length.

The previous Government was a National government in 1999. Near the end of its term, it issued a White Paper on education. Part of that policy direction was that all programmes would need to be quality assured externally to receive Government funding. The second part of those changes was that all education providers would need to come under an audit regime.

But . . . the Labour [Party] came into power at the end of 1999. They didn’t go through with the White Paper recommendations. All through 1999 when the Government signals for a policy change were there, the Association of Polytechnics developed audit standards. We were quite

keen on audit. We felt it was a good progression in terms of quality assurance from a front-end approval of programmes and accreditation of polytechnics to teach them to a more back-end systems check. So it all made perfect sense to us to have an audit model. (MQ09-ABC)

Hence, even though the new government didn't push through all the changes proposed in the White Paper, the polytechnic sector still decided to implement the audit idea. There was no formal government requirement for audit at the time of this research. However, this is expected to change soon as the government has signalled that publicly funded education will need to receive much more quality assurance emphasis by external QA bodies. As one KI stated that:

That's fine. As long as the rules are clear and everyone knows them, then we are quite happy. . . . A lot of polytechnics take the view that even if they don't require external approval for programmes, they will seek it anyway because it's better for their marketing. (MQ09-ABC)

5.3.4 Globalisation Influence on Quality Assurance

The theme of global/international influences on QA emerged in the interviews and hence it is seen to be consistent with the policy rhetoric in the official documents. Global influence in higher education QA, in the context of the ABC College, appears to have come through competition, which leads to a sense of global standards and services. The following excerpts from interviews allude to some of these perspectives:

Changes in tertiary education quality assurance are in response to global trends and developments. New Zealand institutions also feel the need to compete in the global environment and hence it is important that the qualifications offered are recognised internationally. The QA processes NZQA is engaged in are serving this function. (MQ03-ABC)

Obviously, the higher the qualification the more globalization there is. So with our diplomas and degrees yeah, we are competing in the global environment. I mean there is a threat and an opportunity there: (a) you are competing against everybody else; (b) it gives you the opportunity to build a market there. And that's something that as an organisation like everybody else we're actively pursuing. (MQ01-ABC)

The global dimension of higher education works both ways in influencing QA. "It's a two-way thing", contended one KI (MQ02-ABC). Overseas tertiary providers are keen to offer their programmes here in New Zealand, whilst New Zealand providers are also moving offshore. New Zealand providers going overseas need to maintain the reputation of Zealand qualifications. However, the bottom line for overseas providers is "they must go through our quality assurance system, even if it is a so-called reputable organization elsewhere in the world" (MQ02-ABC).

Quality assurance, within a global dimension, is also underpinned by the interest in forming partnerships with overseas education providers. There are a number of institutions, particularly Australian universities, wanting to bring their programmes into New Zealand, through the PTEs. This enthusiasm for international partnership mainly targets international students, rather than domestic ones. According to one participant, this has more to do with New Zealand’s “export education strategy than it is to do with local demand” (MQ02-ABC). These partnerships appear to have emerged in order to overcome a regulatory restriction in the legislation of New Zealand tertiary education. One participant explained this as follows:

Our legislation has other interesting aspects on it too, in that the word ‘university’ is protected. Any university from overseas cannot operate on New Zealand soil and call themselves a ‘university.’ So that puts an interesting mix, it’s not as free to organisations to come and set up a campus in New Zealand as I know a number of them would like to do, but it is legislatively impossible. So that’s almost outside the realms of quality assurance per se but it’s a regulatory effect that’s put on. (MQ02-ABC)

The themes discussed so far relate to external QA practices. A number of discourses consistent with neoliberalism appear to have emerged from the data. The themes that follow in the next section relate to internal QA practices.

5.4 Internal Quality Assurance Themes

5.4.1 *Quality Management and Bureaucracy*

Most QA practices have accountability as a major driving requirement (Harman, 1998). In this respect, it is understandable that QA practices have often led to a build up of administrative and managerial tasks. This build up of tasks may be misunderstood as adding to bureaucracy, but it need not be the case.

Quality management for ABC College meant “coherent management activity that ensures quality policies and objectives are set, implemented and evaluated” (ABC College, 2005). This coherent management activity was governed by the institution’s AQMS (see p. 122). One participant clarified what quality management was and was not, as follows:

Quality management is *not* [emphasis of the participant] management of the quality, but the management of the systems. You are not talking about managing your quality; you are talking about managing systems that will assist the enhancement of the quality of your work. So it’s to do with the implementation, resourcing, monitoring. I would even put into resourcing the need for training. (MQ07-ABC)

Quality management was also about clear communication. One participant observed the ‘taken-for granted’ nature of the transmission of decisions at the ABC College:

Often decisions are made and they are not transmitted. It’s just assumed that everybody will go and look at the Academic Board minutes or the Faculty Board minutes. They don’t always do that. So the decisions filter; they don’t actually often get summarised. (MQ06-ABC)

The same participant explained the reason for this break in communications:

Part of that I think is because we’ve gone from a fairly small institution where everybody knew everybody to a bigger one and some of the procedures that work in a small organisation don’t transfer well. So there is a need for clearer systems of communication. (MQ06-ABC)

These excerpts indicate the importance of efficient and clear communication systems within the QA environment.

Two additional themes that emerged under quality management and bureaucracy were: (1) role of leadership, and (2) cost of time.

5.4.1.1 Role of leadership

At ABC College, quality was considered to be a responsibility of each and every member of staff. As such, the Institution saw quality as primarily a professional issue, whereby the staff members commit to undertake their roles efficiently and effectively and demonstrate a willingness to improve existing practices and also to be innovative. The Council has delegated the oversight of QA to the Academic Board and its Committees. Deans and Campus Principals, in addition to being corporate and administrative managers, were also responsible for quality in their areas of responsibility. The Institution also involved external academics and professionals and industry and community groups in its QA processes. The Academic Board formally approved the AQMS and this was endorsed by the Council. The Chief Executive Officer of the Institution, who was ultimately responsible for the academic and administrative management of the College, was committed to its implementation (ABC College, 2005, p. 16).

5.4.1.2 Cost of time

One of the major challenges and hence a costly affair in QA was lack of time, according to the majority of the interview participants.

The [lack of] time thing is one of the greatest costs, because we’ve got a lot of courses and we have a responsibility to get around to make sure they are academically sound and that all takes time. (MQ04-ABC)

As academic quality managers, the interview participants stated that the teaching staff, with whom they worked, found that lack of ‘time’ was a problem.

We make the time, but the people we are working with are busy; they have huge workloads, they have student issues, they’ve got staffing issues and so forth. So often they are reluctant to participate but once we start we like to keep the ball rolling and the momentum going. (MQ04-ABC)

Why is this? A great many staff have a relatively high contact hour schedule, in addition to their managerial responsibilities and one interviewee explained that he/she interpreted the challenge of lack of time as a reflection of the inadequacy of funding.

They just haven’t got the time to sit down and write them. So I think that does come back to funding because the institution is not funded enough to allow for a large amount of preparation time. (MQ06-ABC)

Lack of time was a challenge not only for the development of programmes, but for moderation as well. This underscores the importance of planning ahead according to this participant (MQ06-ABC).

5.4.2 Learning and Teaching

The broad theme of learning and teaching was examined through the perspectives on the processes that were targeted to enhance: (1) programme development and moderation, (2) evaluation and monitoring, and (3) staff development and awareness.

5.4.2.1 Programme development and moderation

Programme development and review of qualifications related to the ‘Standard 2’ of the AQMS of ABC College. The Standard states:

An educationally sound, effective process is used for the development, approval and review of all qualifications, programmes and courses associated with the institutions.

Stakeholders have appropriate opportunities to give feedback on programmes and to be involved in the development and review of programme outcome. (ABC College, 2005, p. 22)

Over the years the ITPs appear to have developed a rigorous system for development and handling programme development for change. Programme development ensured that they were consistent with the institution’s mission, vision and strategic direction and that they are educationally sound. The Academic Board, as the highest academic policy making body, ensured that the new programmes that have received ‘approval in principle’, was developed in accordance with the profile and charter of the Institution and that the programme complies with the provisions of the Institute’s Academic Statute (ABC College, 2005).

A ‘formal approval’ process was also reported as instituted by the Academic Approvals Committee (a sub-committee of Academic Board) of new programmes (ABC College, 2005). This process followed a detailed scrutiny of the proposed new curriculum, to ensure that the design of the curriculum has followed established procedures and meets ‘quality’ expectations, as per the quality standards.

In addition, it ensures that plans for ongoing development, review and redevelopment of the programmes were in place and were implemented in consultation with stakeholder groups. As one participant explained:

We have a stakeholders’ committee for programmes or suites of programmes and that gives us feedback. And they will tell us whether what we’re doing meets their needs or not. That probably is the biggest feedback we get. We’ve also got regional advisory committees for the whole institution on different sites. (MQ06-ABC)

Academic staff members at ABC College were also supported by a team of Academic Advisors²⁷. The main thrust of the Academic Advisors’ task was to offer curriculum development advice on changes to academic programmes and to work with the staff to ensure that they received a curriculum which was sound and it would ensure that the approval processes were completed (MQ06-ABC). The latter activity included the internal approval processes and then, if accreditation was required, the Academic Advisors would help with the organisation of this accreditation. The stated views of some participants regarding this role indicated that they spent a great deal of time with teaching teams on course development, to make sure that the process was right from the beginning (MQ01-ABC).

The Academic Advisers also “pick up a lot of informal information” that they and some in senior QA work “can go and chat” about (MQ05-ABC). Each Academic Adviser has a portfolio of programmes. They were in a position to see how the programmes were delivered at various campuses of the Institution which gives them “quite a good picture . . . which they can help link with the best practices” (MQ05-ABC).

The procedures in place for programme development appears to be elaborate and hence perceived by some as bureaucratic and time consuming. One participant notes that there is a “healthy friction between wanting to respond quickly to students and

²⁷ At the time of this study there were four Academic Advisers at ABC College.

industry requirements versus following procedures and processes” (MQ05-ABC). The participant further elaborated this tension as follows:

Even the Deans . . . find the process bureaucratic and long. At times they feel it’s unnecessary although as they begin to use it more and more, it doesn’t come so complicated and they appear to be managing the process quite well. But anybody who’s coming into it new . . . if they get really excited and if there are say 20 students and the industry wants this, you know they can’t sort of chuck a programme together and run it. (MQ06-ABC)

Closely aligned to programme development and review is the assessment and moderation. According to the Institution’s AQMS, “the ABC College is committed to ensuring that assessment is fair, valid and reliable” (ABC College, 2005). A number of policies and procedures were in place to ensure good practice is employed for assessment and moderation. Being a multi-campus institution, internal moderation included inter-campus moderation of student assessment processes and outcomes as well.

5.4.2.2 Evaluation and monitoring

In order to achieve internal QA objectives, the ABC College had in place a number of evaluation and monitoring processes. A notable element of the evaluation process was the student evaluation of programmes each semester and student feedback through biannual surveys. (See Section 5.4.3, pp. 151-152). The monitoring and review of programmes include consideration of their currency especially to meet industry needs (ABC College, 2005). This was undertaken through an annual programme report and action plan for improvement.

Internal audits and reviews of aspects of the Institute’s academic systems, regulations and practices, were carried out based on an annual internal programme audit plan, approved by the Academic Board. Additionally a review of the College’s quality management systems in relation to their currency, by senior managers also took place on a biannual basis.

As part of the institutional monitoring processes, review of feedback from student surveys and audit reviews at Boards of Studies and/or Academic Board also took place.

5.4.2.3 Staff development and awareness

Staff development and awareness included providing opportunities for them to undertake adult learning and teaching programmes with support from Academic Advisors and obtaining staff ‘buy-in’.

Staffing is a critical resource in the policy process of QA in any TEIs. At ABC College, one participant noted that, overarching all the faculties and teaching learning teams, there is an acknowledgment of adult learning and teaching (MQ01-ABC). The same participant, with reference to two institutional requirements, substantiated this as follows:

We have a policy that all of our teaching staff (a) have qualifications above the level they are teaching, and (b) have training and mentoring in adult learning. (MQ01-ABC)

Another ABC College participant reiterated the emphasis on gaining tertiary level teaching competence as follows:

[We] make sure that all our staff have got some teaching qualification because polytechnics have often brought the industry person who is well recognised but may not have any teaching qualification. So we are really conscious of starting at that point. We provide an ‘adult certificate’; . . . which isn’t a lot. . . . If you haven’t got, you’ve got to do it. This is the minimum. (MQ05-ABC)

This ‘adult teaching certificate’ is compulsory at the ABC College. As one KI stated for polytechnic teachers this is not a national requirement at this stage. However, it was believed that it would be so in the future.

For the success of QA programmes, nearly all participants expressed the importance of staff buy-in as a critical requirement. “If you don’t have that you are not going to get very far,” asserted one participant (MQ04-ABC). According to this participant, even in policy development, the involvement of staff was crucial.

I think the staff feel as if they have buy-in if they are able to contribute to the policies. That’s the main thing. . . . They have a 2-week consultation period. They get the draft. They can offer their opinions. . . . their suggestions are taken back to whoever is actually writing the policy. They might be amended, they may not be, but normally the staff will get feedback as to why their suggestions haven’t been taken up. So it’s really a whole ‘buy-in’ thing, ‘Okay, I have contributed to this policy, so it’s my responsibility to see that it goes well’. (MQ04-NZ)

5.4.3 Student Engagement: Survey and Student Evaluation

ABC College paid particular attention to removing barriers to student access to tertiary education and subsequent barriers to student success. Exceeding student expectation was a major part of its quality philosophy. Hence, obtaining student feedback, not only from student surveys and programme evaluations but from a variety of sources, was regularly carried out. The Institution conducted two main student surveys throughout the year. One was the ‘first impression’ survey undertaken with students who were just starting their courses. This survey was conducted fairly early in the year, to find out students’ first impressions of the institution and to identify any problems that might be arising, so that they could be fixed as quickly as possible (MQ01-ABC). The other student survey was the main ‘student satisfaction’ survey, conducted across all students. This survey was conducted later in the academic year around August/September and it sampled the whole institution.

One participant was convinced that students would be forthcoming in their feedback during such surveys:

The students will tell you if they are receiving the right sort of teaching method to suit them. We’re also actually working in terms of ‘have they surveyed their client group, and are they providing what is required out there?’ (MQ04-ABC)

At the same time, the same participant admitted that, although a lot of information was gathered from students, particularly during audits, not all information gathered was useful.

A lot of it is hot air; a lot of students . . . use the audit perhaps as an avenue to vent their frustrations. That’s fine, but we cut through a lot of that and question them about ‘How is this going to impact on you?’ ‘Why is this happening?’, ‘How can we make improvements?’ Again it’s getting their buy-in too, because they feel comfortable they can share their information with us and we can share it in the end in feedback with their tutors and lecturers. (MQ04-ABC)

Another participant also agreed that student surveys needed to be read with a degree of caution.

I have done a lot of student satisfaction surveys and most of those students are pretty satisfied with their teaching/learning experience, even if I as educator know that there are people teaching on that programme who I would consider would need further staff development. Students notoriously will be more interested in and will be more vocal about, ‘how far they have to walk to the library’, ‘the number of car parks’, ‘how good the food is’, and ‘what’s in the sandwiches in cafés’. Those things tend to

overtake some of the real fundamental shifts in teaching that we are trying to actually create. (MQ02-ABC)

These excerpts indicated that student buy-in was also important, in the same way as seeking staff buy-in and was critical in the implementation of QA policies. Instead of regular student surveys, through the more traditional filling of forms, the conducting of ‘focus groups’ may be an alternative, or even a complementary strategy, for QA. The following participant subscribed to this approach.

Some of the student satisfaction surveys I have done have been around developing focus groups of students to get the real questions out. It’s looking at the satisfaction level as well as an importance rating on the various things. (MQ02-NZ)

5.4.4 Impact on Teaching and Learning

The case study explored the impact this highly regulated QA system has had on teaching and learning, through the perspectives of the study participants. Although the sample was limited and the views expressed were those of only a certain segment of stakeholders within tertiary education, these views were considered informative from a policy implementation perspective. QA policy and practice appear to have impacted on the tertiary education sector in various ways. No participant unequivocally stated that there was a definite improvement of teaching and learning per se, as a result of QA processes. Most respondents were either evasive or they perceived the issue in quite general terms. A selection of views stated below reveals the ‘flavour’ of the K1’s perspectives.

There is a greater degree of teaching staff looking outside their own areas at what other people are doing. And I guess, you know, the standards and the audit process help that as well. So people are much more willing to look at outside their own area and say ‘well, what are they doing about this’? . . . One of the most direct spin offs of that is that people are willing to take responsibility for those sorts of things. (MQ01-NZ)

One staff member reflected to earlier times and compared these to the impact of QA processes in place at the present time.

I never saw a curriculum: what I got was just a piece of paper and the topics and I developed it. I think now a staff member coming into that would be given the paper descriptor and the depth to go into. So that’s definitely changed. . . . Staff are much more aware that they need to be clear in what they’re writing in terms of what the content of their curriculum is, the learning outcomes and the assessments where there can be consistency. (MQ06-ABC)

Not only was there a discernible impact on the clarity of curriculum content but assessments were also reported as being well defined at the present time.

If you looked at assessments over the years you would see that they are tighter, especially the evidence and judgments are much clearer now. It's the most important aspect that they must be there too; people are more aware of that consistency now just because of the quality assurance process. The curricula are clearer. (MQ06-ABC)

The emphasis on teaching and learning was clearly evident, although the impact QA has had on teaching and learning was unclear. One participant contended that it would be difficult to disagree that the main outcome of QA was on the teaching and learning processes, rather than the institution's systems.

The most important thing that a tertiary institute does is to teach students and that they learn. ITP Quality has, when it reviewed the audit standards, made a greater emphasis on teaching and learning as part of those standards. You can't ignore all of the other systems that lead towards the outcome or the benefit of good teaching practice. But I think there is a recognition that it is of paramount importance that what happens in the classroom is very important. ITP Quality process isn't about looking into classrooms, to see how students are taught as such. But its significance in quality assurance is very clear. (MQ09-ABC)

However, with recent introduction of the auditing process, the ITP Quality audit standards looked at the ways used by polytechnics to improve their teaching and learning performance. The auditors interviewed students and asked about their experiences. The audit team also interviewed teachers, tutors and lecturers.

5.5 Summary of ABC College Case Study Themes

The case study of ABC College has enabled the identification of a number of issues related to both external as well as internal QA policy and practice. First and foremost it was clear that QA at this TEI was influenced significantly from the external policy making environment (see Chapter Four) that prevailed in the country. The overall environment was one where accountability to stakeholders was dominant and where autonomy and academic freedom are overshadowed. External influences had a strong impact on much of the internal development at the Institution. The tertiary education system for the polytechnic sector could be said to be in broad terms centrally controlled. Whilst there was a degree of leverage for the Institute councils, the academic and operational autonomy was limited.

Secondly, the role of the state in bringing about this highly centralised regulatory model of QA could also be noted. One of the major benefits of the QA system as noted by many participants was the consistency of standards. In other words portability within the country's polytechnics was a much desired outcome. The

national standards (ITP Quality standards) promoted through the centralised regulatory QA model facilitated the portability of qualifications.

Thirdly, the dominance of economic imperatives, and adherence to the principles of market forces, had created competition in higher education. This has had profound impact on the way QA has been organised within the sector. The element of competition was brought into a sector which until then was noted by some participants as a fairly collaborative environment. The institution was not only competing for students from the local 'market', but was also actively marketing in the global market for international students. This indicated evidence of the impact of globalisation on higher education in general. These developments were also part of the response to the export education strategy through which the New Zealand Government by 2000 took a more active role in fostering under the neoliberal emphasis. One major issue for the ABC College then was the determination of the right balance between the competitive and collaborative aspects of higher education. As was noted by some participants in the study, there were advantages to be gained from both the aspects.

The centralised regulatory QA model, it is believed, has translated into an elaborate and rigorous system of procedures of internal QA mechanisms, at the level of practice. An examination of the Institute's AQMS gives an indication of the wide range of documentation involved in 'managing' QA. An emphasis on meeting stakeholder needs and 'customer satisfaction' has become dominant in QA. Achieving quality unfortunately appears to have been bureaucratised and increases the likelihood of managerialist practices.

Part II: The USP

Part II of this chapter presents the second secondary case study, the University of the South Pacific (USP). A brief introduction to the University was provided in Chapter Four.

5.6 Major Quality Assurance Themes from the USP Case Study

In a similar way to the ABC College case study, it was decided that a more meaningful and perceptive approach would be to present and discuss the findings under themes which emerged from the data. The identification of themes from the

USP case study also followed a similar pattern to that of the ABC College case study. (See Section 3.8.1, pp. 95-99 and Section 5.2, pp. 136-137). Hence, the interview data (supported by relevant official documents from the University) revealed the following emergent themes. These themes, identified for discussion, were necessarily delimited to the scope of the specific research question of the case study and the questions prepared for the semi-structured interviews.

Table 5.2

Major Themes from the USP Case Study

External quality assurance

- i. Global influences
 - Competing globally
 - Benchmarking internationally
 - Assuring the stakeholders in small developing nations (SDNs)
 - Marketability of skills
- ii. External Advisers
- iii. External audit

Internal quality assurance

- iv. Quality management and bureaucracy
 - Bureaucracy and role of leadership
 - Audit and review
 - Quality culture and attitude
 - v. Student questionnaires
 - vi. Learning and teaching
 - Staffing: review, communication, staff turn-over
 - Staff buy-in
 - Adult learning and teaching
 - vii. Impact on teaching and learning
-

5.7 External Quality Assurance Themes

5.7.1 Global Influences

5.7.1.1 Competing globally

Global forces have impacted on the quality of higher education at USP. Recent changes from schools to faculty structures, in addition to the internal quality audits (scheduled for 2007), have been cited as examples of such emphasis on matters of quality within the university. One participant confirmed this trend as follows:

USP is definitely responding to global trends, especially those depicted by Australia and New Zealand. This is evident by the USP's move to adopt the Academic Quality Audits and the auditing body is the same as the ones used in these nations. (MQ12-USP)

For some participants, QA was something that had to be followed, to survive in a global environment. It was seen as something that had to be done, whether they liked it or not (MQ02-USP). One participant was, however, concerned that the university was perhaps uncritically adopting a universal approach to quality. This participant elaborated further:

Quality is now the ‘in-thing’ and everybody wants to do it. I think it all goes well with the modern marketing of education. In my own view, unfortunately, if we focus too much on quality for marketing then we may miss ‘real quality’. (MQ10-USP)

Some participants were particularly convinced that the QA movement was linked to the export driven education business. In this context, one Head of Department (HOD) was worried that education had become essentially a commodity to be bought and sold. This point was well stated by one participant:

I think this whole quality assurance strategy is all related to the global trends in education. . . . Under the WTO, when you are liberalising trade in services, basically education is a commodity which is being imported and exported by countries. That itself creates a need for quality just like quality goods. For export or trade you need quality education. Australia is doing that. . . . They can only do that if they assure those who want to import or buy those services that the quality is good. (MQ09-USP)

Furthermore, this KI asserts that a great deal of ‘quality’ issues appeared to be driven by global forces. This is because universities can no longer survive in their traditional roles because, according to this KI:

The quality itself is driven by the market, for example, employability. The market determines what kind of graduates we produce. And the market is also something which does not tolerate inefficiency or lack of quality. The market wants efficiency and quality. (MQ09-USP)

Therefore, it is quite evident from what has been stated by the USP participants that competition in the global arena has contributed to an increase in the intensity with which USP was looking at its own QA strategy, to establish a robust accreditation and audit system. Ultimately, this is what will attract students locally in addition to those from overseas. One participant informed the researcher that the USP was at a stage where “it wants to go international” in order “to attract [more] foreign students to come to USP” (MQ09-USP). The KI elaborated that the “only way the USP can do that is to tell these students we are a quality university and we have this system” (MQ09-USP). Hence from an institutional point of view, and from a global point of view, this appears to be a very important development.

5.7.1.2 *Benchmarking internationally*

Another major influence on the development of a QA strategy at the USP has been the need to benchmark their qualifications internationally. The role of QA in developing higher education systems in SDNs was, according to one participant, to align and benchmark their higher education systems with institutions abroad, in order that students from SDNs also received the quality education other renowned universities could provide (MQ11-USP). One KI explained the overseas reference points of USP:

We align ourselves very closely with Australian and New Zealand universities and the University of the West Indies, too. So, as an institution, as opposed to department level, I guess that [QA] is now more important. (MQ02-USP)

In the context of higher education, “when people move from one country to the other, their own national degrees must be acceptable” argued one HOD. Students after completing their degrees at USP migrate to Australia and/or New Zealand. Therefore, it becomes imperative that the students are “assured that the degrees they get from USP will be recognised in Australia and New Zealand” (MQ09-USP). International recognition of certificates becomes an essential requirement for SDNs, where people may migrate to other countries for employment purposes. “International recognition is the bottom line, isn’t it?” was the rhetorical question posed by another KI (MQ02-USP). For this KI, the international recognition of awards was extremely important for the survival of any institution with an international stature, such as the USP.

Dwindling resources have also influenced the USP’s move towards greater emphasis on QA and its member countries, who contribute financially, now have other options for educating their people.

Resources are becoming scarcer and . . . our regional governments have the option of either sending students here or to Australia or New Zealand. Normally they send the cream of their students to Australia and New Zealand. So if we can convince them that we are just as good as anybody else, then we have a better chance of attracting better students from the regional countries. (MQ02-USP)

The issue of attitude was also a relevant concern for one participant. There appears to be an attitude that a small regional university, such as the USP is likely to have difficulty in maintaining high standards. Therefore, USP has to be constantly fighting against the assumption that it does not maintain high standards. For that reason alone, the USP “needs to be constantly proving to ourselves and proving to other people that it does have high standards” (MQ08-USP).

5.7.1.3 *Assuring the stakeholders in small developing nations*

The majority of the USP participants in this research were of the view that QA in higher education was particularly important for SDNs. The principal reasons for this centred around two main issues of: recognition of awards; and getting value for money. One participant pointed out:

One [reason] is that we have to assure the quality of the product that they are investing in. . . . The person who graduates with an award from USP has to know that their award is recognised around the world. That's why we have to have external input and external audit, in order to achieve that level of assurance. (MQ05-USP)

The second reason according to the same participant was:

The small island developing states are . . . in the main very poor. . . . So funding is critical. University education is expensive. So they are entitled to know that they are getting value for money in any investment that they are putting into the university. So quality assurance is critical in helping them to be satisfied. If I were an investor, I wouldn't invest in a university or any organisation that didn't have appropriate quality management and quality assurance systems and I'd expect that the small island developing states would take the same view. (MQ05-USP)

In an increasingly globalised world, SDNs need to prove themselves, more than “all the big fish in the seas” (MQ02-USP), as one participant stated. The main reason is that “we are able to say we are good enough: we may be one of the small island countries but we are still good enough to attract people, to attract attention, to attract students, and to attract funding” (MQ02-USP). As the world trading systems have become more inter-linked, for SDNs quality higher education is also becoming more and more important, since this falls within trade in the services sector. This point was well emphasised by one participant:

Small island countries are trying to grapple with the global trading regime and basically they are not sure whether they can compete. They are trying to say to the developed countries that they need some kind of special and differential treatment. We need time, they say, we need space to develop ourselves and compete in the global market. I think the same applies to services and the same applies to education. Unless small institutions aspire towards a quality that is recognised, at least in some countries or within the region these countries are in, they will not have credibility. (MQ09-USP)

5.7.1.4 *'Marketability of skills'*

Quality is also measured in the South Pacific region through the 'marketability of skills'. People in the region travel a great deal and they tend to seek overseas employment. For example, many men work on ships and send their money home.

Thus, the marketability of skills was extremely important, according to many interviewees.

The flow of educated labour out of small states is, in a complex manner, linked to QA. For many small island states, there is a major concern when their people seek overseas employment, since this can lead to an eventual 'brain drain'. There is a concern that people receive their education at USP and then they are 'on the first aeroplane out of the country' to take up employment somewhere else. One participant saw this both as a disadvantage as well as an opportunity.

In some ways that's unfortunate but in some ways it's fortunate as well. They become ambassadors for their home country in the new country and I think the world in general becomes a better place as a result of that sort of movement and freedom. (MQ05-USP)

However, the loss of skills to the country that has educated their people is regrettable, particularly if the net traffic is always outwards. According to one participant, there is often a balance (MQ05-USP). Compared with Australia, where there is some evenness in the in-out flow of educated people, Fiji, for example, amongst the South Pacific island states, is at a disadvantage. Although Fiji gains some skilled people, overall the country loses more people than those who immigrate to Fiji. Therefore, according to the participant, "these things ebb and flow and it is important to have a global attitude, as well as a national attitude" (MQ05-USP).

The issue of QA appeared to be a dilemma faced by SDNs which were still developing their higher education systems. Small states want to be on par with metropolitan countries and their universities. They are keen to make their graduates comparable with those from metropolitan and developed universities. As articulated by one participant:

Given comparability through quality assurance, our graduates are also given the ability to run away from us and to migrate to metropolitan countries. So, in the process of ensuring quality in our qualifications, we are exposing ourselves to this potential loss. . . . It's a ticket for migration and the wider implication is serious. That's the dilemma: we develop our own people and we export these people away. (MQ10-USP)

The dilemma leads to the issue of brain drain. This is more than an issue of quality, according to one participant: it is a matter of QA for the nation as such. The participant elaborated on this issue as follows:

It [QA] is important because you want, at the end of the day, to turn out graduates who will be able to make good decisions, who will be able to lead, to take initiatives, to be innovative, to make a difference in whatever

it is they are undertaking, whether they are teachers, . . . economists, accountants, whatever. When we put them out there the institution wants to be able to say 'We have put good people out there and they will make a difference'. (MQ07-USP)

Once the graduates are in the workforce, they are no longer seen as the responsibility of the HEI. They become the responsibility of the nation. Stressing this point the previous KI continued as follows:

If the nation can't keep them, that's no longer our problem. That is the quality assurance for the nation. The Prime Minister or the President has to devise ways and means to keep their people at home and to make their contribution to nation building: we have made ours. (MQ07-USP)

The issue appeared even more complex from what this KI explained.

Unfortunately the more quality we put in this and the more recognition international institutions and countries give to our qualifications, the easier for them to suck our people into their economies. And it makes it more difficult for our national leaders to keep our people. Nevertheless, we must keep them here. (MQ07-USP)

5.7.2 External Advisers

The system of External Advisers has operated at the USP since the creation of the University. External Advisers are mainly drawn from Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States. At any point in time, each department must have an External Adviser. They are normally professors in their field and they are appointed for a period of two to three years. They visit the university at least once during their appointment and they are required to talk to all the staff in the programme, and other staff, related to the programme in one way or another, throughout the university. External Advisers also talk to the respective departmental staff and Advisory Groups where applicable. Advisory Groups are made up of senior people from within the department, in addition to the stakeholders outside the department.

External Advisers can get deeply involved in what goes on in a department. Within a faculty the most senior appointments, for example professors, had the input of External Advisers through their involvement as a member of search committees. External Advisers are also referees involved in staff promotion. The terms of reference for these academics is to compare the USP courses with courses from other established universities. The respective departments of the USP provide the Advisers with examination papers, syllabi and all other relevant documentation necessary for making a comparative judgment. The External Advisers examine the courses,

programmes, laboratory facilities and every other related facility and then they make recommendations regarding improvements to the programme. The most important recommendation External Advisors make is “whether that particular programme in the department is comparable to what they think is offered at their university” (MQ02-USP). If the programme is not comparable, the Advisor identifies areas needing improvement and this is set against a timeline. They also make other recommendations, which need to be implemented and the department is then obliged to write responses saying how they will achieve those recommendations within the timeline. From the department, these responses are taken to the Boards of Studies, the Academic Committee, the Senate and finally the Council.

The External Adviser system has had its advantages and disadvantages. The following statements are a selection of differing viewpoints both positive and negative.

By and large these reports have been useful. (MQ04-USP)

The individual gets one or a maximum of two chances to comment and we then move on to somebody else the next time around. You can't have somebody for more than four years, for example. So that's a good thing. The other good thing is that they are very close to what happens in the department. (MQ02-USP)

They [External Advisers] are very experienced people. Those who are appointed are very good academics and very good professionals. So that in itself means quality. Secondly, they are able to compare USP with other top universities in the world. And some of the top universities have quality and that quality they will tell us about. (MQ06-USP)

Not all views were so positive about the role of External Advisers.

Normally we choose people at the professorial level. We assume that because somebody is a professor somewhere he/she can offer something. It doesn't always work like that because many of them don't understand the University here. . . . Some of them, because they are busy, may only spend a week here. We want them to spend two weeks at least to meet all the staff, talk to students and all the interested parties and other associated departments. Sometimes they don't do it. Sometimes the department which organises it also doesn't do a good job. They meet only limited people and then whatever information they gather they write about it. . . . I would say from about 50 percent of these people we have received useful reports. The other 50 percent are a bit doubtful. (MQ04-USP)

Right from the beginning of the university, that has been the practice, to assure the quality to the public. So, whenever there is a graduation ceremony the Vice-Chancellor will say that this is one of the things we do: having an External Adviser to come and comment on the quality of programmes, of our graduates, so that people will feel good and happy. By

and large they are useful. But in some cases the reports have not been helpful. (MQ04-USP)

Some participants felt that, even though the External Advisers are highly educated and well-respected academics, the limited time period and their lack of cultural knowledge prevent them from undertaking an effective job. As one participant stated:

. . . no matter how highly qualified one person is, nothing can be done in two weeks. That's just one person. And secondly there is misunderstanding of our cultural base. So they might bring something that happens in Monash, for example, and want to plant it here. But it doesn't work. (MQ06-USP).

While comparability is the main brief for External Advisers, it was alleged by some KIs that some departments have taken advantage of the flexibility in their terms of reference, in which they are required to comment on "other things that they see pertinent to the whole quality of courses and teaching" (MQ10-USP). Thus HODs have in some instances, exploited the opportunity and asked Advisers to comment on various things, such as resources and staff issues, in order to lobby for additional resources for their respective departments (MQ10-USP).

The External Adviser system, nevertheless, is to be retained and strengthened by close administration and monitoring of their activities. The Quality Unit will maintain records of appointments and renewal of Advisers, in addition to receiving reports and follow-up action against the reports.

The External Adviser system was being modified under the new QA strategy at the time of this research. In the new system, the component of External Advisers was still maintained, explained one participant, "but it will be part of the Programme Advisory Committee" (PAC) (MQ05-USP). The participant further explained the new system:

That's more in line with how other universities now operate. Therefore, they have to argue to the committee and they are therefore accountable to the committee as a group. I think that's a more robust system and I hope that it will have a better outcome. I think what it [also] does is to have Programme Advisory Committees that bring much more community engagement into the university. (MQ05-USP)

Within the new faculty structures, that were emerging at the USP at the time of this research, the composition of the PACs was left partly to the Deans. There were some absolute requirements, in that at least three external members were to be employers of graduates, representing related areas of study. The Committee must also have at least

one senior academic from another university. This external academic actually fulfilled the same role as the External Adviser.

5.7.3 External Audit

An external quality audit was proposed, under the new quality strategy, for the first time at the USP. The first such audit was planned for 2007. It was proposed that external audits would be conducted every seven years by the Australian Universities' Quality Agency (AUQA) or the New Zealand Universities Academic Audit Unit (NZAAU), or through a joint panel from both these bodies. Under this model of audit, the university would be required to submit specified documentation and self-appraisal, prior to the audit. The university would then be judged against its claims in the self-appraisal report and documents, which had been previously submitted (PDO, 2004).

Not all participants were convinced of the value of these planned external audits. The details of how these external audits would take place had not been worked out at the time of data collection for the present research. One participant was definitely not convinced, as can be judged by the following remarks:

How they would do that, I don't know: whether it would be just taking the model from Australia or anywhere else, I don't know. Increasingly, people want to have some tangible evidence from an independent source that allows them to say something about the quality. I think some kind of inspectorial system like that doesn't work. And it doesn't help to promote a professional attitude towards improving teaching or research for that matter. Heavy-handed attempts which try to force people to do certain things is not going to bring about quality. (MQ01-USP)

5.8 Internal Quality Assurance Themes

5.8.1 Quality Management and Bureaucracy

5.8.1.1 Bureaucracy and the role of leadership

The university has set up a Quality Unit and at the time of fieldwork for this research this unit had appointed all but one of the planned staff. A Senior Quality Assurance Coordinator headed the unit. The Quality Unit came under the overall direction and guidance of the Director of Planning and Development, who was a member of the Vice-Chancellor's Office. At the USP, in recognition of the view that planning and quality were closely linked, a single individual in senior management was identified to take responsibility for the planning and quality implementation of all new initiatives

across the university. This person had a vital leadership role as the institutional standard bearer of quality.

In addition to a centrally located key figure, at the level of Schools, Departments, Institutes and Support Services, 'Quality Facilitators' were also identified to "contribute to improving existing academic and administrative quality systems" (PDO, 2004, p. 17). The Quality Unit worked with these Quality Facilitators to jointly act as innovators and motivators for all staff. The university was in the process of restructuring into a faculty system and it was envisaged that each faculty would take over this responsibility of quality facilitation, in a faculty-wide and consistent manner.

Other members of the university senior management, such as the librarian, registrar and bursar, also took delegated responsibility for quality in their respective areas. Within the Schools (after data collection restructured as faculties) of the USP, the Heads of Schools took on delegated responsibility for all aspects of academic quality. The Pro Vice-Chancellor (Teaching, Learning and Research) maintained delegated responsibility for directing the overall approach to teaching, learning and research, across the university. The Quality Unit worked closely with the Quality facilitators, to assure and enhance the quality of student experience and academic standards and it contributed to the audit of all areas of the university. A central aim of the quality strategy was to have an efficient but lean Quality Unit, with a strong supporting and monitoring role, whilst responsibility for quality was firmly embedded within the academic units (PDO, 2004, p. 18).

Quality assurance, as it was practised at the USP, was said by one participant to be "a bureaucratic monster". It required academics to spend more time filling out forms, demonstrating that they were doing certain things and taking time away from when they might actually be doing these things. According to this participant:

I think this increasing documentation is a waste of time. I don't think that's the way to achieve quality because people need to make only cosmetic changes to be able to say certain things. For example, one form of quality assurance is to count the number of publications that staff members create. This encourages people to write briefer and shallower things in lower and lower quality journals so that they can demonstrate an increasing number of outputs and research activity. (MQ01-USP)

This was not QA according to this participant. "It is neither assuring quality, nor is it encouraging it. It's quite the contrary. So this is counter productive", explained this KI (MQ01-USP).

The same participant conjectured what the practice of QA was trying to do as follows:

I think what quality assurance is trying to do is attempting to find a bureaucratic substitute for a Weberian model of leadership. You don't have leadership in academies any more. This way, Weber seems to have taken a back seat along with Marx and is not too clear, and now what we've got is bureaucracy instead. This is not necessarily quality assurance. (MQ01-USP)

This statement underscores the importance of good leaders. A bureaucratic set-up, emphasising managerialism, does not necessarily bring about quality in higher education. This type of practice was the same as saying "that we need inspectors, less than we need good leaders" (MQ01-USP). The importance of leadership, in promoting quality within higher education, was stated by this participant as:

If you have good leaders, then quality takes care of itself. If you don't have good leaders, no amount of report writing and form-filling is going to bring about quality. Efforts to raise the quality assurance processes as I have experienced in the past, tend to put more and more pressure on the people at the bottom of the academic hierarchy: the ones who do most of the teaching and are supposed to be most active in research. The pressure, in my view, should be on the people at the top to ensure quality. They provide the academic leadership, institutional stability and efficiency. (MQ01-USP)

Thus, quality comes about when the institution provides the environment within which people can deliver quality. Paradoxically, it is also observed that contradictory developments have occurred within tertiary education systems. One participant observed:

At the same time as we are getting this tremendous boost of energy into quality assurance, critics are finding that universities are actually lowering standards. (MQ01-USP)

Quality management has become extremely administrative, according to one participant, who was critical of the role of managers in managing academic quality. As the role of the university was to teach students, the most important aspect of the university, according to this participant, should be the "teacher-student relationship" (MQ03-USP). This being the case, the participant critically questioned the role of the management:

Where does the management come in? Management comes in to manage us: those who teach. But, if you go through the university funds which may be coming from various sources in different countries . . . you will be surprised that 60-65 percent goes to pay the salaries of the management. 35-40 percent is the amount that comes to [teaching] staff. What is the management doing? They are assuring quality. . . . Quality should be assured between students and us. (MQ03-USP)

5.8.1.2 Audit and review

Evaluation of performance, through review and audit, was also an important dimension of the USP quality strategy. All activity areas of the university continued to review and evaluate their performance on an annual basis through self-review. Such reviews produced action plans for the following year, with dates and persons responsible for each action.

Internal audits were undertaken at the direction of senior management. These could be annual or they could arise when such a need was identified, as a result of irregularities or perceptions of poor performance in a given area or unit within the university.

5.8.1.3 Quality culture and attitude

Creating a culture of quality is necessary, in order for people to believe in quality. People within an institution tend to believe in quality, once such a 'quality platform' is established. An example of how this quality platform was established, in one department at the USP, was given by one participant from the area of setting assignments. This HOD continued by offering an explanation through an example:

I have asked them that when they set assignments they state what the students are going to learn from it or what they are expected to do. So that becomes quality. It helps the students as well as the lecturers. So what happens really is that the students, lecturers and I are on a common wavelength through the assessment criteria or objectives, for example. Then I know that they are going to do that, they know that they are going to do it and the students know that they are going to do it. That is the 'what' part of it. (MQ06-USP)

Establishing a 'quality culture' not only addressed the 'what' part of it. The 'how' part of it also needed attention. As explained by the same participant:

Then we go and ask the other question which is the 'how' part of it. How are they going to do it? Here we talk about different strategies, what I call pedagogies or different ways of learning: cooperative learning, inquiry based learning and so on. So that goes on. I always try and see that the lecturer does not go there and just read out the lecture. He attempts to construct knowledge. He himself constructs but also he helps the students to construct new knowledge as the lecture unpacks. (MQ06-USP)

Quality culture was also reported to be built in, through the system of workload sharing. In the past, the teaching load was so high that staff rarely undertook any research. Workload distribution was said to be 40 percent / 40 percent / 20 percent in this particular department, whereby 40 percent was allocated for teaching, 40 percent for research and 20 percent for management (MQ06-USP). Quality was said to go up

“by itself ... as research informs their [staff] practice” (MQ06-USP). Action research was encouraged, within this department, since money was allocated for research. According to this participant, who was also a HOD, “the quality of teaching was improving because people go and find the strengths and limitations of their practice and they try and understand the students” (MQ06-USP).

Quality improvement was also reported to be affected by the attitudes of the staff. These attitudes affected the students’ morale, according to one participant, who narrated an example from one of the university departments, where first year students were warned about failure in their very first lecture at the University. The participant continued:

The lecturer comes and tells them, ‘Look at your neighbours. Next year they probably won’t be with you.’ This means that two thirds will drop out. If this is the kind of attitude we have right from the beginning in the first lecture, what message are we giving to the students? So we have to change the whole attitude: the mind set. Why are we here, we have to question. Are we promoting success or failure? (MQ04-USP)

Not only the attitudes of the teaching staff, but also the attitudes of the management affected the quality of student performance. When students achieved higher marks, the academic staff tended to be questioned. One interviewee explained this as follows:

In a particular course, supposing 50 percent of the students get an A+, immediately they will raise questions, ‘How come 50 percent have got A+?’ I say, ‘What’s wrong with that? This is the criteria for getting A+, this is the criteria for A, B, C, etc. If the students have satisfied the criteria they will get it’. We want people to succeed. Let everybody get an A+. That’s why we are here. We want all students to do well. But if you assume that so many should fail, you will work towards that. (MQ04-USP)

5.8.2 Student Evaluation

One very important component of the institutional QA was the course evaluation undertaken by students. This evaluation was implemented during all the semesters and for all courses. At the end of each semester, teaching staff were reminded by the Head of School to download and photocopy the evaluation forms, and then hand them to the students. Usually, when they were completed, the students collected them and brought them over to the School office. The Schools dealt with these forms, following the posting of their examination results, so that there would be no element of penalising students (MQ02-USP). One senior academic, who also performed managerial tasks, explained the process of student evaluation as:

What we've always had is a very simple questionnaire that goes out to the students. There is a policy to say how you deal with a course evaluation. But in my experience we haven't really dealt with it as well as we could have. (MQ02-USP)

This senior academic explained how the process had been improved, at least within the School and Departments that came under the jurisdiction of the KI:

In the last two and half years I've been leading this section, I really made use of those evaluation questionnaires. However simple they are, they still give you some ideas. . . . We collect those ideas. The staff go through them and pick up the important strengths and weakness that the students have come up with overall and in respect to the course and the teacher. Then the HOD goes through it as well and then they sit down and say, 'Ok, now this is good practice we carry on.' or, 'Let's talk to the others about it. These are the weaknesses and how do we deal with these.' Then we document those and that will then come to my office [we've got one staff member looking after that]. And the next year we will then check to see if the comments are any different. And then we can build on that. We've now got three cycles of it, so we've got a pretty good measure of it. (MQ02-USP)

However, not all the KIs from the USP were convinced of the usefulness of student evaluation. As recounted by one participant, this type of QA activity did not achieve a great deal:

Student questionnaires are neither useful nor, as far as I know, used for anything. This form of quality assurance was a very elaborate, time consuming, tedious and inefficient activity. (MQ01-USP)

5.8.3 Learning and Teaching

5.8.3.1 Staffing: Review, communication, staff turn-over, staff buy-in

A form of QA at the USP was the staff review. Initially, staff members were contracted for a period of three years. Less than one and a half years into each contract, each staff member was required to go through a review process. Renewal of a contract required the staff member to make an application, which required the presentation of documentation relating to various professional activities undertaken, including the courses taught, involvement in staff development programmes and research and publications. Contract renewal depended on the university receiving reports on those activities, which were then considered by a committee.

The staff review was a rigorous exercise, where each person was required to fill in a detailed form relating to their teaching, administration, consultancies and research. Various people at supervisory levels also commented on these areas. Some activities,

for example, research, were easy to document. However, identifying good teaching was more difficult. Thus, at least one department had developed a set of teaching evaluation criteria. This was explained by a KI as follows:

First of all, there is self evaluation. A staff member will have to say what he or she has done in the area of teaching, what improvements have been done. What are the innovations? What new ideas have been introduced, both in face-to-face and distance education? Then two colleagues will observe the teaching and they will comment on it. Then we have a School teaching evaluation committee. We fill in a form. All kinds of things are there so that people will take their teaching seriously. So that is another quality improvement kind of thing. (MQ04-USP)

Staff members cannot opt out of this activity insisted one Head of School.

When it comes to staff review we have a teaching evaluation committee chaired by me. What I do for every staff member's teaching evaluation, is that a staff member of mine, who looks after all course evaluation business, will bring up summaries of that staff member for the last two or three semesters for the course [identifying weaknesses, recurring issue, how things were dealt, and what the staff member has done about it]. . . . So we have a fairly good concrete thing in front of us. Because it's now so linked to the teaching evaluation, the staff members actually make an effort. Previously we used to only receive may be 20 percent of the course evaluation forms. (MQ02-USP)

The USP had been unduly strict on staff reviewed in the past, complained one participant. However, according to this participant, this was slowly changing and now it was "a bit more flexible" (MQ04-USP). Furthermore, the same participant observed that the institution was more rigid with staff who were already employed by the university and more lenient to those who were more recently recruited.

However rigorously the staff review activity was implemented, some participants were still of the view that it was a wasteful practice that did not achieve a quality outcome. This opinion was exemplified by the following participant:

I don't know how long they have been doing this, but I gather for a very long time. As I said, it's time-consuming, it's inefficient, in so far as it takes a lot of effort but it doesn't really serve to promote better quality, nor does it make the administration better informed about what academics are doing. It's a waste of time and waste of money. (MQ01-USP)

Staff involvement in QA, right from the beginning, cannot be too heavily underscored. This was all the more important particularly because, as one participant mentioned, "most people aren't all that interested in QA" (MQ05-USP). Quality assurance was generally seen as a 'boring topic' and most academics believed that everything was generally adequate. As one participant stated, "there's the usual

healthy element of scepticism that I'm sure will apply in the Maldives, just as it applies to everywhere else" (MQ05-USP). Hence, it was argued that:

It's important to communicate and try to explain that it's not just adding on: it's really rationalising things. (MQ05-USP)

Such rationalisation was believed to reduce the administrative burden on the institution.

In some cases, it might reduce the amount of bureaucracy and administration, as it should. I think at USP when we have our new processes in place that it will substantially reduce the bureaucratic requirements that are placed on departments. By substantially, I mean, by thousands of person hours per year. (MQ05-USP)

5.8.3.2 Adult learning and teaching

An emphasis on adult learning was observed at the USP, similar to that of the ABC College in New Zealand. However, at the USP, the process had become more formal over the years. The need for academic staff to undertake an adult learning course had been formalised and this activity had evolved into a specific department, the Centre for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching (CEL^T)²⁸, which started in 1992. According to one participant, "the remit then was also not just to look after the students' learning needs, but also to look at assisting staff to teach better" (MQ07-USP). Over the years, the programme developed and was eventually formalised as the Graduate Certificate in Tertiary Teaching (GCTT) in 2000. As a formal credit programme within the university, the GCTT offered training in teaching for staff, who did not have any formal qualifications in education or who needed a refresher course in their area. The specific focus of the programme, when it was developed, was the practice of teaching within HEIs.

The GCTT was not a formal requirement at the time of this research and there was no enforcement of it. The obligation to take part in this programme very much rested upon the individual lecturer. Some participants felt that this status quo must change, if the university was serious about implementing its QA policy:

We should enforce it. . . . It should have a very, defined place in the whole process of ensuring that all staff teach well and teach effectively. (MQ07-USP)

²⁸ CELT was a university initiative, primarily in response to the need for student support in a university-wide process. Within the School of Humanities, the English Resources Unit and the Maths Resources Unit, the staff primarily assisted students' needs in English language and mathematics.

Enforcement of the programme was not enough for this participant, who stated that it should also be carefully monitored:

It should also have a defined system of monitoring and somebody must be accountable for the process happening. At the moment, there is far too much looseness in the system, as far as I am aware. (MQ07-USP)

The usefulness of the GCTT programmes can be recorded at best as ‘mixed’. Some staff members were found to be quite enthusiastic about the programme, whilst others dismissed it as ‘doctrinaire’ (MQ01-USP).

5.8.4 Impact on Teaching and Learning

Although there were a few sceptics, regarding the positive impact of QA practices, most participants at the USP expressed the view that QA policy and practices were either showing positive impact or they were hopeful that they would in the future. A direct impact was the requirement to deposit course related documentation with the Heads of Departments’ offices. With respect to the depositing of lecture notes, course papers, etc., one participant recounted that at the present time “probably only 50 percent of the staff” fulfilled the request (MQ02-USP). Nevertheless, when the QA strategy is fully in place this would be a requirement, as auditors would need to view all these documents.

Measuring the quality of teaching is difficult and thus the majority of participants were only ‘hopeful’ that QA had in fact improved the quality of teaching at the USP. As one participant stated:

I would like to think that it has. It’s a little difficult to document something like that at the moment. How do you measure quality of teaching? Is it your pass rate? Some people believe that a good pass rate means good quality teaching. I don’t necessarily believe that. I think it could be one way, but there are other ways. I would be very hesitant to say yet that these are the processes, so these are the improvements. (MQ02-USP)

This staff member was more confident about the impact on staff awareness for areas of improvement:

One thing I can say is that staff are more aware with the student evaluations. . . . I personally feel a lot more comfortable knowing that with student evaluations staff are more aware that they have actual documentation and they must improve on this. And next year somebody will ask them whether they have improved. Five years ago we never did that. So that’s wonderful. . . . I can say that while I am a lot more comfortable now than I was, I wouldn’t be able to put it down to any one specific thing actually. It’s a little hard to identify. (MQ02-USP)

As a result of an increased formalisation of staff review practices, participants felt more comfortable that the opportunity to improve had been made more available to them. With all these opportunities, if staff members were found to have not improved their performances, then their staff contracts were not renewed. As one Head of School declared:

If we find that a staff member has not improved, we go through a very rigorous performance management sort of thing and we evaluate their teaching at various levels. If we find at the end that they have not improved, then we will just not renew their contract. They are aware of this happening. We provide all the support we can by way of sending them for training and improvement in speech etc. We will do all that for a year or six months and then we will evaluate again and if they have not improved then we will not [emphasis of the participant] renew his contract. Previously we weren't doing that. (MQ02-USP)

5.9 Summary of USP Case Study Themes

A number of global trends were found to have influenced the development of formal QA at USP. Quality assurance per se at USP was not new. The formalisation of QA mechanisms, albeit in a more managerial manner, is new. Staff members interviewed, who were also teaching, appeared to be committed to QA. However, they were doubtful whether the new QA mechanisms which they saw as more bureaucratic, would lead to academic quality improvement.

The external adviser system was a central component of USP's QA right from the beginning. This was clearly a transnational QA arrangement that had served the institution for a long time. This provided much needed external comparability. Being a regional university, the university always had an outward orientation, and hence an internationalisation agenda was incorporated within the setup of the institution. The external adviser system has been proposed to undergo some revision. The proposed revision appears to suggest a marked shift from individual international academic to a more bureaucratised structure with the framework of a panel of reviewers. An external adviser system fits with the overall university traditional QA practices. It is also a key element of the new QA strategy, although in a modified managerial form.

5.10 Common Themes from the Two Secondary Case Studies

The ABC College in New Zealand and the USP cases have shown that their QA policies were greatly influenced by the global environment. These two institutions increasingly tended to function within such a globalising environment. The ABC

College had a national policy framework, which was influenced by New Zealand's adoption of goals that pursued a global economic agenda. The role of the market and the discourse of skills development have lately dominated the agenda in the higher education environment of both these institutions. This emphasis, in the case of the USP, was more forcefully influenced by the 12 member countries, that in turn had various aspirations to be part of a global network of countries. The international and regional character of the USP definitely informed its quality policies. The adoption of international QA systems and practices was not new to the region. Many international companies, which operated within the South Pacific, had QA systems that applied to all their operations, regardless of location.

In both case studies, there was a marked shift towards increasing the formality of QA policies and practices. This had resulted in an increase in institutional evaluation and monitoring tasks.

Both institutions have moved towards a more holistic and 'managerial' approach to QA. This involved inclusion of all departments, both academic and non-academic services, in the pursuit of quality. Quality was linked in more formal ways to the planning and budgeting aspect of institutional governance.

