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

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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.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION - SETTING THE SCENE

1.1 BACKGROUND

The quest for quality has had a pervasive effect on business activity in the 1980s and 1990s. Boards of directors and managers believe that it gives them a competitive advantage, consumers demand it and employees want it. There is a widely held belief that “quality does it all. It saves. It sells. It satisfies” (Brown, S.W., Gummesson, E., Edvardson, B. and Gustavsson, B., 1991, p. xiii). Universities and other public institutions have not been immune from this quest. The research reported in this thesis sets out to identify the major dimensions of quality associated with teaching Business Studies at a distance in a large New Zealand university.

Quality and quality control measures have long existed for tangible goods. Definitions of quality centre on the ability of a product to fulfil its purpose (Juran’s “fitness for purpose”) and to meet predefined specifications (Crosby’s “conformance to specifications”). However, in services, quality is more difficult to define and measure. Although most services incorporate the use of tangible goods, the service itself is basically intangible. Service also is a process, that is, it is a series of activities rather than things (Gronroos, 1990; Lovelock, 1992). In addition, as Lovelock (1992) points out: “Services are timebound and experiential, even though they may have lasting consequences” (p. 6). Moreover, service is usually dependent on the interaction of at least two individuals - the customer and the service provider, and it is often a lengthy process to which the customer may make a considerable contribution, an “input” often impossible to predetermine or define. Gummesson calls this key concept “*interactive production* [italics added] in which quality contributions come from the concerted efforts of both the customer and the service provider” (Gummesson in Brown et al., 1991, p. 4).

The assessment of quality then can be the result of complex interactions but will ultimately depend on the perceptions of the customer. This is true of all services, even those such as education and health which have traditionally not defined the users of their services as customers. Because service is usually the result of a complex process, quality is assessed on the basis of a number of attributes or dimensions. Thus service quality is a multi-dimensional construct (Lehtinen & Lehtinen, 1982; Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1985; Gronroos, 1990).

1.2 UNIVERSITIES AND QUALITY

Publicly funded institutions have not escaped the demand for quality. For example, there is now a substantial literature reporting the application of quality management methods in local bodies (see for example Jones & Hampton, 1995), the military (Overstreet & Pessel, 1990), health (Donabedian, 1989; North, 1995) and education (see for example Bogue & Saunders, 1992; Lewis & Smith, 1994). In New Zealand this has largely been in response to deregulation, increased competition, reduced funding, the drive for efficiency and a greater requirement for accountability from both the government and the public. The result has been massive changes in the structure and culture of many public institutions.

Tertiary education, and in particular the university sector, has not been at the vanguard of this change. However, deregulation has allowed many new entrants into the degree granting tertiary education sector. This has created an environment where all the providers in the sector, including the universities, have to compete for funds and students. In addition, a national body, the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) has been established, one of whose functions is to monitor quality in the education sector. While many tertiary education providers have opted to come under the NZQA umbrella, the universities have preferred to establish their own quality monitoring body, the New Zealand Universities Academic Audit Unit.

There has also been a substantial reduction in the level of government subsidy that students receive to support their tertiary study. So as the range of providers and programmes expands and as students are expected to contribute a greater proportion of their own fees, they increasingly view themselves as customers and use quality as an important determinant of choice.

The quality movement in tertiary education coincides with an increasing demand for more flexible approaches to learning and open-learning systems which enable students to study how, when and where they like. Such systems facilitate lifelong learning and the combination of study with work. Employers too are becoming influential stakeholders in tertiary education. This may be through requests for specific programmes or modes of delivery, for example block courses, by providing financial support either directly to institutions or by subsidising employees' study costs, or by entering into strategic alliances with tertiary providers whereby students carry out the practical component of a course in their workplace. Distance education is frequently viewed as more open and flexible than traditional face-to-face classroom based methods of learning and so is well suited to meeting these needs. It utilises a range of approaches and technologies and in many countries, including New Zealand, distance education providers have been quick to capitalise on the opportunities afforded by new technologies such as the Internet.

It is only recently that distance education has managed to shake off its mantle of 'second-rate education'. It has often been used as a means of mass education, especially in developing countries, enabling large sections of a population to gain access to education and training, or to provide a second chance to those who may have been denied earlier opportunities for higher education. It is also relatively cheap if advantage is taken of economies of scale (Rumble, 1986). Because of these characteristics it has become known as an 'industrialised' form of education (see for example Peters, 1989), and is exemplified by the United Kingdom's Open University, a model which has been emulated all over the world.

Now, however, distance education is turning out to be something of a cinderella. As tertiary institutions compete for market share and seek to enhance the quality of their teaching programmes, they are looking for ways to improve responsiveness and increase flexibility. The 'openness' of distance education and the technologies which it uses are proving to be very attractive options. Indeed they are entering the mainstream of the education process (Miller, 1993). An institution such as Massey University, with a distinctive competence in distance education systems and methods has an important competitive advantage, particularly if this is coupled with high quality programmes.

Quality measures in higher education have traditionally focused very much on outputs and 'objective' performance indicators. In distance education, quality assessment has centred on outputs such as printed course materials and the use of media, and performance indicators such as retention and pass rates. Until recently, little attention was paid to what quality means to the consumers of the service. While tertiary education providers may have an increasing awareness of stakeholders and the 'customer' in education, there is still a reluctance to take cognisance of their expressed needs and perceptions when deciding and designing quality standards. The attitude of the 'expert' defining quality still persists. This is exemplified by the 1992 Report of the Project to Investigate Quality and Standards in Distance Education in Australia. Although the aim of the project was

to develop an inventory of standards that enables distance education provider institutions to define acceptable quality of service and to assess strengths and weaknesses in the provision of services as an aid to long term planning for quality improvement (Nunan & Calvert, 1992, p. 13),

student perceptions of quality were specifically omitted from the terms of reference. As end users are one of the best judges of quality, this is a serious threat to validity.

Teaching staff are another stakeholder group in the quality equation. Their perceptions of quality, often based on years of successful teaching experience, can be overlooked in favour of instructional design techniques or output considerations.

These 'customer' and 'stakeholder' perceptions are, however, very important as they help to illuminate the complex construct of quality, and highlight ways that it can be assessed and programmes improved.

The recognition of the importance of stakeholders and a clear focus on defining and meeting customer needs are central to many models of quality management used in business. A number of these models, including Total Quality Management (TQM), have now been applied to tertiary and distance education (see for example Coate, 1990; Lewis & Smith, 1994; McIlroy & Walker, 1993, 1996). There are also some studies which have included student and teaching staff perceptions of quality (for example Harvey, Burrows & Green, 1992).

The following themes emerge from the preceding discussion and are elucidated in the next two chapters which review relevant literature:

1. The definition and measurement of quality in tertiary and distance education.
2. The rejection of Fordist models in distance education.
3. Open learning and more flexible approaches in distance education.
4. The application of business management models to higher education.
5. The recognition of a stakeholder model in higher education.
6. The increasing emphasis on customer service and satisfying customer needs in higher education.

1.3 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study examines the construct of quality in undergraduate, business studies, distance education courses at Massey University. Massey University is a multi-campus, mixed mode institution and is the major provider of university level distance education courses in New Zealand. The study relates to the Palmerston North campus where 26902 students were enrolled in 1993, the year in which the study began. Of these, 17270 were studying extramurally (at Massey University, students studying at a distance are referred to as extramural students). 40.8 % of the extramural enrolment was in the Business Studies Faculty and 87.4% of those students were taking undergraduate courses. In mid-1997, the Faculty of Business Studies was reconstituted as the College of Business. However, throughout this thesis, reference is made to the Faculty of Business Studies.

The main purpose of the study was to identify the major dimensions of quality by sampling the perceptions of three groups of stakeholders - students, teachers or academic staff and senior managers. This was done by using focus groups, individual interviews and a questionnaire. Thus the study was a cross perceptual analysis of the viewpoints of three important groups with a stake in the delivery of quality distance education courses at Massey University. Business Studies was selected because of the rapid expansion of this area and the large numbers of students studying in it. As the questionnaire may also be used in other contexts, it was important to choose a subject taught universally so that comparable groups of students could be found.

The study had the following objectives:

1. Determine the dimensions of quality as perceived by extramural students, teaching/academic staff and senior managers within the Business Faculty at Massey University.
2. Analyse areas of congruence and incongruence in the perceptions of quality of these three groups.

3. Discuss the degree to which these dimensions illuminate the major construct of quality discussed in the literature.
4. Identify areas of good practice.

1.4 STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

Chapter 1: Introduction - Setting the Scene

An overview of the investigation is presented including background and context, research objectives, purpose of the study and the structure of the thesis.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter develops four major areas identified in the international literature which relate to the study. These are:

- Approaches to quality in higher education. This section examines the concept of quality in higher education and approaches that are taken to the definition and assessment of quality. The influence of the two broad models that have shaped the structure and culture of universities in many parts of the world is also examined.
- Quality in tertiary level distance education. The development of quality assessment in this area is described, and shows how rather narrow conceptions of quality have broadened to take account of a range of stakeholder needs.
- The rejection of Fordist Models in distance education. Fordist, 'industrialised' models of distance education are shown to be less appropriate for meeting the needs of a number of important stakeholders in distance education. Post-Fordist approaches are being used to enhance responsiveness and facilitate open learning.
- Open learning and more flexible approaches in distance education. The rise of open learning and its meaning in contemporary distance education is examined.

Chapter 3: The Application of Business Management Models to Higher Education

The application of Total Quality Management (TQM) and other business management models to quality assessment and enhancement in higher education, including distance education, is described. These models include Quality Function Deployment, and SERVQUAL. The place of stakeholders and 'customers' in higher education is also examined.

Chapter 4: Methodology

In this chapter the rationale for and methods used in the study are discussed in detail. The value of qualitative and quantitative approaches is explored. The strength of triangulation as a method of enhancing the validity and reliability of results is discussed. The methods of data collection and analysis used for the three groups are explained.

Six focus groups were conducted with students, and one with teaching staff. Ten in-depth individual interviews were also conducted with senior managers using the same question schedule and discussion topics that were used for the focus groups. The analysis of these data identified many dimensions of quality which were then grouped into the following broad phenomenological scales:

1. Course structure and content.
2. Face-to-face contact.
3. Assessment.
4. Communication.
5. Institutional and environmental influences.
6. Standards and evaluation.
7. Programme integrity.

These scales formed the basis for designing a questionnaire which was sent to a sample of 584 students and 146 teaching staff of the Business Studies Faculty. The process of questionnaire development and the method for analysing the results are described, and sampling and ethical issues are discussed.

Chapter 5: Focus Group and Interview Results

Results of the six focus groups with students, three with low experience students (those with passes in five or fewer extramural papers) and three with high experience students (those with passes in 10 or more extramural papers), the focus group with staff and the 10 interviews with senior managers are presented and discussed.

Chapter 6: Questionnaire: Results and Analysis

The results from the student and staff questionnaires, including profiles of the two samples, are presented. Areas of congruence and incongruence and statistically significant differences are analysed for staff and the whole student sample, and high and low experience students.

Chapter 7: Bringing it all Together - Implications and Conclusions

This chapter brings together the results of the research. In particular, it examines the implications of the findings for the Faculty of Business Studies and comes to conclusions about the study. Good practice is identified and discussed and suggestions made for how quality perceptions of the faculty's extramural programme could be enhanced. Some strengths and limitations of the study are identified and suggestions made for further research.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The next two chapters review the literature about quality in higher education and in particular, distance education. They examine five major themes that relate to the study. The first four, approaches to quality in higher education, quality in distance education, the rejection of Fordist models in distance education and open learning, and more flexible approaches in distance education, are addressed in this chapter. The fifth theme, the application of business models to higher education, is dealt with separately in the next chapter. This approach was adopted for two reasons. First, an extensive body of literature has now accumulated on the topic. Second, the ability of some of these models to accommodate the diverse and sometimes conflicting range of stakeholder and customer needs and requirements makes them particularly appropriate for the management of quality in higher education.

This chapter is divided into four sections:

- Approaches to quality in higher education. This section introduces the concept of quality in tertiary education and discusses the two broad models, namely the English and the French, which have shaped the structure and culture of universities in many parts of the world. The interpretation and assessment of quality in each of these models is examined.
- Quality in distance education. This section shows how rather narrow conceptions of quality have broadened in the 1990s to take into account a range of stakeholder needs

and expectations. This is manifested in the rise of Post-Fordism and open learning in distance education.

- The rejection of Fordist Models in distance education. The debate about Fordist and Post-Fordist approaches to distance education is rehearsed and the impact of these on quality definition and assessment is explored. The appropriateness of these models for distance education today is examined.
- Open learning and more flexible approaches in distance education. Open learning is a concept that has undergone considerable change during this decade. As originally conceived it referred to open access, but it now includes a number of other dimensions which influence the organisation and delivery of distance education as well as the definition and assessment of quality.

2.2 APPROACHES TO QUALITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

In the sixties, the most trendy word [in higher education] was equality. Now in the eighties we have lost the 'e' and the trend is to talk about quality. All over the world, there is a heavy interest in quality... In some countries, for example the United States, quality assessment in one way or another has been [the] subject of interest for a long time. In other countries, individual scholars, departments and faculties have always paid attention to quality, but not in a structured and systematic way as it is nowadays (Vroeijenstijn, 1990, p. 21).

Vroeijenstijn is highlighting the enormous emphasis that is placed on quality and which reflects the massive changes that have occurred in many tertiary education systems since the 1980s. These have largely been part of the reform of the public sector which has brought a greater demand for accountability to government and the public. In addition, deregulation in many countries has opened up the tertiary education market and providers

find themselves competing for funds and for students. The ISO 9000 (or BS 5750) series of standards for quality management systems are widely accepted in both the manufacturing and service sectors and have been applied to tertiary education (Harvey & Green, 1993; Solomon, 1993; Storey in Ellis, 1993; Lewis & Smith, 1994), and distance and open learning (Freeman, 1991). A more quality conscious public has also helped to create pressure for standards and good value for money. These factors have all conspired to see much more emphasis being placed on quality and could lead to a view “which give issues of quality a strongly political cast” (Moran, 1995, p. 158). Nunan and Calvert (1992) state this view quite explicitly: “The prominent place of quality and performance monitoring on the Australian educational agenda ... is in fact the current phase in the intervention by the state into the affairs of the higher education system” (p. 27). It is against this changing environment that quality has emerged and taken a central place in the public sector and in tertiary education.

Quality is an elusive concept. It has many different meanings and means different thing to different people. “[It] is rather like pornography ... we may not easily be able to define it, but we know it when we see it” (Peters, J. 1993, p. 67). Its meaning is also mediated by the context and will ultimately be determined by the expectations and perceptions of the end users of the product or service. Current conceptions of quality management have been greatly influenced by quality ‘gurus’ such as the Americans Deming, Juran and Crosby and the Japanese engineers Ishikawa and Taguchi. While all of them developed their ideas and theories in manufacturing industries, it is now commonplace to find them being applied and practised in the service sector including education.

Much has now been written about quality in tertiary education. In a comprehensive analysis, Harvey and Green (1993) have grouped the different conceptualisations of quality into five discrete but interrelated categories and discussed them in relation to tertiary education:

- Quality as exceptional. This embodies the three notions of quality as distinctive, quality as excellence and quality as passing a set of required minimum standards. There are no benchmarks against which to measure quality, quality is not defined and quality is 'instinctively recognised'. Quality and standards are inextricably linked in degree classifications and grading systems - students must meet the required minimum standards. Generally speaking, in universities, quality has traditionally been associated with this category.
- Quality as perfection or consistency. This category encapsulates Crosby's ideas of zero defects and getting things right the first time, and implies a culture where everyone in the organisation is responsible for quality. This is consistent with a TQM philosophy. Excellence in this approach involves prevention, not simply conforming to specifications, and thus an emphasis on process is required rather than solely on inputs and outputs. Harvey and Green argue that the ideas of zero defects and getting it right the first time raise difficulties in an educational setting where a major concern may be the analytical and critical development of the student which involves constant reworking and reconceptualisation.
- Quality as fitness for purpose. In contrast to the exceptional notion of quality, this is an inclusive and functional definition. If something does what it is designed for then it is a quality product or service. This raises the questions of whose purpose and how will fitness be assessed? These are complicated and contentious issues in higher education, for they involve more fundamental questions about just who the 'customer' is, and who should be assessing fitness.
- Quality as value for money. This category captures the political imperatives of efficiency, effectiveness and accountability which are underpinned by the economic drivers of market forces and competition. Harvey and Green link these to government requirements for more participation in higher education with minimal additional investment and the desire for more control mechanisms. There is also an implicit assumption in this approach that the market will take care of quality in the long run so that institutions can therefore be left to ensure the quality of what they provide. Performance indicators and customer charters are manifestations of this approach.

- Quality as transformative. In this category, education is viewed as a process of transformation which leads to the notions of quality as enhancing and empowering the student. Value added is a measure of quality as enhancement. However, using input and output measures for this can be very deceptive. For example, brilliant school leavers may become brilliant graduates with little value added by the institution. Such indicators conceal the nature of the qualitative transformation. Instead, “learners should be both at the centre of the process by which learning is evaluated and at the centre of the learning process. Feedback from learners is a crucial aspect of evaluation” (Harvey & Green, p. 25). This leads to learner empowerment which may be achieved by student evaluation; students monitoring guaranteed minimum standards; students being given control over their own learning; and developing students’ critical thinking ability. These ideas are totally consistent with the open learning approaches which have developed in distance education and are discussed later in this chapter.

These categories are not mutually exclusive. Indeed some of them coexist in many higher education institutions, particularly the notions of quality as exceptional, quality as fitness for purpose, and quality as value for money.

The ideas associated with Harvey and Green’s first category of quality as exceptional are embodied in the two broad approaches to higher education that have influenced the development of quality assessment in Australasian tertiary education. Van Vught (1993) describes these as the English model where a university was made up of a self governing community of fellows, and the French model which vested control in an external authority (p. 3). The English model relied on ‘the academy’ or peer review to decide curriculum and who should teach it. The concept of academic freedom derives from this. In the French model an external authority decided what should be taught at the university and who should teach it.

While each model has its strengths, they are not without their weaknesses. Underpinning the English model are the ideas of quality as distinctiveness or exclusiveness and quality as

excellence. This has tended to foster a culture of elitism where a quality university education referred mainly to the perceived status and reputation of the institution attended, lesser known, smaller and provincial institutions often being perceived as having low status and therefore not providing a 'quality' education. Harvard, Yale, Oxford and Cambridge Universities epitomise institutions of high status which continue to attract lucrative endowments and top students and scholars from all over the world because of their exclusiveness and their reputation for excellence. In this system the excellent 'outputs' are dependent on the ability of the institution to attract excellent 'inputs'. The best students and the best resources ensure that the reputation for excellence is maintained so that a self-perpetuating cycle is established. As the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) of Otago University put it, "The university's reputation is earned by its outputs" (Staff, University of Otago Newsletter, 1996, p. 7).

In this approach the concept of 'standard' is tied to the idea of excellence and is manifested in examinations and final degree classifications. Academic staff somehow 'know' what these standards are and some kind of comparability across institutions is ensured at the higher levels by the external examiner system. New Zealand provides an interesting example of the external examiner system and, incidentally, how the English model has been perpetuated. Universities in New Zealand did not become fully autonomous until the dissolution of the University of New Zealand in 1961. Until 1925, university examinations were set and marked by the University of London and thus the academic standards of an institution from a country on the other side of the world were applied in New Zealand. The same system operated in other colonial countries such as South Africa.

However, equating quality with excellence can "signal anti-egalitarian values" (Nunan & Calvert 1992, p. 31) which does not rest easily with the values of equity and access which are now widely held in tertiary education. This applies particularly to distance education which has become a popular method for achieving mass education, and for opening up educational opportunities to those who may previously have been denied entry or access to them. Distance education has always been considered to be cost effective if advantage is

taken of economies of scale (Rumble, 1986) but now this is being further facilitated by new and innovative technologies (Cook, 1995).

But even in this situation where driving values may be equity and access, the rapidly expanding number of providers and increasing competition for students and funds means that excellence continues to be a differentiator of consumer choice and therefore a relevant dimension of quality.

Another major criticism of this model is that the concepts of academic freedom and professional autonomy which derive from it, make it difficult to apply quality control mechanisms (Guri, 1987). Instead, quality control measures involve self-regulation, as judgements about the value and worth of courses are made by those who also design and teach them (Nunan, 1991). While this model encourages self control it can be viewed as exclusive rather than inclusive in that it risks alienation from external groups by not taking account of their interests or those of other stakeholders such as students and some groups of employees.

In the French model, while the notions of distinctiveness and excellence are still present, it is the meeting of standards that have been defined by an external body which is the most important idea. This involves the use of performance indicators and the establishment of standards which quantify an institution's performance against preset norms. Such systems have benefits in terms of public accountability and are now proving popular with governments which wish to see the most efficient use made of public resources. However, they may discourage self-control in institutions and disempower individuals who work within them.

Criticisms of the use of performance indicators in higher education are well documented in the literature (see for example Kells, 1990; Paul, 1990b; Cave, Hanney, & Kogan, 1991). Generally speaking, governments strongly emphasise their importance, while institutions of higher education tend to be reserved and sceptical about them (Vroeijenstijn, 1992). Their

proponents argue that because they are based on statistical data, they are objective and that they therefore permit institutions to be readily compared. Assumptions are often made about the quality of an institution's programmes on the basis of such measures. Opponents claim that such measures say little about quality or performance and too often are concerned with control rather than improvement (Fasano, Hedberg, Harper, Macpherson, Palmer, & Weeks, 1995).

Is the performance of university Y with a pass ratio of 80 per cent superior to the performance of university X with a ratio of 60 per cent? Or has university Y lowered its level? Or is university X more selective in the first year? These performance indicators do not give answers but do raise questions (Vroeijenstijn, 1992, p. 114).

Harvey and Green make the further point "that as [performance indicators] are better at measuring efficiency than effectiveness, ... quality becomes further entangled with value for money" (1993, p. 23). What is required is the use of both qualitative and quantitative data from a wide variety of sources when judgements are being made about quality.

The increasing use of national standards for education is another manifestation of the French model. This may involve the establishment of national bodies whose responsibility is to set and monitor standards in the entire national education system, for example the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) in New Zealand, or the establishment of bodies which have responsibility for setting and monitoring standards in a specific sector, for example the Higher Education Quality Council (HEQC) in the United Kingdom and the Hong Kong Council for Academic Accreditation (HKCAA). This movement has created a tension in some higher education systems where the inclination is towards the English model with quality assurance based mainly on peer review. In New Zealand, the universities as a whole have so far resisted opting into the Qualifications Framework and the associated system of Unit Standards. However, there have recently been experiments where standards-based assessment has been applied in a university setting (see for example

Purvis, 1993 for a report on the project to develop standards based assessment in the English Department at the University of Otago).

In New Zealand, the universities set up their own quality monitoring body in 1994, the New Zealand Universities Academic Audit Unit (AAU). They have stated that “while it may be **desirable** for a product to be exceptional, it is **essential** that the product be what is expected or required. This leads to a definition of quality as meeting or fulfilling requirements, often referred to as **fitness for purpose**” (Woodhouse, 1995, 2.1), Harvey and Green’s (1993) third category. Elements of both the English and French traditions can be identified in this approach. The unit operates in audit mode rather than as an inspectorate and so “does not assume absolute standards, nor a unique approach to quality assurance” (Woodhouse, 1995, 1-1). It is up to each institution to develop its own quality systems and quality assurance processes which will enable it to achieve its stated aims and objectives. As Barnes (1997) says in relation to Massey University, the identification and promulgation of good practice throughout the organisation is an integral part of this process. The AAU then comes to a conclusion about the effectiveness of these as a result of the audit process. Audit panels comprise the Director of the Unit plus a small team drawn from a register of currently employed academics and other people with appropriate experience.

Similar systems are in operation nationally in other parts of the world. For example, in the Netherlands the Dutch Association of Universities began a quality assessment programme based on peer review in 1987 (Acherman, van Welie, & Laan in Teeter & Lozier (Eds.), 1993) and the UK Academic Audit Unit was established in 1990 (Williams in Craft (Ed.), 1992). Bodies such as these have been a response to the demand for more accountability, the drive for more efficiency and effectiveness and the perceived arrogance associated with the notions of academic freedom and autonomy where “none but the expert practitioner was in a position to pass judgement on academic matters” (Williams in Craft (Ed.), 1992, p. 142). Elements of Harvey and Green’s (1993) first and fourth categories can be discerned in these arguments.

Other countries have opted for systems which derive from the French model and use accreditation as an important indicator of quality. Accreditation is “a status granted to an institution or a program within an institution that has been evaluated and found to meet or exceed stated criteria of educational quality” (Bogue & Saunders 1992, p. 31). Often accredited programmes or institutions find it easier to access funding. In the eyes of the public where awareness of other approaches to quality may not be high, it represents a ‘seal of approval’. Like the ISO 9000 Series, it is seen as something that has some standing outside of the institution and it ties in with student desires to have a qualification that has recognition nationally and internationally.

In a climate of accountability in public institutions, an audit process is most important. However, staff often perceive a downside of accreditation and other standards-based assessment or audit systems as being the documentation that is required. “Universities are sinking in a sea of paperwork, as they seek to demonstrate that they have procedures that assure quality. Quality inevitably gets defined in terms of what can be grasped and measured” (Lentell, 1995, p. 124). Lentell goes on to suggest that all too often this leads to the substitution of mechanistic systems for informal self-regulation by professionals - the loss of elements of the traditional English model that were highly valued by academic staff. This change in organisational culture is often difficult for some to accept.

In New Zealand, where the universities are currently adjusting to an audit system, considerable effort has to go into educating staff about the meaning of an audit as well as what is involved in the process itself. It was explained thus during an audit visit at Massey University

Many people have the wrong idea about the process. The aim is to talk about both good processes and weaknesses. An audit is not about finding fault. It is about making sure good practice is universal and documented. Issues or problems identified should be addressed not because of the audit but because of your own concern for quality (Staff, MU Campus News, 1996, p. 1).

Despite what this is saying, the title of the article from which this quote is taken, *Running a ruler over Massey*, probably reflects the more common perception of audits among staff, that is, audits are a process by which institutions and people are judged to see if they are 'measuring up'.

In distance education, accreditation and audit systems are quite common. Some are voluntary, for example the Distance Education and Training Council in the USA established its Accrediting Commission in 1955 and the UK Council for the Accreditation of Correspondence Colleges was established in 1969. Other countries, for example Germany, France and Norway, have legislated for quality control in distance education institutions (Ljosa & Rekkedal, 1995, p. 129).

These two models then, the English and the French, have broadly shaped the structure and culture of higher education institutions and influenced conceptions of quality including how it is defined and assessed. However, there is a discernible shift away from the collegial English model which Paul (1990b) explains:

As universities have become more complex institutions, competing with each other and with the private sector, learning to do more with fewer resources, and having to be much more fiscally accountable and responsible, the collegial model has been increasingly under attack and often abandoned or modified in times of crisis (p. 32).

This process seems to be under way in New Zealand.

2.3 QUALITY IN DISTANCE EDUCATION

Until the end of the 1980s, conceptions of quality in distance education tended to be narrowly focused on pedagogical issues. Even as late as 1991, Nunan (1991) identified this as a fundamental problem in the literature about quality in distance education. He claimed that writers seldom took a comprehensive view of the whole enterprise, tending instead to focus on a particular aspect of distance education. Much of the emphasis was on outputs,

such as the number of graduates produced, or more particularly, on course materials production and delivery processes.

There is an extensive body of literature about how to improve the quality of instructional materials. While the emphasis now is on the application and integration of a range of sophisticated technologies (see, for example, Deegan, 1995; Heath, 1992; Koumi, 1994; Millar, 1993), in the 1980s and early 1990s the concern was with making the best possible use of print materials. Guri (1987), for example, described the complex system of quality control that Everyman's University in Israel applied to its distance education courses where the emphasis was on developing the best possible printed course materials according to preset standards and goals. Thus a quality control approach was taken by adjusting operations to predetermined criteria. This is consistent with Harvey and Green's (1993) second category of quality as perfection or consistency and the notion of excellence as being zero defects, in course materials anyway.

In the 1980s, theories of adult learning greatly influenced the development of distance education and how quality was defined. Such theories have been subsumed into the term andragogy and are frequently contrasted with pedagogy which is usually applied to the classroom based learning of children and adolescents (Knowles, 1970; Coldeway, 1982; Shaw, 1982, 1985). According to adult learning theory, adults learn differently from children. They tend to be self-directed, mature, use their own experiences to problem solve areas of knowledge and need to accommodate learning experiences with the other activities of adult life (Shaw, 1982; Scriven & Ryan, 1994). However, they may have problems of confidence, particularly if they have been away from study for a long time, and, at least initially, require a great deal of reassurance and support with their studies. Thus a 'good' extramural course would ensure that these requirements were met.

Burge (1988) along with others, explored the development of this model into learner centredness and argued that learner interdependence and self-responsibility were important as long as they were coupled with the support and collaboration of educators. An understanding of these issues had an important bearing on the quality of course design. Adequate support systems for distance students and appropriate ways of breaking down the

isolation that they felt from each other, their teachers and the institution were also important quality considerations.

Quality deriving from the learning process has remained a prominent theme in the literature of the late 1980s and early 1990s. For example, Bradbery (1991) argues that the fundamental criterion of quality must be value to the learner which makes the learning process the central concern in issues of quality. He proposes a model of the learning process which has four components:

- Acquiring information.
- Integrating that information into pre-existing schemata.
- Doing something with the information.
- Skill development so that learning is adept and useful.

Bradbery argues that learning takes place in steps within which all four components of the learning process will be necessary. As learners become adept at one step they are ready to move on to the next one. Learning objectives and assessment should be built into each step. A learning hierarchy or network can then be designed. Broadly speaking, this scheme would fit in with a unit standards approach such as the NZQA one in New Zealand.

The emphasis on the process of learning as a central issue of quality in distance education is also consistent with the ideas of Paul (1990a) who defines institutional success in terms of producing independent, self-directed learners. He claims that the process of interaction between students, the materials and tutor “produces” the course as much as the course writers do. Thus knowledge is viewed as a process which is in contrast to the Fordist model (see below) where knowledge is seen more as a commodity.

