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**A CROSS-PERCEPTUAL STUDY OF QUALITY IN A UNIVERSITY
DISTANCE EDUCATION PROGRAMME**

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in
Management

Massey University

1997

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ABSTRACT

This thesis reports a study carried out at a large New Zealand university. It investigated the major dimensions of quality in undergraduate Business Studies courses taught in the distance mode. In particular, it examined whether different stakeholders had the same or different perceptions about these dimensions.

The study reported used both qualitative and quantitative methods to collect information from three groups of stakeholders - students, teaching staff and senior managers. Focus groups were carried out with students and staff and individual interviews were conducted with senior managers. The qualitative data collected from these, in combination with themes from the international literature, were structured into seven broad phenomenological scales: course structure and content; face-to-face contact; assessment; communication; standards and evaluation; and programme integrity. These provided the basis for the design of a questionnaire which was sent to a sample of undergraduate students and teaching staff in the Faculty of Business Studies at Massey University.

The triangulation of methods and data permitted the comparison of the perceptions of the three groups of subjects on a number of aspects of quality on each of the scales. This analysis revealed substantial areas of congruence as well as some incongruence in perceptions of quality. There were also some differences in perception between students with relatively low experience of learning at a distance and those with high experience. From the analysis, implications and conclusions were reached about good practice and how quality could be improved. This has particular relevance in relation to the satisfaction levels of the primary stakeholder group, students, as well as for improving the cost efficiency and the effectiveness of the distance education operation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I could not have carried out this study without the assistance, cooperation and support of many people. In particular, there would have been no research without the subjects and I would like to thank all the participants in the study, students, teaching colleagues and senior managers, who so willingly gave their time and whose 'voices' are heard in the text.

I especially acknowledge the invaluable support and guidance provided by my supervisors: my chief supervisor and Head of Department, Professor Tony Vitalis, whose unfailing pragmatism, perspicacity, and encouragement, inspired and sustained me; and Dr Mervyn Probine and Dr John Monin also provided valuable advice and support, often at critical times.

Massey University awarded me two grants which contributed greatly to the progress of the research. A financial grant from the Massey University Research Fund made a substantial contribution to the costs of field work. As a recipient of a Massey University Study Award for Academic Women in Semester 1, 1996, I was able to make considerable progress with the writing of the thesis. I thank the university for these opportunities.

A number of people provided technical assistance. Julianne Ngatuere and Robyn Martin helped me with formatting, tables and diagrams in the thesis. Dr Ted Drawneek, Glenys Wallbutton and Associate Professor Steve Haslett helped with statistics and data analysis. Anne Austin from Editext proof read the thesis.

Thankyou to the many friends, family and colleagues who provided the professional and personal support that enabled me to persevere. My special thanks to my sometime co-author and research colleague, Robyn Walker, who provided inspiration and wonderful friendship. But this study and thesis would not have happened without Don - my husband, mentor and best friend. Thankyou.