Both institutions had adopted auditing as a means of improving quality. The ABC was already engaged in both internal and external auditing. The USP was in the process of institutionalising these practices. However, the External Adviser system, which had operated in the USP since the university opened, was also a form of external auditing, which had provided useful feedback to improve their educational practices.

From the analysis of themes from the two secondary case studies, the following broad nine themes appear to be appropriate for exploration in the context of the primary case study.

- i. Discourses (influencing QA)
- ii. Globalisation influence on QA
- iii. Role of the state
- iv. External advisors
- v. From accreditation to auditing
- vi. Quality management, bureaucracy
- vii. Learning and teaching (including programme development and staffing issues)
- viii. Student engagement in QA
- ix. Impact on learning and teaching.

Additional themes are also expected to emerge from the primary case study data.

5.11 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the two secondary case studies of the present research. The ABC College, a public tertiary education institution in New Zealand, was the first case study discussed. This College functioned within a highly regulated national QA system based on: (1) registration; (2) course approval and accreditation; and (3) monitoring and auditing of standards. It can be reasonably concluded that this system had resulted in a compliance-oriented quality environment within the ABC College. Such a claim can reasonably be extended to the polytechnic sector as a whole, within the New Zealand tertiary education system, since all 20 polytechnics come under a similar government regulatory framework relating to finance and governance. The USP had recently adopted a Quality Strategy, which used an integrated model of QA that extended to the university's geographical region and covered the core areas of the university.

The next chapter will present the primary case study of this research. This will be the case study of the MCHE. Analytical themes, for this primary case study, were derived from a combination of overlapping and relevant themes taken from the two secondary case studies and the interview questions, specifically framed for the primary case study. The presentation will be conceptualised within the policy analysis theoretical framework (discussed in Chapter Two) adopted for this research.

Chapter Six

PRESENTATION OF RESULTS: THE PRIMARY CASE STUDY

6.1 Introduction

This study of the policy processes relating to quality assurance (QA) in higher education is conducted through a global, national and local perspective, in the specific local context of the Maldives and its principal higher education provider, the MCHE. This chapter addresses the following two research questions (Questions number 2 and 3) pertaining to the primary case study. These two questions were guided by the respective subsidiary questions.

- Q2. Why and how did quality assurance policy emerge in Maldives' higher education?
 - 2.1 What internal and external (including global) contextual factors influenced the quality assurance policy requirement in Maldivian higher education?
 - 2.2 How was the policy requirement constructed and over what time period did it evolve?

- Q3. How does quality assurance operate in the emerging Maldivian higher education sector and in particular at the MCHE?
 - 3.1 What are the obstacles encountered in implementing national quality assurance policy at the MCHE?
 - 3.2 What quality assurance practices exist in the MCHE and how is quality assurance carried out at MCHE?
 - 3.3 What benefits/challenges arise from following the national quality assurance policy requirement at MCHE?
 - 3.4 How have these policies impacted on academic quality at the MCHE?

6.2 Overview of Data Analysis

Similar to the presentation of data analysis of the secondary case studies, it was decided that a meaningful approach would be to also present the primary case study data from a thematic analysis. The data are drawn from content analysis of documentary evidence, survey questionnaire and interview data from Key Informants (KIs) associated with the QA in higher education, both at policy level and at the level of practice at the College and the MAB.

Results of the primary case study are reported principally from combined data, which were derived from academic staff questionnaires and interviews with KIs from three major categories of the academic teaching staff, academic managers involved in implementing quality policies and contributors to policy making. The manual identification of themes, from each of the four groups, resulted in several themes. The product of combining the tentative themes of the four groups from MCHE is presented in Table 6.1.

Table 6.1
Emerging Themes from the Various Respondent Groups

Interviews with policy contributors N = 11	Interviews with quality managers N = 10	Interviews with academic staff N = 12	Academic staff questionnaire N = 59
Global trends	Globalisation of quality standards	International recognition of certificates	Acceptance in higher degrees / overseas employment
Role of overseas links	Quality and employability	Globalisation and QA / International standards	Communication/ policy awareness. Involvement of staff
International marketing	Proving competitiveness	Conducting franchised programmes	Conduct staff development seminars, workshop, etc.
Massification and vocationalism	International recognition of certificates	Role of external verifiers / External Adviser	Curriculum review and assessment
Benchmarking internationally	International benchmarking,	Quality locally driven	Improvement of library facilities/ internet services
External Advisers/Verifiers	External links/affiliation	Costs/ drawbacks / challenges	Improvement of managerial qualities of senior management staff
Proving competitiveness	No global influence	Accreditation	Inadequate infrastructure and equipment
Globalisation and markets	Legal framework	Compliance with standards	Inadequate knowledge concerning QA
Small states & international recognition of cert.	Role of the state	Accountability & improvement	Internal verification
Portability of qualifications	Discourse of control	Changes and improvement	Lack of qualified staff. Large no. of part-time staff
Accreditation and MAB – capacity	Compliance with standards	Merger challenges and benefits	Lack of Staff development
Impact [of accreditation]	Societal expectation	Prog. development, coordination and approval	Necessity of links with foreign institutions / universities
Brain drain	Competition and private sector	Restructuring of courses	Monitoring and supervision
Role of the state	Accountability	Part-time staff and QA	Monitoring by Central Administration

Interviews with policy contributors N = 11	Interviews with quality managers N = 10	Interviews with academic staff N = 12	Academic staff questionnaire N = 59
Compliance with standards	Merger and semesterisation	Multiple perspectives on QA	No global factors / Unaware of global factors
Accountability and improvement	Transition to university status	Staff buy-in	No QA policies and practices
Competition and private sector involvement	Perception of quality: Multiple meanings	Staff motivation	Peer support and free discussion of queries
Merger	Quality culture	Workload	Setting up of committees/ meetings
Low quality school education	Student evaluation / Monitoring of teaching and learning	Staff remuneration	Poor quality of students at entry
National level demands for quality	Course / Curriculum development moderation and review	Lack of policies to evaluate teaching and learning	Poor working conditions
Expansion [of higher education] and equity	Management and bureaucracy	Administrative support	Poor/weak management
University establishment	Remuneration / conditions of work	Student evaluation of teaching and feedback.	Staff dissatisfaction. Low motivation and commitment
Multiple perspectives on quality	Lack of resources	Student engagement	Strengthen quality monitoring process
National recognition	Academic forums	Standardisation of courses & quality of students	Strengthen the relationship with industry
QA management and bureaucracy	Autonomy and academic freedom	Impact of accreditation	Student evaluation of classroom teaching.
Institutional autonomy	Quality of students at entry	National recognition	Teachers' own motivation for improvement
Course / Curriculum development	The end result is set standards	Quality improvement and research	Transnational QA
Monitoring of teaching and learning	Staffing: Recruitment, training and reviews?	Autonomy and academic freedom	Heavy teaching load
Staffing / conditions of work	Adult learning and teaching		Unclear policy
Adult learning	Student engagement		Workshop / seminars for staff / Staff dev.
Student engagement	Perceived weaknesses / Tensions in following multiple QA practices		Regular monitoring
Clarity of MAB role	Importance of research		Training in QA schemes
Working with stakeholders	Working with stakeholders		Use of external consultants
Financial incentives and validation of certificates	Recruitment and retention of staff / Staff development		
Tensions when following multiple QA practices	Enhancing international recognition		
	National need for A		

Internal and external influences on QA policy processes, including policy formulation and implementation in the context of Maldivian higher education and MCHE in particular, were captured in the responses given by each category of participants. Additionally, data on the principal challenges the College faced and how it had addressed these challenges in terms of current effective QA practices were also obtained. This list of tentative themes constituted the thematic framework that served as the list of nodes for the purpose of coding in the NVivo programme. (See Chapter Three, pp. 99-100).

Subsequent to the collation of the initially identified themes, there followed an examination of similarities and differences, clustering and renaming of themes and organisation of the themes into categories with similar meaning. (See Chimwayange (2005) for similar approach to data analysis in a qualitative case study). These themes were first categorised under the two main dimensions of external and internal QA. This process resulted in the identification of 13 themes related to each of external as well as internal QA. The themes, under these two dimensions, are presented in Tables 6.2 and 6.3 respectively.

Table 6.2

Consolidated Quality Assurance Themes from the External Environment

List of themes related to external quality assurance	
1. International marketing	2. Learning from others
3. International affiliations	4. International organisations and external advisers
5. National need for QA	6. Financial incentives and certificate validation
7. Role of the state in QA	8. Discourse on control and compliance
9. Discourse on economic managerialism, human resource development	10. Decline of support for policy implementation
11. Role clarity of MAB	12. Strengths/benefits of accreditation
13. Perceived weaknesses in the implementation of the QA system	

Table 6.3***Consolidated Quality Assurance Themes from within MCHE***

List of themes related to internal quality assurance	
1. Merger of post-secondary institutions and semesterisation	2. Development of home grown degree programmes
3. Role of external consultants	4. Restructuring of courses
5. Staffing (Recruitment, use of part-time staff, retention, staff motivation, training, workload)	6. National recognition
7. Standardisation of courses and quality of students	8. Development and approval of courses
9. Evaluation of teaching	10. Impact of external QA
11. Autonomy and academic freedom	12. Market discourse
13. Transnational QA	

Once the themes were finalised, a process of re-clustering, based on the theoretical framework of this study, was undertaken. Following a modified policy cycle approach from a *glonacal* perspective (Ball, 1994; Marginson & Rhoades, 2002; Vidovich 2002a), (see Chapter Two, p. 60), the tentative themes identified in Tables 6.2 and 6.3 are presented in Table 6.4 (see p. 180). Within these two dimensions mentioned earlier, the themes fall under three main categories of global (or transnational), national and local (or institutional). Utilising Ball's policy cycle model, the themes further represent the contexts of influence, policy text production and practice.

The results of the primary case study are presented according to these dimensions and categories in the following two sections: 6.3 (external QA), and 6.4 (internal QA). The results presented in the majority of cases are supported by direct quotes from KI interviews and the relevant documents. It should be noted that, due to the dearth of documents on this subject in the Maldives, the researcher's knowledge, from past involvement in the policy process under study, also became a useful source of information. The 26 themes were clustered under the contexts of influence, text production and practice. The external QA dimension was further divided into 'global' (reflecting the transnational QA practices) and the 'national' levels. Hence the three groups of themes were eventually analysed at the three levels of global, national and local levels.

Table 6.4

Final List of Themes Clustered into Categories and Dimensions

Dimension	Category	Themes		
		Context of influence	Context of policy text production	Context of practice
External quality assurance	Global /Transnational	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • International marketing • Learning from others • International affiliations • International organisations and external advisers 	[Chapter 2, Literature review]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • [Chapter 2, Literature review] • [Chapter 4, Study contexts]
	National	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National need for QA • Financial incentives and certificate validation • Role of the state in QA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overview of QA policy texts • Process of accreditation • The MNQF document • Discourses on: control and compliance, economic managerialism, human resource development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decline of support for policy implementation • Role clarity of MAB • Strengths / benefits of accreditation • Perceived weaknesses in the QA system
Internal quality assurance	Local / Institutional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Merger of post-secondary institutions and semesterisation • Development of home-grown degree courses • Role of external consultants 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National recognition • Standardisation of courses and quality of students • Restructuring of courses • Development and approval of courses • Impact of external QA • Evaluation of teaching • Staffing (Recruitment, use of part-time staff, retention, staff motivation, training, workload) • Autonomy and academic freedom • Transnational QA at MCHE

Table based on policy cycle and glonacal model of policy analysis (Ball, 1994; Fiocco, 2005; Marginson & Rhoades, 2002; Vidovich 2002a).

6.3 External Quality Assurance Dimension

Within the dimension of external QA there were two categories under which factors that influenced the introduction of QA policy were analysed: global and national.

6.3.1 Global Context of Influence

The literature review and the secondary case studies have indicated that several factors, which operate at a macro or global level, tend to influence QA policies in many countries. In the case of the Maldives, four themes relating to the global context could be identified as having influenced QA policy. These themes, derived from interview data and documentary evidence, are: international marketing; learning from others; international affiliations; and international organisations and external advisors.

6.3.1.1 International marketing

In the context of reduced government funding over the last two to three decades, pressures have been created for higher education institutions (HEIs) to actively seek other sources of income. This has resulted in the bringing of HEIs, particularly Western universities, strongly into the 'business' of higher education. Consequently, many of them became engaged in international marketing, in order to attract students from overseas countries.

One KI noted that developments in Western countries, such as the United Kingdom, to advance a commercial aspect of higher education indirectly affected the need to raise quality in the Maldives. This created a desire to set standards from overseas institutions within our locally offered programmes. According to this participant:

There is big competition to attract Maldivian students to their colleges in the UK, for example, Middlesex University, Oxford Brooks, Westminster College. These were polytechnics that, during [Prime Minister] Margaret Thatcher's time, evolved into universities. So they are trying to in fact internationalise their colleges and they see the Maldives as a potential market. I think this influences our quality at a time when the Maldives College of Higher Education is trying to promote itself to being a university. (QPc06-MCHE)

This KI argued that a QA system in the country was justified, in order to offset the negative consequences of vigorous international marketing and thereby the draining of local students to overseas destinations. Evidence for such a justification was noted in the following quotation:

This is exactly the reason why we want to set our standards the same as theirs. We don't want to see our students, our future leaders, trained in the West. We want to see our people trained in Maldivian universities, top-notch people at their level. . . . These external forces or elements are driving the whole expectation towards maintaining or reaching that quality. That is definitely driving quality. (QPc06-MCHE)

Although no specific developments in the South Asian region, where the Maldives is geographically placed, influenced the country's adoption of accreditation as QA policy, some recent regional developments are likely to have had an influence. One KI revealed this to the researcher as follows:

Recently, there has been a move by the open and distance learning institutions' association of SAARC²⁹ to mutually recognise each other's awards. I think it will not be long before we establish peer review systems for accreditation agencies, and even national and ultimately SAARC-wide QA frameworks. (QPc11-MCHE)

Arising from globalisation, there is a greater movement of students and labour across national borders. This factor, according to one KI, will become a problem for the Maldives as "we are signing regional agreements, be they trade agreements or otherwise" (QPc09-MCHE). The implications of this, explained this participant, are that "a person recognised as a specialist in one country may have to be recognised as a specialist in another country, although our accreditation is different" (QPc09-MCHE). This participant envisages that in future "those countries within these blocks, such as SAARC, or whichever blocks we are in, will have to come to an agreed standard of higher education, and an agreed standard of recognising each others qualifications" (QPc09-MCHE). Thus, a regional QA framework was seen as inevitable.

Data from the academic staff questionnaire also confirmed the mixed set of views on the influence of global factors on QA in the Maldives. In response to statement 25 in the questionnaire, little more than a third (37%) agreed that global factors had little influence on QA policies in the Maldives (Table 6.5). At the same time, nearly a third (34%) of the participants disagreed, suggesting that global factors do influence QA. Just under a third of the respondents (28%) were neutral on this matter.

²⁹ SAARC refers to the eight-member South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation of which the Maldives was a founding member.

Table 6.5***Global / International Factors and Influences on Quality Assurance Policies in the Maldives***

Responses	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	3	5.1
Disagree	17	28.8
Neutral	17	28.8
Agree	20	33.9
Strongly Agree	2	3.4
Total	59	100.0

Note. Based on Questionnaire Item 25 (see Appendix K2)

Data from the questionnaire indicate that many staff members (65%) were not aware of the global influences that impact on QA. However, this does not mean that they do not exist. In the experiences of the academic staff members, global influences did not exist. This suggests that awareness of these influences is more likely to have been experienced at a higher level in the system – i.e. amongst the policy makers.

6.3.1.2 Learning from others

A small developing nation (SDN) faces special challenges in QA. Firstly, the Maldives faces the challenge of a shortage of qualified and competent people to be involved in QA work. The pool of academic staff is limited and the number of people conversant with QA issues and the management of these issues are also limited. All these factors limit the capability to undertake the type of tasks required in QA.

Another challenge is the dearth of funds that can be allocated to QA. This limits the hiring of consultants for external audits, the undertaking of accreditation processes and the carrying out of follow-up actions, which are often built into the QA systems in vogue at any one time.

As a SDN, the higher education system is also less diverse. The number of institutions is also comparatively fewer. The low numbers of institutions, according to one KI, “does not generate a diversity of quality assurance and/or issues that a larger higher education sector could generate” (QPc11-MCHE).

The Maldives appears to have little choice in its path towards QA in higher education. As one KI stated;

. . . we cannot swim against the current. I think our quality assurance aim will in the end be, not that it is desirable, but that we will become similar to most countries: a fully auditable system with the full documentation required by a quality management system. This would by definition, be high quality education. (QPc11-MCHE)

In light of the special challenges faced by the Maldives, as a SDN, it has taken the most viable route of learning from those systems with more robust QA policies and systems. As one KI explained:

MAB, for what it's worth, became what it is today because of the strategies it adopted. Firstly, it studied what the larger countries were doing in this area. Then, with a small number of interested and competent people, discussions were held to formulate national guidelines and processes for this work. Key personnel were sent overseas to study various systems. Relevant and best practices were then adopted by MAB. (QPc11-MCHE)

6.3.1.3 International affiliations

International affiliations here refer to both formal and less formal links with overseas institutions, be they universities and colleges or professional organisations engaged in educational standards setting or examinations. Such affiliations have come about through both bilateral aid projects as well as through individual associations with institutions. Although no participants specifically mentioned that any overseas affiliation was responsible for QA policy, the majority hailed the usefulness of such affiliations, for the purposes of maintaining and improving quality.

Data from the questionnaire results, regarding staff perspectives on overseas links for the QA (Table 6.6), clearly showed that a majority of the participants favoured overseas links, compared to local accreditation.

Table 6.6

Importance of Local Accreditation Versus Overseas Link Institutional Accreditation for MCHE

Responses	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	8	13.6
Disagree	28	47.5
Neutral	17	28.8
Agree	3	5.1
Strongly Agree	3	5.1
Total	59	100.0

Note. Based on Questionnaire Item 22. (Refer to Appendix K2)

Over 60 percent of the participants either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that local accreditation was more important than overseas links. This result corroborates the views stated by staff members in support of overseas links for QA purposes.

It can be reasonably concluded that this factor may have contributed to the exposure of Maldivian academics to overseas QA policies and their specific model of accreditation. As argued by a senior policy official,

The overseas links have actually forced various institutions to actually step up their standards and not only conform to their minimal [MAB] requirements but also to international standards. (QPc01-MCHE)

In addition to stepping up the standards, overseas linkages also seem to have played a role in building up the confidence of those who seek education. According to one KI,

The role of overseas linkages is very important. On the one hand it is establishing an external quality assurance and on the other it creates confidence and assurance for our customers of the existence of such an external quality assurance mechanism. (QPc05-MCHE)

Related to the confidence aspect, in forming external linkages, is the issue of credibility. As stated by one KI, the credibility of the local institution, in terms of having overseas quality standards, is built into the system. Furthermore, particularly as the Maldives was in the early stages of its development of quality processes, international affiliations provided an opportunity to learn from more established institutional quality systems and practices. Staff from link institutions, according to some participants, provided training sessions and they have also been able to provide standards from their respective institutions (AC05-MCHE). An example from the MCHE, the upgrading of the Diploma of Nursing course³⁰, was quoted by some as a successful example of such an international linkage and one that has proven that quality can be raised through such affiliations. After a review of this programme, by an invited member of the link institution, the faculty was informed that there was nothing that the external reviewer could suggest to further improve the programme in respect of its standard and quality. This was encouraging feedback, although it should be noted that this came from a staff member who cannot be considered independent of the same institution which helped in upgrading the programme. Nevertheless, as expressed by one senior policy official, “expressions of approval of our courses by academics from such [well-established] institutions are very important” (QPc03-MCHE) for QA.

However, not all participants were convinced that international linkages were a necessity for quality. This was seen as “fictitious additions” which were “not a

³⁰ This was an example of a three-year degree programme, through an institutional collaborative effort between the Faculty of Health Sciences (FHS) of MCHE and the University of Newcastle in Australia.

substitute for true quality”, according to one participant (QPc11-MCHE). Skeptical about affiliations with overseas institutions, this KI recalls how some universities, in countries such as China, seek affiliated status from New Zealand universities, a fact which was relayed to this KI by a senior executive of a New Zealand university who visited the Maldives:

[Senior] visitors [from Chinese universities] are very eager for MOUs to be signed between the universities on co-operation. For this purpose they [the New Zealand university] have a proforma MOU of affiliation, which is non-committal about everything and leads to nowhere, except that they could say that an MOU of cooperation has been signed between the parties. Some of the universities are keen to display the logo of such ‘affiliated’ universities in their course brochures, as badges of honour. For me, they are more badges of servility. It is little more than ‘stamp collecting’. (QPc11-MCHE)

This practice akin to ‘stamp collection’, in an area of human resource development, it is implied, is immoral as the “unsuspecting public are duped into believing that the greater the number of ‘stamps’ of affiliations the better is the institution” (QPc11-MCHE). It is perhaps for this reason that this KI considered the “obsession to seek affiliations is nothing more than a form of self-imposed neo-colonialism” (QPc11-MCHE). The benefit arising from such affiliations was also questioned by this KI. Comparing this practice with well-known and reputable universities, this participant noted that invariably the ‘name lender’ benefits most.

The desire among some institutions to seek linkages with overseas reputable institutions also presupposes that there are ideal HEIs (QPc11-MCHE). Such a desire would require the institution, for example MCHE, to measure its quality against some ‘gold’ standard, for example, Oxford. According to this theory, “the quality of MCHE is then the degree of match between the indicators and processes of the two institutions” (QPc11-MCHE). The KI further expressed distaste for this type of misguided simulation as follows:

I find this idea of imitation abhorrent. The underlying assumption in this misconception is that the clientele of the two institutions are the same: the national context is the same, etc. This is not to say that there aren’t things we can learn from such institutions; we can and we must. But, if we are going to determine the quality of MCHE by the number of affiliations or by how well we imitate the practices and performance of the ‘exemplar’ institution, then there is something wrong with our notion of quality. (QPc11-MCHE)

6.3.1.4 International organisations and external advisers

As a SDN, the Maldives receives substantial foreign assistance, both as bilateral grant aid and through loan projects. It is customary to engage 'foreign' consultants and advisers to review policy and make recommendations for change and further development. This is not to say that there is no local input into the process. Nevertheless, in the case of QA, the policy initiative can be traced back to the recommendations of a team of two external advisers to the Government of Maldives (GOM). In 1997, the Maldivian government, through an Asian Development Bank (ADB) grant, engaged two Australian consultants to develop a project, through which the MCHE was to be established. (See Chapter Four, pp. 131-132). The project objective was to merge the existing post-secondary education and training institutions to form the first ever higher education college in the country. Based on the consulting team's final report, the loan project stipulated, through one of the two loan covenants built into the project, that an accreditation board be formed. The stated objective of the proposed National Post-secondary Accreditation Board (PSAB) was to "establish national standards of post-secondary accreditation for the public and private sectors and develop coordination and complementarity between the public and private sectors" (ADB, 1998, p. 41)

The consultants had recommended that the new College be delegated the powers to form the PSAB, with the authority to accredit post-secondary education programmes and awards of the College and those of the private institutions offering post-secondary programmes and qualifications (ADB, 1998, Appendix 12, p. 1). The recommendation further stated that the proposed board "would be responsible for ensuring appropriate high standards in the post-secondary education programmes and awards offered in the Maldives" (ADB, 1998, Appendix 12, p. 1). It was intended that the move would encourage the various divisions of the College to license short courses to the private sector, thus enabling the College to concentrate on the higher level awards courses. It was also envisaged that this would have the effect of bringing the private education sector into the national post-secondary system, on an approved and complementary basis.

Clearly this was a 'tall order' for a newly formed national College to perform. The MCHE later considered it inappropriate to have accrediting powers vested with just one organisation, albeit the major provider of post-secondary education and training in the country. At that time, the MCHE functioned directly under the Office of the

President and not under a Ministry. Hence, it was deemed a logical and most prudent option to form the accreditation board under the Ministry of Education (MOE). Thus, after much deliberation, the Maldives Accreditation Board (MAB) was finally formed on 14 August 2000, under the MOE.

6.3.2 National Context of Influence

The national context was the core arena for formulation of the rationale for the QA policy and its production and subsequent implementation. The analysis of data, relating to the national context of influences, led to the identification of three main themes, namely: (1) the national need for QA, (2) the role of the state in QA, and (3) financial incentives and certificate validation. Each of these themes is discussed below.

6.3.2.1 National need for quality assurance

As was demonstrated in the previous section of this chapter, the national need for QA was initially generated through the ADB project formulation stage and subsequently through the implementation phase of the project. According to one KI, the need was initially identified as being due to the growth of the post-secondary sector and an increase in the number of private providers (QPc03-MCHE). Additionally, the need to accommodate good practices was also a relevant concern recalled by this KI.

Perhaps unaware of the influencing forces from outside, most participants stated that the interest for QA was locally driven. Some attribute the QA movement in the Maldives to “the awareness and the desire for a quality higher education” (QPc11-MCHE). This belief, according to the KI, has been fuelled as a result of developments within countries in the region, where a number of Maldivian students travel for higher education.

There are so called ‘American’ colleges in Sri Lanka which now advertise in the ‘Haveeru’ newspaper³¹ with the clause: ‘Accredited by the Maldives Accreditation Board.’ The fact is that the MAB has never given institutional accreditation to any College. Many of the public are now wary of higher education vendors, both in the Maldives and overseas. They are aware of the commercialisation of higher education and that qualifications are now, in a sense, for sale. (QPc11-MCHE)

³¹ A locally published daily newspaper in the Maldives.

The 'erosion of quality' was also observed, by some participants, in the graduates who returned from overseas training. This was noted by a KI as follows:

Many of these graduates are unable to express themselves. The public also know that many overseas qualifications are not recognized by the MAB. I would say that it is the awareness and the desire for a quality higher education which is driving the QA movement in the Maldives. (QPc11-MCHE)

The establishment of the MAB was perceived as the QA strategy for Maldivian higher education. Accreditation was the mechanism for QA. However, as explained by one KI, "they [MAB] actually don't do that; they don't do anything about quality assessment" (QPc07-MCHE). It was further explained that the function of the MAB was overwhelmed by the task of certificate validation (discussed in the next section). Thus, the need for QA started as a foreign certificate validation activity. This activity served a specific employment related requirement for the public service of the Maldives.

The establishment of the MAB was a major step forward in the QA policy development. It has ushered in greater consciousness for quality in the country, amongst stakeholders of higher education. Students, prior to admission and during their courses, seek clarification as to whether courses are accredited or not. They are equally keen to know whether the course they complete in the Maldives will be accepted for higher levels of study in overseas institutions. Parents are also keen to know whether they are supporting a 'government approved' course of study. Employers now readily seek attestation of approval from the MAB before employment is confirmed.

6.3.2.2 Financial incentives and certificate validation

A key factor, that influenced moves to introduce a system of QA, was the policy decision in the civil service to offer a financial incentive related to a person's qualification. Commencing on 1 April 1996, the GOM decided to provide, in addition to the basic salary, a 'higher education allowance' and a 'technical allowance' to qualifying government employees and this scheme is still ongoing. The 'higher education allowance' is provided for those who have obtained at least an undergraduate degree. The 'technical allowance' is provided to those who have completed at least a one-year long certificate or diploma level programme. Understandably, this move was intended to both supplement the comparatively low

salary of public service personnel and to offer a direct incentive for higher education and training.

In order to determine eligibility for these allowances, the certificates, diplomas and degrees would need to be obtained from an institution 'acceptable' to the GOM. In order to carry out the process, the Department of Public Examinations (DPE), under the MOE, was authorised to validate foreign qualifications³². The task was delegated to a newly formed Committee for the Recognition of Certificates, Diplomas and Degrees formed within the DPE. This Committee assessed qualifications submitted to it and validated those qualifications deemed acceptable to the Committee. The researcher, being a member of this Committee, can attest to the somewhat arbitrary nature of determining the qualifications in the early phase of committee work. In the absence of a detailed guideline for assessing qualifications and the limited information relating to foreign institutions, combined with limited knowledge about accrediting organisations in other countries, 'a fair degree of subjective judgement' would be an accurate characterisation of the committee's work.

It is important to note that the decision to grant an allowance was not a decision for the committee to make. The committee's responsibility was limited to determining whether it was an acceptable programme or not. Essentially the Committee continued its work with two main criteria i.e. duration of programme and whether the programme was conducted from an institution registered in the respective country. A foreign programme that was shorter than eight months of fulltime study was not accepted as valid, for the purposes of granting eligibility for the allowance. There was no way to check or validate the quality of the programme that a participant followed. Nevertheless, the application form to validate a certificate required a participant to submit other information, such as the mode of study, subjects studied and it also required, in some cases, the submission of curricula documents.

After the creation of the MAB, the functions of the Committee were transferred to the Board. The Committee was replaced by a Certificate Validation Panel with revised terms of reference. As one policy official stated:

³² A mechanism to assess local qualifications was not instituted. In principle it was agreed that a locally offered programme of study, involving a minimum of eight academic months of full-time study, would be recognised by the government as a sub-degree certificate or diploma course.

It [MAB] started as a mechanism to validate certificates and to formalise the giving of allowances to government job holders. They still continue to do such superficial level undertakings. Also the allowance and the job do not have any connection, as such. There are instances when a person may be in a job that has nothing to do with the type of course they are doing, yet they would be entitled to an allowance by virtue of having completed an MAB approved course. (QPc07-MCHE)

The function of certificate validation did not change in any significant way. However, the function is now also extended to all local qualifications, in addition to foreign certificates. The work is more systematised and efficient and this has largely been brought about by the increased information available to the Panel and its secretariat.

The GOM's decision to require all overseas certificates to be assessed through the MAB, for employment in the government, clearly overwhelmed the Accreditation Board's work in its infancy. The agency was understaffed and the people were under-trained. This could be one main reason why developments in strengthening QA in local higher education were stalled for a number of years.

6.3.2.3 Role of the state in quality assurance

Quality assurance in higher education in developed countries has traditionally been in the domain of the institutions themselves. Internal procedures have been in place to ensure the standards of courses and assessment procedures. The business of maintaining quality was more a collegial activity, than meeting a set of bureaucratic requirements. In these institutions, the role of the state in directly regulating quality has been minimal. However, in more recent times, governments have become more active in their pursuit and involvement in QA processes. As funding has declined and requirements for accountability have increased, the need for protection, at least in the political rhetoric, has increased the state's direct involvement in QA.

In the case of SDNs, the situation is somewhat different from that in more developed systems. In particular, in the SDNs, the development of the higher education sector as a whole is largely a responsibility of the state. The state's involvement in the initiation and implementation of policy initiatives is extensive. In the case of the Maldives, the state was the initiator of all activities that led towards an external QA regime. However, these initiatives were in response to other developments in the broader society.

The Maldivian government also had a role to protect the public, which spends a substantial amount of funds and valuable time on higher education. The investment of individual students requires protection, in order for them to secure a qualification that has worth. Acknowledging that it could be construed as an autocratic view, one senior policy official admitted that:

If we want to reduce mistakes we need to have some degree of control mechanisms. I don't think people are ready yet. . . . It is important to protect the clients also. We see abuse of the system as well. We have our students going to Sri Lanka and hardly any of them get what they expect. So we need to look into these issues. (QPc07-MCHE)

The necessity of government intervention for QA came about, according to another KI, because of the success in expanding opportunities for higher education abroad. As this KI stated:

The Government took three loans from the World Bank to fund secondary education development and to increase the number of degree-holders. . . . Many of our youth returned home with many degrees, some of which are of dubious standing. People began to see disharmony between the behaviour expected of those who had a degree and the behaviour of graduates. It was felt that course rigour varied across universities. (QPc11-MCHE)

Due to this state of affairs, the official assessment and accreditation of qualifications became a justifiable necessity.

6.3.3 Local Context of Influence

The local context of influence in this study refers to the influence of the MCHE in the development of QA policy. The MCHE, as the single largest public HEI, has played a key role in the construction of policy on QA, in the Maldives. This section will therefore examine the role played by the MCHE in influencing quality policy in local higher education in the Maldives.

6.3.3.1 Merger of post-secondary institutions and semesterisation

At the time of the merger, which formed the MCHE, different institutions had vastly different standards and academic practices. Entry standards needed for academic programmes, offering awards with the same name, varied between institutions. The names of awards for programmes, with more or less the same entry qualifications and durations, often differed. A certificate from one institution equated to a diploma in another institution. Likewise, curriculum development processes were vastly different. A number of institutes had advisory mechanisms for consultation in curriculum

development, whilst others did not have such mechanisms. In general, the institutes, through delegation from their respective Ministries, held the authority for curriculum approval. In practice, what operated was a process of self-accreditation within the institutions with no central mechanism of coordination or quality monitoring.

The merger of institutions thus created the opportunity for a unified attempt at the standardisation of practices. As one participant explained “we were able to use one standard and we all came to know of a single standard to work for” (AC07-MCHE). Most of the respondents reflected on the positive outcome of the merger. Although some participants reported on the challenging tasks that resulted from the merger, the benefits far outweighed any disadvantages. Benefits, including the sharing of collective resources (QM02-MCHE; QM03-MCHE) and the opportunity for teamwork (QM04-MCHE) were noted by some KIs.

The sharing of experience and knowledge is not something that could be overlooked as a major benefit that paved the way for QA. Selected excerpts from interviews, stated below, provide evidence for this perspective.

Over the years, we have been able to adjust ourselves to the new realities, especially in terms of improving the quality of the courses that we run here. We now have more guidance, especially with course development, compared to what we had prior to the establishment of the MCHE. (QM03-MCHE)

Collectively we got the opportunity to share the experience and knowledge of a number of staff members in managing similar institutions at various meetings. We have the opportunity to attend College Council as well as Academic Board meetings. Hence, the merger was a positive change. (QM07-MCHE)

The first Principal (later renamed as Rector), of MCHE, confirmed in an interview, given to the first Newsletter of MAB, that the circumstances of unequal entry standards and duration of programmes, for awards with the same names, “forced the MCHE to rationalise the award schemes across the College” (MAB, in press). The Rector, a *key player* (Taylor et al., 1997, p. 46) in the development of policy, stated that the only viable option for the rationalisation of awards at the MCHE was seen through the development of a framework to structure the awards (MAB, in press). Consequently a process of semesterisation of academic programmes was launched at the newly formed College in April 1999.

The MCHE Central Administration circulated a paper on semesterisation to all the faculties, which identified specific start and end dates for the academic year, which was divided into two main semesters of 15 weeks per semester. This document also stipulated the subject module codes and credit points system. The Rector recalled:

We considered 1200 hours of on-task time was equivalent to a year of full-time study. We knew this varied from 900 to 1300 hours in our studies of various universities. The credit point value per semester, of full time study, was set at 48, a number which was divisible by 2, 3, 4, 6, 8 and 12, which would enable whole number credit points for almost all the subjects. (MAB, in press)

The Rector admitted that his involvement in QA work in the sector came about through his exposure to overseas qualifications frameworks (MAB, in press)³³. The Rector elaborated on how he had received the documents that appear to have had lasting consequences for QA in Maldivian higher education, as follows:

A group of Victorian Government officials, desiring to obtain consultancies for an upcoming ADB project, handed the Minister some papers about the Australian Qualifications Framework and some promotional materials for attracting overseas students. I brought these papers [home] and studied them. (MAB, in press, p. 3)

Following this exposure, the Rector was believed to have prepared the first draft of the MNQF “based on the Victorian documents on the Australian National Qualifications Framework and the National Vocational Qualifications, NVQ, of the UK” (MAB, in press, p. 3). The Rector, however, was emphatic that the draft framework which he prepared “was only meant for the College” (MAB, in press, p. 3), confirming that they were not meant for any national use.

Thus, the creation of the MCHE, through the merger of post-secondary education and training institutions, was a catalyst for the evolution of the QA policy and its eventual implementation through a newly created state body.

6.3.3.2 Development of home-grown degree programme

A second significant development, that led events towards QA and a national qualifications framework, was the decision to launch the first home-grown

³³ This exposure, recalled by the Rector, resulted from a “fateful trip” made in March 1998, together with the then Minister of Education, to attend the UNESCO organised Conference on Education for the 21st Century in the Asia-Pacific region, which was held in Melbourne (MAB, in press). The Rector attended the conference as the then Chief Curriculum Coordinator at the Educational Development Centre of the Maldives (MAB, in press).

undergraduate degree programme. In early 1998, the GOM had, prior to the establishment of the MCHE, approved a proposal prepared by the then Institute for Teacher Education (ITE), to launch the first undergraduate degree programme. It was decided that this would be a degree in the local language, *Dhivehi*. The inspiration for the Dhivehi degree course at the ITE, according to the Rector, came after listening to a “particularly original speaker from Papua New Guinea, who spoke about the importance of cultural relevance in education” (MAB, in press, p. 3) at the March 1998 UNESCO conference, mentioned in the previous section.

Whilst this may very well be the case, the need and the idea of a Dhivehi degree course had also evolved through the curriculum revision exercise conducted at ITE during 1997, which the researcher³⁴, can recall. In 1997, the ITE launched the first ever two-year Diploma of Secondary Teaching programme, prepared in collaboration with an Australian university. This programme was modeled on a semester structure with credit points for respective units (papers or subjects), similar to the programme structures of the link institution. Thus a semesterised programme was introduced at ITE in one area, whilst the remaining primary and middle school teacher education programmes were not structured along these lines.

The complexity of managing the delivery of two different structures of programmes within the same institution was addressed through a corresponding curriculum revision exercise of the primary and middle school level programmes. With the assistance of an overseas [Australian] consultant, the Institute embarked on this task. A particular suggestion, which came out of the consultation process, with past students and heads of schools, was the launch of higher-level programmes for the secondary Dhivehi language teachers: the first batch of these teachers had already completed a one-year certificate programme. Suggestions were made to prepare a one year diploma programme for these certificate holders, followed by another third year which would culminate in a degree award for the Dhivehi language teachers.

This particular proposal, the launch of a Dhivehi degree programme for teachers, was followed up, in 1998, by the ITE, through consultations with the National Centre for Linguistics and Historical Research (NCLHR), whose support was then deemed important. Having secured the support of NCLHR, a brief proposal for the launch of a

³⁴ The researcher was the Head of the ITE at the time.

Dhivehi degree course for teachers was prepared by the Head of the English Language Department of ITE³⁵. This proposal to develop a Dhivehi degree programme for teachers, in collaboration with the NCLHR, was granted by the Office of the President in mid 1998³⁶.

This degree for teachers in the Dhivehi language was in keeping with the teacher education mandate of the ITE. The establishment of the MCHE in October 1998, together with changes in personnel and re-structuring of post-secondary education management, brought about a change in focus on the original concept of the degree programme for Dhivehi language teachers. The focus changed from one intended for practising and prospective teachers to one intended for a general audience. As one KI stated:

As the course development progressed, it was felt that the course would become more popular and beneficial to the country if it was offered to more than just teachers. (AC12-MCHE)

Whether this change in focus on the degree programme was an attempt to bring it into alignment with the Minister's initial inspiration, or not, was not verifiable through any written evidence. Nevertheless, this change in focus, appear to have served as a demotivating factor for the staff of ITE. Reflecting on the challenges in developing the first degree programme, one KI observed the following:

Maldives was relatively new to designing and teaching higher level courses. Although the Maldives had a considerable number of graduate scholars, people holding language degrees were few. In addition, people with language degrees, who were also proficient in Dhivehi, were even less. Further, people who were assigned to work on developing this course were already very busy in their jobs, especially with the semesterisation and curriculum review work going on. (AC12-MCHE)

Consequently the situation delayed the completion of the degree course. As noted by the above-mentioned KI:

Meeting deadlines for Dhivehi degree course work became difficult to achieve. The demands placed by MCHE on ITE staff were very high and hence they were at times unable to finish work to schedule. This was

³⁵ A formal departmental structure did not exist at that time. However, groups of staff members in specific subject areas were, for all practical purposes, considered as 'Departments'.

³⁶ It is standard practice that all new policy developments are formally approved by the Office of the President. This proposal was subsequently submitted to the Office of the President, through the Minister of Education, which again was the standard practice for corresponding with the Office of the President.

perceived by MCHE officials as reluctance, by some of the ITE staff, to work on the Dhivehi degree course. (AC12-MCHE)

These developments, the researcher observed, forced the MCHE Rector to later “locate the Dhivehi degree in another faculty and [personally] attend to its development and delivery” (MAB, in press, p. 5). The College Rector, however, recalled a problem in moving forward.

We wanted the first batch of students [of the Dhivehi language degree] to graduate in 2003. Although we had some ideas about what a degree is, as compared to a diploma or an advanced diploma, the key criteria for what constitutes a degree were not well established and therefore a framework became critical. (MAB, in press, p. 4)

A significant input towards the development of the framework and the degree definition came from the NZQA. This came about through a study visit undertaken by an MOE official in her previous capacity as Director of the DPE [prior to the establishment of MAB], together with this researcher, in his role of Vice Rector (Academic) of MCHE. The Rector of MCHE recounted this input as follows:

They visited Thailand and New Zealand to study accreditation systems in late November 1999. From their visit to the NZQA, both colleagues brought quality assurance documents for degree courses and other very useful information. We had by then almost all the information for what we wanted to do. (MAB, in press, p. 4)

Thus, the implementation of the proposal to launch the first home-grown degree programme, though mired with some contestation, was a key factor that accelerated the development of the qualifications framework.

6.3.3.3 Role of external consultants

The presence of global influences was observed at the institutional level, through the incorporation of strong input from external consultants. The ADB project, for the development of the MCHE, stipulated over 40 person months of consultancy. This translated into 24 consultants, all of whom came from Australia, since the successful bidder for the consultancy contract was an Australian university firm. The consultants had the opportunity to contribute in areas which included academic qualifications and standards, curriculum development, institutional management and governance. The impact of these consultancies is reported to be “variable, ranging from ‘Low’ to ‘High’ with the majority being ‘Medium’” (Rawlinson, 2004).

One KI, in response to external influences, noted the presence of a great many consultants from abroad, but the impact of their work was very minimal (QM01-MCHE). At the time of their engagement, their influence was apparent. However, this KI confessed that their influence has diminished over time, after the consultancy assignment was over. The participant further explained this may be because “things are more established now” in terms of the recommendations of the consultants (QM01-MCHE). The participant further added that “if there were influencing global factors, it is the influence of Australian consultants” (QM01-MCHE). Thus the influence of ‘traveling consultants’ was felt at the level of practice, in matters of quality.

6.3.4 Context of Policy Text Production

In the global arena, discourses of control, regulation, accountability and managerialism appear to be dominating QA policy texts. Such discourses frequently embody a view of efficiency, which often emanates as a consequence of a focus on economic rationality. The remainder of this section will examine the available documents regarding QA policy requirements in the Maldives. An overview of the texts will be presented, together with an interpretation of the dominant discourses in the policies.

6.3.4.1 Overview of quality assurance policy texts

There does not appear to be a large amount of textual materials published, regarding QA ‘policy’ in the Maldives. In addition, a specific ‘policy’ document relating to QA in higher education does not exist: neither does a QA framework exist. Nevertheless, three documents were identified that related to QA policy requirements in the Maldives. These were:

- i. An unpublished document accompanying the Presidential letter that established the MAB. This document outlines the purpose for the establishment of the MAB and the major functions assigned to the MAB. This document, dated 14 August 2000, was originally written in the Dhivehi language.
- ii. “The Maldives National Qualifications Framework”, published by the MAB, Ministry of Education, in 2001.
- iii. “Pre-qualifications criteria and application for course approval”, published by the MAB, Ministry of Education, in 2001.

The document that led to the establishment of the MAB was developed by officials of the MOE, based on the recommendations of the ADB consulting team. The ADB

consultants' report contained an outline which identified the structure and suggested membership of the proposed Accreditation Board. The consultants' proposal was to form the Accreditation Board as an organ of the MCHE, which would then entrust the College to perform tasks over and above a higher education provider.³⁷ The MCHE, having realised that the functions of the proposed Board were national and beyond the scope of a single provider of higher education, recommended to the Government that the Board be placed under the MOE. This appeared to be the most appropriate body to carry out the work of qualifications approval (MAB, in press).

The MAB was eventually established under the MOE, in accordance with the advice from MCHE, but contrary to the consultants' recommendation, with the following objectives.

- i. To develop a national qualifications framework (NQF).
- ii. To determine the standards of courses within the national framework; to monitor that teaching is carried out to that standard; and to monitor whether standards of courses, for which certificates are awarded, are maintained.
- iii. Register all courses and certificates awarded by public and private providers.
- iv. To assess the standards of certificates obtained from overseas institutions (Office of the President, 2000).

The overall intention of the Government, in setting up the MAB, appears to focus on registration of courses and benchmarking courses to specified standards, through an NQF. The said document also identified three main functions for the MAB. The first function pertains to the preparation of an NQF, in order to facilitate the accreditation of education programmes. This framework should include the broad areas of certificates / awards and levels of qualifications. The second function required the MAB to prepare minimum standards, in order to maintain quality and standards of certificates issued by providers. The third function required the MAB to develop guidelines for providers to follow, in order to continue maintaining the quality of the programmes, once they are accredited. The document also identified the accreditation process to be applied in the Maldives, which involved a two-stage process. (See Section 4.9.3, pp. 129-131).

³⁷ The consultants also suggested membership of the Board which was as follows: Academic Vice Rector of the College as the Chairperson, a member from the Ministry of Education, two Deans, two external members of the College Council and one academic staff member from the Council (MAB, in press).

6.3.4.2 The MNQF document

The key national QA policy requirements were included in the last page of the seven-page (A5 size) booklet relating to the MNQF. The booklet stated that QA is provided through the following policies:

Qualifications recognised through the MNQF must meet or exceed specified quality benchmarks.

A course leading to a qualification in the MNQF must meet the Pre-Qualifying Criteria (PQC), which sets the minimum quality standards acceptable to the Maldives Accreditation Board.

It is mandatory for Bachelor, Master and Doctoral degrees to undergo accreditation. (MAB, 2001a, p. 7)

The MNQF was designed to facilitate the development of a QA mechanism for the post-secondary education sector and to provide a framework for recognition of qualifications offered in the Maldives and abroad (MAB, 2001a). Here the reference to both the local and overseas qualifications is noteworthy. Regulation and comparability have been built into the overall purpose of the MNQF. In addition, the MNQF was intended to serve as a 'benchmark' during validation of foreign qualifications, which may have been designed and delivered on quite different value assumptions and objectives.

The MNQF was also intended to provide a comprehensive and coherent national framework that would facilitate quality improvement and QA and private sector participation in higher education. It was also intended to ensure that stakeholders, including students, employers, education providers and the whole community, would easily understand the learning outcomes involved in various qualifications.

Within the MNQF, all education and training was classified into one of three categories. The first pertains to general education. The second pertains to further education and training, including all training programmes leading to certificates, advanced certificates, diplomas, and advanced diplomas. This second category, by definition, is predominantly for employment-oriented education and training programmes. The third category, 'Higher Education', includes diploma, advanced diploma and degrees, including masterate and doctoral degrees. The levels are differentiated, based on the breadth, depth and complexity of the knowledge and skills included in the qualification. The beneficiaries of the MNQF, according to MAB (2001), include learners, employers and providers. Learners would benefit by increased transferability and by implication mobility, through recognition of

qualifications from institutions. The learners would have “greater choice and flexibility in what, where and how to learn” according to the MNQF (p. 3).

The Framework document contained features of the MNQF, a graphical representation of the awards and levels (see Appendix N) and a definition of credit hours and credit points for respective awards. In 2001, an 11-page (A4 size) document, outlining the pre-qualifications criteria and application process for course approval, was also published by the MAB (MAB, 2001b). This document stated the regulatory requirement from the MAB, for obtaining prior approval to commence a course leading to an award in the MNQF. This regulatory requirement became effective on the 1 October 2001 and documents (including the MNQF ones) were first published in September 2001. All courses, being conducted at the time, were also required “to complete course approval documents and submit to MAB before the end of December 2001” (MAB, 2001). This meant that there was effectively only three months available to meet regulatory requirements and therefore this involved an enormous amount of work, particularly for the MCHE, which offered over a hundred courses leading to an award in the MNQF. The purpose of this approval, according to the MAB, was to ensure adherence of each course to minimum standards of quality, as prescribed in the MAB Pre-Qualifying Criteria (PQC).

6.3.4.3 Dominant discourses

(i) Discourse on control and compliance. It is not surprising to see ‘control’ as one of the central discourses that run through this set of documents discussed above. It is understandable that any policy introduced for the first time, with the intention of regulation, is expected to embody a certain degree of control. The documents stipulate that a provider cannot introduce courses without prior approval from the state. The state had assumed a formalised role of controlling what ‘can be’ and what ‘cannot be’ taught in the HEIs, through this QA policy project. According to Taylor et al. (1997), it is rather common that such a policy is constructed, in order to embrace a regulatory objective.

Closely tied with the discourse on control, is the discourse on ‘compliance’. Prior to the commencement of a course, compliance with certain state prescribed criteria is mandatory. No provider can award a qualification without meeting certain minimum standards. QA policy requirements embody the requirement for minimum compliance

to specified standards. A senior policy official confirmed the importance of accreditation and admitted that:

There is no capacity in the country to ensure quality other than through accreditation. By saying that only approved courses can be conducted, a restriction or limitation appears to be imposed indirectly upon the courses that can be conducted. This means that not just anybody can conduct anything here. (QPc07-MCHE)

In emphasising the importance of accreditation, this senior policy official appeared to have justified the imposition of some restrictions on the development of higher education. It was further stated by this KI that “this might not be the best thing but otherwise the sector can become out of control; anybody can come and do anything” (QPc07-MCHE). The perceived necessity to control and regulate the sector was reason enough for the government to intervene.

(ii) Discourse on economic managerialism. By the late 1990s, the post-secondary education sector came under pressure to enrol more students and meet the more diversified manpower requirements of the employment sectors, brought about by two decades of significant economic progress. Allied with this situation, was the necessity to increase the standards of post-secondary education and training and thus ensure that the sector was more credible and of a higher status (ADB, 1998, p. 6). The ‘grand narrative’ for QA also envisaged that the improvement of standards would more readily attract donor support, facilitate international linkages, assist in the retention of high calibre staff and attract higher student enrolments. Thus, the human resource development (HRD) perspective, which was part of a wider discourse on managerialism, was woven through the reports of the external consultants, which initially identified the QA requirement for the country’s higher education sector. The HRD rationale, coupled with the desire to improve standards and the impetus to rationalise the existing awards, provided the key discourses in the quality policy requirements. The HRD perspective was also reinforced by the policy intention of elevating the MCHE to university status: the first university in the Maldives

Whilst the heads of faculties (‘Quality Managers’ in this study) accepted that quality was defined differently in different places, some focused on the ‘achievement of competency’ as quality. Understandably, this view seems to have been upheld in faculties where there was a predominance of lower end vocational / technical courses. The following excerpts provide evidence to this perspective.

For us, quality is competency; achievement of competency. This is quality according to [the international] standards we follow as well. Accordingly, one should be able to perform the tasks. (QM02-MCHE)

We believe that every student, who completes a programme here, should be very competent in the area of study. Hence, competency is what we look for. Most of the staff members at MCHE also work in industry. Hence, they are quite aware of the work from an industry perspective. In addition we bring those who work in the industry as guest lecturers. Therefore, we emphasise sending competent people out into the job market. (QM07-MCHE)

Meeting the needs of the employment sector and attending to ‘employer satisfaction’ was also a theme that could be observed in interviews with some faculty heads. The following excerpts exemplify this perspective:

We have to work for quality on our own because quality is measured by those who employ our students. If employers are satisfied then that means our training is seen as quality training. Otherwise, even if we say our courses are accredited to a high standard, we don’t achieve or meet quality. (QM02-MCHE)

Even if we have to change the duration of the course we still cater to the needs of the industry. (QM07-MCHE)

Thus, within an overall HRD strategy at the level of practice, QA appears to have taken a managerial emphasis on a skill-oriented competency-based approach to teaching.

(iii) Market discourse. The language of the market, which uses such words as ‘customers’, ‘wide customer base’ and ‘competition’ represents a perspective of quality from the domain of business and the market. References, relating to private sector enhancement, from official documents (see Section 6.3.4.1, p. 199), were cited earlier. Such a market discourse was clearly also evident from the Maldives context. A KI stated:

I think competition is good. When we allow that we also have to be able nationally to monitor the private sector institutions as well. . . . Of course, it creates pressures for us as well. We know that we can compete quite easily, because of the resources that we have, compared to the [rest]; but, again, long-term it may not be the case. We have to think of competition; we just cannot operate within our comfort zone. (QM03-MCHE)

As noted in the previous section, these perspectives embody an increasingly ‘consumer-driven’ education model. The danger is that in this model ‘education’ becomes a commodity that could be traded (Roberts, 1997). Education loses its position of being a public good and becomes a private good, “where the only

recognized benefits are those that accrue to individuals purchasing 'provider' services (Roberts, 1997, p. 36). Marketisation in education is nevertheless, far too complex. This complexity was acknowledged in the following perspective offered by one participant:

The issue of quality is complicated in higher education because the customers are too many. There are internal and external customers. . . . It is this wide 'customer base' that makes quality so critical and hard to achieve. I think the 'fitness' expected by each will be different. Quality in higher education must, therefore, have several facets. (QPc11-MCHE)

The emphasis on suiting the 'needs' of employers reinforces a move towards marketised model of education (Roberts, 1997).

6.4 Context of Practice

6.4.1 National Context of Practice

The context of practice refers to the context where the policy, in this case, a QA policy, was practised with various effects and consequences. The national context of practice was analysed through an assessment of the institutional capacity for the implementation of national QA policy requirements, which was based on the perspectives of policy contributors and quality managers. Additionally, an assessment of support for the implementation of the policy, the evolving role of the MAB and the perceived strengths and weakness of the national QA policy was also made.

6.4.1.1 Decline of support for policy implementation

Several participants highlighted the lack of capacity at the MAB and its inability to move beyond a first stage when implementing a national QA policy. An analysis of political events in the last six to seven years and the accompanying structural changes in the government departments can offer some indications as to the reasons for this slow pace of progress.