Like Paul, Viljoen, Holt and Petzall (1990) also focus their conception of quality on the process of interaction between the learner, the materials and the facilitator, highlighting some distinctive aspects of education as a service:

quality is as much determined by the input of the customers as it is by the providers of the experience. Educators can never guarantee that their product will work to a pre-specified level of performance because consumers of the product must play a significant and active role in maximising their learning from the product (p. 503).

These approaches also encapsulate the definition of quality as transformation as they focus on learner enhancement and empowerment (Harvey & Green, 1993).

Viljoen et al.'s research is important because it was one of the first studies in distance education to contend "that quality is a primary means of gaining competitive differential advantage *only if quality is defined by student perceptions*" [italics added] (p. 502). Although the study was confined to a specified section of the MBA market in Australia, its relevance to the distance education market generally is now clear.

The study was qualitative and followed the 1988 intake of Deakin University distance MBA students. It examined their entry level conceptions of management and how these changed with the course; identified and analysed students' educational needs; looked at the interplay between students' educational, personal and professional lives; and identified implications from these for improving the development, delivery and servicing of the programme. Then after two years of study, each participant was asked "What is quality in distance education - what do we have to do to make your learning experience a quality one"? (p. 503). Essentially, the same question was asked of the focus group participants in this study. From students' perceptions, Viljoen et al. constructed a summary, generic framework of quality for the Deakin MBA programme which they divided into Product Quality Criteria and Service Quality Criteria.

Product Quality Criteria

- Performance - course materials must contain relevant up-to-date information
- Durability - materials must be able to withstand robust treatment

- Conformance with Specifications - course materials must contain accurate information and possess few errors
- Features - materials must contain good educational design characteristics
- Image - materials must convey a quality image
- Finish - as for image
- Customisation - design of materials should be such that students are encouraged to learn according to their individual professional needs
- Value for money - the programme should constitute value for money in the management education market

Service Quality Criteria

- Reliability - academic staff must be available when needed
- Responsiveness - all staff must respond quickly and willingly
- Competence - academic staff must have the knowledge and skill to gain the trust and confidence of the students
- Empathy - all staff must understand the individual problems of each student
- Courtesy - staff must have a friendly manner with students
- Efficiency - all student queries must be handled efficiently
- Customisation - choice of elective units allows students to customise their learning
- Value for money - see above

(adapted from Viljoen et al., 1990, p. 504)

From these, a management action framework and a student learning framework were constructed and a value chain analysis conducted.

The research showed that because of the high opportunity cost of study for this group of students, they develop an acute awareness of quality related issues. This finding is probably true for many mature students who study at a distance, especially those in applied faculties such as Business Studies. Viljoen et al. add that

academic institutions should avoid the often whispered view that students have no reference point by which to measure quality, so poor quality programmes will probably not even be noticed if they are delivered with enough gusto and jargon, and surrounded with enough academic mystique! (p. 509)

Such quality-hostile assumptions (Heilpern & Limpert, 1991) militate against quality improvement and customer (student) satisfaction. Viljoen et al. conclude that “The research findings also show quite clearly that the concept of quality needs to be based on the conceptions of the student as much as on the conceptions of the suppliers of the educational goods and services” (1990, p. 509).

By the 1990s, researchers and commentators were beginning to take a much broader view of quality in distance education. Nunan and Calvert (1991), for example, argued that it was time to extend the focus beyond outputs and the ‘how’ of learning to encompass considerations of quality ‘for whom’ and ‘in whose interests’. A conception of quality as fitness for purpose (Harvey & Green, 1993) was emerging. However, The Report of the Project to Investigate Quality and Standards in Distance Education in Australia (Nunan & Calvert, 1992), specifically excluded students and employers as stakeholders, and their views were not sought. In identifying the elements and the indicators of quality and the processes that foster the achievement of quality or its improvement,

the investigation encompassed government policy statements; institutional mission statements, policies and services; the views of academic staff and those providing distance education services in institutions; and the expectations of institutional clients of Distance Education Centres (p. 7).

The 'for whom' and 'in whose interests' was limited, and the researchers recognised this as a constraint on the way in which quality was viewed. They justified their position by saying that to include students "would necessarily involve a larger and more complex study than that already proposed" (p. 73). This provides a graphic example of the reluctance of distance educators to attribute value to students' perceptions of quality, an attitude which is now changing.

From their interviews and discussions with academic and distance teaching support staff, Nunan and Calvert compiled a list of indicators of quality in distance education. These are categorised under policy development and management, staff development, service provision and processes of distance education. The last two are of relevance to this study and include areas such as institutional responsiveness to student enquiries, student receipt of learning materials, technical quality of course materials, lecturer availability to students, assignment marking and monitoring student progress and achievement.

However, about the same time, Henderikx (1992) put forward a three-pronged definition of quality in distance education which reflects the multi-dimensional, holistic nature of it as a concept, and recognises the centrality and importance of various constituents, including students. First, quality is the "intrinsic validity of the product of distance education with regard to fulfilling its academic mission" (p. 34). The academic institution itself has to evaluate whether this has been achieved but it can be assisted in the process by external bodies or independent academic experts. Assessment is based on academic standards but may also include more intuitive evaluations. Second, quality is customer satisfaction achieved by meeting customer expectations. Customers are defined as students and also broadly as society. Courses must therefore not only meet the requisite academic standards but also be driven by market (including student) needs and demands. Third, the technical quality of the product itself must be assured. This is the area of quality in distance education that received so much attention in the 1970s and 1980s (see for example Guri, 1987; Zahlan, 1988).

This broader definition of quality and the recognition that there are different sections of the market who may have different needs and expectations of the same course indicate the need

for cross perceptual and triangulated research strategies. Dean (1995) did this in her study of the distance learning Diploma of Human Resources at Monash University. She surveyed students and employers using a questionnaire developed from loosely structured interviews and found that the concept of quality had important dimensions of product, service and outcomes, and that the relative importance of these varied according to the stakeholder group.

In another study, Lampikoski (1995) surveyed distance education managers, teachers and students to discover “the relative importance they attached to different criteria in terms of their significance in distance education’ (p. 119). While there was a high level of agreement among the three groups, there were also some interesting differences. For example, students rated more highly than managers and teachers the benefits of the course of study to their work situations and in enhancing their career prospects. Another difference was that tutors favoured the integration of new technology into courses much more highly than students.

These two studies in distance education are similar in scope and philosophy to the study reported in this thesis. They recognise the importance of the idea of multiple customers or stakeholders and the different perceptions that they may have of quality. It is important that such differences are recognised and that ways of defining and assessing quality that take account of them are developed. Business management models have the potential to do this and also offer useful frameworks for improving quality. They are discussed in the next chapter.

During the late 1980s and 1990s, more flexible approaches to distance education which have been facilitated by technological developments, have become very popular. A range of interest groups now also have a direct influence on the shape of tertiary education. There are changed funding mechanisms and a proliferation of providers in the distance education market in response to increased industry training and education needs and issues of equity and access. Socio-political issues such as these have redefined tertiary and distance education and have given rise to new ways of defining and assessing quality.

There are two important themes that have arisen from and are a response to these changes and which are central to issues of quality in distance education. They are the rejection of Fordist approaches and the rise of open learning and more flexible approaches in distance education. These coincide with the application of business management models to tertiary education, many of which, while striving for maximum efficiency, also seek to meet stakeholder and customer needs in the most effective way possible.

2.4 REJECTION OF FORDIST MODELS IN DISTANCE EDUCATION

The German scholar, Peters (1983, 1989, 1996) is credited with developing the theory that distance education systems represent an industrialised form of learning. His analysis was first published in German in 1967 (Tait, 1994). Peters argued that not only are the processes of production industrialised but so too are the actual teaching and learning. This Fordist model of distance education is characterised by “strongly bureaucratic procedures ... and [a] commitment to a product development and service paradigm premised on mass production and high volume courses” (Raggatt, 1993, p. 21). Economies of scale are achieved by both the high volume and the limited range of courses available. The long shelf life of courses justifies the care, time and expense that goes into their development. A quality control approach is usual in this type of system where the emphasis is on ensuring that the prespecified standards are reached. This model is epitomised by the British Open University which for many years during the 1970s and 1980s was used as an exemplar of distance education systems. It has been successfully transplanted into other societies, for example the Indira Gandhi National Open University in India and the Open University of the Netherlands.

Since 1991, there has been considerable and contentious debate in the literature about the perceived inadequacy of the Fordist model for the management and delivery of distance education. In particular because this model is relatively cumbersome and bureaucratic and therefore unable to respond quickly to changing market needs, it does not lend itself to flexible and open approaches to learning and may also compromise contemporary

approaches to and definitions of quality. Since 1993 much of the debate has occurred in the journal, *Open Learning*. It is focused on management and has had a strong semantic and philosophical component.

Undoubtedly “there is some confusion over terminology” (Rumble, 1995a, p. 10), particularly the terms Fordism, Neo-Fordism and Post-Fordism. In his three articles, Rumble (1995a; 1995b;1995c) addresses the meaning of these terms in relation to modes of production in distance education (see Table 2.1) especially at the UK Open University. He refutes the allegation that the Open University is essentially a Fordist institution and asserts that its production systems are more flexible and less bureaucratic and its products more variable than writers such as Raggatt (1993) seem to imply.

Rumble’s first article (1995a) examines the issue of industrialisation and rationalisation in distance education. He points out that not all distance education is industrialised and that the application of the concept of Fordism cannot adequately explain the development of distance education. In his second article, Rumble (1995b) goes to some lengths to argue that the Open University does not have three key features that a Fordist institution would have - a limited number of courses, courses kept in the academic profile for a long time, and large numbers of students on each course. The last of Rumble’s three articles (1995c) is devoted to Post-Fordism. In all three articles, Rumble relies heavily on drawing parallels with the automotive and cycle industries for which he is taken to task by Campion (1996).

Table 2.1: Characteristics of Fordist, neo-Fordist, and post-Fordist modes of production in distance education (based on Campion and Renner)

	Fordist	Neo-Fordist	Post-Fordist
Level of labour	Low	Low	High
- Division of labour	High	High	Low
- Level of de-skilling	High	High	Low
Process variability	Low	High	High
- Vertical integration	Centralised	Central control + local administration	Decentralised
- Mode	Single mode (distance only)	Possibly mixed mode	Integrated distance and on-campus
- Coverage	National	International	Not stated
Product innovation	Low	High	High
- Product life	Long	Short	Short
- Mass market/mass production	High	Low	Low

(Source: Rumble, 1995c, p. 2)

To date, several writers have taken issue with Rumble over a number of his arguments and no doubt the debate will continue. Jarvis (1996), for example, makes the point that “it may be necessary to relocate the discussion so that the Open University is not treated as an exemplar of distance education organisations” (p. 47). There are many different successful distance education systems and organisations in existence. The small scale mixed or dual mode universities, commonly found in Australia, where there has been a large number of small distance education providers, and in New Zealand, where the small national population has not permitted substantial economies of scale, are far less Fordist in their approach than the Open University. However, the benefits of mass production and the economies of scale deriving from long production runs and uniform services have proved attractive to them and parts of their systems, particularly in materials production, are indeed very industrialised.

In Australia, the move to Distance Education Centres (DECs) in 1988 was an attempt to reap some of these benefits. “It is this [Fordist] production paradigm which has in recent years dominated distance education policy in Australia in a period of substantial restructuring” (Campion, 1989, p. 60). It is interesting that the DECs were effectively abandoned in 1993 in favour of the Open Learning Agency of Australia (Stevens, 1994, p. 313) which offers considerably more flexibility to the consumers of distance education as well as improved access. This development in distance education will be more fully discussed in the next section.

In an earlier article, Raggatt (1993) contends that new entrants to the field of distance education are opting for a Post-Fordist approach, moving away from high volume, standardised products and developing niche markets. He argues that open and distance learning will become more consumer-driven and that “there are also clear indications of readiness to research the needs of potential customers - companies and individuals - and to provide the client-centred services that are wanted” (p. 21). The quality approach taken in such a system centres on meeting customer or end-user needs, fitness for purpose, and requires a high degree of flexible specialisation. It is entirely consistent with the customer-focused business management models that are now being applied in tertiary education. In

an argument that has focused almost entirely on the supply side it is refreshing to see an awareness of demand. Institutions such as Massey University, which are less industrialised in their approach than many, are well placed to meet this challenge.

Campion (1996) takes issue with Rumble for another reason, arguing that he appears to believe that “the conceptual framework related to Post-Fordism is a dangerous poison” (p. 41). He is critical of Rumble’s willingness to take a judgmental approach to the application of the conceptual frameworks associated with Fordism, Neo-Fordism and particularly Post-Fordism to distance education, rather than using them to inform the debate about appropriate structures for distance education. Campion believes that the focus of debates such as these should be to “formulate suitable goals for university education in the 21st century in the light of new technologies and new cultural contexts, and then considering what type of institutional framework would be best devised to meet these ends.” He goes on to suggest that it might even be the type of small scale dual mode institutions that operate in Australia and New Zealand. The debate about Fordism in distance education, he concludes, has at least permitted consideration of a range of options for the future.

In an earlier article Campion (1993) also expressed concern that the debate should be about what a good university should be, rather than how to beat off the competition. “What place quality assurance ... if we cannot articulate what it is about university education that sets it apart?” (p. 60). These philosophical issues have increasingly tended to take second place to the more pragmatic concerns associated with a competitive market and the reduction in funding faced by many tertiary institutions. Nevertheless they are important, and Campion does well to remind us of them.

Peters (1996) has also taken issue with Rumble’s interpretation of his notion that distance education is the most industrialised form of education. Peters claims that Rumble has misconceived the industrialisation of distance education as referring to the working processes in the institution only and not to the actual teaching and learning. It is Peters’ contention that any education system which cannot take place without technical mediation (including letters) and a certain amount of planning and administration, is industrialised. He refutes the argument that face-to-face education, especially with large classes, is also

industrialised claiming that when the communication structure is oral, it is influenced by reciprocal expectations and group dynamics. "The oral interaction process ... is... clearly pre-industrial - even if it takes place in a highly industrialised environment" (p. 53). Thus conventional teaching can be compared to the artisan phase of production i.e. the learner has to be in the right place at the right time to benefit from the instruction.

Through rationalisation and mechanisation, however, the best teachers of a subject can be employed to create teaching materials which can be sent to thousands or tens of thousands of learners, who use the 'product' at a time and place of their choosing. Mass production, together with the ensuing division of labour and quality control familiar in the industrialisation process; becomes the hallmark of distance education, which offers opportunities to wider and wider numbers just as the industrialised production of books and cars did (Tait, 1994, p. 32).

Peters points out that traditional, face-to-face forms of academic teaching are proving remarkably resistant to industrialisation. Although he attributes this to the tenacity of university teachers in holding on to them, there is plenty of evidence that the market also values them. For example, the popularity of block mode at Massey University, which is a combination of substantial face-to-face interaction and extramural study materials, supports this.

In support of a Post-Fordist model, Raggatt (1993) identifies and discusses some forces of change which undermine the viability of Fordist approaches to distance education. The rapidity of change in some professional and academic areas means that courses or parts of courses can become out of date very quickly. This is particularly so for courses that are affected by changes in national policy or law or that deal with new technologies. Where attempts are made to integrate new material into existing courses, this may create design and pedagogical problems and compromise the quality of the learning experience for the students. This means either that courses should be designed so that these kinds of changes can be incorporated without compromising quality, or that providers should be able to produce new courses quickly and easily utilising the range of high quality desk-top publishing technologies that are now available, or both.

Related to this is the emergence of new academic areas, a point also made by Jarvis (1996), particularly in education, health and business, which have an emphasis on applied theory and professional development. These niche markets often require specialised courses which

may be externally funded, bringing welcome and increasingly necessary entrepreneurial income to the university... They do not fit easily into university planning cycles and approval systems. Their time scale for development and production is typically short, arising from a need to meet the requirements of a sponsor or to meet new professional demands before other providers do (p. 24).

Course delivery may be 'mixed mode', a face-to-face component taking place at weekends or in blocks, supplemented by high quality, low cost course materials and supported by other media such as computer or video conferencing. This requires a flexibility and responsiveness on the part of the provider that can be stifled by inflexible and unwieldy bureaucratic structures and systems. As Raggatt points out, desktop publishing technology can be integrated with market information to facilitate just-in-time production which also avoids storage costs. Thus a high degree of product innovation is required with a short product life cycle. This does not lend itself to mass production and is in line with a Post-Fordist approach.

Like the New Zealand Universities' Academic Audit Unit, Raggatt defines quality as "fitness for purpose". This means providing relevant, up-to-date materials for students using open and flexible approaches to teaching and learning, which meet the needs of a range of stakeholders including students, professional groups, sponsors, academics and the community. It may also involve partnerships or strategic alliances with other professional bodies or providers. Many new contenders in the open learning/distance market are doing just this. For example Black (1995) describes an initiative taken by the Centre for Labour Market Studies, University of Leicester, UK, to provide a distance learning MSc in Training which was "launched within one year of identifying a demand from people engaged professionally in training management for an internationally recognised qualification" (p. 37). Course content is multidisciplinary and the course was designed in

consultation with practitioners and policy makers. High quality course materials are both written and prepared for the printer by the Centre staff.

Individual members of staff have their own specific areas of responsibility and expertise, boundaries are diffuse and information is shared and policy decisions are made on a group basis. This facilitates rapid decision making in response to changes or new developments (Black, 1995, p. 37).

Courses are usually revised on a two year cycle but can be done annually. This is an example of a Post-Fordist approach as described by Raggatt (1993):

Decisions would be devolved to Faculties and Schools working within cost limits and within the broad objectives set by the university but they would otherwise be free to manage their resources. Responsibility for quality control would also be at unit level. Production would be undertaken in multi-skilled teams which would buy in additional specialist skills as necessary. It is the approach being adopted by the new wave of distance learning competitors unfettered by a Fordist past (p. 30).

This approach also enables the provider to stay close to the customer and other stakeholders, respond better to their on-going needs and, where appropriate, involve them in the course design process. However, it requires big changes in the way that work is organised in many tertiary education institutions along with changes in organisational culture. If organisations are leaner, flatter, and less hierarchical they are able to be more responsive. But an implication of this is that traditional career paths change with a movement away from bureaucratic careers with a high degree of structure and predictability towards flexible careers. This involves considerably less security and a much higher degree of risk for many employees, especially in the middle management levels, as they in turn are required to be flexible and work in new ways.

As alluded to already, changes in course design are also required but these are facilitated by the range of technologies now available. The modular design of course materials permits considerable flexibility and can also enable customisation and individualisation to be built

into programmes in order to meet the needs of individuals or specific sector groups - an important component of quality.

However, technology can be used as another means of industrialising distance education and delivering mass education. For example, China has used television as a very effective way of achieving mass education of its population. Some of the newer technologies such as CD Rom, the Internet and email allow considerable interaction of tutors and students and students and students and have much more potential for customisation. They also tend to appeal to governments as after the initial financial outlay, they are cheap to run because users pay. This is sometimes equated with improving quality: "Australian government policy recognises that gains in teaching quality are more dependent on the sensible and creative use of technology than on diminishing student-teacher ratios" (Bottomley, Calvert, Jakupec, & Nicoll 1995, p. 43).

What is clear is that models such as these should be viewed as ideal types. The application of them to the management and delivery of distance education can assist understanding and development. Elements of Fordism, Neo-Fordism and Post-Fordism can be observed within the same institution and this may be entirely appropriate in order for the organisation to meet its goals and objectives. However, in common with many industries in both the manufacturing and service sectors, there has been a general move away from Fordist models in distance education and this has coincided with the movement towards open learning - each facilitates the development of the other. Both require more flexible approaches to the management and organisation of distance education production, delivery and support systems which in turn facilitates customisation and individualisation. Identifying individual learning styles is consistent with adult learning. More open access to higher education has seen a growing emphasis on allowing students to have much more control over their own learning.

2.5 OPEN LEARNING AND MORE FLEXIBLE APPROACHES IN DISTANCE EDUCATION

Open learning has become extremely popular in the 1990s and the philosophy and methodologies that underpin the concept are discussed in this section. The term itself tends to have positive connotations and is usually associated with the ideas of equity and access. This is in contrast to the term distance education which has often been viewed as second chance and/or 'second-rate' education. It is noteworthy that in this decade many former distance education providers, associations and publications have been renamed to reflect the new emphasis on open learning.

Before the Rumble-Lewis debate of 1989-91 in *Open Learning*, the terms distance education and open learning had been used vaguely and often interchangeably. This led to confusion and misunderstanding. The debate did much to clarify the meaning of open learning and to distinguish it from distance education. As Rumble put it, distance education is a "means by which education is achieved" while open learning refers to "the objectives and character of the educational process" (1989, p. 28).

Field (1994) says that open learning refers to both an educational philosophy and to techniques used for delivering knowledge and skills. These techniques are "characterised by the use of resource-based teaching and training, often associated with the use of new communications media" (p. 7). As a philosophy, open learning is sometimes confused with open access to education. The idea of opening university education to those without the required entry qualifications was encapsulated in the open universities, most notably the UK Open University, which were established for the purpose of 'opening up' access to higher education. This was achieved using the distance education mode which eliminated the need for regular face-to-face tuition and proved to be extremely cost efficient. However, the notion of accessibility was soon expanded:

Whereas initially, open-learning institutions provided opportunities for independent learners who lacked the formal qualifications or availability to attend conventional colleges and universities, they are increasingly serving a broader cross-section of the

population, including many who would not previously have contemplated independent learning. This is even more the case in the developing world, where distance education has become a primary response to mass demands for higher education and mainly serves the 18-24 year-old age group (Paul, 1990b, p. 82).

The Open University's 'openness' in relation to access is questionable, given that some students have to wait over a year to gain admission and that many of these withdraw before a place becomes available (Paul, 1990b, p. 79). However, the notion of open learning now encapsulates a much broader philosophy than simply the idea of open access.

Open learning is predicated on a learner-centred philosophy which recognises and caters for individuals' different learning styles. It is committed to providing "learning opportunities which endeavour to minimise the constraints on an individual's learning needs" (Scriven & Ryan, 1994, p. 482) and is characterised according to a number of dimensions:

1. **Accessibility.** This refers to helping students overcome barriers associated with entry qualifications, time, physical location, financial constraints, personal characteristics and social justice.
2. **Flexibility.** This refers to frequent admission periods, student self-pacing of courses and a range of optional support services.
3. **Learner control over content and structure.** In the optimum case individual learning contracts would apply where the student negotiates what he or she wishes to learn and the assessment methods to be used.
4. **Delivery systems.** Students can choose the delivery systems and learning processes most appropriate to their individual requirements.
5. **Accreditation.** Students should be able to transfer credit between institutions, use challenge exams to get recognition for prior learning (RPL), and receive credit for experiential learning (adapted from Paul, 1990b, pp. 46-49).

These characteristics of openness are often assessed on a continuum by asking the questions who? what? how? where? and when? in relation to the delivery of educational programmes (Jakupec & Nicoll, 1994; Walker & McIlroy, 1994; Freeman, 1990; Lewis, 1986, 1990). Institutions can therefore be ranked for relative openness and closure. There are still very few providers of tertiary education which would be at the extreme end of openness on all these dimensions.

Open learning then is very responsive to the expressed needs and wants of learners. It implies placing the learner rather than the provider at the core of educational practice. It is therefore consistent with customer-focused approaches to quality. In addition, because it accepts the importance of acknowledging and building on adult experience as part of the learning process, it supports Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and acknowledges that academics in a university are not the sole repositories of knowledge (Scriven & Ryan, 1994).

Scriven and Ryan go on to argue that because of these characteristics, open learning is particularly well suited to continuing professional education - an expanding, very important and lucrative market in tertiary education (see previous section on Post-Fordism). It permits a high level of relevance in terms of content and the individual's needs and level of knowledge, and RPL can assure learners credit in terms of skills and competencies already gained. Open learning uses a high media mix which takes account of different learning styles. This is important to many professionals who use complex technology daily and feel comfortable with it as a learning medium.

Distance education has been credited with offering the type of flexibility consistent with an open approach to learning. Learners may study in their own place and at their own pace, often have a great deal of control over media, and increasingly have a much wider choice of courses from a variety of suppliers. There are now a number of consortia, for example the National Universities Degree Consortium in the USA, the Open Learning Agency in Canada, and the Open Learning Agency of Australia, which combine the efforts of a number of suppliers to offer degree and diploma programmes. Learners have a smorgasbord of offerings from which to choose. The concept of distance education is

therefore changing and becoming more 'open' and indeed some commentators, for example Miller (1993), are arguing that distance education technologies will become the mainstream. Computer and video conferencing and networking facilitates more responsive programmes and flexibility and this can help to remove unnecessary barriers to learning. This perhaps is what really characterises open learning rather than the concession of academic control.

However, many distance education programmes remain highly structured and locked into traditional ways of deciding and designing curriculum including methods of assessment. There has also been considerable criticism of and a reluctance to accept some of the principles of open learning on the part of some academics. For example, Jakupec and Nicoll (1994) say this:

...the public concept of open learning, as a do-it-yourself form of learning, leads to an impression that is dangerous because it devalues or subverts the basis of the traditional mechanisms for the social construction of knowledge and the traditional legitimisation by society of the expertise of the educator and of the academic. It does so by claiming, by implication, that an individual *can* adequately *a priori* decide what, where, when and how to learn and how to demonstrate what he or she has learned, and, perhaps most importantly, even *what is to be learned*. In so doing, the concept of open learning trivialises knowledge and makes the educator and the academic redundant (p. 229).

This demonstrates the threat that open learning poses to some academics because it erodes their authority which in the university system has been derived from their personal and professional education and expertise. Such staff may dominate university governance and help to conserve a more traditional approach to programme delivery (Paul 1990b). Paul also points out that many students too have very conventional expectations about higher education and are unwilling to accept open learning approaches. Other concerns relate to the never-ending academic year which may be very demoralising for staff and effectively erode their research time, and fiscal factors:

Given that open-learning systems are often justified in terms of their cost efficiency and effectiveness, there may be a tendency to cut back on resources required for student support, so that a critical component of the commitment to open learning, support for the individual student, is compromised (Paul, 1990b, p. 52).

The move to more open delivery systems for tertiary education is also strongly linked to socio-political imperatives. The drive towards access, equity and equality in tertiary education mirrors changes in the wider social context. Funding bases have changed. A proportion of funding in many countries has become linked to some of these social justice criteria. In addition, tertiary institutions have increasingly to find some of their own funding from other sources. This has meant that programmes have to be provided which meet the needs and requirements of the funders and this in turn has meant that many institutions have jumped on the open learning bandwagon.

Whether these social justice objectives have been achieved is questioned by some. Field (1996) for example, makes the connection between education and consumerism. "Education - and open learning in particular - was bound to be affected profoundly by the growth of consumer culture. The basic resources required to participate in lifelong learning - money and time - are available in larger amounts to more people than at any previous period" (p. 56). However, as these resources are largely concentrated in the hands of the middle strata of society, open learning functions as a means of solidifying the position of these groups and could therefore be interpreted as a means of social exclusion. The point is also made by Walker and McIlroy (1994) in relation to the UK Open University: "The primary objective in establishing the Open University was to break down traditional barriers to university education for the 'working classes' ... It was, in fact, the middle classes who were attracted to this new option and motivated to succeed" (p. 502).

What are the implications for quality definition and assessment that stem from an open learning approach? Clearly some of the dimensions of openness can be objectively and independently assessed, for example, admission qualifications of students, the provisions made for and numbers of special needs students enrolled, the range of media utilised. However, some of the common performance indicators applied to universities may be very

misleading if applied in an open learning context. In relation to success rates, for example, Paul (1990b) points out that “liberal extension and suspension policies which allow students to buy extra time for the completion of their courses may penalise other students waiting for a course place and may reduce success rates by tacitly encouraging procrastination” (p. 52). Withdrawal rates can also be misleading. Adult students studying in open learning or distance education modes are frequently very busy people who have to fit study alongside their other roles and responsibilities at home, at work and in the community. Their withdrawal rates are usually considerably higher than full-time, on-campus students. This should therefore be factored in when calculating completion rates.

It has been suggested by Paul (1990b) that two important and appropriate but more difficult to measure indicators of success in open learning systems are the postgraduation performance of students and the degree to which they develop independent learning skills. Miller (1993) and Harvey and Green (1993) refer to this as the ‘empowered student’, able to control their own learning. In a system based on a learner-centred philosophy, where so much control is vested in the hands of the learner, the most significant assessment of quality must come from the recipients of the ‘product’. It is this very aspect that troubles many working in distance and open learning as they see their own control, especially over curriculum issues being eroded and their roles as educators changing. Much of the debate about whether or not students are ‘customers’ and the role of stakeholders in tertiary education highlights these issues.

There is also a perception in some quarters that too much influence on the definition and measurement of quality is being exerted by groups outside the learning process. This was voiced at an international conference on quality in open and distance learning at Cambridge in 1993: “there was strong agreement among delegates that the measures of quality must be defined by educators and learners, not solely by stakeholders outside of the learning process” (Brindley, 1994, p. 49). For measures of quality in tertiary education to be appropriate they must meet the needs and expectations of all the important stakeholder groups including learners.

2.6 CONCLUSION

This chapter has examined the concept of quality in higher education and looked at the two broad management models, namely the English and the French, commonly found throughout the world in higher education which have influenced the interpretation and assessment of quality. It has been shown that in distance education, rather narrow conceptions of quality where the provider was placed at the core of educational practice, are being replaced by learner-centred, open and flexible approaches which are more responsive to students' needs. Distance education has also become more market driven in response to different funding mechanisms and rapidly changing training and education requirements in industry and the professions. Partnerships between industry clients and educational suppliers often require a rapid response and customised, high quality courses designed for niche markets. Long life, standardised, mass produced courses are less relevant in this environment which has resulted in Post-Fordist approaches emerging in the production and delivery of distance education programmes.

These changes make higher education and distance education in particular well suited to some of the quality management models which have developed in business and industry. The literature in relation to this is discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3: THE APPLICATION OF BUSINESS MANAGEMENT MODELS TO HIGHER EDUCATION

3.1 INTRODUCTION

There is now a large body of literature which explores the application of business and industry management models to higher education. This includes an increasing number which specifically apply some of these models to distance education and/or open learning (for example Freeman 1991; McIlroy & Walker, 1993; Murgatroyd, 1993; Lampikoski, 1995). In the main, most writers have focused on a theoretical approach but a few report original research (see for example Bell & Shieff, 1990; Murgatroyd, 1993; Athiyaman & O'Donnell, 1994; Dean, 1995; McIlroy, 1995; Owlia & Aspinwall, 1996).