Since 2004, the Maldives has been experiencing a period of unsettled times. Demands for greater political participation, more transparency in the Government and the promotion of social justice have been on the increase. Together with constitutional revision, the Government was compelled to announce an 'agenda of reforms'. In 2005, on the political scene, the registration of political parties was allowed for the first time in the country. Unprecedented civil disobediences have occurred in a number of island communities around the country. Hitherto unseen, parents have closed public schools for weeks with demands for better services, including trained

and better qualified teachers. The MCHE has witnessed the open and vocal expressions of student demands. The civil service administration has also experienced a period of unsettlement. During these periods of tense political developments, the Maldives has witnessed changes within cabinet portfolios: frequently seen together with the restructuring of Government ministries. The Rector of the MCHE highlighted these changes and it is useful to quote his comments at length:

The Minister of Education, Dr Mohamed Latheef [the Minister at the time of establishment of the MAB and a person who accorded high priority to the matter] was relieved of his portfolio on 8th October 2002 and Mr. Ismail Shafeeu became the new Education Minister. Dr Mahmood Shougee [the acting part-time head of MAB, in addition to being the Chief Education Officer] was appointed as Deputy Minister of Education on 9th October 2002. The Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) was established on 19th November 2003 and Dr. Abdul Muhsin Mohamed [Head of Curriculum development] was appointed its Executive Director. The MAB then became an organ administered by the DHET. (MAB, in press)

As part of the 2005 restructure of Government machinery a new Ministry of Higher Education, Employment and Social Security (MHESS) was formed on 14 July 2005. The DHET and MAB became organs of this new Ministry. Other changes included the re-transfer of the head of DHET back to the Ministry of Education and the appointment of Ms. Khadeeja Adam, a former Director of the DPE, as the new Executive Director of DHET in August 2005.

This period of political changes unfortunately coincided with the early years of the establishment of the MAB. It was unfortunate in the sense that the MAB was moved around in its infancy, hence undermining the opportunity to focus on its development. With only an acting staff in-charge during its infancy, the MAB has been administered 'from a distance', as one KI remarked (QPc03-MCHE). This KI further explained:

The rapid staff changeover was also an issue. The number of staff members who headed the MAB has changed several times over the last four to five years³⁸. . . . So, therefore, the MAB is viewed only from a distance, isn't it? The place has not continued to develop as an independent institution. (QPc03-MCHE)

³⁸ Firstly, Dr. Shougee headed the Board. He was then a senior official and later the Deputy Minister, but he was still employed by the Ministry. [Mr. Ahmed Ali Didi, a Director seconded for the job from the Ministry of Education, worked under Dr. Shougee]. Later, Dr. Muhsin was the overseer of the Board, whilst still holding the position of Executive Director of DHET. Then [Dr. Muhsin's Assistant Director] Asra also physically stayed in DHET and operated as a part-time staff member. Later, Shukoor [who had transferred from the post of Deputy Principal in a secondary school] joined the board for a short while. (QPc03-MCHE)

It was confirmed that the first fulltime Head of MAB was in fact appointed five years after the setting up of the MAB.

6.4.1.2 Role clarity of MAB

A point of contention, noted during the interviews with policy officials, was the issue of the unclear role of the MAB. Whether the MAB was a QA 'institution' or merely a 'group of persons' responsible for QA at the national level was actively debated during the data collection period of this research. This topic was debated amongst members of the Board in their formal meetings and at internal meetings within the Ministry under which it operated. According to the August 2000, Presidential Decree, through which the MAB was established, the concept of the MAB was a group of persons with decision making powers who also held responsibility for QA. This group would be serviced by a secretariat within the MOE. This conception, according to a senior policy contributor "has evolved over the years" (QPc03-MCHE). Consequently, "this group of persons did not function as a coherent body accountable for quality assurance", the KI further claimed (QPc03-MCHE). The original concept of a group, charged with responsibility for QA in higher education at the national level, appeared to have transformed with the changeover of the secretariat to a new Higher Education Ministry. This KI recalled that:

The Higher Education Ministry's thinking is different. The Minister is of the opinion that the office is the Board. [The Director General (DG) assigned to the Board] is the Head of this office. The Minister made it clear that he has entrusted authority in the DG and that the DG as the Head should be responsible for the work of this institution. He also made it clear that the group referred to as the Board is an academic advisory group. (QPc03-MCHE)

Thus the policy regarding the formation of MAB, a principal organisational structure of QA in the Maldives, has changed at the level of policy implementation over the first five years of its life. The Board, initially conceived as a group, has evolved into an institution. The Head of the MAB functioned as a secretary to the Board, not by appointment of the Board but by default and at the discretion of the person in charge of the secretariat to the Board. However, in reality, the Director General, who was appointed by the Higher Education Ministry, has been made responsible for QA and the role of the group of persons was confirmed to be advisory (QPc03-MCHE).

Interviews with members of the MAB, external to the education sector, also revealed the ambiguity of their role, which they faced in discharging their duties. As one member explained:

The MAB at the moment is 'in between' [a group and an institution]; it's very fuzzy. Even I myself asked that question the other day at the MAB meeting. . . . The MAB is acutely aware of this problem and consciously wants to move away from this present loose kind of organisation to a more solid organisation. (QPc06-MCHE)

Interviews with policy contributors clearly revealed that there was a lingering issue of the role clarity and function of the MAB. Whilst this ambiguity did not necessarily prevent the MAB's day-to-day functions of certificate validation and course approval, the development of external QA activities per se was impeded. During the interviews, the researcher was informed that the thinking within the Higher Education Ministry and the 'group of persons' meeting as the Board was that the secretariat of the MAB will evolve into an institution, such as a qualifications authority, with an advisory group serving as a council. No documentary evidence to support this thinking existed at the time of data collection. Hence, the nature of any future development of MAB can only be speculative.

6.4.1.3 Strengths / benefits of accreditation

Almost all interview participants from amongst the three groups of KIs in this study consistently noted the establishment of the MAB and the subsequent introduction of a national QA system as being very positive steps taken by the Government. The majority of participants believed that the newly introduced system would be instrumental in bringing about 'acceptable standards' and that it would also 'maintain' standards (QPc02-MCHE). A ministerial level policy contributor remarked that it was very beneficial to have started the accreditation just as the MCHE was also created (QPc08-MCHE). This KI pointed out that it was through the example of MCHE that a number of private parties also started business stream and computer courses, particularly those with linkages to institutions in other countries (QPc08-MCHE).

The introduction of the MNQF was also identified as a significant strength by senior policy contributors. As one KI stated, "Its current strength is the establishment of the MNQF and the acceptance of this framework by accreditation agencies overseas" (QPc01-MCHE). Now that this framework has been developed and it is available for everyone to use, there has been greater acceptance of the framework. Institutions have also accepted this as a development in itself. As stated by one KI, "Its other strength is

that the higher education institutions are conforming to this and there is ready acceptance of it and institutions are seeing this as a way forward, rather than a barrier” (QPc01-MCHE).

The introduction of a national QA policy and system has also raised the awareness of students over their concerns for quality in higher education. As one KI stated:

People are very aware and they come and ask us. Students also telephone and ask us whether such and such a course conducted in, for example, the Mandhu Learning Centre [a private institution] is accredited or not. So that is very encouraging and satisfying. Many also asked about the short courses conducted by institutions and they want to know why short courses do not fit into the framework are offered. (QPc03-MCHE)

Some of the ‘Quality Managers’ were of the view that the national QA system brought about standardisation of courses and national recognition in local higher education. As one manager stated, “Standardising the level of the courses that we provide is a major benefit” (QM04-MCHE). Another KI stated that the national QA system,

... definitely gives national recognition. I also think that, in the long term, it will have benefits beyond what we get right now, because it takes time to build credibility. (QM03-MCHE)

Quality Managers were also keen to point out the international recognition of local courses which also arose from a national QA system. One KI stated that:

Having a formal system of national accreditation / quality assurance will facilitate the long-term building of an international reputation. (QM03-MCHE)

Another KI agreed to the above perspective and stated that:

When overseas people know that there is an Accreditation Board here, their confidence in us is higher. This was evident when we prepared our programme A and informed institution Y³⁹, regarding the commencement of this programme and they informed us that, once it has been MAB approved, they would have no issues in accepting our course. If there is any issue they said they will raise questions with the MAB. (QM05-MCHE)

Another Quality Manager stated satisfaction that the graduates from the respective faculty were able to enrol in overseas institutions, based on the qualification they received at the MCHE. This KI stated these views as follows:

We now get information that those who complete our courses now have opportunities to go for further training overseas. I must assume that this is

³⁹ The programme and link institution are not named to protect the identity of the KI.

the result of us conducting accredited courses here in the Maldives (QM07-MCHE)

Whilst there was a growing confidence in the standard of local higher education, one policy level official was more cautious in endorsing such a high degree of confidence. As this KI stated:

It is hoped that this will build confidence in the provision of higher education. This only will lead to this situation if we are able to function properly. There could be perhaps a second stage to come in the future. (QPc03-MCHE)

This policy official, who was closely associated with QA management in the Maldives, acknowledged that the stage of accreditation has not arrived yet and confirmed that:

Not a single course has been fully accredited by the Board. We will ask institutions to undertake self-study. That's the second phase, which we are planning to start. We are looking at internal auditing models. We have collected models from . . . other countries. (QPc03-MCHE)

What most participants referred to as 'accreditation' during their interviews was actually the pre-qualification process. They were referring to the national policy requirement to obtain prior approval to begin a course, which then leads to an award in the MNQF. This prior approval, which certainly demands a rigorous document preparation process, was perceived as bringing about quality in higher education.

6.4.1.4 Perceived weaknesses in the quality assurance system

Instituting a national policy and a system for QA was seen as a step forward. Participants were also asked about the drawbacks of the system. One senior policy official was quick to admit that there were also some limitations in the system. This KI highlighted the weakness of the MNQF as follows:

The Maldives National Qualifications Framework is an *academic* [emphasis of KI] framework and the major labour market requirement is in the technical vocational area. It is very difficult to 'plug in' technical vocational qualifications to the existing framework. . . . It's only very recently that a chartered accountant [qualification] was given a place in the framework. (QPc01-MCHE)

The academic nature of the Framework and the difficulty of fitting in vocational sub-degree programmes were also highlighted by other KIs (QPc04-MCHE, QPc03-MCHE, QPc07-MCHE).

Policies are introduced with certain intentions and the state, as the initiator of the policy, has responsibility to provide the necessary resources to implement these policies. Not all participants were satisfied with the capacity of the MAB to undertake the implementation of the policies with which it has been mandated. Part of the problem is not only financial but human as well. Although the system is in place, one KI was not satisfied with the operation of the system and stated:

The total functionality of the MAB is not yet established. They are, at the moment, only looking at course outlines. They are not able to streamline these course outlines and organise them in such a manner that they can efficiently scrutinise the programmes. (QPc04-MCHE)

Furthermore, the theme of not going beyond the pre-qualification approval stage and onto the actual accreditation process was a recurring theme amongst several interviewees. As one KI commented, “Right now it is basically an approval process, even though the underlying principles [of accreditation] are that there will be institutional or programme accreditation”. (QPc04-MCHE)

A senior policy staff member, closely associated with the national QA policy, accepted that the capacity of the MAB to implement the policy was very low, for a number of reasons. It is low “not only because we don’t have staff” stated this participant. The problem was also compounded by the lack of a large pool of academic staff in the country. As this KI further explained:

We have to send the courses [submitted by providers] to subject specialists to review, as part of our approval procedure. We have very few such subject specialists outside the institutions that develop these courses. . . . So the local academic pool is very limited. As a result, we cannot easily outsource these tasks. As you know, we cannot recruit fulltime specialist staff here for each subject area. Therefore, we have to outsource these tasks but the pool is small. Hence, we cannot achieve the standards we want to maintain. Secondly, we find it difficult to organise this activity. (QPc03-MCHE)

The limited nature of an in-country academic pool is a special problem faced by SDNs and it is not an easy problem to resolve. The MAB aims to obtain opinions from two subject specialists, for each of the subjects, during the approval process. “We don’t like to limit the process to only one person’s feedback” stated this KI (QPc03-MCHE). However, it is sometimes not possible to find a second opinion even “when the first person’s feedback is not very satisfactory” (QPc03-MCHE). Based on these first hand observations, the participant seemed to have accepted that:

The current model of peer reviewing and approval of courses is not functioning effectively or it is a very weak model for us, since the pool is small. So, therefore, we need to find an alternative model. (QPc03-MCHE)

The engagement of subject specialists, as part of a peer review process in reviewing subjects, assumes the availability of a sufficient pool of academic staff. In a SDN with an emerging higher education sector, such an assumption is clearly not valid.

6.5 Internal Quality Assurance Dimension: Perspectives of Policy Implementers

6.5.1 Local Context of Practice

This section focuses on QA at the level of institutional practice. As demonstrated earlier in this chapter, the QA ‘policy ensemble’ referred to in this study came about as a direct consequence of the establishment of the MCHE. Hence, the MCHE was selected as the institution for analysis of data at the level of practice.

Ball (1997) argues that policy implementation depends on local responses, since policies do not dictate what should be enforced, but rather “they create circumstances in which a range of options . . . are narrowed” (p. 270). Whilst this could be said of developed Western systems of education, the researcher is of the view that, in state controlled and highly regulated systems and particularly in the context of the Maldives, policies in fact dictate what should be enforced *and* at the same time create circumstances in which a range of options can also be accommodated. This is exactly what happened in the case of the introduction of national QA in the Maldives: The policy dictated the minimum levels of compliance.

The MCHE, as the prime mover of the policy, perhaps realising its limitations, created additional opportunities in assuring quality. It is true that HEIs do not depend totally on external (national) QA mechanisms. A number of internal QA practices are also at work within HEIs. The QA practices at MCHE also showed a mix of transnational QA mechanisms, in addition to its specific internal mechanisms. Hence, developments at MCHE, with respect to QA, provided a unique opportunity to analyse a specific context of practice at the micro level.

This section addresses the second of the two principal research questions posed for the primary case study and it is presented through an analysis of the benefits and challenges for national regulatory QA policy and the subsequent issues of QA practice at the MCHE. The results are presented through a thematic analysis of the data

obtained from those who were more directly involved at the level of practice. Hence, data for this section come primarily from the academic staff interviews and academic staff questionnaires. The quality managers identified in this study also played an active part in the implementation of policy, in addition to their contributions to policy making in various policy forums. Hence, relevant parts of the interviews with the quality managers were also included in the data analysis reported in this section.

6.5.1.1 National recognition

National recognition of academic programmes and corresponding qualifications was the most mentioned benefit of the QA policy, by academic staff members and faculty heads within the MCHE. It must be noted that 'QA policy' referred to in this study was known to the majority of participants as 'accreditation'. Hence, the interviews were also conducted with this understanding and the word 'accreditation' was used freely to refer to QA. Furthermore, it was also observed that the majority of participants had little understanding of the difference between 'approval to commence' and 'accreditation'. The English word 'accreditation', which does not have an equivalent in the Dhivehi language, was freely used when communicating in the local language. Recognition of academic programmes by a Government agency was equated with 'high quality'. According to some participants, this view was widely held amongst the public. The following excerpts support this perspective:

At the societal level, people believe that whatever is recognised by the government is of high quality. Since the MAB is part of the government, people believe that a programme recognised by the MAB is of quality. (AC02-MHCE)

Among the locals, the MAB is a place that is recognised. So it (accreditation) is compulsory for the purpose of recognition. (QM01-MCHE)

Definitely, it (accreditation) gives national recognition. I also think that, in the long term, it will have benefits beyond what we receive right now. (QM03-MCHE)

Thus, the national recognition of programmes, arising from the initial approval from the MAB, was a worthwhile benefit that was achieved through the QA 'policy ensemble'.

6.5.1.2 Standardization of courses and quality of students

Standardisation of courses was another frequently mentioned benefit. As one KI said, "standardising the level of courses that we provide" was a major benefit. This

standardisation for others came in the way of alignment of curriculum to a predefined format. This view was supported by two other participants:

Previously, when we prepared the curricula everybody did it in their own way. Once the Accreditation Board was established we had to change all the curricula to their format It is a very major advantage for us that all the curricula are in line with the MAB framework. We find it very easy to follow the curriculum now. Also, when we conduct classes we know what we are going to do every week. (AC04-MCHE)

When we started accrediting [seeking approval of] courses, we were compelled to maintain the standard determined by them [MAB]. These standards included a certain amount of workload, a certain amount of credit points, etc. We had to plan according to this. So, in that respect, the establishment of an accreditation board is important for us. (AC07-MCHE)

Others also spoke of the opportunity the MAB guidelines created to select a better standard of students than the students selected prior to the policy. This was particularly mentioned in relation to the Maritime Studies courses, where the courses were prepared according to the International Maritime Organisation's (IMO) model courses. Some of the IMO model courses prescribed a lower level of entry than that stipulated by the MAB. Although the Centre for Maritime Studies could conduct courses based on IMO standards, the Centre had decided to pursue both IMO standards and the MAB standards for some of their courses: a move that some regarded would "guarantee a better product" (AC05-MCHE).

However, not all the faculties were convinced that the QA 'policy ensemble' created the opportunity for selecting a higher standard of students, than before this policy. At the Faculty of Engineering and Technology (FET), it was noted that, according to the MNQF, a student with two General Certificate of Education (GCE) ordinary level (OL) passes could join their Advanced Certificate courses. Since the faculty did not attract enough students for this level of courses, the faculty added one semester, thereby increasing the duration of the programme by 50 percent.

As one staff member explained:

The entry criterion is a minimum of two GCE Ordinary level passes, which include either maths or physics. But we didn't get enough students at this standard so, therefore, we lowered the criteria. . . . So, since we revised the criteria as 'having completed grade 10', the standard of students we get has dropped considerably. . . . One group with some OL passes and the other without any OL passes. We notice significant difference among these two groups. (AC03-MCHE)

Thus, the programmes at FET were designed to meet the MAB standards, but securing the required quality of students proved to be a difficulty. However, from an equity perspective this increased access to a wider audience of students.

6.5.1.3 Restructuring of courses

It was also noted that courses in some MCHE faculties had undergone a significant restructuring, as a consequence of the national QA policy requirements. Previously, FET for example, used to have what was known as ‘trade theory’ and ‘practical’ sessions as the two main components of their programme. The ‘trade theory’ component included the content knowledge of subject matter. With the revised structure, the ‘trade theory’ component of teaching was redesigned into a number of separate subjects. This enabled the assignment of different lecturers to teach the various subjects. Previously, when the ‘trade theory’ was taught as one combined subject there was often only one lecturer assigned to teach this whole component. With restructuring of courses along MAB guidelines, more competent lecturers with subject expertise were assigned to teach the various subjects.

Although the ‘approval’ of academic programmes was hailed as a major benefit of the introduction of the QA ‘policy ensemble’, participants were also quick to point out the drawbacks. The drawbacks highlighted the tensions in the actual implementation of the policy. The following excerpts provide support for such a claim:

The evaluation process within MAB is not very effective at the moment. Some of our programmes, which I consider are not very good, were accredited. I think the MAB needs more trained staff. (AC01-MCHE)

The quality of paper work will be very good. In my view, it should be a mandate for the MAB to actually monitor the facilities and see how the courses are conducted. That function doesn’t happen. (AC03-MCHE)

Excessive delay at the MAB, when completing the approval process, was noted by many as a major drawback (AC04-MCHE). As one KI mentioned:

Most of the syllabus outlines are still at the MAB. That’s a major challenge for us, especially as we head towards being a university. Many outlines are not approved. We have no information about the process. The MAB is only in a name. They don’t have professional people. (AC07-MCHE)

The unquestioned and informal nature of course approval was clearly not something that the academic staff appreciated. “Nobody was questioning” the subject outlines, reported one academic staff member, who was involved in writing an outline (AC10-MCHE). The question of why a certain subject was taught in the first year for a

Diploma course, whilst the same unit was also taught in the third and final year in a related degree programme was cited as an example. As this participant further explained:

Initially when we wrote the outline, we also had many prerequisites. Later, we submitted it [for the Diploma programme] without the prerequisites. Nobody asked, 'Why are the prerequisites not here and why have they just been deleted from here? Is it the same unit? Is it the same thing? What has happened?' (AC10-MCHE)

The unquestioned acceptance of courses and subject outlines by the MAB was seen to be 'beneficial' to the College but academic staff members questioned the implications for quality. As one participant put it:

I think, from the Faculty's perspective, it's very good that they are there, because we can run any programme, and it gets accredited. We presented our x programme in 2000. It wasn't accredited when we started running it. By September or June - I'm not sure of the date - we were told that it was accredited. I still haven't heard from the y subject Unit⁴⁰. (AC10-MCHE)

Based on these experiences, the staff member concluded that: "It was very good for the College that the Accreditation Board has been there, because anything we do is accredited" (AC10-MCHE). One academic staff member, however, disagreed and stated that it was not the fact that no questions were asked at all. The questions asked at course approval committee meetings were too trivial, in the sense they were addressed to things such as the credit hours and the number of credit points allocated per semester (AC11-MCHE). A focus on a managerialist approach to QA, rather than an academic improvement approach, could be detected here. From the experience described by these academic staff members, this observation appears to be consistent with the type of dominant discourses embedded in the 'policy ensemble'.

6.5.2 Issues of Quality Assurance Practice at MCHE

The MCHE was involved in the early developments of the MAB and the MNQF. As such, it was probable that the MCHE would be aware of the limits of external QA for improvement purposes at the College. The MCHE, in its Strategic Plan 2000-2005, prepared during the same time as the discussions relating to the development of national QA took place, identified improvement in the teaching and learning across all its faculties and centres as a key objective. Several strategies were identified to achieve this objective. The final year of the Strategic Plan period, 2005, was dedicated

⁴⁰ The programme and subject are not named to protect the identity of the participant.

as a year with special emphasis on academic quality improvement (MCHE, 2006). Seminars and discussions amongst various levels of internal staff were particularly focussed on improving academic quality (MCHE, 2005, January). The College year planner for 2005 carried the theme of 'quality' (MCHE, 2005). Every page representing the beginning of each month in this planner, published in the form of a 28-page book, carried a quotation on quality from either a 'quality guru' or a renowned philosopher. Examples of these include:

The first absolute of Quality Management is: quality has to be defined as conformance to requirements, not as goodness. (Crosby, as cited in MCHE, 2005, p. 1 under the month of November)

We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence then, is not an act, but a habit. (Aristotle, as cited in MCHE, 2005, p. 1 under the month of July)

A major highlight of the year was the formation of a subcommittee of the Academic Board, which was entrusted with the task of documenting existing QA practices and developing an action plan for the improvement of teaching and learning quality. The output of the subcommittee, the Teaching and Learning Development Plan 2006-2008 (TLDP), was published in early 2006. The TLDP identified several internal QA practices within MCHE which were broadly classified under course administration, course development and delivery and evaluation (MCHE, 2006). It was also noted that the practices varied widely among the divisions of the MCHE. These variations, also confirmed during this study, were "partly due to the varying academic administration structures, QA processes and reporting practices" within the divisions (MCHE, 2006, p. 3). This was also due to the nature of the courses offered and their mode of delivery.

Furthermore, in preparation for becoming a university, the MCHE recently undertook a self-assessment against the criteria of Quality Assurance Agency of the UK (MCHE, 2006). The Deans Committee concluded that against the QAA guidelines, "the MCHE presently meets 78 percent of the criteria at an acceptable level" (MCHE, 2006, p. 2).

6.5.2.1 Development and approval of courses

As noted earlier, the establishment of the MNQF was announced in September 2001 and all institutions, which provided courses leading to an award in the MNQF, were given only a period of three months to submit all existing courses for approval. Discussion regarding preparation of documents for the MNQF was confined only to the members of the MAB. These members only represented the Government sector. Their decisions did not go out for feedback or commentary to the wider educational

community during the preparatory stage. Once the Framework was announced, in October 2001, the MAB secretariat organised two workshops to orient higher education providers to the new Framework and the requirements of submission for course approvals. As reported by the consultant:

By early 2002, the MAB had received 90 course proposals, 55 of these being from the MCHE. The MAB established priorities in reviewing applications for course approval but with limited professional and support staff, and with limitations on the time of Panel members who occupied key roles in Government ministries and the professions, progress was slow. (Baumgart, 2002, p. iv)

The courses submitted by the MCHE for approval included both ongoing and new courses at Certificate, Advanced Certificate, Diploma, Advanced Diploma and Degree levels. Considerable confusion about course structures and credit points allocated to subjects arose, partly because of unfamiliarity and lack of detail within the new Framework. The problem could also be partly attributed to the difficulty faculties experienced in putting aside their past practices once they were merged and after years of working as autonomous entities. There were signs of difficulties with removing course structures from former institutes: a structure where a 'batch' of students were allocated to classes and taught a fixed set of subjects as a class group (Baumgart, 2002a). Another complication, in the development of courses as per the new QA policy requirements, was that "several programmes followed external curricula and underwent forms of monitoring to achieve accreditation from an international agency" (Baumgart, 2002a). The multiple systems of course development and meeting multiple quality standards was a contentious issue faced by the faculties.

With no agreed understanding or clear definition of credit points, allocation of credit points was also found to be a troublesome issue. Amongst the 55 courses submitted by MCHE, in the first round of applications for course approvals, a patchwork of different credit points (ranging from 3 to 20 or more) was found (Baumgart, 2002a). This proved to be a major limiting factor to the development of a flexible way of offering subjects and thereby allowing greater choice for students to choose optional subjects. Staff involved in the early phase of preparing courses for MAB approval reported on the relatively short time given to prepare courses and the lack of opportunity to seek advice on credit points and also to review their submissions with College Central Administration. As Baumgart (2002a) reported:

Although the procedures were announced some two months ahead of the deadline, effective implementation occurred within about a month. Hence,

many staff reported that they submitted programmes without sufficient review, in order to meet the deadline. (p. iv)

When it was evident that submissions from the MCHE needed a great deal of revision, in terms of aligning the MCHE courses with the agreed format, the MCHE courses were withdrawn and permission was sought for them to be re-submitted later (Baumgart, 2002a). Other difficulties encountered relate to the definition of 'depth' of study by prescribing a minimum number of credits at the highest level for the award. The modification of the credit hours used in defining the credit points has also been recommended. These developments clearly indicate the complexity involved in the application of QA policy at the level of practice.

It must be noted that the problems highlighted in the early stage of implementing the MNQF and the requirement for course approvals did not arise merely because of the policy itself. This was also a period of establishing the newly founded College. It was a period in which the MCHE was coming to terms with the new realities of a merged HEI. The College was in the process of implementing a raft of new policies, almost all of which had implications for QA. It is also important to note that when the first set of courses were submitted to the MAB, by end of 2001, as stipulated by the Government, the MCHE internal QA systems were at an early stage of development. For example, the MCHE's Academic Board was also not in place at the time, consequently, there was no College-wide review mechanism for curriculum and course development.

A significant development, that came about as a consequence of the slow pace of course approval at MAB, was the recommendation to set up a 'Committee on Courses' within the MCHE. This new structural element was recommended by the Consultant on Academic Qualifications and Standards, mentioned earlier. This was recommended in view of the delegated authority of the Academic Board once formed, in matters of academic standards and quality. It was hence decided that all course submissions for approval from MAB would be first considered by this Committee. This cross-faculty committee functioned as a working party for the Academic Board.

The MAB had subsequently accepted the careful scrutiny and peer appraisal that took place within the MCHE. This process had been well developed. A summarised version of the development of a unit of study or a subject was explained in a paper presented by two Senior Management staff from the MCHE. The process according to them was as follows:

Once the need has been identified, the objectives of the unit are written and a brief outline of the content is drawn. This is usually undertaken by a committee of experts. Then the unit is written in detail with the objectives for each lecture/session, the assessment, content, resources required, pre-requisites and references. Once the unit is developed it is 'blindly' reviewed by two subject matter experts. The unit may be changed as a result of this review. The unit is then sent to the Academic Board [later on through the Committee on Courses] for review, which then independently considers the need for the unit in the overall purpose of the College. The Board may, at this stage, return it for review. If the Board is satisfied with the quality and the capacity of the College to deliver it, then the unit is submitted to the MAB. If approved, it is taught as part of a course. Students are provided with the outline of the unit within the first week of their course. Changes to the assessment regime cannot be brought about without student approval after the first week. . . . Assessment will always include tasks for which verifiable individual effort would count as 50%. (Hameed & Haleem, 2002)

All faculties were known to have endeavoured to follow this generalised procedure. However, in practice there were variations. Often, course developers found difficulty in identifying two and at times even one subject matter expert for reviewing an outline.

6.5.2.2 Impact of external quality assurance

The introduction of an external QA regime generated internal QA mechanisms within the MCHE. This was clearly an opportunity created for MCHE by the new national QA policy during its implementation. The MCHE appears to have taken full advantage of this opportunity. Once the Committee on Courses was formed and practice within the MCHE was aligned to review all College submissions through this Committee, it created further opportunities to gain a greater degree of control for QA within the MCHE itself: a move which developed confidence within the MAB to offer a 'light touch' approval for MCHE courses, compared to those offered by private sector institutions. It was also a time saving opportunity for an over-burdened MAB. As one KI confirmed:

The courses from MCHE are now scrutinised within the Academic Board. So, therefore we are somewhat satisfied with that process from a quality assurance perspective. (QPc03-MCHE)

The researcher understood that this increasing 'satisfaction' has led to 'almost automatic' approval of submissions from the College without further MAB evaluation through an Approval Panel. However, there were occasions where such approvals were not automatic.

A view from academic staff members provided a different perspective to that of the confidence expressed by staff involved at national level QA. As one academic staff member put it:

Curriculum development itself is a real challenge because some of the staff we have in the departments have just done their initial Bachelor Degree. . . . There is a range of expertise, and some of these people have just completed their initial training. So, I don't think they have the capacity to contribute well enough to develop curricula for second and third year university degree levels. (AC11-MCHE)

Another member of the academic staff commented on this issue as follows:

In reality, a number of curricula have been developed with the creation of the College. They were semesterised, names were modified and credit points were also adjusted. We submitted those to the MAB. We still do not know whether they are acceptable or not. Most of the syllabus outlines are still at the MAB unapproved. (AC07-MCHE)

This staff member, nevertheless, questioned the expertise of the reviewer in the area of the staff member whose subject matter was submitted:

As far as x subject⁴¹ is concerned, the person who is checking our outlines is not a person, according to my knowledge, who has studied x subject as we know, but is someone who has a higher qualification in the related y subject. So this is a challenge. Sometimes we get feedback for some subjects. But these comments have no relation to x subject although they could be related to y subject. So, this indicates that the reviewer does not know much about the subject. (AC07-MCHE)

Part of the challenge in developing curricula also arose from the lack of expertise and interest amongst the academic staff. An academic staff member, involved in the coordination of curriculum development work at a faculty, stated that:

One of the challenges is there aren't enough people who really understand the importance of the particular standards in the curriculum. . . . But slowly they are showing interest into this and are trying to work according to the advice that we give and they are also starting to work on the curricula, despite their other work. (AC01-MCHE)

One of the major issues in curriculum development and course approval was the systematic reviewing and revising on a regular basis. This type of revision work, as one faculty head explained, "requires willingness on the part of the academic staff, as well as institutionalised practices, not just within faculty but across MCHE as well" (QM03-MCHE). As this KI elaborated:

⁴¹ The subjects in this quotation are not named to protect the identity of the participant.

Right now, there are no regular reporting requirements to the MCHE Central Administration as such from the faculty, as far as the quality issue is concerned. However, it does not mean that the curriculum is not being revised or not developed. It means that there is no formal reporting mechanism. I think that's a big challenge for us. (QM03-MCHE)

Course development was also hindered, due to the unavailability of highly experienced staff. Additionally, this was also connected with compensation levels for existing staff, whose remunerations are comparatively low and they "are forced to find after-hours work to be able to meet their basic needs". (QM03-MCHE)

The fact that the curricula were scrutinised, through a central Committee at the College level, was noted as being an effective process. However, one participant stated that it was good for the purpose of documentation. According to this participant:

Document-wise it is very good now. . . . Perfecting the document does not mean that quality is assured. At the central level, the document is checked and corrected or fitted into the MAB guidelines. At the faculty level, we don't know to what extent the document is practically applied. So the monitoring of teaching at the classroom level isn't that good. (AC03-MCHE)

This chapter now turns its attention to this aspect of monitoring teaching at the MCHE, for the purpose of QA.

6.5.2.3 Evaluation of teaching

Evaluation of teaching by students is one of the main internal QA practices at the MCHE. The Central Administration of MCHE required, as a matter of policy, that every subject and its corresponding teacher be evaluated once every semester. A standard evaluation form had been circulated to all the faculties. Twelve out of the 59 respondents of the questionnaire, administered to academic staff, identified 'evaluation of teaching by students' as the most effective QA practice at the MCHE. Three out of the 10 academic staff members who were interviewed also identified this as the most effective practice. Despite being a centrally initiated and formally required activity, not all the faculties were undertaking this evaluation on a semester basis with communicated feedback to staff (MCHE, 2006). Interview data were confirmed and triangulated with the finding reported in an MCHE publication (AC03-MCHE, AC04-MCHE, AC08-MCHE, and AC10-MCHE). Administrative difficulties, associated with data entry and the processing of large numbers of evaluation forms in a timely

manner, have been cited amongst the constraints to the regular undertaking of this activity. Some regarded this as a useful activity. As one staff member stated:

Once a semester, the Senior Coordinator administers a questionnaire to the students to obtain feedback regarding teaching. I have already received feedback this semester. . . . The feedback is an opportunity to identify student problems. I don't know whether it is a successful practice [to all]. . . . When the feedback is received, individual staff members will scrutinise it and rectify the situation. . . . In that sense, this is an effective practice. (AC03-MCHE)

In some faculties, it was reported that evaluation of teaching occurred regularly in mid semester and at end of every semester (QM03-MCHE). Reports were generated and then communicated to the staff. One faculty head explained that they:

Rank academic staff based on a scale. We have been doing this for the last two or three semesters. We give feedback and that has been seen to be quite useful to some staff. Again it has to be linked in some way to performance improvement. (QM03-MCHE)

Another staff member (AC04-MCHE) also agreed with this perspective relating to the evaluation of teaching.

Not all staff members were convinced that this was practised efficiently, although some identified this as the most effective QA practice at the MCHE (QM04-MCHE, QM03-MCHE).

Frankly speaking, collecting feedback from students on a semester basis, through a form, has not been undertaken properly or regularly in the past. We have just started that. So, therefore, it is a bit early for me to give any feedback on that. (QM05-MCHE)

A staff member who cast doubt about the genuineness of student feedback said:

Sometimes, we don't get genuine comments from the students. In practice, the forms are given towards the end of the class period. Hence, the students tick mark and send the form back as quickly as possible. Hence, feedback and reality do not match so well. Sometimes, we come across very 'poor' teachers but we hear of very positive comments concerning that person. This could be because he or she gives marks generously. Furthermore, the form is also not seen as a very appropriate form. (AC07-MCHE)

Another staff member also questioned the reliability of student feedback. For this KI, a more important issue was the analysis of the feedback given by the students. Staff members who give easy tests were rated highly and this was a matter that did not receive proper attention. As this KI stated:

If I give them 10 out of 10 from a test, then definitely my feedback is going to come out as 6, 6, 6, 6, 6: everything good. But I think nobody

looks into that. If I give them a test that is simple, they give all 6s. And when I give them what I call a 'standard test' and receive the feedback, it is different. . . . So basically I don't rely on those. (AC10-MCHE)

In addition, evaluation of teaching has also been practiced in other ways. Some faculties have found that meeting with students, in some cases with students' representatives, from time to time and having discussions with them had proven to be extremely valuable in obtaining feedback about teaching, together with many other issues directly related to qualitative improvement (QM03-MCHE, QM05-MCHE, QM07-MCHE). Informal discussions with students, in a more relaxed atmosphere, have also been effectively used by some staff members, together with feedback regarding the quality of teaching (AC11-MCHE; QM05-MCE).

From the questionnaire responses, it was revealed that a number of academic staff members considered that the opportunity to meet other academic staff and the faculty heads, through various fora, was a very effective practice for the purpose of quality improvement. These opportunities included regular weekly staff meetings, departmental level meetings, subject coordination meetings and Academic Review Committee meetings, which were normally held towards the end of a semester, in order to discuss issues of marks and grades and failing students.

6.5.2.4 Staffing and quality assurance

This section will present the perspectives of academic staff, regarding a range of issues on the broad topic of academic staffing. These issues are: (1) staff recruitment and use of part-time staff, (2) staff retention, motivation and remuneration, (3) staff training and development, and (4) staff workload. Each of these issues will now be discussed.

(i) Staff recruitment and use of part-time staff. According to Lim (2001), one of the most important conditions for QA is having a group of staff members who are qualified. It is generally agreed that the possession of only an undergraduate degree is inadequate for a university level institution to undertake research and teaching at this level. Lim (2001) also notes the requirement of a PhD degree for entry into the academic staff workforce, for universities aspiring to membership of the international community of scholarship (p. 105). In addition knowledge of the subject and enthusiasm for the subject are generally needed for satisfactory teaching. Formal and informal training in teaching is also believed to be needed, in order to impart

knowledge effectively. In many universities in developed countries, a teaching portfolio is required with an application for promotion.

The majority of the participants from the respective faculties indicated that they did not have the required number of qualified academic staff. An active staff recruitment and training programme had been underway at the MCHE, since it was created in 1998. The ADB project, mentioned earlier in this chapter, together with other funding sources, had trained several new academic staff members and the College constantly reviewed its Staff Development Plan.

The issue of the adequacy of fulltime staff numbers available at MCHE was explored in the study, in relation to the planned transition of the College to a university in 2007. Data obtained from MCHE faculties showed that five out of the seven divisions engaged in classroom-based teaching had 30 or over 30 percent of their staff as part-time members. The employment of part-time staff may bring about some advantages, which include financial gains. However, in the case of Maldives, where the academic pool was relatively small, the utilisation of part-time staff members, who were themselves employed in other fulltime jobs, has proven to be a major problem.

Sometimes, even securing the services of part-time staff had been a major challenge. It is appropriate to note here that a number of policy level participants in this study, external to the MCHE, also commented on the issue relating to part-time lecturers and how this affected QA at the College. A number of the academic staff interviewed also noted the issue of part-time staff (AC03-MCHE, AC07-MCHE, AC10-MCHE). In addition, 16 out of 59 (27%) of questionnaire respondents noted the issue of the lack of qualified fulltime staff and the issue of having to recruit a large number of part-time lecturers. The MCHE Teaching and Learning Development Plan (MCHE, 2006) again identified the problem of managing part-time lecturers as one of the main issues that compromised quality at the MCHE. The Plan stated:

Whilst there are several outstandingly high performing part-timers, some Faculties reported part-time lecturers who contribute to poor quality. However, the dilemma is that, due to the shortage of qualified and experienced full time staff, several faculties have to rely on part-timers. (MCHE, 2006, p. 5)

One faculty head noted that, because of the insufficient number of qualified and experienced staff, the faculty's course development work was hindered (QM03-MCHE). This problem was also particularly acute in areas where there was a national shortage of qualified people in certain professions, which included law, accounting

and information technology. As one KI noted, the main issue, when part-time lecturers are engaged, was “their inability to attend regularly” (QM05-MCHE).

(ii) Staff retention, motivation and remuneration. Recruitment of qualified fulltime staff and the use of part-time staff were related to the ability of the MCHE to retain qualified and well performing staff. Staff performance was understandably related to their motivation, which in turn was to a large extent related to remuneration. Recruitment and retention of quality staff has been an important strategic, as well as an operational objective of the MCHE, since the formation of the College. The first Strategic Plan and the current Strategic Priorities maintains this objective (MCHE, n.d.).

The ability to retain staff and also to attract qualified staff was seriously compromised by the inadequate remuneration and the academic staff structure⁴². The main reason why the faculties were unable to recruit highly qualified staff was due to the unfavourable working conditions (QM05-MCHE). The MCHE staff structure was, according to some KIs, “not attractive enough” to professionals already employed in other sectors (QM01-MCHE).

The issue of salaries, within the premier HEI in the country, was a matter commented on by many participants. The current service structure was more “consistent with teachers at secondary or higher secondary schools” according to a faculty head (QM03-MCHE). This suggested that the structure was unsuitable for professional staff involved in higher education, where the type of responsibilities were thought to be “much more difficult for the work done at this level” (QM03-MCHE).

Due to this rather unsatisfactory employment situation, arising from the staff structure being crucially in need of revision, staff members were forced to find work after-hours, in order to be able to meet their basic needs. This was confirmed to be the case particularly for those staff members from other islands residing in the capital, where the College faculties are mainly located (QM02-MCHE, QM03-MCHE). Consequently, academic staff members were unable to give their total commitment

⁴² The academic staff structure refers to the framework which identifies the list of academic positions, their job descriptions and the recruitment criteria, which includes the minimum academic qualifications and experiences and the salary scales. This framework is also used for promotion purposes.

and concentration to the academic work of the faculties, according to some heads of faculties. As one KI stated:

This is something linked to our economic capability, I think. For example, I'm somebody who spends about 16 hours a day at the faculty. I don't have to think about anything else in my personal life. However, there are other staff members who are compelled to devote time to other personal matters in life. So, for them the kind of attention they can give to the faculty work gets reduced. (QM05-MCHE)

In addition, the academic staff members interviewed also raised the issue of remuneration (AC03-MCHE, AC02-MCHE, AC05-MCHE, AC10-MCHE, AC11-MCHE). Clearly this was a serious matter that had affected the staff. The researcher was informed by a number of policy officials, both within the MCHE and external to MCHE (but within higher levels of the Government) that the matter of the academic staff structure had been under review for over three years. There appeared to be a great expectation that this was going to be resolved soon. At the time of data collection (June 2006), the expectation was that the revised structure was about to be finalised.

The issue of the unresolved staff structure and the temporary freeze on academic staff promotion for more than three years is believed to have taken its toll on staff motivation. The motivation of the MCHE academic staff members towards their professional work can be stated as low, based on the perspectives of interviewees (AC02-MCHE; AC03-MCHE; AC04-MCHE; AC08-MCHE) and questionnaire respondents.

Other participants were more restrained in their perceptions about staff motivation as the following excerpts indicate:

I would say that it is moderate. When I say moderate, it is on the lower side of the moderate band. (AC05-MCHE)

We have two groups. Some who have motivation and some who don't have it but those who are really dedicated to this faculty are very few. . . . In actual fact, motivation has disappeared within this faculty to a large extent. (AC07-MCHE)

Normally, when staff members join the faculty, I think, their motivation level is quite high. At the moment, in my department, we have new staff members. . . . I will try to sustain their motivation. But there are some members who are not motivated. (AC11-MCHE)

Motivation was also low because some of the staff felt they were not valued at the College (AC10-MCHE). The foot-dragging on the matter of revising the academic

staff structure, which included a merit-based recruitment ladder and one which considerably enhanced each remuneration package, was clearly an impediment for the implementation of the Government declared policy on QA in higher education. Quality assurance at the level of practice within the MCHE, was found to have serious consequences in terms of staff recruitment and motivation, which many participants believed, affected the quality of academic performance.

(iii) Staff training and development. As stated earlier in this chapter, the MCHE has been engaged in training its academic staff as a whole. This training was still continuing at the time of this study. Several staff members were also on study leave, pursuing both undergraduate and postgraduate studies in overseas institutions. In addition to long-term degree level studies, the College had also sent several staff on short-term training courses to overseas institutions.

A key area of staff training, identified by some participants, was the area of instructional delivery. It was noted that, although College staff had qualifications in the subject discipline, some of them lacked the relevant instructional and pedagogical skills. As one participant mentioned “although they [the staff] are professionals, their instructional delivery is a problem” (QM02-MCHE). This problem was found to be most acute at the Centre for Maritime Studies where teaching staff were very experienced in the maritime field but not in teaching. The majority of the staff members were advanced in age and due to lack of exposure and training found the use and application of modern teaching equipment and resources to be demanding.

(iv) Staff workload. The teaching load of academic staff at the MCHE was 15 hours per week. Staff members were able to take on an additional five hours of teaching as paid work. All faculty heads and some academic staff members did not consider this workload high or unreasonable. However, some staff noted the unequal distribution of the workload amongst staff members as an issue. The “workload of some staff is very high, over 20 hours a week, while there could be other staff member with a very low workload” stated one participant (AC03-MCHE). Another staff member reported that the workload varied from Department to Department (AC06-MCHE). This latter participant stated the following as evidence:

In our department, the workload is very high as we have only three staff members, including me. And we have very skill-based subjects, including a great deal of practical work. (AC06-MCHE)

However, one KI stated, based on the views of the staff members of a particular faculty, that 15 hours of contact time per week was “a bit too much to prepare adequately and teach” (AC07-MCHE). This participant further stated that:

Some staff objected to this even at the beginning of the year. However, when instructed they won't disobey. They will undertake teaching when they have to do it. (AC07-MCHE)

In response to the obstacles to quality at MCHE, only six out of 59 (or 10 percent of the participants) identified the “heavy load of teaching” as an obstacle. Those who identified this as an obstacle were of the opinion that the heavy teaching load hindered their ability to adequately prepare for lectures. This was also seen as something that limited their ability to engage in other academic responsibilities, such as research.

6.5.2.5 *Autonomy and academic freedom*

Higher education institutions have varying degrees of institutional autonomy. Whilst some are completely independent, in the sense that they are able to award their own qualifications and they are accountable in vague terms to the community they ‘serve’, others are subject to varying levels of external control (Sensicle, 1992). In its first five years of operation, from 1999 to 2003, the MCHE operated under the Office of the President. From late 2003 to the middle of 2005, it operated under the Ministry of Education. From the middle of 2005 to the time of this study, the College has operated under the newly formed Higher Education Ministry. In the context of the state controlled bureaucratic system in the Maldives, the MCHE can be said to have enjoyed a high degree of autonomy in its academic affairs. The highest policy making body for the College remains the College Council. Participation of stakeholder Ministries was ensured through representative members appointed by the Government from these key Ministries. The highest body on academic policy making and scrutiny has been the Academic Board. The Deans Committee and other committees have functioned effectively and contributed at advisory and decision making levels in the governance of the College

Based on the comparatively lower political freedom indices in developing countries, as opposed to developed countries, Lim (2001) argues that universities in developing countries face significant constraints on their academic freedom. According to Lim (2001, p. 119), “criticism of any sort is either frowned upon or penalised with varying degrees of severity” in developing countries. As a result, institutional leaders, who are normally appointed by the Government, either do not seek or are unable to involve the

rank and file in developing and implementing QA schemes. Consequently, the “requirements that are crucial for the success of quality assurance are not present” (Lim, 2001, p. 116).

In the case of the MCHE, the majority of participants from amongst both the faculty Heads and academic staff members agreed that the College enjoyed a fair degree of autonomy and academic freedom. As one faculty head stated:

At the College there is no obstacle to such academic freedom. We can just continue to undertake our academic work. There is no barrier to that. (QM01-MCHE)

Another faculty head supported this view as follows:

If we want to introduce a new programme, we could do that quite easily if we think that we can resource it. Basically, there is quite significant freedom to manage our own affairs in the academic field. I think that is a good thing and I don't think there are big constraints. (QM03-MCHE)

This was also the view generally echoed by the academic staff members. A few interview excerpts provided support to this.

I don't think there is any limit or constraint in that regard. But I think we need some incentives, in order to encourage us to improve and address quality assurance issues. At the moment, we don't have quality assurance policies. So, in the absence of such, I don't think there could be any limits or constraints. (AC02-MCHE)

Another staff member endorsed this view as follows:

I was the HOD and I had a lot of autonomy in developing the academic programme I was looking after. (AC06-MCHE)

On further questioning, it was evident that a degree of intervention from outside the College system was occurring (QM03-MCHE, AC09-MCHE). This was seen as political pressure that came from some Ministries in the social services. One participant gave the example of stakeholder (employer) pressure to compromise on already advertised entry qualifications for courses.

In addition to institutional autonomy, Lim (2001) reports on the generally low level of tolerance in developing countries for any criticism of government views. Experiences of harsh treatment by the police against student demonstrations, imprisonment and termination of employment or expulsion have been cited (Lim 2001, pp. 116-117). In the case of the MCHE, the researcher is aware of (although this was not reported by any of the participants) at least two instances where the Government had ordered the termination of the contracts of part-time lecturers, whose teachings were either critical

of or at variance with Government policy. In one case, in addition to the termination of the lecturer's contract, the Dean of the respective faculty was also transferred to another post in the Government, outside the College.

Autonomy and academic freedom have also been affected in more subtle ways as explained by one participant. A particular course, which was sent for approval to the MAB, was sent to a stakeholder Cabinet Member for comment. This approval was stalled as the Cabinet Member objected to some syllabus outlines of the course. The interesting fact, noted by the participant, was that the new programme, developed at the respective faculty, was benchmarked to its affiliated overseas university's programme. The MAB delayed the approval on the grounds that the course 'would not attract enough candidates' to justify its introduction, when in fact the actual reason was unofficially known to be the objection of a political figure to the curriculum (QM05-MCHE). The faculty eventually had to rewrite two new subject outlines. The participant concluded that, "in this respect we don't have academic autonomy and independence" (QM05-MCHE).

6.5.2.6 Transnational quality assurance

Earlier in this chapter, (Section 6.3.1.3, pp. 199-201) it was demonstrated that a number of participants favoured and justified the need for international linkages. The links with overseas universities and other academic institutions, according to the participants, served as an important QA function. The MCHE "Strategic Directions: Operational Priorities 2004-2009" states the following, as one of its short to medium-term development priorities:

That the College continues to explore avenues for expanding its international network (universities and accrediting agencies) without an undue drain on the budget". (MCHE, n.d.)

Lack of capacity at the MAB for proper implementation of QA policies and delays in commencing the auditing and full accreditation of courses is offset at the MCHE through links with a number of overseas institutions. These links have come about mainly through projects, whilst some have been financed through the MCHE budgetary resources, which come primarily from the Treasury.

The dimension of external QA located outside the country of the relevant HE system has been described as transnational QA in this thesis. 'Transnational', 'cross-border', 'offshore' and 'borderless' are terms conceptually different but they have been used

interchangeably (Knight, 2007, p. 24). Knight prefers to use cross-border education (CBE) and considers CBE as a subset of internationalisation. However, since CBE has closer conceptual relevance to the movement of students, programmes and provider institutions, in the context of the Maldives case study this 'movement' was not significant. At MCHE there were a number of academic programmes that had QA arrangements with institutions located in other countries. (See Appendix O). Therefore it is deemed more appropriate to use transnational QA in the context of this study, rather than cross-border QA.

Appendix O provides a list of the main academic linkages at MCHE, over the last seven years. These linkages include a variety of transnational QA arrangements that come under franchise, articulation and validation agreements⁴³. Transnational QA arrangements have been built into the overall QA environment of MCHE. This has come about as part of the affiliations with overseas institutions. A number of the affiliations were initiated not necessarily for QA purposes per se. For example, the first two years of a three-year degree programme from a British university was launched at the MCHE as part of the diversification of educational programmes. It also served a commercial interest of the UK university, since it was part of its expanding global operations. The advantage for MCHE was that the franchise arrangement exposed its staff to involvement in teaching and managing the programme to the quality standards of an overseas university.

In addition to the institution-to-institution arrangements, some programmes employ quality management systems that have international application. An example of this was the process of 'External Verification' used in the Business Technology Education Council (BTEC) programmes. External verification visits occur at one Faculty of MCHE on an annual basis, for external review and assessment of the BTEC course being conducted. This is part of a wider QA system of internationally exported BTEC

⁴³ *Franchise* refers to "an arrangement whereby a provider in the source country A authorises a provider in country B to deliver their course/programme/service in country B or other countries. The qualification is awarded by the provider in country A. Arrangements for teaching, management, assessment, profit-sharing, awarding of credit/qualification, etc., are customized for each franchise arrangement and must comply with national regulations (if they exist) in country B and sometimes national regulations or codes of good practice of country A (if they exist and are applicable to the provider. *Articulation*. Various types of articulation arrangements between providers situated in different countries permit students to gain credit for courses/programmes offered by all of the collaborating providers. *Validation* arrangements between providers in different countries allow provider B in receiving country to award the qualification of provider A in source country" (Knight, 2007, pp. 28-29)

courses. The specific quality system is undertaken through the Edexcel⁴⁴. According to Edexcel guidelines for QA, “everyone working for Edexcel is required to operate the Edexcel Quality Management System against the quality standard ISO 9001” (Edexcel, 2006). This model of external QA is known to have worked well at the secondary school level, particularly for small developing states in analysing the examinations model at national (e.g. Fiji, Malta national examinations), regional (e.g. Caribbean Examination Council (CXC), the South Pacific Board for Educational Assessment (SPBEA), and the West African Examinations Council (WAEC), and metropolitan (e.g. Edexcel examinations and the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate (UCLES)).

Verification is employed to ensure that “there is overall consistency of assessment at all levels nationally and to confirm learner achievement” (Edexcel, 2007, p.5). The External Verification visit is normally undertaken by one staff member sent by Edexcel, usually for a period of one week. During this week, the External Verifier would talk to all the staff in various departments involved in teaching a given programme. The External Verifier would also examine sample assignments completed by students and also make recommendations to rectify any problems. Verification involves sampling the internal assessment decisions made on the range of units taken within the Faculty that is registered as a BTEC approved centre, in order to meet the requirements of the qualifications structures. One staff member, specifically commenting on this arrangement, stated that: “I don’t think it is effective” (AC06-MCHE). This participant was convinced that an appropriate judgment could not be made by simply examining a sample assignment completed by one student. On closer examination, it was discovered that, in theory, the sampling involved a selection from a number of students based on a formula determined by BTEC. Reports prepared by External Verifiers for FHTS programmes show evidence of coverage of a number of areas that impinge on academic practices. There was also evidence that recommendations have been made for specific corrective action with deadlines attached to them. The reports were shared with the Head of the faculty who was expected to see that follow-up takes place in due course, before the next annual visit takes place.

⁴⁴ The University of London Examinations and Assessment Council (ULEAC) in 1996 merged with the BTEC to form the Edexcel Foundation (Bray & Adam, 2001).

A particular variation of a transnational QA practice occurs at the Centre for Maritime Studies (CMS). This arises because of the membership of the Maldives to an international convention of the International Maritime Organisation (IMO). Under the convention, the CMS is required to maintain quality standards acceptable to the IMO, which provides standards through their 'model courses'. Courses can only be commenced after obtaining approval from the Ministry of Transport, which acts as the local QA agency on behalf of the IMO. The IMO quality standards need to be maintained, in order for the country to continue its membership in IMO approved lists of countries with acceptable standards of training and certification.

For a seafaring nation, that trains a number of people for the national and international merchant shipping service, maintaining an international QA standard becomes an imperative. There were two main reasons, as one participant stated:

Firstly, it is the reputation of the Centre. The other is to make it easier for those who seek jobs. Most of our trainees look for overseas employment. And ISO 9000:2000 has been identified as the most appropriate for us. (QM02-MCHE)

Thus, the MCHE, appear to be engaged in a variety of transnational QA arrangements in addition to meeting national QA requirements. The tensions in managing all these QA arrangements are immense. Some of these have been referred to previously in this chapter in Section 6.3.1.3 (pp. 199-201). These tensions of transnational QA, in relation to portability of qualifications, will be discussed in the next chapter.

6.6 Summary and Conclusion

This primary case study set out to explore the policy processes of QA in Maldivian higher education, with an overarching aim of gaining a fuller understanding of the issues of introducing QA policies and implementing them, particularly in an emerging public higher education college. For the purpose of analysis, a modified policy cycle, which included the two dimensions of external and internal, was employed. The external and internal dimensions were taken from the reference point of the higher education institutional context. The external dimension was further delineated into the two levels of global and national. It must be noted that these factors do not necessarily arise separately as external and internal influences. This framework serves an analytic purpose. However, though the policy processes are discussed separately, in practice the processes overlap and interact.

Several interrelated themes emerged from the interview data, which involved contributions from information gathered from 11 policy contributors, 10 quality managers, 12 academic staff members from the MCHE and questionnaires returned from 59 academic staff members. The data were also supplemented by a limited participant observation, undertaken by the researcher, through his participation in meetings of the College Council, the Academic Board and the Committee on Courses, during the data collection exercise. Data were analysed using manual coding and a method of categorisation, as well as the NVivo computer programme.

Results indicated that the Maldives has also adopted a globally dominant model of external QA in higher education. Ten factors were identified as having influenced the adoption of the QA policy and the policy instrument of accreditation in the Maldives. Four of the themes relate to the global context of influence, namely: international marketing; learning from others; international affiliations; international organisations and external advisers. At the national level, three themes were identified as having influenced the introduction of a QA policy. They were: the national need for QA; financial incentives and certificate validation; and the role of the state in QA.

At the local or institutional level, the influences on QA were found to be few, but more direct. They were the merger of post-secondary institutions, the development of home-grown degree courses, and the role of external consultants. The circumstances that led to the introduction of QA were directly related to the establishment of the MCHE. The immediate cause of the establishment of the MAB was the fulfilment of a covenant within a loan agreement signed between the Maldivian Government and the Asian Development Bank, that came about in the form of the Post-secondary Education Development Project, which assisted the early development of the College.

The discourses that could be identified from the data were discourses on control and compliance, managerialism, and the market. The data confirmed that the QA policy agenda was weighted more towards the market and managerial perspectives, rather than on academic quality improvement that focuses on teaching and learning.

At the level of practice, both at the national and institutional level, a number of issues were identified. At the national level, it was found that the institutional capacity was lacking in terms of dedicated leadership and personnel to administer the system, once the MAB was established. A decline of support for the implementation of the system was clearly evident and a lack of qualified staff, together with an over-ambitious

initial implementation phase leading to an influx of course documents for scrutiny and approval, overburdened the system. External QA in higher education was confined to the regulatory mechanism of course approval (i.e. approval to offer a course, only). Though a limited activity in terms of QA, at the national level this was seen as a major development in improving the quality of higher education. The study participants identified a number of strengths and benefits of the newly introduced policy. With the introduction of a QA policy in the Maldives, a significant benefit was the development of a greater awareness of quality requirements amongst all stakeholders.

At the level of practice, the data also confirmed that external QA has contributed in some way towards QA practices at the MCHE. It has facilitated the documentation of a full curriculum for each course taught at the MCHE. The College is now in a position to distribute course outlines to all students at the beginning of each course. This was a practice that did not occur in all faculties and with all programmes, pre-MCHE. In the past curriculum outlines, which included assessment details, remained with the respective lecturers. This practice had lent itself to an ad-hoc and subjective curriculum modification by lecturers, without any proper mechanism of consultation and advice. Referring to the current situation, one KI stated that “there is now a central depository for all [higher education] curricula in the nation” (QPc11-MCHE).

Nevertheless, external QA has certainly not been able to contribute to quality practices at the MCHE, to the extent that it could have done. The MCHE, by itself, has continued to develop and rely on strengthening its own internal QA policies and systems. The MCHE claims to have developed better standards than MAB standards, for internal review and approval of courses prior to sending them to the MAB for approval. This occurs through their internal Committee on Courses structure.

Data from the primary case study confirmed that a number of conditions, necessary to implement QA systems and often designed on models in developed countries, were lacking at MCHE.

The next chapter will discuss the key findings from the secondary case studies in addition to the primary case study, in the light of a set of key analytic categories.

Chapter Seven

DISCUSSION

7.1 Introduction

The previous two chapters investigated the specific questions underpinning this research, which was conducted through an in-depth primary case study from the Maldives, supplemented by two international secondary case studies. This chapter extends the analysis beyond the research questions and discusses the main findings presented in the previous two chapters. The discussion is undertaken through a set of analytic categories, newly derived from a re-categorisation of the themes of the primary case study. The analytic categories will be discussed with reference to relevant literature and interpretation of data from the primary case study. Where appropriate, reference will be made to the corresponding thematic analyses from the secondary case studies.

Following Patton (1990), the researcher was able to undertake another thematic re-organisation of the 26 themes presented in the primary case study chapter (see pp. 178-180). This was possible through closer meaning analysis and working “back and forth between the data and the classification system to verify meaningfulness” (Patton, 1990, p. 403). Through this process of analysis it was possible to discover and identify more meaning from the data, by grouping together those categories that had a converging theme (Miles & Huberman, 1984). Further categorisation of the themes analysed under the three contexts of influence, text production and practice gave rise to ten analytic categories (Figure 7.1).

The new groupings are classified as: (1) education policy (discourses and contexts), (2) external QA, and (3) internal QA. The analytic categories that correspond to the various groups of themes are given below in Figure 7.1.

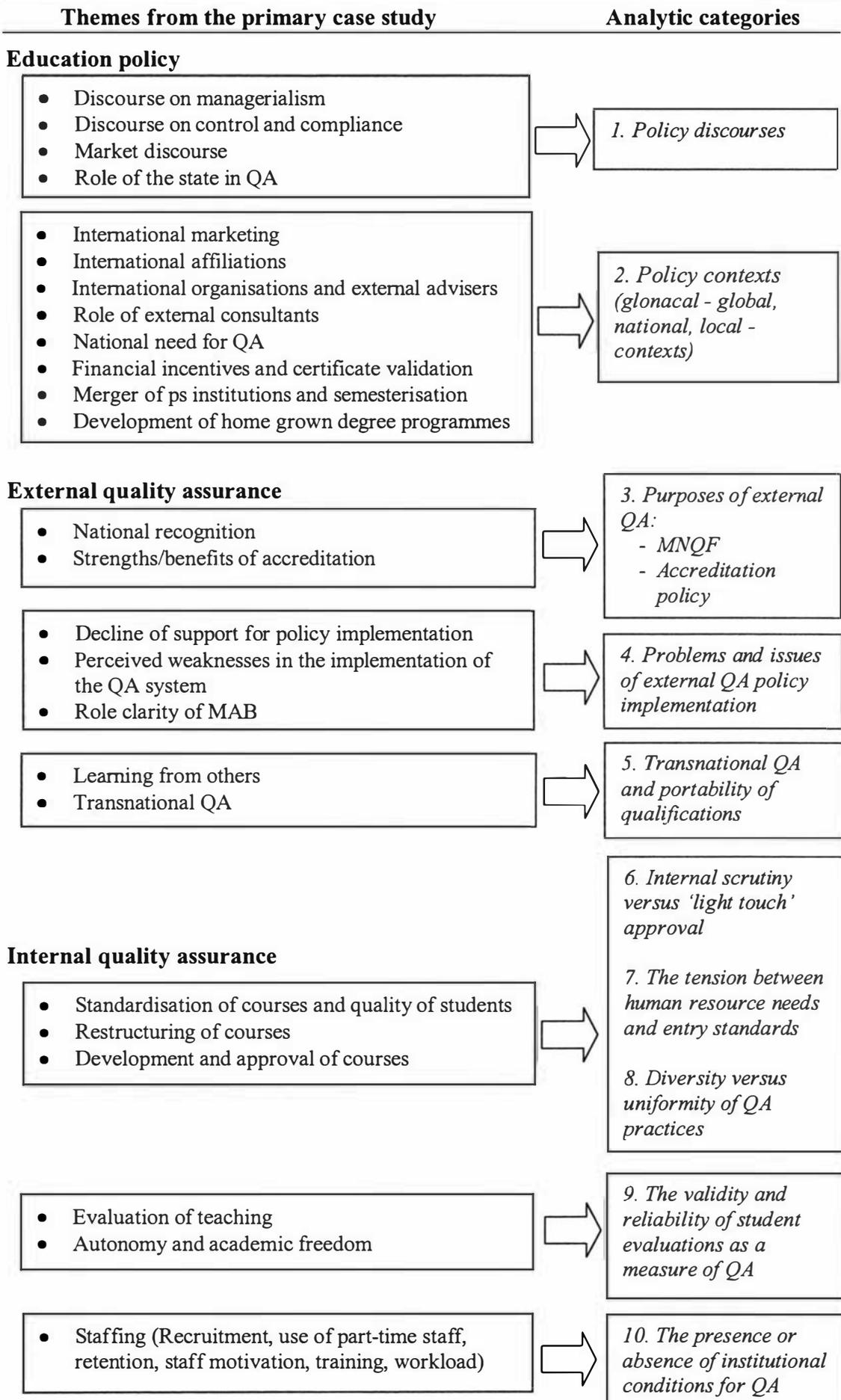


Figure 7.1 Themes from the primary case study and the analytic categories

7.2 Education Policy

The theoretical framework of this thesis accepted that education policy making was not a tidy linear process. Nor was policy making regarded as a neutral activity, being more or less consensual in nature. Instead, the framework highlighted the complex and contested nature of the education policy process. Policy making does not necessarily lead to straightforward uncritical acceptance of policy and its implementation. The primary case study, in this research, confirmed this contested nature of QA policy making in higher education. Understandably, the nature and degree of contestation varied within the three case studies. The findings of this research, pertaining to education policy, will be discussed through the following: (1) policy discourses, and (2) policy contexts.

7.2.1 Policy Discourses

Since the 1980s, many countries, both developed and developing, have witnessed the increasing dominance of the economy and economic processes over all areas of state policy making. The case studies undertaken in this research point to the fact that, to varying degrees, QA policy processes have been influenced by a set of discourses, which are aimed at furthering economic interests and promoting market solutions to educational issues. Principal amongst these is the discourse of neoliberalism.

7.2.1.1 Neoliberalism

Neoliberalism in part is the science of economics applied to social and political questions (Peters, as cited in, Fitzsimons, 1997). It emphasises an economic explanation for aspects of modern society. For neoliberal authors, a competitive market not only maximises economic efficiency, it is the main guarantor of individual freedom and social solidarity (Giddens, 1994). Neoliberals promote economic individualism. They see such individualism as the key to the success of democracy within the context of a minimal state. This school of thought de-emphasises the polity and stresses the role of the market in national economic success (Slaughter, 1998).

Resulting from the analysis of macro influences on QA policy development in New Zealand (see Section 4.2, pp. 105-118), it was revealed that neoliberalism was at the centre of a number of major education reforms, including the qualifications and QA reforms. Neoliberalism appears to have provided the 'master discourse' (Marginson,

1993, p. xii) in education policy making. With respect to higher education in New Zealand, Peters & Roberts (1999) summarise the neoliberal effects as follows:

... higher education has been reconfigured along market lines, with a heavy emphasis on 'student choice', competition between different 'providers', new 'accountability' mechanisms, and a favouring of corporate models of governance and ownership. (p. 11)

The New Zealand qualifications reforms, aligned to market tendencies, were also accompanied by the need for monitoring of educational institutions. The creation of the NZQA and subsequently the ITP Quality as a committee within the Association of the Polytechnics in New Zealand (APNZ), through delegated powers from the NZQA, were intended to serve this purpose. Based on an economic model, monitoring was achieved through surveillance, profile reporting and charter contracts. These were apparent in both the document approval and auditing processes, to which the ABC College was subjected.

However, the deregulatory moves "ironically created controls and accountabilities that were previously captured in professional expectations and associated actions but which have now been formally imposed on educators and education" (French, 2001, p. 5). Achieving greater efficiency and measures of effectiveness and accountability have been directly associated with the intensification of tasks and closer monitoring and appraisals (French, 2001).

The NQF, which was developed after the NZQA was established, stipulated course development based on unit standards, which measured competencies. The empowerment of industry, through the Industry Training Act (1992), had also given way to a greater curricular control by people, other than those who taught and delivered educational programmes. By improving consumer accountability via the Industry Training Organisations (ITOs) and by creating competition amongst providers, the concepts of agency theory have been incorporated into the system (French, 2001). In her Foucauldian analysis of the impact of New Public Management (NPM) (see pp. 108-109) on QA in New Zealand, French (2001) concluded that:

. . . external quality assurance agencies not only rise from an ideological base; they also contribute to the power/knowledge control and surveillance picture of that base. . . . They [the agencies] have been presented and developed as the answer to the government's needs for quality in higher education, but they are really a mechanism for government control of funding. (p. 11)

In the case of the USP, it being a regional university, there was no particular and singular national context within which influences were brought to bear on policy making at the institution. The forces of neoliberalism were not discreetly evident, as witnessed in the New Zealand case. However, it could be argued that, given the pervasiveness of neoliberal influences, the USP member countries, perhaps through their representatives in the University Council, could have adopted such rationales. At the USP, the emphasis was through the competition arising from economic globalisation. The economic narrative of globalisation is a manifestation of neoliberalism at the global level. Recent USP planning documents reflect themes such as globalisation, rapid political and socio-economic changes and financial problems in the member countries (USP, 2004). One Head of Department (HOD) at the USP stated that global trade in education has driven the quality agenda, as “education has become a commodity which is being imported and exported by countries and that itself creates a need for quality just like quality goods” (MQ10-USP). Other participants also referred to the emphasis on “modern marketing of education” (MQ11-USP).

To what extent have neoliberal discourses impacted on QA policy making in the Maldives?

The connection between the Maldives’ economic development and human resource development (HRD) appeared to have been a recurrent theme in every major national development planning document published in the last two decades (see Fifth National Development Plan: 1997-1999; Sixth National Development Plan: 2000-2005; Strategic Economic Plan: 2005; Education Master Plan 1996-2005)⁴⁵. Furthermore, Country Strategies and Staff Appraisal Reports prepared by the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank (ADB), over the last decade or so, have consistently maintained a close connection with economic development and HRD. ‘Reducing the skill gap’, ‘expanding public expenditure’ and ‘quality improvement in education’ have been some of the recurrent themes in World Bank reports on the Maldives (World Bank, 1995). The charging of school fees for secondary school students and cost recovery from vocational and tertiary fellowships were identified as intended policy for the first time in the 1995 Staff Appraisal Report of the World Bank. These themes clearly showed evidence of a neoliberal discourse underpinning external recommendations in education policy making in the Maldives. Arguably, a sustained

⁴⁵ Except for the Education Master Plan, which was published by the Maldives Ministry of Education, all other documents were published by the Maldives Ministry of Planning and Development (MPND). All MPND documents are available from <http://www.planning.gov.mv>.

neoliberal rhetoric from the largest financial lender for over a decade, coupled with HRD projects, provided the bedrock on which a formal QA project gained political rationality. (Further discussion on this aspect will be found under ‘global context’ later in this chapter).

There were a number of aspects of neoliberalism that did not ‘fit’ in the case of the Maldives. These will be discussed below with reference to the changing role of the state and the strategies that underpin the principal roles.

7.2.1.2 Changing role of the state

Traditionally, the principal role of the state in the higher education sector has been in provision and funding. In most countries, this translated into a relatively straightforward relationship between the state and HEIs (Steier, 2003). Steier contends that, depending on the country specific conditions, this relationship was characterised by either a high degree of centralised control or by a great deal of institutional autonomy.

In the neoliberal model, the role of the state is reconfigured along market dynamics. Generally, the three main roles, in relation to education policy, could be identified as: (1) provision, (2) regulation, and (3) funding. In terms of the state’s role of provision, neoliberalism emphasises a minimum role in the engagement of the direct provision of education services. However, provision is promoted through ‘marketisation’ and ‘privatisation’. In neoliberalism, state control is thought to be counterproductive and hence the argument for minimal state involvement is advanced. The role of regulation is influenced through the discourse of managerialism. The role of funding is underpinned by the HRD strategy, whereby the funding of higher education is seen to be an investment in human capital. In the Maldives, the state has been the initiator, provider and funder of higher education for a long time and continues to be so, to a large extent. However, in recent times this situation has started to change. It was noted in Chapter Six that one of the purposes for the introduction of the QA ‘policy ensemble’ was to facilitate greater participation from the private sector, for the provision of higher education.

These strategies, that underpin the three principal roles of the state in respect of higher education, are discussed, in order to understand some of the policy developments in QA.

7.2.1.3 Marketisation and privatisation

Related to the wider discourse of neoliberalism, the state's role of provision is influenced by the strategies of marketisation and privatisation. Marketisation constitutes the installation of market forces in relation to competition "as a way of increasing productivity, accountability and control" (Olssen et al., 2004, p. 187). Marketisation offers governments the opportunity to reduce government funding without having to debate the issue of spending cuts (Ball, 1998). This results in shifting the onus for high quality education from the government to the 'user'. This situation gives way to an environment of 'competitive neutrality', where reforms have been operationalised as 'user-pays' or 'per capita' funding schemes (Olssen et al., 2004). These schemes are devised in order to serve as a mechanism of choice for students. This exerts pressure on course selection by students, in addition to pressure on course and programme development by the educational institutions. Such schemes constitute students as self-reliant consumers, who are eager to 'purchase' available (and relevant) courses. In many cases, this competition further allowed institutions to compete with each other for students, in relation to costs and services. Increased competition also resulted in a proliferation of the number of providers, in addition to a proliferation of programmes offered within these institutions (Olssen et al., 2004). Competition is invariably seen in purely positive terms as a means of increasing efficiency and effectiveness. Within the higher education sector, however, a number of potentially negative effects of these 'competitive neutrality' policies have been identified (Olssen et al., 2004). Examples of these effects are that they can:

- contribute an inbuilt pressure which encourages unplanned expansion, resulting in educational providers that lack educational viability;
- result in needless and costly duplication of courses and programmes;
- result in the private sector siphoning off educational areas that are easily marketed; and
- lead to 'dumbing down' of courses and qualifications, and results in a compromising of standards in order to compete for student-based income. (Olssen et al., 2004, p. 188)

The discourse of privatisation has been developed to provide legitimacy to global / transnational capital (Mugunda, 1999). Such a discourse is advanced to foster, maintain and rationalise the ideology of the market forces. It is an ideology articulated by economics and free choice theoretical perspectives (see Chapter Four, p. 106), in order to convince governments that the public sector ought to be reduced. Thus, privatisation promotes competition, by breaking up monopolies within the public

sector and this includes HEIs. In education, the privatisation discourse has been advanced by placing blame on the education system for its failings, which include quality. Social ills, resulting from technologically advancing global economic systems, have been unfairly blamed on schools and higher education systems. At the core of the debate lies the re-conceptualisation of education as a private good, rather than a public good.

In the developing countries, the spread of neoliberalism, combined with growing pluralism and a rising demand for higher education, have contributed to increased privatisation (Steier, 2003). The rise in public demand was a result of demographic growth and increased access at lower levels of education, which resulted in the outstripping of the governments' capacity to pay for provision of education at higher levels.

It was envisaged that the system of accreditation, originally conceived to be instituted in the Maldives, would allow for the growth and development of the private sector in the higher education market. The development of the private sector in higher education would understandably create choices in higher education. The public higher education college, despite being the largest in operation, was clearly constrained to meet the rapidly growing demand for higher education. Expansion of higher education in the private sector would provide the availability of more choice for potential students, both in terms of institutions and programmes. In 2007, the first private college had been registered in the Maldives, albeit by one of the most successful business leaders who also happen to be the country's Finance and Treasury Minister. It would be premature to speculate the implications of this new development for MCHE from a QA perspective, although the situation clearly presents one of a conflict of interest.

A particular strand of the privatisation discourse is the insertion of fees into higher education. The MCHE witnessed increasing fees for some of its courses. From the very beginning until today, most teacher education and health sciences courses do not charge any fees. In fact, the government continues to pay a stipend for those who are enrolled in these courses. Contrary to this practice and based on strong recommendations from the World Bank, fees (arguably relatively high fees) were introduced within the Faculty of Management and Computing (FMC), for business, management and information technology courses. Between 2000 and 2003, a marked decrease in enrolments at the FMC was observed. The raising of tuition fees has been

identified as one major cause for this decline in enrolments (Zameer, 2003). It was stated that:

FMC has gradually increased the fees charged for courses from an initial 50% over the past years. From cost-sharing, the arguments for levies have degenerated to cost-recovery. At the same time, the fees for franchised programs have risen while the paying capacity of the potential students has decreased. (Zameer, 2003, p. 1)

Elements of marketisation and privatisation appear to have underpinned QA policy development in the Maldives. Until the last decade, the activities of private education and training establishments were restricted mainly to the provision of tuition for school children, adult English courses and those courses aimed at preparing candidates for secretarial and other local examinations⁴⁶ (QPc11-MCHE). Since the late 1980s, a number of private institutions have been offering short (mainly two weeks to three months) courses, such as basic computer literacy and graphic design. As the KI stated:

In order to provide public acceptance of longer courses offered by these institutions, a government-guaranteed quality assurance mechanism was essential. In fact, the myriad qualifications now being offered by the private sector is a direct result of MAB regulation. (QPc11-MCHE)

The foregoing discussion of experiences at the MCHE suggests that neoliberalism has had partial effects in the Maldives.

From an equity perspective, the increase in privatisation and institutional choice for students is only meaningful for those who can afford to pay tuition fees or those with access to financial aid. The absence of financial aid can lead to a dramatic decrease in enrolments, as was seen in the case of the FMC⁴⁷ in the Maldives. A paradoxical situation, in which students from high-income families are over-represented in the tuition-free or low-fee public institutions and students from low-income families are over-represented in private fee-paying institution, could also occur (as was the case in Bolivia and Venezuela) (Steier, 2003). Students from low-income families are more vulnerable during times of financial crises (as was the case with Thai students during the Asian financial crisis in the late 1990s).

Participants associated with the ABC College case study attested to the growing marketisation, within which they were required to operate. As a polytechnic with a

⁴⁶ The latter are government examinations, which are conducted to assess information competency for certain jobs, such as that of an undertaker, clerk and Island Chief.

⁴⁷ It must be noted that, in addition to higher fees, other factors also contributed to this low enrolment. Notably these include inflexible public service regulations, study leave for teachers and the more stringent requirements of the MAB.

regional focus, the institution was seen to be in competition with other TEIs for students and fees. The lean towards a competitive and marketised model created a 'dynamic tension' (see p. 141). The key to survival, through this type of tension, is to strive to maintain a balance between the collaborative and the competitive aspects of education.

The intensification of marketisation in New Zealand tertiary education, some commentators argue, would appear to have enabled the creation of a more diversified tertiary education sector (Abbot, 2006). This sector is now more responsive to the demands of students. Whether and to what extent the marketisation provides information about quality education programmes is, however, a different issue altogether.

7.2.1.3 Managerialism

Managerialism stresses constant attention to quality "being close to the customer and the value of innovation" (Newman & Clark, as cited in Ball, 1998, p. 123). The ABC College case study revealed an example of this insertion, which was referred to as NPM or 'managerialism' in education (see pp. 108-109). Closely allied to managerialism are the notions of compliance, control and accountability. Compliance with standards and control for ABC College arose through their AQMS. Compliance with the national standards was perceived to be desirable by ABC College participants. The interview excerpts from ABC College participants (MQ04-ABC and MQ06-ABC) (see pp. 138-140) attest to this view. It appears that "consistency of approach" (MQ06-ABC) was the most important aspect of compliance with standards. The system of compliance with national standards was hence deemed "excellent" and "fundamentally a good system . . . not flawed" as stated by one participant (MQ06-ABC).

Although some of the ABC College participants stated their approval of the national compliance with standards approach in QA, the burdensome nature of meeting information and reporting requirements was also noted by some participants. (See p. 139). The obligation for quality, through the Education Act (1989), which requires the ABC College to strive towards the highest standards of excellence and monitoring by funding agencies of performance agreements and performance measures, would appear to be all part of the 'performativity' (see p. 25) drive within New Zealand tertiary education.

Likewise, the USP Quality Strategy identified the formalisation of 'benchmarking' by the use of a set of performance indicators, which had been identified by the university as a key component in improving quality. This component envisaged "both internal benchmarking and benchmarking with international comparators" (PDO, 2004, p. 8). It could be claimed that these new approaches were aligned to the emerging culture of managerialism and performativity, which has developed through the construction of the new Quality Strategy at USP.

Ball (1998) argues that such attempts at cultivating a corporate culture in education settings are deeply paradoxical. Ball asserts:

On the one hand, they represent a move away from Taylorist, 'low-trust' methods of employee control. On the other hand, new forms of surveillance and self-monitoring are put in place, e.g. appraisal systems, target setting, and output comparisons. (p. 123)

It could be argued that, in the Maldives, the emphasis on performance excellence and the introduction of performance appraisal in the public service developed within the broader agenda of NPM and performativity. The development of strategic plans and annual operational plans and identifying specific targets and accountabilities at the MCHE, were part of the move towards the transformation of the public service, in accordance with NPM. These attempts would appear to be highly indicative of attempts towards the cultivation of a 'corporate culture' in the first ever public college of higher education, during its path towards becoming the first national university.

7.2.1.4 Human resource development

The human resource agenda is promoted on the basis of human capital theory (HCT). Marginson (1993) asserts that HCT is the most influential economic theory of education and it has set the framework for government education policies since the 1960s. The HCT, after a period of decline in its popularity, was revived in the 1980s by the OECD. In its revived form, the OECD recognised education's role as "a screening system for the labour markets and proposed the standardisation of credentials to make this function more efficient" (Marginson, 1997, p. 112). This theory emphasises education as an investment (Woodhall, 1997). Education can support economic revival, through investing in the education of the individual. Proponents of HCT argue that most benefits of education were appropriated as individual monetary returns (Friedman, as cited in Marginson, 1997). Thus, investing in education for its private returns became manifest with fee charging and competition between institutions and programmes and through student loans and grants.

Marginson (1997) notes that, in the TAFE (Technical and Further Education) sector in Australia, competency-based training reform was, “premised on the notion of human capital as the transferable attributes of individuals” (p. 115).

The growth of QA in the Maldives was linked to broader developments in the higher education sector, as can be observed in many other countries. From the second half of the 1990s, higher education policy experienced a major and significant transformation in the Maldives. The Government’s objectives for higher education development were constructed within the human resource development (HRD) agenda, which has been identified as a key policy priority since the 1980s.

The success of this policy priority, with the correspondingly high allocation of public funding, has been well documented, within the achievement of universal primary education prior to 1990, followed by a rapid expansion in secondary education (MPND, 2001). Undoubtedly, this success in primary and secondary education has resulted in corresponding implications at the next level of higher education. Sector reviews undertaken in the 1990s called for structural reforms within higher education. The Education Master Plan 1996-2005, aligning itself with the National Development Plans, called for the consolidation of the post-secondary education sector (Hickling Corporation, 1995). The specific reviews for this consolidation came in the form of two reviews, which followed consecutively and these will be discussed later in this chapter.

In the case of New Zealand, the development of national level standards, by the Association of Polytechnics and Institutes of Technology (APIT), clearly paved the way for the standardisation of competencies. Similarly, in the case of MAB and the MCHE, the introduction of an NQF and an elaborate set of prescriptions for course approval contributed towards the standardisation of courses. In the New Zealand context, this standardisation was received positively by the ABC College quality managers. As a polytechnic, it was understood that the practice of following national level standards, which leaned towards a centralising force, was nothing new. In fact, the polytechnics in New Zealand have remained under strict central authority and control right from the beginning and as a result of the broader public sector reforms they received greater autonomy in governance. Ironically, this apparent increase in autonomy came about through greater regulatory control.

In the case of the Maldives, the former institutions that merged to form the MCHE were all established and run by the Government. Even after the merger, the MCHE remained under the central authority of the Government. However, the governance model of the MCHE, with a Council as the principal policy making body and an Academic Board for academic decision-making, in a sense, provided a degree of autonomy for the newly formed institution. Nevertheless, in a public service structure, with a strong central Government bureaucracy and a highly centralised budgetary arrangement, some participants noted that any greater degree of independence and autonomy would be counterproductive to the new institution. As one participant noted, “If you are referring to the lack of autonomy of MCHE per se, I think it is not in the best interests of MCHE” (QPc11-MCHE). The many quality issues and problems at MCHE appear to arise not from lack of autonomy, but from the “requirement to follow bureaucratic and antediluvian financial and personnel practices and regulations” (QPc11-MCHE). The MCHE, because of these practices and regulations, was unable to utilise the allocated resources to best meet its ‘quality’ objectives.

Just as MCHE operates in a national context, the USP, as a leading higher education provider in a regional context, recognises that, if it is to serve its member countries in the future, it must make quality a priority. An important consultative report on plans for the University to 2020 states that:

The pursuit of quality is critical to the future of USP. The Region requires it and globalisation demands it. If USP and the region are to survive and thrive in the 21st Century it must deliver excellence and quality. (USP, 2004, p. 9)

Similarly, the establishment of good quality higher education throughout the Maldives has also been a long-term goal of Maldives’ Vision 2020, announced in the year 2000. Under this vision the Maldives aims to elevate itself from a least developed country status to “one of the top-ranking nations amongst the middle-income developing countries” (MPND, 2000). The MCHE and MAB have significant roles to play in the pursuit of these national goals.

Over recent years, the situation in the South Pacific has become competitive, with the opening of new HEIs (for example, in Samoa, Solomon Islands, and Fiji). In addition, foreign universities have established offshore branches in Fiji, offering undergraduate programmes, in addition to postgraduate programmes. A number of internationally accredited courses are on offer in the region, which use distance education and

information communication technologies (ICT) (USP, 2004). Likewise, the number of overseas-accredited higher education programmes has increased, both at MCHE and in private institutions in the Maldives, over the last seven to eight years, since the national QA mechanism was introduced. The presence of international HEIs could have the positive effect of provoking public HEIs “out of their complacency” (Jansen, 2007). However, in newly emerging higher education systems, they could also “limit and undermine the building of new national institutions” (Jansen, 2007), thus contributing to the eroding of national goals and policy priorities.

The foregoing discussion reveals that neoliberalism and its associated strategies of marketisation, privatisation, managerialism and HRD have shaped QA policy development in varying degrees, in the three case studies. The evidence was most clear-cut in the case of New Zealand. In the Maldives, the policy development in QA did not come about within a climate of economic and educational crisis legitimated by politics, as was the case in New Zealand. In the Maldives, a political imperative for protecting the public, in the face of perceived poor quality in overseas qualifications, was politically legitimated at a national level, in order to control higher education. At the same time, it also paved the way for new programmes to be made available in the private sector. Furthermore, as was noted earlier in this chapter, neoliberalism has had only partial effects in the Maldives. This process has been legitimated through the engagement of external consultants through supranational institutions, albeit institutions that promulgated policies aligned to neoliberal discourses. The discussion now turns to policy contexts.

7.2.2 Policy Contexts

Following Marginson and Rhoades (2002), a glonacal perspective on educational policy refers to the recognition of the influences on policy formation, from the global, national and local arenas. The findings of this study confirm that a combination of global, national and local factors influenced the development of QA policy in the Maldives. The Government of Maldives (GOM) established the MAB, introduced an NQF and launched an approval and accreditation mechanism for external QA. Such a trend appeared to be similar to developments in many other developing countries. This trend was also indicative of the globalising nature of QA in higher education policy. The influence from each of the three inter-related contexts will now be discussed.

7.2.2.1 Global context

The global context of influence, with respect to the development of a QA policy in the Maldives, can be understood through the twin phenomena of globalisation and internationalisation. Globalisation, as discussed in Chapter Two, does not refer to a single well-defined phenomenon. In fact, most writers contend that it lacks a precise definition (Kellner, as cited in Yang, 2003; Mundy, 2005). Within the scope of this thesis, globalisation was accepted as a highly differentiated phenomenon, which involves interconnected dimensions as diverse as economics, politics, culture and technology. 'Internationalisation' of higher education, on the other hand, refers to the trend towards increasing interaction and interdependence between higher education systems.

(i) Globalisation. Globalisation has had a significant impact on the formulation and implementation of the educational policies of many countries (Bell & Stevenson, 2006). Its impact has also resulted in a shift in emphasis from policy related to provision, to policy concerned with regulation.

Influence, located in the global arena, can include the influence of international institutions and consultants. These institutions comprise donor/lending agencies and supranational organisations, which advocate globally dominant policies and approaches in QA, within higher education. These institutions often grant or lend finance to assist in the development of QA policies and systems (Lenn, 2004).

The most straightforward manner of dissemination, for such influences and practices, would be through the flow of ideas through social and political networks or what Popkewitz (as cited in Ball, 1998) refers to as the 'international circulation of ideas'. In the case of the New Zealand study, the widespread exposure of the Scottish model was achieved through an exchange of visits between high level officials. The seminar presentations held in various locations in New Zealand, by the Chief Executive of SCOTVEC (see p. 110) was reported to be instrumental in gaining support for this model. The Maldives case study showed that the Government specifically sent its officials to other countries, including New Zealand and Thailand, to study respective QA systems within their higher education sectors. Senior officials from the GOM were also exposed to the Australian quality system, during attendance at conferences. Documents obtained through such visits have been used extensively in drafting policy for discussion in MAB meetings (see p. 194).

This circulation of ideas could also have occurred through the exchange of graduates, in particular from Western universities. This would be particularly relevant in the case of the Maldives since most lecturers and senior policy officials would have obtained their higher education qualifications from overseas institutions, many of which would be Western universities. In some contexts, it has been observed that this movement of graduates “carries ideas and creates a kind of cultural and political dependency which works to devalue or deny the feasibility of ‘local’ solutions” (Ball, 1998, p. 123). One participant from the Maldives highlighted this point in relation to local graduands’ desire for overseas affiliations as follows:

I have found this trait, at times, from those who have graduated from certain overseas universities where the ethos of the place imprints their impressionable young minds with an attitude of mediocrity towards anything indigenous, including one’s own capacity to rise above the limitations one has set upon himself. It arises from an inferiority complex. If we seek quality of our programmes through affiliations, if we determine our own manhood from what others say, we are destined to remain second rate forever. (QPc11-MCHE)

The second manner, in which dissemination occurs, is through the agency of transnational organisations that either sponsor or at times seek the export of particular policy ‘solutions’ (Ball, 1998). This is also referred to as ‘traveling’ education policy (Alexiadou, 2005). Such organisations include the World Bank, the OECD, UNESCO, the ADB and the European Union (EU). The policy agendas of such transnational organisations “interact with existing traditions, ideologies and forms of national organisation, but do intend to change the conceptualisations of educational purpose in particular directions” (Alexiadou, 2005, p. 132). The World Bank is important here, particularly in respect to developing countries. The various reports undertaken by World Bank officials and consultants recruited by the World Bank (and also the ADB) (see p. 187), point to the influence of such institutions offering policy ‘solutions’. As Jones (1998) argues, “the World Bank’s preconditions for education can only be understood as an ideological stance in promoting an integrated world economic system along market lines” (p. 152). In this respect, the loan covenant that bound the GOM to establish an accreditation board attached to the MCHE project of over US \$ 6 million, financed by the ADB, would constitute such an example of the promotion of an ideological stance. Consultants were often engaged by these agencies or included as part of these agencies’ projects. Furthermore, some of these consultants were engaged as part of assistance programmes by international institutions, such as the World Bank, the ADB and UNESCO.

The period of consultancy for the MCHE project, undertaken by teams of Australian academics, was also a period when Australia was defining its new 'quality' policies. Many commentators have argued that QA policies in the 1990s were a result of the neoliberal restructuring of their countries' economies, which impacted on the global market of higher education. The controversial three-year Australian university quality reviews in the early 1990s (McBurnie, 2001), exposed the economics and politics involved in QA. After abandoning this scheme in 1995, Australia began their search for a new model of quality and New Zealand appeared to provide an appropriate model. There was a significant influence from New Zealand on the Australian policy development (Vidovich, 2004, p. 345). However, any direct linkage to the Australian 'quality' policy debates and practices in the 1990s, to the Maldives context, could only be consequential rather than deliberate. Nevertheless, it could be reasonably concluded that, in the global context, the transnational agencies and external advisers, through their consultancies, have shaped QA policy.

The Maldives is a member of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). There was little evidence that educational policy making in the Maldives has been influenced in any significant way by this regional association per se. However, exploratory meetings and discussions have taken place amongst member countries, in relation to adopting common QA frameworks in some higher education programmes⁴⁸ (Ahmed, 2007, July 12).

Thus, quite a unique configuration of global influences was observed in the development of the QA policy in the Maldives. The other process that has been identified within the global context is that of internationalisation of higher education. The next section takes up the discussion of internationalisation with respect to QA.

(ii) Internationalisation of higher education. Internationalisation of higher education is considered one aspect of globalisation. Jane Knight's (2003) updated definition of internationalisation is presented as follows:

Internationalisation [of HE] at the national, sector and institutional levels is defined as the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education. (p. 2)

⁴⁸ A testimony to this arrangement was the meeting of experts from the SAARC region, together with officials of the World Health Organisation, which was held in the Maldives in July 2007, in order to discuss guidelines for accreditation and common QA standards in relation to the training of midwives (Ahmed, 2007, July 12).

This definition emphasises the process nature of internationalisation. It takes into consideration changes in the rationales and providers and the delivery methods of higher education, particularly education that is provided through distance education and e-learning. It also recognises the need to understand internationalisation at national and sector levels, in addition to institutional level. Furthermore, it recognises a sense of relationship between the diverse cultures that exist within countries, communities and institutions (Knight, 2003).

Internationalisation of higher education is a reflection of the growing trend of globalisation. According to McGaw (as cited in Bell & Cullen, 2006, p. 2), the causes of internationalisation could be traced to both the supply side and the demand side. On the supply side, the causes include ‘international relations’ (such as the Fulbright and Erasmus Programmes) and ‘financial’ factors at national and institutional levels. On the demand side, the causes include ‘individual needs’ (primary), ‘national needs’ and ‘increased accessibility’. Quality assurance is increasingly seen as being central to the efforts made to improve higher education and the trend for international collaborations and interactions. In the case of New Zealand, a recent study on internationalisation in the higher education sector found that “there has been a substantial and positive shift towards a broader and deeper response to the internationalisation of tertiary education in New Zealand in recent years” (McInnis, Peacock, & Catherwood, 2006, p. 10). This contrasts with the previous (in the 1990s) focus on an expanding export industry contributing to the national economy.

In the case of the Maldives, the need for ensuring quality was partly influenced by a set of factors located inside the country, in addition to some located outside the country. Those factors located outside the country were linked to the supply side of higher education. As a consequence of the liberalisation of educational markets, particularly in neighbouring countries, such as India, Sri Lanka and also Malaysia (QPcl 1-MCHE), a number of educational programmes sprang up in these countries. Institutions in these countries and those located in developed countries, particularly Australia and the UK, became engaged in considerable marketing campaigns, in order to attract Maldivian students. The new openness in the neighbouring countries, mentioned above, saw the mushrooming of higher education and training institutions⁴⁹. This favourable environment also led the local institutions in these

⁴⁹ Students also travelled to other countries in the region and beyond. However, it is generally believed that the three countries singled out were favoured more in terms of their culture and the cost of living.

countries to launch training programmes, in collaboration with established higher education institutions in the developed countries. These joint venture programmes saw the potential of attracting thousands of Maldivian students, who were completing their secondary education by the late 1990s. This is an emergent feature in the internationalisation trends where certain developing countries, with a sufficiently large pool of academics and technological know-how, are beginning to enter the global export market of higher education. Bashir (2007) notes that this is “intra-developing country trade being developed through the ‘education-hub’ model pioneered by Malaysia, Singapore, Dubai and Qatar, which have used foreign universities to attract students from developing countries” (p. 75).

On the supply side, the market forces in higher education were clearly in play to attract the local student population to seek education outside the country. On the demand side, the number of potential students for higher education in the Maldives rapidly increased, without a commensurate increase in the capacity of the local institutions to provide access for all of them. Moreover, in the past two decades, the overall economic progress of the Maldives had created an increasing segment of middle class, to whom travelling overseas for the purpose of education became more affordable. This was evident from the number of students (in some cases this included whole families) who travelled overseas for the purpose of education (DHET statistics, 2006). Education being highly valued, people were keen to seek overseas higher education, as a result of their unmet local needs.

In addition, the GOM also undertook a major HRD programme, through loans secured from the World Bank. The question now needs to be asked is: ‘Does the rapid increase in students traveling overseas influence the assurance of quality internally?’

By the late 1990s, certificates awarded by some of the overseas institutions where Maldivians, particularly self-financed students, were enrolled, were beginning to be questioned in the Maldives. The dubious nature of some of the programmes and qualifications became more apparent when the Government started validation of overseas qualifications. This validation of qualifications initially commenced in relation to a new scheme of granting ‘higher education’ and ‘technical’ allowances, in order to supplement the salaries of civil servants (see pp. 189-190). By that time, the public had begun to question the quality of some of the programmes completed in some overseas institutions. As one KI stated:

Together with the expansion of secondary education and other related factors, enrolment in higher education grew like waves in a storm. Some of these causes and ideas lapped our shores and many of our youth returned home with many degrees, some of which are of very dubious standing. The government took three loans from the World Bank to fund secondary education development and to increase the number of degree-holders. People began to see disharmony between the behaviour expected of those who had a degree and the behaviour of graduates. It was soon felt that course rigour varied across universities. Thus, official assessment and the accreditation of qualifications became a necessity. (QPc11-MCHE)

Thus, the nature of policy making in QA in the Maldives appears to have been influenced by the changing contexts in higher education in some other nations. It was apparent that developments, that have occurred in these countries were a result of the new marketisation and privatisation of the higher education sector.

7.2.2.2 National context

Quality assurance policy development in the Maldives arose in the context of Government initiated re-structuring of higher education in the country. The timing of the policy was well suited to the decision, to consolidate the fragmented system of post-secondary education and training into a coherent and credible system of higher education. It was also opportune to bring the validation of external qualification activity into the policy on QA. Thus, it was the national drive to expand and consolidate higher education, coupled with the questioning of some of the qualifications earned through some overseas programmes, that provided the background context for the thinking behind the impetus for a QA policy.

In the case of the Maldives, it was evident that the fulfillment of a covenant within a loan agreement, signed between the GOM and the ADB project, was the immediate reason for the development of a QA policy. This came about through a series of reviews and planning exercises undertaken by the Government in the 1990s.

In 1997, a team of two Australian academics were first engaged by the Government, through a World Bank financed project (Rawlinson & Hind, 1997). The purpose of this first study was to “examine post-secondary education needs in the Maldives, having particular regard to the increasing numbers qualifying for further certificate or degree training, the high cost of training abroad and the urgent need to meet skills shortages in the country” (Rawlinson & Hind, 1997, p. v). The study followed the Government intention to establish a single tertiary institution outlined in the Fifth National Development Plan 1997-1999 (MPND, 1997). Based on the analysis of

economic, social and education contexts in the Maldives and also comparable international developments, one of the major challenges the study team identified, for the proposed single institution and also for the nation, was “establishing national and international credibility” (Rawlinson & Hind, 1997, p. vi). To this effect, the report outlined a range of issues which needed to be addressed, in order to achieve this objective. The study report presented to the GOM also noted that:

... the determination of a sound and robust framework for the new tertiary institution will be fundamental to addressing national skills priorities and to strengthening the economy; and the development of a quality institution will have a profound effect on the future study aspirations and opportunities for young Maldivians. (Rawlinson & Hind, 1997, p. vi)

Following the immediate completion of this study underpinned by a neoliberal rationalisation, two Australian consultants were again employed: this time by the ADB to develop a project for the establishment of the single college. The project, prepared for loan financing from the ADB, addressed the issue of national and international credibility, through a specific recommendation for an ‘accreditation board’. The period of this latter consultancy was late 1997 to early 1999. This consultancy was undertaken under a grant aid from the ADB.

Another factor, that influenced the introduction of QA, relates to the growth of private party involvement in higher education. This led to a reduction in standards within some programmes. Some of these easy-to-achieve programmes were available locally in the Maldives. One KI was of the view that the interest and preoccupation with QA was due “not so much with (to) the quality movement gaining momentum overseas, but by (to) our own developments at home” (QPc11-MCHE). The increased social demand for higher education has facilitated the growth of the higher education sector. This participant noted that there were a number of unscrupulous higher education vendors in the Maldives and also in the destinations to which many Maldivians travelled for further studies. There have been many instances where a number of these providers “are only too eager to change their curriculum to suit our needs” (QPc11-MCHE).

The findings from the case studies and the literature review provide evidence to support the view that there was a convergence of QA policy. There appeared to be convergence in QA policy amongst higher education systems, whilst at the level of implementation contextual differences existed. Many countries have developed similar policies and practices. Studies on QA policy development have confirmed that

cross-national policy convergence had taken place amongst some European countries (Perellon, 2001).

Convergence in education policy in general, and in QA policy and practice in particular, can be further interpreted and explained through the thesis of 'policy transfer' or 'policy borrowing' (Dolowitz & Marsh, 1996; Phillips & Ochs, 2003). Policy borrowing in education entails a sequence of four principal stages, Phillips and Ochs (2003) argue. These stages are: (1) cross-national attraction, (2) decision, (3) implementation, and (4) internalisation or indigenisation. Cross-national attraction involves two aspects: impulses and externalising potential. 'Impulses' refer to preconditions for borrowing, which could include internal dissatisfaction, inadequacy of some aspects of educational provision, negative external evaluation, economic and political changes. Externalising potential refers to aspects such as guiding philosophy, ambitions and strategies, enabling structure and processes and techniques. The 'decision' stage consists of a wide variety of measures, through which government and other agencies attempt to start the processes of change. The 'implementation' stage may include the adaptation of any foreign model within the context of the borrower system. The degree of adaptation depends on a larger number of contextual factors. Depending on the adaptability of policy measures, change through the implementation stage might be speedy or long-term in nature.

In the final stage of internalisation, the policy 'becomes' part of the system of education in the borrower county (Phillips & Ochs, 2003, p. 456). Internalisation consists of a series of four steps according to Phillips and Ochs. They are: impact on the existing system, (2) the absorption of external features, (3) synthesis, and (4) evaluation. Based on this explanatory model, in the case of the Maldives, there were several 'impulses' or preconditions for borrowing the QA policy. The global, national and institutional influences, discussed in Chapter Six, constituted the impulses for the policy. Some of the impulses, or 'external dynamics' (Westerheijden, Hulpiau, & Waeytens, 2006) (e.g. the local disquiet relating to the qualifications that were earned in some of the more market-orientated programmes in the neighbouring countries and the national restructuring of higher education) were clearly more influential in the search for a solution. It was not easy to identify any singular factor as having a greater or lesser impact. In combination, the impulses for change inspired the search for foreign models. The decision stage materialised through a foreign loan project. In the implementation stage, the Maldives looked for models from historically associated

Commonwealth countries, such as Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom. In the end, the MAB finalised a qualifications framework and a QA mechanism that closely resembles the system in New Zealand. Finally, at the internalisation stage, the MAB does not appear to have taken an in-depth evaluation of the policy and system.

The reasons why convergence takes place have been discussed above. However, with similar objectives for quality improvement and given the pervasive global influences, it can be asked, ‘Why do some differences occur?’ Perellon’s (2001) study also confirmed that cross-national policy convergence was far from being homogeneous. This indicates the co-existence of differences and similarities on QA, across various aspects of national policies. Although, QA systems in many countries appear to have converged on common practices, they also differ in significant ways. Quality assurance systems vary according to their purpose, philosophy, level of state involvement, the tools they use for assessment, the nature of their judgments, the level and method of public reporting, the nature of benefits and sanctions and the linkage to various regulations and funding decisions (Hopper, 2007, p. 114).

Although nation states are influenced by global forces and global policy orientations, their education policies are not mechanistically determined by them (Fowler, 1994). Instead, global forces are filtered through the “prism of each country’s unique characteristics” (Wirt & Harman, as cited in Fowler, 1994, p.94). These unique characteristics would include the availability of economic resources, policy-making processes and national values. A similar view, with respect to QA, was observed by one of the MCHE participants who stated that:

Quality assurance is largely based on a country’s educational system’s philosophy and objectives and determining the extent of fitness to the objectives of our educational system. Even if objectives are similar the resources available are different. Our culture is embedded within our educational objectives and our philosophy. (QPc05-MCHE)

Whilst comparatively rich countries may invest in elaborate external quality assessment exercises, SDNs often lack the necessary funds to even institute such an exercise. This is certainly true with respect to the case of the Maldives. Although it is nearly seven years since the MAB was established, a proper mechanism for quality assessment and auditing, although envisaged, has not yet commenced. Lack of resources, including both human and financial, could have been the reasons. Thus, “it would be naïve . . . to think that the solutions chosen in the best performing countries can be readily transferred” to other national contexts (Kaiser, 2005, p. 46). Hence,

there are inevitable differences in QA practices. For example, the difficulties arising from the small pool of national subject experts, to carry out course approvals, was mentioned by a senior policy contributor (QPc03-MCHE) as a major limitation in implementing the model of QA in the Maldives (see p. 210).

As a result, these tasks cannot be outsourced easily. Recruiting fulltime specialist staff members to the MAB for each subject area is also not a feasible alternative. Hence, achieving the standards MAB wants to maintain is reportedly lower. Secondly, the organisation of this activity has also been found to be rather difficult.

7.2.2.3 Local context

The local influence on QA policy was identified in relation to the agency of MCHE. MCHE staff members were identified as having contributed directly to the policy formulation process. Since the MCHE was the principal higher education provider (and because of its national character), it is arguable that the intellectual resource of the nation was pooled at this institution. It is only natural that the services of such a pool of intellectual wealth be utilised for a national purpose. One participant testified to the role MCHE played as follows:

MCHE played an important role in initially developing the discussion documents. In fact, the first MCHE document on qualification framework is dated 11th April 1999 indicating that the development of a qualification framework was seen as a priority. . . . Apart from MCHE which was represented at MAB by two members, there was no significant force to shape opinion at MAB. It is inevitable. MCHE staff had a greater familiarity with qualifications and issues than any other member of MAB as they are the bread and butter of MCHE. (QPc11-MCHE)

Furthermore, the MAB and QA policy came about because of the MCHE, as pointed out in Chapter Six. It was the political process of consolidating a fragmented higher education system, through the strategic decisions to merge all the post-secondary institutions, which resulted in the Government proposing QA in a more formal manner. No doubt, direct external advice was received for this and was accepted by the Government. The MCHE was initially obliged to develop the policy framework, as the task of establishing an effective accrediting board was entrusted to it under the ADB loan project. However, subsequently, MCHE handed over responsibility for establishing the MAB to the Government.

In a similar way to the Maldives, a regional institution, such as the USP, has also been influenced by the local context. At the institutional level, the major impetus for QA at

USP has been the long-term planning exercise undertaken at the University. In particular, a Review undertaken between 2000 and 2003 provided the long-term developmental direction of USP, reflecting a 'Pacific way' (USP, 2004). The Review culminated in a new vision, mission and values. These indicated the expectations of the University by its member countries. The outcome of one of the main recommendations of the review was the new Quality Strategy, which was introduced in 2004. As a HEI in a SDN, which serves a number of small island states, QA was of critical importance in terms of assuring stakeholders. The principal stakeholder in this regional university is of course the students. Quality at the USP was found to be an important matter of assurance for students from the South Pacific region, who were concerned about their further education in other countries. As few higher education opportunities exist in the island nations of the region, particularly those that are less developed, the students' aspirations for further and higher degrees are invariably placed in metropolitan universities in developed countries. Therefore, a mechanism for QA was very important for their students, as one participant explained:

We always get students coming and asking us, 'If we get a degree from USP, can we go and do our masters in any other country in the world?' And I say, 'you can go anywhere in the world; I did a masters here and I did a PhD in England. It's good enough.' So that kind of assurance needs to be there for our own people: for our regional people and regional governments. The regional governments send the cream of their students off to Australia and New Zealand [universities], not to USP. (MQ02-USP)

Similar to concerns found at the USP, assuring students of the quality of programmes they complete (and by implication the quality of qualifications) this was found to be a major issue in the case of the Maldives (QM05-MCHE). In the absence of opportunities for post-graduate studies in the country, the students required assurance that the qualifications they obtained from the MCHE would be accepted by world universities. As one participant stated:

MCHE does not provide, for example, post-graduate education. In that regard, many students have to go, and do post-graduate education in other universities. By having these linkages we are assured that some of our students who graduate from our programmes will get direct entry, or reasonable amount of advanced standing, for some of the programmes ... in their universities. (QPc04-MCHE)

The concerns relating to assurances may have arisen partly due to some of the early difficulties some students found in getting their awards, obtained from overseas linked programmes conducted in pre-MCHE institutions, accepted for further studies in the respective overseas universities (AC03-MCHE). It is pertinent to note that these

experiences were encountered before the establishment of MAB and a national QA mechanism. Nevertheless, knowledge of such experiences tends to remain fresh in small societies until circumstances change. Since, admission to institutions is dealt with on a case-by-case basis, whether MCHE graduates would be accepted was something that faculties could not assure the students up front. With the passage of time in consolidating the work of MCHE and the MAB, the issue of assuring students of the acceptability of MCHE qualifications overseas has lessened. As one participant stated:

Here we don't have that problem now. Our graduates have got placements with UK universities and another has got placement *with scholarship* [emphasis of participant] from Singapore National University which is believed to be in the top 20 universities in the world. Unconditional offers are also available (to some students) from Manchester and Glasgow University. Obtaining a placement with Singapore National University is quite commendable. (QM05-MCHE)

In terms of policy making, the study also confirmed that, even in SDNs where there was a strong influence of state control in overall political, economic and social affairs of the country, policy making in education was not a straightforward technical activity. It conforms to the policy cycle model and exemplifies the contested nature of the policy process. However, the degree of contestation in policy making is somewhat different from that which is portrayed to occur in developed states. Contestation appeared to be less at the policy making stage. All staff members, interviewed from the Maldives, were supportive of the introduction of external QA. A few statements from policy contributors stated below reflect this situation.