Although the application of these models has been widespread, their popularity has not been universal. As early as 1987, Irving expressed the opinion that there was no proof that pursuing business management principles such as efficiency, accountability and contestability in education would raise educational standards. Baldwin (1994) is strongly critical of TQM (total quality management) and its acceptance by some universities: "How is it that a conceptual system based on quasi-religious faith and zeal can achieve relatively widespread acceptance in institutions which are supposedly based on scepticism, questioning and scientific testing of evidence?" (p. 135). Others take issue with particular aspects of business approaches which they deem to be inappropriate for education. A good example of this is the definition of students as customers. A more extreme position is taken by some who believe that the drivers behind such approaches are hostile political ones which should be resisted at all costs. A new Head of Department at Massey University had this to say:

There are hostile political forces which are seeking to marketise education. Teachers need to be well prepared to defend educational values and defend their

profession and the state education system against some of its current critics, particularly the free marketeers who seek to privatise education (Staff, Massey Focus, 1996, p. 16).

However, irrespective of an alleged political stance, business management models continue to be applied to tertiary education. They have a particular appeal to administrators as they tend to emphasise maximising efficiency and effectiveness and require a high degree of accountability and are thus consistent with the conception of quality as value for money (Harvey & Green, 1993). However, they have a number of other benefits, including a strong focus on understanding and meeting customer and stakeholder needs (quality as fitness for purpose), a concern with continuous process improvement, and an emphasis on assessment and measurement. For these reasons, one particular quality management model, total quality management (TQM), has received a great deal of attention in the literature about improving quality in higher education and merits a brief discussion. The remainder of this chapter focuses on the strengths and weaknesses of this approach, including the necessity to define customers, and comes to some conclusions.

3.2 CHARACTERISTICS OF TQM (TOTAL QUALITY MANAGEMENT)

Quality systems in business and industry have evolved through four fairly discrete stages (Dale & Plunkett, 1990). These reflect the shift over the past two to three decades from a focus on producer-based to consumer-based conceptions of quality, and mirror the shift in distance education from placing the provider to placing the learner at the core of educational practice. They are:

- Inspection which is simply an-after-the-fact action which identifies faulty or defective products;
- quality control which is a reactive process involving the use of statistical techniques for measuring the quality of products against prespecified criteria or standards and passing rejects for scrap or rework;

- quality assurance which is a proactive process where the emphasis is on prevention of problems and defects, ‘getting it right the first time’ and assuring end-users that the product or service supplied will meet stated or implied needs, usually by establishing documented procedures often based on national or international standards such as the ISO 9000 Series;
- TQM which, while it may incorporate all of the above, is based on a general philosophy of involving all employees in the achievement of quality objectives by using operational statistical techniques, group problem solving and on-going employee education and training. It emphasises relationships with customers and suppliers and has a primary aim of continuous improvement which should help to reduce costs.

(adapted from Dale & Plunkett, 1990; Dawson & Palmer, 1995).

The term TQM is often used interchangeably with TQC (total quality control) and TQS (total quality service). As Dawson and Palmer (1995) point out, all three are very similar, the only real difference being one of emphasis. TQC has largely been applied in the manufacturing sector and focuses on the use of statistical techniques, while TQS is TQM redefined to take account of the special characteristics of service organisations. TQM has now even transmogrified as TQE (total quality education) where it is defined as “an educational culture characterised by increased customer satisfaction through continuous improvements, in which all employees and students actively participate” (Dahlgaard, Kristensen, & Kanji, 1995, p. 445).

Notwithstanding these changes in emphasis according to industry sector, TQM can be broadly defined as a philosophy of organisational change (Dawson & Palmer, 1995). It has a number of key themes which if followed, it is argued, should result in improved performance and eventually, substantial cost savings:

- A customer focus which involves meeting the needs and expectations of both internal and external customers.
- Employee involvement and the participation of everyone.

- Continuous process improvement.
- Teamwork.
- Partnerships with suppliers.
- Measurement and evaluation.
- Management commitment and leadership.
- Education and training.

Many of these themes can be recognised as drivers in higher education today, so it is not surprising that TQM has been embraced as an appropriate management model, echoing the acceptance of it in both the manufacturing and service sectors generally.

3.3 TQM IN HIGHER EDUCATION

While TQM has great appeal, it requires a systematic, focused, long-term institution-wide effort in order to succeed. There are now many reported accounts of successful TQM programmes operating in higher education institutions, and two of the best documented are by Spanbauer (1992, 1995) at Fox Valley Technical College and Coate (1990) at Oregon State University.

Spanbauer (1995) identifies and discusses the key elements of TQM in education which are represented in Figure 3.1. His analysis reiterates the TQM principle that customer focus must be the first priority. Thus customer service is the central element of his model, with all other elements impinging on and being directed towards it.

Figure 3.1: Key Elements of TQM in Education



(Source: Spanbauer, 1995, p. 523)

Spanbauer contends that the other key elements must be present to permit the focus on the customer. Strong, visionary, committed leadership which encourages involvement, shared decision making, and teamwork are essential. Traditional hierarchies are replaced with more integrated networks which create an environment more responsive to customer needs. This is consistent with the Post-Fordist management models for distance education discussed in the previous chapter.

Teams use the appropriate TQM methods and tools to collect and manage useful quality data with the aim of improving processes and eliminating the root causes of problems. There are many examples in the literature of higher education institutions which have done this. At Oregon State University for example, 12 critical processes were identified and targeted for improvement. These included admissions, teaching, research, community relations, information services and workforce hiring and development. A 10 step problem solving process is used which provides a common technique and language for process

improvement. "It begins with the customer [internal and/or external], focuses on root causes/barriers to improvement, and ensures that decisions and actions are based on real data" (Coate, 1990, p. 98). Flowcharts, affinity, spider and fishbone diagrams are some of the tools that have been applied. Marked process improvements have been achieved.

Heverly and Parker (1993) describe how Delaware County Community College (USA) used Hoshin or Breakthrough Planning to integrate strategic planning into the daily work of all units in the College. Sapp and Temares (1993) used focus groups to clarify customer (student) needs in a number of areas relating to student life on campus. A number of improvements were made as a result of this research. Williams (1993), at the University of Kansas, showed how using flowcharting techniques to simplify a very complex process, reduced data collection time by more than 40%.

On-going staff education and training ensures that staff have the skills necessary to do their jobs and that they are up-to-date with changes and developments in their field. There is a commitment to the on-going career development of individuals. Staff are also trained in the tools and techniques of TQM (Spanbauer, 1995).

Educational organisations which have these elements present, as well as customer focus as their first priority, will also have achieved a healthy and appropriate organisational climate. Spanbauer (1995) reports impressive gains in student learning at Fox Valley after six years as assessed by graduate placement in job-related occupations, employer satisfaction and student transfer of credit; improved efficiencies in service departments and productivity gains in the classroom; and dramatic improvements in organisational climate, especially in relation to customer focus.

However, in the process of implementing TQM, particularly in achieving a customer focus, there are a number of institutional barriers that may need to be overcome.

3.3.1 Barriers to TQM in higher education institutions

Lewis and Smith (1994) identify some structural, cultural and linguistic factors which militate against the successful implementation of TQM or any institution-wide quality improvement initiatives in higher education, particularly in universities.

The first structural barrier is the division between administrative and academic functions which creates a dual organisational structure making it difficult to develop a mutually supporting system with shared mission, vision and values. The cultural characteristics of these two groups are also very different. In dual mode universities which engage in both internal and extramural teaching, there is often a real opportunity to break down this barrier as there may be considerable blurring between the academic and administrative functions. However, the second structural factor of extensive divisionalisation may militate against this as loyalty to the discipline and/or department tends to over-ride loyalty to the institution. The third structural factor is fragmented leadership with a division of responsibility where the CEO focuses on external issues, abdicating the leadership role within the institution.

In addition, there are a number of cultural factors inhibiting the successful adoption of TQM in institutions of higher education. These include the beliefs that they are different from other social institutions and, because they are purveyors of knowledge, they already practise quality and should be exempt from further assessment and evaluation. Related to this is the rejection of the notion of continuous improvement. There is a common belief within academic circles that quality has already been achieved and is being practised. Other factors are the emphasis that is placed on individual achievement, and reward systems that reinforce this rather than team or group performance. A further inhibiting cultural factor is the belief that because universities are based on a culture of collegiality, high levels of participation already exist and there is no need to develop a high involvement culture.

Finally, the language of quality management can also inhibit quality improvement efforts in universities and is part of the cultural change that is required for quality improvement programmes to succeed. Baldwin (1994) views this as part of the attempt to ‘colonize’ university culture with a mix of the interrelated cultures of business, industry and advertising. Terms such as ‘control’, ‘management’, ‘deployment’, ‘standardisation’, ‘variation’, ‘stakeholders’, ‘market’ and even TQM itself, can be anathema to academics, especially those in more traditional faculties such as Humanities and Science. But the term that seems to cause the most dissension is ‘customer’, and in particular, the conception of students as customers. As a customer focus is at the core of TQM and most quality improvement strategies, this is a critical issue.

3.4 CUSTOMERS AND STAKEHOLDERS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The notions of customers and stakeholders in higher education are crucial because quality definition and assessment depends on correctly identifying their needs and expectations, and providing programmes that meet them. This applies to research and community activities as well as teaching. There is now widespread acceptance and use of the term stakeholders in tertiary education. Most would accept that there are many groups in society who are “materially concerned in [education’s] welfare” (Sykes, 1976, p. 1117). Stakeholders include the government which provides a significant level of funding for tertiary education, employers, parents, employees, suppliers, students and society in general which includes the local communities in which tertiary education institutions are located.

Lindsay (1994), who is resistant to the use of the word customer in higher education, distinguishes between “internal stakeholders or direct participants (for example students and staff) and the external stakeholders who are affected indirectly, obtain benefits, or bear the costs without direct involvement with the institution or program” (p. 67). Some authors, for example Owlia and Aspinwall (1996) and Spanbauer (1995) view all groups not as stakeholders but as customers. Others, such as Vroeijenstijn (1990) talk of “various

interested parties each of whom defines quality in accordance with the objectives they set themselves” (p. 32). He sees the ‘customer’ as commerce and industry, while the student is a student. Still others, such as Hawkrige (1995) and Harvey and Green (1993), prefer to talk of consumers which includes students and other stakeholders listed above.

Wenmoth (1994) explores the notion of customers in public services such as education and concludes that in order to manage quality, customers should be defined as the primary beneficiaries of the service. This allows providers to focus on maximising the benefits to customers through refining the service delivery process. Thus in education students are the customers and all other interested parties are either secondary beneficiaries or stakeholders. However, Rosenberg (1995) cautions against any approach that focuses primarily on this one group of customers i.e. students, as teaching is but one of the functions of a university. It runs the risk of overemphasising teaching at the expense of research and other contributions to the community and society.

There now seems to be fairly widespread acceptance that tertiary institutions have customers and that these are primarily students. Underlying this acceptance is the notion of ‘the market’. In many countries, government funding is now based on EFTS (equivalent full-time student) formulae so that as Hawkrige, with reference to the United Kingdom puts it, “Institutions that lose their students lose their funding from government” (1995, p. 86). Students are now also contributing a much greater proportion of their own fees and feel justified in demanding improved levels of service. An exploratory study using focus groups (McIlroy and Walker, 1992), found that extramural students were increasingly defining themselves as customers with consumer rights, a point also made by Crawford (1996) with reference to education in general.

In a recent international study, Owlia and Aspinwall (1996) surveyed faculty members of universities about a range of issues relating to quality in higher education. Respondents were asked to rank different groups according to their importance as customers. Given the somewhat limited nature of the study, the preliminary results indicate that students were

perceived as the most important customers, followed by employers, society/government, faculty and families (p. 165). The importance of internal customers was also mentioned, a concept which will be discussed below.

While Owlia and Aspinwall's study indicates acceptance of a customer-oriented definition of quality, the debate continues and really centres on the difficulties of specifying and satisfying customer needs and expectations in higher education. The difficulty also includes who should be defined as customers, and the complexity arising from the dynamic and interactive nature of the student/teacher relationship. Gilbert (1995), while acknowledging the disquiet that many academics feel about referring to students as customers, argues that it is a valid and useful concept with some provisos which highlight these difficulties. First, he contends that

metaphors from the market place such as those evoking the idea of product, customer, commodity or exchange will never do full justice to so rich an intellectual, cognitive and moral transaction. In a rich scholarly environment the distinction between teacher and student itself becomes blurred (p. 16).

To quote Baldwin (1994) “[use of] the term ‘customer’ debases the teacher-student relationship” (p. 136).

Underscoring these objections is the simple, transactional connotation of the word customer associated with the purchase of goods. However, in service industries, the customer-provider relationship is often much more complex than this. In many services, the service cannot take place without the information, knowledge, experience and sometimes the skills that the customer brings to the interaction. This applies to medicine, legal services and, of course, education and is an example of Gummesson's (in Brown et al., 1991) concept of “interactive production” (see Chapter 1). In many professional services, the distinction between customer and provider (student and teacher) becomes blurred. In addition, the customer may be both a supplier and the end product. This is particularly true of education

where it is the coming together of the tutor, the course materials, the supporting services and the capability of the student which determines the quality of the final product.

Furthermore, Gilbert's "scholarly environment" and the "rich intellectual, cognitive and moral transaction" which occurs between student and teacher may be present at post-graduate levels but is something of a 'white rhino' at undergraduate levels i.e. becoming harder and harder to find. In large first and second year courses particularly, pressure of numbers and increasing staff-students ratios may make this kind of traditional rich interaction somewhat Utopian. Given the changing nature and scope of tertiary and distance education, it makes it even more important to be clear what customer requirements are and to ensure that they are being met.

Gilbert's second proviso is that listening to the student as customer should not "subvert the sovereignty of academic judgement in matters of curriculum design... or in matters of student assessment and progression" (p. 16). There is no doubt that this is a sticking point for many academics. With reference to the Open University, Rumble (1995c) has this to say: "The willingness of academics to compromise course design in the light of student (i.e. customer) demand - including customer views on content, modularisation, award structures, choice of media, and teaching and assessment strategies, would be a major departure" (p. 32).

Harvey and Green (1993) take the view that students are often not in a position to be able to specify what is required and that traditionally they opt for what is available to them. This puts tertiary education on a par with most other services. As at a McDonalds restaurant, customers are presented with a predetermined 'menu' from which they make their choice.

However, many researchers and commentators in higher and distance education (see for example, Viljoen, Holt, & Petzell, 1990; Murgatroyd, 1993) contend that building customer defined quality attributes into the design of products and services, increases customer satisfaction. In the services sector generally this has been shown to increase customer

retention and reduce customer defections (Reichheld & Sasser, 1990; Reichheld, 1995). The economic argument associated with this can be attractive to resource constrained higher education institutions - it costs considerably more to recruit new customers than to retain existing ones.

That is not to say that only student views should be taken account of but rather that they should contribute to the way that an institution defines and assesses quality. With distance education this may be particularly pertinent where students are often mature, experienced and have limited time available for their studies. As Viljoen et al. (1990) showed, they may have very clear ideas about their educational needs, and the style of course materials that is most accessible. Lozier and Teeter (1996) develop the idea of the student as co-producer where students do not tell their tutor *what* they want to learn but jointly develop with the tutor *how* they would like to learn and be assessed. Again this could pose difficulties for the distance mode and large classes.

Even with issues of content and curriculum students who are currently working in a field may be able to make worthwhile contributions about what topic areas should be included in a course, particularly in terms of relevance. In this area in particular, wide consultation with appropriate stakeholders/customers such as industry and/or professional groups, experts in the field - academic and other, and people with instructional design expertise may enhance quality. This does not imply conceding academic control to customers or stakeholder groups. However, the process of consultation and gaining information from appropriate sources increases the likelihood of developing products that will satisfy the needs of the market. This is pertinent to Gilbert's final proviso which is that students are not the only customers that universities have and that their needs must be balanced with those of other customers (see also Rosenberg, 1995).

As many writers (for example Gilbert, 1995; Marchese, 1994) point out, the mindset that the notion of customer - especially the student as customer - encourages, is very important as it can result in greatly improved levels of service. Under a TQM approach customers are

defined not only in terms of external end users and groups, but also as any individual or group within the organisation who receives a product or service (McIlroy & Walker, 1993). This is the concept of the internal customer or NOAC - next operation as customer (Denton, 1992) - which helps to focus attention on processes. Everyone within a higher education institution receives work from someone else. For instance, an instructional designer may receive draft extramural study material from an academic, who after transforming it in some way may hand it back to the academic for further work. It follows then that each person or department/unit has suppliers on whom it relies for its work. Most of them will be internal. Viewing work in this way facilitates an holistic approach which allows staff to see how the process works and how the various pieces of it fit together to make up the whole (Coate, 1990). This in turn can help to break down the barriers caused by excessive divisionalisation (Lewis & Smith, 1994), enhance communication, encourage teamwork and lead to process improvements (Coate, 1990, Spanbauer, 1995).

From the point of view of the student customer, the learning experience includes all of the actions that occur from their first point of contact with the institution to the time that they leave. This involves a chain of internal customers and suppliers, networked together in various processes, with their energies focused together on the ultimate customer, in this case the student (Murgatroyd, 1993).

A customer focus then is the first priority when TQM is applied in education, as well as being the key to success. Once customers have been identified their needs and expectations should be established. These can then be built into the design of courses, and existing processes can be targeted for improvement.

3.5 ESTABLISHING CUSTOMER NEEDS AND EXPECTATIONS

A number of studies are reported in the literature which investigate customer or stakeholder needs and expectations of university courses and programmes. The studies conducted by Viljoen, Holt and Petzall, 1990; Nunan and Calvert, 1991; Dean, 1995; and Lampikoski, 1995, with distance education programmes, have already been discussed in Chapter 2. All of them identified dimensions or criteria for quality as specified by one or more customer or stakeholder groups.

Three other studies are reported in the literature which apply the SERVQUAL scale of Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1985) to higher education. The SERVQUAL scale is based on Parasuraman et al.'s gap theory which suggests that the difference between customer expectations and perceptions of a service determines judgements about quality. The scale is organised according to Parasuraman et al.'s five dimensions of service quality, tangibles, reliability, assurance, responsiveness and empathy which have been distilled down from their original 10 dimensions. In a study of the MBA programme at Auckland University, Bell and Shieff (1990) found that while Parasuraman et al.'s original 10 generic dimensions were generally relevant, they were not specifically suited to analysis of quality in a business school. In another study conducted by Athiyaman and O'Donnell (1994) at Charles Sturt University in Australia, the SERVQUAL instrument was adapted so that it was more appropriate for the higher education context. The third study (Ford, Joseph & Joseph, 1993) reported a comparative study using SERVQUAL with undergraduate business students in the USA and New Zealand. Again, this study was limited as it focused on the service aspects of a university education and not on learning and teaching. Thus it did not take account of very important dimensions of quality in an educational setting.

The findings from these three studies reflect the more general findings of Cronin and Taylor (1992) in relation to measuring quality in service industries, i.e. that scale items that define service quality in one industry may be different in another. Cronin and Taylor therefore recommend that managers and researchers investigate the individual dimensions of quality

relevant to their own industries from the perspective of the appropriate customer and stakeholder groups.

Another interesting approach to establishing customer expectations and then building them into the product design is reported by Murgatroyd (1993). He used quality function deployment (QFD) or the House of Quality in the design of a post-graduate distance learning course at Athabasca University, Canada. QFD was originally developed for use in the manufacturing sector but is now increasingly being applied in the service sector including education. Primarily, its aim is to meet customer expectations while at the same time achieving the operational efficiencies required by the organisation in the design of products or services. It therefore involves collecting a considerable amount of data from customers as well as having correct information about the institution's capabilities.

A 'house of quality' is constructed which contains a number of rooms. The WHATs room is what customers expect. In this case, students identified up-to-date resources, interactive learning, challenging material, contact with academic, fast turnaround, clear feedback, clear assignments, explanation of progress and transferability. The HOWs room is a statement of how the design team can meet these requirements through the process of course design and delivery. The RATING room uses data collected from students to show how well the University is meeting these student requirements. The WHATs versus the HOWs room is expressed as a matrix and asks the designers to assess, using a three point scale, how strongly a HOW meets the need expressed by students. In the DIFFICULTY room the design team rates how difficult it will be for the organisation to meet student expectations. The DESIGN TARGET room identifies the measurable targets for each of the HOWs; the ASSESSMENT room looks at how much value is added to learners' experience by each of the HOWs based on data from students; the IMPORTANCE room is the designers' ratings of the importance of specific design components; the DESIGN DIFFICULTY room is a calculation of the relationship between design importance and organisational difficulty; the HOWs versus the HOWs "shows the interrelationship of design features" (p. 41) based on

students' perceptions of the connections, and finally, the IMPROVEMENT ON EXISTING DESIGNS room looks at the direction of improvement (p. 40-42).

Murgatroyd identifies four benefits of using QFD. First, it requires a design team to "systematically examine their own knowledge and that of their customers... and requires designers to use customer input in making design choices and decisions... Second, it clearly specifies the benchmarks for success... Third, it forces a design team to recognise the design assumptions it is making and the interrelationships between them... and finally, it focus[es] attention on areas of design that need improvement, both from the students' point of view and from the design team's point of view" (p. 42). This, contends Murgatroyd, is a service way of thinking.

While Murgatroyd used only one customer group i.e.students, QFD can incorporate the views of several stakeholder or customer groups. Bergman (1995) reports the successful use of QFD to improve an advanced course in TQM at Linkoping University in Sweden. Here feedback was sought from progressive quality managers and alumni and the course contents of industrial education bodies were examined to provide data for the QFD model. QFD was also used at Oregon State University (Coate, 1990) to identify and prioritise the needs of multiple customer groups and translate them into university priorities. These examples illustrate the importance of using feedback and information from a variety of stakeholders/customers.

3.6 CONCLUSION

Business quality management models and especially TQM can be usefully applied to higher education institutions, including those that offer distance or open learning. Their primary focus on the customer and the recognition of multiple customer or stakeholder groups, all with needs and expectations to be met, is totally compatible with open learning. Post-

Fordist approaches to the management and delivery of distance education are also consistent with the principles of TQM.

All of the studies reported in this chapter take the view that student customer defined quality attributes should be built into the design of courses and support services. This is a different approach from the one so often employed in higher education institutions where a course is designed and delivered and then students are asked what they think of the quality of it. This approach may prove very costly where institutions or course design teams have to revamp a course or a support service because it did not meet requirements. Post hoc evaluation is also notoriously unreliable, student evaluations being affected by their relationship with the tutor, how they have performed in the course and the opinions of their peers.

Further, the studies reported here recognise that the requirements of other stakeholders are important too and must not be ignored. Harvey and Green (1993) suggest that it is important to define as clearly as possible the criteria that each stakeholder uses when judging quality, and for these competing views to be taken into account when assessments of quality are undertaken. Such an approach will potentially lead to the greatest levels of satisfaction.

There are potential benefits to all stakeholder groups in using customer or stakeholder defined quality attributes to assess performance. Students are more likely to be satisfied if a course meets their needs and expectations and are also more likely to re-enrol. Employers and professional groups are likely to feel satisfied and willing to support educational institutions if they perceive that appropriate education and training needs are being met. Academic teachers will have fewer student problems and complaints to deal with if courses are well designed to meet student needs and expectations. This means less rework and 'wastage' of their time and more time to devote to other activities such as research which can lead to improved teaching and increased job satisfaction. From the institution's

perspective resources are being better utilised and waste is being reduced. This should lead to cost efficiencies. Courses will no longer be produced that do not appeal to the market. It should also assist in building a loyal customer base which can be a very effective way of recruiting new students.

Having introduced the concept of quality in service industries, defined the scope of the research undertaken in the study, reviewed the relevant literature and looked at some of the tensions surrounding the issue of quality in higher and distance education today, the methodology used in this study will now be discussed. This is followed by results and discussion of the primary research undertaken.

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides an overview of the methodology used in the study. It discusses the rationale for selecting the methods and groups of subjects used for the survey, and provides detail about the specific methods used for the various stages of the research, how samples were drawn and the ethical issues involved. Results and discussion follow in the next two chapters.

4.2 THE STUDY

The complexity of the construct of quality and the importance of gaining the perceptions of multiple stakeholder groups in order to illuminate it, was addressed in the previous chapter. In line with contemporary literature and research findings, it was important then to design the study in such a way that not only were the perceptions of important stakeholder groups captured, but also that the methodology was robust and capable of validating the findings as much as possible. To that end, it was decided to use a variety of survey methods, both qualitative and quantitative, to gather the perceptions of different groups. Thus the study is multi-method and cross-perceptual in nature and addresses the following research questions:

1. What are the dimensions of quality in extramural courses as perceived by students learning at a distance, staff teaching at a distance and senior managers in the Business Studies Faculty at Massey University?
2. What are the areas of congruence and incongruence in the perceptions of these three groups?

3. To what extent do the primary data illuminate the construct of quality discussed in the literature?
4. What are the implications for good practice?

4.2.1 The Groups

Like many tertiary institutions world-wide, Massey University has become increasingly interested in quality management. With this goes a recognition of the importance of meeting the needs and requirements of various stakeholder groups. Three very important groups in this equation are the senior managers of the university who have ultimate responsibility for allocating resources and setting policy, academic staff who have responsibility for deciding and teaching the curriculum, and students who are the recipients and users of the educational product which is a complex mixture of both goods and services.

It was thought that while each of these groups would have some common perceptions of quality, they would also have others that were different. Furthermore, the emphases that each group placed on various dimensions of quality would also be different. By sampling and analysing the views of these three groups, a common understanding of the meaning of quality could be reached.

Massey University has a distinctive competence in distance education which is an important way in which it differentiates itself in the tertiary education market. In particular, the Faculty of Business Studies has an extensive extramural programme which has expanded rapidly in response to market demand. This rapid growth caused some problems and there was a considerable amount of anecdotal evidence to suggest that both students and staff were less than satisfied with aspects of the faculty's extramural programme. The undergraduate extramural programme was relatively well-established and much bigger than the comparatively new postgraduate programme. In addition, much of the dissatisfaction seemed to spring from the undergraduate programme. It was therefore decided to target the

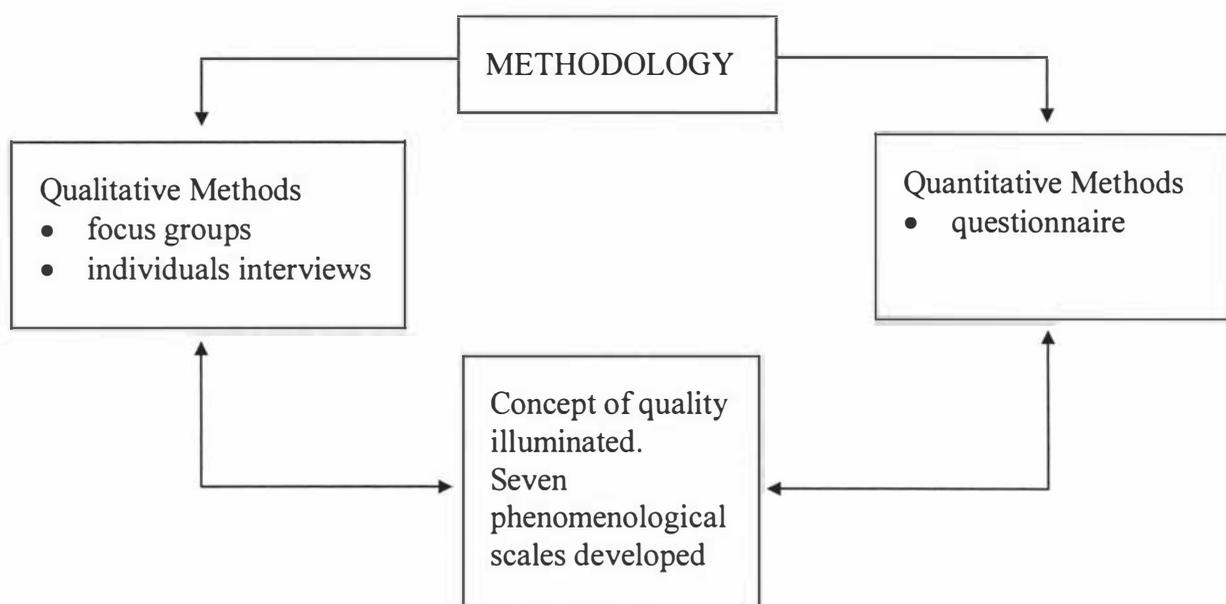
undergraduate extramural programme in the faculty. By identifying important stakeholder defined quality attributes and using them as the basis for course design, delivery and direction, it should be possible greatly to enhance satisfaction levels.

4.2.2 The Methods

Given the comparative lack of research data about quality in distance education from the perspectives of students and teaching staff and the complex nature of the construct itself, it was decided to explore the issues using qualitative methods. A two-stage research design (Cooper & Emory, 1995) was employed. In the first exploratory stage a series of focus groups was conducted with students and staff where the construct of quality in extramural business studies undergraduate courses was explored. Ten senior managers were also interviewed individually using the same pre-prepared question guide that was used for the focus groups. Analysis of the data from all the focus groups and interviews lead to a greater understanding of the concept of quality and crystallised the construct into seven broad dimensions.

The second stage of the research was confirmatory and quantitative in nature. A questionnaire was designed based on the data from the focus groups and interviews. All items were scored using a Likert scale so no further qualitative data was collected. The survey was mailed to a random sample (n=584) of undergraduate extramural business studies students and the total population of academic staff (n=146) in the faculty. The results from the questionnaire were analysed and the perceptions of the respondent groups were compared. Areas of congruence and incongruence were identified and discussed. Thus the study is multimethod and uses both qualitative and quantitative techniques. Figure 4.1 shows the relationship of the methods used in the study.

Figure 4.1: Methods used in the Study



What then are qualitative and quantitative methods and how have they been used in this study?

4.3 QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE METHODS

Broadly speaking there are two main philosophical positions from which research methods are derived in the social sciences. The first of these is positivism which is based on the assumption that “there is an objective truth existing in the world which can be revealed through the scientific method” (Cassell & Symon, 1994, p. 2). It asserts that the social world and its properties should be measured by using objective means to gather facts. It relies on quantitative methods and key concerns are that measurements should be valid, reliable and generalisable. In this approach “theory is deduced as a result of testing hypotheses” (Cassell & Symon, 1994, p. 2).