The higher education institutions are conforming to this and there is ready acceptance of this. And institutions are seeing this as a way forward than a barrier. (QPc01-MCHE)

Apart from MCHE, which was represented at MAB by two members, there was no significant force to shape opinion at MAB. (QPc11-MCHE)

However, at the level of implementation, tensions have been noted. A policy level staff noted, as follows:

In 2005, soon after many countries adopted 120 credit points as equivalent to a full-time study for an academic year, I wrote to MAB asking them to align itself with the more rational credit point system. But till today, the matter has not been addressed. The current system is a 90-credit point system introduced . . . in opposition to MCHE proposal. (QPc11-MCHE)

An academic staff member provided further evidence to the controversy, as follows:

I don't think we know very well the real meaning of quality or even how we assure quality. . . . We submitted [a number of curricular] to MAB. We still do not know whether they are acceptable or not. . . . No body checks on test papers here. . . . There is no monitoring system established here. (AC07-MCHE)

This could be partly because of the absence of interest groups and political parties and organised associations when the policy was developed. However, the political and social landscape of the Maldives has changed in the past three to four years, with initiatives for unprecedented political reforms. The country has witnessed the registration of four political parties, since this study commenced. Furthermore, at least three more parties were in the process of registration at the latter stage of this study. The country has also witnessed the establishment of a number of civil society organisations. Hence, the nature of contestation in policy making, witnessed lately, has dramatically changed. Recent discussions to further rationalise the MNQF, with respect to developments taking place in Europe (e.g. the Bologna process) have surfaced several contentions amongst members of the MAB. Some members of the Board were in favour of a unified framework in which school education, vocational training and higher education are integrated into one column, as in the frameworks of Scotland and Wales (QPc11-MCHE). Some members of the Board were in favour of having two columns, as in the English framework. It is therefore expected that contestation in education policy will also be seen, particularly on the topic of 'quality', over which multiple stakeholders hold different interpretations.

7.3 External Quality Assurance

The second set of analytic categories, derived from the themes, relates to external QA. It is generally accepted that a QA system in higher education should entail both internal and external QA processes. Internal QA, on the one hand, refers to processes undertaken within a HEI, in order to assure quality. External QA, on the other hand, refers to processes that lie outside a HEI to assure all stakeholders of the quality of the institution's graduate. Within the scope of this thesis, the external dimension has two further subdivisions: (1) QA processes external to the HEI and located within the nation-state, and (2) QA processes located outside the nation-state, referred to as transnational QA. This section will discuss the following three analytic categories pertaining to the external dimension of QA in higher education.

- i. Purposes of external QA: Dominance of compliance and control as manifested in:

- The MNQF;
 - Approval and accreditation policy.
- ii. Problems and issues of EQA policy implementation, and
 - iii. Transnational QA and portability of qualifications.

7.3.1 Purposes of External Quality Assurance

Chapter Two and the previous section of this chapter pointed to the pressures to develop QA policies in the Maldives. These pressures appear to have come in part from a combination of factors both within the country and outside. These included: (1) the marketisation of higher education, (2) the development of a new higher education institution that had to demonstrate quality, (3) direct external advice and (4) the processes of globalisation and internationalisation. Internationally, it has been noted that, while there appeared to be a convergence on the practice of QA, there is wide divergence on the purposes of QA. There appeared to be a ‘spectrum of purposes’ (Kells, 1995). There is also great discrepancy in the capacity of developing countries to implement QA to the level of international expectations, partly defined by globally dominant models. An examination of the purposes of external QA can help in understanding the phenomenon, as it operates in the Maldives.

7.3.1.1 Purposes of EQA

According to Harvey and Newton (2004, 2005) there are four broad purposes of external QA. They are: (1) accountability, (2) control, (3) compliance, and (4) improvement.

(i) Accountability. Accountability is a set of practices and policies defined by the discourse of managerialism. Accountability in a conventional sense “is to be held to account”, defining a relationship of formal control between parties, one of whom is mandatorily held to account to the other for the exercise of roles and stewardship of public resources” (Ranson, as cited in Vidovich et al., 2004, p. 9). In the context of higher education, accountability then is about institutions taking responsibility for the service they provide and the public money they spend in offering this service (Harvey, 2007). In most countries, HEIs are required to demonstrate their worth and to properly account for their use of public resources. This is particularly so when HEIs face tough competition for state funds.

The interview data from the primary case study do not indicate that, in the Maldives, accountability was an upfront primary rationale, when introducing the policy on QA in higher education. Asked whether the model used by MAB was emphasising accountability, one faculty Head responded by saying that this “is to be tested yet, because . . . MAB right now is unable to move beyond just approvals” (MQ03-MCHE). This participant noted this in relation to MAB’s inability to conduct quality monitoring visits to HEIs and lack of requirements by MAB for “annual reports by institutions”. Accordingly “that’s when we’ll see whether it is accountability or not” stated the participant (MQ03-MCHE). Another participant was more emphatic: “Accountability? We don’t have it. It is very vague” (QPc07-MCHE). This does not mean that accountability was disregarded or that the MCHE, whilst being a fully state-sponsored institution, was not required to properly account for its use of public funds. If anything, the accountability for its public resources is highly scrutinised through an elaborate and (as one participant noted) ‘an archaic’ accounting system and financial auditing undertaken by the Office of the Auditor General. Thus, the requirement for accountability appears to be covered within the overall requirements of the state, through the obligations for providing annual reports with (un-audited) financial statements. This is a requirement for all government departments including educational institutions.

In the Maldives, another aspect of accountability was manifested through the emphasis on improving the efficiency of public services. A number of public sector reform strategies were underway during the 1990s. According to Asim (2002), two key strategies, employed by the GOM in improving public services, were the development of a national agenda of priority programmes and the establishment of a network of senior government officers. The former was a strategic planning exercise, where Government departments identified priority activities and projects each year and submitted them to the Cabinet for inclusion in a national agenda⁵⁰.

The objective of the exercise has been “to mobilise departments at the national level in order to achieve planned strides of progress in national development” (Asim, 2002, p. 7). The objective of the latter, the ‘network’, was “to institutionalise a mechanism for implementing public service reform programmes which mobilize the whole

⁵⁰ Sample programmes /projects identified for 2001 aimed to: (i) conduct a public expenditure review and facilitate the effective utilisation of public resources for social and economic development, (ii) conduct a study on the privatisation of existing government services, (iii) enhance the availability of internet facilities in the education sector (Asim, 2002).

bureaucracy” (Asim, 2002, p. 6). The MCHE, being a public service institution, was also required to participate in these strategies and projects, which were undertaken under these strategies.

Generation of public information about the quality of institutions and programmes is also an important aspect of accountability. Accountability, by way of public information to prospective students, employers and the community, in such a way that they will “easily understand the learning outcomes involved in various qualifications”, was built into the EQA policy documents (MAB, 2001, p. 1).

(ii) Control. ‘Control’, which is another policy agenda embraced by the discourse of managerialism, according to Harvey and Newton (2005), is the second purpose of QA. It is about “ensuring the integrity of the higher education sector, in particular making it difficult for poor or rogue providers to continue operating and making access to the sector dependent on the fulfilment of criteria of adequacy” (Harvey, 2007, p. 3). Control has been applied in the form of regulating the market-led expansion in higher education, particularly in countries with significant private sector involvement in higher education. Harvey (2007) also points out that control is exercised through the perceived need to ensure the status, standing and legitimacy of higher education.

Evidence from the primary case study showed that ‘control’ was a key aspect of the QA policy development in the Maldives. This was evident in both the policy texts, in addition to the interviews. A policy document stated:

Today, the Maldivian post-secondary education sector is growing rapidly, with an increasing number of private providers entering the sector to meet the demand. (MAB, 2001, p. 1)

The policy dictated that providers could not introduce any course without prior government approval. One participant stated that, with the establishment of the MAB, “a restriction or limitation appears to be imposed indirectly upon the courses that can be conducted” (QPc07-MCHE). (Also see Chapter Six p. 202). A further interpretation was offered by the same participant, as follows:

... this means not just any body can conduct anything here and as we expand private colleges, this will become more important. (QPc07-MCHE)

According to one quality manager “quality assurance is ‘control’”, which ultimately limits the educational opportunities provided for locals” (QM10-MCHE).

The above interpretations seem to add further support to Harvey and Newton's (2004) claim that 'control' has been subsumed as a purpose of QA. Greater control in the Maldivian higher education sector was also achieved through what one participant considered a "screening process" (QM09-MCHE). This quality manager, who was involved in implementing the new policy stated:

It was a good move by the Government to start such a screening process; especially to ascertain the level of certificates given out by many of the private providers that were emerging so fast. . . . Some parties totally withdrew their applications to run any course while others withdrew their applications to run courses at the diploma level after the MNQF was introduced. . . . One party even gave up the idea of running a degree programme. These private providers then concentrated on certificate level programme which were, in our view, more appropriate given the resources available to these parties. (QM09-MCHE)

Linked to such needs for restricting provision was also the perceived need to ensure the status, standing and legitimacy of public higher education, which in this case comprised the single institution of the MCHE. Thus, contrary to the policy rhetoric of encouraging private party participation in higher education, external QA facilitated, at least to a certain degree, the control and restriction of the private sector. In the absence of any financial package to support the private sector, such a control appears quite penalising.

(iii) Compliance. The third main purpose of external QA is compliance. External QA encourages compliance with existing or emerging government policies (Harvey & Newton, 2004). Government pressure is increasingly felt, by the higher education sector, to be more responsive to value-for-money concerns, more relevant to social and economic needs and also more open to widening access. There is also pressure to ensure comparability of provision and procedures, within and between HEIs. This also extends to international comparison.

In the case of the Maldives, the establishment of the MAB was the first time that higher education was subjected to any form of formal compliance within the country. In the absence of any other quality monitoring, validation bodies or professional bodies (except for the recently formed Nursing Council, Medical Council and Health Sciences Board, which in any case were in their formative years and not very active) the MAB remained in an authoritative position. Compliance with guidelines and standards, determined by a central authority such as the MAB, in a sense made the consolidation of MCHE programmes easier. It also made the ensuring of compliance

with institutional standards easier. Thus, external QA served as a tool to ensure compliance with local (i.e. institutional) guidelines and regulations (Harvey & Newton, 2004, p. 152).

Quality assurance, at its simplest level, also encourages or even forces “compliance in the production of information, be it statistical data, prospectuses, or course documents” (Harvey & Newton, 2004, p. 152). This means that practices and procedures, that were often taken-for granted, had to be made explicit and be clearly documented. According to Harvey (1998) “it represents the minimum required shift from an entirely producer-oriented approval of higher education to one that acknowledges the right of other stakeholders to minimum information and a degree of ‘service’ ” (p. 241). The detailed and elaborate guidelines, for the preparation of documents for initial MAB approval, forced MCHE to produce detailed course outlines and related academic policies. This in turn facilitated the development and dissemination of prospectuses, which in turn aided the more active marketing of courses. This could also be true of other HEIs in the Maldives.

The initial approval, also known as pre-qualification approval, also obliged HEIs to meet resource requirements. A certain level of physical as well as financial resource availability had to be demonstrated. The MCHE, from 1999-2007, experienced a rapid increase in its enrolments. A commensurate increase in staffing and resources cannot be claimed to have taken place, although staffing and resources, admittedly increased. Many academic staff members, interviewed and surveyed through the questionnaire, pointed to the issue of the lack of resources, relevant to the improvement of teaching and learning processes. Some faculties also reported on substantial utilisation of part-time teaching staff. Many participants mentioned serious difficulties when attempting to engage part-time staff (AC03-MCHE; AC10-MCHE).

These opinions corroborate what the researcher noted in some MCHE Council meetings which he attended, during the data collection period. In one such meeting the issue of part-time staff was discussed at length. Furthermore, a senior policy official also highlighted the issue during an interview as follows:

We don't have enough lecturers at the College. I'm not saying we should have all permanent lecturers for all subjects. I'm told that there are part-time lecturers in other countries as well. I agree with that but it is also important to note that in other countries there are large pools from which part-time lecturers can be selected. But in this country even part-time

lecturers are also people in full-time employment in very responsible positions. (QPc02-MCHE)

Harvey and Newton (2004) maintain that QA can be “used as a smoke screen to ensure compliance to resource restrictions by covering the issues that arise when student numbers increase rapidly without commensurate increase in staffing and resources” (p. 152). Such a view also received support from the perspective of one academic staff member from the USP who stated:

In developing countries where student numbers have gone up, assuring quality is a problem. Whatever steps we take to assure quality, is being defeated by the fact that numbers are going up uncontrolled. (MQ03-USP)

As Barrow (1999) has commented, the state (represented by MAB in the case of the Maldives) and the institutional management (MCHE) “maintain a degree of surveillance from a distance to ensure that the requirements of the system are met” (p. 35).

(iv) Improvement. The fourth purpose of external QA, identified by Harvey and Newton (2004), is improvement. According to these scholars, most systems of external QA claim to encourage improvement. However, “despite the rhetoric, improvement has been a secondary feature of most systems” (Harvey & Newton, 2004, p. 152). A notable and rare example, where this has not been the case, was the Swedish audits. In this scheme, improvement was designed from the outset, through the identification of improvement projects and evaluation of their effectiveness.

The improvement function of QA encourages institutions to reflect upon their practices. This would enable the institutions to further develop their delivery of education. In other words a “continuous improvement of the learning process and the range of outcomes” needs to be built into an external QA process.

Quality movements appear to have gone through phases in most systems. In its early phase, compliance and accountability have been the dominant rationales. The improvement rationale has gained more attention “as systems move into second or third phases” of QA (Harvey & Newton, 2004, p. 152; also see Chapter Two, pp. 15-18). The improvement rhetoric, though observed in QA related documents and also in most interviews of policy contributors from the Maldives, was not evident in practice. Quality assurance policy implementation was predominantly control and compliance oriented. This was evident in the inability of MAB to move beyond its initial course approval stage, as was noted by several participants. It could be reasonably concluded

that the MAB is still in the 'first phase'. Perhaps, and more noteworthy, is the fact that the first phase has already been seven long years.

The MAB is in a position to exert highly centralised control on higher education providers, through its approval and accreditation processes. "We are in a position to use QA to influence quality of education" one policy official stated (QPc03-MCHE). One participant went further and posed the following fundamental questions to the Government:

Why control[ling] the education or training when there are not enough institutions for locals to get educated?

Why control[ling] the education or training when there are not enough trained people or educational professionals to fill the job market?

Why control[ling] the education or training when there are not enough funding opportunities available to create such opportunities or to pursue such education and training? (QM10-MCHE).

The state, through the MAB, whose members are all Government appointed, can exercise control, whilst shifting the responsibility for delivering educational services to the MCHE and other local HEIs. The resultant effect is to divert public attention away from the MAB (and by default the Government) to the local level of institutional providers. Whilst this appears to have been partially achieved, due to the retention of the certificate validation function, the MAB, and through it the Government, was not too successful in diverting the spotlight from it. Nevertheless, the MAB has not been able to exert its central control due to its weak management, which has been compounded by a lack of adequate resources to carry on this major reform initiative. Most notable was the situation in which the MAB lacked a fulltime leadership to direct its activities during its early years. The first full time head was appointed only after five years of its establishment (MAB, in press). Hence, progress in QA policy implementation was slow. The next section will discuss the MNQF and its related issues.

7.3.1.2 The MNQF and Semesterisation

Over the last one and half decades, several countries have developed national qualifications frameworks (NQFs). In simple terms, an NQF can be conceptualised as a set of principles to classify qualifications. It is a hierarchy consisting of many levels. In addition to providing information, NQFs are also regulatory devices whereby "qualifications must be produced and classified on the basis of prescribed criteria"

(Blackmur, 2004a, p. 267). Soon after the establishment of the MAB, a key activity within it has been the development of a qualifications framework.

NQFs provide information, in terms of some notion of equivalence and difference (Blackmur, 2004b). In the normal design of NQFs, different qualifications are placed at different levels and equivalent qualifications are supposedly placed on the same level. The process of assigning qualifications is meant to be governed by the level descriptors, which are essentially statements of national standards. The MAB has so far not come up with 'level descriptors' for qualifications in the MNQF. It provides minimum (academic) entry criteria for every qualification level, with credit hours and credit points in a tabular form (see Appendix N). In the absence of level descriptors, which could be constituted as national standards, the levels of qualifications appear to equate to years spent in learning: they do not equate with the content of the qualification. The size of different qualifications is distinguished by means of credit points. The credit point is defined as "fourteen credit hours" and a credit hour is defined as the "time spent in learning activities that directly relates to the requirements to complete the respective qualification" (MAB, 2001, p. 6). Thus, the credit point is based on 'notional learning hours', as in the case of the New Zealand NQF. However, unlike in the Maldives, in the New Zealand system it includes the time spent "in doing assignments . . . and time spent in assessment" (NZQA, 2003). The important component of 'assessment' in qualifications and qualification frameworks appears to be missing altogether in the Maldives case. This is another confirmation of the assertion, within this thesis, that QA development in the Maldives was external to the core activities of teaching and learning.

In order to offset this situation, the MCHE appears to have developed some of its own strategies. Mention was made earlier of a MCHE policy to have assessment tasks, for which verifiable individual effort would count for at least 50 percent (see p. 219). Furthermore, each qualification in the MNQF is assigned a unique number of credit points. In this system, as in the case of the New Zealand system, there is no recognition of diversity in assessment. Due to this limitation, an MNQF, designed partly for the purpose of comparability of local qualifications with qualifications offered abroad, could not produce fully meaningful comparisons in assessment procedures.

The MNQF was originally conceived as a framework which would allow "all qualifications to have a purpose and relationship to each other and provide for

articulation from one qualification to the other by recognizing prior learning” (MAB, 2001, p. 2). This is theoretically possible but difficult to achieve in practice. To date, there have been no additional documents published that explain the relationship of qualifications to one another and how to achieve a perceived ‘seamlessness’ built into the framework. It is also unclear how this could be achieved without any guidelines for the recognition of prior learning.

The MNQF was conceived to be a comprehensive, inclusive guide to ensure the quality of both academic and vocational education and training. However, the MNQF appears to focus essentially on academic credentials, rather than career-oriented learning: the latter being greater national need, as expressed by some senior policy officials. (See Section 6.4.1.4, pp. 209-211).

The definitions and terminology used in the MNQF are biased to fit formal academic learning. The framework policy “does not fully acknowledge or provide details of how employment-oriented training programs offered by various providers will truly be accredited and ladderred into the formal credentialing system” (COL International and Simon Fraser University, 2003). The well-intentioned purposes for which the MNQF was designed will, however, remain unfulfilled so long as it does not serve the national interests. It will remain as a rudimentary classificatory instrument that serves a regulatory function. It allows for the classification and naming of qualifications but the rationale of facilitating quality improvement remains largely unattained.

The principal methodology, with which the MNQF is utilised for QA purposes in the Maldives, is accreditation. The next section will discuss this model. It will also discuss the problems faced in fully implementing the model in the Maldives.

7.3.1.3 Accreditation

Chapter Two of this thesis reviewed a number of QA approaches. The advantages and drawbacks of these approaches were also explored. Accreditation is one approach that is predominantly applied in many countries. The notion of accreditation, however, differs in different countries. Whilst the USP did not utilise accreditation as a mechanism for QA, the notion of accreditation differed in the other two case studies. In New Zealand, accreditation was one principal component of QA. The Maldives appears to be moving towards an accreditation model, although no course has undergone the accreditation process. The official policy stated that it was mandatory for all courses leading to a degree to undergo accreditation. Starting from 2003, an

increasing number of degree courses have been completed, although none have undergone local accreditation. Ironically, the MAB validates these degree qualifications for employment purposes, a necessity for financial purposes in Government employment in the Maldives. For all practical purposes providers, students and employers interpret the initial approval to commence teaching a course as 'accreditation'. Many private providers have advertised their programmes in the local media with statements such as, 'accredited by the MAB', when clearly this has not been the case. The path of external QA taken in the Maldives appears to be a pragmatic one. Cognisant of both financial and human capacity limitations, a phased model of accreditation has been adopted.

Accreditation in New Zealand refers to "the status awarded when an organisation has shown it is capable of delivering an approved course or assess against standards on the National Qualifications Framework" (NZQA, 2006). Approval and accreditation are very distinct parts of the QA process and this distinction was one of the major strengths of the system (MQ02-ABC). In the New Zealand system, approval involves "looking at things like the titles, the credits, the outcomes statements, the assessment philosophy . . . they are all in the gazetted criteria" (MQ02-ABC). The approval process looks to see if there is a "coherent programme that is useful, that is relevant" this KI elaborated. In accreditation, which is also a 'front-end' process, the system, "looks at the capability of the provider to deliver" the approved programmes (MQ02-ABC). It was also noted that, in the case of New Zealand, approval and accreditation was "usually done at the same time" (MQ02-ABC). However, it can also be done at different times. The last time the gazetted criteria were reviewed, a change was brought about so that "a provider can actually apply for approval by itself, approval and accreditation or just accreditation" (MQ02-ABC). This change enabled flexibility for the "commercial variations" (MQ02-ABC), that were occurring with partnerships in tertiary education. In other words, this was a regulatory flexibility that facilitated further the commercialisation of operations within tertiary education, thus adding to the globalisation occurring in this sector.

Another notable feature in the New Zealand system was the move from a front-end approval and accreditation process to a back-end systems check, based on a quality audit model. This is a "reflection in part of the growing number of approved courses and providers, the fiscal costs and cost effectiveness of a detailed assessment of all courses, as well as the need for the tertiary education organisations to manage their

own QA and academic quality processes, which are overseen by the provider's academic board" (SSC, 2005, p. 61). The audit model, it was revealed, was taken up by the polytechnic sector, not by Government regulation but on their own accord (see p. 143). The polytechnics' desire to undergo these various QA processes, is partly explained by the desire for further commercialisation and hence the presence of a profit-making motive, created by an evolving neoliberal agenda and pursued by the government of the day. To repeat what one participant stated, "A lot of polytechnics take the view that even if they don't require external approval for programmes, they will seek it anyway because it's better for their marketing" (QM09-ABC) (see p. 144).

In the Maldives, the MAB is yet to undertake an accreditation of any programme. Whilst no official definition of 'accreditation' has yet been publicly available, it was understood from the interviews that it would align to a practice that would be close to the definition offered by Harvey (2004). Harvey states "accreditation is the establishment or restatement of the status, legitimacy or appropriateness of an institution, programme (i.e. composite of modules) or module of study" (Harvey, 2004, p. 208)⁵¹. It was also understood that the MAB envisaged undertaking programme accreditation, instead of institutional accreditation. As one senior KI stated:

We will ask institutions to undertake self-study. That's the second phase, which we are planning to start. We are looking at internal auditing models [from other countries]. . . . We are trying to develop our own model. (QPc03-MCHE)

As noted earlier, a lack of local capacity has hindered development in this area. Consequently, the Maldives was again engaged in learning from overseas experiences and practices, when implementing the next phase of the QA accreditation model. In this respect, it would be worthwhile to heed the experiences of recent reviews of QA development in developing countries and particularly countries with significant resource constraints.

Recent reviews of the development of standards and criteria for accreditation in developing countries identify broad consultation amongst stakeholders as a success factor (Materu, 2007). Draft documents were widely circulated and stakeholders were encouraged to give feedback, before the standards were applied. In some cases, great care appears to have been taken to engage in consultation and to even pilot the

⁵¹ For further discussion of various definitional variations of accreditation, see Analytic Quality Glossary maintained by INQAAHE at www.qualityresearchinternational.com/glossary.

standards before full implementation. Standards set by QA agencies vary in their scope but there are standard requirements for common elements such as mission, academic programmes, faculty and staff quality, library and information resources and infrastructure and finances. Several agencies also included standards for governance, internal QA processes, integrity and planning (Materu, 2007, p. 24).

Another key to successful implementation of accreditation, in developing countries, appears to be flexibility in defining and interpreting standards. A degree of 'vagueness' in defining standards (for example with the use of terms such as 'appropriate to', or 'suitable conditions for', or facilities that are 'adequate for') allowed some delegation of decision-making to peer review panels. Whilst this may create some subjectivity in interpretation, it appears that most stakeholders preferred this wording, instead of rather prescriptive standards. Materu (2007) states, "ultimately the credibility of the results will rely largely on the strengths and integrity of the peer reviewers and the QA agency staff" (p. 25). This reliance outlines the critical importance of adequate human capacity in QA work. In other words, the training of reviewers becomes essential, particularly in the Maldives.

Although no definite policy document stated this, it was understood that the MAB would move towards programme accreditation, instead of institutional accreditation. In any case, a prior policy commitment to accredit all degree level programmes already existed. Programme accreditation, as opposed to institutional accreditation, was found to be more labour-intensive and costly (Materu, 2007). Only two of the 12 countries in Africa, with QA agencies, carry out programme accreditation, although more were planning to do so. Most of these countries engaged in institutional accreditation. Obviously, this depends on recognition of the magnitude of the task involved in requiring accreditation of programmes. In the Maldives, programmes were estimated to be in excess of 100. This has to be weighed against the availability of trained peer reviewers. However, the number of degree programmes, at the time of this study, was less than 15. Some countries (e.g. Madagascar) have decided to undertake programme accreditation on a selective representative basis during their institutional accreditation cycles, due to cost factors (Materu, 2007). This decision was made with a long-term view of eventually reviewing all programmes.

7.3.2 Problems and Issues of External QA Policy Implementation

The Maldives case study indicates that introduction of external QA was well accepted by all the participants. However, empirical evidence also showed that implementing the external QA policy encountered a number of problems. Continuation of these problems can impede or deter further development of QA in the Maldives. Many participants noted the lack of progress of this innovation in the HE sector. Statements, indicating the MAB has not been able to move beyond the pre-qualifications approval stage, were made by many participants. These were indicative of the fact that there were few effects, at least in comparison to the expectations of the participants. Furthermore, with increased emphasis on QA, by all stakeholders in HE there seemed to be no direct impact on the day-to-day practices of academics. Some explanation of this situation was evident in the empirical data itself. The two major explanatory factors are: (1) decline of support for policy implementation, and (2) insufficient human capacity.

Several participants highlighted the lack of capacity at the MAB and its inability to move beyond a first stage, when implementing a national QA policy. An analysis of political events in the last six to seven years and the accompanying structural changes in the government departments can offer some indications as to the reasons for this slow pace of progress. (See Chapter Six, p. 204).

This is not surprising when one recalls many examples of policy failures or even partly successful policies in HE (Cerych & Sabatier, as cited in Huisman & Currie, 2004). One possible explanation is that a fascination with external QA has become fashionable but, at government policy level, promotion of external QA is often merely rhetoric. Governments advocate QA but they either refrain from enforcing these policies or, when they are enforced, they become overly bureaucratic processes that hardly impact on the teaching and learning process.

A second line of explanation would be insufficient human capacity. There is no doubt that a small higher education system, such as that in the Maldives, has several constraints, resulting from insufficient staff to carry out QA work. The analysis presented in Chapter Six, showed how the MAB, during its infancy, has been administered 'from a distance', with no fulltime head for its first five years. (See Chapter Six, pp. 205-206).

7.3.3 *Transnational QA and Portability of Qualifications*

A number of Maldivian participants in this study stated that an overseas linkage was important for QA purposes. However, exposure to a transnational approach to QA is not a guarantee of quality at the receiving institution. There appears to be insufficient empirical evidence to support the claim that transnational arrangements actually bring about quality. Instead, many participants (QPc10-MCHE, QPc12-MCHE, QM05-MCHE) noted that such arrangements were necessary for ‘credibility’ rationales. This was seen as an opportunity to bring in academic standards of established HEIs. Affiliations and benchmarking with overseas standards is simply not enough. These standards may not translate to quality practices unless “monitoring” (QPc12-MCHE) and “vetting” (QPc06-MCHE) of the processing involved occurs.

The weak implementation of the national QA seems to have facilitated the continuation of transnational QA practices and the instituting of new QA arrangements for new programmes. The local higher education system is at an early stage of its development. The public at large are used to a secondary education system that has, for over forty years, depended on a well-known overseas examination system⁵². The tension between national self-determination and international portability of qualifications becomes a relevant issue. Often “the desire for external recognition conflicts with a desire for national self-determination” (Bray & Adam, 2001, p. 233). Similar tensions are evident in the case of many SDNs, some of which do not have university systems. Thus, the transnational QA arrangements at the MCHE (and other HEIs in the Maldives) are perhaps an extension of the tensions and issues associated with the dialectic between the international and the national. The relationship is partly based on dependency. In the global scheme of marketisation, it would also be a relationship of interdependency.

In the case of USP, an element of transnational QA existed in the form of External Advisers. The external review of programmes, through the use of an External Advisor system, is one of the oldest external QA mechanisms at the USP. This has been one major component of USP QA processes. The same rationale of credibility and the desire to reflect international standards and portability of qualifications appears to be the overriding rationale. Furthermore, being a regional university serving a number of countries, the imperative for an international dimension of quality and hence

⁵² The secondary students, both at the ordinary level (grade 10) and the advanced level (grade 12), have continued to sit for GCE examinations from London University (and more recently Cambridge University).

portability of qualifications becomes more acute. However, according to official university documents, this system has not proven to be entirely reliable and satisfactory (PDO, 2004). In 2003, a number of programmes did not have an approved External Adviser and the quality of the External Advisor reports are also reported to be variable. In order to strengthen this aspect of QA, the Quality Strategy has proposed the setting up of External Panels to review programmes. Such panels were proposed to consist of two to three external members (selected from amongst leading international academics from overseas universities) and two to three internal USP professors (selected from outside the faculty concerned).

Transnational QA also appears to create the tension for international comparability of standards and retaining graduates in the region, particularly in the SDNs of the South Pacific. The recognition of USP qualifications, discussed in Chapter Five (see p. xx), contributed to the dilemma of a 'brain drain', as a result of internationally comparable HE qualifications. One participant explained this complexity as follows:

If we focus our degrees to meet the developmental level that we are in and the quality of our degree is based on our level of development, then we will arrest the brain drain, because our qualifications wouldn't be compatible with those from the metropolitan countries. In this situation we will be left behind in skills and technology development. It hinders the overall development. We will be holding back if our graduates can only work in Fiji. (MQ11-USP)

Other regions of the world have developed transnational QA policy arrangements, in response to the rapidly growing transnational or cross-border HE. The Caribbean region, for instance, has responded to the challenges by CARICOM's regional mechanism for accreditation, equivalences, and articulation, "to guide governments in setting up their own national mechanism (Gift et al., 2005, p. 150).

In summary, TNQA has served an important function in the Maldives. Whilst the policy rhetoric has been to assure quality through international standards, many participants felt that these arrangements served merely a 'credibility' function. These mechanisms 'improved' the image of programmes and institutions, but not necessarily the quality of the programmes.

7.4 Internal Quality Assurance

This section will address QA, pertaining to the internal operations of MCHE. An attempt is made to explain some of the main internal QA practices and the key

tensions identified in the thematic analysis of interviews and survey data in Chapter Six, through five analytic categories. They are:

- i. internal scrutiny versus 'light touch' approval,
- ii. the tension between human resource needs and entry standards,
- iii. diversity versus uniformity of QA practices,
- iv. the validity and reliability of student evaluations as a measure of QA,
- v. the presence or absence of institutional conditions.

7.4.1 Internal Scrutiny versus 'Light touch' Approval

Significant progress has taken place at MCHE, in terms of the restructuring and standardisation of courses, in line with the MNQF guidelines which came into effect in 2001. However, the process has not been without problems. Difficulties that arose during this process were presented in Chapter Six. Delays in the approval of courses have occurred. At the time of interviewing for this study, some participants mentioned that they were still waiting to hear about the status of approval of some MCHE courses. This is despite the fact that the courses were already being conducted.

MCHE's pragmatic response, to this slow pace of the course approval process, has been the development of an internal structure for the scrutiny of courses, through the formation of a Committee on Courses. This new development generated an internal QA mechanism within the MCHE. This was clearly an opportunity created for MCHE, by the new national QA policy. Once the Committee was formed and the practice within the MCHE was aligned to review all College submissions through this Committee, it created further opportunities to gain a greater degree of control for QA within the MCHE itself, a move which developed confidence within the MAB to offer a 'light touch' approval for MCHE courses, compared to those offered by private sector institutions. As a result of the impeccable course development process, careful scrutiny and the peer appraisal system now in place, the MAB's approval procedure for MCHE has been significantly influenced and changed. It was also a time-saving opportunity for an over-burdened MAB. As one KI confirmed:

The courses from MCHE are now scrutinised within the Academic Board. Therefore we are somewhat satisfied with that process from a quality assurance perspective. (QPc03-MCHE)

The researcher understood that this increasing 'satisfaction' has led to 'almost automatic' approval of submissions from the College, without further MAB evaluation through an Approval Panel. However, there were some occasions where approvals were not given automatically.

Despite this growing confidence in the internal QA processes within MCHE, the concerns of some staff members, pertaining to the 'light-touch' approval from MAB, are a reason for some caution. International experience shows that QA agencies have been either more relaxed about public institutions or they have not involved them at all in early phases of QA development. Understandably, in many developing countries, QA systems first emerged to deal with problems of quality in the private sector and the public sector HEIs were included at a later period.

7.4.2 The Tension between Human Resource Needs and Entry Standards

Chapter Six presented the processes involved in the standardisation of courses at MCHE, as part of the internal QA process. With the introduction of MNQF the entry standards for each qualification level have been established. These are minimum requirements and QA policy requires HEIs to adhere to these requirements. It must also be noted that those who wish to do so can raise the entry criteria and/or increase the length of a course to more than what is stipulated in the MNQF. However, there is no real incentive to raise the minimum standards stipulated nationally.

Keeping up to the standards of entry to various programmes appears to have created tensions within MCHE. This could have arisen due either to an absence of a shared notion of quality or to the changing notions of quality and QA, or both of these factors. Some programmes, that had maintained higher entry standards prior to the MNQF, were required to adjust the entry criteria under the MNQF. As one participant explained:

The criterion [we had set] is minimum 2 Ordinary Level (O Level) passes. . . . But we don't get enough students. So we lowered the criteria [to the MNQF criteria]. Now if they have studied in grade 10, they can join these courses. . . . Since we announced the criteria as having studied in grade 10, the standard of student we get has dropped considerably. (AC03-MCHE)

The diversity of students received by this faculty proves to be challenging. At the faculty level, this requires a creative response. This was explained by the previous participant as follows:

One group with some O Level passes and the other without any O Level passes. We notice a significant difference among these two groups. . . . In fact we have added one extra semester to bring these students up to standard. In fact, the students we get not only have an academic problem. Some of them also have an attitude problem. So getting them to do something they do not want is a problem. But for those who are keen to study, one semester is enough. (AC03-MCHE)

A similar issue was also noted at the Centre for Maritime Studies (CMS). In the case of CMS, where internationally stipulated (through the IMO) model courses are taught, the entry criteria of one particular course was found to be lower than than a similar level course in the MNQF. Nevertheless, due to the desire to achieve MAB recognition, in addition to validation from international standards, the entry criteria were raised to benchmark the course with the MNQF.

Despite these adjustments, the need to develop a foundation studies programme was justified as a number of programmes still failed to fill their places with enough qualified students. Students in the foundation studies programme undertook a condensed programme. Those who successfully completed the foundation programme received automatic entry and admission to their respective academic programme at MCHE. As one participant stated:

If there are students from Advanced Level (A Level), and we have good enough students . . . we should be able to take them, instead of the foundation [students]. We should be able to reject them [those from the foundation]. The College does not give us the right to reject them. We have to take them. Those students don't have the A Level standards and our programmes are designed for A Level standards. It's very difficult to bring them to the A Level standard in just one semester. (AC10-MCHE)

With the launching of Foundation Courses, the programme had to accommodate, two teacher education programmes and a more diversified group of students, who were also weak in language ability. The lowered entry associated with these programmes, according to some participants, definitely increased the number of applicants (eligible) for a course, thus serving more favourably the need to accelerate the number of trained teachers.

The examples cited above indicate tensions in attempting to keep to the national standards of entry in the MNQF. The institutional responses, endeavouring to meet multiple stakeholder demands, were varied. The push by some academic staff members to admit only highly qualified students, from general secondary education, to some MCHE programmes may arise from three desires according to a policy level KI: (1) the students will invariably do well in the programme and provide an affirmation of their own prowess as teachers, (2) the teaching is a great deal easier because teachers have to work less to teach, and (3) the number of students will be lower, which is advantageous to the lecturer (QPc11-MCHE).

Such an emphasis arises from an interpretation of quality as an input-output model of education. According to this model, the quality of input determines the quality of output. In rapidly expanding student populations, when the social demand for higher education is high and rising, restrictive policies can be seen as undemocratic and unegalitarian. Attesting to this restrictive view of quality, one KI stated that quality of teaching “has to be determined by the transformation that you can effect in a student” (QPc11-MCHE). Furthermore, a second focus on the output as the determinant of quality is also problematic. Output can be ‘managed’ to show that an institution has quality. Thirdly, there are those who are of the view that frequent scrutiny results in quality. This is similar to the inspectorial system found in the school sector. Interview and questionnaire data indicate that staff members expected that senior supervisory level staff of MCHE should visit the faculties and observe academic functions (including teaching) and provide feedback. The KI, referred to in this paragraph, argued against a single focus on any one of the above three conceptualisations of quality, since “a ‘fixation’ on any one can only lead to a tunnel vision of quality” (QPc11-MCHE).

It appears that quality means different things to different faculties and individual staff members. This also leads the researcher to conclude that the different faculties appear to emphasise different mechanisms and procedures, in order to attain quality. This is perhaps recognition of the expanded notion of quality embraced by the MNQF, in contrast with a rather restricted view of quality that some pre-MCHE institutions maintained.

7.4.3 Diversity versus Uniformity of QA Practices

Analysis of QA practices, at MCHE, shows that a number of activities were geared towards quality. These practices included regular meetings with students during the semester, course evaluation by students, meetings with student representatives from different courses, and weekly staff meetings. Staff members do not necessarily regard these activities as QA. Whilst many of these activities were undertaken in most faculties, there generally appears to be wide variations of practice amongst the MCHE faculties.

A primary rationale for the establishment of the MCHE was to consolidate the provision of higher education in the public sector and to bring about some uniformity in the practices of HE within a single administration. A single and consolidated

institution can also expect to bring about a reasonable level of uniformity, to the various practices amongst the constituent academic units of the organisation. These might include practices in curriculum development, programme entry regulations, assessment and examination processes and other course administration procedures. All academic staff members interviewed and surveyed (71 in total) were supportive of the new external QA initiative. They welcomed the move towards the standardisation of academic programmes and practices across the amalgamated HEI, where individual faculties were struggling to find their place and role. However, there appeared to be tensions between the external QA requirements and institutional understandings and approaches to quality. These include notions of quality related to fitness for purpose, providing value for money, consistently demonstrating compliance with standards and customer satisfaction. Quality, as discussed in Chapter Two, lacks a specific definition in the literature.

This diversity of understanding, relating to 'quality' within MCHE, could be problematic for the further development of internal QA. Nationally, there is no set of standards available, as was the case in the New Zealand polytechnic study. The polytechnics association in New Zealand has a set of standards around which individual polytechnics organise their internal QA systems. This was certainly the case with ABC College, in this study. The extent of awareness and understanding of 'quality' and 'quality assurance' matters can be low or high. This might affect the degree of ownership of quality systems within the institutions. Generally, HEIs would face problems of establishing and sustaining 'ownership' of QA systems (Newton, 1999, p. 86). Likewise, all institutions experience some contestation of certain aspects of their quality systems. In the case of MCHE, due to its post-merger situation, the differences in levels of exposure to internal QA practices were revealed. Some faculties were already very dependent on external QA (e.g. Faculty of Hospitality and Tourism Studies), whilst others relied on internally generated practices. Such differences are partly reflective of the historical legacy of the faculties. Practices, initiated during their pre-MCHE days, continue to be retained.

7.4.4 The Validity and Reliability of Student Evaluations as a Measure of QA

Student evaluation of teaching and teaching staff was reported, by a majority of participants, as the most common and most effective of internal QA practices at MCHE. Participants from the Maldives case study noted a range of perceptions

regarding evaluation of courses. This is also an area where there were wide differences of opinion regarding its usefulness. Some even questioned the feedback students gave in the evaluation forms.

There were differences in practices amongst the MCHE faculties, with respect to the time when the questionnaire was administered, the person administering it and what use was made of the feedback. In some faculties, the Deans themselves were directly involved in administering and implementing, whilst in others these tasks were undertaken by respective senior coordinators. Understandably, faculty level capacity, in analysing the information gathered, was a major issue. There was one faculty that did not, at least at the time of this study, undertake this type of evaluation through a questionnaire. Instead, regular meetings with student representatives or whole class meetings were held for the purpose of obtaining student feedback.

Academic staff members have stated their distrust of the feedback they receive at times. Mention was made of lecturers who receive high ratings from students, when generally most people knew very well that the staff member in question was not that outstanding (see p. 222). Student evaluation of teaching is used in many Western countries as part of the internal QA processes. In many HEIs across the world, “the only primary data systematically collected to evaluate teaching are student evaluations” (Cashin; Marsh; Marchant & Newman; Rasmden, as cited in Nguyen & McInnis, 2002). Gibbs (1995) has also noted an increase in the UK of the compulsory use of student feedback questionnaires. In Western countries, student evaluation is generally seen as reliable and valid and a source of helpful information to guide teachers’ professional development, although there are concerns with this form of evaluation. Four out of eight faculty Heads of MCHE stated that this practice was effective for QA purposes, whilst one faculty head questioned the effectiveness of this form of quality monitoring. The other three, whilst not disregarding the practice, stated that meeting students was a better option to obtain feedback. Academic staff members seem to have difficulty in trusting the genuineness of feedback from students. One staff member mentioned how staff manipulated these evaluations by presenting easy tests (AC10-MCHE) or “increasing the marks of students” (AC07-MCHE).

The above differences, regarding perceived effectiveness in the use of student evaluation through questionnaires, could be partly explained from a cultural perspective. Traditionally, teachers (at all levels) are highly regarded in the Maldives,

as is the case in many Asian countries (Nguyen & McInnis, 2002). The prevailing image of the teacher in many Asian societies is still an image of a learned scholar, an expert in the discipline. This would also largely be the case in the Maldives, although admittedly values have undergone changes in recent years. In the Maldivian HE sector it would be reasonable to state that the relationship between the teacher and student is formal and hierarchical. This leads to more formal teacher-centred methods of teaching. In addition, this could also have negative implications for students' creativity, since the respect implies learning without a great deal of questioning. Hence, deeply embedded cultural values may be inhibiting feedback, particularly negative feedback, in response to questionnaires. As one Dean noted, "Some students do not want to present things in writing, they come and tell us verbally" (QM05-MCHE).

Thus the 'cultural feature' may pose a challenge in adopting such internal QA practices, often taken for granted in Western institutions. Further development of QA policy must take these matters into consideration, if the mechanism of obtaining meaningful student feedback is to become an effective practice in MCHE.

7.4.5 The Presence or Absence of Institutional Conditions

The success of an internal QA system depends to a large extent on the favourable institutional context that prevails. According to Lim (2001), the adoption of the predominantly instrumental approach to QA, practised in developed countries, can only work if a number of conditions are met. Whilst these conditions are normally taken for granted in developed countries, many developing countries, who adopt similar approaches to QA, do not seem to have such conditions met. The first condition Lim (2001) identifies is the issue of academic staff, their qualifications, working conditions and remuneration. Participants in this study also identified the issue of academic staffing as a critical factor that affects QA within the MCHE. Table 4.2 (p. 132) presented the profile of academic staff at the MCHE. It could be observed that the number of staff has increased and also the academic profile of the staff showed higher qualifications. Despite these positive developments, a number of issues related to staffing have been highlighted in the study. (See Section 6.5.2.4, pp. 223-228).

A number of problematic internal QA process issues could be related to the emerging nature of the institutional context that needs to meet the several conditions identified

by Lim (2003). Empirical evidence shows that staffing related issues constitutes a major barrier to internal QA processes. Inadequate numbers of staff in some faculties necessitated the recruitment of part-timers. Using part-timers created a number of problems, since the recruitment pool is also small. A more crucial staff-related issue was that of motivation. Motivation has been seriously undermined at MCHE, due to the inability of the Government to revise the academic staff and promotion structure. The freeze on the current structure for staff promotion, for over three years, together with only a hope of revising the structure, was another crucial factor that contributed to this low motivation.

Participants also reported a reduction of commitment, in terms of time devoted to academic activities at MCHE. Since MCHE is a teaching-intensive institution, with a negligible amount of research activity, academic activity would by and large translate to teaching, curriculum development and course coordination. With low remuneration and poor promotion opportunities, some participants stated that many staff members have been compelled to devote more time to other commitments, such as an additional job. Invariably, in many cases, these happen to be a teaching job in a private HEI. Although there was no definitive evidence that this shift in time commitment affects quality in a negative way, the trend for staff to invest less, in terms of time spent in MCHE academic activity, is real. Such a phenomenon Kuh (as cited in Dill, 2003) describes as “faculty disengagement” (Dill, 2003, p. 4). Dill interprets faculty disengagement in two ways: the first and most obvious meaning is where faculty members spend less time on teaching and more time on research and scholarship. This meaning of ‘faculty disengagement’, according to Dill, raises interesting and troubling questions of professional responsibility and public policy. (See Dill, 2003 for further elaboration).

A second, less obvious, meaning of ‘faculty disengagement’ is reflective of what Massy, Wilger, and Colbeck (as cited in Dill, 2003, p. 4) call ‘hollowed collegiality’. According to this interpretation, whilst academic departments appear to act collectively, they avoid those specific collaborative activities that might lead to real improvements in curricula and instruction. Hollowed collegiality means there was the appearance of acting collectively, whilst avoiding specific collaborative activities, that might lend to real improvements. In the MCHE case, this disengagement could mean investing less time in academic activity and more time in personal private engagements, often in a secondary job. This is an entirely rational decision, since the

second job provides a much needed supplement to a government salary. In Western HEIs, this takes place as 'research drift', whereby academic staff members attempt to shift their time from teaching to research. No doubt, this is due to government policy shifts with contestable research funds and the emphasis on knowledge production. (The New Zealand PBRF is a clear example of such a policy). Evidence does not appear to show the applicability of 'hollowed collegiality' in the case of MCHE.

Nevertheless, in the Maldives, the issue of reallocation of faculty time, from teaching at MCHE to other activities, is of relevant concern. It could be reasonably predicted that this issue negatively affects the quality of teaching at MCHE. This negative impact could also be extended to other academic activities, such as curriculum development, teaching evaluation and student assessment, upon which both effective student learning and the maintenance of academic standards are critically dependent. The issue of 'faculty disengagement' and how this affects academic quality at MCHE, could be a worthwhile topic for research in the Maldives.

7.5 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the QA policy processes, through ten analytic categories formed by regrouping the themes identified under the Maldives case study. The new groupings were classified as: (i) education policy (discourses and contexts), (ii) external QA, and (iii) internal QA.

The findings of this research, pertaining to education policy, were discussed through the two categories of policy discourses and policy contexts. The case studies, undertaken in this research, provided empirical evidence to varying degrees, to show that QA policy processes have been influenced by a set of discourses, which are aimed at furthering economic interests and promoting market solutions to educational issues.

It was revealed that in New Zealand, neoliberalism was at the centre of a number of major education reforms, including the qualifications and QA reforms. The connection of the Maldives' economic development with HRD appeared to have been a recurrent theme in every major national development planning document published in recent times. One of the purposes for the introduction of the QA policy ensemble was to facilitate greater participation in the provision of higher education, from the private sector. The foregoing discussion reveals that neoliberalism and its associated strategies of marketisation, privatisation, managerialism and human resource

development have shaped QA policy development in varying degrees, in all three case studies.

The findings of this study have confirmed that a combination of global, national and local factors influenced the development of QA policy in the Maldives.

An examination of the purposes of external QA showed that there were four broad purposes of external QA. In most countries, higher education institutions are required to demonstrate their worth and to properly account for their use of public resources. At MCHE there were a number of academic programmes, which had QA arrangements with institutions located in other countries.

Whilst the policy rhetoric has been to assure quality through international standards, empirical evidence showed that the TNQA arrangements served merely a ‘credibility’ function. These mechanisms ‘improved’ the image of programmes and institutions, but not necessarily the quality of the programmes.

Internal QA, pertaining to the internal operations of MCHE, was also discussed in the light of five analytic categories. The next chapter will revisit the research questions and present the conclusions of this study. The significance of this study for the Maldives and for MCHE, in the further development of QA, will be identified. Specific recommendations for QA development will be presented. The limitations of this study will be identified, together with suggestions for new future research.

Chapter Eight

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

8.1 Introduction

The research reported in this thesis aimed to explore and understand issues and problems relating to the development and implementation of quality assurance policy in higher education. The establishment of the Maldives Accreditation Board (MAB) in 2000 and the subsequent introduction of the Maldives National Qualifications Framework (MNQF), in 2001, marked the commencement of formal quality assurance in Maldivian higher education.

In this study, the MNQF policy instrument and the specific QA policy requirements built into it (see pp. 198-199) were collectively referred to as the Government 'policy on quality assurance in higher education' or 'policy ensemble': in short 'the policy', which this study examined. This examination was made with special reference to the Maldives' public higher education sector, exemplified by the Maldives College of Higher Education (MCHE). The study incorporated two secondary case studies to illuminate the analysis and understanding of the phenomenon in the primary case study, which was focussed on MCHE. In doing so, the study was enriched with useful lessons from contexts, where quality assurance has been in operation for a comparatively longer time.

This chapter is divided into the following six parts. The first part, Section 8.2, summarises the theoretical framework and the methodology adopted for the study and restates the research questions. Section 8.3 summarises the main conclusions of this study. Section 8.4 considers the significance of this study. Section 8.5 makes recommendations for policy and practice in QA. The next section, 8.6, identifies the limitations of the study. On the basis of the results and limitations of the study, the final section, 8.7, provides some suggestions for further research on quality assurance.

8.2 Theoretical Framework, Methodology and Research Questions

Chapter Two presented the theoretical framework adopted for this study. This framework originated from the exploration of Ball and associates' (Bowe et al., 1992) and Ball's (1993) education policy model. This model consists of three interrelated contexts of influence, text production and practice. Vidovich's (2002a) three

refinements of the model were accepted in the theoretical framework of this research. With these refinements, the researcher extended the theoretical framework to incorporate a glonacal perspective, following Marginson and Rhoades' (2002) glonacal agency heuristic. This new framework, constructed for this study (see Figure 2.2, p. 60), allowed for an in-depth analysis of the factors at all three levels of global, national and local (institutional) levels. The main rationale for adopting this framework is the increasing confirmation of the close association of quality assurance and globalisation. Furthermore, there is increasing evidence of the adoption of globally common quality assurance models, whilst at the same time there are also contextual differences. Why do small developing nations (SDNs) such as the Maldives adopt globally dominant QA models? How are globally dominant models adapted /adopted in such resource-constrained nation states? What are the results of adapting /adopting these globally prevalent QA practices in a newly emerging higher education system? Do they actually improve the academic quality of teaching and learning? These were some of the broader questions that initially elicited interest for this study.

Within this overarching context of commonalities amongst QA models in higher education, the study focused on the following key research question.

How does the newly emerging higher education system in the Maldives, exemplified by the Maldives College of Higher Education, assure quality amidst a rapidly globalising quality assurance policy environment?

The study was conducted as a qualitative case study. Based on Crotty's (1998) methodological framework, the study utilised the epistemology of social constructivism and adopted the interpretive qualitative paradigm of research. The methodology adopted was pluralist, in the sense that it conducted three different case studies in three different countries and employed different methods of data collection. The research was designed as a qualitative multi-site case study with a single focus, the phenomenon of QA in higher education. The limitations and disadvantages of studying a relatively new phenomenon in a single site, the primary site of study, were alleviated by the particular research design that incorporated two secondary case studies. From an epistemological sense, this particular design provided richness to the investigation of the single phenomenon.

The key question was explored through three principal questions, which in turn were explored through subsidiary questions. With respect to the secondary case studies the principal question was: What lessons can be learnt from the practice of quality

assurance at ABC College, New Zealand, and the USP? The research question for the secondary case studies sought to explore QA through a thematic analysis of issues in the respective institutions and to draw lessons that might assist in exploring QA in the primary case study. From the New Zealand case study, the issue of QA within a centrally regulated national system received focussed attention. From the USP study, the issue of transnational QA, particularly through the external adviser system, was the main thrust of exploration.

For the primary case study from the Maldives, the first of the three principal questions was: Why and how did quality assurance policy emerge in the Maldives' higher education? Two aspects were involved in this question: (1) policy influences: What discourses influenced the development of QA policy? (2) contextual factors: What global, national and local level factors contributed to QA policy development?

The second principal question for the primary case study was: How does quality assurance operate in the emerging Maldivian higher education sector and in particular at the MCHE? Two main aspects were involved in this question: (1) external quality assurance policy and systems, including the obstacles in implementation of policy and the benefits and challenges of the policy, and (2) internal quality assurance issues at MCHE and the impact of this policy at the level of practice.

In order to answer the specific research questions, interviews, documents and a questionnaire (only at MCHE) were used to collect data from the respective research sites. In New Zealand, the interviews were conducted with staff members involved in quality management at the ABC College and national agencies involved in QA work, namely NZQA, ITP Quality, NZVCC and AAU. At USP, interviews were obtained from university staff members associated with the implementation of the new quality assurance strategy - the 'Quality Network'. A majority of these members had been teaching at the university for several years: some for nearly 20 years and they had contributed to quality assurance in various capacities (e.g. Heads of Department, Heads of Schools). It is also important to note that some of the participants from USP were teaching staff members, in addition to being involved in QA management. In the Maldives, interviews were obtained principally from three groups of people: (1) those who contributed to policy making, (2) those who managed QA activities, and (3) those who implemented QA practices (teaching staff members).

Undertaking qualitative research in small closely-knit societies is challenging. It does not readily conform to the conventional research practices, particularly in maintaining distancing during fieldwork. This was notably the case during the Maldives' fieldwork. This type of situation can arise when a researcher undertakes to study his/her own previous workplace. The personalised nature of the situation stems from the researcher being personally known to most of the participants in the Maldives, through prior working relationships and this made it difficult, for example, to assure the type of distancing that conventional research practice requires, for the purposes of objectivity or guaranteeing anonymity. In addition, maintaining a degree of informality which reflects the personalised nature of the research, but not to the extent of jeopardising the research principles, was also important.

The extensive preparations and consultations, with the management of MCHE (discussed in Chapter Three), point to ways in which qualitative research can be accommodated in the unique contexts of small states. The importance of obtaining consent and safeguarding participant identity and also being sensitive to what people shared with the researcher cannot be underestimated. The assurance of confidentiality and anonymity has to be meticulously attended to in this type of situation. The strategies used to achieving this (see Chapter Three and Appendix B1) are noteworthy, in the area of conducting qualitative research in small state settings.

8.2.1 Global Factors of Influence

The pursuit of quality in tertiary education is not a new phenomenon. However, lately, renewed concern relating to quality in tertiary education has emerged, as a consequence of structural changes that have been brought to bear on higher education institutions the world over. A number of these changes were discussed in Chapter Two.

Within the prevailing force of globalisation, maintenance and enhancement of quality in higher education became a major international focus in the 1990s. There were two principal factors that gave rise to this international focus. Firstly, there was the rapid expansion from elitism to massification. Secondly, there was a concurrent need for economic restraint to limit public expenditure. The need to do more with less, by way of improving effectiveness, became paramount. Allied to these developments was the growing demand for public accountability. Subsequently, many developed countries, followed by developing countries, established formal agencies with responsibility for

quality assurance in higher education. The Western countries undertook a number of initiatives to deal with issues linked to quality, such as recognition of qualifications and student and labour market mobility.

The influence of the global context cannot be underestimated in the development of QA policy and practice in the Maldives. International organisations, such as the OECD, the World Bank and UNESCO have called for new structures and new approaches to quality assurance. The study found evidence to support the theory that globally dominant influences, despite the non-recognition by many in the primary case study, were instrumental in shaping national and institutional QA policies and practices. It is feasible that outside influence was more subtle in the case of the Maldives.

Conceivably, some academics were unwilling to credit outside influences for QA development, since many nationals wanted to project the development of QA as a national response. No doubt, QA policy was a national response, which was generated due to 'pressures' originating from within and outside the country. It emerged within a national higher education development project, in which both nationals and overseas consultants were heavily involved. However, it is true that no specific consultant was hired to initially draft the MNQF or to oversee the setting up of the MAB. The initial recommendation to set up an accreditation board came from the consultants who previously developed a project for Asian Development Bank (ADB) financing.

There was compelling evidence that international organisations and international consultants contributed to the policy that led to the establishment of a national accreditation body, which in turn led to the introduction of the MNQF and a formal mechanism of QA in the Maldives. These have been discussed, through the thesis of 'international circulation of ideas' or the export of policy 'solutions' (Ball, 1998) (see Chapter Seven). More powerfully, the ideological stance taken by supranational agencies has influenced the policy solution. In the case of the Maldives, the immediate cause of the 'policy ensemble' analysed in this study was the fulfillment of a loan covenant for a project financed by a regional development bank.

Secondly, teams of international consultants, of course at the invitation of the Government of Maldives (GOM), have assisted in the evolution of the 'policy ensemble' in the Maldives. This is consistent with what has happened in many

countries, including Australia and New Zealand. Advisers have also played a key role in the development of quality assurance regimes in these countries.

Another 'global' factor was the role of international marketing of higher education courses, that occurred mainly in the western HEIs and to some extent in some rapidly developing countries who were entering the 'market' of higher education, namely Malaysia, India and Sri Lanka. This international marketing has contributed to the draining of potential local students to such HEIs overseas. Some have argued that there was a necessity to develop local assurances of quality, partly to mitigate the negative consequences of vigorous overseas marketing. The local population had to be assured that the programmes offered locally were also of a high quality. However, this created a mistaken notion of quality that equated QA with international comparability. International comparability *by itself* is not a valid mechanism or criterion for quality.

8.2.2 National Factors

Small and emerging higher education systems, particularly those dominated by a single public HEI, have little choice except to learn from others. In this endeavour, the tendency appears to be more than just trying to fit into global QA models. There were several pressures to also fit into the dominant models. The present study was able to identify a set of policy discourses and contextual factors that influenced the development of QA policy (in two national contexts). The principal discourse, that shaped QA, was found to be neoliberalism. Several strategies associated with neoliberalism were found to be instrumental in promoting this path, which favours an economic rationalist model of development. Neoliberal influences were found to be particularly influential during the development of New Zealand qualifications and quality assurance policy. The far-reaching legislative and policy changes in New Zealand higher education quality assurance had its origins in neoliberal influences. Under neoliberalism, alleged advantages, which free markets were claimed to have over state regulation, were advanced. QA policy developments in New Zealand higher education parallel the macro policy developments under a wider agenda of economic restructuring and public sector reforms (see Chapter Four).

In contrast to the New Zealand situation, the neoliberal effect was only partial in the case of the Maldives. Factors, related to the rapid expansion of the HE sector, were germane to the Maldives. In the Maldives, the human resource development discourse was advanced in the overall expansion of higher education. A country, whose

economy had been in rapid development for nearly two decades, needed the necessary human resources to sustain this economic growth in addition to further development in this area. In the area of higher education within an overall policy emphasis on private sector enhancement, the marketisation and privatisation strategies were advanced. Quality and the need for QA emerged more prominently from within these expanding opportunities for higher education that were occurring within the country.

An important development at the national level, which led towards some form of QA, was the decision of the GOM to award a financial incentive to civil servants, based on their tertiary qualifications. This decision led to the initial introduction of validation of foreign certificates, which was later extended to also cover local qualifications. This task overwhelmed the work of the MAB after its creation, when it was assigned this duty, previously undertaken by the Department of Public Examinations.

In the creation and implementation of the 'policy ensemble', it was observed that the role of the state was significantly extensive. Vidovich's one refinement of Ball's policy model was also based on the recognition that the state played a key role in policy making. This is particularly true in a neoliberal economy, where the state is centrally placed as an "effective broker". Ball (1998) did not fully take the view that the state was powerless; rather he proposed that a different kind of state took shape within the neoliberal context. In the Western economic rationalistic context, Marginson (1993) and Lingard (1996) also observe the role of the state as the 'market player', thus assuring a new managerial role of 'steering from a distance'. In the theoretical framework of this study, following Vidovich (2002a), the state is central to the role of policy creation and development. However, as noted in Chapter Two, the state-centred model was applicable in the case of the Maldives as far as the level of practice at MCHE was concerned, although their overall system is a top-down state-control model. The MCHE not only participated, but also played a lead role in shaping the QA model adopted in the Maldives.

In the case of the Maldives, there is no doubt that the role of the Government was central to the creation of the 'policy ensemble'. In the Maldivian context, it could be argued that there was a need for the state to intervene, in order to steer and regulate the post-secondary sector in the public interest, because the change required in the system would not be delivered through market mechanism or through voluntarism. The discussion in Chapter Seven shows that the influence occurred within the context of global, national and institutional influence. The global forces from outside, national

factors and the MCHE institutional influences guided the way in which the state utilised its power of control. The state's adoption of the policy was made effective on all HEIs that wanted their courses to be acceptable. In a SDN context, HEIs, both public and private, even if they were not linked to funding support, had no choice except to comply. Opposing the state would be unthinkable. Nevertheless, the local forces that urged international comparability, 'constrained' the MCHE to simultaneously seek transnational QA in addition to local QA, through the MAB. Hence, the maintenance in some programmes and the establishment of new linkages to overseas HEIs was observed in the MCHE.

Although there was convergence of policy and QA models, in the implementation they were far from being similar. Models or solutions, chosen in some contexts, cannot be readily transported to other national contexts. One major factor, in the case of the Maldives, was found to be the lack of a sufficient pool of local subject specialists. At national level, the QA strategy adopted in the Maldives is that of approval and accreditation. Although no programme has undergone accreditation to date, there was evidence to indicate that QA was interpreted as 'accreditation' and that the 'initial approval process' was widely understood and believed to be 'accreditation' in the Maldives.

8.2.3 Local Factors

There is a close link between the national quality assurance policy, implemented through the mechanism of approval and accreditation, and the MCHE. The establishment of the MCHE and the subsequent introduction of MAB have come about through the same national exercise of higher education development. The MCHE was the catalyst, through which a national need for quality assurance was established and delivered. In order for these processes to eventuate, international lending organisations and foreign consultants have played their part. The international lending organisations, such as the World Bank and the ADB, are known to have supported global trends in quality assurance in higher education systems in many developing countries.

The MCHE, in addition to being the catalyst for external QA, had a direct influence in the preparation of the NQF, a principal policy instrument of quality assurance, through its senior officers. A direct input was made through the development of a first draft of the qualifications framework, which was initially intended for MCHE internal use by

the MCHE Rector. Staff associated with MCHE also provided input, through their knowledge and experience from study tours of quality assurance organisations in other countries. Documents relating to quality assurance from other countries were also obtained and these were made available to MCHE and the MOE, during the preparation of national quality assurance policy instruments.

The findings of this study indicate that the widespread acceptance of a policy idea does not necessarily translate to its direct application. It is ironic that education policy makers have often advocated policy in inherently educational terms, yet they fail to achieve the associated goals in the core educational activities. It is possible that policy intentions are dominated by other goals. There was, for example, evidence from the MCHE study to support the view that 'semesterisation' was a key aspect of the quality assurance project. Such a process was initiated just after the establishment of the MCHE and before the national QA framework was introduced. Semesterisation, in the context of the Maldives, was akin to the 'modularisation' that has taken place in other countries. The MNQF and the approval and accreditation model, adopted in the Maldives, have endorsed the semesterisation model initiated at the MCHE. By its extension, this laid the foundations of an improved and 'quality assured' higher education system in the country.

The evidence suggests that semesterisation and the credit point system, adopted in the national QA approach, was a case of policy transfer, albeit from the New Zealand and Australian QA policy environments. The credit point system and the process of fitting units or modules of studies into set slots of time do not appear to be based on an adequate rationale in the education theory of learning or assessment. The main part of the argument, in support of semesterisation, has been based partly on the need for harmonisation and standardisation, following the merger of the post-secondary institutions, which formed the MCHE. The credit point structure, which to this day remains contested by the MCHE (and is little understood within the MCHE) is essentially a market mechanism. It paves the way for credit transfer within the country and eventually among HEIs around the world and it becomes a common currency by which higher education is bought and sold with ease.

The academic quality advancement, through QA policy and systems, appears to be pre-eminently managerialist and draws the strength of its support more from managerial rather than educational theories. The thrust for semesterisation was accompanied by a concentration on outcomes and competency-based assessment. As a

consequence, there is great emphasis on measurable behavioural change, which is consistent with the neoliberal discourses of managerialism and performativity.

8.3 Conclusions of the Study

In general the thesis has concluded that:

1. The study confirms that defining 'quality' in higher education is problematic. A single definition of 'quality' does not exist and it would be pointless to even attempt such a definition, since aspects of higher education are valued differently by different people in different systems. The diversity in response, to issues of quality, provides evidence of the complexities involved in this process. The most commonly used definition seems to be the 'fitness for purpose' definition. This is an instrumental approach to quality. According to this definition, if education fulfils its purpose then it is said to be one of quality. However, stakeholders in education may have different views on 'purposes' and 'fitness'. An instrumental understanding of 'quality' appears to underpin the QA policy and practices, in the three case studies. Conceptually, this has led to practices in assessing and monitoring quality, with a focus on management systems. This, in turn, has engendered rigorous systems of accountability and associated surveillance policies and practices.
2. The growth of emphasis on quality is linked to broader developments in the higher education sector: growth in higher education, widening access and private sector developments. The trends are also represented as attempts at social justice claiming protection of the public. These broader developments could be related to the effects of neoliberal restructuring of economies in the Western world, arising from globalisation. It is true that globalisation, taken from the vantage point of a newly emerging and particularly small state system is grossly imbalanced and it unfairly disadvantages these developing countries. Globalisation and the neoliberal policy agenda have commercialised higher education to the advantage of well established higher education systems, such as those in Britain, the US, Australia and New Zealand. It could be argued that there also exists a degree of exploitation, by the Western HEIs, of the immensely growing social demand for higher education throughout the developing countries, in the name of robust policies and systems of QA. It is true that the developing countries also demand quality. However, this demand is inadvertently misconstrued as international comparability

through, for instance, accreditation models and recognition frameworks. The 'quality assured' higher education courses in the West are heavily marketed and tend to fill a gap, albeit a growing gap in the developing countries, with their increasing populations and greater success in universalising their primary and secondary schooling.

The global inequality that globalisation has brought about is not redressed through higher education QA schemes. On the contrary, rapidly globalising QA models sustain the inequalities and by extension the social injustices created through neoliberal policy agendas.

No doubt developing countries may have achieved some success in protecting the public, through QA policy and systems, by identifying and communicating with each other about unscrupulous higher education vendors. Nevertheless, in a market-driven world system, clamping down on unscrupulous vendors becomes a challenge, since such vendors can easily manipulate the system which sustains them.

It is further observed that globalisation tends to standardise and homogenise a culture (Daun, 2002, p. 20). In the context of globalisation, QA is then a mechanism of the cultural standardisation that the market economy and neoliberalism imply. In the capitalist system, the driving forces, together with profound changes, are situated in the economic, material and organisational spheres of life. Thus, QA policies are globalised but the degree of implementation of these policies varies and so does the outcome of what is implemented.

3. The analysis of the historical context of the development of quality assurance in New Zealand provides some understanding of the role of the state in education policy formulation. Education policy, with respect to QA (and qualifications) in New Zealand, was deeply embedded in the economic rationalist mode in which the state policy making was structured. The quality assurance policy served the neoliberal agenda and more lately the modified form (the Third Way), to commercialise higher education with stronger elements of competition. The state has retained its regulatory control but at the same time it has delegated a great deal of its managerial functions to the polytechnics themselves. Neoliberalism is the ideological base, within which contemporary quality assurance policy is developed and legitimised. In the global dimension, the aim of neoliberalism is to reduce the

size and scope of the state and to privilege market forces in regulating social services: and this includes education. In this regard, QA policies appear to aim at promoting and facilitating the commodification and marketisation of education. This was most readily observed in the New Zealand case study.

Whilst the state's role was strong, it was also observed that the capacity of nation states to determine their national education policy is limited by both global and internal social, economic and political dynamics.

4. The portability of qualifications has become an important concern in today's higher education. There was evidence in support of this fact from the three case studies in this research. QA in the USP has developed within the globalisation discourse. There was recognition in the university planning of the rapid social and economic changes that the university member countries have witnessed in the recent past. Globalisation has resulted in a major transformation of the Pacific Island countries. In this complex, increasingly competitive and variable environment, quality, excellence and relevance have become central themes, around which the quality agenda is charted.

The economic manifestation of globalisation, reinforced by the need for movement of labour, influenced QA policy developments. This made the issue of portability of qualifications a genuine concern, from a South Pacific perspective. Likewise, portability of qualifications was also a relevant concern for the Maldives. As Crocombe and Crocombe (1994) observed in the South Pacific context, it was also observed in the Maldives that students and their parents wanted qualifications that were as widely recognised as possible, since these qualifications allegedly facilitate higher salaries, higher status, mobility and migration. Resource-constrained developing countries, with low per capita incomes, cannot compete with more developed countries, in terms of high salaries and working conditions. Moreover, strong political pressures also exist to recruit staff from local citizens. Internationally accepted higher standards may mean the loss of the most skilled local staff members, who have often been trained overseas at a high cost. Hence, the dilemma of QA, regarding the retention of local staff is a real one. The metropolitan models of QA once again favour the metropolis.

5. In both the ABC College and the MCHE, there was a strong national regulatory QA environment. Within this regulatory environment, there was a high degree of

acceptance of QA practices for these HEIs. Staff members perceive the standardisation of awards to be a major benefit (innovation). The first attempt at introducing QA policy and a QA system in the Maldives was an attempt to regulate and control the higher education sector, from a central government agency.

The development of QA policy, in the three cases, indicates the global trend towards a dominant model. In this regard, international development, particularly supported by supranational agencies, provides the direction for developing countries. Spurred on by OECD, UNESCO and the World Bank, there is widespread policy convergence in QA.

The supranational agencies often disregard national and cultural differences in their urgency for policy convergence: These forces tend to bring together countries and HEIs on common grounds. The common frameworks of QA, the Bologna process and the UNESCO guidelines for the recognition of qualifications, for example, facilitate this process. These developments demonstrate the hegemonic influence of the supranational institutions, particularly on emerging systems.

6. Quality assurance, especially for SDNs, appears to need an international dimension. There is evidence to suggest that the Maldives, as a small state, has a special need for an international dimension of quality assurance, in order to mitigate the negative consequences of globalisation.

In more recent time, transnational QA has assumed an international dimension to higher education, in many parts of the world. Developments that have occurred in Europe, with respect to ERASMUS exchange programmes, attempts at developing countries' quality assurance systems and regional and multi-state solutions amongst SDNs, are examples of this trend (UNESCO, 2007; Vroeijenstijn, 1999). The growing developments of transnational QA practices around the world suggest that this could be an alternative to comprehensive national QA systems and agencies, particularly for SDNs with limited human and financial resources (Hopper, 2007). A regional or multi-national approach to QA is occurring in some regions, such as francophone Africa, Central America and the Caribbean. (See Hopper, 2007 and UNESCO, 2007 for a detailed discussion of the risks, benefits

and opportunities with this type of regional approach to EQA). Developments in this regard worldwide have been rapid⁵³.

These initiatives appear to work towards internationally standardised models of QA and all these worldwide initiatives have apparently received funding from the World Bank (Hopper, 2007). Based on earlier discussions of policy discourses (in this chapter), it would be reasonable to assume that transnational QA developments are reflective of a global and instrumental emphasis on quality. It also depicts the influence of the dominant discourse of neoliberalism, at work behind the initiatives of external quality assurance, on a worldwide scale. Globally, systems appear to be in place to further facilitate and accelerate the commercialisation and commodification of higher education. In this context, it would be reasonable to assume that the emerging higher education systems, particularly in SDNs, are highly disadvantaged. The pressure to develop such higher education systems, to internationally comparable standards, is substantial. A lack of training, for the national pool of academic and professional staff, in QA strategies adds further to this disadvantage for SDNs.

7. The 'approval and accreditation' model of QA, developed and promoted under neoliberalism, is widely identified as bureaucratic: hence it is likely to lead to compliance rather than improvement. Accreditation, it has been argued, is more about minimum standards than about the quality of the process (Harvey, 2004). It is the determination of and the statement of achievement of a certain threshold of quality. Such thresholds are usually set at an average level. Accreditation decisions are based on transparent, agreed, predefined standards or criteria. However, evidence from literature shows that not all accreditation criteria are as transparent as they might claim to be (Harvey, 2004). Harvey asserts that accreditation is primarily about control. It involves compliance with standards and indirectly with accountability. However, its main function is to maintain control of the higher education sector and the programmes offered within it. Improvement is a spin-off from the accreditation process.

⁵³ A series of newly-formed regional networks for QA agencies and professionals deserve cautionary mention. The Asia Pacific Quality Network, Latin America Quality Network for Higher education (RIACES) for Latin America and the Caribbean, the Association of African Universities for sub-Saharan Africa, the Association of Arab Universities' network and the Global initiative for Quality Assurance Capacity (for launching in 2007) and the INQAAHE, as a worldwide umbrella network, are notable developments

8. The size of the higher education system is one relevant contextual issue that can impact on the choices made regarding the structure for QA (Martin & Stella, 2007). Large systems with numerous HEIs will develop a different mechanism for QA, than small developing states. A small country has fewer institutions and less diversity than a large country. Running a large QA system, for example in India or Indonesia, is not the same as running one in Fiji or the Maldives. The small number of institutions, within a less diverse system, does not generate the diversity of QA issues that a large HE system can generate. As a participant from the Maldives noted, “the greater the number of issues to be handled, the more robust the QA system is likely to be” (QPc11-MCHE).

Most systems have both institute and programme level QA processes. Whilst some QA agencies tend to specialise in one mechanism, others attempt to undertake both programme and institutional QA. What is certain, according to Martin and Stella (2007), is that the size of the education system to be covered influences other aspects of QA, namely: policies and practices pertaining to the participation of EQA agency staff in site visits; the selection of course programme reviewers; the constitution of a review team; and the place given to the training of reviewers. All these factors are shaped by the size of the system. In a large system there is heavy reliance of external reviewers, with little input from the local QA body. Identifying reviewers may not be a major concern in large systems. However, training reviewers to adhere to the QA framework and maintain consistency among themselves, and putting appropriate safeguards to minimise inter-team variances may become very challenging (Martin & Stella, 2007). Small systems, such as the Maldives, with a population of around 300,000, face the challenge of a severe shortage of qualified and competent staff to both conceptualise and manage QA systems. Furthermore, the shortage tends to create high staff turnover in QA agencies, since qualified staff are more likely to find more job opportunities.

9. One critical implication, arising from the above conclusion, is the need for training of staff in QA agencies. Professional staff in QA agencies are known to require two main types of skills sets: (1) skills for system conceptualisation and development of methodology, and (2) skills for implementation of the QA process (Materu, 2007). Evidence to support this was also found from the two secondary case studies. In the early stages of an agency’s development, skills related to the first set appear essential. In most developing countries, senior staff assigned to

lead and manage national agencies have little knowledge and exposure to QA, apart perhaps from some involvement in teaching and research at the HE level.

At the implementation level, an additional set of skills is required, “to ensure that the work is credible and has its own internal quality guarantees” (Materu, 2007, p. 51). Whilst the presence of staff with experience in higher education processes is critical, often younger staff members, who have never worked in a HEI, need to be involved. Unacceptable as this may be, the scarcity of competent academics and professionals is an issue to be dealt with in such a situation. Staff, in national QA agencies, would thus require training in at least two dimensions. They would need to acquire an exposure to higher education processes and academic activities, by spending time in HEIs and also through participation in conferences and in-house training workshops. They would also need to pursue relevant higher degree qualifications. The GOM has already initiated a graduate degree training programme for MAB staff in foreign universities⁵⁴. Establishing affiliations with other QA agencies, for staff exchanges (as undertaken by South Africa) could prove to be worthwhile for newly emerging QA agencies.

Small HE systems present the additional challenge of a scarcity of competent academic and professional staff, who can serve as peer reviewers. This is further compounded in the case of the Maldives, since the HE system itself is undergoing internal transformation and rapid expansion. To recall the words of one senior official from the Maldives, “We have very few subject specialists outside the institutions who can develop these courses” (QPc03-MCHE). This official further stated that the matter can be resolved “only through a very strong and reliable partnership between us and the subject specialists” (QPc03-MCHE).

Thus, the importance of developing and maintaining a healthy relationship with the subject specialists of the country appears essential for continuing QA work in the Maldives. Such relationships will require trust and reciprocal reliability. This could in part be achieved through offers of training and overseas conference participation. The scarcity of capable reviewers is not a reflection of a lack of support by academic staff members, who have had such experiences. Engaging

⁵⁴ One staff member has completed a master degree and two others were training in New Zealand in 2006.

foreign peer reviewers is an alternative, but it is a costly affair. Most SDNs would not be able to afford to go down this path. However, cheaper practices (e.g. sharing of costs with the relevant industry for external verification or review) can be explored.

8.4 Significance of the Study

This study is significant for both practical and theoretical reasons. From a practical perspective, the MAB is expected to gain a comprehensive analysis of its QA policy and system, identifying current deficiencies and challenges for policy implementation. Analysis of challenges and particular difficulties can contribute to a better understanding of how to develop more effective policy and systems, in order to strengthen the QA practices in the future. This in turn can be used to generate relevant and practical policy options for the national system, in addition to the national higher education provider (the MCHE), in terms of advancing their QA systems. This research is the first of its kind in the Maldives. Hence, the identification of challenges and constraints faced by MAB and the MCHE and the opportunity to explore various approaches of QA provides valuable information for policy makers, managers and practitioners of QA. In this sense, it is hoped that the study will serve as a useful resource for informed decision-making, regarding quality assurance policy and practice.

A comprehensive QA policy framework is imperative for the Maldives, in order for it to develop an internationally credible higher education system, to promote public accountability, to inform student choice and to promote and improve quality processes and outcomes. This research can significantly contribute to either revising or strengthening current policy frameworks and approaches to QA in the Maldives: strengthening both the external and internal QA at MCHE.

The findings of the study indicate that the issue of QA in the Maldives is addressed by a combination of institutional, national and transnational practices. The MCHE, in its first phase of establishment, has been engaged in developing a number of policies directly related to quality. It has been involved in consolidation and standardisation of processes, through policies on assessment, entry standards and it introduced QA practices, such as student evaluation of teaching. At the same time, the MCHE is also involved in diversification of QA practices, particularly through various approaches in

accreditation, validation and monitoring arrangements that continue to exist between various faculties and more well-established internationally known HEIs.

The social demand for international quality validation has found expression in a growing trend of transnational QA arrangements with more well-established HEIs in western countries. The model that is emerging in the Maldives has a distinct identity, cognisant of its multi-purpose, multi-level and multi-mode institution. It is QA for a national small state system, that is integrated and at the same time flexible to be diverse enough to accommodate multiple education and training needs.

This study, at a theoretical level, may have made a contribution, as an example of a critique of the ideological basis on which QA is established. Although the study was limited and exploratory in nature, it may have served to clarify what happens when QA operates as an ideological project, with influences from neoliberalism, globalisation and managerialism. In this sense, this study may serve as a resource for self-reflection by both policy contributors and those who implement quality assurance.

8.5 Recommendations

Acknowledging that it is highly problematic to define precisely 'quality' and recognising that 'quality' is multi-faceted, a working definition of quality appears to be essential, if a QA system is to achieve a degree of success. A number of academic staff members of the MCHE reported that they were unaware of any specific quality assurance policy requirements. Whilst this could be valid in theory, since there is no specific QA policy or a QA framework as such or a quality management system, the implication of the staff responses is that there was a serious lack of communication relating to QA, at the level of practice. This also implies that a shared understanding of 'quality' was missing within the MCHE, despite the availability of documents showing the institution's vision and mission. Dissemination and induction into QA practices could have been weak. In practice, this means that there is a necessity for clear dissemination of information relating to QA requirements. There is a need also to expose staff members to various QA mechanisms at the institution, both at a conceptual level and at an implementation level. It would be expected that a handbook about QA would serve this multi-campus institution that operates in a number of islands within the Maldives.

An insufficient pool of academics limits the ability to develop a system that relies on adequate staffing. Hence, a system that assumes the availability of people for auditing,

based on local academics, is unlikely to work in the Maldives and therefore auditing may have to involve expatriate personnel. Furthermore, a dearth of funds limits the hiring of such overseas academics, since this is an expensive avenue to pursue.

A strong partnership between the MAB and the available few subject specialists in the country appears crucial, in order to carry out external quality assurance work in the Maldives.

QA should be built into regular activities, not isolated and bureaucratised. Quality assurance needs to refocus on improving teaching and learning. The validity of EQA processes is questioned, since “they generally display a flawed understanding of the essentials of teaching and learning” (Ramsden, 2003, p. 220). As an academic staff member from the USP shared, “no amount of report writing and form filling is going to bring about quality” (MQ01-USP). This view resonates amongst the evidence, particularly from the academic staff members who participated in this study. As Ramsden has argued, it is time for the academics to take charge of quality assurance.

One main implication, arising from this study, is the essential need for training in the area of QA. This is particularly relevant in the emerging context of higher education in the Maldives, since the overall pool of academically qualified people, in general within the MCHE and also outside MCHE, is relatively small.

8.6 Limitations of this Study

There were some limitations to this study. The study was limited to an in-depth analysis within one institution in the Maldives (the primary case) and less-intensive explorations in two institutions located in two other countries, namely, New Zealand and Fiji. A full exploration of all the issues, studied in the Maldivian institution, has not been undertaken in the other two institutions and hence they were regarded as ‘secondary cases’ within the scope of this study. The study was not designed as a full comparative case study of three HEIs in three countries. It was designed as a case study on quality assurance policy and practice, within the emerging Maldivian public higher education system. The two secondary case studies were intended to draw insights from issues, problems and successes in quality assurance policy and practice. However, with this limited exploration of issues in the secondary case studies, limited comparisons can be made. The inclusion of USP, due to its regional characteristics, posed some difficulty in making comparisons with either the ABC College or the MCHE case study, both of these being national institutions.

Secondly, the purposeful sampling procedure decreased the generalisability of the research findings. There was little or no control, on the part of the researcher, in identifying and selecting interview participants from the secondary case study institutions. Hence, those identified by the institutions could present a particular bias on the topic of quality assurance. The wide range of questions, posed during the interview, was partly in recognition of this fact. This study, as in most qualitative research studies, did not attempt to generally apply the findings to all developing or small higher education systems.

Thirdly, the data collection was limited to policy and managerial level staff together with academic staff members. It did not extend to students in HEIs or employers of graduates within these institutions. Valuable insights could have been obtained if data had been also collected from students and employers. However, due to practical considerations, a limitation was imposed on the study.

Fourthly, the study was limited to the public higher education system in the Maldives. The exclusion of the private sector, in a study on QA, may have limited the range of issues related to the phenomenon of QA. The private sector may present a particularly interesting set of QA issues. In many countries, it is known that formal QA systems have evolved in relation to rapid developments in the private higher education sector, in relation to marketised models of higher education.

8.7 Suggestions for Further Research

On the basis of the results of this study and the limitations identified above, some suggestions for further research are presented below.

Firstly, the impact of quality assurance policy on the private HEIs requires exploration. Whether and to what extent the introduction of quality assurance and the qualification approval process has improved academic quality in the private HEIs is worth researching. Included in such a study could also be the identification of challenges encountered by private HEIs in delivering quality assured programmes. Such a study could contribute to a much needed policy development, in assisting HEIs to improve the quality of teaching and learning.

Secondly, research is also needed to identify teaching, learning and assessment methods to discover the extent to which these methods lead to improved quality

outcomes. Either as part of such a research or separately, the issue of ‘faculty disengagement’ (discussed in Chapter Seven) could also be explored.

Thirdly, research is also needed to determine the extent to which QA is institutionalised within the various academic sub-units of the MCHE (e.g. Departments, HODs, Coordinators and at the individual level). Establishing how to ensure accountability to external stakeholders and how to establish a balance in accountability and improvement is paramount.

Fourthly, the growth of transnational (or cross-border) higher education is on the increase in the Maldives. The quality assurance mechanisms, maintained by these programmes, are worth researching, since this is expected to continue as a public concern.

Fifthly, future research in the area of quality assurance needs to incorporate the student perspective on quality and quality assurance. Students are regarded as the main and immediate beneficiaries or stakeholders in higher education. Their perspectives are deemed crucial in gaining information as to the extent to which quality assurance mechanisms are working effectively.

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Appendix A
Research approval from Massey University Human Ethics Committee



Massey University

26 May 2005

Ahmed Ali Maniku
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PALMERSTON NORTH

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Dear Ahmed

Re: HEC: WGTN Application – 05/12
Development of systems and policy for quality assurance in higher education: A case study from the Maldives

Thank you for your letter dated 19 May 2005.

On behalf of the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Wellington I am pleased to advise you that the ethics of your application are approved. Approval is for three years. If this project has not been completed within three years from the date of this letter, reapproval must be requested.

If the nature, content, location, procedures or personnel of your approved application change, please advise the Secretary of the Committee.

A reminder to include the following statement on all public documents: *“This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee, Wellington Application 05/12. If you have any concerns about the ethics of this research, please contact Professor Sylvia Rumball, Chair, Massey University Campus Human Ethics Committee: WGTN telephone 06 350 5249, email humanethicswn@massey.ac.nz”.*

Yours sincerely

Professor Sylvia V Rumball, Chair
Massey University Campus Human Ethics Committee: Wellington

cc Professor John Codd & Professor Wayne Edwards
 Department of Social & Policy Studies in Education
 PN900

Ms Toni Floyd
 Graduate School of Education
 PN900

Appendix B 1

Ethical Approval Process

The core of ethics employed in this study was to honour and maintain due respect for the integrity of all those who voluntarily participated in the study. Obtaining MUHEC approval involved a number of processes. Firstly, formal written approval, to undertake parts of the study in the three research sites, was obtained from respective institutions. Obtaining approval to conduct the study in the Maldives and at MCHE was initially obtained from the Ministry of Education (Appendix B 2). However, as the MCHE functioned fairly independently, it was deemed ‘politically correct’ to also obtain a separate approval from the institution. Hence, an additional consent was obtained from the MCHE (Appendix B 3). Obtaining consent and approval from the Maldives did not require any pre-conditions to be met.

Approval to undertake the study at ABC College was also obtained relatively easily, but with a condition. A full set of the ethics application to Massey University had to be sent to ABC College. As per standard procedure, my application was considered at a meeting of the ABC College’s Research Committee. Approval was granted on condition that Massey University approval was received (Appendix B 4). A copy of the MUHEC approval letter was later sent to ABC College.

Approval from the USP was initially the fastest and easiest (Appendix B 5). Once a formal request was sent, the approval was sent by fax the following day. However, obtaining a ‘research visa’ to Fiji, a requirement for foreign researchers, proved to be a tedious and time-consuming affair. A visa application firstly requires a ‘research permit’ from the Fiji Ministry of Education (MOE). A separate application and an undertaking (to send a copy of the completed thesis to the MOE had to be signed with the Fiji MOE to obtain this permit (Appendix B 6). It took nearly one month to obtain the necessary permit from the Fiji MOE. This ‘procedural delay’ in signing the approval letter, due to the “busyness and hence unavailability of the section head” (personal communication with the corresponding MOE officer) sounded all too familiar a situation in small states’ ministries and departments. Once the permit was received, a visa application had to be sent by post directly to Fiji Immigration Department in Suva, despite the fact there was a Fiji High Commission in New Zealand. It took nearly two months to process the visa. During this period, confirmed travel arrangements had to be revised twice. Thus obtaining the research permit and visa approval to visit Fiji faced unnecessary and unexpected challenges and delays. This process required frequent follow-ups with the Fiji Ministry of Education and Fiji Immigration, through the USP and it consumed considerable amounts of time. In the end, it was the staff from the Quality Unit of USP and a Maldivian colleague studying at the USP who were instrumental in expediting the visa application.

Obtaining ethics approval from Massey University required the submission of all interview schedules and the academic staff questionnaire, together with the research information sheet and samples of the invitation letter, consent form and transcript approval form, which all had to be printed on departmental letterhead. All documents to be used in the Maldives had to be translated from English into Dhivehi, the first language of the Maldivian participants. Once all these documents were submitted (in 12 copies and one original) they were considered by the next monthly meeting of the ethics committee. A few clarifications were sought from the committee, through email communication, together with a few suggestions to

amend some points in the application. Once these matters were clarified by return email, the ethics application was granted with approval number, WGTN 5/12 in May 2005.

All prospective participants were sent a three-page research information sheet, which provided details of the nature of the study, the research purpose, the use of findings, the extent of participant's involvement and potential sources of harm that could arise during the process. Opportunity for clarification of issues was welcomed at all times. An invitation for voluntary participation was extended in writing to all prospective participants.

Once an indication of willingness to participate was received, either through telephone or email communication, the interview questions were emailed to the respective participants. The notion of informed consent was explained, both in writing and later verbally, when meetings took place for the interviews. At the meetings, before the interviews began, signatures of participants on the Massey University sample consent forms were obtained, as evidence of informed consent. Samples of letters to participants and information sheets are provided in Appendices B7 and B 8 respectively. Although consent was given, participants were given the opportunity to decline to respond to any question if they felt it was not comfortable to answer. Participants were also given the opportunity to withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty or offence taken by the researcher. Those participants filling out the questionnaire were informed that filling out and returning the questionnaire implied that they had consented to voluntarily participate in the study.

All participants were assured of the confidentiality of all data collected. The information sheet stated who would have access to the data, how this would be accessed and for how long that data would be stored. Participants were informed that all data, gathered during the various data collection phases of the study, would be kept confidential and stored securely in a place only accessible to the researcher. They were also assured that data in electronic form would be stored in a password secure, Massey University computer and my own personal laptop and also that the data would not be used for any purpose other than the purpose for which it was collected. They were also assured that a participant's identity would not be disclosed. The participants were also informed that the raw data, including the audio tapes, would be kept securely under lock and key in the Department of Social and Policy Studies in Education, for a period of five years, as stipulated by Massey University. After this five-year storage period is over, the data, including the audio tapes, would be disposed of under the supervision of the Head of Department. In order to maintain confidentiality in reporting the data, the following alpha-numeric codes were assigned to the interview participants (Refer to Table B 1).

Table B 1

Alpha-numeric Codes Assigned to Participants in Three Research Sites

Research Site	Alfa-numeric Codes		
ABC College	QM01-ABC		
USP	QM01-USP		
MCHE	QPc01-MCHE	QM01-MCHE	AC01-MCHE

QM refers to 'quality managers' and these were persons involved in QA functions at a managerial level. The number 01 is an arbitrary serial number, assigned to participants in the order of conducting the interviews. In the ABC College, this number ranged from 01 to 09. In the case of USP, the number ranged from 01-12. In the Maldives, the numbers ranged from 01-33 reflecting the serial order of interviewing. However, during the analysis stage the numbering was re-arranged to an arbitrary serial number within each of the three participant categories, in order to further strengthen the aspect of anonymity. QPc, in the case of MCHE, refers to 'quality policy contributors' and the number of participants in this category ranged from 01-11. These were government officials in various capacities who *contributed* towards policy making. It is difficult to identify anyone of them as *policy makers*. Hence, the term 'policy contributors' as opposed to 'makers' of policy is used. QM in the Maldives case study refers to 'quality managers' and were heads of faculties and managerial staff at MAB. The number of these participants ranged from 01-10. AC refers to 'academic staff members', generally involved in teaching and their numbers ranged from 01-12. The second part of the code identifies the institution to which the participant belongs. In the case of participants from the Maldives, all participants, although they may not be officially staff members of MCHE, were categorised under MCHE, since they were interviewed about quality and QA policy and practice nationally and with particular reference to MCHE.

Participants were assured that they would remain anonymous in any writing which arose from this study. The alpha-numeric codes assigned to interviewees would offer protection against any adverse unforeseen reactions that may occur. It was impossible to disguise MCHE and the USP as they are unique and 'one of a kind' in their respective countries. These two institutions were made aware of this situation. In the case of ABC College, since it was one of several similar institutions in New Zealand, an attempt has been made to conceal its identity, through a pseudonym. ABC College was made aware of this strategy and every effort was made to ensure that the thesis did not contain anything that could be harmful to the reputation of the institution or any of its staff members. Nevertheless, New Zealand being a small country, the institution was informed that there was possibility the institution may be identified, even when a pseudonym was being used.

When interviews were transcribed, all participants were given the opportunity to view and provide feedback on their interviews. They were also given the opportunity to amend or add to their responses. A signature was obtained for release of transcripts on a Massey university form. Participants were also informed that copies of the thesis, arising from this study, will be located at Massey University library, the MOE (Maldives) and the MCHE. In addition, an undertaking was given to the Fiji Ministry of Education to provide them with a copy of the thesis. Participants can access the thesis from these locations.

Appendix B
Research approval from the Government of Maldives



Department of Higher Education and Training
Ministry of Education,
Male' Republic of Maldives

10th January 2005

166-D/MIS/2005/08

Mr Ahmed Ali Manik
Ma. Florifer,
Male'
Republic of Maldives.

Dear Mr. Ahmed Ali Manik,

This is with reference to your letter dated 2nd January 2005 to Honorable Minister of Education, Dr. Mahmood Shougee requesting permission to undertake the research in the Maldivian higher education system as a part of your fieldwork in Maldives.

We have studied your proposal and grant you permission to conduct your data and information gathering activities as stipulated in the above-mentioned letter. Furthermore, we would be pleased to offer you our assistance to facilitate your work here in Maldives.

Let us also request you to share with us your findings for our information and possible use as per conditions appropriate to you and your University. However, this sharing of your findings is not conditional to our consent for your fieldwork in Maldives.

You are required to conform to all local regulations in all your activities in Maldives. You are also required to share with us a time-line of activities prior to the commencement of your fieldwork so that we will be able to alert the Ministry of Education, Maldives Accreditation Board and Maldives College of Higher Education.

If you need any further clarifications please get in touch with us. You may share this letter with any concerned party who may contact us for further verification purposes.

Aminath Asra
Assistant Director,
asra-dhet@avasmail.com.mv / asra@dhet.gov.mv

Appendix B 3

Research approval from the Maldives College of Higher Education



MALDIVES COLLEGE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Male',
 Republic of Maldives
 Phone +960 315400, Fax +960 315411

OFFICE OF THE RECTOR

H Hameed
 B Sc, Dip Ed, PGDES, M Ed, PhD

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

We understand that Mr. Ahmed Ali Maniku is pursuing a doctorate degree at Massey University. His research project involves data collection in the Maldives, particularly at the Maldives College of Higher Education.

I am delighted to consent to his research and pleased to provide all professional courtesies he may require.

Mr. Ahmed Ali Maniku is the former Vice Rector (Academic) of the College. Already conversant with the current business processes of the College, we are confident that his research project which involves extensive review of germane literature and overseas quality assurance procedures will contribute towards strengthening the existing academic practices of the College. In view of his commendable involvement in the past and the prospective contribution to higher education in the Maldives, MCHE is proud to be associated with his research.

Thanking you,


 Rector



16th March 2005

Appendix B 4

Research approval from the ABC College

3 December 2004

Mr T Prebble
Professor of Higher Education
Dept of Social and Policy Studies in Education
Massey University
Private Bag 11 222
Palmerston North

Dear Tom

Thank you for your letter dated 22 November regarding your PhD student, Ahmed Maniku from the Maldives, who is proposing to study the development of QA policies and systems within the Maldives tertiary education system.

We would be pleased to be involved and I have passed your request on to our Research Committee to facilitate the request.

In the first instance, could you please ask Ahmed to contact me any time after Christmas so that we can set up a process to progress with this project. I will be returning to work on the 5th January 2005.

All the best for Christmas and the New Year.

Kind regards

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Sheila Grainger'.

Sheila Grainger
Deputy Chief Executive (Academic)

Appendix B 5

Research approval from the University of the South Pacific



The University of the South Pacific

Serving the Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.

Laucala Campus, Suva, Fiji. Fax: +679 3302809. Phone: +679 3313900/3212702. : e-mail: jones_i@usp.ac.fj

Mr Ahmed Ali Maniku
Department of Social and Policy Studies in Education
College of Education, Massey University
Fax: + 64 6 351 3385

3 February 2005

Dear Ahmed,

Thank you for contacting me and briefing me on your PhD project on the development of QA policies and systems within the Maldives tertiary education system. We would be particularly interested to support your studies in relation to the development of transnational arrangements for QA for franchised programs and for program accreditation.

We would be very pleased to support your project by hosting you for a visit to USP. We would look forward to collaborative discussions involving staff at USP.

We will provide office facility and support, and we can help with the logistics of arranging meetings and discussions.

We look forward to a fruitful collaboration.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Ian K Jones

Senior Quality Assurance Coordinator

Appendix B 6

Research approval from Ministry of Education, Fiji Islands

**MINISTRY OF EDUCATION****“Education- Our Nation’s Building Block”**

Marela House, 19 Thurston Street, Suva, Fiji Islands
Private Mail Bag, Government Buildings, Suva

Ph: (679) 331 4477
Fax: (679) 330 3511

Our Reference:

Your Reference:

Date: 31st May, 2005

Mr. Ahmed Ali Maniku,
Massey University,
New Zealand.

RE: RESEARCH PERMIT

Dear Mr. Maniku,

I am glad to inform you that your application for a research permit which will allow you to collect data at the University of the South Pacific for your research topic:- "Development of Systems And Policy For Quality Assurance: A Case Study From The Maldives." has been approved.

As a condition for all research work, we would appreciate a copy of your final report forwarded to the Ministry of Education, when it is available.

I wish you well in your research.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Asenaca'.

Asenaca Bainivaliku[Mrs]
For Chief Executive Officer[Education]



Massey University

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION
Te Kupenga o Te Mātauranga

Appendices 346

SCHOOL OF EDUCATIONAL STUDIES
Private Bag 11 222
Palmerston North
New Zealand
T 64 6 356 9099
F 64 6 351 3385
www.massey.ac.nz

Appendix B 7 Letter to participants

29th March 2006

Dear

I am currently undertaking a research project for my doctoral studies at Massey University, New Zealand. The research is entitled "Development of systems and policy for quality assurance in higher education: A case study from the Maldives". In this study I intend to explore the issues and problems of quality assurance as experienced the Maldives College of Higher Education (MCHE) along with additional insights drawn from a well-established tertiary education institution in New Zealand and The University of the South Pacific. Attached is an information sheet which provides more details about the research.

This study will be significant in developing a better understanding of the complex nature of quality assurance as a policy domain in higher education in general and the dynamics of the global, the national and the local imperatives that operate within a multi-faculty multi-campus institution such as the MCHE in particular. The study is considered timely and relevant, since MCHE, as per publicly declared Government policy intention, is now on course to elevate itself to university status in the near future.

This study cannot be completed without the help of a number of people. I trust that as an experienced professional / policy official contributing to the higher education sector in the Maldives, your views and suggestions in relation to the topic of this research would be of immense value to my study.

Therefore, I kindly invite you to participate in this study as an interviewee / to complete a questionnaire. If you need further information on any aspect of this study please feel free to contact either me or my Chief Supervisor Professor John A. Codd at J.A.Codd@massey.ac.nz.

If you accept this invitation to participate, I would appreciate if you could kindly let me know at your earliest convenience a date / time and place for an interview. I intend to be in Male' for the next 6-7 weeks. My contact details are provided in the information sheet attached.

Thanking you.

Yours sincerely,

Ahmed Ali Maniku



Appendix B 8

Information Sheet 1

**Project Title: Development of systems and policy for quality assurance
in higher education: A case study from the Maldives**

INFORMATION SHEET 1

Student's Name: Ahmed Ali Maniku

Contact details:

Department of Social and Policy Studies in Education
College of Education, Massey University
Private Bag 11 222
Palmerston North, NZ
Tel: (06) 357 7044
Mobile: 021 151 9073
Email: aamaniku@yahoo.com

Student's Supervisor: Professor John A. Codd

Professor of Policy Studies in Education
Dept of Social and Policy Studies in Education
College of Education, Massey University
Private Bag 11 222
Palmerston North, NZ
Tel: (06) 351 3365
Fax: (06) 351 3385
Email: J.A.Codd@massey.ac.nz

Name of Degree and Field: PhD in Education

Employment Status of student: Currently on study leave from the post of Vice Rector,
Academic of the Maldives College of Higher Education

Purpose: The purpose of the study is to examine how Maldives College of Higher Education (MCHE) develops and manages its own quality assurance (QA) policies and systems in relation to comparable and different systems employed by the New Zealand polytechnic sector and a university in a small island developing state. The MCHE emerged in 1998 through the amalgamation of existing post secondary institutions in the country and over the last 7 years has experienced rapid transformation. As a comparatively small multi-faculty, multi-purpose national institution with a limited number of full-time academic staff, the MCHE has adopted a unique mix of quality procedures along with the requirements for national accreditation. Taking into account the government policy decision already made to transform the MCHE into a university in the near future, the study will analyse the unique QA challenges and systems in place at MCHE for setting of performance standards, implementing processes to achieve standards, monitoring, reviewing and evaluating outcomes and planning for improvements. The analysis of these various elements of a quality assurance framework will have developmental focus on teaching and learning quality at MCHE.

Two additional institutes, a polytechnic in New Zealand and the University of South Pacific (USP) in Fiji will also be studied to gain further insights on how these institutes go about assuring quality of their programmes. The New Zealand polytechnic will be studied in the context of New Zealand Qualifications Authority's (NZQA) QA processes. It is expected that comparative data from these institutions will illuminate this project by providing tested models of QA from their past experiences.

Participant Recruitment and involvement

The research will be undertaken as a qualitative case study based largely on interviews, feedback from a questionnaire, a focus group discussion and document analysis exploring how quality of educational programmes is assured at 3 purposefully selected sites. MCHE located in Male' the capital of Maldives will serve as the primary research site (primary case). A polytechnic in New Zealand and the University of South Pacific (campus in Suva, Fiji) will serve as two secondary research sites (secondary cases). The secondary cases will provide the opportunity to gain further understanding of how QA schemes operate in a system from where Maldives had drawn lessons for QA introduction (New Zealand) and another institution in a comparable country from the perspective of a small island developing state (SIDS).

The study will involve the following activities and will be undertaken in two stages.

Phase One: This phase involves searching for general QA principles and procedures from New Zealand and the USP context. The activities will include the following:

- (i) Interviewing 6 Key Informants from a polytechnic in New Zealand and USP. (Three from each institution identified in consultation with the research coordinator of the respective institution).
- (ii) Analysis of documents from the polytechnic in NZ and USP.
- (iii) Interviewing approved staff members from NZQA / ITP Quality, who are responsible for QA in the polytechnic sector identified with the advice and approval of the CEOs of NZQA / ITP Quality. Each interview will take approximately one hour.

Phase Two: This phase involves in-depth exploration of QA issues within the Maldives. The activities will include the following:

- (i) Interviewing 20 Key Informants from MCHE (2 from each of the 8 Faculties / Centres and 4 from the Central Administration of MCHE). The interviews will take approximately one hour.
- (ii) Interviewing 3 senior staff from Ministry of Education / Maldives Accreditation Board. The interviews will take approximately one hour.
- (iii) Administering a questionnaire to all (146) teaching staff of MCHE based in Male'. This number represents 94% of the academic staff. The remaining 6% are based in outer atoll campuses and are left out due to logistical difficulties in reaching them during the limited timeframe, arising from lack of reliable postal services to outer atolls and severely disrupted communications infrastructure (during the December 2004 tsunami). Completion of the questionnaire should not take more than half an hour.
- (iv) Conducting a focus group discussion of academic staff (not more than 10) invited from MCHE. Each discussion will take no more than one and a half hours. Participants will be identified in consultation with the Deans of faculties based on the following criteria
 - a) A fulltime academic staff
 - b) Minimum 3 years of service at MCHE
 - c) Coordinated or currently coordinating a course at MCHE

Please note that no staff of MCHE will be required to participate in all three activities (ie individual interviews, completion of questionnaire and focus groups). Since the questionnaire will be distributed to all the academic (teaching) staff, those

who are invited to participate in the individual interview will not be required to participate in a focus group.

- (v) Reviewing of documents such as strategic plan, operational plan, annual reports, minutes of College Council and academic board meetings, policy documents, consultancy reports of academic standards and quality improvement.

All interviews will be audio taped if consent is received from participants. Even if consent is obtained, participants have the right to ask for the audio recording to be turned off at any time during the interview. No discomforts or risks to participants as a result of participation are expected in this study.

In the case of the questionnaire, please note that the completion and return of the questionnaire implies consent. However, participants have the right to decline to answer any particular question.

Project Procedures

All data gathered during the various data collection phases of the study would be kept confidential and stored securely in a place accessible to the researcher only. Data will not be used for any purpose other than the purpose for which it was collected. A participant's identity will not be disclosed and permission for this is not sought. Upon completion of the study, a copy of the completed thesis would be kept in the Massey University Library, Palmerston North, New Zealand. A copy each, of the thesis would also be presented to the Ministry of Education, Maldives and to the Maldives College of Higher Education to be kept in their respective document sections.

The raw data, including the audio tapes, would be kept securely under lock and key in the Department of Social and Policy Studies in Education, Massey University for a period of 5 years. After this 5-year storage period if over the data including the audio tapes would be disposed of under the supervision of the Head of the Department.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee, Wellington Application 05/12. Permission to conduct this study in the Maldives has been granted by the Department of Higher Education and Training, Ministry of Education, Maldives through its letter no. 166-D/MIS/2005/08 dated 10th January 2005. The University of South Pacific and the polytechnic in New Zealand has also pledged their support to the project in February 2005. Permission to conduct part of the study in Fiji (at USP) has been granted by the Fiji Ministry of Education through its letter dated 31st May 2005.

If you have any concerns about the ethics of this research, please contact Professor Sylvia Rumball, Chair, Massey University Campus Human Ethics Committee: WGTN telephone 06 350 5249, email humanethicswn@massey.ac.nz.

The purpose of this information sheet is to provide you with essential information regarding this study and to invite you to participate in this study. You are under no obligation to accept this invitation. Your participation is voluntary and, even if you decided to participate, you still have the right to decline from answering any particular question or ask any question related to the study or withdraw your participation at anytime without any penalty.

If you have any questions regarding any aspect of this study you could contact either me or my Supervisor at J.A.Codd@massey.ac.nz

Thanking you,

Ahmed Ali Maniku

20th August 2005



Appendix C 1

Interview schedule for ABC College staff members

Project title: Development of systems and policy for quality assurance in higher education: A case study from the Maldives

QA policy and system

1. What is your main area of responsibility within this institution?
2. What goals in quality are you seeking at ABC polytechnic? What aspects of quality do you focus on?
3. What principles underpin your quality strategy?
4. How do you develop your quality policies?
5. What management systems are in place to manage your QA processes? What quality assurance models are in place in this institution?
6. What quality assurance approaches are in place in the institution?
7. What are the national QA systems and policies within which your institution is required to operate? How desirable is a national system for you as a polytechnic along with an institutional system for QA?
8. What in your view are the main strengths of the NZ quality assurance systems with respect to the tertiary education at the ITP sector?
9. In terms of assuring quality what are you doing especially well?

Benefits, suggestions and challenges

10. What are the costs (broadly and NOT in terms of \$), benefits, challenges your institution faces in working within this national QA framework?
11. How could this national framework accommodate changes to provide an improved QA environment for your institution and similar institutions?
12. To what extent in your opinion has the national QA processes led to improved quality of teaching and learning? What evidences would one look for? Is there evidence of improvement in other institutional practices? If so, in what institutional practices.
13. Based on New Zealand experiences and your involvement in QA, what suggestions could you make for putting in place a QA system for a small emerging higher education institution (like the one in the Maldives)?