The other position is phenomenology, sometimes referred to as hermeneutics (see for example Gummesson, 1991), which emphasises explanation based on appreciating and understanding the different constructions and meanings that people place on their experiences. There is no objective or clear-cut reality and researchers use qualitative methods to gather data which they attempt to accurately describe and interpret. “Theory is generated from the data collected, that is, it is ‘grounded’ in the data” (Cassell & Symon, 1994, p. 2).

Researchers tend not to hold steadfastly to one approach or the other and “many... especially in the management field...adopt a pragmatic view by deliberately combining methods from both traditions” (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, & Lowe, 1991, p. 22). Combined approaches also enable the researcher to take advantage of the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative methodologies and gain a wider perspective of the phenomena being studied. This will be discussed later in the chapter under triangulation.

The main differences between qualitative and quantitative methods are in the procedures used and in the emphasis and objectives of the study. The two are not mutually exclusive, however. Data collected qualitatively may be coded in such a way that they can be analysed statistically (Ghauri, Gronhaug, & Kristianslund, 1995). In addition, as in this study, qualitative and quantitative methods may be used at different stages of the research and for different purposes.

In the first stage of this study where the construct of quality was being explored with three different stakeholder groups, it was important not to constrain subjects by using set questions and rigid formats. As the aim was to find out how these three groups defined quality and what they saw as its major dimensions, they needed to be able to give free expression to their beliefs and attitudes. Qualitative techniques are particularly well suited to this purpose. As they are flexible and unstructured, they yield rich open-ended data which are not constricted by predetermined ideas. They also provide in-depth insight into a phenomenon.

Ghuri et al. (1995) also point out that at the stage of a research project where a problem is relatively unstructured, qualitative methods are most useful as they can lead to hypothesis building and explanations. In this case, the qualitative techniques of focus groups and individual interviews permitted a thorough exploration of the construct of quality where both researcher and subjects came to a clearer understanding of its meaning. They resulted in five phenomenological scales grounded in the views and perceptions of the participants.

Van Maanen (1983) says that “qualitative methods... seek to describe, decode, translate and otherwise come to terms with the meaning, not the frequency, of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena in the social world” (p. 9). So while they have a number of advantages, they also have some important limitations. The first of these is that there is considerable room for ambiguity as they reflect the perceptions, beliefs and attitudes of individuals and as such are highly subjective. This makes the data difficult to code as they can be open to many different interpretations. It is hard to rank order and attribute value to responses as each response is as valid as the next. However, this makes qualitative techniques well suited to a construct like quality where there is such a strong subjective element.

There are also threats to reliability in that it is difficult to replicate the data or repeat situations. If situations are repeated there is the problem of lack of control and the danger of collecting more and more data which in turn raises the problems associated with coding and interpretation. The amount of data generated by qualitative techniques can be overwhelming, presenting the researcher with information of great breadth as well as depth. As there is, therefore, an inherent danger that the research will just keep expanding, it is important to set limits on both the scope of the project and the data collection.

Quantitative methods, however, can be used to overcome some of these limitations. As their primary purpose is to “determine the quantity or extent of some phenomenon in the form of numbers” (Zikmund, 1994, p. 88), they can be used to clarify ambiguities and the frequency of the occurrence of particular perceptions, beliefs and attitudes can be checked.

Quantitative methods are easy to code and interpret and can usually be computer scored. They are able to be replicated with different groups of subjects, they lend themselves to statistical analysis and are less prone to criticisms about validity and reliability. However, if used alone quantitative methods run the risk of overlooking important variables as they tend to be driven by the statistics rather than the data. They take a mathematical view of the world and are based on assumptions, like normal distributions, and consequently rely on a norm-referenced interpretation of data. This can impose limits on interpretation and can exclude other equally valid ways of viewing data.

For this study a questionnaire was designed based on the phenomenological scales derived from the qualitative data and from the literature. The questionnaire data were gathered from a sample of students and staff and were subjected to some statistical analysis. It is this interrelationship of qualitative and quantitative data that is so powerful in research. Rich, diverse and illuminative information was yielded by the qualitative methods of focus groups and individual interviews. The quantitative data gathered from the questionnaire will help to increase the validity of the study.

The central concepts of validity and reliability will now be discussed.

4.4 VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

Ebel (1972) provides a very neat definition of reliability and validity. "... reliability means the consistency with which a set of test scores measure whatever they do measure ... [while] validity means the accuracy with which a set of test scores measure what they ought to measure" (p. 409). The difference between the two is often illustrated with the example of a rifle being fired at a target. Assuming an expert marksman, if successive shots are closely clustered the rifle is performing reliably. However, for the rifle to be performing validly, the shots must also be clustered in the bull's eye (Linn & Gronland, 1995; Ebel, 1972;

Zikmund, 1994). Therefore “reliability is a necessary but not sufficient condition for validity” (Linn & Gronlund, 1995, p. 48).

As well as being reliable and valid, some writers (for example Linn & Gronlund, 1995; Cooper & Emory, 1995) add that measurement procedures should also be practical. This encompasses economy (balancing the ideal with the real in terms of costs and time constraints); convenience (ease of administration and clarity of layout); and interpretability (clear information and guidelines for use and the interpretation of test results).

4.4.1 Validity

“Validity is a matter of degree. Tests are not valid or invalid. They are more or less valid” (Ebel, 1972, p. 448). The degree and type of validity achieved will depend on the aims of the research as well as how it is designed. Linn and Gronlund (1995) discuss four other cautions about the nature of validity which should be kept in mind when designing research:

- While reference is often made to the validity of a procedure, validity actually refers to “the appropriateness of the interpretation of the results, ...not to the procedure itself”.
- Validity is specific to a particular use or interpretation. “No assessment is valid for all purposes”.
- Validity is a “unitary concept based on various kinds of evidence”.
- “Validity involves an overall evaluative judgement” (p. 49).

It is therefore important to have a good understanding of the concept in order to develop an appropriate research design and select measures of validity which reflect its aims.

Many different types of validity are discussed in the research literature. They are usually categorised as two major forms - external and internal validity (Cooper & Emory, 1995; Ghauri, Gronhaug, & Kristianslund, 1995). Internal validity refers to the ability of research

findings to measure what they are intended to measure, while external validity refers to their ability to be generalised. This study is concerned only with internal validity although it is envisaged that further research will involve establishing external validity.

There are three major forms of internal validity - content, criterion and construct validity. Content validity is the extent to which adequate coverage of the topic under study has been provided (Cooper & Emory, 1995). Zikmund (1994) uses the terms face validity and content validity interchangeably although Ebel (1972) views face validity as “not what a test necessarily measures, but what it appears to measure” (p. 437). This is more in line with the earlier suggestion from Guilford (1954) that “face validity ...is best restricted to the fact that a test ‘looks’ valid” and the reminder that: “Since ...looking valid, by itself, is no guarantee of any form of genuine validity,...one can have little confidence in such information” (p. 400). While Guilford’s remarks no doubt reflect a positivist position, they also highlight the dangers of relying on a single indicator of validity. They could also be interpreted as adding support to the notion of using both qualitative and quantitative techniques.

The determination of content validity tends to be subjective. Sometimes panels of appropriate persons are used to assess questions or test items. Often content validity is determined by a group of people involved in the research agreeing the elements that constitute adequate coverage of the topic and defining relevant dimensions and measures. Any instrument developed must then reflect these elements and dimensions.

Criterion or criterion-related validity “reflects the success of measures used for prediction or estimation” (Cooper & Emory, 1995, p. 150). It may be used to predict an outcome when it is known as predictive validity. An opinion poll that correctly forecasts an election result has predictive validity. The other form of criterion validity is concurrent validity which uses a criterion to estimate the existence of a behaviour or condition. As the name implies, the measures of the criterion and the behaviour or condition must be taken at the same time. Criterion validity is always empirically based and therefore provides a more

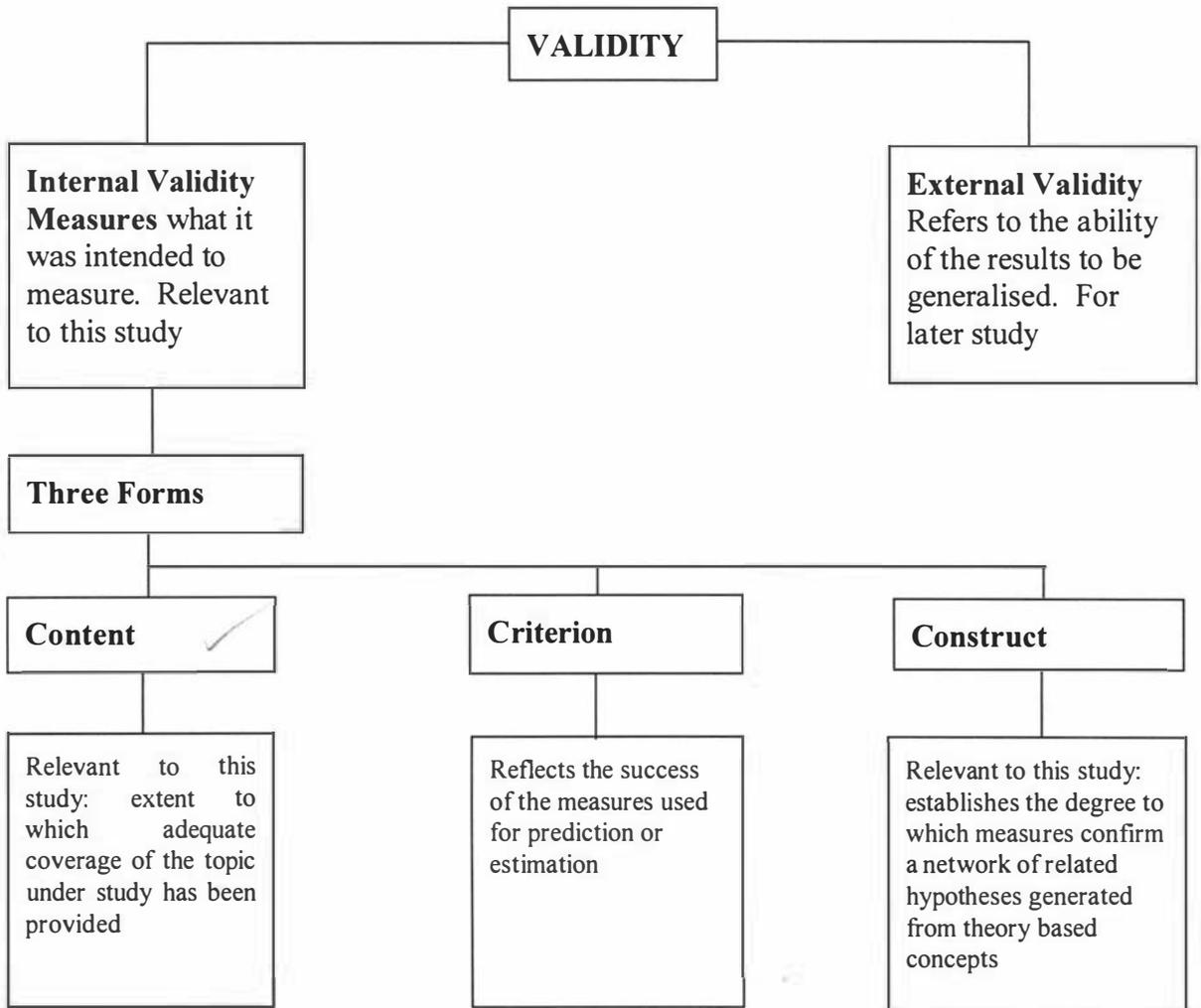
rigorous approach to validity. However, it is important that the criterion measures themselves are valid and they should be judged in terms of qualities such as relevance, freedom from bias, reliability and availability (Cooper & Emory, 1995).

Construct validity is “established by the degree to which the measure confirms a network of related hypotheses generated from a theory based on the concepts” (Zikmund, 1994, p. 291). Attitude scales frequently fall into this category. In attempting to determine construct validity, a set of propositions based on theory is associated with the results derived from using a measurement tool. If these correlate in a predicted way then some construct validity can be inferred (Emory, 1980). Construct validity includes both convergent and discriminant validity. Convergent validity is achieved when a new measure “converges” with other similar measures, for example if it correlates highly with established measures of similar constructs. Conversely, discriminant validity is established by achieving a low correlation with measures of dissimilar concepts.

Thus content validity depends primarily on rational analysis and judgement, while criterion and construct validity are derived mainly from empirical and statistical evidence. Thorndike and Hagen (1969) categorise these two types as direct and derived validity.

Figure 4.2 summarises types of validity and identifies those relevant to this study. This is discussed more fully below.

Figure 4.2: Types of Validity



From the preceding discussion, it is clear that content and construct validity, but not criterion validity, are relevant to this study. Content validity, which is particularly relevant to the first stage of the study when qualitative methods were used, was derived from both the focus groups and the individual interviews. Participants in the focus groups and individual interviews agreed the elements and defined the relevant dimensions of quality in undergraduate, business studies, distance education courses. This resulted in seemingly adequate coverage of the topic especially in the light of the literature and other reported studies (see for example Viltjoen et al., 1990; Bell & Shieff, 1990). The development of the phenomenological scales was derived from the elements and dimensions identified in

the focus groups and interviews and therefore truly reflects the perceptions of those students, teaching staff and senior managers. This also lends face validity to the study.

The focus groups and individual interviews were also an important step in construct validity. The ideas and concepts generated by them tested the major constructs of quality in university distance education business studies courses identified and discussed in the literature, and also helped to illuminate them. Furthermore, as the questionnaire was developed from the phenomenological scales this established some content validity for it.

The study then has used a mixture of qualitative and quantitative methods from which both content and construct validity were derived.

4.4.2 Reliability

While the prime concern in validity is the appropriateness of the interpretations being made from the data, in reliability the prime concern is with the consistency of the results. "Reliability is concerned with estimates of the degree to which a measurement is free of random or unstable error" (Cooper & Emory, 1995, p. 153). Reliable instruments are robust, work well over different times and in different conditions and allow the user to have confidence in the results. As with validity, reliability does not refer to the instrument itself, but to the results obtained with that instrument. However, unlike validity, reliability is primarily statistical. It always estimates a particular type of consistency and should not be treated as a general characteristic. The appropriate type of consistency will be dictated by the use to be made of the results (Linn & Gronlund, 1995).

It is the factors of time and condition that provide the basis for stability, equivalence and internal consistency - the three commonly used perspectives on reliability. Specific, statistical reliability estimates apply to each of these.

Stability refers to the ability of an instrument or assessment technique to secure consistent results with the same person given repeated measurements over time. This is referred to as the test-retest method. If the measure is stable over time and administered under similar conditions, similar results should be obtained. A coefficient of stability, r , is calculated and the closer this is to 1.00, which is a perfect positive relationship, the more stable the results. This method has limitations, however. For example, subjects may remember how they answered questions the first time, they may become 'test wise' or sensitised to the topic, or with an attitude survey, they may be subject to influences that alter their opinions between test administrations.

Linn and Gronlund (1995) suggest that these problems can be largely overcome by using test-retest in combination with equivalent forms which will yield measures of both stability and equivalence. Normally equivalent or parallel forms, which are alternative versions of the same instrument designed to be as equivalent as possible, are administered straight after one another to the same group of subjects. This is known as item equivalence. However, this may lead to subject fatigue which can bias results so they suggest a delayed time interval between the two administrations to combat this problem. Cooper and Emory (1995) sound a note of caution by pointing out that it is still rare to find forms that are fully equivalent and interchangeable.

Equivalence is also concerned with variations at a point in time among observers. In this case the scoring by different observers of the same event is correlated to give an interrater reliability index of how consistent their ratings are (Cooper & Emory, 1995). Estimates of equivalence are also expressed as correlation coefficient r .

The third perspective on reliability is internal consistency which Guilford (1954) views as one of the major classes of reliability. Here one administration of an instrument or test is used to assess consistency or homogeneity among items. The split-half technique is commonly used for this purpose. The results of a test are divided in half by item, either by odd and even numbers or randomly, and then correlated. If the correlation is high, the

instrument is said to have high internal consistency. However, the way that the test is split may affect the internal consistency coefficient. There are two other techniques which provide an index of internal consistency without splitting the results in half. These are the Kuder-Richardson formula, KR-20, and Coefficient Alpha (sometimes known as Cronbach's Alpha).

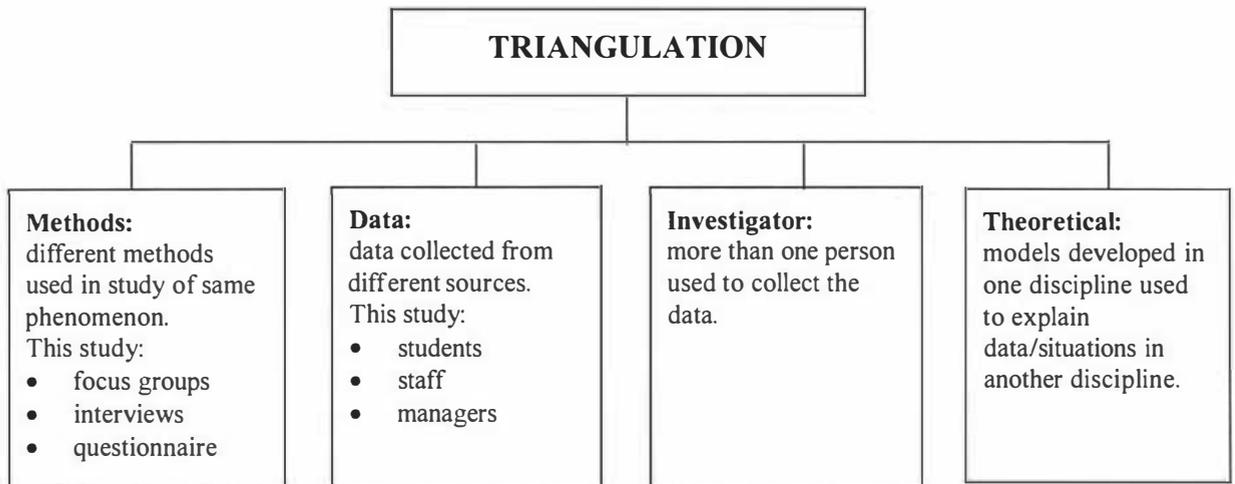
None of these reliability measures is suitable to use at this stage of the research.

4.5 TRIANGULATION

The advantages of using research approaches which combine both qualitative and quantitative methods have already been discussed. This technique of using different methods in the study of the same phenomenon is often referred to as triangulation, specifically methods triangulation (Mathison, 1988). There are three other types of triangulation. Data triangulation is where data is collected from several sources. It may also include data collection over different time frames such as in longitudinal studies. Investigator triangulation uses more than one person to collect data and has the benefit of using insights gained from the perspectives of different researchers. Theoretical triangulation involves using models developed in one discipline to explain data and situations in another discipline (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, & Lowe, 1991; Mathison, 1988; Denzin, 1978). While on the face of it, triangulation could be viewed as a panacea, it is not suited to all studies. The research objectives and purpose should determine the research design. This study used methodological and data triangulation.

Figure 4.3 summarises types of triangulation and shows how they are relevant to the study.

Figure 4.3: Types of Triangulation



4.5.1. Methods Triangulation

Although the term triangulation was not coined until 1966 by Webb (Mathison, 1988), Campbell and Fiske (1959) are usually credited with being the first to discuss the advantages of using multiple methods in the same study. Their work was in the area of psychological testing and they claimed that using a variety of methods could aid in the establishment of validity propositions and provide a fuller understanding of a topic of interest. The technique of triangulation, although not always explicitly acknowledged, is now widely applied in many disciplines including business and management research. For example, Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1985), Zeithaml, Parasuraman, and Berry (1990), well known for their research on service quality, frequently use a mixture of focus groups, in-depth interviews and questionnaires.

Methods triangulation enables the researcher to take advantage of the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative research to gain a wider perspective on the phenomena being studied. For example in this study, the focus groups and interviews illuminated the construct of quality in terms of the beliefs, attitudes and values of the participants, a relatively small sample whose views were not necessarily representative of the population

under study. The administration of the questionnaire allowed data to be collected about the prevalence of these views and more valid conclusions to be drawn about the meaning of quality for the larger population. So the use of multiple methods increased the validity of the study.

Methodological triangulation is also a useful way to gather large amounts of data. There is a limit to the amount of qualitative data that a researcher can handle as it takes a great deal of time to code and interpret it. As a consequence, it is extremely difficult to study large populations in this way. However, using quantitative methods which generate data that are easily coded and analysed facilitates the collection of large quantities of data. So there are often sound pragmatic reasons for using multiple methods.

4.5.2 Data Triangulation

For this study, data were collected from three different sources in relation to the Business Studies Faculty at Massey University - students studying at a distance, staff teaching at a distance, and senior managers responsible for policy decisions relating to the distance education programme. For a concept such as quality, which is strongly subjective, assessing or measuring it depends on understanding what it means to many different people who may be affected by it. The more the opinions of different groups of stakeholders can be tapped, the more the concept will be illuminated. This will enhance construct validity which is in line with Denzin's (1978) suggestion that understanding a social phenomenon requires its examination from different perspectives and/or under a variety of conditions.

Mathison (1988) discusses three outcomes that might result from a triangulation strategy. The first of these is convergence whereby data from different sources, methods or investigators will provide evidence to support a single proposition. The second outcome is inconsistency when the evidence presents alternative propositions which may contain inconsistencies and ambiguities, while the third outcome is where the data are actually contradictory. Thus triangulation highlights areas of both congruence and incongruence in

a study. "The value of triangulation ... is as a technique which provides more and better evidence from which researchers can construct meaningful propositions about the social world" (Mathison, 1988, p. 15).

The three methods used in the survey for data collection, that is focus groups, individual interviews and the questionnaire will now be discussed.

4.6 FOCUS GROUP METHODS

The focus group is a technique frequently used in market research which has become increasingly popular as a research strategy in social science and business research. "[It] is a group discussion that gathers together people from similar background or experiences to discuss a specific topic" (Dawson, Manderson, & Tallo, 1993, p. 7). It is unstructured, free-flowing and flexible and guided by a facilitator who introduces a topic for discussion and encourages the group to talk about it naturally and openly. Participants should feel free to discuss their true feelings and beliefs and ideally the discussion would proceed at the group's initiative. In reality the facilitator may need to move the discussion along if it becomes bogged down in an issue or dominated by an individual.

The ideal size for a focus group is six to ten individuals (Wells, 1974; Zikmund, 1994). It may be difficult to generate a lively discussion in a group that is too small or the group may be intimidated by one or two members. With groups larger than 10 it may be hard to ensure that everyone in the group gets adequate participation time. The facilitator should be someone who easily establishes rapport with people and gains their confidence. They should also be able to listen carefully as they have an important role in 'focusing' the discussion and keeping it going. There is no rigid question schedule. Rather, the facilitator has a pre-prepared question guide or list of topics which participants discuss and probe.

Focus groups are of particular benefit in the exploratory stages of research and have a number of specific advantages. These include group synergy and stimulation which can generate a very wide range of ideas and insights, and security for less confident members of the group who may be encouraged to express their ideas by bolder participants. Morgan (1988) defines this as the hallmark of focus groups, that is “the explicit use of the group interaction to produce data and insights that would be less accessible without the interaction found in a group” (p. 12). In addition, they are relatively easy to conduct and interviewing a group of people together is quicker and less costly than interviewing individuals.

However, they also have some important limitations. Focus groups can indicate a wide range of opinions and views but these may not be representative of the total population being studied. Therefore the researcher should not generalise from the results as they may be biased. Another factor which may limit representativeness is subject conformity to group norms. (Byers & Wilcox, 1991; Dawson et al., 1993; Morgan, 1988). Morgan (1988) also points out that the degree of control the researcher has over the data generated in focus groups is considerably less than with individual interviews.

Notwithstanding these limitations, focus groups are a very useful qualitative technique, especially when they are used in conjunction with quantitative methods, such as a questionnaire, as they were in this study. They are a time and cost efficient method for exploring topics, generating ideas and hypotheses and illuminating theoretical constructs, in this case about quality in undergraduate, business studies distance education courses.

4.6.1 Focus Groups for the Study

The purpose of the focus groups was to provide preliminary data to help answer the research questions. In preparation for the focus groups, a schedule of very broad discussion topics was prepared based on student feedback and other anecdotal evidence and the literature (see Appendix 1). This was pilot run with local distance education students in Palmerston North. It was thought that student perceptions of quality change with their

experience as students over time. Consequently two focus groups were convened - one of students who had completed five or fewer Business Studies distance education papers (low experience) and the other of students who had completed 10 or more Business Studies distance education papers (high experience).

The perceptions of the two groups did indeed prove to be different so the design was retained for the research interviews. No refinements to the question schedule were required.

4.6.1.1 Student Sample

A total of six student focus groups were conducted. Two groups, one low experience students, the other high experience students were convened in each of three cities - Auckland, which is the largest city in New Zealand and has about one fifth of Massey University's distance education enrolment; New Plymouth which is a small city serving a largely rural population and where students feel quite isolated; and Dunedin, the biggest city in the south of the South Island (see Appendix 2, map of New Zealand).

Students were selected from the Business Studies undergraduate roll and were studying papers in one of the seven departments or two centres of the faculty. In New Plymouth and Dunedin, because of the low experience/high experience criteria, all eligible students were contacted. However, in Auckland, where there was a high population of distance education students, care was taken to try and achieve a gender balance and to include students from different age groups and from outlying rural areas in both groups. Attention was also given to ethnicity with Maori, Pacific Island and Asian students in the groups. Every effort was made to oversubscribe all groups to cater for 'no shows' on the day.

As nearly all participants were working during the week, groups were convened on a Saturday. Light refreshments were served which helped to create a relaxed and convivial

atmosphere. All participants were sent a small ex gratia payment to cover travelling expenses.

Of the 41 students who took part, 61% (n=25) were female and 39% (n=16) were male. This reflected the gender balance on the total distance education roll but not on the undergraduate distance education Business Studies roll where there was 46% female and 54% male enrolment. Table 4.1 shows the number of participants in each of the student focus groups.

Table 4.1: Number of Participants in Student Focus Groups

	Auckland	New Plymouth	Dunedin
low experience	9	4	5
high experience	9	6	8

4.6.1.2 Staff Sample

One staff focus group was conducted comprising seven staff. All Departments and Centres except Banking Studies were represented. There were four women and three men and their distance education teaching experience ranged from two to 12 years. The group convened after work one evening and light refreshments were served.

All student and staff focus groups were tape recorded and transcribed ready for data analysis.

Focus groups are an extremely useful mechanism for generating a lot of ideas which can begin to answer the research questions formulated for the study. However, it was believed that more in-depth knowledge and information was required from a third and very powerful stakeholder group within the university, that is senior managers. The data collection method used for this will now be discussed.

4.7 INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS

The beliefs, attitudes and values of senior managers have a major impact on the definition and assessment of quality. It was decided to conduct qualitative research interviews (King in Cassell & Symon, 1994), i.e. in-depth individual interviews, with senior managers as the opinions of each one of them had a major influence on policy development, planning and how important issues such as quality assurance were handled.

“The goal of any qualitative research interview is ... to see the research topic from the perspective of the interviewee, and to understand how or why he or she comes to have this particular perspective” (King in Cassell & Symon, 1994, p. 14). These interviews will therefore usually have a low degree of structure, focus on specific situations and topics and use mainly open questions. Unlike in focus groups where the interviewer’s role is largely one of discussion facilitator, the relationship between the interviewer and interviewee is seen as reciprocal. Both are viewed as participants in the research, actively shaping the course of the interview. Therefore the interviewer must be both knowledgeable and credible in the eyes of the interviewee.

While individual interviews do not provide the advantages of synergy derived from focus groups and may be more costly in terms of time and resources, they do have some advantages of their own. It is easy to pursue new ideas or leads and skip unwanted material in a one-to-one interaction. Therefore the interviewer has much more control over the data generated than in the focus group situation (Morgan, 1988). Ideas can also be explored in depth which is important when dealing with complex topics such as quality, and the interviewee can be encouraged to share as much information as possible (Cooper & Emory, 1995).

Morgan (1988) points out that focus groups generate fewer ideas compared with individual interviews but that individual interviews require more time to conduct, transcribe and analyse. He suggests that using both techniques in the same study is a good way of cross

validating data, a notion which is highly relevant to this research and also relates to triangulation. As with focus groups, this type of interview is considered to be most appropriate where a study is focusing on the meaning of particular phenomena to individuals and/or groups and as exploratory work for a quantitative study (King in Cassell & Symon, 1994).

4.7.1 The Senior Manager Sample

The senior managers who had direct influence on matters of quality for the Business Studies Faculty were defined as the Vice-Chancellor, Assistant Vice-Chancellor Resources and Registrar, Assistant Vice-Chancellor Academic, Director of Extramural Studies, Registrar Student Affairs, Dean of the Business Studies Faculty and the seven Heads of Departments in the faculty. In the event two of the HODs were excluded, one as he was the chief supervisor for this research and the other because he took part in the staff focus group. Another HOD was unavailable. All of the other senior managers approached agreed to participate therefore 10 interviews were conducted.

As it was important to explore the same issues with these staff as with students and teaching staff, the focus group discussion topics were used as the basis for the interviews. However, as these interviews were conducted after the focus groups, it was possible to explore some of the ideas and issues raised by students and teaching staff. All interviews were conducted during work hours either in the office of the interviewee or the researcher. Uninterrupted time was requested and given and each interview was tape recorded and transcribed ready for data analysis.

4.8. DATA ANALYSIS METHOD: FOCUS GROUPS AND INTERVIEWS

While the focus groups and the interviews yielded a great variety of very rich and interesting qualitative data, their main purpose was to explore the meaning of quality in

extramural courses and to identify major dimensions of the construct which could then be tested out with a questionnaire. Therefore, it was important to derive a structure from the data rather than impose a structure on them. This meant analysing data to tease out main themes, patterns and categories and the ways in which these were manifested in extramural courses. In this way, ‘grounded’ theory was generated derived from the concepts and categories used by the students and staff (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, & Lowe, 1991).

Various methods for analysis of qualitative data are described in the literature, ranging from content analysis which is quasi-statistical to immersion where researchers immerse themselves in their data and “produce an account of their findings through analytical reflection and intuitive crystallisation of meaning” (King in Cassell & Symon, 1994, p. 27). This type of analysis can result in very lengthy narratives. For this stage of the study, the template approach was used (King in Cassell & Symon, 1994).