Appendix C 2

Interview schedule for NZQA staff members

Project title: Development of systems and policy for quality assurance in higher education: A case study from the Maldives

1. What is your main area of responsibility within this organisation?
2. What are the current postgraduate (PG) qualifications that come under NZQA's quality assurance system? Which Institutes of Technology and Polytechnics (ITPs) offer PG qualifications currently? What is NZQA's role in quality assuring PG qualifications of ITPs?
3. What are the main aspects of quality assurance that you focus on now with respect to PG qualifications? Could you elaborate on the policies and systems in place for auditing of delegated quality assurance functions?
4. How have these aspects changed since the system was first introduced? Do you see the changes as part of the efforts to respond to global trends? How and to what extent in your view is globalisation impacting on tertiary education in New Zealand context?
5. What in your view are the main strengths of the NZ quality assurance systems with respect to the tertiary education at the ITP sector? What are the critical success factors of the NZ quality assurance system?
6. What are the key QA processes of your system? Registration, course approval, accreditation, confirming on-going registration and accreditation.
7. Quality assurance is often perceived as the state asserting its responsibility and shifting its role from a promoter to a controller of tertiary education. What is your view on this?
8. To what extent in your opinion has the NZQA initiated QA processes led to improved quality of teaching and learning? What evidences would one look for? Is there evidence of improvement in other institutional practices?
9. How are qualifications of overseas-based providers quality assured by NZQA?
10. Providing courses offshore: How is course approval and accreditation managed with respect to providers delivering a quality assured course overseas?
11. Can a NZ ITP deliver a programme in collaboration with an overseas provider? What QA processes are in place for such delivery?
12. Based on New Zealand experiences and your involvement in QA, what suggestions could you make for putting in place a QA system for a small emerging higher education institution (like the one in the Maldives) seeking university status?



Appendix C 3

Interview schedule for ITP Quality Staff members

Project title: Development of systems and policy for quality assurance in higher education: A case study from the Maldives

1. What is ITP Quality's current role and function with respect to quality assurance of courses offered by polytechnics?
2. What are the main principles of the quality assurance model /system in place for courses offered in polytechnics?
3. What are the main aspects of quality assurance that you focus on now? How have these aspects changed since the system was first introduced?
4. Do you see the changes as part of the efforts to respond to global trends? How and to what extent in your view is globalisation impacting on tertiary education quality in New Zealand context?
5. What in your view are the main strengths of the NZ quality assurance systems with respect to the tertiary education at the ITP sector? What are the critical success factors of the NZ quality assurance system?
6. What are the major challenges the ITPs face in assuring quality?
7. To what extent are polytechnics in compliance with the national quality system in place? If no, why not? And what do you do about it?
8. Quality assurance is often perceived as the state asserting its responsibility and shifting its role from a promoter to a controller of tertiary education. What is your view on this?
9. To what extent in your opinion has the ITP QA processes led to improved quality of teaching and learning? What evidences would one look for? Is there evidence of improvement in other institutional practices?
10. What best practices have you observed in the following areas in the polytechnic sector: programme development, programme approval, monitoring learning and teaching, and establishing and maintaining transnational QA linkages, if any.
11. How do you compare the NZ QA system at the polytechnic sector in relation to international practices? Is there scope for further improvement? If so, in what areas do you wish to see future changes?
12. Based on New Zealand experiences and your involvement in QA, what suggestions could you make for putting in place a QA system for a small emerging higher education institution (like the one in the Maldives) seeking university status?



Appendix D

Interview schedule for USP staff members

Project title: Development of systems and policy for quality assurance in higher education: A case study from the Maldives

Interview schedule (USP staff members)

Quality assurance (QA) in general (with respect to small and developing states)

1. What should be the purpose/s of QA in developing countries in general and in small states in particular?
2. Does QA have a role in the development of higher education in small states in general? What do you envisage should be the role of QA in developing higher education in small island states? How is this role fulfilled now?

Quality and quality assurance at USP

3. What is the nature of the USP view of 'quality', and how 'quality' should be assured? How has this present understanding evolved?
4. What are the main aspects of quality assurance (QA) in place at USP? How have the main aspects of QA changed in recent times? Do you see the changes as part of the efforts to respond to global trends?
5. How and to what extent in your view is globalisation impacting on quality of tertiary education at USP?
6. What have been the major influences on the development of USP's quality assurance processes and what impact have they had? What in your view are the main strengths of the USP quality assurance systems?
7. Has QA processes led to improvement in quality of teaching and learning? If so, to what extent? How is this improvement evident? Is there evidence of improvement in other institutional practices? If, so in what areas?

Transnational QA arrangements (links with overseas institutions for purposes of QA)

8. What are the various transnational (or overseas) QA arrangements USP have (or has had in the past)?
9. What have been the major influences on the development or establishment of transnational QA arrangements at USP? What in your view are the main strengths of USP's transnational quality assurance arrangements?
10. How do these transnational QA arrangements contribute to USP's own QA system?
11. What role do overseas institutional linkages play in the improvement of quality of USP programmes? What impact have these arrangements had on improvement of teaching and learning? And how is this evident?
12. What are the costs (in broad terms), benefits and challenges USP faces in working with overseas institutional QA arrangements?
13. How could these transnational QA arrangements be managed more effectively in small systems of higher education within and alongside their own institutional arrangements for quality assurance?

Suggestions for QA

14. Based on your experiences and your involvement in QA, what suggestions could you make for putting in place a QA system for a small emerging higher education institution (like the one in the Maldives now seeking university status)?



Appendix E 1

Interview schedule for MCHE policy contributors

1. Policy Officials and Executives at Ministry of Education / Higher Education

1. What is current government policy with respect to the development of higher education in the country? For example: promoting access – equity, expanding and, developing existing institutions, creating new institutions, facilitating and encouraging, private sector, autonomy, or other.
2. What is government policy with respect to transforming MCHE into a university?
3. What is the overall policy of the government in terms of promoting quality in higher education? Compliance to standards? Accountability? Improvement?
4. What in your view are the main obstacles / barriers in implementing the policies for improving quality in higher education? How could the government overcome them?
5. The country has introduced “accreditation” as the main quality assurance mechanism in locally provided higher education. What contextual factors motivated the government to introduce this system?
6. Introduction of local accreditation enhanced quality of higher education in the Maldives? Could you please comment on the impact the introduction of accreditation has had on higher education sector in general and its quality in particular?
7. What role do overseas institutional linkages play in the improvement of quality of higher education in this country? Is it desirable / necessary to have a formal institutional linkage to a recognised overseas institution? Why? Why not?
8. What impact has the overseas link institutional arrangements had on the quality of higher education in the country? And how is this evident?
9. The national interest in quality assurance in the higher education sector appears to be very high. How and to what extent is this influenced by external (within the country) and/or global trends or obligations to international organisations?

Specific Questions for Selected Policy Officials

1. Why did the government introduce ‘the policy’? What national factors influenced the introduction of ‘the policy’ in the Maldives? [E.g. growth of the postsecondary sector, merging of public post secondary institutions, local media, emphasis on public sector reforms, accountability, managerialism, increased private sector involvement, establishment of MCHE, etc....]
2. What external (global / international) factors may have influenced the introduction of ‘the policy’ in the Maldives? [E.g. international consultant recommendations, recommendations of international Banks, requirements through participation in international or regional conventions, developments in other countries, etc....]
3. How was the policy text (the Maldives National Qualifications Framework) developed? Who were the key players involved in the formulation of the policy requirements? What role did they play in the policy development process?

4. What specific interest groups or persons, if any, influenced the development of 'the policy'?
5. Which interests were the most / least influential and why?
6. What was the role of MCHE in the development and subsequent implementation of 'the policy'?
7. How have the policy requirements for quality assurance affected quality assurance practice at the MCHE?
8. What is your general assessment of the implementation / success of 'the policy'?

2. Policy Officials / Council Members

Perspectives on quality assurance (QA) in higher education and local accreditation

1. How in your opinion is 'quality' and 'quality assurance' in higher education understood at MCHE Council?
2. What are your perspectives on 'quality' and 'quality assurance' in higher education, if different? [with respect to Q 1, above]
3. What is College Council policy with respect to transforming MCHE into a university?
4. What in your view are the main obstacles / barriers in implementing Council policies for improving quality of higher education at MCHE? How could these obstacles be overcome?
5. How is local accreditation important for quality within MCHE?
6. How in your opinion has the introduction of local accreditation enhanced quality of higher education in the Maldives? Could you please comment on the impact the introduction of accreditation has had on higher education sector in general and its quality in particular?
7. State-directed quality assurance models / practices in many higher education systems are understood as promoting a 'culture of compliance' and 'accountability' to the detriment of promoting a 'culture of improvement'. What is your view on this in the context of MCHE?

Overseas linkages and quality assurance

8. What role do overseas institutional linkages play in the enhancement of quality at MCHE? Is it necessary to have a formal institutional linkage to recognised overseas institution? Why? Why not?
9. To what extent are institutional linkages important for Maldives as MCHE approaches university status? Why?
10. What impact has the overseas link institutional arrangements had on the quality of higher education in the country? And how is this evident?

General

11. The national interest in quality assurance in the higher education sector appears to be very high. How and to what extent in your view are global imperatives [influences outside the country could include rapid globalisation, movement of students and labour across borders, influence of international agencies like UNESCO, World Bank, etc...] impacting on higher education quality in this country?
12. How best in your view can small states with emerging higher education systems assure quality?

3. Senior Staff members of Maldives Accreditation Board

1. What factors lie behind the motivation of the Government to introduce a national system of quality assurance?
2. What is the model / system in place now? What were the reasons for adopting 'accreditation' as a system for QA?
3. What specific purposes does the accreditation system in Maldives serve? What specific benefits of 'accreditation' are observed / applicable in the context of Maldives with an emerging system of higher education in a small developing state?
4. How and to what extent has the introduction of 'accreditation' model led to higher quality in higher education in the Maldives? In the Faculties of MCHE? In other post secondary institutions? To what degree do QA practices in higher education institutions conform to the Maldives Accreditation Board QA requirements?
5. Is the current MNQF adequate? Is the accreditation process suitable to cater to a university system? As MCHE approaches university status, do you intend to revise the Maldives National Qualifications Framework (MNQF)?
6. What developments in QA policy and systems are envisaged for the near future in Maldivian higher education?
7. The national interest in quality assurance in the higher education sector appears to be very high. How and to what extent is this influenced by external (within the country) and/or global trends or obligations to international organisations?
8. State-directed quality assurance models / practices in many higher education systems are understood as promoting a 'culture of compliance' and 'accountability' to the detriment of promoting a 'culture of improvement'. What is your view on this in the context of Maldives?
9. How best can small states with emerging higher education systems assure quality?
10. What were the main activities the MAB was preoccupied with during your time at the Board?
11. What constraints (or obstacles) did you face in implementing the 'policy on quality assurance in higher education' (particularly with respect to the approval (and accreditation if any) of in-country courses)?
12. What steps were taken to overcome (or manage) these constraints?
13. How best in your view can small states, like the Maldives, with emerging higher education systems assure quality?

4. Policy Officials / Executives of Maldives College of Higher Education

Role and purpose of quality assurance (QA) in higher education

1. What in your opinion is the role of QA in the development of higher education in this country? How is this role fulfilled now? What should be the purpose of QA in Maldives?
2. What role do overseas institutional linkages play in the enhancement of quality in MCHE? Is it necessary to have a formal institutional linkage to recognised overseas institution? Why? Why not? What factors are considered in linking with overseas institutions?
3. How is accreditation important for quality within MCHE?
4. How does the system of state control over higher education affect the autonomy of MCHE as a premier institution of higher education in the country?
5. To what extent are institutional linkages important for Maldives as MCHE approaches university status? Why?

Perceptions of quality and quality assurance

6. How is 'quality' and 'quality assurance' understood within this institution?
7. What are your perspectives on 'quality' and 'quality assurance' in higher education?
8. What aspects of quality do you focus on?
9. What principles underpin this focus on quality?
10. What are the main challenges your institution faces in working within a national QA framework?
11. How could the national framework / standards be changed to provide an improved QA environment for your institution and similar institutions?
12. State-directed quality assurance models / practices in many higher education systems are understood as promoting a 'culture of compliance' and 'accountability' to the detriment of promoting a 'culture of improvement'. What is your view on this in the context of Maldives?
13. The national interest in quality assurance in the higher education sector appears to be very high. How and to what extent is this influenced by external (within the country) and/or global trends or obligations to international organisations?
14. How and to what extent in your view are global imperatives impacting on higher education in this country?
15. How best in your view can small states with emerging higher education systems assure quality?



Appendix E 2

Interview schedule for MCHE Heads of Faculties

Project title: Development of systems and policy for quality assurance in higher education: A case study from the Maldives

Merger & Challenges

1. The merger of existing post secondary training institutions, as you know created MCHE seven years ago. Briefly describe your early experiences of working in a merged institution?
2. What challenges did you face in the early years?
3. What key benefits have risen from the merger? What benefits have risen especially related to quality improvement?
4. What are the current challenges you face in assuring quality of your academic programmes? You may focus on the following: curriculum development, course approval, monitoring teaching and learning, staff, resources, administrative support systems, and /or others.

Staff

1. Do you have enough staff adequately qualified to run your academic programmes? Can you provide an academic staff profile?
2. What percentage of your staff is fulltime? Part-time?
3. In your opinion do your staff have adequate education and training to serve this institution as a College? As a university? Do you have enough qualified staff to change over to a university? Are you doing anything to change the profile of academic staff? If so, what are they?
4. How would you describe the motivation of staff for improving the quality of programmes? [High? Low? or Moderate?]
5. Are the working conditions of academic staff (e.g. remuneration, workload, facilities and status), appropriate?
6. Are administrative support services adequate?

Policy and governance

1. Do you have academic freedom to manage your own affairs? How does the extent of academic freedom constrain or limit your efforts for QA?
2. What bureaucratic control do you experience in terms of governance?
3. What controls affect your quality assurance processes? Positively? And negatively?

Institutional QA

1. What institutional policies do you have in place to assure quality of your academic programmes?

2. How have these policies emerged within the institution? Who prepares the drafts? At level or committee or board is policy discussed? Do students and staff have opportunity to contribute comments? When does the draft become a policy?
3. What systems and processes are in place to implement these policies?
4. What are the most effective processes at your institution?
5. What evidence can you provide to prove the effectiveness of these processes?

National QA

1. What policy or regulation dictates MCHE's adherence to national accreditation?
2. What benefits are derived from following the national accreditation approach to QA?
3. What challenges /constraints are faced in meeting the accreditation requirements of MAB? How do you overcome these challenges / constraints?
4. Do you have to meet additional quality standards of any other organisation in the country other than MAB? If so, which organisation? Why and how?
5. National accreditation models in many state-centred higher education systems are known to promote a 'culture of compliance' and 'accountability' to the detriment of promoting a 'culture of improvement'. What is your view on this in the context of MCHE?

Research

1. In what ways might research be important to MCHE? Is research valued at MCHE?
2. What steps has MCHE taken to encourage research?
3. What pressures encourage / discourage staff undertaking research?
4. Why do you think the College should be involved in research? Any evidence?
5. What kinds of research should the College be promoting?

Transnational QA

1. What policies or requirements govern the establishment of linkages to overseas universities /academic institutions?
2. What overseas institutional links do you have? Which programmes are linked to an overseas institute? Is it the whole institution? How and when was the link established? What motivates you to keep the link?
3. In what ways does an overseas institutional linkage assure quality for your educational programmes?
4. What issues, academic as well as administrative do you face in managing an overseas link agreement.
5. What has been the effect of the introduction of local accreditation programs on the international quality assurance schemes employed?
6. How do you reconcile the requirements for quality within your Faculty, MCHE, with MAB (and /or other government agencies) and with overseas institutions? What challenges do you face in managing all these QA systems simultaneously?
7. What are the lessons learnt from overseas linkages? What are the lessons for a multi faculty national higher education institute in implementing a national compliance model of QA together with overseas QA systems?
8. The national interest in quality assurance in the higher education sector appears to be very high. How and to what extent is this influenced by global trends or obligations to international organisations?



Appendix E 3

Interview schedule for Senior Academic Staff Members of MCHE Faculties

Project title: Development of systems and policy for quality assurance in higher education: A case study from the Maldives

Merger & Challenges

1. The merger of existing post secondary training institutions, as you know created MCHE seven years ago. Briefly describe your early experiences of working in a merged institution?
2. What challenges did you face in the early years?
3. What key benefits have risen from the merger? What benefits have risen especially related to quality improvement?
4. What are the current challenges you face in assuring quality of your academic programmes? You may focus on the following: curriculum development, course approval, monitoring teaching and learning, staff, resources, administrative support systems, and /or others.

Staff

1. How is 'quality' and 'quality assurance' understood within this Faculty/centre?
2. In your opinion do your staff have adequate education and training to serve this institution as a College? As a university? Do you have enough qualified staff to change over to a university? Are you doing anything to change the profile of academic staff? If so, what are they?
3. How would you describe the motivation of staff for improving the quality of programmes? [High? Low? or Moderate?]
4. Are the working conditions of academic staff (e.g. remuneration, workload, facilities and status), appropriate?
5. Are administrative support services adequate to promote a 'quality culture'?

Policy and governance

1. Do you have academic freedom to manage your own affairs? How does the extent of academic freedom constrain or limit your efforts for QA?
2. What bureaucratic controls do you experience in terms of governance?
3. What controls affect your quality assurance processes? Positively? And negatively?

Institutional QA

1. What institutional policies do you have in place to assure quality of your academic programmes?
2. How have these policies emerged within the institution? Who prepares the drafts? At level or committee or board is policy discussed? Do students and staff have opportunity to contribute comments? When does the draft become a policy?
3. What systems and processes are in place to implement these policies?
4. What are the most effective processes at your institution?
5. What evidence can you provide to prove the effectiveness of these processes?

National QA

1. What policy or regulation dictates MCHE's adherence to national accreditation?
2. What benefits are derived from following the national accreditation approach to QA?
3. What challenges /constraints are faced in meeting the accreditation requirements of MAB? How do you overcome these challenges / constraints?
4. Do you have to meet additional quality standards of any other organisation in the country other than MAB? If so, which organisation? Why and how?

Research

1. In what ways might research be important to MHCE? Is research valued at MCHE?
2. What pressures encourage / discourage staff undertaking research?
3. What kinds of research should the College be promoting?

Transnational QA

1. What overseas institutional links do you have? Which programmes are linked to an overseas institute? Is it the whole institution? How and when was the link established? What motivates you to keep the link?
2. In what ways does an overseas institutional linkage assure quality for your educational programmes? What issues, academic as well as administrative do you face in managing an overseas link agreement?
3. What has been the impact of the introduction of local accreditation programs on the international quality assurance schemes employed?
4. How do you reconcile the requirements for quality within your Faculty, MCHE, with MAB (and /or other government agencies) and with overseas institutions? What challenges do you face in managing all these QA systems simultaneously?
5. What are the lessons learnt from overseas linkages? What are the lessons for a multi faculty national higher education institute in implementing a national compliance model of QA together with overseas QA systems?
6. The national interest in quality assurance in the higher education sector appears to be very high. How and to what extent is this influenced by external (within the country) and/or global trends or obligations to international organisations?
7. How best in your view can small states with emerging higher education systems assure quality?



Appendix F MCHE Academic Staff Questionnaire

Project title: Development of systems and policy for quality assurance in higher education: A case study from the Maldives

Please respond to all questions as honestly as you can. Information collected will be handled in strict confidence and will be securely stored. Individual names will not be collected or used in raw data and any final reports. This questionnaire consists of 4 pages.

Section A: Individual Profiles

Please answer by a tick mark (Q.1) or by writing in the spaces provided.

1. Indicate Faculty or Centre where you mainly work by a tick mark in the appropriate box.

FE FET FHS FHTS FMC FSL CMS COL

2. How long have you been an academic staff of MCHE? [Give total years completed (or months if less than a year)] to the nearest year (or month) including the duration as an academic staff in a post secondary institute prior to the establishment of MCHE).

..... months / years

3. On the average how many hours do you usually spend weekly for the following activities at the Faculty / Centre during the academic semester?

a) Teaching: hours
(include the total number of hours for which you are time tabled for teaching / tutoring, lab or practical session)

b) Other related academic administration duties: hours
(include total number of hours spent on preparation for teaching, marking of exams, assignments, etc., course coordination and other administrative matters)

c) Committee work: hours
(include the total number of hours spent on attending committees, councils, boards or staff meetings and other meetings attended in your official capacity)

d) Research: hours

e) Other tasks: hours
(include total number of hours spent on other tasks other than those mentioned above that are undertaken officially. List most important tasks performed under this category).

.....

Section B: Staff perception of quality, quality assurance and impact of quality QA practices

The following are a list of 25 statements regarding aspects of quality in higher education. Please indicate your agreement or disagreement with these statements by circling the number which most closely describes your perception. Responses are categorised as:

(1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) neutral, (4) agree, (5) strongly agree

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
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1. A formal system to assure quality is essential for the development of higher education in this country.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Your knowledge of quality assurance policies at your institution is sufficient.	1	2	3	4	5
3. The academic standards of programmes should be mainly controlled by the institution.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Teaching should be regularly monitored by the MCHC administration.	1	2	3	4	5
5. Regular feedback from students is a helpful way to promote quality improvement.	1	2	3	4	5
6. Quality assurance should emphasise accountability more than improvement.	1	2	3	4	5
7. Quality assurance should emphasise improvement more than accountability.	1	2	3	4	5
8. Quality assurance should emphasise both improvement and accountability equally.	1	2	3	4	5
9. Academic staff should be accountable for the use of public funds for higher education.	1	2	3	4	5
10. Quality matters should be mainly left for internal systems within the College.	1	2	3	4	5

11. Academic freedom is vital to the promotion of quality.	1	2	3	4	5
12. Quality at MCHE should be regulated by the government through a body such as Maldives Accreditation Board.	1	2	3	4	5
13. Teaching is more important than research at college level.	1	2	3	4	5
14. Research is more important than teaching at college level.	1	2	3	4	5
15. Research and teaching are equally important at college level.	1	2	3	4	5
16. Motivation of academic staff towards improving the quality of academic programmes is generally high.	1	2	3	4	5
17. Working conditions of staff at MCHE generally promote a climate to improve quality of teaching and learning.	1	2	3	4	5
18. National accreditation has improved the quality of academic programmes at MCHE.	1	2	3	4	5
19. Most academic staff endeavour to meet higher quality standards than are local accreditation requirements.	1	2	3	4	5
20. National accreditation requirements have reduced academic staff professional responsibility for improvement.	1	2	3	4	5
21. Both overseas link institutional accreditation and local accreditation are important for MCHE.	1	2	3	4	5
22. Local accreditation is more important for MCHE than overseas link institutional accreditation.	1	2	3	4	5
23. Overseas link institutional arrangements do not promote quality at MCHE.	1	2	3	4	5
24. International recognition of MCHE qualifications is more important than their national recognition.	1	2	3	4	5
25. Global / international factors have little influence on quality assurance policies in Maldives compared to national factors.	1	2	3	4	5

Section C:

1. What in your opinion are the most effective policies / practices at your Faculty /Centre that help in improving quality of teaching and learning?

.....
.....
.....
.....

2. What in your opinion are the greatest obstacles to improving teaching and learning at your Faculty / Centre?

.....
.....
.....
.....

3. What international / global factors (or agencies) influence quality assurance policies and practices?

.....
.....
.....
.....

4. What would you suggest to strengthen the current quality assurance policies and / or practices at MCHE?

.....
.....
.....
.....

The end

Thank you for your patience

Appendix G

Sample list of initial ideas /concepts and tentative themes from the ABC College data

Tentative list of Themes / Code (Step 2)	Initial list of ideas /concepts (Step 1)	Brief description
National policy influences	Legal framework	Legal and regulatory basis for quality; Act, White paper. Gazetted criteria. Charters and profiles. Decree and directive
	NQF and QA	Perceptions on NQF and quality assurance
Policy discourse	Compliance with standards	Meeting standards stipulated by external agency/ies.
	Globalisation & markets	QA policy emphasis arising with globalisation
	Accountability	For judging against peers; accountable to stakeholders
	Improvement	Improving learning; we get what we measure
	Collaboration / competition	Policy shift from collaboration to competition
	Linking quality to results	Linking of funding to results
	Global influences	Globalisation of QA
International marketing		Staff traveling to promote institute courses overseas
International students		Getting more international students
Cross-border higher education and quality		Going offshore, taking institutes programmes overseas countries; overseas institutions offering programmes in NZ
E-learning		making courses available through e-learning
National QA system	Elements of the national QA system	Approval, accreditation, monitoring and audit of courses / programmes / institutions
	Desirability of national system	Against standards, standards to measure against; ensures standards across polytechnics
	Strengths of the national system	Strengths and benefits of a national system for quality assurance
	Role of the state	Role of the state in quality assurance
	Costs	Challenges of the national system
	Changes / improvements	What has changed or improved in the last few years
Institutional policy goals for QA	Institutional policy goals	Goals that are identified by the institution regarding quality assurance. (comply with standards, catering to student interests, ensuring quality, consistency of standards)
	Regional specialisation & standardization	New campuses and acquiring greater regional role, regionalization; Standardization of programmes across campuses
	Consistency	Consistency across campuses.
	Academic Statues	A legally enabling overarching document that defines the principles fro quality enhancement within the institution
	Academic freedom & responsibility	Freedom in professional matters; Responsibility that goes with freedom
	Empowering	QA is about empowering and enhancing, not control
	Control	QA must never be about external control
	Being innovative	Encourage innovation in teaching methods

Appendix H

Sample list of ideas /concepts and tentative themes from the USP data

Tentative list of Themes / Code (Step 2)	Initial list of ideas /concepts (Step 1)	Brief Description
External QA	Compliance to standards	Meeting standards stipulated by external agency/ies.
	Globalisation & markets	QA policy emphasis arising with globalization
	Accountability	For judging against peers; accountable to stakeholders
	External Advisors - for accountability	Engaging senior academic from other universities for each subject area
	External audit MoUs	Planning for audit from AUQA and NZVCC/AAU Memorandum of Understanding for student and staff exchanges, collaborative research.
	Cost of links	Cost is not cheap
	Role of the participating states	Policy emphasis at the Council
	Benchmarking internationally	Comparing standards internationally
	Support from the top; Council, PDO	Support from the top seen essential for QA work
	Policy suggestions	QA maxim
Existing status		Not losing sight of from where you come from
Vision, goals		Where do you want to go
Realistic steps		Have realistic short steps
Standards		Have standards in place, everything will fall in place
Making expectations explicit	Expectations fro teaching quality to be explicit	
Global influences	Globalisation of QA	Policy convergence on QA among countries
	International marketing	Staff traveling to promote institute courses overseas
	International students	Getting more international students
	Cross-border higher education and quality	Going offshore, taking institutes programmes to overseas countries; overseas institutions offering programmes in NZ
	Small states and quality assurance	Special challenges of keeping graduates at home countries
	Accountability to survive in global environment	Accountability and showing quality to compete in a global sphere
	Links with oversees institutions	Link for comparability of standards
Role of QA in small states	Proving competitiveness internationally	Quality and employability of graduates
	Marketability of skills	Loss of skill to country - brain drain - need to retain them for quality development
	Assurance to locals and regional governments	Provide assurance of quality to stakeholder govenrements
	International recognition	Important for students
	SIDS not wealthy and uni ed is expensive	Lack of resources, hence need to strive for quality

Appendix I

Sample manual coding of a transcript

QA research project

QPc01- MCHE

Researcher (R): *What is current government policy with respect to the development of higher education in the country? What is government policy with respect to transforming MCHE into a university?*

Participant (P): Basically, one of the major policy directions I think is towards the establishment of a university. It has been declared that by January 2007 the Maldives College of Higher Education (MCHE) will be transformed into a university. That work is being done. Work timelines have been drawn up. And it appears as if that the university is going to be a teaching university. As an individual person I'm a bit reluctant to that. Nevertheless, that's not how what the majority feels. Personally I have reservations that established basic research areas in the country are not been brought together under the umbrella of the university; specifically environmental research. There is a significant amount of environmental research going on. But the already established Environment Research Unit will not be brought under the umbrella of the university. And Fisheries Research Centre that is also not going to be brought under the university setup. These are concerns because I think we have a lot to offer in the area of environmental research and marine research to the rest of the world. These are our strong areas. And research in the area of tourism too; various aspects of tourism. But nevertheless the College is going to be transformed into a teaching university. That's one policy area.

Uni estab.

Teaching
Uni is
Research.

The other policy direction is expanding the role of private sector in higher education. Various parties have expressed their interest in establishing colleges with degree awarding rights. And couple of parties have already submitted proposals that are being studied by the government. But even here I have major concerns in that still we don't have an Education Act that will technically empower post secondary education providers to invest and move forward in the area because regulations can be changed anytime and people will be reluctant to actually invest without a firm knowledge of how things will be in the future. So if we do have an Education Act, that will empower people to move forward in the area and make significant investments.

Pvt sector
expansion

No legal
mandate.

There is work being done in the area of an Education Act. And although the formation of the university may not be initially through an act of parliament, there is talk and preparation for that eventually. I think it will be through a presidential decree in the initial stage. But with the Education Act there would be most probably another act of parliament that will provide the legal powers to the university.

Act or
decree -
undemocratic

The third preoccupation in policy area is towards establishing various strategies for funding. Providing funding opportunities for individuals.

Strategies
for funding

R: What is the overall policy of the government in terms of promoting quality in higher education? Compliance to standards? Accountability? Improvement?

P: A lot of checks and balances are already in place to ensure quality. First in the internal supervisory mechanisms that involves appraisal of teachers by students. That involves outside party affiliation and liaison.

Int. Sup.
Ext. affiliation

There are university affiliations which were initially established with overseas universities and various faculties. And most importantly all the courses are accredited or approved by the Maldives Accreditation Board (MAB). And MAB is playing a major role in quality management and enhancement. But then with the move towards a university the role of MAB will cease. Because with the university status, the institution gets the awarding rights. They don't have to go through the MAB. Then there is still another check. If the certificate is not approved, then the person can't get a government job. So still there is an MAB role. However, MAB will be out of the picture as far as the course design and introduction of new course are concerned. But still in real life, even a certificate from Harvard has to be accepted by MAB. If a graduate from Harvard wants to work in the Maldives despite of the name of the institution and its history and its high standing in the academic world, the certificate has to be accepted by the accreditation board. Just like the University of Maldives, just assuming the name, the certificate must be accepted by the MAB for the government to honour and to give an employment or a promotion to an employee.

National approval - MAB

MAB role change
Cert. Validation

As far as I understand there are frequent meetings of the Deans Committee to ensure the administrative protocols are in place including the administrative supervisory protocols. The second slightly higher level is the academic committees of the faculties; the Faculty Advisory Committees (FACs). These FACs provide a forum where employers and university staff plus policy makers in various government departments can sit down and work together. Unfortunately some of these FACs have not been functioning very well. With the move towards university status there is a strong push towards activating these FACs and to make good use of them.

Int QA
Admin Protocol
- Deans Com.
- FACs

R: What in your view are the main obstacles / barriers in implementing the policies for improving quality in higher education? How could the government overcome them?

P: What all of us are facing is the limited human capital. I think MCHE is now a pretty large institution by any standard. You are talking about pretty large institution with major responsibilities. There appear to be a drain out of the College of qualified professional people. That is a concern. And the expansion and the current unwritten policy of making all staff Maldivian is hindering the whole process. I think we should be thinking of recruiting lecturers from overseas. And for sometime those lectures, just like what happened in the schools will have to function. And you have to pay good remuneration for good lecturers.

HCT. obstacles for QA

Drain out of MCHE

Now it's a vicious cycle. Funding is limited and that's most probably the reason for not inviting overseas lecturers because there isn't enough funds to attract good quality lectures. Instead of that available funds have been invested in training locals.

Staffing issues

Appendix J 1

Initial list of concepts and possible themes from MCHE quality policy contributors' interviews

1. Role of overseas links

- Living in a global village and the Maldives is actually a very small place
- Overseas links have actually forced various institutions to actually step up there standards
- Conform to their minimal MAB requirements
- Establishing an external quality assurance and also to create the confidence and assurance for our customers of the existence of such an external quality assurance mechanism
- Business perspective – overseas students
- Quality perspective – competing with universities internationally, produce quality
- For postgraduate studies
- An external quality assurance mechanism
- Historical link –to notion of quality education from the West, London GCE O level examinations
- A sceptical view: An obsession, a fictitious addition not a substitute for true quality
- Nothing more than a form of self-imposed neo-colonialism.
- Presupposes ideal universities
- Name lender benefits

2. Globalisation and quality assurance

- Policy convergence on QA among countries.
- Adherence to global standards (IMO approved courses), and necessity to remain in internationally recognised bodies or lists (IMO white list). Use of overseas quality assurance systems. Modified UK system.
- Local expectations go beyond regional expectations.
- Perception to look beyond the region
- External QA attains a global dimension through linkages
- Regional agreements, recognition of qualification, regional recognition frameworks

3. International marketing

4. Massification and vocationalism

- Rising numbers, increasing school leavers, reducing scholarships
- Expanding Faculties and programmes, curriculum reorganisation.
- Indirect political emphasis on vocational and skills development, indirect policy emphasis
- Poor quality secondary students, cannot cope the academic higher education
- Current emphasis on producing graduate for jobs
- Certificates for job hunting
- Quality assurance has a new flavour with massification and vocationalism
- Funding decreased, workload increased and accountability and accreditation takes central importance
- QA becomes a system of procedures and audits to meet the expectations of students, peers, potential employers and other stakeholders
- QA a big business e.g. ISO9001

5. Benchmarking internationally

- International acceptance takes time, attitude of some developed systems
- Quality comparison with UK standards
- Curriculum comparability

6. External Advisers/Verifiers

- Approval from external reviewers

7. Proving competitiveness**8. Globalisation and markets****9. Small states and international recognition of certificates**

- Difficulty in accepting the validity of certificate - ISO certification.
- Cannot swim against the current.
- Despite smallness, pioneers in the SAARC region in forming accreditation
- Portability of qualifications / International recognition.
- Need international standards

10. Accreditation: Imposed by default?

- MAB has a place among the public, system capability
- Lack of capacity to move beyond approval stage.
- A control system
- Develops awareness
- Builds confidence over providers/provision
- Current model not functioning effectively, a weak model.
- Need to strengthen internal quality assurance
- Approval requirement restricts courses
- Accreditation with the College set up is a strength

11. MAB – capacity

- MAB role validation of certificate
- MAB and MCHE role change with university set up
- Acceptance by overseas agencies
- Two levels of confidence
- To sustain quality at an acceptable standard
- To develop an MNQF
- Role of the board and the institution, clarification
- To evolve into a more solid, responsible body
- A future qualifications authority
- A degree of control to protect clients, Protecting 'our' students
- Validation tied to allowance
- Job and allowance not related

12. Impact [of accreditation]

- Not much on the MCHE, accreditation system took what the College was doing anyway
- MCHE spearheading quality assurance in higher education, a prime mover, instead of the state
- May have improved the private sector

13. Brain drain

- Cannot afford a brain drain
- Out of fishing and tourism into a knowledge economy
- Attract our brains outside the country to return, pay enough.

14. Influences on QA

- Fictitious additions not a substitute for true quality.

- External forces driving quality
- National level demands for quality.

15. Low quality school education

- Primary and secondary education quality is low
- Input into higher education poor
- Compelled to lower entry quality
- Schools face similar problems, of poor quality teachers, a vicious cycle.

16. Role of the state

- Lack of legal back up for private involvement in higher education
- Encouraging private colleges, stringent requirements
- Should have a major role, 90% of budget from the government
- Public protection of students who spend several years and their money
- Lack of autonomy, not in the best interest of MCHE
- Problems from bureaucratic and antediluvian financial practices and personnel practices and regulations
- MCHE prime mover of quality assurance.

17. Compliance with standards

- Conformance and ready acceptance
- A way forward rather than a barrier
- Compliance and improvement both
- Compliance with standards of external standards bodies within the country.

18. Accountability and improvement

- Improvement aspect built into the committee structures at MCHE
- Improve and maintain
- No agenda except improvement
- Culture of improvement through external auditing
- Accountability too vague, we don't have it.

19. Competition and private sector involvement

- Expanding the private sector role, legal back up
- Funding strategies.

20. Expansion [of higher education] and equity

- Accreditation limiting opportunity to students
- Not producing people for international job market
- Restrictions for higher education, forced to go outside the country, enrol in institutions unaccredited
- Accreditation: Benefits and challenges.

21. Merger

- Opportunity for teamwork team spirit.
- Sharing of resources.
- Became more bureaucratic and time consuming; lost touch with the industry.
- Status of MCHE.

22. University establishment

- Meeting NDP objectives
- Legal requirements
- Autonomy and responsibility to the public
- Status of MCHE
- Perception local and international

- Meeting minimum requirements
- An Act giving the necessary independence important for quality work
- Not for expansion but for political pressure
- Preparations for university title, self assessment against UK quality guidelines
- Research is important.

23. Perspectives on quality: Multiple meanings

- Perception of quality varies with individuals
- Degree of fitness – a simplistic definition
- Complex uses of ‘products’ of higher education
- Quality concept is complicated, because there are many customers – market discourse
- Quality, aim at a moving target
- Quality in higher education a balancing act, continuous feedback loop
- Quality related to quality of primary and secondary education
- Judged by employers
- Quality defined through competency for the industry – market discourse
- Teaching /learning development
- Quality between teacher and student
- Quality as input-output, Quality of students
- Quality as output
- Quality through frequent scrutiny
- Ability to permanently maintain at an acceptable standard the processes and activities undertaken by an institution and the results of these activities.
- Academic and structural quality, objective and transparent
- Quality assurance is a prerequisite to accreditation
- Aligning with best practices of the world – e.g. Scottish / English framework.

24. Quality assurance policy and strategy

- Lack of national QA framework
- Lack of QA policy at MCHE
- A number of separate policies affecting quality issues.

25. Quality assurance management and bureaucracy

- All quality assurance polices are not in place, too much work
- Staff understand importance of quality assurance.

26. Academic freedom and responsibility

27. Institutional autonomy

28. Course development / Curriculum development

29. Monitoring of teaching and learning / Student evaluation

- Not properly followed up
- Keeping harmonious relationships with staff.

30. Institutional influences on quality assurance

- By local developments at home
- Many unscrupulous higher education vendors in the country and in destination where our students travel to
- Commercialisation of higher education and erosion of quality
- MCHE, the prime mover of quality assurance.

31. Staffing

- Staff best agents for change
- Limited human capital, drain out of MCHE
- All local staff policy hindering
- Better remuneration
- Delay in revising staff structure
- Biggest limitation for quality, better options in other sectors
- Staff retention.

32. Staff working conditions

- Low pay, difficulty in hiring part-time staff
- Workload.

33. Adult learning and learning**34. Student endearment**

- Managing complaints from students.

35. Funding [and bureaucratic strangulation]

- Adherence to archaic financing and accounting practices
- Inability or leverage in managing funds
- Insufficient resources made available
- Unable to utilize funds raised.

36. Credibility and managing public expectations

- Public perception matters
- Peoples' perceptions to look West
- Societal expectation, community expectations
- A psychological effect.

37. Financial incentives

- Validation of certificate linked to an allowance in the public sector
- Job and allowance unconnected.

38. Working with stakeholder / Stakeholder assurance

- Assuring stakeholders /locals
- Stakeholder needs not matched in education.

39. Tensions in following multiple QA practices

Ways to improve quality assurance**40. Student engagement****41. Increase of funds (Dearth of funds)****42. Increase and train staff (Shortage of staff)****43. Learn from others: Follow international best practice**

Appendix J 2

Tentative list of themes from MCHE quality managers' interviews

- 1. Globalisation of quality standards**
 - Policy convergence on QA among countries.
 - Adherence to global standards (IMO approved courses), and necessity to remain in internationally recognised bodies or lists (IMO white list). Use of overseas quality assurance systems. Modified UK system
- 2. Quality and employability**
 - Ease of foreign employment.
 - Global movement of people /labour
- 3. Proving competitiveness**
- 4. Small states and international recognition of certificates/ Portability of qualifications**
 - Difficulty in accepting the validity of certificate - ISO certification.
- 5. International benchmarking,**
 - Proving quality to others, proving competence and confidence to overseas institutions.
- 6. External links/affiliation**
 - Raise public image, higher public recognition, Reputation of the centre, Public perception matters, Credibility of the Faculty
 - Continue future / future studies, Undertaking to accept graduates for higher degree programmes, Further education, Guarantee of enrolling in Masters programmes.
 - Links from the region vs. links from OECD countries
 - Building confidence among the overseas institutions regarding local institutions
 - Tensions in managing multiple quality systems simultaneously.
 - Costs and drawbacks
 - Strengths of global quality standards
- 7. No global influence**
 - Not influenced by our requirements under international obligations, no need for a link for quality purposes.
- 8. Legal framework**
 - Legal and regulatory basis for quality, decree and directive.
 - National level demands for quality
 - Recommendation from consultant, requirement through a loan (ADB) covenant, use of overseas consultants.
 - Accreditation as quality assurance policy strategy, important, but not too rigid.
- 9. Role of the state**
 - Influence QA through accreditation, justify QA and promote a strong regulatory QA mechanism Requirement to validate certificates from MAB
 - Creation of Financial incentives, immediate monetary benefit.
 - Protection of students
 - Confidence of overseas link institutions high with a national accrediting body

10. Accreditation

- MAB has a place among the public, system capability
- Lack of capacity to move beyond approval stage.
- Lack of qualified staff for the work.
- Limited in country pool of academic staff.
- MAB has no standards for competency based courses
- Small states and fitness of global models.

11. Compliance with standards

- Standardisation of courses, Adherence to same format of course presentation.
- External standards bodies within the country, Maritime Administration Nursing Council Health Sciences Board
- Effectiveness of monitoring
- Differentiation in qualifications – easy recognition and transfer of credits

12. Societal expectation

- Managing public expectations, assurance to stakeholders, more national level demands for QA.
- Not for quality issue – future is at stake

13. Competition and private sector

- Comparing with private sector, no real competition to MCHE.

14. Accountability

- For judging against peers; accountable to stakeholders Continuous quality improvement.

15. Discourse of merger and standardisation

- A positive change but lack of consultation with staff.
- Opportunity for teamwork team spirit.
- Sharing of resources.
- Became more bureaucratic and time consuming; lost touch with the industry.
- Status of MCHE

16. Transition to university status

- Legal requirements
- Perception local and international
- Meeting minimum requirements

17. Perception of quality: Multiple meanings

- Quality judged by employers
- Quality defined through competency for the industry.
- Teaching /learning development
- Quality between teacher and student

18. Student evaluation / Monitoring of teaching and learning

- Monitoring of teaching through questionnaires
- Twice per semester at FMC.
- Lack of explicit policy on monitoring teaching and learning
- Most effective practice: Meeting with students at FSL, Meeting with student reps. mid semester, weekly staff meetings, fortnightly meeting with course representatives.
- Desirability of a special unit for quality monitoring.

19. Course development / Curriculum development moderation and review

- No formal reporting mechanism for curriculum development.
- Very good at FSL as they engaged foreign experts.

20. Management and bureaucracy

- Institutional autonomy and freedom
- Weak admin support.
- Strengthening of central functions.
- Small institution too many admin control. Limits slow things.
- A public service institution just as another office –does not help. Public expectation high
- Role of HODs limited to administrative tasks
- Keeping harmonious relationships with staff
- Transparency issue is there.

21. Quality culture

- Staff attitude, trust and motivation
- Staff working conditions
- Staff buy in

22. Remuneration / conditions of work

- No very satisfied, have two jobs.
- Low.
- Not favourable
- Is ok – FHS
- High at FSL
- Workload

23. Lack of resources**24. Academic forums****25. Autonomy and academic freedom**

- Not an issue. NAI - FMC
- NAI – FHS
- Some control at the central level is necessary.

26. Quality of students

- Pressure to take students of lower standards.
- Poor standard of students – forced to extend the courses than the national MAB standards.

27. Quality control**28. Staffing: Recruitment, training and review**

- Attract and retain quality staff
- Incentives improve working conditions

29. Adult learning and teaching**30. Student engagement**

- Managing complaints from students
- Discuss in ARC and take action. Sometimes don't invite part timers second time if performance is poor.

31. Tensions in following multiple QA practices

- MAB policies and quality monitoring proposals from link institutions. Difficult to follow some components of the external model

32. Important of research

- Important but no funds.
- A journal is necessary.
- Through higher degree (Masters) courses.

33. Working with stakeholder

- Meeting the needs of the respective sectors.
- Consent of 'powerful' stakeholders.

34. Recruitment and retention of staff

35. Staff development

Appendix J 3

Tentative list of themes from MCHE Academic staff interviews

- 1. International recognition of certificates**
 - Students want a qualification recognised by an overseas institution
 - Societal concern for quality is high
- 2. Globalisation and quality assurance / International standards**
 - Maritime- external quality control.
 - Advantage to go for international standards Assuring locals/stakeholders
 - External link is very important
- 3. Conducting franchised programmes**
 - Teaching overseas linked programmes [e.g. FMC offers foreign programmes with foreign curricula. CIMA, ACCA, CCMA]
 - All overseas universities are not quality institutions, so linking up is an issue
 - Dual standards of operation for locally approved and foreign courses.
 - Image and credibility
 - Influences from the West
- 4. External verifiers / External Adviser**
 - Receiving recommendations from external verifiers
- 5. Quality driven locally**
 - Quality is driven locally, not from external global sources
 - In some areas societal concern is not for quality but for quantitative e.g. teachers. Quality attention is coming from the institution
 - Concerns of employers.
 - Employers judgment of performance of competency of skills
 - External verifiers review programmes and make recommendations
- 6. Costs/ drawbacks**
 - External links are useful but cost a lot of money
 - Rather than a link, nurture a culture within the institution and prepare people to take criticism
- 7. National QA discourse: Accreditation**
 - Benefits of accreditation widely understood by the society
- 8. Compliance with standards**
 - All agree that there is increase in compliance, but does not show much improvement.
- 9. Accountability & improvement**
 - Perception of government approval equals quality
 - No monitoring to determine improvement
- 10. Strengths & benefits**
 - Introduction of accreditation has brought in standards or benchmarks
 - Combining international and local requirements is good
 - Quality of paper work is good
- 11. Changes and improvement**
 - Need to undertake institutional accreditation in addition to programme accreditation
- 12. Costs and challenges**

- Do not receive feedback from MAB regarding programmes submitted for approval
- Tension between Global and national QA
- Good but double workload when we have to meet MAB as well as institutional links requirements
- Do not have staff to review or handle the programmes submitted.
- Articulation between technical and academic education programmes
- Unable to employ independent people who have had no input in course development
- Challenge of the work involved at the MAB
- Any programme submitted is approved, no feedback

13. Merger challenges and benefits of the merger

- Consolidating finances is good, but created a number of difficulties at the faculty level
- Issues arising from the merger
- Focus on making common rules and regulations (streamlining) rather than focussing on quality improvement
- Lack of proper information to staff
- Joining institutes were at various stages of development.

14. (Current challenges) Programme development and coordination

- Curriculum scrutiny at central college level is good. Lack of curriculum development section within the Faculty
- Students with low standards is a major challenge
- Lowering of entry standards
- Lack of electronic resources at the library
- No effective liaison with the industry in most Faculties
- Lack of teaching evaluation at the Faculty level

15. Part-time staff and QA

- Large number of part time staff in most Faculties. Lack of enough full time staff.
- Lack of professional qualified academic staff
- Students should have a favourable environment to study

16. Multiple perspectives on QA

- Quality and quality assurance is little understood by the management, administrative system improvement, narrow concept of quality focussing mostly on administrative aspects
- Quality is understood as capability of students as per industry requirements
- Quality as industry expectations

17. Staff buy in

- Lack of staff voice in policy matters that affect them

18. Staff motivation Staff buy-in

- Majority note that motivation is low. One stated that is moderate. One mentioned that it is high when staff join the Faculty, but sustaining it is an issue
- Neglect of staff concerns

19. Staff remuneration

- Staff remuneration is a major issue. It is too low compared to other professions. Staff departures is a concern
- Promotion schemes not in place
- Revising the staff structure has taken too long

20. Workload

- Lack of policies clearly defining workload. Uneven distribution of workload among staff

21. Administrative support

- Administrative support is all right in most cases.
- Some staff feel redundant already in the event of becoming a university. Related to lowly qualified staff who have been in service for a long time.

22. Student engagement

- Students not encouraged to write freely or to express freely.
- Student evaluation and feedback.
- Most effective quality process Student evaluation

23. Lack of policies to evaluate teaching and learning

- Quality monitoring
- Role of Academic Review Committee is very limited. Only to review failing cases.
- Discussion among staff members within departments about successful and not so successful practices
- Shared evaluation among departmental staff
- Keeping good relationship among staff is important in a small place like the MCHE
- Emphasis on attendance especially in short courses
- Introduction of paper review committee

24. Impact of accreditation /strengths

- Students gain confidence in the programmes as graduates gain admission into higher degree programmes overseas
- Will improve quality as this brings about external monitoring
- MNQF is inadequate to accommodate all the qualifications
- No quality assurance process at the faculty level
- Not much impact (3 respondents)
- Most competent people at the College. Lack of competent people outside the College
- Both internal and external quality assurance is required

25. Autonomy

- Most agreed that there is autonomy in the case of academic programmers. Independent

26. Quality improvement and research

- Research is not valued. Research included in job description but not supported
- Lack of incentives for research. Lack of funds
- Can conduct small scale research
- Low salary necessitates a second job, hence no time for research
- Very important to publish research based writings.
- Proposed types of research: Educational research especially on assessment and improving teaching; environment, tourism, marine, Maritime area, politics, economic development.

27. How can we improve?

- Training of staff
- More up to date resources, e-resources
- Treating students in a fair manner (injustice of students)
- Taking corrective action against staff who treat students unfairly
- Exchange of lecturers
- Quality through competition

Appendix K 1
Initial themes from open-ended questions in the academic staff questionnaire

1. What in your opinion are the most effective policies/ practices at your Faculty/ Centre that help in improving quality of teaching and learning?

Themes	Related all responses
1. Student evaluation of classroom teaching.	12 responses
2. No such policies and practices noticed Unclear policy	14 responses
3. Peer support and free discussion of queries.	6 responses
4. Setting up of committees/ meetings	1 response
5. Workshop / seminars for staff / Staff dev	5 responses
6. Curriculum review and assessment	2 responses
7. Monitoring and supervision.	1
8. Internal verification	3 responses
9. Transnational quality assurance (Global factors)	7 responses
10. Miscellaneous	21 responses

2. What in your opinion are the greatest obstacles to improving teaching and learning at your Faculty/Centre?

Themes	Participant responses
1. Inadequate library / internet facilities, lack of and unmaintained equipment / resources, and inadequate infrastructure	35 responses
2. Poor/weak management	17 responses
3. Staff dissatisfaction. Low motivation and commitment	9 responses
4. Lack of qualified staff. Large number of part-time staff	16 responses
5. Poor quality of students entering	1 response
6. Inadequate knowledge about QA	1 response
7. Lack of Staff development	9 responses
8. Poor course coordination	11 responses
9. A heavy teaching load	6 responses
10. Poor working conditions	3 responses
11. Miscellaneous	13 responses

3. What international/global factors (or agencies) influence quality assurance policies and practices at your Faculty/Centre?

FHS

Themes	All related responses
1. No global factors / Don't know	13 responses
2. Links with foreign institutions / universities and use of consultants	24 responses
3. Acceptance in higher degrees and overseas employment	3 responses
4. Miscellaneous	6 responses

4. What would you suggest to strengthen the current quality assurance policies and/or practices at your Faculty/ Centre and/ or MCHE as a whole institution?