The interviews were analysed and a pattern of themes was developed from an initial reading of the transcripts. These themes were revised many times as the texts were re-read and as the transcript for each new interview became available. In other words, the pattern or template was modified through use. The emerging themes were interpreted qualitatively rather than numerically which is characteristic of this approach, and were eventually distilled into phenomenological scales.

The next stage of the study was to design an instrument that would hopefully provide substantial, confirmatory quantitative data for the phenomenological scales derived from the focus groups and the interviews.

4.9 THE QUESTIONNAIRE

For this part of the survey, a self-administered mail questionnaire was designed. The advantages of developing a questionnaire from data gathered from the focus groups and the

individual interviews have already been discussed elsewhere in this chapter i.e. they provide data of great breadth as well as depth and give the study both content and construct validity. From a purely practical point of view, they provide the raw material from which to build the questionnaire - they highlight the issues that should serve as the basis for questionnaire development (Byers & Wilcox, 1991).

A number of advantages and disadvantages are reported in the literature for self administered mail questionnaires (Beed & Stimson, 1985; Cooper & Emory, 1995; Fowler, 1993; Hoinville, Jowell, & Associates, 1977; Weisberg & Bowen, 1977; Zikmund, 1994). The advantages are first, that they provide the cheapest way of reaching a very geographically dispersed population. As Massey University's Business Studies distance education students reside all over New Zealand, this was an important consideration. A related advantage is that a mail survey can reach individuals who might otherwise be inaccessible, such as those living in isolated areas.

Second, mail surveys give respondents time to consider their responses. They may wish to think about questions or consult others before responding which may lead to more considered or precise answers. Third, mail surveys provide a very high level of anonymity for respondents and are therefore perceived as impersonal. This factor may encourage some individuals to respond. A final advantage is that as there is no interviewer present there can be no interviewer influence over responses.

The major limitations discussed in the literature for mail questionnaires relate to response problems and the bias they can cause in the results. First, there is the question of the response rate itself. Zikmund (1994) reports that a poorly designed questionnaire may have a response rate as low as 15% which makes it very difficult to draw valid conclusions or generalise from the data. On the other hand, response rates of more than 70% have been reported although rates of between 30 and 50% are often considered satisfactory (Cooper & Emory, 1995; Fowler, 1993). Related to this is the question of who actually responds. People who respond to the questionnaire may not be typical of all those in the sample. In

addition, those who have a strong interest in the topic are more likely to respond than those who are indifferent to it. Thus increasing respondent motivation to complete the questionnaire is an important way of combating non-response error.

Other disadvantages of mail questionnaires are that the return rate may be slow and that there is a high potential for respondent misunderstanding or ambiguity as there is no interviewer present. Much can be done in the design of a questionnaire to minimise the effects of these limitations and disadvantages.

There are a number of techniques that researchers can use in an effort to increase response rate. These include a covering letter which explains why the study is important and the possible benefits to the respondent along with assurances of confidentiality, the inclusion of a post-paid preaddressed return envelope, and a follow up letter mailed several weeks after the questionnaire asking respondents to make sure that they have returned it. These three techniques were used with the questionnaire for this study. Monetary incentives have been shown to be very effective in increasing response rates (Cooper & Emory, 1995) but add considerable costs to a survey and raise the ethical issue of coercion. Other techniques such as personalisation of the cover letter and colour, size and reproduction of the questionnaire do not appear to affect response rate. A deadline date has been shown to accelerate the rate of return but not the response rate itself (Cooper and Emory, 1995).

Pretesting is also a very important way of detecting problems with the instructions, design and wording of the questionnaire. A poorly designed, ambiguous questionnaire can discourage responses. Zikmund (1994) suggests that pretesting can be done with other research professionals and/or a group of respondents. For this questionnaire both methods were used. The two supervisors for the study, another research professional and a distance education instructional designer pretested it. These individuals also had experience as distance education teachers. In addition, individuals from the two populations to be used for the questionnaire pretested it. These were four academic staff and 10 currently enrolled undergraduate students studying at a distance from the Business Studies Faculty.

All individuals taking part in the pretest were either contacted in person or by telephone and the purpose of the pretest or pilot was explained. In addition, a brief covering letter (Appendix 3) which reiterated the main points was included with the draft questionnaire. Some respondents contacted the researcher personally to discuss their feedback and others wrote it on the draft questionnaire

The pretest proved to be extremely valuable. As a result of feedback the clarity of the instructions was greatly enhanced, some question repetitions and ambiguities were identified and eradicated, the comprehensibility of a number of questions was improved, the request for some biodata was shown to be irrelevant so it was removed, and the layout of the questionnaire was improved.

4.9.1 Item Development

Questions were formulated from the qualitative data obtained in the focus groups and individual interviews. They were initially created under five scales, one of which had three subdivisions. These were course design, subdivided into course structure and content, face-to-face contact and assessment; communication; institutional and environmental influences; standards and evaluation; and course integrity. These became the seven phenomenological scales of:

- Course structure and content.
- Face-to-face contact.
- Assessment.
- Communication.
- Institutional and environmental influences.
- Standards and evaluation.
- Programme integrity.

Frequent reference was made to the transcripts of the focus groups and to the interviews to clarify meaning and ensure there were no omissions. The language and vocabulary of the focus groups guided item development. This increased face validity and gave authenticity to the instrument. If appropriate, the exact words of participants were used in questions although care had to be taken with this. A common understanding of words such as 'performance indicator' for example could not be assumed, especially as there were two different populations, that is students and staff, being surveyed with the same instrument. However, "shared vocabulary" (Cooper & Emory, 1995, p. 308) was used as much as possible. Questions were not personalised so that issues were presented objectively and a mixture of positively and negatively worded questions was used to prevent response bias.

A four point Likert scale was used for the majority of the items. As one of the main objectives of the study was to look at different views of quality in distance education courses, something about which all participants in the study had opinions based on their experience as either students or staff, it was decided to avoid a neutral or 'don't know' position. This meant that no 'escape route' (Ghuri, Gronhaug, & Kristianlund, 1995) was provided for respondents who wanted to avoid answering questions other than to not respond at all. The scale was 1 = strongly agree, 2 = agree, 3 = disagree, 4 = strongly disagree. There were four items at the end of the questionnaire which had different scales. Three of them had a five point Likert scale. This was because respondents were being asked to rate items rather than express their opinion about a statement. A broader scale, including a middle position, was therefore more appropriate. The fourth item asked respondents to indicate an appropriate workload for papers of different points value according to four options. The questionnaire and covering letters are included in Appendix 4.

The questions were initially ordered under the seven phenomenological scales. However, in order to discourage response bias, the questions were put into random order. Random number tables were used to reorder the items.

Some biodata were also required to yield the information required to answer the research questions and do the necessary comparisons. These questions were formulated so that respondents simply had to tick the appropriate box. While students and staff answered the same questionnaire, different biodata were collected from each sample. Staff also had one question where they were asked to provide the name of their teaching qualification if they had one. Thus all items were designed so that they could be easily coded for computer analysis. There were no open-ended questions.

The initial draft of the questionnaire was much too long and contained over 160 items. Before the pretest, the research supervisors and the researcher worked on the draft and substantially reduced the number of items mainly by deleting repetitions but also by combining and rewording some items. The pretest further reduced the number of items and the completed instrument had 118 questions excluding the biodata sections. Students were required to answer four and staff seven biodata items.

4.9.2 Length of Questionnaire and Timing of Administration

This was a relatively long questionnaire, respondents to the pretest indicating that it took 20-30 minutes to complete. Given the intense interest on the topic of quality among both students and staff, it was hoped that there would be a high level of motivation among respondents to complete and return the questionnaire despite the time commitment. The literature is equivocal on the subject of the effect of length on response rate anyway, Cooper and Emory (1995) citing an example of a study done on the general population with a questionnaire that required 158 answers which yielded a response rate of over 70%.

The timing of such surveys can also have an effect on response rate. For example, a mail survey sent to extramural students during their examination period could well elicit a low response. It was therefore decided to mail it out during the between-semester break when

students had finished their exams but before they began their next courses. It was also a less pressured time for staff.

4.9.3 The Samples

Two populations were used in the study - Business Studies Faculty teaching or academic staff, and students studying in the faculty's undergraduate extramural programme. As the total population of eligible staff was only 153, it was necessary to survey all of them to try and obtain a usable and representative sample. Seven individuals were excluded from the survey as they had taken part in the pretest of the questionnaire or were involved with the research in some other way. The questionnaires were sent out in the university's internal mail system with a return addressed envelope included.

The student population was defined as all those registered extramurally in 1996 in Diploma in Business Studies or Bachelor of Business Studies programmes, excluding those with a 1996 ID number. These students were excluded on the ground that they probably had insufficient experience to enable them to answer the questionnaire satisfactorily. This left a population of approximately 4000 students.

A large sample was required for representativeness and for establishing reliable results when making comparisons between subgroups, for example high and low experience students. Therefore a random sample of 584 was drawn by the university statistician from the student roll as defined above. The questionnaires were mailed out with a post-paid return addressed envelope.

A follow-up reminder letter (Appendix 5) was sent to all individuals in the samples two weeks after the questionnaire was dispatched.

4.9.4 Data Analysis Methods

As the questionnaire was entirely computer scored, staff at the university's Computer Centre were consulted about its design. The SPSS statistical package was used to calculate means, standard deviations and frequency polygons for each item. In addition, the Mann-Whitney *U* Test was used to look at levels of significance between groups of students and staff.

4.10 ETHICAL ISSUES

Any study carried out at Massey University using human subjects must be approved by the University's Human Ethics Committee. Of prime concern are issues of confidentiality and the individual's right to privacy which is also protected by the New Zealand Privacy Act, 1993. The individual's right to information about the research and the need for informed consent from all participants are also most important. The following methods were used in this study both to protect and to fully inform participants from whom data were collected. Approval for the study was granted by the Human Ethics Committee.

4.10.1 Focus groups

All student and staff potential participants were contacted initially by telephone. If they agreed to participate they were sent a letter confirming the venue and time for the group to meet (see Appendix 6) along with an information sheet about the research. This explained how confidentiality would be assured, that the tape and/or transcript of the focus group would be available on request and that participants could also have access to a summary of the research findings at the completion of the project (see Appendix 7). In addition, all participants signed a consent form before the interview started (see Appendix 8). After the focus groups, letters of thanks were sent to all participants.

4.10.2 Individual interviews

A letter and information sheet were sent to each of the 10 managers targeted for the study. These explained the purpose of the research and an interview was requested (see Appendix 9). The information provided met requirements for informed consent, gave an assurance of confidentiality, and explained that the interview tape and/or transcript would be available on request. The researcher followed this up with a phone call several days later and arranged a time for the interview. Each interviewee signed a consent form before the interview began (see Appendix 10). A letter of thanks was sent after the interview was completed.

4.10.3 Questionnaire

The questionnaire covering letter (Appendix 4) assured anonymity in that no individuals could be identified from their responses and that only group data would be reported. The sentence reading "Thankyou for your cooperation" was changed to read "Thankyou" as the former could be seen to assume cooperation and as such could be interpreted as implied coercion. It was assumed that consent was given if a respondent returned the questionnaire.

A further issue in relation to the Privacy Act concerns the provision of not using information obtained in connection with one purpose for any other purpose. However, an important exception to this provision is when the information is used for statistical or research purposes. For this study the Student Record Database was used to access the names and addresses of students for the mail questionnaire. Clearly the information is being used for research purposes and so the Privacy Act requirements are being met.

4.11 CONCLUSION

By using the strategies of methodological and data triangulation, this study has explored the construct of quality in business studies, undergraduate, extramural courses. These strategies were employed to enhance the study's validity. In the next two chapters, the results of the primary data collection are presented and discussed. In Chapter 5, the qualitative data from the focus groups and interviews is examined. This is followed by Chapter 6 which reports and discusses the quantitative data collected from the questionnaire.

CHAPTER 5: TELLING IT LIKE IT IS - FOCUS GROUP AND INTERVIEW RESULTS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

“Quality is subjective but you know if you've been conned”.

(from a student in a focus group)

This chapter reports and discusses the first stage of the two-stage research design i.e. the exploratory phase. The purpose of this stage was to explore the construct of quality in the business studies undergraduate extramural programme at Massey University with three groups of subjects and identify the major dimensions of quality as perceived by them. Six focus groups were conducted with extramural students and one with teaching staff in the faculty. Individual interviews were also conducted with 10 of the university's senior managers. The perceptions of the three groups showed many similarities but also some remarkable differences.

5.2 RESULTS

Generally there was a high level of interest in the research from prospective participants who were contacted. A number of student participants said that they were pleased to have the opportunity to feed information back to the university about such an important topic as quality. Refusal rates for students varied. In Auckland 54% of those contacted were unable or unwilling to participate. In New Plymouth the rate was 53% and in Dunedin it was 25%. Because of their geographic isolation, Dunedin students tend to accept any opportunity for contact with university staff members.

Staff who were contacted were also very pleased to have the opportunity to talk about quality. Because of their heavy workload, which emerged as a theme in the discussions, it was quite difficult to find a time when a group could convene. Managers also were very willing to participate but constraints on their time meant that the interviews were carried out over a three month period.

While the literature suggests that six to ten participants is about the right size focus group to be easily managed and to provide the mutual stimulation so essential for ideas generation and discussion (see Chapter 4, Methodology), two of the groups fell below this size. While every effort was made to over-subscribe the groups to cater for this eventuality, in both of these locations the total number of students meeting the criteria for the group concerned was low. In the event, the small number of participants in these two groups did not appear to hinder the flow of conversation and ideas.

Although a great deal of very useful and positive information came out of the focus groups, inevitably it was also an opportunity for both students and staff to 'air their gripes'. It is worth noting that at the end of several of the focus groups a number of participants were at pains to point out that despite the criticism, the extramural programme basically functioned well. Although there were some problem courses there were also many that were very well taught.

The tone of the individual interviews was different. It was noticeable that the managers saw the extramural programme as a source of pride and definitely one of Massey's competitive advantages. All recounted extramural student success stories. A number of them commented that the university had created a great deal of good will through its extramural programme, and that it should make more use of this to promote itself externally. This would also have benefits within the university in terms of promulgating good practice:

We have to talk about the good things that we are doing. We have to promote our work and practice in distance education to the wider public and show them what we are doing. We have got a lot of excellent ambassadors out there - thousands of them [alumni]... It might have a nice effect, letting people out there see what we really do, and internally it helps because people get a sense of well, that is the standard.

Analysis of the focus groups and individual interviews identified some common themes about quality in extramural courses but also some fundamental differences between students, staff and managers. Managers who were Heads of Departments (HODs) expressed opinions and ideas that tended to reflect those expressed by teaching staff. This was not surprising as all of them were still actively engaged in some teaching, and the focus of their day-to-day managerial work was the teaching department for which they had responsibility. The five managers who were not HODs of teaching departments generally focused more on resource issues, the overall quality issues facing the university, and the university's reputation both nationally and internationally. For all participant groups the dual mode structure of Massey University permeated their discussions which often incorporated comparisons between internal and extramural students and teaching.

While a multiplicity of quality themes emerged from the discussions they were collapsed into seven major dimensions that became the phenomenological scales:

1. Course structure and content.
2. Face-to-face contact.
3. Assessment.
4. Communication.
5. Institutional and environmental influences.
6. Standards and evaluation.
7. Programme integrity.

Staff and student groups had different overall perceptions about what gave a course its integrity and quality. For staff, content was the most important dimension, while for students, relevance and assessment were the over-riding themes that emerged from their discussions in relation to quality in their extramural courses. Students also focused on the importance of local support and contact and of getting 'value for money'. For the Dunedin groups, the increasing costs associated with study (fees, travel to the campus for courses and textbooks) were causing some to look at other study options. Many students also commented on the huge variation in the quality of the papers that they had studied in the faculty.

Generally, staff and high experience students, that is, those with passes in 10 or more extramural papers, articulated a wider range of ideas and displayed greater familiarity with the university 'system' than did the low experience groups i.e. students with passes in five or fewer papers. Staff and high experience students also seemed to share a sense of some broader values and the need for an element of intellectual challenge. This was not so evident in discussions with the low experience groups who expressed the need to have their study clearly directed by staff. However, students and staff alike displayed a sense of personal ownership of the courses with which they were involved - students as customers and staff as 'creators' of their courses.

Students and staff unanimously agreed that it was difficult to separate the service aspects of courses from the materials and content. A staff member summed it up in the following way: "You can't have quality if you have got really perfect service but really terrible content, and you can't have quality if you've got really brilliant content and shocking service". The managers reiterated the view that service and content issues were inextricably bound together and that one was not more important than the other. It was necessary for services to be "of the highest standard in terms of the accuracy of what we are doing, the timeliness of it, [and the] consistency of it" in order to support the academic side of the operation.

Some of the high experience students had survived very negative experiences and exhibited high levels of persistence. The drive to complete the degree was a powerful motivator. Many of these students also commented that their perceptions of quality had changed over time as their experience as students increased:

We've just been exposed to more so you can start forming judgments. For the first couple of years it is new to you and you don't know what to expect. But once you've been through a few papers you know [what makes a good course].

Experience had also made some cynical. "I think that they're [course controllers] going to do what they want to do anyway. So I'll try and give them what I think that they want."

Staff also felt that students perceived quality differently over time, one saying that "in the short term they look for service, in the long term content."

The focus of the managers' discussions was rather different. They tended to start their discussions by defining quality as a multidimensional construct whereas teaching staff and students reached this conclusion at a much later stage of the discussion. While agreeing with the staff view that content and curriculum was of major importance in extramural courses, they were rather preoccupied with university resource issues as they related to the extramural programme. They expressed concern about the worsening staff: student ratio and the effect of the lower rate of funding for extramural students. Extramural students are funded at the Arts/Commerce rate irrespective of their programme. They also spent more time discussing standards and the academic audit of courses than either the student or staff groups.

As could be expected, managers tended to take an institutional view and see extramural as part of the 'big picture'. Both staff and students saw issues much more in personal terms, staff focusing at the course level and students at the individual level.

5.2.1 Course structure and Content

Students, managers and staff were in strong agreement that a coherently structured course was one of the key dimensions of quality. This included clearly stated aims and objectives which were reflected in the academic content and assessment including exams. This was tied to the broader notion of staff needing to communicate clearly their expectations to students in the course. Textual clarity or readability was also identified as important with students referring to “appropriately levelled” materials as well as clearly written and error free text. As one student said, “it is important that the actual material is not confusing or ambiguous. It's got to be well organised in a logical order.” This was compared to “some papers you get seem to dart here there and everywhere and it isn't until the end of the year that everything falls into place.” Low experience students were also keen to have a weekly timetable to guide their reading and assignment work and to provide a framework and structure for their study. They felt too that course materials should contain clear information about what additional resources were available to them.

Students valued some variety in teaching media. They liked audio and videotapes as these were perceived to be helpful in getting the right emphasis. A variety of presentation techniques was also a useful teaching strategy to get the point across and would help to take account of different learning styles.

Staff believed that content was the highest priority in a quality course. Implicit in their discussions about content was the notion that students should be challenged or extended intellectually and that an element of ‘personal development’ would be incorporated into the content. A quality university course should develop critical thinking abilities. Also distinguishing staff from student perceptions of quality was the staff view that quality incorporated a special element which was variously referred to as “academic stringency” or “rigour” referring to a certain level of analysis and critical appraisal.

Managers were quite explicit about this element of quality and expressed the belief that challenging students through the course materials was essential. Students should be encouraged to stretch themselves. "Quality is about encouraging students to aspire to excellence." The manager who said this also expressed great impatience with the student attitude of "just tell me what I have to do to pass." Managers stressed the need for a quality education to produce independent learners, capable of increasing knowledge for themselves. Becoming an intellectual thinker should be an outcome of a university education.

Staff spoke of the necessity for materials to include a range of readings that complemented the prescribed textbook. Students, however, tended to address the issue of readings in terms of quantity maintaining that the quality of some courses was marred by the excessive quantity of required reading, including the requirement to buy multiple texts - an unnecessary financial burden. Students commonly felt that the reading workload for many papers was quite unrealistic and that the relative importance of all course reading should be clearly indicated e.g. essential, optional, or extra for experts. Another useful strategy would be to include additional material for those having difficulty with a topic.

While staff did not address the issue of readings in terms of student workload, managers views tended to parallel those of students. Most expressed a belief that students were being overloaded with readings and extra resources as well as assignments and that more effort should be put into addressing this problem: "The workload has to be achievable within the timeframe that has been set." Many course controllers were over-optimistic about what it was reasonable and realistic to expect students to read. Others lacked the appropriate expertise and experience:

some lecturers do not know enough about their subject to know that they are actually trying to pour too much into those single papers. In other words they are not expert enough, they are not experienced enough to know how to judiciously select the material to reach the course objectives.

Some staff no doubt, would relate this criticism to not being able to teach in their areas of primary interest and research (see Section 5.2.5 Institutional and Environmental Influences below).

Students, particularly the low experience groups, tended to address course content and quality in terms of relevance - "I think relevance is the essence of quality." This had two aspects, currency of the material and applicability to the work situation. Generally, students valued courses that were practical as opposed to theoretical, applicable to their work situations, and texts that were either written about or highly relevant to New Zealand. "I want to be able to learn more than I can do sitting at work and I want to be able to transfer those skills to my work." Another low experience student put it more vehemently. "Massey must realise that we want skills, we don't want theory." They also felt that there was often a mismatch between course theory and practice, something that they were more aware of than their internal counterparts because of their experience, and that courses that contained out-of-date material were a waste of time, especially in subjects like accounting, finance and business law where the legislative framework was crucial. Therefore in this faculty, "having the same extramural course material year after year is a bad idea." This practical emphasis is undoubtedly a function of the applied nature of business education coupled with the fact that the majority of extramural students are working in business or organisations and studying part-time. A similar concern with vocational relevance is likely to emerge in an investigation of quality for other applied disciplines.

Staff too felt that relevant, up-to-date course materials were important and that they should be flexible enough for students to be able to apply in their individual situations. This echoes Bradbury's (1991) contention that value to the learner is a prime consideration in quality.

Managers had a somewhat different perspective on relevance which they tended to view as the relationship to a wider body of knowledge. One put it this way:

Relevance is related to the discipline and the area in which you are in fact imparting the knowledge. To say that the quality is good, [the material] has to be relevant to the discipline that we are pursuing [and] clearly to the forefront of the discipline. [Students] may feel that it does not relate to what they are doing now. Clearly it won't always. In a sense I hope it doesn't because we should be reaching out ahead of them in many cases.

Another manager agreed with this point of view, particularly in relation to professional degrees. Students cannot always see any immediate relevance in what they are studying but it may be very important as a building block in a professional qualification. All managers agreed that it was also very important to keep the course materials current and up-to-date and apply overseas texts to the New Zealand context.

However, a strong view was expressed by some managers that quality standards and international reputation should not be compromised because of relevance, although it was acknowledged that in the applied disciplines taught in the Business Studies Faculty relevance was of much more importance than in subjects such as classical studies or history, for example. One manager believed that Massey's Business Studies Faculty was seen by the wider community as more relevant than commerce faculties at other universities. Another had a sense that students were now looking at individual papers to assess relevance to their personal situations, rather than a total package i.e. a degree or diploma.

Students also felt that staff must anticipate the problems that they were likely to encounter with the course content which was summed up by one student thus:

Distance teaching really presumes that the teacher is going to be able to work out where the difficulties are lying and anticipate them, and in the study guide try and overcome those problems by setting out solutions to the likely difficulties.

All three respondent groups, but students particularly, also equated quality with the physical presentation of course materials. They needed to be durable, easy to use and flexible. There was strong support for course materials being presented in ring binder folders which were properly indexed and which enabled students to personalise the course by adding and deleting material. There was also a lack of enthusiasm from students for materials presented in bound booklets which were regarded as being inaccessible, inflexible and lacking in permanence compared to folders. Some students went so far as to say that there should be a standard format for all courses with consistency of layout and organisation - "you should be able to go to page two and know that it will be a timetable because it's basically the same as other study guides." Staff, however, did not like this idea, preferring instead to choose "an appropriate format for the course."

5.2.1.1 Summary

The discussions from the three participant groups about course content and structure produced considerable agreement about some issues and marked differences in perception on others. There was strong agreement from all participants that a good course should be clearly written, coherent, integrated and presented in a durable, attractive, easy-to-use format. In addition students wanted their learning to be clearly structured.

Students believed that the excessive workload on some courses caused by the large quantity of additional readings detracted from quality. Managers also had a strong sense of this problem although staff did not appear to do so. They were more concerned to include a range of readings with a course that complemented the set text.

The discussions about relevance highlighted a fundamental difference between students' and staffs', including managers', perceptions about this dimension of quality. Students, particularly the low experience groups, wanted courses, that were practical rather than theoretical and applicable to their work situations. This they described as relevance.

Managers and staff on the other hand, believed that courses should be a balance of theory and practice and that they should develop students' critical thinking, intellectual and analytical skills. Managers, particularly those who were not HODs, defined relevance in terms of the relationship to a body of knowledge or a discipline rather than immediate applicability to a student's work situation.

5.2.2 Face-to-face Contact

At Massey University, most courses taught in the distance mode, offer some opportunity for face-to-face contact between students and the course tutor. This is either at the Palmerston North campus (campus course) or at a regional venue (regional course) when course numbers warrant it. Depending on course requirements, attendance may be voluntary, strongly recommended or compulsory.

The importance of face-to-face contact as a component of quality was stressed by students and staff alike. Generally the student view was that they "humanise [the course] for me. You get to put a face on the name, a personality to the comments. It also puts a bit of perspective on things...and you have an opportunity to clarify feedback and ask questions".

However, cost was becoming a disincentive for attending campus courses. Overwhelmingly, students felt that the university should offer more courses in their regions and at weekends rather than expect them to travel to Massey for campus courses. Weekend courses would mean that they did not have to take time off work which was very difficult and expensive for some. Expense was a critical consideration for students in Dunedin who could pay as much as \$1000 (travel and accommodation) to attend the campus for a week. These students were very keen for the university to offer alternative courses in Christchurch if numbers did not warrant it in Dunedin. All groups said they would be willing to pay extra to have local courses.

Low experience students in particular valued campus courses. "It was packed. You know the tutors were motivated and exciting and it was neat." High experience students were equivocal about campus courses. They stressed the value gained from being able to use the library, meeting other students and having contact with staff. While they agreed that a well taught course was of enormous benefit, they perceived less need for them as they became experienced with extramural study. This contrasted with the staff view that face-to-face contact was more important at higher levels. These students were also cynical about the value of some courses. "[Some of the lecturers] just talk at you. The worst ones are the ones that virtually read the study guides out to you." This was not value for money. There was also a perception that lecturers did not put as much effort into voluntary courses as those that were compulsory.

While acknowledging the difficulties currently preventing students from attending campus courses, staff believed that face-to-face contact was an important component of quality. Additionally, they appeared to be more sympathetic to students who attended campus courses:

If I find students not going very well and they didn't come to the campus course, then I don't have quite as much sympathy for them. [Attendance] is saying something about the motivation of the student... It is so much easier if they do come in. Then perhaps it's osmosis, but you can help them out a lot.

Managers who were HODs reflected the staff view about face-to-face contact. They saw it as an important adjunct to the teaching and learning process. One even saw it as an opportunity to develop entrepreneurial and creative teaching approaches more in line with mature students' expectations. However, there was a view from the managers who were not HODs that while "some form" of face-to-face contact was important, it did not have to be in the form of a campus or regional course. Student-to-student contact could be just as effective. Staff/student face-to-face contact was a "worthwhile extra" but did not

necessarily improve quality. These opinions could well be another reflection of the underlying concern with resource allocation that the managers tended to exhibit.

5.2.2.1 Summary

All participant groups had a sense of the value of face-to-face contact as a component of quality. However, low experience students, staff and HOD managers placed the highest value on it. High experience students were rather equivocal about campus courses and felt that some of them added little value to a course. All student groups were concerned about the increasing costs of accessing face-to-face contact, particularly those in Dunedin who had a strong preference for regional courses in the South Island. Managers who were not HODs viewed staff/student face-to-face contact as a “worthwhile extra” but not essential.

5.2.3 Assessment

Staff and student groups spent a considerable amount of time talking about assessment. Students, in fact, were rather preoccupied with assessment as a dimension of quality and many expressed strong emotion about this topic. Teaching staff also agreed that assessment was one of the most important aspects of quality and viewed it as an integral part of the design and content of a course. Staff and students agreed that the integration of assignments with course material, clearly defined topics, a reasonable assignment workload, the timely return of marked assignments, the amount and helpfulness of the feedback, the transparency of grading systems, flexibility of deadlines and the ‘fairness’ of assignments and exams all contributed to perceptions of quality.

Students reported that assignment topics could be quite ambiguous and when they were, they wasted a considerable amount of time trying to work out just what the lecturer was looking for. After all, said one student, “the most important thing is actually passing the paper and you need really well defined assignments to know exactly what you need to do to pass the assessment.”

Three weeks was thought by students to be the maximum turnaround time for marked assignments as the assignment would still be fresh in their minds and there would be time to incorporate feedback into the next assignment. It was essential that marked assignments were returned before the next one was due. Students also felt that sending out summary statistics i.e. the range of marks and the mean for each assignment, added value in that they could rate their performance in relation to the class. As one said, “51% is a brilliant mark if you find that everyone else failed!” And from another student: “It can give you the confidence to carry on when you’re actually finding the material quite tough.”

All student groups stressed the importance of constructive feedback on their assignments. Even when they had received a good grade, they still wanted to know why the assignment was good or where it could be improved. “I’ve had essays back for which I got a good mark, but about two lines of explanation. Now I don’t know why I got that good mark and there was no marking schedule either.” Low marks and negative comments could have a devastating effect on students’ self concepts.

Low experience students emphasised the importance of early and regular feedback for students who were new or getting back into study after a long break - “the timeliness of the first assignment, the timeliness of the feedback - regular feedback because extramural students are isolated and they need regular feedback.” They had a preference for shorter more regular assignments rather than two or three larger pieces of work. This would help to keep them focused and provide the regular feedback that they valued. Another student likened it to the work situation: “It’s just like at work with staff, you need to keep giving them feedback.”

There were a number of complaints from students about the lack of consistency within large papers and across papers in the faculty generally over assignment requirements and marking standards. This they felt, really detracted from quality. Several also commented that marking criteria were not specified with the assignment topic and were therefore a surprise

when they came back with the marked assignment. This made writing assignments difficult. “How can you write an assignment if you don’t know what the [marking] criteria are?” Often it was not clear how marks and grades related to each other. In fact, one student summed up the feelings of their group by saying that “the whole assessment question is shrouded in mystery.”

A difference between the high and low experience groups was that the high experience students tended to view assignments as an integral part of the learning process while less experienced students tended to focus on the outcome in terms of grade achieved. More experienced students felt too that assignments should be challenging and reinforce course content. A number of students from all the groups also expressed a strong aversion to exams and felt they were an inappropriate assessment tool for mature students. If exams were used, students valued having their internal course work contributing a proportion to their final grade. Many felt that 50% from internal assessment and 50% from the exam was the fairest approach.

Staff were concerned that there be a variety of appropriate assessment and that the topics extend the students. Fairness to all students was important and they believed that marks standardisation was essential to a quality course. They also saw that a rapid turnaround of assignments was crucial to the learning process as well as an important aspect of service delivery and therefore related to quality.

Many students were concerned and even angry about the lack of accountability of some staff over assignments. They felt that as they had to meet assignment deadlines, staff too should have marking deadlines and return assignments to students by a prespecified date. However, they also valued staff flexibility in relation to assignment deadlines, especially given the other constraints under which many extramural students study. Students also commented on what they perceived as a double standard in that they were expected to hand in error-free assignments and were penalised when they did not, but that course materials often contained errors.

Managers tended to approach assessment from the perspective of overall course design and communication and developing people through constructive feedback. But it was noticeable that the managers who were HODs focused very much on the resource issues associated with marking student work. While agreeing that rapid feedback was very important in terms of students' learning, the large enrolment in many business studies papers created difficulties with this as it was impossible for course controllers to do all their own marking. Finding suitable markers was often difficult. Training them, maintaining standards and achieving consistency could also be problematic, especially when remuneration rates were not high. Providing comprehensive marking guidelines was no guarantee that markers would do a quality job.

These managers were also keen to retain a final exam as "the only way you can guarantee what the student knows is in the final exam... if [a paper] is totally internally assessed... you have got no idea of whether they are actually doing it."

Several managers were also concerned about assessment as it related to student workload. Sometimes course controllers had unrealistic expectations about the size of and how many assignments students could complete satisfactorily without compromising the quality of their learning.

5.2.3.1 Summary

This dimension of quality generated a great deal of emotional discussion from students. It was the area where they were most likely to feel that 'the system' was unfair or that they personally had been unfairly treated. They cited many instances of what they perceived to be inconsistencies in marking and grading.

All participant groups agreed that assignments should be unambiguous and clearly related to the course learning outcomes, that feedback should be comprehensive and constructive, and that turnaround of marked assignments should be timely.

Staff and managers perceived difficulties in standardisation and consistency of marking across papers in the faculty and saw the high numbers in some courses as a large part of the problem. Managers were particularly concerned about resource issues related to recruiting and training markers and to the problems of quality and consistency that this raised.

5.2.4 Communication

This section includes administration of courses, university procedures such as enrolment, and the relationships between the student and the institution at all times. These constitute important aspects of quality for students and staff and managers.

Students in all groups reported that their relationship with the university before starting their course had quite an influence on their perceptions of quality. Obtaining appropriate and helpful pre-enrolment advice, getting through the enrolment process without delays, and receiving the first posting on time all created a positive image. If course materials or text books were late, students felt that it was important that they be given extra time to complete reading and assignments. The importance of accurate information upon which to base course choices was also important. For example, a change to the advertised time for a campus course really affected personal planning and detracted from perceived quality.

Managers had a strong sense that students' relationships with the university before they started their courses were very important in relation to their perceptions of quality:

Your initial inquiries are most important to quality. If they get good service at that time they are going to look forward to receiving the materials. Then if the material

is late coming they are going to have a negative perception before they even start [the course].

Most felt that the first impression was a lasting one and that staff in front line positions should be knowledgeable and friendly. This had training implications as a number of front line staff were employed temporarily during periods such as enrolment.

Another manager categorised communication as engendering in students the sense that they belonged to the university and this meant a helpful and user-friendly attitude at all points of contact.

The enrolment process came in for a lot of discussion from all students groups. It was reported as being complicated and intimidating and for some evoked a feeling of “if I can’t do this right then I shouldn’t be at university.” However, more experienced students also reported that they perceived improvements in the enrolment process and that it was becoming clearer and easier. Staff did not necessarily share this view. Students felt that a ‘bad’ enrolment experience coloured their perceptions negatively for the whole year. This was particularly so when their enrolment had been delayed and their course materials were sent late. This put them behind, and for some it meant that they never caught up the whole year which was unfair and put them at a disadvantage relative to other students. It was difficult to have a positive view of quality under these circumstances.

Students made little distinction between the functions of different sections of the university and the roles played by different individuals, so if course materials were late it was the course controller’s ‘fault’. Staff confirmed this and reported that students were often very confused about who did what and that roles and responsibilities within the university were not made clear to students.

Most of the students in the New Plymouth and Dunedin groups were conscious of an acute sense of isolation from the university. They felt that quality would be enhanced if

communication with the university could be facilitated. A toll free telephone line was a popular choice. Not only would a “quick phone call make things clearer” but a number of students also resented having to phone Massey at their own expense to sort out an error that the university had made. Dunedin students in particular felt that the university should initiate contact with students - “a quick call just to say how are you doing makes all the difference.” Auckland and Dunedin students made use of Massey’s local regional offices as a way of breaking down the sense of isolation. Others had formed study groups with students in the same paper and found this a useful way to overcome isolation. However, not all students perceived isolation as a problem. “I don't find it all that bad. I'm quite happy to just phone up one of the lecturers. They're always really happy to help you out.”

One of the distinguishing aspects of the student focus groups was that personal communication improved quality for them all. The relationship with the course controller was paramount and was established initially by the tone and nature of the on-enrolment posting. “The first mailing gives you an idea straight away whether this is going to be a good course or a bad course.” This “moment of truth” (Normann,1984) was critical to their perception of quality. Thereafter the course controller’s attitude was all important and students used words such as “approachable”, “helpful”, “accommodating”, “friendly”, “enthusiastic”, and “encouraging” as descriptors of quality in the relationship. Staff and managers also used similar descriptors for the sort of behaviours and attitudes that a good course controller should exhibit.

As most extramural students have important work and family responsibilities as well as their study commitments, lecturer flexibility, especially in relation to assignment deadlines, was highly valued by students. On the other hand, an autocratic “these are the rules, obey them” attitude, put students on the defensive and made them “feel a bit defeated even before you start.”

Students greatly appreciated contact with anyone from the university. One student commented that when the researcher phoned it was the first time in four years that anyone

from Massey had phoned him, even when he had left a message for someone to return his call! Another problem mentioned by several students is encapsulated in this comment: "The number of times that I'm left with an extension that's ringing and ringing and ringing, it's very frustrating." It was suggested that it would be helpful to have a contact person or an answering service in each department.

Students also valued staffs' willingness to establish communication channels which were convenient to them and believed that through this they could judge the course controller's level of interest. An indicator of this was course controllers requesting a personal profile from students as it "will help them to understand my circumstances and constraints." Staff recognised the value of this but thought generally that the university could improve quality in this area by centralising student data collection at faculty level.

Staff also recognised the importance of their own attitudes and behaviours in contributing to student motivation and perceptions of quality. However they felt that in practice it was often difficult to give students the time that they wanted because of the complex demands made on their own time. They tended to make a distinction between their academic and service functions and felt a conflict between the different roles that they were expected to fulfil. They believed that more administrative support was necessary in order to provide a quality service. Several of the managers agreed with this. There was a feeling that large courses did not share the advantages of smaller ones in establishing a personal relationship between staff member and student. "Individual attention and that feeling that there is someone there who, if you are stuck, you can ring up and talk to is quite important in terms of quality." They talked about their own "enthusiasm", and "commitment" to extramural teaching and suggested that it was important to "answer the phone with a smile." However, in practice it was often difficult to do this and extramural students did not appreciate the complex demands on their time:

I could spend easily a day a week or even longer just answering letters and queries and things from extramural students. Then they ring and they catch you on the hop

or when you are just running out of the room to give a lecture somewhere else. You have to be quite careful to explain to them that it's not that you don't want to talk to them, it's just that you have other commitments and they will have to call you back.

HOD managers also perceived this as a problem militating against quality, reiterating that when students wanted help they wanted it immediately and they found it hard to understand that teachers had multiple demands on their time.

The course controller appeared to fulfil multiple support roles for students. Not only did they have an educational role but they sometimes also played a counselling or pastoral role. One staff member described dealing with a student who had experienced enrolment difficulties: "Suddenly my role wasn't an educator. I was a counsellor dealing with this anger."

Staff also talked about the difficulties associated with this complex relationship given that they may not feel equipped to play other than a teaching role: "You become the focus of [the student's] emotional commitment. Suddenly all their energy and hope is focused on your course."

Generally students had a perception of themselves as adult learners: mature, self directed, independent, and able to initiate contact and seek advice when they needed it (Shaw, 1982; Scriven & Ryan, 1994).

5.2.4.1 Summary

It was agreed by students, staff and managers that students' relationships with the university at all times, not just during their courses, affected their perceptions of quality. Students needed effective pre-enrolment information and a speedy and accurate journey through the enrolment process. Students perceived that the enrolment service was improving, though staff did not share this view. All groups agreed that perceptions of quality were adversely affected when course materials were delayed.

All groups also recognised the problems of isolation for students. Low experience students seemed to feel this most acutely. There was also strong recognition from all groups that positive, personal communication with the university enhanced perceptions of quality for students.

Staff were concerned that the multiple roles they had to play worked against quality. They sometimes felt ill-equipped to deal with these roles, both personally and in terms of support from the university. Managers felt that more administrative support was required for the extramural programme.

Students made little distinction between the functions of different sections of the university and tended to see everything as the course controller's responsibility. Staff felt that it was important to clarify for students the different roles and responsibilities of different people.

5.2.5 Institutional and Environmental Influences

Both internal and external environmental constraints were identified as key contributors to quality by all groups. These included structural and cultural issues as well as resource limitations in terms of people, time and money.

Staff perceived a number of institutional constraints that militated against quality extramural courses. These included inefficient and inflexible systems, a lack of administrative and instructional design support, and inadequate recognition for good extramural teaching.

Staff described the extramural operation as "hugely inefficient" and this detracted from quality. They felt restricted by the lack of teaching and administrative support and sometimes found it difficult to find out who could assist them. They also found the rigidity of the extramural production deadlines a real concern as these placed unnecessary pressure

on them especially as they were required to play multiple roles (see also previous section on communication). Quality was compromised by the inflexibility of these deadlines which prevented staff including important up-to-date material. This is probably more important in an applied faculty like Business Studies where, to remain relevant, course content must reflect changes taking place in the external environment.

Both HOD managers and staff claimed that the promotion system discouraged excellence in course delivery. They maintained that the system still primarily rewarded lecturers for high research and publication outputs rather than teaching. Since many staff felt that the bulk of their time was engaged in teaching and teaching related activities, both internal and extramural, promotion criteria were perceived as inconsistent. One manager felt that promotion should be done on a faculty basis rather than on an institution wide basis. That way the faculty could reward performance that was appropriate to its particular profile i.e. in Business Studies a strong emphasis on teaching because of high student numbers would be recognised.

Another HOD suggested that there should be a prize for excellence in extramural teaching. This could either be a cash award or something like a visit to the UK Open University to further expertise and knowledge in the area of distance education.

Staff constantly referred to the lack of time, largely attributable to the dual mode, as a barrier to quality. They made reference to internal teaching exacerbating the resource constraints and felt that their own energies were thinly spread between the two modes. This was coupled with organisational factors such as the lack of administrative support, particularly for large courses, which further inhibited quality. This meant that staff spent a disproportionate amount of time on administrative matters to the detriment of their teaching and research.

HOD managers also discussed the time problem in terms of staff workload and were concerned that the multiple demands on staff meant it was sometimes difficult to do a

quality job on anything. They reported various strategies for dealing with this - trying to lessen an individual's internal teaching workload if they had a major rewrite or new extramural course to prepare, or providing extra marking assistance.

The non-HOD managers also shared a sense of the time constraints under which staff worked and made the connection between poor course design and the lack of staff time to create a sound learning environment for students. As one said, "long, long study guides are born of rush, rush, rush."

In addition, these managers had a perception that the university model of collegial governance with the high value that it placed on academic freedom and individual autonomy, lead to courses being offered and sustained that might reflect individual academics' interests and preferences, but did not meet market needs. It had contributed to a proliferation of courses which diluted staff effort, some of which were unsustainable because they attracted such low numbers. Not only was this expensive in terms of resources but it also could contribute to staff overload where a staff member was involved in teaching several small courses both internally and extramurally. The notion of academic freedom in this sense then, was viewed by managers as a threat to quality. Thus a tension was apparent. Staff, on the one hand, wanted the freedom to develop and teach papers that reflected their research interests and expertise (see also section 5.2.7 Programme Integrity), while managers were concerned that the best possible use was made of resources, and wanted courses that were economic and appealed to a broader market.

The underlying theme of funding was evident in much of the managers' discussions. All were acutely aware of a sense of 'having to do more with less' but without compromising the quality of the extramural programme. The rising staff: student ratio and continued expansion of the extramural programme were seen as threats because of the pressure on resources. There was a strong sense that it was the overall resource distribution within the university that was important, i.e. resources would have to be directed to where the best overall result would be achieved. There was also some sense of disjunction caused by the

dual mode which was attributed in part to the government's funding arrangement which funded extramural at a lower rate than internal teaching. This 'encouraged' departments to try to find ways of obtaining the higher rate such as offering courses in block mode instead of extramurally. This in turn raised equity issues as block mode courses restricted access.

However, as one manager pointed out, there was "no tolerance from the clients, and quite rightly so, about the factor of resource limitations and things that as a manager you face." From the students' point of view, as their fees continue to rise, so too do their expectations about quality in the extramural programme.

Managers and staff also criticised the lack of instructional design support. While they felt that the two Centre for University Extramural Studies (CUES) teaching consultants did a good job, this resource was totally inadequate for the whole university. Staff and the HOD managers also felt that the current system lacked the integration necessary to obtain a quality product which melded content and instructional design expertise. It would be more appropriate to locate instructional designers in the departments or in the faculty which would allow both teaching staff and instructional designers to feel part of the same process and keep quality control close to where the product was initiated and developed. It would also overcome the feeling that some staff had of "being evaluated" if they went to CUES to use the Teaching Consultants. Furthermore it would encourage a team approach to course design and might help to change some of the 'less desirable' (see above) behaviours attributed to academic freedom. However, it would also probably extend the time required for course development.

All the HOD managers preferred to send course material camera-ready to CUES. They felt that this was the only way to assure the level of planning and control that they desired for the courses in their departments. Staff also had a preference for this approach. Sending course materials to CUES meant "they disappeared into the system for weeks and when you finally got them back you were usually too busy with something else [to look at them]."

However, there were other managers who felt that the centralised model of instructional design was the most appropriate one given the current resource restrictions. Not only would a devolved model be more expensive, these staff argued, but there would also be difficulties of coordination and quality assurance.

Without exception, the HOD managers felt that there was inadequate training for staff, new or established, in extramural course design and delivery.

There is no training for people in dealing with distance education. You inherit a paper or you establish a paper and basically you are on your own and you either find out from others or you do go and get support from CUES yourself... Generally the quality is dependent on the person - the person's motivation to make the course good.

This also summed up the feelings of staff who constantly referred to the lack of support for extramural teaching. One of the HODs suggested that a training video for new staff to acquaint them with the extramural operation would be a good idea.

Managers who were not HODs also recognised the need for additional support in the area of training and felt that the establishment of the Training and Development Unit (TDU) would help to alleviate this problem.

Students too identified a number of institutional constraints that militated against quality. High experience students expressed frustration at the continuing changes to the structure and regulations for the Bachelor of Business Studies (BBS) degree which they perceived disadvantaged them compared with internal students. "I guess it's easier if you are doing it in three years [like an internal student]. The impact is not quite the same if you are doing it over 10 years. And every year it is just an on-going battle." However, other students took a more positive view and saw the constant change as the university moving with the times.

An awareness of the dual mode structure of Massey was also evident in students' discussions. They perceived themselves as quite different from internal students and felt that their maturity, confidence and work experience should be taken into account in course design. "It's okay to fill internal students up with theory but we need practical stuff that we can use at work the next day." Staff also were very conscious of the different needs, characteristics and motivation for study of the two groups, but felt that it was important to maintain parity and standards between the two modes so that a degree obtained extramurally did not become perceived as a lesser qualification. This would also ensure what they called "fairness" to both groups. The more experienced students also perceived that parity between internal and extramural courses was an important quality issue.

Students studying internally were perceived by their extramural counterparts as being advantaged in that they had direct access to the lecturers and the other resources on the campus and that they often had better markers. They also felt that it was unfair that they had to pay the same fees as internal students for what they perceived as a lesser service. As it was much cheaper to run extramural courses, their fees were being "creamed off" to subsidise internal students.

Implicit in many of the discussions was the notion the dual mode meant that extramural processes were geared to internal academic processes and that the extramural operation was simply the internal diet served up in a different way. One manager explicitly characterised this as a barrier to quality in the extramural programme. The extramural client group was very different and required a more open approach to enrolment and more flexibility in programme delivery. A rolling enrolment where students could enrol and complete courses in their own time would be more appropriate for a client group who were generally working and studying part-time. These students often preferred to study over the summer, for example, a time when traditionally the university did not teach. "There needs to be a review of the whole open-endedness - there are both human and management factors that could be better addressed." Such an approach would be more in line with operations at some single mode distance teaching universities such as Athabasca in Canada.

Managers, staff and students referred to the apparent slowness of some of the university's processes and the effect that this could have on perceptions of quality. Students could experience considerable frustration when waiting for enrolment approval or their first posting, for example. One manager felt that the problem was one of perception - what students saw as an intolerable wait could be quite normal for the institution. Staff and managers recognised that this was a problem that the university needed to address both by speeding up processes and by better client education about how long some processes might take.

All participant groups identified changes in society that affected their perceptions of quality including an increasing demand for and awareness of quality generally. Students also believed that the increasing proportion of fees that they were paying gave them rights as customers and enabled them to be more demanding about quality. They were quick to point out that they would defect to other providers if Massey could not meet their quality needs. A manager also pointed out that in terms of the legislative framework within which the universities operate, particularly the Consumer Guarantees Act and the Privacy Act, students were regarded as customers under the law. This manager had a preference for using the term client rather than customer as it had connotations of a more long-term relationship and was therefore a more appropriate way of describing the extramural student/institution relationship.

However, while managers spoke a great deal about the current competition in the tertiary education market in New Zealand especially from the polytechnics, they did not perceive them to be a threat to the university's livelihood. As one said, "there is room in the market for all of us as long as we do not let our standards slip." Even The Open Polytechnic, which now offers a distance mode undergraduate business degree, was not perceived to be a serious threat. In fact there was a perception that the dual mode positioned Massey well in the market as the two systems fed off each other to some extent and provided the university with a level of flexibility in delivery that many of its competitors lacked. However, the

competitive environment had meant operational changes. For example, universities now had to be prepared to market themselves, and this included Massey.

The increasing costs of study were a concern to all the student groups but especially those in Dunedin. They cited the expense associated with accessing face-to-face contact (see section 5.2.2), the rising costs of texts and increasing fees as disincentives to study. They also felt that these costs prevented many people who would benefit from study from enrolling in courses.

5.2.5.1 Summary

There were lengthy and complex discussions from all participants about this dimension of quality. All were conscious of the effects of the dual mode, in fact it became obvious that all groups believed that the internal programme was used as an informal benchmark or standard for the extramural programme. The university's organisation and processes were geared to servicing internal students and were not well adapted to the needs of the extramural client group. Students in particular saw themselves as disadvantaged compared with internal students.

Staff and managers too felt that the extramural programme was under-resourced and that many of the university's systems were inefficient and inflexible. There needed to be more administrative support as well as more instructional design assistance. Staff and HOD managers felt that this would be better located in the departments or the faculty.

Managers had a particular concern about the worsening staff: student ratio and the need to do more with less resources. They perceived that the university's system of collegial governance and the concept of academic freedom could be counterproductive to efficiency and effectiveness as evidenced by the proliferation of uneconomic courses, and were concerned about the multiple demands on staff time.

Staff and HOD managers felt that the promotion system still did not provide adequate recognition for teaching, especially extramural teaching.

All groups had an increasing awareness of students as customers. Students felt that the greater number of tertiary providers gave them more options. Managers, while very conscious of the competitive market, did not perceive Massey University's extramural programme to be under threat.

5.2.6 Standards and Evaluation

Participants in the focus groups and individual interviews referred to standards and evaluation within the broader discussion at various points and believed they were very important dimensions of quality. They also explicitly addressed the question of how quality should be assessed. In this area, there was considerable agreement between managers and staff. However, students had rather different perceptions about this dimension.

Staff believed that the notion of 'academic freedom' and difficulties in evaluating the "substance" of courses conflicted with establishing standards. This was in line with their preoccupation with course content. They were concerned with maintaining consistency across courses and modes. They also mentioned the "pressure [from students] to push down standards" and the problems associated with the differing personal and academic standards of individual staff. This 'problem' is a commonly accepted interpretation of academic freedom. Establishing standards when students enter the course with a range of experience, ability and motivation was seen as a challenge.

Students also had an acute awareness of the problem of consistency and discussed this both in terms of differing standards within the faculty and between tertiary institutions. Examples were cited of being able to sit papers at polytechnics which were much easier than the equivalent Massey paper but then being able to get cross credit for them at Massey. Many wanted assurance that an equivalent paper passed at any university had the same

standard and supported this by examples of employers discriminating among prospective employees on the basis of which institution their qualifications came from.

A related issue was the concern expressed by some students about the transfer of credit from one university to another. Some had experienced difficulties with this and saw it as another reason to have national standards applied to the universities. At the same time, some students felt that it was time for the university seriously to address the issue of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and set standards which would recognise the work skills that many extramural students already had when they enrolled in courses. This would enhance perceptions of quality and reduce feelings that some had of being discriminated against.

Students then, especially the more experienced ones, felt that independently set and monitored standards and the close involvement of stakeholder groups such as professional bodies, would enhance quality. They were conversant with standards such as the ISO9000 series and some believed that a similar approach should be applied to the universities. For example, if the universities were brought on to the New Zealand Qualifications Authority Framework (NZQA), the setting and monitoring of standards would be facilitated.

They also felt that staff should be “held a lot more accountable, not only for the product but for the people they are actually educating” and that peer assessment of teaching performance should be used. The more experienced students were also keen on performance-based pay for staff in relation to teaching. “It doesn’t matter whether the guy is a professor with a string of letters after his name. If he can’t communicate that information to students then he’s not an effective staff member in the institution.” Many of these students had experience of performance-based pay in their own work environments.

Generally the student groups felt that there should be strong control mechanisms in place to ensure that standards were being met. Such assessment procedures should be administered

centrally, perhaps at faculty level or by a central quality assurance unit within the university if not at the national level.

Managers and staff did not favour the use of external bodies such as NZQA to accredit or evaluate the quality of their courses. This belief was rooted in the notion of the universities being different from other educational institutions because their courses were designed to develop higher level thinking abilities, the interrelationship of teaching and research, and the importance of being a part of the wider international community of scholars. A manager put it this way: “I do not see how a body like NZQA can know about international standards. I would have no confidence in NZQA running one of its standard checks over us.” One manager did point out that if the faculty was teaching a qualification where the competitors were all NZQA accredited, the university might have to follow suit.

However, managers were not against independent review and there was strong support for the New Zealand Vice-Chancellors’ Committee Academic Audit Unit which was seen as a way to help the university self review and continuously improve its operations. They recognised, though, that some staff might view this as an infringement of autonomy. In fact staff tended to opt for any system of moderation or evaluation being conducted on a self review and collegial basis. A devolved model with quality assurance responsibility vested in the departments and linked to broader institutional quality aims and objectives was favoured.

The use of peer review both within the university and from other universities was viewed positively as was moderation and cross checks with other universities. HODs were seen as having a major role to play in quality assurance. Generally staff and managers supported a quality management model where each staff member was expected to fulfil their own quality responsibilities.

Consultation with stakeholder groups in setting quality standards and deciding curriculum was considered to be very important by managers. It was up to each department or unit to

identify their key stakeholders - professional bodies, other departments within the university, client groups - and consult with them about their needs. In some subjects it would be necessary to have content reviewed by external or professional bodies who were not academics. Stakeholder needs had to be balanced against each other and accommodated within operating resource constraints.

Both staff and managers had reservations about using student feedback to assist in the setting of standards. Managers felt that student feedback could only be used in relation to the presentation and service aspects of their extramural courses, for example, the physical presentation of course materials, turnaround time on assignments and whether or not the university met its deadlines.

Staff highlighted the difficulties in obtaining constructive feedback about quality from students when post hoc evaluation was used. Students also highlighted this problem and reported reluctance to give honest feedback in case their grades were affected. Generally they felt that evaluations at the end of courses should be conducted independently of the course controller and that the information from them should be used for staff appraisal purposes which is what the university has done with Student Evaluation of Content, Administration and Teaching (SECAT), see below. Some experienced students felt that rating scales on course evaluations were of little value and that a better approach would be to talk to students directly and get their feedback.

Both staff and students pointed out that because of the long lead time for extramural course materials, student feedback could not be incorporated into course design for two or three years, which often rendered it irrelevant. It was too early to say how effective SECAT was going to be in this regard although there was a lot of criticism of its predecessor, Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET). Managers generally felt that any systematic method of evaluation was good although this did not absolve course controllers of the responsibility to monitor their activities continuously.

According to students, pass rates, failure rates and dropout rates should also be used as performance indicators, a high failure rate indicating that there was something wrong with the course. They and some of the managers also believed that market share and looking at why students do not re-enrol should be used as ways to evaluate the quality of the university's programmes.

5.2.6.1 Summary

The results from discussions about this dimension fell clearly into two camps. Students were strongly of the opinion that university standards should be independently set and monitored. This related to three concerns. First, they desired good, marketable qualifications. Second, they wished to be able to transfer credit easily between tertiary institutions. Third, they felt that university teachers should be held a lot more accountable for the courses that they teach. They also wanted the university to recognise prior learning for credit.

Staff and managers were not in favour of independently set and monitored standards, preferring self and peer review within the broader institutional context, with university audits conducted by an autonomous universities' audit committee.

All groups believed that there should be consultation with appropriate stakeholders, including students, professional bodies and employers, when standards were being set. However, staff and managers felt that student feedback should only be used in relation to the service aspects of courses.

5.2.7 Programme Integrity

Programme integrity refers to an area of quality that was difficult to describe other than in terms of the perceived soundness, reputation or standing of the entire programme and the courses offered by the faculty - its "fitness for purpose" (Juran, 1989). This integrity aspect

underpinned many of the other quality perceptions of the participants. What is interesting is that the views of staff and managers coincided on many aspects of this dimension while student views were different.

Staff were concerned that course integrity would be compromised if what they referred to as “academic standards” were not achieved. They perceived external pressure to lower standards and pressure from students some of whom “don’t really care about the content, they just want to get the paper”, a perception also shared by some managers. There was a sense that they were part of a wider university community and it was important that Massey University was recognised as a reputable institution. Whilst their own reputations were important, they also wanted the qualifications awarded by the university to be recognised for their quality.

You have got to be careful because otherwise you could slip into being a university which has no content at all. We are academics and we need to maintain standards, which I think is very important otherwise it does just get watered down and become a \$10 PhD University, a storefront university.

Managers were particularly concerned that Massey’s reputation was high both nationally and internationally. It was important that Massey be part of an international community of scholars and this was best achieved by maintaining high standards for both teaching and research. The university would be judged by the calibre of the graduates it produced and therefore courses must develop students who were independent and intellectual thinkers and who aspired to excellence.

Another way that managers believed the integrity and reputation of the university would be enhanced was to do well in any independent audits conducted in the university and to make sure that continuous improvement was achieved by appropriate monitoring and adjustment of processes.

Staff knew that it was important to 'keep up with the play' yet expressed dissatisfaction that they were not always able to teach in their research areas. This diluted their efforts and compromised course quality and integrity.

Staff also mentioned that integrity would be enhanced by using a range of media and technologies to deliver their courses, and made particular mention of computer technology. Some managers were also very enthusiastic about the possibilities for quality enhancement using technology. They cited the use of email to facilitate communication with students and the need to move away from print based materials. CD Rom and using video conferencing to connect subject 'gurus' with students at campus or block courses were given as examples. There were two reasons given for this. One was that students in the business faculty often experienced high quality materials and presentations at seminars and workshops they attended, especially in the private sector, and this raised their expectations of Massey's course delivery. Massey needed to keep up. The other was that using leading edge technology would enhance the university's reputation and could provide economies of scale without losing the human dimension of service.

Yet technology was notably absent from the student discussions, supporting the findings of Bowser and Shepherd (1991) that "while technology may from a practitioner's perspective enhance the quality of the product it does not necessarily do so for the consumer" (no page reference given). This suggests that there is more likely to be a technology 'push' from the providers than a technology 'pull' from the recipients, surprising perhaps in a Business Faculty where it is often assumed that extramural students have access to state-of-the-art technology.

Students too thought that Massey's reputation in the market place was very important, especially as it related to their ability to get a job. They wanted the qualification that they obtained from Massey to give them an edge in the job market. One manager echoed this view by saying that an important measure of quality was how well adapted Massey's graduates were to the careers they chose. This would be for employers as well as graduates

to decide. Another manager believed that the university had to become more responsive to the needs of the market and be able to move quickly, bringing on new courses as required.

For all students, the issue of staff credibility in terms of their teaching abilities was central to course integrity. There was a strong feeling that staff needed to increase their credibility as teachers by being required to undergo some form of teacher training. In addition, some lacked practical work experience in industry or business.

Some have very little practical experience and it is all theory. They may have finished their degree or masterate or something, and then next year they are out lecturing. As an extramural, when you're a bit older, it starts showing through the gaps what happens in the real world and what happens in the textbook. They lose a bit of respect from you... It comes down to their credibility.

Industry exchanges and working as consultants were suggested as ways of keeping staff up to date, to enable them to build real world experiences into course materials and help to ensure that employers' needs were being met. This would also facilitate the balance between theory and practice, as well as enhance staff credibility.