FHS

Themes	Participant responses
1. Improve library facilities/ internet services.	4 responses
2. Conduct staff development seminar, workshop, etc...	19 responses
3. Strengthen quality monitoring process, regular monitoring, and training in quality assurance schemes – Internal QA.	39 responses
4. Better communication/ policy awareness. Involvement of staff – Internal QA	10 responses
5. Monitoring by Central Administration -External quality assurance through monitoring (CA AND MAB)	9 responses
6. Improve management qualities of senior management staff at the Faculty level.	10 responses
7. Strengthen the relationship with the industry.	3 responses
8. Transnational quality assurance	3 responses
9. Miscellaneous	9 responses

Appendix K 2

Aggregate Responses to MCHE Academic Staff Questionnaire Statements

Statements	No. and Percentage of Respondents					
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
S1: Formal system to assure quality is essential for development of HE	No.	1	1	1	5	51
	%	1.7%	1.7%	1.7%	8.5%	86.4%
S2: Knowledge of QA policies at MCHE is sufficient	No.	11	28	11	7	2
	%	18.6%	47.5%	18.6%	11.9%	3.4%
S3: Academic standards of programmes should be controlled by the MCHE	No.	5	4	8	19	23
	%	8.5%	6.8%	13.6%	32.2%	39.0%
S4: Teaching should be regularly monitored by the MCHE Central Administration	No.	3	11	7	22	16
	%	5.1%	18.6%	11.9%	37.3%	27.1%
S5: Regular feedback from students is a helpful way to promote quality improvement	No.	1	6	4	18	30
	%	1.7%	10.2%	6.8%	30.5%	50.8%
S6: QA should emphasise accountability more than improvement	No.	6	18	22	8	5
	%	10.2%	30.5%	37.3%	13.6%	8.5%
S7: QA should emphasise improvement more than accountability	No.	5	10	19	18	5
	%	8.8%	17.5%	33.3%	31.6%	8.8%
S8: QA should emphasise both improvement and accountability	No.	0	3	7	17	32
	%	0.0%	5.1%	11.9%	28.8%	54.2%
S9: Academic staff should be accountable for the use of public funds for higher education	No.	5	11	12	16	15
	%	8.5%	18.6%	20.3%	27.1%	25.4%
S10: Quality matters should be mainly left for internal systems within the College	No.	3	18	10	18	9
	%	5.2%	31.0%	17.2%	31.0%	15.5%
S11: Academic freedom is vital to the promotion of quality	No.	2	0	12	22	21
	%	3.5%	0.0%	21.1%	38.6%	36.8%
S12: Quality at MCHE should be regulated by the government through a body such as MAB	No.	2	2	12	25	18
	%	3.4%	3.4%	20.3%	42.4%	30.5%
S13: Teaching is more important than research at college level	No.	3	18	18	15	3
	%	5.3%	31.6%	31.6%	26.3%	5.3%
S14: Research is more important than teaching at college level	No.	5	26	21	4	2
	%	8.6%	44.8%	36.2%	6.9%	3.4%
S15: Research and teaching are equally important at college level	No.	0	3	8	12	35
	%	0.0%	5.2%	13.8%	20.7%	60.3%
S16: Motivation of academic staff towards improving the quality of academic programmes is generally high	No.	9	19	12	11	8
	%	15.3%	32.2%	20.3%	18.6%	13.6%
S17: Working conditions of staff at MCHE generally promote a climate to improve quality of teaching and learning	No.	14	22	15	6	2
	%	23.7%	37.3%	25.4%	10.2%	3.4%
	No.	7	14	19	17	2

S18: National accreditation has improved the quality of academic programmes at MCHE	%	11.9%	23.7%	32.2%	28.8%	3.4%
	No.	1	4	23	25	6
S19: Most academic staff endeavour to meet higher quality standards than local accreditation requirement	%	1.7%	6.8%	39.0%	42.4%	10.2%
	No.	3	24	25	7	0
S20: National accreditation requirements have reduced academic staff professional responsibility for improvement	%	5.1%	40.7%	42.4%	11.9%	0.0%
	No.	2	0	3	27	27
S21: Both overseas link institutional accreditation and local accreditation are important for MCHE	%	3.4%	0.0%	5.1%	45.8%	45.8%
	No.	8	28	17	3	3
S22: Local accreditation is more important for MCHE than overseas link institutional accreditation	%	13.6%	47.5%	28.8%	5.1%	5.1%
	No.	7	30	15	5	1
S23: Overseas link institutional arrangements do not promote quality at MCHE	%	12.1%	51.7%	25.9%	8.6%	1.7%
	No.	1	11	13	15	18
S24: International recognition of MCHE qualifications is more important than their national recognition	%	1.7%	19.0%	22.4%	25.9%	31.0%
	No.	3	17	17	20	2
S25: Global / international factors have little influence on quality assurance policies in Maldives compared to national factors	%	5.1%	28.8%	28.8%	33.9%	3.4%

Appendix K3

Faculty-wise Responses to MCHE Academic Staff Questionnaire Statements

S1: A formal system to assure quality is essential for the development of HE in this country						
No. and % of respondents						
Faculty		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
FE	No.	0	0	1	1	13
	% of Total	0.0%	0.0%	1.7%	1.7%	22.0%
FET	No.	0	0	0	1	9
	% of Total	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	1.7%	15.3%
FHS	No.	0	0	0	1	15
	% of Total	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	1.7%	25.4%
FHTS	No.	0	1	0	1	5
	% of Total	0.0%	1.7%	0.0%	1.7%	8.5%
FMC	No.	1	0	0	0	5
	% of Total	1.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	8.5%
CMS	No.	0	0	0	1	4
	% of Total	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	1.7%	6.8%
Total	No.	1	1	1	5	51
	% of Total	1.7%	1.7%	1.7%	8.5%	86.4%

S2: Knowledge of QA policies at MCHE is sufficient						
No. and % of respondents						
Faculty		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
FE	No.	2	8	1	4	0
	% of Total	3.4%	13.6%	1.7%	6.8%	0.0%
FET	No.	0	8	1	0	1
	% of Total	0.0%	13.6%	1.7%	0.0%	1.7%
FHS	No.	4	7	4	1	0
	% of Total	6.8%	11.9%	6.8%	1.7%	0.0%
FHTS	No.	4	1	2	0	0
	% of Total	6.8%	1.7%	3.4%	0.0%	0.0%
FMC	No.	0	3	2	0	1
	% of Total	0.0%	5.1%	3.4%	0.0%	1.7%
CMS	No.	1	1	1	2	0
	% of Total	1.7%	1.7%	1.7%	3.4%	0.0%
Total	No.	11	28	11	7	2
	% of Total	18.6%	47.5%	18.6%	11.9%	3.4%

S3: The academic standards of programmes should be controlled by the MCHE

		No. and % of respondents				
Faculty		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
FE	Count	0	1	2	6	6
	% of Total	0.0%	1.7%	3.4%	10.2%	10.2%
FET	Count	0	1	1	4	4
	% of Total	0.0%	1.7%	1.7%	6.8%	6.8%
FHS	Count	1	0	2	5	8
	% of Total	1.7%	0.0%	3.4%	8.5%	13.6%
FHTS	Count	2	2	1	0	2
	% of Total	3.4%	3.4%	1.7%	0.0%	3.4%
FMC	Count	2	0	1	1	2
	% of Total	3.4%	0.0%	1.7%	1.7%	3.4%
CMS	Count	0	0	1	3	1
	% of Total	0.0%	0.0%	1.7%	5.1%	1.7%
Total	Count	5	4	8	19	23
	% of Total	8.5%	6.8%	13.6%	32.2%	39.0%

S4: Teaching should be regularly monitored by the MCHE Central Administration

		No. and % of respondents				
Faculty		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
FE	Count	0	3	1	7	4
	% of Total	0.0%	5.1%	1.7%	11.9%	6.8%
FET	Count	2	0	1	4	3
	% of Total	3.4%	0.0%	1.7%	6.8%	5.1%
FHS	Count	0	3	1	9	3
	% of Total	0.0%	5.1%	1.7%	15.3%	5.1%
FHTS	Count	1	2	3	0	1
	% of Total	1.7%	3.4%	5.1%	0.0%	1.7%
FMC	Count	0	2	0	1	3
	% of Total	0.0%	3.4%	0.0%	1.7%	5.1%
CMS	Count	0	1	1	1	2
	% of Total	0.0%	1.7%	1.7%	1.7%	3.4%
Total	Count	3	11	7	22	16
	% of Total	5.1%	18.6%	11.9%	37.3%	27.1%

S5: Regular feedback from students is a helpful way to promote quality improvement

		No. and % of respondents				
Faculty		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
FE	Count	0	0	2	5	8
	% of Total	0.0%	0.0%	3.4%	8.5%	13.6%
FET	Count	0	1	0	4	5
	% of Total	0.0%	1.7%	0.0%	6.8%	8.5%
FHS	Count	0	0	0	5	11
	% of Total	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	8.5%	18.6%
FHTS	Count	1	2	0	1	3
	% of Total	1.7%	3.4%	0.0%	1.7%	5.1%
FMC	Count	0	2	1	2	1
	% of Total	0.0%	3.4%	1.7%	3.4%	1.7%
CMS	Count	0	1	1	1	2
	% of Total	0.0%	1.7%	1.7%	1.7%	3.4%
Total	Count	1	6	4	18	30
	% of Total	1.7%	10.2%	6.8%	30.5%	50.8%

S6: QA should emphasise accountability more than improvement

Faculty		No. and % of respondents				
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
FE	Count	2	5	6	2	0
	% of Total	3.4%	8.5%	10.2%	3.4%	0.0%
FET	Count	0	2	4	2	2
	% of Total	0.0%	3.4%	6.8%	3.4%	3.4%
FHS	Count	3	2	8	2	1
	% of Total	5.1%	3.4%	13.6%	3.4%	1.7%
FHTS	Count	1	4	0	0	2
	% of Total	1.7%	6.8%	0.0%	0.0%	3.4%
FMC	Count	0	4	2	0	0
	% of Total	0.0%	6.8%	3.4%	0.0%	0.0%
CMS	Count	0	1	2	2	0
	% of Total	0.0%	1.7%	3.4%	3.4%	0.0%
Total	Count	6	18	22	8	5
	% of Total	10.2%	30.5%	37.3%	13.6%	8.5%

S7: QA should emphasise improvement more than accountability

Faculty		No. and % of respondents				
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
FE	Count	1	3	4	5	1
	% of Total	1.8%	5.3%	7.0%	8.8%	1.8%
FET	Count	0	0	4	4	2
	% of Total	0.0%	0.0%	7.0%	7.0%	3.5%
FHS	Count	2	2	8	3	1
	% of Total	3.5%	3.5%	14.0%	5.3%	1.8%
FHTS	Count	2	3	0	1	1
	% of Total	3.5%	5.3%	0.0%	1.8%	1.8%
FMC	Count	0	2	2	2	0
	% of Total	0.0%	3.5%	3.5%	3.5%	0.0%
CMS	Count	0	0	1	3	0
	% of Total	0.0%	0.0%	1.8%	5.3%	0.0%
Total	Count	5	10	19	18	5
	% of Total	8.8%	17.5%	33.3%	31.6%	8.8%

S8: QA should emphasise both improvement and accountability

Faculty		No. and % of respondents				
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
FE	Count	0	0	2	6	7
	% of Total	0.0%	0.0%	3.4%	10.2%	11.9%
FET	Count	0	0	3	3	4
	% of Total	0.0%	0.0%	5.1%	5.1%	6.8%
FHS	Count	0	0	0	6	10
	% of Total	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	10.2%	16.9%
FHTS	Count	0	0	1	0	6
	% of Total	0.0%	0.0%	1.7%	0.0%	10.2%
FMC	Count	0	2	0	2	2
	% of Total	0.0%	3.4%	0.0%	3.4%	3.4%
CMS	Count	0	1	1	0	3
	% of Total	0.0%	1.7%	1.7%	0.0%	5.1%
Total	Count	0	3	7	17	32
	% of Total	0.0%	5.1%	11.9%	28.8%	54.2%

S9: Academic staff should be accountable for the use of public funds for higher education

Faculty		No. and % of respondents				
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
FE	Count	1	5	2	5	2
	% of Total	1.7%	8.5%	3.4%	8.5%	3.4%
FET	Count	0	1	1	5	3
	% of Total	0.0%	1.7%	1.7%	8.5%	5.1%
FHS	Count	0	2	5	3	6
	% of Total	0.0%	3.4%	8.5%	5.1%	10.2%
FHTS	Count	3	1	1	0	2
	% of Total	5.1%	1.7%	1.7%	0.0%	3.4%
FMC	Count	1	0	1	2	2
	% of Total	1.7%	0.0%	1.7%	3.4%	3.4%
CMS	Count	0	2	2	1	0
	% of Total	0.0%	3.4%	3.4%	1.7%	0.0%
Total	Count	5	11	12	16	15
	% of Total	8.5%	18.6%	20.3%	27.1%	25.4%

S10: Quality matters should be mainly left for internal systems within the College

Faculty		No. and % of respondents				
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
FE	Count	0	6	2	3	4
	% of Total	0.0%	10.3%	3.4%	5.2%	6.9%
FET	Count	0	3	2	4	1
	% of Total	0.0%	5.2%	3.4%	6.9%	1.7%
FHS	Count	2	3	4	6	1
	% of Total	3.4%	5.2%	6.9%	10.3%	1.7%
FHTS	Count	0	2	0	3	2
	% of Total	0.0%	3.4%	0.0%	5.2%	3.4%
FMC	Count	1	4	1	0	0
	% of Total	1.7%	6.9%	1.7%	0.0%	0.0%
CMS	Count	0	0	1	2	1
	% of Total	0.0%	0.0%	1.7%	3.4%	1.7%
Total	Count	3	18	10	18	9
	% of Total	5.2%	31.0%	17.2%	31.0%	15.5%

S11: Academic freedom is vital to the promotion of quality

Faculty		No. and % of respondents				
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
FE	Count	0	0	0	8	7
	% of Total	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	14.0%	12.3%
FET	Count	1	0	3	3	3
	% of Total	1.8%	0.0%	5.3%	5.3%	5.3%
FHS	Count	0	0	4	6	5
	% of Total	0.0%	0.0%	7.0%	10.5%	8.8%
FHTS	Count	0	0	4	1	2
	% of Total	0.0%	0.0%	7.0%	1.8%	3.5%
FMC	Count	1	0	1	2	2
	% of Total	1.8%	0.0%	1.8%	3.5%	3.5%
CMS	Count	0	0	0	2	2
	% of Total	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	3.5%	3.5%
Total	Count	2	0	12	22	21
	% of Total	3.5%	0.0%	21.1%	38.6%	36.8%

S12: Quality at MCHE should be regulated by the government through a body such as MAB

Faculty		No. and % of respondents				
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
FE	Count	0	1	2	7	5
	% of Total	0.0%	1.7%	3.4%	11.9%	8.5%
FET	Count	0	0	2	4	4
	% of Total	0.0%	0.0%	3.4%	6.8%	6.8%
FHS	Count	1	1	3	6	5
	% of Total	1.7%	1.7%	5.1%	10.2%	8.5%
FHTS	Count	0	0	4	2	1
	% of Total	0.0%	0.0%	6.8%	3.4%	1.7%
FMC	Count	1	0	0	4	1
	% of Total	1.7%	0.0%	0.0%	6.8%	1.7%
CMS	Count	0	0	1	2	2
	% of Total	0.0%	0.0%	1.7%	3.4%	3.4%
Total	Count	2	2	12	25	18
	% of Total	3.4%	3.4%	20.3%	42.4%	30.5%

S13: Teaching is more important than research at college level

Faculty		No. and % of respondents				
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
FE	Count	1	4	5	4	0
	% of Total	1.8%	7.0%	8.8%	7.0%	0.0%
FET	Count	0	1	4	3	2
	% of Total	0.0%	1.8%	7.0%	5.3%	3.5%
FHS	Count	2	5	5	3	1
	% of Total	3.5%	8.8%	8.8%	5.3%	1.8%
FHTS	Count	0	5	2	0	0
	% of Total	0.0%	8.8%	3.5%	0.0%	0.0%
FMC	Count	0	2	2	2	0
	% of Total	0.0%	3.5%	3.5%	3.5%	0.0%
CMS	Count	0	1	0	3	0
	% of Total	0.0%	1.8%	0.0%	5.3%	0.0%
Total	Count	3	18	18	15	3
	% of Total	5.3%	31.6%	31.6%	26.3%	5.3%

S14: Research is more important than teaching at college level

Faculty		No. and % of respondents				
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
FE	Count	2	6	6	1	0
	% of Total	3.4%	10.3%	10.3%	1.7%	0.0%
FET	Count	0	4	5	0	1
	% of Total	0.0%	6.9%	8.6%	0.0%	1.7%
FHS	Count	3	7	5	1	0
	% of Total	5.2%	12.1%	8.6%	1.7%	0.0%
FHTS	Count	0	4	2	0	1
	% of Total	0.0%	6.9%	3.4%	0.0%	1.7%
FMC	Count	0	3	3	0	0
	% of Total	0.0%	5.2%	5.2%	0.0%	0.0%
CMS	Count	0	2	0	2	0
	% of Total	0.0%	3.4%	0.0%	3.4%	0.0%
Total	Count	5	26	21	4	2
	% of Total	8.6%	44.8%	36.2%	6.9%	3.4%

S15: Research and teaching are equally important at college level

Faculty		No. and % of respondents				
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
FE	Count	0	1	3	2	9
	% of Total	0.0%	1.7%	5.2%	3.4%	15.5%
FET	Count	0	1	2	3	4
	% of Total	0.0%	1.7%	3.4%	5.2%	6.9%
FHS	Count	0	1	2	2	10
	% of Total	0.0%	1.7%	3.4%	3.4%	17.2%
FHTS	Count	0	0	0	1	6
	% of Total	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	1.7%	10.3%
FMC	Count	0	0	0	2	4
	% of Total	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	3.4%	6.9%
CMS	Count	0	0	1	2	2
	% of Total	0.0%	0.0%	1.7%	3.4%	3.4%
Total	Count	0	3	8	12	35
	% of Total	0.0%	5.2%	13.8%	20.7%	60.3%

S16: Motivation of academic staff towards improving the quality of academic programmes is generally high

Faculty		No. and % of respondents				
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
FE	Count	1	4	2	7	1
	% of Total	1.7%	6.8%	3.4%	11.9%	1.7%
FET	Count	0	6	1	1	2
	% of Total	0.0%	10.2%	1.7%	1.7%	3.4%
FHS	Count	5	5	4	0	2
	% of Total	8.5%	8.5%	6.8%	0.0%	3.4%
FHTS	Count	1	1	1	2	2
	% of Total	1.7%	1.7%	1.7%	3.4%	3.4%
FMC	Count	2	2	2	0	0
	% of Total	3.4%	3.4%	3.4%	0.0%	0.0%
CMS	Count	0	1	2	1	1
	% of Total	0.0%	1.7%	3.4%	1.7%	1.7%
Total	Count	9	19	12	11	8
	% of Total	15.3%	32.2%	20.3%	18.6%	13.6%

S17: Working conditions of staff at MCHE generally promote a climate to improve quality of teaching and learning

Faculty		No. and % of respondents				
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
FE	Count	1	5	7	2	0
	% of Total	1.7%	8.5%	11.9%	3.4%	0.0%
FET	Count	0	5	3	1	1
	% of Total	0.0%	8.5%	5.1%	1.7%	1.7%
FHS	Count	6	5	2	2	1
	% of Total	10.2%	8.5%	3.4%	3.4%	1.7%
FHTS	Count	4	2	1	0	0
	% of Total	6.8%	3.4%	1.7%	0.0%	0.0%
FMC	Count	3	3	0	0	0
	% of Total	5.1%	5.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
CMS	Count	0	2	2	1	0
	% of Total	0.0%	3.4%	3.4%	1.7%	0.0%
Total	Count	14	22	15	6	2
	% of Total	23.7%	37.3%	25.4%	10.2%	3.4%

S18: National accreditation has improved the quality of academic programmes at MCHE

Faculty		No. and % of respondents				
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
FE	Count	0	5	8	2	0
	% of Total	0.0%	8.5%	13.6%	3.4%	0.0%
FET	Count	1	2	2	4	1
	% of Total	1.7%	3.4%	3.4%	6.8%	1.7%
FHS	Count	1	2	5	7	1
	% of Total	1.7%	3.4%	8.5%	11.9%	1.7%
FHTS	Count	3	1	2	1	0
	% of Total	5.1%	1.7%	3.4%	1.7%	0.0%
FMC	Count	2	3	0	1	0
	% of Total	3.4%	5.1%	0.0%	1.7%	0.0%
CMS	Count	0	1	2	2	0
	% of Total	0.0%	1.7%	3.4%	3.4%	0.0%
Total	Count	7	14	19	17	2
	% of Total	11.9%	23.7%	32.2%	28.8%	3.4%

S19: Most academic staff endeavour to meet higher quality standards than local accreditation requirement

Faculty		No. and % of respondents				
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
FE	Count	0	3	6	5	1
	% of Total	0.0%	5.1%	10.2%	8.5%	1.7%
FET	Count	0	0	4	3	3
	% of Total	0.0%	0.0%	6.8%	5.1%	5.1%
FHS	Count	1	0	7	6	2
	% of Total	1.7%	0.0%	11.9%	10.2%	3.4%
FHTS	Count	0	0	4	3	0
	% of Total	0.0%	0.0%	6.8%	5.1%	0.0%
FMC	Count	0	1	1	4	0
	% of Total	0.0%	1.7%	1.7%	6.8%	0.0%
CMS	Count	0	0	1	4	0
	% of Total	0.0%	0.0%	1.7%	6.8%	0.0%
Total	Count	1	4	23	25	6
	% of Total	1.7%	6.8%	39.0%	42.4%	10.2%

S20: National accreditation requirements have reduced academic staff professional responsibility for improvement

Faculty		No. and % of respondents				
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
FE	Count	0	4	8	3	0
	% of Total	0.0%	6.8%	13.6%	5.1%	0.0%
FET	Count	0	2	6	2	0
	% of Total	0.0%	3.4%	10.2%	3.4%	0.0%
FHS	Count	1	8	6	1	0
	% of Total	1.7%	13.6%	10.2%	1.7%	0.0%
FHTS	Count	1	4	2	0	0
	% of Total	1.7%	6.8%	3.4%	0.0%	0.0%
FMC	Count	1	4	0	1	0
	% of Total	1.7%	6.8%	0.0%	1.7%	0.0%
CMS	Count	0	2	3	0	0
	% of Total	0.0%	3.4%	5.1%	0.0%	0.0%
Total	Count	3	24	25	7	0
	% of Total	5.1%	40.7%	42.4%	11.9%	0.0%

S21: Both overseas link institutional accreditation and local accreditation are important for MCHE

Faculty		No. and % of respondents				
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
FE	Count	1	0	2	9	3
	% of Total	1.7%	0.0%	3.4%	15.3%	5.1%
FET	Count	1	0	0	2	7
	% of Total	1.7%	0.0%	0.0%	3.4%	11.9%
FHS	Count	0	0	0	7	9
	% of Total	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	11.9%	15.3%
FHTS	Count	0	0	0	4	3
	% of Total	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	6.8%	5.1%
FMC	Count	0	0	1	2	3
	% of Total	0.0%	0.0%	1.7%	3.4%	5.1%
CMS	Count	0	0	0	3	2
	% of Total	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	5.1%	3.4%
Total	Count	2	0	3	27	27
	% of Total	3.4%	0.0%	5.1%	45.8%	45.8%

S22: Local accreditation is more important for MCHE than overseas link institutional accreditation

Faculty		No. and % of respondents				
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
FE	Count	1	8	5	1	0
	% of Total	1.7%	13.6%	8.5%	1.7%	0.0%
FET	Count	2	2	3	2	1
	% of Total	3.4%	3.4%	5.1%	3.4%	1.7%
FHS	Count	3	7	4	0	2
	% of Total	5.1%	11.9%	6.8%	0.0%	3.4%
FHTS	Count	2	5	0	0	0
	% of Total	3.4%	8.5%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
FMC	Count	0	4	2	0	0
	% of Total	0.0%	6.8%	3.4%	0.0%	0.0%
CMS	Count	0	2	3	0	0
	% of Total	0.0%	3.4%	5.1%	0.0%	0.0%
Total	Count	8	28	17	3	3
	% of Total	13.6%	47.5%	28.8%	5.1%	5.1%

S23: Overseas link institutional arrangements do not promote quality at MCHE

Faculty		No. and % of respondents				
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
FE	Count	1	7	6	1	0
	% of Total	1.7%	12.1%	10.3%	1.7%	0.0%
FET	Count	1	5	1	2	1
	% of Total	1.7%	8.6%	1.7%	3.4%	1.7%
FHS	Count	5	8	2	1	0
	% of Total	8.6%	13.8%	3.4%	1.7%	0.0%
FHTS	Count	0	6	0	0	0
	% of Total	0.0%	10.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
FMC	Count	0	4	1	1	0
	% of Total	0.0%	6.9%	1.7%	1.7%	0.0%
CMS	Count	0	0	5	0	0
	% of Total	0.0%	0.0%	8.6%	0.0%	0.0%
Total	Count	7	30	15	5	1
	% of Total	12.1%	51.7%	25.9%	8.6%	1.7%

S24: International recognition of MCHE qualifications is more important than their national recognition

Faculty		No. and % of respondents				
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
FE	Count	0	3	3	4	5
	% of Total	0.0%	5.2%	5.2%	6.9%	8.6%
FET	Count	0	3	1	3	3
	% of Total	0.0%	5.2%	1.7%	5.2%	5.2%
FHS	Count	1	3	4	4	4
	% of Total	1.7%	5.2%	6.9%	6.9%	6.9%
FHTS	Count	0	1	1	1	3
	% of Total	0.0%	1.7%	1.7%	1.7%	5.2%
FMC	Count	0	1	2	1	2
	% of Total	0.0%	1.7%	3.4%	1.7%	3.4%
CMS	Count	0	0	2	2	1
	% of Total	0.0%	0.0%	3.4%	3.4%	1.7%
Total	Count	1	11	13	15	18
	% of Total	1.7%	19.0%	22.4%	25.9%	31.0%

S25: Global / international factors have little influence on quality assurance policies in Maldives compared to national factors

Faculty		No. and % of respondents				
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
FE	Count	0	6	4	4	1
	% of Total	0.0%	10.2%	6.8%	6.8%	1.7%
FET	Count	0	2	2	5	1
	% of Total	0.0%	3.4%	3.4%	8.5%	1.7%
FHS	Count	2	4	6	4	0
	% of Total	3.4%	6.8%	10.2%	6.8%	0.0%
FHTS	Count	1	3	2	1	0
	% of Total	1.7%	5.1%	3.4%	1.7%	0.0%
FMC	Count	0	2	3	1	0
	% of Total	0.0%	3.4%	5.1%	1.7%	0.0%
CMS	Count	0	0	0	5	0
	% of Total	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	8.5%	0.0%
Total	Count	3	17	17	20	2
	% of Total	5.1%	28.8%	28.8%	33.9%	3.4%

Appendix L 1

Nvivo list of all Nodes

NVivo revision 2.0.161

Licensee: AAM

Project: QA Project User: AAM Date: 15/09/2007 - 09:28:03

NODE LISTING

Nodes in Set: All Tree Nodes

Created: 12/11/2006 - 12:52:31

Modified: 12/11/2006 - 12:52:31

Number of Nodes: 170

- 1 (1) /External quality assurance
- 2 (1 1) /External quality assurance/National policy influences
- 3 (1 1 1) /External quality assurance/National policy influences/Legal framework ~ requirement 2
- 4 (1 1 2) /External quality assurance/National policy influences/NQF and the Register
- 5 (1 1 3) /External quality assurance/National policy influences/Financial incentive
- 6 (1 1 4) /External quality assurance/National policy influences/Internal QA mechanisms
- 7 (1 1 5) /External quality assurance/National policy influences/University
- 8 affiliations
- 8 (1 1 6) /External quality assurance/National policy influences/Accreditation
- 9 (1 1 7) /External quality assurance/National policy influences/Vocational & Skills dvpt
- 10 (1 1 8) /External quality assurance/National policy influences/Low quality school education
- 11 (1 2) /External quality assurance/QA discourses
- 12 (1 2 1) /External quality assurance/QA discourses/Compliance with standards
- 13 (1 2 2) /External quality assurance/QA discourses/Competition ~ private sector
- 14 (1 2 3) /External quality assurance/QA discourses/Accountability & improvement
- 15 (1 2 4) /External quality assurance/QA discourses/University establishment
- 16 (1 2 5) /External quality assurance/QA discourses/Linking quality to results
- 17 (1 2 6) /External quality assurance/QA discourses/Globalisation & markets
- 18 (1 2 7) /External quality assurance/QA discourses/Funding
- 19 (1 2 8) /External quality assurance/QA discourses/Expansion and equity
- 20 (1 2 9) /External quality assurance/QA discourses/Institutional autonomy
- 21 (1 2 10) /External quality assurance/QA discourses/Protecting our students
- 22 (1 3) /External quality assurance/National QA system
- 23 (1 3 1) /External quality assurance/National QA system/Elements ~ MNQF
- 24 (1 3 2) /External quality assurance/National QA system/Desirability
- 25 (1 3 3) /External quality assurance/National QA system/Strengths
- 26 (1 3 4) /External quality assurance/National QA system/Role of the state
- 27 (1 3 5) /External quality assurance/National QA system/Costs & challenges
- 28 (1 3 6) /External quality assurance/National QA system/Changes ~ improvements
- 29 (1 3 7) /External quality assurance/National QA system/Societal expectation
- 30 (1 3 8) /External quality assurance/National QA system/Influence ~ factors
- 31 (1 3 9) /External quality assurance/National QA system/Impact
- 32 (1 3 10) /External quality assurance/National QA system/MAB capacity
- 33 (1 3 13) /External quality assurance/National QA system/Benefits of Accreditation
- 34 (1 3 13 1) /External quality assurance/National QA system/Benefits of Accreditation/Recognition, credibility, reputation
- 35 (2) /Global influences
- 36 (2 1) /Global influences/Globalisation of QA
- 37 (2 2) /Global influences/International marketing
- 38 (2 3) /Global influences/International students
- 39 (2 4) /Global influences/Cross-border higher education & qual
- 40 (2 5) /Global influences/E-learning
- 41 (2 6) /Global influences/External examination
- 42 (2 7) /Global influences/Massification & vocationalism

- 43 (2 8) /Global influences/International benchmarking
- 44 (2 9) /Global influences/Transnational quality assurance
- 45 (2 9 1) /Global influences/Transnational quality assurance/External Advisers
- 46 (2 9 2) /Global influences/Transnational quality assurance/External audit
- 47 (2 9 3) /Global influences/Transnational quality assurance/MOUs and research
- 48 (2 9 4) /Global influences/Transnational quality assurance/Role of the participating states
- 49 (2 9 5) /Global influences/Transnational quality assurance/Benchmarking internationally
- 50 (2 9 6) /Global influences/Transnational quality assurance/Quality and employability
- 51 (2 9 7) /Global influences/Transnational quality assurance/Costs & drawbacks
- 52 (2 9 8) /Global influences/Transnational quality assurance/Strengths
- 53 (2 9 9) /Global influences/Transnational quality assurance/Advisory committees
- 54 (2 9 10) /Global influences/Transnational quality assurance/Credibility & managing public expect
- 55 (2 9 11) /Global influences/Transnational quality assurance/Peoples' perceptions
- 56 (2 9 12) /Global influences/Transnational quality assurance/Role of overseas linkages
- 57 (2 10) /Global influences/Small states and QA
- 58 (2 10 1) /Global influences/Small states and QA/Proving competitiveness
- 59 (2 10 2) /Global influences/Small states and QA/Marketability of skills
- 60 (2 10 3) /Global influences/Small states and QA/Stakeholder Assurance to locals
- 61 (2 10 4) /Global influences/Small states and QA/Intern't'al recognition~Portability
- 62 (2 10 5) /Global influences/Small states and QA/Expensive university education
- 63 (2 10 6) /Global influences/Small states and QA/Brain drain
- 64 (2 10 7) /Global influences/Small states and QA/Own system
- 65 (2 10 8) /Global influences/Small states and QA/Influences on QA
- 66 (2 10 8 1) /Global influences/Small states and QA/Influences on QA/Western standards
- 67 (3) /Internal quality assurance
- 68 (3 1) /Internal quality assurance/Institutional policy goals
- 69 (3 1 1) /Internal quality assurance/Institutional policy goals/Merger influence on quality
- 70 (3 1 2) /Internal quality assurance/Institutional policy goals/Regional specialization 2
- 71 (3 1 3) /Internal quality assurance/Institutional policy goals/Academic statutes
- 72 (3 1 4) /Internal quality assurance/Institutional policy goals/QA policy ~ strategy2
- 73 (3 1 4 1) /Internal quality assurance/Institutional policy goals/QA policy ~ strategy 2/Quality as transformation
- 74 (3 1 4 2) /Internal quality assurance/Institutional policy goals/QA policy ~ strategy 2/Community expectation
- 75 (3 1 4 3) /Internal quality assurance/Institutional policy goals/QA policy ~ strategy 2/Quality as input - output
- 76 (3 1 4 4) /Internal quality assurance/Institutional policy goals/QA policy ~ strategy 2/Quality as output
- 77 (3 1 4 5) /Internal quality assurance/Institutional policy goals/QA policy ~ strategy 2/Frequent scrutiny
- 78 (3 1 5) /Internal quality assurance/Institutional policy goals/Consistency
- 79 (3 1 6) /Internal quality assurance/Institutional policy goals/Empowering vs control
- 80 (3 1 7) /Internal quality assurance/Institutional policy goals/Academic freedom and responsibility
- 81 (3 1 8) /Internal quality assurance/Institutional policy goals/Promoting innovativeness
- 82 (3 1 9) /Internal quality assurance/Institutional policy goals/Major influences
- 83 (3 1 10) /Internal quality assurance/Institutional policy goals/Transition to university status
- 84 (3 2) /Internal quality assurance/Institutional QA system
- 85 (3 2 1) /Internal quality assurance/Institutional QA system/Adult learning & teaching
- 86 (3 2 2) /Internal quality assurance/Institutional QA system/Reviewing, moderation & feedback

- 87 (3 2 3) /Internal quality assurance/Institutional QA system/AQMS & internal standards
- 88 (3 2 4) /Internal quality assurance/Institutional QA system/Quality control
- 89 (3 2 5) /Internal quality assurance/Institutional QA system/Student evaluation
- 90 (3 2 6) /Internal quality assurance/Institutional QA system/Action plans
- 91 (3 2 7) /Internal quality assurance/Institutional QA system/Staff recruitment, training & review
- 92 (3 2 8) /Internal quality assurance/Institutional QA system/Role of Academic Advisors
- 93 (3 2 9) /Internal quality assurance/Institutional QA system/Academic forums
- 94 (3 2 10) /Internal quality assurance/Institutional QA system/External Advisers
- 95 (3 2 11) /Internal quality assurance/Institutional QA system/Research
- 96 (3 2 12) /Internal quality assurance/Institutional QA system/Programme Advisory Committee
- 97 (3 2 13) /Internal quality assurance/Institutional QA system/Strengths of the internal system
- 98 (3 2 13 1) /Internal quality assurance/Institutional QA system/Strengths of the internal system/Programme development & moderation
- 99 (3 2 13 1 9) /Internal quality assurance/Institutional QA system/Strengths of the internal system/Programme development & moderation/Quality at front end
- 100 (3 2 13 2) /Internal quality assurance/Institutional QA system/Strengths of the internal system/Formal & informal evaluation systems
- 101 (3 2 13 3) /Internal quality assurance/Institutional QA system/Strengths of the internal system/External & internal audits
- 102 (3 2 13 5) /Internal quality assurance/Institutional QA system/Strengths of the internal system/Opportunities for staff
- 103 (3 2 13 6) /Internal quality assurance/Institutional QA system/Strengths of the internal system/Greater staff awareness
- 104 (3 2 13 7) /Internal quality assurance/Institutional QA system/Strengths of the internal system/Willingness to take responsibility
- 105 (3 2 13 8) /Internal quality assurance/Institutional QA system/Strengths of the internal system/Collegiality & sharing
- 106 (3 2 13 8 14) /Internal quality assurance/Institutional QA system/Strengths of the internal system/Collegiality & sharing/Close cooperation
- 107 (3 2 13 9) /Internal quality assurance/Institutional QA system/Strengths of the internal system/Stakeholder committee
- 108 (3 2 13 10) /Internal quality assurance/Institutional QA system/Strengths of the internal system/Faculty Boards of Studies
- 109 (3 2 14) /Internal quality assurance/Institutional QA system/Quality of students
- 110 (3 2 15) /Internal quality assurance/Institutional QA system/Monitoring of teaching
- 111 (3 2 16) /Internal quality assurance/Institutional QA system/Paper review committee
- 112 (3 3) /Internal quality assurance/Quality management
- 113 (3 3 1) /Internal quality assurance/Quality management/Quality management & bureaucracy
- 114 (3 3 1 12) /Internal quality assurance/Quality management/Quality management & bureaucracy/Regionalisation
- 115 (3 3 1 14) /Internal quality assurance/Quality management/Quality management & bureaucracy/Maintaining consistency
- 116 (3 3 2) /Internal quality assurance/Quality management/Student assessment
- 117 (3 3 3) /Internal quality assurance/Quality management/Role of leadership
- 118 (3 3 4) /Internal quality assurance/Quality management/Quality culture, attitude and trust
- 119 (3 3 4 1) /Internal quality assurance/Quality management/Quality culture, attitude and trust/Staff motivation
- 120 (3 3 4 2) /Internal quality assurance/Quality management/Quality culture, attitude and trust/Staff working conditions
- 121 (3 3 4 3) /Internal quality assurance/Quality management/Quality culture, attitude and trust/Seeking staff buy-in
- 122 (3 3 4 4) /Internal quality assurance/Quality management/Quality culture, attitude and trust/Review and evaluation
- 123 (3 3 4 5) /Internal quality assurance/Quality management/Quality culture, attitude

- and trust/Teaching ~ work load
- 124** (3 3 4 6) /Internal quality assurance/Quality management/Quality culture, attitude and trust/Attitude
- 125** (3 3 5) /Internal quality assurance/Quality management/Resourcures for implementing
- 126** (3 3 6) /Internal quality assurance/Quality management/Obstacles to quality
- 127** (3 3 7) /Internal quality assurance/Quality management/Student engagement
- 128** (3 3 7 1) /Internal quality assurance/Quality management/Student engagement/Student buy-in
- 129** (3 3 7 2) /Internal quality assurance/Quality management/Student engagement/Feedback through surveys
- 130** (3 3 7 3) /Internal quality assurance/Quality management/Student engagement/Empowerment
- 131** (3 3 7 4) /Internal quality assurance/Quality management/Student engagement/Understanding background
- 132** (3 3 8) /Internal quality assurance/Quality management/Relationship with agencies
- 133** (3 3 9) /Internal quality assurance/Quality management/Identifying good teaching
- 134** (3 3 10) /Internal quality assurance/Quality management/Academic Approval Committee
- 135** (3 3 11) /Internal quality assurance/Quality management/Healthy friction
- 136** (3 3 12) /Internal quality assurance/Quality management/Cost in time
- 137** (3 4) /Internal quality assurance/Impact on teaching and learning
- 138** (4) /Perspectives on quality
- 139** (5) /Suggestions
- 140** (5 1) /Suggestions/Dearth of funds
- 141** (5 2) /Suggestions/Shortage of staff
- 142** (5 3) /Suggestions/Learn from others
- 143** (5 4) /Suggestions/Policy suggestions
- 144** (5 4 1) /Suggestions/Policy suggestions/QA maxim
- 145** (5 4 2) /Suggestions/Policy suggestions/Existing status
- 146** (5 4 3) /Suggestions/Policy suggestions/Vision, goals, realistic steps
- 147** (5 4 3 1) /Suggestions/Policy suggestions/Vision, goals, realistic steps/Starting from success
- 148** (5 4 3 2) /Suggestions/Policy suggestions/Vision, goals, realistic steps/Making expectations explicit
- 149** (5 4 4) /Suggestions/Policy suggestions/Standards
- 150** (5 4 5) /Suggestions/Policy suggestions/Legal support
- 151** (5 4 6) /Suggestions/Policy suggestions/Quality enhancement
- 152** (5 4 7) /Suggestions/Policy suggestions/Clear policies
- 153** (5 5) /Suggestions/System suggestions
- 154** (5 5 1) /Suggestions/System suggestions/Objective measurement
- 155** (5 5 2) /Suggestions/System suggestions/Separating academic and service qual
- 156** (5 5 3) /Suggestions/System suggestions/Moderation & auditing
- 157** (5 5 4) /Suggestions/System suggestions/Start with internal auditing
- 158** (5 5 5) /Suggestions/System suggestions/Performance monitoring
- 159** (5 5 6) /Suggestions/System suggestions/Balancing decision making and accoun
- 160** (5 5 7) /Suggestions/System suggestions/Appoint an academic
- 161** (5 5 8) /Suggestions/System suggestions/Promoting research through students
- 162** (5 5 9) /Suggestions/System suggestions/Using existing models
- 163** (5 5 10) /Suggestions/System suggestions/Overseas links
- 164** (5 5 11) /Suggestions/System suggestions/Contacts
- 165** (5 5 12) /Suggestions/System suggestions/Involving staff ~ Communication 2
- 166** (5 5 13) /Suggestions/System suggestions/Add value to students
- 167** (5 5 14) /Suggestions/System suggestions/Mentoring locals
- 168** (5 5 16) /Suggestions/System suggestions/Customr focus
- 169** (5 5 17) /Suggestions/System suggestions/Quality network
- 170** (5 5 18) /Suggestions/System suggestions/Recruit staff

Appendix L 2 Sample Node Coding Report

NVivo revision 2.0.161

Licensee: AAM

Project: QA Project

User: AAM

Date: 15/3/2007 - 13:41:48

NODE CODING REPORT

Node: /External quality assurance/quality assurance discourses/Competition ~ private sector

Treenode address: (1 2 2)

Created: 14/11/2006 - 21:45:56

Modified: 15/03/2007 - 13:08:19

Documents in Set: All Documents

Document 1 of 58 NZ01

Passage 1 of 3 Section 0, Para 72, 304 chars.

72: education was an extremely collaborative sector within the country and moved into quite a competitive arena. And I think they are still trying to find a balance between “what’s competitive?” and “what’s collaborative?” because there are advantages to be gained from both, but it is striking that balance

Passage 2 of 3 Section 0, Para 121, 132 chars.

121: This school is associated with professions as opposed to more diffusing public good type stuff that universities are concerned with.

Passage 3 of 3 Section 0, Para 121, 148 chars.

121: And its part of that positioning and balance that we went through in terms of “what’s competitive?”, “what’s collaborative?” you know, where we fit.

Document 2 of 58 NZ04

Passage 1 of 1 Section 0, Para 87, 198 chars.

87: Because it’s a competitive market out there. So we’ve got to provide the very best quality education that we can for our students so that we can attract others, both nationally and internationally.

Document 3 of 58 QM03-MCHE

Passage 1 of 1 Section 0, Para 206, 982 chars.

206: I think competition is good. When we allow that we also have to be nationally able to monitor the private sector institutions as well. But then from national interest point of view I think, competition comes in areas where there is less investment to enter into the sector. Competition does not come in areas where there is high investment to enter the marketplace. This has been the case in the private sector. Most of the competition comes basically through tuition providers, offering external programmes; ventured programmes. When we allow that, nationally we must be able to monitor that they meet the basic minimums of the quality assurance agency; in that case, MAB. That is very important. And, of course, it creates pressures for us as well. We know that we can compete quite easily, because of the resources that we have, compared to the [rest]; but, again, long-term it may not be the case. We have to think of competition; we just cannot operate within our comfort zone.

Document 4 of 58 QPc01-MCHE
 Passage 1 of 2 Section 0, Para 13, 745 chars.

13: The other policy direction is expanding the role of private sector in higher education. Various parties have expressed their interest in establishing colleges with degree awarding rights. And couple of parties have already submitted proposals that are being studied by the government. But even here I have major concerns in that still we don't have an Education Act that will technically empower post secondary education providers to invest and move forward in the area because regulations can be changed anytime and people will be reluctant to actually invest without a firm knowledge of how things will be in the future. So if we do have an Education Act, that will empower people to move forward in the area and make significant investments.

Passage 2 of 2 Section 0, Para 47, 181 chars.

47: And secondly the growth of private party involvement in marketing. Some of these easy-to-achieve programmes locally in Maldives. These are the two reasons why MAB had to be formed.

Document 5 of 58 QPc02-MCHE
 Passage 1 of 3 Section 1.1, Para 69, 512 chars.

69: The Higher Education Ministry has published guidelines for the registration of private colleges. So that is going on now. However, having seen the document that came for discussion at the Higher Education Council, frankly and I personally I have doubts as to whether parties will be able to meet all the requirements included in it. Or how many parties will be able to meet those requirements. I read in the newspapers that 3 parties have taken application forms. So that's an encouraging development in my view.

Passage 2 of 3 Section 1.1, Para 71, 162 chars.

71: Apart from this College, there are several institutions that conduct tertiary level courses. Some are conducting diploma level courses at a fairly good standard.

Passage 3 of 3 Section 1.1, Para 73, 613 chars.

73: If private colleges can be established in a sensible manner it will be good. Look at Sri Lanka for example. They are really good in that sense. They have very good programmes there. I think even here those who are interested will most likely establish colleges with foreign collaboration. I am sure the government will finalise these things in a reliable way. So that's good. But with respect to the guidelines, I thought even if people have funds, how many people can meet especially the education requirements mentioned in the document. This is my personal view. I will applaud if these requirements can be met.

Document 6 of 58 QPc04-MCHE
 Passage 1 of 3 Section 0, Para 10, 74 chars.

10: I think quality assurance is a very important aspect of higher education.

Passage 2 of 3 Section 0, Para 10, 545 chars.

10: since Maldives College of Higher Education became an established institution, I think, many other private institutions, as well as government institutions, are picking up the aspects of higher education. In this regard, quality assurance is something that is very, very important, at the moment, because, in order to maintain the standards of the programmes that are taught in the

private education providers as well as, in the government educational institutions that are coming up I think, quality assurance mechanism is very important aspect.

Passage 3 of 3 Section 0, Para 62, 251 chars.

62: I think, with the Maldivian Government allowing other colleges and institutions to be established in the Maldives; local, as well as international colleges; I think, all our programmes need to be reviewed, in the sense that there are competitors now.

Document 7 of 58 QPc05-MCHE
Passage 1 of 2 Section 0, Para 58, 420 chars.

58: the objective of non government institutions that are operated as a business is to try and fit there courses in the framework that exists. They will do the minimum to fit their programme and commence. They will need to show to the public that their programmes are approved by the MAB. This is all that is needed for them. So once the MAB approval is obtained, their objective is achieved. These are commercial ventures.

Passage 2 of 2 Section 0, Para 60, 176 chars.

60: However, ours is very different. At the College rather than focussing on the commercial side, we emphasise on improving programmes and maintain quality. This is how I see this.

Document 8 of 58 QPc10-MCHE
Passage 1 of 2 Section 0, Para 18, 165 chars.

18: I think now there is a national committee to encourage private sector to come in a major way and also to encourage people to come and build colleges here, PHYSICALLY

Passage 2 of 2 Section 0, Para 22, 188 chars.

22: I think in general, the idea is to give more autonomy to higher education sector and also to encourage more private sector to actually come into the higher education sector in a major way.

Document 9 of 58 USP13
Passage 1 of 1 Section 0, Paras 10 to 12, 590 chars.

10: In general to compete and survive in the market, QA plays an important role, for examples, Singapore and Japan bank on quality for its success and sustainability.

11: ● Also if the stakeholders are convinced of the high quality of the products and services, they would remain loyal instead of going to the competitors locally as well as internationally.

12: ● Universities, mainly, being a self accrediting institutions (be it small states or large nations) it is important to have QA so that all the stakeholders are assured that the “products and services” of the university are of “good quality”

This Node codes no other documents in this set.

Appendix M

**Quality Assurance Authorities, Associated Bodies, Functions
and Tertiary Providers in New Zealand (2006)**

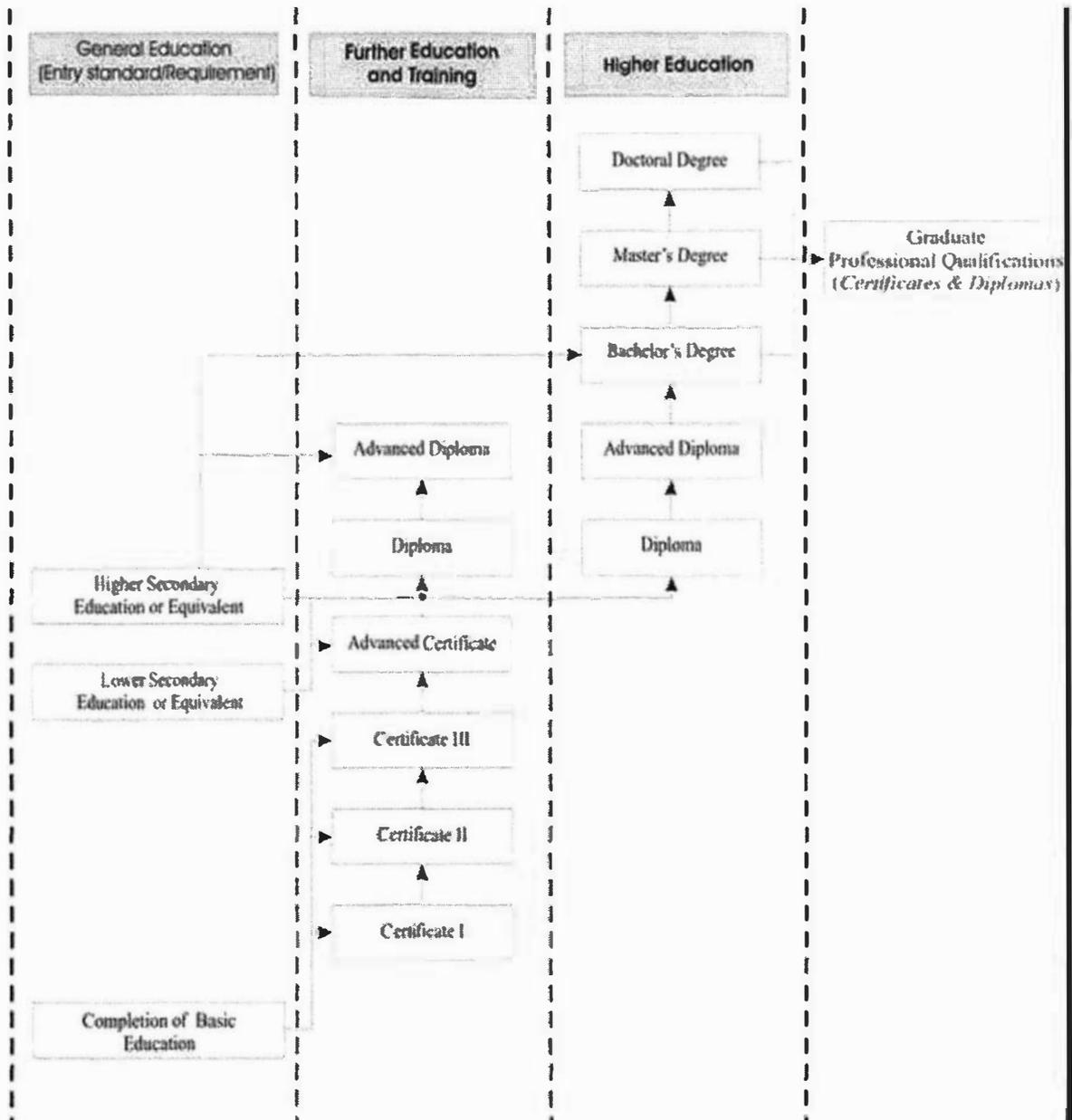
QA Authorities and Associated bodies	Function	Tertiary Providers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NZQA 	Implements registration, accreditation and moderation procedures.	Private Training Establishments (PTEs). There are over 800 registered PTEs providing tertiary education and vocational training.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NZQA 		Other Tertiary Providers. 13 organisations deliver programmes (e.g., NZ Drama School)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NZQA 		Government Training Establishments (GTEs). 11 GTEs are registered with the NZQA (e.g., New Zealand Armed Forces).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NZQA 		Wānanga (Māori education provider). Three Wananga are registered as tertiary institutions.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Association of Colleges of Education in New Zealand (ACENZ) • Colleges of Education Accreditation Committee (CEAC) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delegated authority from NZQA for course approval, accreditation and moderation procedures. • CEAC implements course and programme approvals and accreditation below degree level. 	Colleges of Education (CoEs): Four CoEs initially provided teacher education and research to the early childhood, primary and secondary sectors of education. Since then, two CoEs have merged with universities.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institutes of technology and Polytechnics (ITPNZ) – formerly the Association of Polytechnics of New Zealand – APNZ. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ITPNZ has delegated authority from NZQA. • ITP Quality implements course and programme approvals and accreditation below 	Polytechnics: Over 20 polytechnics and/or institutes of technology provide a wide range of vocational, professional and academic courses. They offer degree

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Institutes of Technology and Polytechnics Quality (ITP Quality) – formerly the New Zealand Polytechnics Programmes Committee) – the operational arm of ITPNZ 	<p>degree level. Polytechnics wishing to offer degree programmes are required to gain NZQA accreditation. In 2000, ITP Quality began the Academic Audit process and from 2001 this has included auditing degree programmes by delegation.</p>	<p>programmes and they are involved in a diverse range of research activities, particularly in the applied and technological areas.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New Zealand Vice-Chancellors' Committee (NZVCC) Committee on University Academic Programmes (CUAP) Academic Audit Unit (AAU) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NZVCC has delegated authority to Committee on University Academic Programmes (CUAP) for course approval, accreditation and moderation procedures. AAU carries out audits of universities and provides information on academic standards and good practice. 	<p>Universities: Eight universities are primarily concerned with research and teaching to international standards. Through legislation, they also have a role as the critic and conscience of society.</p>

Note: This table generated from Weir, 2000; NZQA, 2003; NZQA Presentation Handout, 2005; NZVCC Presentation Handout, 2005; www.nzqa.govt.nz

Appendix N

Maldives National Qualifications Framework



Maldives National Qualifications Framework

Credit Hour and Credit Point System

Qualification	Minimum Entry Requirement	Credit Hours	Credit Points	Duration in Weeks	Duration in Academic Years
Certificate I	Basic Education or Equivalent	42	3	2	0.07
Certificate II	Basic Education or Equivalent	336	24	8	0.25
Certificate III	Basic Education or Equivalent	630	45	15	0.5
Advanced Certificate	Lower Secondary Education or Equivalent	1260	90	30	1
Diploma	Lower Secondary Education or Equivalent	2520	180	60	2
Advanced Diploma	Higher Secondary Education or Equivalent	2520	180	60	2
Bachelor's Degree	Higher Secondary Education or Equivalent	3780	270	90	3
Graduate Certificates	Undergraduate Degree or Equivalent	630	45	15	0.5
Graduate Diploma	Undergraduate Degree or Equivalent	1260	90	30	1
Master's Degree ¹	Undergraduate Degree or Equivalent	1260	90	30	1
Doctoral Degree ²	Master's Degree or Equivalent	-	-	-	3 – 5

¹ A Master's degree normally takes one academic year to complete after an honours degree or two years after a Bachelor's degree.

² The length of a Doctoral degree may vary considerably, but typically requires 3 to 5 years of study.

Appendix O
Selected transnational QA arrangements at MCHE 2000-2006

MCHE Faculty	Overseas Link Institution	Courses Offered	Funding and Status of the Link
Centre for Maritime Studies	IMO through the Ministry of Transport and Communications	IMO model courses	Bound by IMO standards, due to the country's ratification of the IMO Convention on STCW. Ongoing
	Macquarie University, Australia	Diploma of Secondary Teaching	Started with AusAid project. Discontinued after project ended in 2001.
Faculty of Education	Edith Cowan University	Bachelor of Education (primary) Bachelor of Education (secondary)	Started with a contracted project from World Bank loan. Contract ended in 2006.
	University of Newcastle, Australia	Bachelor of Nursing	Started through an AusAID project. Annual auditing ongoing through Government funds. Link ongoing.
	ABC Institution, UK	Diploma of Counselling	Course accreditation and awarding of a Diploma from link institution. LI prepare exam papers. Ongoing.
	Two medical colleges in India	Diploma of Nursing	From Government funds to provide practical experience for nurses. LI reports on student performance in a questionnaire provided by FHS. Ongoing
Faculty of Health Sciences	One training institute in Sri Lanka	Diploma of Laboratory Technology and Diploma of Primary Health Care	From Government funds to provide practical experience for nurses. LI reports on student performance in a questionnaire provided by FHS. Ongoing
	EdExcel, (UK)	BTEC National Diploma and Higher National Diploma courses (in Hotel Catering and Institutional Operations, Hospitality Management, Travel and Tourism)	Paid through Government funds and registration fees paid by students. Annual verification from staff of link institution. Link ongoing
Faculty of Hospitality and Tourism Studies	College of Food, Technology and Creative Arts of	B.Phil (Hospitality Management) MA (Hospitality Management)	Started with ADB loan project funds for Faculty staff development. Annual

	Birmingham University		verification from staff of link institution. Link ongoing
	Middlesex University	Bachelor of Business Information Systems with Business Studies (franchised)	Conducted first two years of the Middlesex degree at MCHE. Student fee paying arrangement. Programme stopped after 2 batches completed in 2004.
Faculty of Management and Computing	Auckland University of Technology	Bachelor of Management / Bachelor of Information Technology	Programmes developed by staff of AUT contracted through World Bank loan financed project. Annual accreditation from AUT planned through Government funds. Link ongoing
Faculty of Shari'ah and Law	International Islamic University, Malaysia (IIUM)	Advanced Diploma in Shari'ah & Law	Course developed by IIUM staff on contract through an ADB grant aid. Course accredited by IIUM. Maintained through mutual faculty visits paid by FSL. Link ongoing.