Despite the emphasis on 'real world' experience, more experienced students in particular did not discount the value of theory. They suggested that there should be a balance of the practical and theoretical within a degree or diploma. They also related this back to 'value for money' and the increased contribution that they were making to their fees. However, less experienced students appeared to place little value on theory. Relevance was the main contributor to course integrity for them and this meant industry experience and a practical bias.

A number of the high experience students felt that the quality of teaching in the extramural programme, particularly the presentation of course materials, had greatly improved. Requests for student feedback were also interpreted as an improvement in quality.

Finally, both staff and managers believed that the extramural programme had a positive effect on staffs' internal teaching as it encouraged them to have an organised and systematic approach to their courses. This was an advantage of the dual mode.

5.2.7.1 Summary

In this dimension, programme integrity, there were noticeable differences between students and the staff and manager groups. Staff and managers tended to look at this dimension from an institutional point of view while students took a more personal approach.

Staff and managers were concerned about the university's reputation both nationally and internationally. Academic standards must be maintained and high quality graduates must be produced. Staff felt that standards were being compromised by pressure from students.

Students on the other hand were more concerned about the marketability of their qualifications from Massey. To that end they wanted lecturers who were good teachers but also in touch with current business and industry practice. High experience students felt that the quality of the extramural programme had improved over recent years.

While managers and staff believed that leading edge technology would improve quality and enhance the university's reputation, students did not appear to share this view:

We must want quality to be part of everyday life. It is not something special that we bring out when we have a crisis, or on some days, or thanksgiving day or whatever. It is an everyday experience. It is natural, it is normal, it is part of the process of aspiring towards excellence. (from a manager's interview)

5.3 CONCLUSION

This chapter has reported the exploratory phase of the research where the construct of quality in business studies, undergraduate, extramural courses was explored in focus groups with students and staff and in individual interviews with managers. Quality was found to be a multi-dimensional construct and the data was collapsed into seven phenomenological scales from which a questionnaire was designed. This was sent out to samples of students and staff in the Business Studies Faculty. The results of the survey are reported in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 6: ANALYSIS OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE DATA

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter reports, interprets and discusses the findings from the questionnaire. Each of the phenomenological scales developed from the focus group and interview data and which were the basis for the questionnaire, is examined. Areas of congruence and incongruence are discussed.

From the 584 questionnaires sent out to students enrolled in the undergraduate, business studies extramural programme, a total of 311 usable questionnaires were returned. A further three were returned "unknown at this address". This gave a response rate of 54%. Of the 146 staff questionnaires sent out 66 usable responses were received. Three were returned blank and five were returned uncompleted with a comment saying that the recipient felt unqualified to respond. A response rate of 48% was therefore achieved for staff. These rates can be considered good for a mailout survey of this type (Cooper & Emory, 1995; Fowler, 1993; Zikmund, 1994).

6.2 BIOGRAPHICAL DATA

6.2.1 Students

6.2.1.1 Gender

There were 131 male respondents i.e. 42%, 163 female respondents i.e. 52.2% and 17 missing cases. This is a fairly good reflection of the actual gender balance on the 1996 extramural, undergraduate business studies roll, where 54% were female and 46% were male.

6.2.1.2 Age

Table 6.1: Student Respondents by Age

category	frequency	percentage
under 20	3	1.0
20 - 29	71	22.8
30 - 39	122	39.2
40 - 49	93	29.9
50 - 59	21	6.8
over 60	1	.3
	311	100.0

70% of student respondents were aged 30 - 49 years which is typical of higher education students studying in open learning and distance modes, i.e. they tend to be mature and experienced.

6.2.1.3 Student experience

Table 6.2: Number of Years Enroled as an Extramural Student

years	frequency	percentage
3 or less	146	47.1
4 - 6	88	28.4
7 - 9	45	14.5
10 - 12	18	5.8
more than 12	13	4.2
	310	100.0

While they might have 'life' experience, almost 50% of student respondents had relatively limited experience as an extramural student, i.e. three or less years. However, some may well have studied elsewhere as a tertiary student.

Table 6.3: Number of Business Studies Extramural Papers Completed at Massey

papers passed	frequency	percentage
5 or less	169	54.7
6 - 9	67	21.7
10 or more	73	23.6
	309	100.0

Just over half of the respondents were in the “low experience” category, i.e. they had passed five or fewer business studies extramural papers at Massey. Nearly 24% were in the “high experience” category in that they had passed 10 or more papers. This means that there were more than twice as many low experience students as high experience students in the survey.

6.2.2 Staff

6.2.2.1 Gender

There were 60.6% male respondents and 37.9% female respondents. One case was missing. This is close to the gender balance for the total of those sent questionnaires where 64.4% were male and 35.6% were female.

6.2.2.2 Department representation

Table 6.4: Staff Respondents by Department

department	frequency	percentage
Accountancy	15 (34)	22.7 (23.3)
Business Law	3 (9)	4.5 (6.2)
Finance	6 (11)	9.1 (7.5)
Human Resource Mgt	13 (25)	19.7 (17.1)
Management Systems	16 (33)	24.3 (22.6)
Marketing	10 (21)	15.2 (14.4)
Property Studies	2 (7)	3.0 (4.8)
Centres	1 (6)	1.5 (4.1)
	66	100.0 (100)

Note 1: The actual number of staff sent a questionnaire in each department and the percentage each department contributed to the overall number of questionnaires sent out is given in brackets.

The results indicate that the sample was representative of the academic staff in the faculty.

6.2.2.3 Staff experience

Table 6.5: Staff Experience as a University Teacher

years	frequency	percentage
3 or less	20	30.3
4 - 7	15	22.7
8 - 11	19	28.8
more than 11	12	18.2
	66	100.0

Although over 40% of staff had three or less years experience as a university teacher, this does not necessarily indicate either youth or inexperience. Many staff are recruited to the faculty from industry or business where they may have had a considerable number of years

of experience which they are able to bring to bear on their teaching and research. They may also have had other teaching experience.

Table 6.6: Staff Years Teaching Business Studies Courses Extramurally

years	frequency	percentage
5 or less	35	53.0
6 - 9	18	27.3
10 or more	13	19.7
	66	100.0

While 53% of staff reported that they had five or less years experience teaching business studies courses extramurally, this excludes other non-business studies distance teaching experience. Some staff may well have had such experience and would have been able to bring it to bear on their current teaching.

Teaching Qualifications

Sixteen staff, 24%, reported having a teaching qualification. Of these, five reported having a Trained Teachers' Certificate or a Diploma in Teaching. Three more had a Post-Graduate Certificate in Education, one of which was in Adult Education. One had a Certificate in Education (CNNA). Three claimed a Diploma in Education as a teaching qualification. One had an LTCL in Speech and Drama. Another had an MBS endorsed in Training and Development. Finally, two claimed a PhD as a teaching qualification. If these two are discounted, the percentage reduces to 21%. It is also likely that some of the other qualifications cited were theoretical in orientation with little or no emphasis on the development of practical teaching skills.

Consulting and Advisory Work

Forty-three (65%) staff reported that in the last five years they had done consulting or advisory work in a business or organisation outside the university. Thus two thirds of staff respondents were keeping in touch with the business and industry community.

In summary it can be said that the student sample was representative of the total business studies undergraduate roll in 1996 in terms of gender balance and age distribution. The staff sample was also representative of the faculty in terms of gender and departmental representativeness. Although approximately half of staff respondents had been teaching distance mode business studies courses for five or fewer years, this does not mean that this was the only teaching experience that they had. Only a small proportion of staff had teaching qualifications, which is quite typical of many university departments, but the majority had recent advisory or consulting experience outside the university.

6.3 STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

The preliminary stage of statistical analysis looked at basic statistical information for the two groups - frequency of responses on the scales, means, standard deviations and histograms. This visual and conceptual analysis gave the researcher a feel for the data and indicated that there were a number of differences between student and staff responses. The next stage of analysis was therefore the examination of the level of statistical difference between the responses of the two groups on all questions. The Mann-Whitney *U* Test was used for this purpose.

The Mann-Whitney test was chosen because it is a powerful nonparametric test and therefore robust enough for the data. It avoids the 'limiting assumptions' of the parametric *t* test, such as that the data were drawn from normally distributed populations, and is appropriate to use "with two independent samples if the data are at least ordinal" (Cooper &

Emory, 1995, p. 651). The Mann-Whitney test uses ranks rather than means, and overcomes the assumption that numbers on a Likert scale represent equal appearing intervals or values. Seigel (1956) claims that the Mann-Whitney is the most useful alternative to the powerful parametric *t* test where nonparametric data are being examined.

It was postulated that there would be differences in perceptions of quality between staff and students and low experience and high experience students (see Chapter 4, Methodology). In order to test this contention, Mann-Whitney *U* Tests were applied to the following groups:

1. Staff and the total sample of students.
2. Staff and low experience students i.e. those with passes in five or less papers.
3. Staff and high experience students i.e. those with passes in 10 or more papers.
4. Low and high experience students.

The most significant differences were between staff and the total sample of students. Surprisingly, there were only eight significant differences between high and low experience students, and only two that were highly significant. These are summarised in Table 6.7, Appendix 11.

As would be expected, the pattern of results for staff and low experience students (group 2 above) and staff and high experience students (group 3 above) reflected the pattern for group 1. Significant differences also mirrored those for staff and the total student sample. Therefore only the staff and all student sample results and the low and high experience student sample results will be reported and discussed.

Results were grouped according to the phenomenological scales developed from the focus groups and the individual interviews. These were:

- A: Course structure and content.
- B: Face-to-face contact.

- C: Assessment.
- D: Communication.
- E: Institutional and environmental influences.
- F: Standards and evaluation.
- G: Programme integrity.

There was a total of 114 items on the seven scales which required a response on a four point Likert scale. In addition at the end of the questionnaire, there were four more items which asked respondents to rate the effectiveness of eight different media in enhancing quality (item 116); rate the importance of various ways to assist in the setting of standards (item 117); rate 12 dimensions of quality according to importance (item 118); and indicate an appropriate workload for papers of differing point values taught over a single or double semester (item 115). These items gathered some new data but also cross-validated and summarised concepts examined on the scales. Items 115 and 116 are relevant to Scale A: *Course structure and content* and will be reported with these results. Item 117 results will be reported with Scale F: *Standards and evaluation*. As item 118 cross-validated concepts tested on all of the scales except Scale F, the relevant dimensions will be reported at the end of the discussion for the relevant scale. Table 6.8, which is a summary of item 118 results, is in Appendix 12.

6.4 RESULTS

Results will be reported according to whether or not the results were statistically significant. Items where there were significant differences can further be grouped into those where the results were congruent i.e. both groups agreed or disagreed but indicated significant differences, and those where the results were incongruent i.e. those where one group agreed and the other group disagreed and the differences were significant. Areas of congruence and incongruence will therefore also be examined.

6.4.1 Scale A: Course Structure and Content

There were 23 items on this scale which related to how courses were structured and organised and to some issues of content. Some items looked at support/administrative issues such as the extramural library service (e.g. item 4); others asked about issues of course structure such as format (e.g. items 8, 97) and organisation of the material (item 12); and others asked about issues relating to content such as relevance (e.g. items 74, 84) and currency of material (e.g. item 92).

There were 11 items where there was high agreement between staff and students and there were no significant differences, see Table 6.9.

Table 6.9: High Agreement, No Significant Differences Staff and all Students, Scale A : Course Structure and Content

Item
12: Aims, objectives and learning outcomes for all courses should be clearly stated
22: Course materials should be easy to use
36: All course texts should be available for the start of the course
39: All course materials should be clearly and simply written and jargon kept to a minimum
42: There is often a mismatch between theory in textbooks and workplace practice
50: The information in course materials should be accurate and error free
53: A range of readings that complement the set text should be included with the course
54: The quality of courses is compromised if the quantity of readings is excessive
72: Course materials should be presented in such a way that they are durable and robust
87: Course materials should be up-to-date/current
94: Lecturers should anticipate areas of learning where students commonly have difficulty and try to find ways to overcome them

With the exception of item 42, these items relate to the structure, accuracy, currency and usability of course materials, the availability of texts and the quantity of additional readings. They also represent what could be described as aspects of “good practice” in distance education courses and the results confirm that both students and staff concur with and value them. It is important that the institution ensures that they are built into the design

of extramural courses. This is particularly so in a market that is becoming increasingly competitive with new providers entering the field from both New Zealand and overseas. Moreover, as recent research by Wood (1996) found, customer expectations are also continuing to rise, and identifying best practice and transferring it throughout the organisation is a useful and effective strategy for improving service quality.

Item 42 confirms that both staff (83%) and students (79%) perceive that there is frequently a mismatch between theory and practice. This is not to say that theory should be viewed skeptically, but rather that it needs to be placed within an appropriate learning context.

There were 12 items on this scale where there were significant differences between students and staff, see Table 6.10.

Table 6.10: Significant Differences Staff and all Students, Scale A: Course Structure and Content

Item	Students	Staff	Level of Sig
4: Extramural library service is excellent	a↑	a	.029*
8: Should be standard format for all courses	d	d↓	.000**
18: Course content should reflect learning outcomes	a	a↑	.023*
28: Courses should develop critical thinking abilities	a	a↑	.000**
60: Course materials should consistently refer to the text	a↑	a	.025*
63: Relative importance of all course reading should be indicated	a↑	a	.000**
64: Uni courses should be knowledge based rather than skills based	d	a	.000**
68: No justification for purchase of multiple texts for a course	a↑	a	.000**
74: Courses should be practical and relevant to the business world	a↑	a	.000**
84: Texts should be written about or highly relevant to NZ	a↑	a	.002**
92: Courses should be based on contemporary international literature and knowledge	a	a↑	.028*
97: Weekly timetable should be included all courses to guide students	a↑	a	.000**

Note 1: a = agree, ↑ = stronger agreement
d = disagree, ↓ = stronger disagreement

Note 2: ** significant at the p<.01 level
* significant at the p<.05 level

6.4.1.1 Items Showing Congruence

The three items 60, 63 and 97 indicate a strong need on the part of students for structure in their learning and clear guidance from the course controller about what they should read and when. This need is more strongly felt by students than staff perceive. There was also extremely high agreement from both groups that course content should reflect learning outcomes (item 18), a further indication of the need for structure in the learning process. On this item, staff agreed more strongly than students. This need for structure and clear guidance is confirmed as an important component of the learning process for adult students studying at a distance by many commentators and researchers (see for example Rowntree, 1992; Morgan, 1993; Marton, Hounsell, & Entwistle, 1997). Item 60 was also the only item on this scale where there was a significant difference between high and low experienced students. Eighty-two percent of low experience students compared with 70% of high experience students agreed that “course materials should consistently refer to the text.” This may suggest that low experience students prefer more direction and structure in their learning, reflecting the fact that students beginning their studies are less confident in their ability to learn than more experienced students (Morgan, 1993) and are therefore more dependent (Benson, Collis, Parer, & Robinson, 1991).

However, the need for structure does not encompass standardising course formats. Neither staff nor students felt that there should be a standard format for all courses (item 8) with staff disagreement being stronger, a highly significant difference ($p < .01$). The strength of staff opinion may reflect the idiosyncratic and less industrialised approach to course design that is part of Massey University’s culture. This, it seems, is more desirable than a template approach which, it could be argued, facilitates course design and makes quality control much easier. Many of the Open Universities, including the UK Open University, use a standard format for their courses. While it may make courses more accessible for users, it also has a very important ‘branding’ function.

Branding, like quality, is associated with developing customer loyalty, which can be used as a very effective strategy in an increasingly competitive market. Not only do loyal customers provide free advertising for the institution or business, but returning customers are considerably more cost effective than new ones (Reichheld & Sasser, 1990). Their records are established and they 'know the ropes'. They are familiar with the university's systems, they generally require less support and assistance and they know what to do when something goes wrong. In addition, the longer customers stay with a firm, the more profitable they become (Lister, 1994). In the university context, many extramural students find that they can manage a greater number of papers per year as they become experienced and their confidence grows. After completing an undergraduate degree, they may go on to enrol in post-graduate studies which means a greater financial return to the institution. So while a standard format for courses may not have immediate appeal to students and staff, the branding implications of this approach should perhaps be explored further.

Although both staff and students agreed that there was no justification for the purchase of multiple texts (item 68), student opinion was much stronger, resulting in a highly significant difference between the two groups ($p < .01$). This outcome is not unexpected, given that students have to 'foot the bill' for their texts, they are generally concerned about the rising costs of study, and want a product they perceive to be good value for money (see 6.4.5. below). This finding may also relate to the question of workload as there is considerable evidence to support the view that students believe "they are taught most effectively (that is, they learn best) ... when there is not too much of it" (Chambers, 1992, p. 142).

Both staff (87%) and students (88%) agreed that the extramural library service is excellent but the level of agreement was stronger from students (item 4). However, it should also be noted that 21 students (7%) and 6 staff (9%) commented on their questionnaires that they either had never used the extramural library service or lacked the knowledge necessary to respond to the question. But it is obviously a service which is highly valued by those who use it and these results would indicate a marked increase in usage over the last 10 years. In

a survey of Massey University extramural students conducted in 1987 (Auger & Tremaine, 1987) it was found that only 43% had used the extramural library service to borrow material although 95% of respondents knew about the service. A number of recommendations were made to improve students' knowledge and use of the library. Now students with the appropriate technology, like staff, can access the library on-line and feedback from the library indicates that many extramural students do so. On-line library services to open and distance learning students are now becoming widely available in many countries (Wynne, 1995).

While all staff and 98% of students agreed that courses should develop students' critical thinking abilities (item 28), staff felt more strongly about this than students did. This same difference of opinion was reflected in the responses to item 74 where students agreed more strongly than staff that courses should be practical and relevant to the business world. This suggests that these students have a strong vocational orientation to education, aimed at meeting training needs and with the primary concern being relevance of courses to their careers (Gibbs, Morgan, & Taylor cited in Morgan, 1993).

Items 84 and 92 relate to the content of course texts. Students felt more strongly than staff that course texts should be written about or highly relevant to New Zealand. This suggests that students want texts that reflect and can be applied to their working environments, again indicating a vocational orientation to education and the need for relevance. Staff responses may reflect the common difficulty of finding suitable texts about New Zealand and the desire to place New Zealand within the wider international context with which they often strongly identify, a notion supported by their strong agreement with item 92.

6.4.1.2 Items Showing Incongruence

There was only one item on this scale that showed significant differences and incongruence between the two groups. Item 64 stated that university courses should be knowledge based rather than skills based. Slightly more than half of staff, 58%, agreed with this statement. However, almost two thirds of students, 65%, disagreed with the statement. While students are indicating clearly that they prefer courses that are based on skills development, confirming a vocational orientation to education, it is interesting that staff, traditionally fairly 'academic' in their orientation to learning, are rather equivocal in their responses. This may reflect the applied nature of business studies and it could well be that staff in a more traditional faculty, such as Humanities, would respond differently.

However, the curriculum in higher education is continuing to take on a more applied and distinctly vocational character and as Morgan said in 1993, "competencies and skills are now entering the vocabulary of the debates about education at all levels" (p. 51). In New Zealand the debate continues about whether or not the universities should be included on the Qualifications Framework which would mean the adoption of a competency-based approach. Be that as it may, the results of this item suggest that staff and students may well have different expectations about courses offered by the Faculty of Business Studies and that such a gap may need to be addressed through appropriate marketing.

Three of the additional items at the end of the questionnaire related to items on this scale. Item 115 asked respondents to indicate what they considered to be an appropriate weekly workload for papers of different point values - see Table 6.11, Appendix 13 for a summary of these results. There were two options where there were significant differences at the $<p.01$ level. In both cases, staff estimated a much higher workload than students for a single semester 15 point paper and a single semester 20 point paper respectively. There were no significant differences between the two student groups for any of the options.

In the business studies undergraduate programme at the present time most papers are single semester with a 15 point value. This is an expected workload of one hour per point per week for a single semester paper, i.e. 15 hours per week. However, by 1999, the university will have standardised on 12.5 points for all undergraduate papers. The results for this item indicate that there is a mismatch between student and staff perceptions of workload which may need to be addressed. But not only that, reasonable workload constitutes effective teaching. There is considerable evidence to support the importance of encouraging a deep approach to student learning which is motivated by a desire to understand and characterised by an inquiring critical stance (Chambers, 1992). “Excessive workload is related to a surface approach to learning” where students adopt a more passive approach and are motivated by the desire to complete tasks (p.143). “It is characterised by lack of reflection, memorisation and reproduction of largely unrelated facts and ideas for assessment purposes” (p. 142).

Item 116 asked respondents to rate eight different media in terms of their effectiveness in enhancing the quality of extramural courses. Results are summarised in Table 6.12 below.

Table 6.12: Media Effectiveness in Enhancing Quality in Extramural Courses

	1	2	3	4	5	Mean
Printed course materials	0	0	8	51	41	4.33
	<i>0</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>19</i>	<i>38</i>	<i>42</i>	<i>4.19</i>
Television	10	14	32	34	10	3.20
	<i>10</i>	<i>14</i>	<i>31</i>	<i>33</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>3.24</i>
Videos	3	3	26	58	10	3.68
	<i>3</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>23</i>	<i>47</i>	<i>16</i>	<i>3.16</i>
Audiotapes	3	26	37	34	0	3.02
	<i>9</i>	<i>24</i>	<i>37</i>	<i>23</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>2.98</i>
Interactive computing e.g. email	3	18	17	49	13	3.51**
	<i>13</i>	<i>26</i>	<i>33</i>	<i>22</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>2.83</i>
Teleconferences	11	26	35	25	3	2.84*
	<i>22</i>	<i>31</i>	<i>30</i>	<i>15</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>2.45</i>
Video conferences	7	23	33	32	5	3.05**
	<i>19</i>	<i>31</i>	<i>31</i>	<i>16</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>2.53</i>
Computer software	3	9	28	50	10	3.55
	<i>3</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>37</i>	<i>38</i>	<i>9</i>	<i>3.37</i>

Note 1: scale 1 = not effective at all, 5 = extremely effective

Note 2: student percentages and means are shown in italics

Note 3: ** significant at the p<.01 level

* significant at the p<.05 level

While the primary medium of instruction in Massey University's extramural programme is printed course materials, many courses use other media as part of the course package. Television, teleconferencing and video conferencing are not commonly used.

The results show high agreement from staff and students that printed course materials are extremely effective in enhancing the quality of extramural courses, this medium being rated more highly than any other. Despite all the so-called 'new technologies', print is still the most widely used and popular medium for distance education. It has a number of advantages for both students and staff:

- It can take many forms - for example, texts, study guides, workbooks, maps; and can include diagrams, photographs, graphs, tables, statistics and so on;
- print is open to inspection, is enduring and is highly transportable - people can use it whenever and wherever they like;
- it excels as a medium that can convey complex ideas;
- most people can learn from print and it can be readily personalised;
- it is relatively cheap to produce and purchase and is very cost effective;
- it gives the provider considerable control and flexibility

(adapted from Rowntree, 1992, pp. 105-6).

These characteristics mean that quality can be readily controlled and assured, given available resources. Print therefore has wide appeal to both the institution and the purchasers of distance education.

There were three items where there were significant differences between student and staff opinion: interactive computing, teleconferences and video conferences. While neither staff nor students consider teleconferences and video conferences to be very effective, students held this opinion more strongly than staff. However, staff were considerably more positive than students about the effectiveness of interactive computing in enhancing the quality of extramural courses. This result may well be a reflection of access. All staff are on email and have access to the Internet but not all students do. However, access to these media is increasing rapidly and as Mercer (1993) points out, computer mediated communications are well suited to distance and open learning because they are distance and time independent, low cost and able to facilitate student to student as well as staff to student communications.

Rowntree (1992) contends that when choosing media, the most urgent question is “to which media do you and your learners have access?” (p. 72). He also points out that “no one medium is ideal for all purposes. But any medium used with imagination can be very effective for most” (1994, p. 70). The important thing is to understand and meet the needs of the learners.

Item 118 listed four dimensions of quality that were relevant to this scale. For “course design” (staff mean = 4.55; student mean = 4.40) and “course content” (staff mean = 4.56; student mean = 4.58) both student and staff respondents agreed that these were extremely important. However, on “relevance to the work situation”, there was a highly significant difference ($p < .01$) with students (mean = 4.04) seeing this as more important than staff (mean = 3.63). The same difference was found with “intellectual challenge” but this time staff (mean = 4.48) saw this as more important than students (mean = 4.08). These results confirm the findings already discussed for Scale A.

This scale, *course structure and content*, has highlighted three things:

- (i) There was a high level of agreement between students and staff about a number of course attributes that could be said to represent good practice. These include physical,

structural and content aspects of course materials. Printed course materials were viewed by both students and staff as the most effective medium for enhancing quality in extramural courses.

(ii) It is clear that students value a high level of structure and guidance in their learning and appreciate techniques such as keying texts to the study guides that will facilitate the learning process.

(iii) Students felt more strongly than staff that courses should be practical, relevant to the business world, and based on texts that are about or highly relevant to New Zealand. They also felt that courses should be skills based rather than knowledge based, reflecting the fact that many of them are doing work-related study. This reflects a vocational orientation to education. Staff, on the other hand, placed a higher value on the intellectual challenge of courses.

6.4.2 Scale B: Face-to-Face Contact

This scale, *face-to-face contact*, had 10 items relating to the value of campus and regional courses. Although there were only three items where the differences between the two groups were significant, the results from the other seven items also produced some interesting information. There were no items on this scale which produced significant differences between low and high experience students.

Table 6.13: Significant Differences Staff and all Students, Scale B, Face-to-Face Contact

Item	Students	Staff	Level of Sig
23: Face-to-face contact with lecturer enhances overall quality of course	a	a↑	.037*
43: Weekend regional courses are of more value than campus courses	a	d	.000**
108: The costs of attending a campus course far outweigh the benefits	d	d↓	.000**

Note 1: a = agree, ↑ = stronger agreement
d = disagree, ↓ = stronger disagreement
Note 2: ** significant at the p<.01 level
* significant at the p<.05 level

6.4.2.1 Items Showing Congruence

Both groups of respondents supported the contention that face-to-face contact with the lecturer enhances the overall quality of a course (item 23) but staff agreement (89%) was stronger than student agreement (72%), producing a significant difference (p<.05). However, item 108 stated that the costs of attending a campus course far outweigh the benefits, and produced significantly different results at the p<.01 level. Eighty-six percent of staff but a much lower 58% of students disagreed with the statement. While staff may base their responses on pedagogical concerns, student opinion may be mediated by other factors such as the considerable costs of accessing face-to-face contact as well as the perceived value of campus courses to them. This is supported by comments made by 11 students on their questionnaires to elucidate their response e.g. “depends on the lecturer”; “the personal cost of losing work to attend these courses is prohibitive”; “includes time off work”; “sometimes yes, sometimes no.”

6.4.2.2 Items Showing Incongruence

Item 43, weekend regional courses are of more value than campus courses, produced a result that was both incongruent and highly significant. While 60% of students agreed with this statement, 64% of staff disagreed. The cost factor again probably influenced student opinion. This is supported by a number of comments added by students to questionnaires e.g. “less cost for the South Island”; “only because of accessibility”; “easier to attend.”

It is interesting to compare the results of this item, which looked at value to students, with item 26 which stated that students prefer to attend regional courses than campus courses. Students both value regional courses more and prefer them. On the other hand, staff attribute considerably less value to regional courses but agree that students prefer them. This probably reflects staffs’ own preference for campus courses which do not involve them in traveling away from home and teaching in unfamiliar venues.

The remaining items on this scale, including item 26 (above), did not yield significantly different results but were nevertheless interesting. For example, in response to the statement that mixing with students at campus courses is more valuable than meeting lecturers (item 9), 61% students disagreed but 51% staff agreed. This finding suggests that the value that students place on networking with fellow students is not as important as staff think it is. In this regard, staff perceptions are no doubt influenced by feedback they receive from students at campus and regional courses, that is from a biased sample.

Both students and staff disagreed that campus courses were of more value at 300 level than 100 and 200 level (item 13), suggesting that both student and staff groups also value campus courses at the 100 and 200 level.

A higher percentage of staff (71%) than students (59%) agreed with the statement that often it is only at the campus course that the course is put in perspective, which is another indication that staff value campus courses more highly than students.

There was high agreement from students and staff that a variety of teaching techniques add value to the learning experience at campus and regional courses (item 66) and that being able to use the library and access additional resources was an important aspect of campus courses (item 69).

Finally, the results for the statement that there is no necessity for compulsory campus courses are equivocal for both students and staff: 55.1% students and 50% staff agreed.

In response to items on this scale, there were a number of comments made by students on their questionnaires indicating that they had never attended either a regional or a campus course. They therefore felt unqualified to respond. There could be a significant number of students who seldom or never attend a campus or regional course during their time as an extramural student. Furthermore, with over 40% of students indicating that the costs of attending a campus course do outweigh the benefits, this could well be an issue that the university has seriously to reconsider, particularly in the light of ever increasing, interactive, accessible technology options. In 1997, Massey University's College of Education is offering New Zealand's first fully external degree (Staff, MU Campus News, 9 June, 1997). There is no face-to-face component but there is extensive use of email. Of course such options depend on student access to the appropriate technology; professional groups such as teachers being more likely to have this than some other groups in society. However, it would be reasonable to assume that a relatively high proportion of extramural business studies students would have access to the appropriate technology, given the nature of the work they do. It is also interesting to note that anecdotal evidence suggests that attendance at both regional and campus courses at undergraduate level is declining.

As would be expected from the results on this scale, on the "face-to-face" dimension in summary item 118, there was a highly significant difference ($p < .01$). Staff (mean = 3.55) rated this dimension as very much more important than students (mean = 2.77) did. A recent study carried out at the Fern Universitat (FeU), Germany (von Prummer, 1995) looked at extramural student communication preferences. The data showed that while FeU

students had a marked preference for face-to-face communication, they adjusted this to accommodate the distance learning mode. “Their strong liking for face-to-face interaction becomes much less pronounced and takes second place to the telephone as a realistic means of communication in the context of studying at a distance” (p. 293). Fifty-six percent responded that they would use seminars and group discussions, which can be likened to Massey University’s campus and regional courses. This percentage is very close to the percentage of respondents to this survey (58%) who disagreed that the costs of attending a campus course outweigh the benefits. It should also be noted that at the time of the study, very few FeU students had access to email.

This scale has shown that both students and staff agree that face-to-face contact enhances the overall quality of a course. Students both prefer and value regional courses more than campus courses while staff have a preference for campus courses. However, it is clear that staff rate face-to-face contact more highly than students do as a dimension of quality.

6.4.3 Scale C: Assessment

This scale was made up of 23 items which concerned the content and structure of assignments (e.g. items 1, 5, 86), forms of assessment (e.g. items 45, 70), marking and feedback (e.g. items 15, 29, 91) and examinations (items 83, 96).

There were seven items on this scale where there were no significant differences between staff and students. Therefore a majority of the items on this scale, i.e. 16, showed significant differences. As assessment is a somewhat more contentious issue than, for example, course structure and content (Scale A), this is not surprising. It is noteworthy that eight of the nine items relating to marking and feedback, and six of the seven items about forms of assessment showed significant differences. There was only one item on this scale (item 49) where there was a significant difference between the two student groups.

Table 6.14: Significant Differences Staff and all Students, Scale C: Assessment

Item	Students	Staff	Level of Sig
1: Regular short assignments are of more value to students than 2 or 3 major pieces of work	a	d	.000**
10: Feedback on assignments should clearly identify strengths and weaknesses	a↑	a	.002**
11: Fixed assignment deadlines keep students focused and working to schedule	a↑	a	.011**
19: Marking standards across the faculty are consistent and fair	a	d	.000**
27: Students should be told how marks equate to grades and visa versa	a↑	a	.024*
29: Assessment criteria should be open and made explicit at the beginning of a course	a	a↑	.032*
34: Students are more concerned about marks/grades than feedback	d	a	.000**
48: Assignments should be marked and returned long before next assignment due	a↑	a	.001**
49: Summary of class results should be sent to class after every assignment	a↑	a	.000**
51: Courses should employ a variety of assessment techniques	a	a↑	.022*
70: Assignments more value if practical and related to students' work situations	a↑	a	.000**
81: Assessments should focus on reaching prespecified criteria rather than comparing students to others in the class	a↑	a	.014*
86: Assignments should be closely related to course material	a↑	a	.040*
91: Marked assignments should be returned within 3 weeks	a↑	a	.001**
106: Assignments should require students to balance theory with practice	a	a↑	.048*
109: Objective type assignments are preferable to written assignments	d	d↓	.000**

Note 1: a = agree, ↑ = stronger agreement
d = disagree, ↓ = stronger disagreement

Note 2: ** significant at the p<.01 level
* significant at the p<.05 level

6.4.3.1 Items Showing Congruence

There were six items in relation to marking that showed significant differences. On four of them, items 10, 27, 48 and 91, there was strong agreement from both the staff and student groups. The difference lies in the strength of the agreement, with students feeling more strongly than staff on each of the statements. On items 10, 48 and 91 the differences are highly significant and are at the $p < .01$ level. These items represent good practice and confirm that they are considered to be such by both students and staff. As Krane (1995) puts it, “[For students studying at a distance] it is well known that prompt assignment return with constructive feedback and counseling is a decisive element for study success and goal achievement” (p. 106). The same arguments apply to item 29 but in this case the strength of staff agreement was greater than students.

A much greater proportion of students, 82%, than staff, 57%, agreed that a summary of all results should be sent to the class after each assignment so that students can rank themselves in relation to the class (item 49). This was also the only item on Scale C where there was a significant difference between the two student groups, high experience students agreeing more strongly, 88%, than low experience students, 77%. This result probably relates to the fact that academic self concept is strongly linked to academic achievement and that successful learning experiences reinforce confidence in one’s own ability. Self concept is also linked to motivation which is critical to adult learners where outside pressures are often in conflict with study commitments (Boondao & Rowley, 1991), and intrinsic motivation helps to keep the focus on study. Therefore it becomes more important to see oneself in relation to one’s peers as one goes on with study. This argument would also apply to those who were not performing well, where a low mark might serve to motivate them to try harder or it might indeed confirm for them that they were performing at about the right level in terms of their own expectations. It may also have the effect of precipitating a withdrawal.

Providing this kind of information also makes assessment more open and less “shrouded in mystery” as one of the student focus group participants in this study put it. Greater transparency can help to engender a sense of fairness and equity, both of which have a bearing on quality.

There were five items on this scale relating to forms of assessment where although the direction of agreement was the same for students and staff, there were significant differences.

A greater proportion of students, 78%, than staff, 60%, agreed that assignments are of more value if they are practical and related to students’ work situations (item 70). This difference is highly significant ($p < .01$) and mirrors the result for item 74 (see 6.4.1.1), again suggesting a strong vocational orientation to education on the part of students in the Business Studies Faculty. However, there was also a high level of agreement from both students and staff, with the strength of opinion being greater for staff, that assignments should require students to balance theory with practice (item 106), indicating the need to put practice within a theoretical context.

While staff had a greater sense of the value of using a variety of assessment techniques than students did (item 51), this is an area where ‘educating the client/customer’ could improve their perception of this concept.

Students strongly supported (93%) item 81 which stated that assessments should focus on students reaching prespecified criteria or standards rather than comparing them with other students in the class. However, 81% staff also agreed, which is interesting as universities have traditionally operated on a norm referenced system. This approach would be consistent with competency and skills based education, see discussion Scale A, item 64, section 6.4.1.2. While student responses to these two items are consistent, staff responses are not so clear cut. They are rather equivocal about skills-based education but clearly support criterion-referenced assessment.

Both staff and students strongly rejected the notion that objective assessment is preferable to written assignments (item 109), staff more so than students. This difference is highly significant ($p < .01$). Nine students added comments to their questionnaires to the effect that “both have their place.”

Two items on this scale (11 and 86) also reinforced the need for learning to be structured. In both cases, while there was over 90% agreement from students and staff, students felt more strongly, which produced significant differences at the $p < .05$ level.

6.4.3.2 Items Showing Incongruence

Two items which related to marking yielded results that were incongruent and had a high level of significant difference ($p < .01$). Item 19 stated that marking standards across the faculty are consistent and fair. While 59% of students agreed with the statement, 78% of staff disagreed with it. It is also significant that 22% staff ($n=14$) responded that they did not have enough knowledge to answer the question. Millar (cited in Cave, Hanney, & Kogan, 1991) claims that students “are the best judges of fairness which primarily concerns testing” (p. 102). The results for this item should be of concern to the faculty as the level of student agreement cannot be considered high while the level of staff awareness of faculty standards is low. This suggests the need for improved communication within the faculty and possibly a review of marking standards.

Item 34 stated that students are more concerned about their marks/grades than the feedback they receive for their assignments. This is a commonly expressed view among staff but the results indicate that this may be a somewhat exaggerated belief. Just over half of the student sample, 53%, disagreed while a large proportion of staff, 75%, agreed. There are a number of studies (see for example Viljoen et al., 1990; Murgatroyd, 1993; Krane, 1995) that indicate that students studying at a distance value clear and constructive feedback on their assignments.

Another item on this scale relating to the form of assessment yielded incongruent and highly significant results ($p < .01$). Item 1 stated that regular, short assignments are of more value to students than two or three major pieces of work. There was strong agreement from students - 72%. However, 54% staff disagreed with this. In their study of distance learners at Monash University, Benson et al. (1991) found that arrangements for setting and marking assignments were potentially very valuable channels of communication for students. So, while the benefits to students of short regular assignments include more frequent feedback and communication, for staff it may mean an increased marking load.

Table 6.15: No Significant Differences Staff and all Students, Scale C: Assessment

Item
<i>High agreement</i>
5 Assignments should relate to course learning outcomes
45 Written assignments improve the quality of learning
83 Courses that do not have a final exam lower standards
96 Examinations are the fairest form of assessment
<i>Equivocal</i>
15 There are often large marking inconsistencies on a paper
17 Directions for assignments are often unclear
89 Assignment topics are often ambiguous

The seven items in Table 6.15 above did not show statistically significant differences. Of these, items 5 and 45 had a high level of agreement from both students and staff and represent good pedagogy. This result lends support to Rekkedal's (1995) finding that "students quite clearly showed that the assignments for submission are the most important means for learning in distance study" (p. 197).

The two items about exams also produced congruent results and no significant differences. Item 83 stated that courses that do not have a final exam lower standards. The same percentage, 78%, of students and staff disagreed with this. Item 96 stated that exams are the

fairest form of assessment. Again 74% students and 73% staff disagreed with this. These items show that staff and students are in agreement that exams are not the fairest form of assessment and not having a final exam does not lower standards.

The remaining three items yielded equivocal results. One of these related to marking. Item 15 stated that there are often large marking inconsistencies on a paper. 49% of students and 45% of staff agreed with this, that is nearly half of both groups. This would indicate a perception of unfairness and inequity which is not conducive to good learning or the institution's reputation and again suggests that the faculty needs to address the issue of consistency of marking standards (see 6.4.3.2 item 19 above).

The remaining two items concerned assignment topics. Item 17 stated that directions for assignments are often unclear, with which 57% of students and 66% of staff disagreed. Item 89 stated that assignment topics are often ambiguous, with which 53% of students and 54% of staff agreed. Viljoen et al. (1990) and Murgatroyd (1993) both highlight the importance of clear assignment topics and instructions when designing quality into distance learning courses. This is therefore an area where the faculty could well direct some improvement effort.

In item 118, "fair assessment" was rated highly by both staff (mean = 4.46) and students (mean = 4.55), confirming it as a very important dimension of quality.

The results of this scale have confirmed that both students and staff believe that assignments should relate to the course learning outcomes and that written assignments improve the quality of learning. They also reject the notion that objective assessment is preferable to written assignments. Prompt assignment return and constructive feedback is highly valued. The need for learning to be structured was again reinforced, as was the student vocational orientation to education. Staff and students also supported criterion-referenced assessment and agreed that exams are not the fairest form of assessment and that not having a final exam does not lower standards.

Students felt more strongly than staff, and high experience students more strongly than low experience students that aggregated class results should be sent to students after each assignment.

However, the question of marking standards, where there are obviously inconsistencies, has been clearly identified as a problematic one for the faculty. Fair assessment was confirmed as an important dimension of quality by both students and staff, students ranking it second only to course content.

6.4.4 Scale D: Communication

This scale was made up of 17 items relating to various aspects of communication between the university and students. These included pre-course communications, the receipt of course materials, isolation, who to contact and the attitude of staff towards students. There were six items where there were no significant differences between staff and all students, six where there was high agreement, and one where there was low disagreement, see Table 6.16 below. However, one of these, item 110, showed a highly significant difference between high and low experienced students. Ten items showed significant differences between staff and all students, see Table 6.17. Item 73, which is in this group, was also the only one on the questionnaire to produce incongruent results for the two student groups.

Table 6.16: No Significant Differences, Staff and All Students, Scale D: Communication

Item
<i>High agreement</i>
41 All students in a course should receive their on-enrolment material at the same time
46 Late arrival of course materials detracts from the quality of a course
80 Personal communication with the university improves the quality of the extramural experience for students
95 A positive and helpful attitude from the course controller is an important determinant of quality
100 Getting students to complete and return a personal profile is a good way to establish initial communication in a course
110 A toll-free line to the university would enhance the quality of service to students
<i>Low Disagreement</i>
55 Often difficult for students to make contact with the course controller

Items 41, 46, 80, and 95 reinforce good practice, while items 100 and 110 could be said to be optional extras or in the ‘nice to have’ category - they are very dependent on the availability of extra resources. Item 41 also has an equity component to it. Students who receive their course materials late through no fault of their own often feel very disadvantaged and find it difficult to catch up. Items 95 and 100 also support Holmberg’s theory of distance education as being “guided didactic conversation”, in particular his contention that “the stronger the students’ feelings that the supporting organisation is interested in making the study matter personally relevant to them, the greater their personal involvement” (1989, p. 45).

Holmberg also contends that as students become more independent and experienced with study, the less relevant the characteristics of guided didactic conversation become. This may help to explain the highly significant difference on item 110 between the two student groups. Ninety-one percent of low experience students agreed with this, compared with 67% of high experience students. In fact, staff agreement at 88% is considerably stronger than for the high experience group. This result highlights the greater need that less experienced students feel for support with their studies, including the need for reassurance

(Shaw, 1982; Scriven & Ryan, 1994). The agreement expressed by low experience students with item 73 below (see 6.4.4.1) also indicates their greater need for support.

Item 55 stated that it is often difficult for students to make contact with the course controller. The result was not clear cut with 59% of staff and 57% of students disagreeing with it. Access to course controllers in a mixed mode institution can be slow but the advent and wide use of technologies such as email should speed up student staff communication. Another useful technique used by some staff already is to have designated contact times clearly indicated in the course materials. As Massey University does not use regional tutors to support distance students, access to the course controller, especially to solve course related problems is important, although, as will be seen below, not as important to students as staff may think.

Table 6.17: Significant Differences Staff and all Students, Scale D: Communication

Item	Students	Staff	Level of Sig
20: Students are often unclear about who to contact	d	a	.000**
33: Students' experiences with the university before courses start influence perceptions of quality	a	a↑	.003**
35: Better to receive all materials in one on-enrolment posting	a↑	a	.000**
52: Early receipt of course materials allows students to plan study effectively	a↑	a	.019*
61: Trying to make contact with the right person often frustrating and expensive experience for students	a	a↑	.000**
73: University should do more to reduce isolation that many students feel	a	a↑	.042*
78: Regional/local support enhances quality	a	a↑	.015*
79: Communication difficulties detract from quality	a	a↑	.000**
98: Full information about course requirements should be available when students making enrolment decisions	a↑	a	.014*
111: Quality of service received from the enrolment office is excellent	a	d	.000**

Note 1: a = agree, ↑ = stronger agreement

Note 2: ** significant at the $p < .01$ level

* significant at the $p < .05$ level

6.4.4.1 Items Showing Congruence

Two items (33 and 98) asked about students' pre-course experiences and resulted in high levels of agreement from students and staff. However, while staff felt more strongly that "students' experiences with the university before they start their courses influence perceptions of quality" ($p < .01$), students felt more strongly that "full information about courses should be available when they are making their enrolment decisions" ($p < .05$).

Two other items, 35 and 52, related to the start of a course. For both, the level of agreement was high but student agreement was stronger than staff agreement. If the results for items 41 and 46 (see above) are considered with these, a clear preference emerges from

students and staff for all students to receive all materials for a course together in one posting, as early as possible.

Item 73 stated that the university should do more to reduce the isolation that many extramural students feel. Staff agreement (71%) was considerably stronger than students (52%). It is interesting that staff perceive isolation to be more of a problem than students do. Staff perceptions are undoubtedly influenced by feedback that they receive from students during campus and regional courses where a sense of isolation may be one of a number of motivators for student attendance. Students seeking assistance during the semester may also tend to be those who feel isolated, thus further influencing staff perceptions.

Of even more interest is that this item was the only one in the questionnaire to produce an incongruent result for the two student groups. 57% of low experience students agreed with this while 57% of high experience students disagreed ($p < .05$ level). This probably reflects the understanding of learning that students develop over time (Morgan, 1993) and the increasing confidence that experience gives them in their ability to manage their own studies. "Changes and development in confidence ...take students through a stage of being anxious and unsure of themselves towards a feeling of security in their own ability and also courage to become independent in their learning" (Marton et al., 1997, p. 231).

A related issue is encapsulated in item 78, regional/local support enhances quality. Both staff and students agreed strongly with the statement but again staff agreed more strongly, supporting the contention that staff perceive isolation to be more of a problem than students do, and also reinforcing the findings from Scale B that staff perceive face-to-face contact to be more important than students do.

Two related items produced very similar results, with significant differences at the $p < .01$ level. Item 79 stated that communication difficulties with the university detract from the quality of its courses with which 95% of staff and 61% of students agreed. Item 61 stated

that trying to make contact with the right person is often a frustrating and expensive experience and 82% of staff agreed while a much lower 50% of students did. This may suggest that students are more robust in coping with these types of difficulties than staff give them credit for, that staff perceptions are distorted by the 'squeaky wheel syndrome' or, as Benson et al. (1991) found in their research, "students were usually happy to rely on the formal channels of communication through study guides, assignments and assignment comments, as long as they were meeting their needs" (p. 5). The results for these items should be considered with those for item 20 below.

6.4.4.2 Items Showing Incongruence

Two items on this scale produced results that were incongruent and with differences that were also highly significant ($p < .01$). Item 20 stated that students are often unclear about who to contact in the university. While 74% of staff agreed with this, 65% of students disagreed. For students this may be because they are indiscriminating about the precise person they need to contact in the university with a particular query and furthermore that it really does not worry them as long as they talk to someone. For staff, who may be asked by students to deal with issues they believe to be the responsibility of someone else, the perception is different.

There were marked differences in perception on item 111, the quality of service received from the enrolment office is excellent. 78% of students agreed with the statement, while 66% of staff disagreed. There are at least two possible explanations for this. There were a number of serious delays with student enrolments during 1996, the year in which the survey was conducted. While in terms of a percentage of overall enrolments the number was small, teaching staff in the faculty received what may have seemed a large number of contacts from extremely upset students. This may have resulted in distorted perceptions about the extent of the problem. A further explanation may be that staff and student interpretation of the question was different. Staff may have interpreted the question as

meaning the service of the enrolment office to staff, while students interpreted the question as meaning service to them.

There were two dimensions on summary item 115 which related to this scale. On “ease of communication” there was high agreement from both staff (mean = 4.10) and students (mean = 4.13) that this was an important dimension of quality. However, for “personal contact with the lecturer” there was a highly significant difference ($p < .01$) with staff (mean = 3.81) seeing this as a more important dimension of quality than students (mean = 3.02). This is interesting as the results from this scale suggest that for students it is the contact per se that is important, and this does not have to be personal contact with the lecturer.

On this scale, Communication, there was high agreement from students and staff that quality is enhanced by the timely arrival of all course materials, good personal communication, and a positive attitude from the course controller. In addition, a toll-free telephone service would enhance communication and have a positive effect on communication. Staff perceive student communication problems with the university to be greater than students perceive them to be, and isolation is more of a problem for low experience students than high experience students.

6.4.5 Scale E: Institutional and Environmental Influences

Of the 13 items on this scale, five had a high level of agreement between staff and students and no significant differences, see Table 6.18. The other eight items had results that showed significant differences, all at the $p < .01$ level. There were also two items on the scale, items 38 and 104, that showed significant differences between the two student groups.

Table 6.18: High Agreement, No significant Differences Staff and All Students, Scale E: Institutional and Environmental Influences

Item
16 Massey's extramural courses are good value for money
38 Poor service from Massey will cause students to defect to other tertiary education providers
40 More resources should be put into extramural teaching
47 There is more demand now than in the past for high quality courses
67 The university should provide more instructional design support for staff developing extramural course materials

The cluster of items shown in Table 6.18 reflect the effect of the increasingly competitive environment for higher education and the move towards more consumer driven education and training. Both staff and students perceive a need for the extramural programme to be better resourced although they agree that at the moment extramural courses are good value for money. Massey University no longer has a monopoly in open and distance learning and it is possible for students to go elsewhere if they are dissatisfied. Consumers, including consumers of distance education, are becoming increasingly discerning about what they buy. Rowntree summed it up thus: "These new consumers want a wider range of products, they want relevance, they want it when they want it and they want value for money" (1992, p. 39).

Item 38 was one of the two on this scale that showed a significant difference in the results of the two student groups: 84% of low experienced students agreed with this compared with 69% of high experienced students ($p < .01$). This probably indicates that more experienced students are more committed to their studies and they may well have developed a higher level of 'brand loyalty'. Less experienced students tend to be less committed and may not yet have developed a clear understanding of their own learning preferences (Morgan, 1993) and, therefore, may be trying a number of different options to see what suits them best. They may also have interpreted 'service' in the sense of support and as they tend to be more

dependent as learners than their high experience colleagues (Benson et al., 1991, Marton et al., 1997), may be more willing to defect if they do not get the support they feel they need.

Table 6.19: Significant Differences Staff and all Students, Scale E: Institutional and Environmental Influences

Item	Students	Staff	Level of Sig
56: As students now pay a greater proportion of their fees, they see themselves as customers with customer rights	a↑	a	.006**
62: Unfair that extramural students pay the same fees as internal students	a	d	.000**
65: Student study groups enhance quality of learning	a	a↑	.000**
75: Good extramural teaching not valued highly enough by the university	a	a↑	.000**
77: Inflexible systems at the university work against responsiveness to needs of students	a	a↑	.000**
85: There is considerable inefficiency and waste in the university's systems	d	a	.000**
104: Quality of extramural programme being compromised because of inefficient admin support	d	a	.000**
107: Extramural students disadvantaged compared with internal students	a↑	a	.009**

Note 1: a = agree, ↑ = stronger agreement

Note 2: ** significant at the p<.01 level

* significant at the p<.05 level

6.4.5.1 Items Showing Congruence

Close to 100% of students and staff agreed with item 56, that as students now pay a greater proportion of their fees they see themselves as customers with customer rights. However, the student agreement was stronger. This finding confirms a belief that is now widely held (see for example Crawford, 1996; Owlia & Aspinwall, 1996; Murgatroyd, 1993; McIlroy & Walker, 1992) although not universally accepted (Baldwin, 1994; Lindsay, 1994).

Item 77 stated that inflexible systems at the university work against responsiveness to the needs of extramural students. Staff agreed much more strongly with this than students - 86% compared to 58%. This item should be seen alongside items 85 and 104 below (see 6.4.5.2) as they all relate to the university's internal systems. In each case staff have a much more acute perception than students of the shortcomings of the "system".

According to the results for item 107, 63% of students perceive themselves to be disadvantaged compared with internal students. Just over half of staff, 52%, agreed with this statement. Student results for this item and item 62 below (see 6.4.5.2) are consistent - a majority feel disadvantaged compared with internal students and they do not think they should have to pay the same fees. However, staff opinion is equivocal for item 107 and clear in relation to item 62 - fees should be the same for internal and extramural students.

Item 65 stated that student study groups enhance the quality of learning. While both staff and students agreed, staff opinion was much stronger - 97% compared with 71%. Again this is line with other findings from the questionnaire which suggest that staff perceive isolation to be more of a problem for students than students perceive it to be.

"Good extramural teaching is not valued highly enough by the university" (item 75) produced strong agreement from staff, 83%, but only 51% agreement from students. Students could not be expected to have very accurate perceptions of the value that the university places on extramural teaching compared with the other activities that academic staff engage in. While the university has tried to place more emphasis on rewarding good teaching in the promotion system, there is obviously still a strong feeling among staff that extramural teaching needs to be more valued, as it is a large component of the workload of staff in the Business Studies Faculty.

6.4.5.2 *Items Showing Incongruence*

Items 85 and 104 produced consistent results and showed big differences between student and staff opinion. Item 85 stated that there is considerable inefficiency and waste in the university's systems, with which 52% of students disagreed and 90% of staff agreed. Item 104 stated that the quality of the extramural programme is being compromised because of inefficient administrative support. While 66% of students disagreed with this, 64% staff agreed. Each of these items asked about university systems, and as staff view these systems from within and students view them from the outside, the differences reflect a different perspective. However, the strength of staff opinion suggests that there are problems in this area that need to be addressed.

Item 104 produced a significant difference ($p < .05$) between the two student groups: 75% of high experienced students disagreed with this while 64% of low experienced students disagreed. Again this probably reflects the more independent approach to study that high experience students take which makes them more robust and less prone to being deflected from their studies by administrative problems.

Item 62 stated that it is unfair that extramural students pay the same fees as internal students, 71% of staff disagreed and 59% of students agreed. Although the percentage of students agreeing with the statement is only just over half, their perceptions of what they get for their money could probably be considerably improved by judicious marketing. Staff have a much greater awareness of exactly what is involved in the development of courses and services for extramural students. Notwithstanding the results for this item and for item 107, item 16 (see above) showed that both staff and students do perceive that Massey's courses are good value for money.

There were three dimensions on item 118 that related to this scale. It is interesting that although both students and staff strongly agreed that Massey's courses are good value for money (item 16), there was a highly significant difference ($p < .01$) in how they rated "value

for money” as a dimension of quality. Students (mean = 4.01) perceive it to be more important than staff (mean = 3.70), perhaps indicating that they are becoming more price sensitive as the market becomes more competitive. Both groups (staff mean = 3.76; student mean = 3.95) rated “rapid service” to be of moderate importance as a dimension of quality, while “responsive service” (staff mean = 4.10; student mean = 4.16) was rated as important.

This scale has shown that there is high agreement between staff and students that although Massey’s courses are good value for money, more resources need to be put into the extramural programme. This may be related to the perception that there is a greater demand now for quality in the extramural programme. In addition, staff perceive that the university does not value extramural teaching highly enough and that some of the university’s systems run counter to quality improvement. Students perceive themselves to be disadvantaged compared with internal students.

6.4.6 Scale F: Standards and Evaluation

Of the 10 items on this scale, four produced no significant differences between students and staff. Of these, there were two where there was high agreement, one where there was high disagreement and one where the result was equivocal, see Table 6.20. The results of the other six items showed significant differences, see Table 6.21. Item 117, which asked respondents to rate the importance of various ways to assist in the setting of standards, is also reported here. There were no items on this scale that produced significant differences between the two student groups.

Table 6.20: No Significant Differences, Staff and All Students, Scale F: Standards and Evaluation

Item	
<i>High agreement</i>	
3	Information/data from course evaluations should be used for staff evaluation purposes
71	The university should use peer evaluation to evaluate lecturers' teaching performance
<i>High disagreement</i>	
113	Students are reluctant to provide honest feedback about courses because they think it might affect their grades
<i>Equivocal</i>	
76	Academics from other universities should moderate Massey's extramural courses

There was a very high level of agreement from students (87%) and staff (77%) that information from course evaluations should be used for staff evaluation purposes (item 3). There is a considerable body of evidence (see for example Cave, Hanney, & Kogan, 1991) to suggest that student course ratings are sufficiently reliable and valid to be used for staff evaluation purposes. Massey University has followed the international trend and Student Evaluation of Content, Administration and Teaching (SECAT) results may be used with promotion applications and HODs may use them in staff appraisal interviews.

There was also high agreement from students (69%) and staff (64%) with item 71, i.e. that peer evaluation should be used to evaluate lecturers' teaching performance. Peer review is practised in many countries (Acherman, 1990; Cave et al., 1991) and is relatively easy and cost effective. According to Millar (cited in Cave et al., 1991), it is particularly well suited to answering questions about the teacher's mastery of the subject, selection of content, relevance of content to the sequence of the course, and relevance and quality of the course syllabus and related materials.

Both staff (63%) and students (65%) disagreed that students were reluctant to provide honest feedback about courses in case it affected their grades (item 113). While this view is

sometimes expressed by students and staff alike, the results of this item suggest that it does not constitute a problem.

Students (49% agree) and staff (50% agree) were equivocal about whether academics from other universities should moderate Massey's extramural courses (item 76), which is interesting given the support for item 71 above. This may relate to the fact that the other New Zealand universities do not teach extramurally and it is only recently that The Open Polytechnic has begun offering degree programmes in the distance mode. Respondents may therefore have felt that appropriate distance education expertise was lacking in other providers. An alternative view may be that others providers were viewed as competitors, although this argument is rather weak given the public nature of extramural course materials.

Table 6.21: Significant Differences Staff and all Students, Scale F: Standards and Evaluation

Item	Students	Staff	Level of Sig
2: Student pass and dropout rates should be used to assess quality	a	d	.000**
7: Staff don't take student feedback seriously	d	d↓	.037*
24: Students should be able to transfer courses between universities	a↑	a	.000**
32: There is a double standard in that students expected to hand in error-free work but course materials often contain many errors	a	d	.012*
59: Student evaluation of course should not be completed until after final exam	a	d	.000**
103: University should give more credit for prior learning by recognising work experience	a↑	a	.000**

Note 1: a = agree, ↑ = stronger agreement
d = disagree, ↓ = stronger disagreement

Note 2: ** significant at the p<.01 level
* significant at the p<.05 level

6.4.6.1 Items Showing Congruence

There were three items that produced congruent results but significant differences between staff and students. Staff and students disagreed that staff do not take student feedback seriously but, as would be expected, staff disagreement was stronger (item 7). This result refutes a more cynical view sometimes expressed by students. As will be seen below (see Figure 6.1), staff rated student input and feedback third equal in importance in setting standards for university business studies courses. In contrast, students rated it seventh which suggests that although they believed that their feedback should be used for staff evaluation purposes, they did not place much value on it for setting quality standards and preferred to leave such judgements to those they viewed as 'authorities'. This appears to be inconsistent with the notion of quality as transformative (Harvey & Green, 1993) where one of the ways that learner empowerment is achieved is by having students monitor minimum guaranteed standards.

Items 24 and 103 related to facilitating university study in general for students. There was a high level of agreement from both staff and students that students should be able to transfer courses passed at one New Zealand university to another New Zealand university (item 24) but student agreement was considerably stronger - 97% compared with 81% agreement from staff. The issue of credit between universities can cause problems for students, leading to feelings of being unfairly treated. It can also lead to competition between universities in an area where cooperation would encourage rather than discourage students in their studies. Not only does ease of credit transfer mean that students may be able to complete qualifications in a shorter time, but it can also avoid unnecessary repetition, and encourage students to upgrade their qualifications (Patterson, 1993). In addition, it can benefit education funders in that they not have to pay for students to repeat courses that are substantially the same as courses they have already passed.

Item 103 is somewhat more contentious. It stated that universities should give more credit for prior learning by recognising work experience that is relevant to a course. While 77%

students agreed with this, a much lower 54% of staff did. This result may reflect a greater perception of the complexity of the issues on the part of staff and highlights the need for the university to involve students in the process when issues such as this are being debated.

However, in an environment where tertiary education is becoming more open and flexible, institutions should try to ensure that constraints on an individual's learning needs are minimised (Scriven & Ryan, 1994). Transfer of credit and RPL are characteristics of open learning (Paul, 1990b) that can facilitate the learning process for students, help them to make links between their work and life experience and their studies, and encourage a positive attitude towards lifelong learning. Rowntree (1992) argues that RPL and credit transfer are all part of the shift towards a consumer orientation in education and training. Therefore it is important to know a lot more about learners than we have ever know before in order to meet their needs satisfactorily. In an applied faculty like Business Studies, where many extramural students are studying for either professional development purposes or to obtain a formal qualification which recognises skills and competencies that they have already developed through work experience, these considerations are very important.

6.4.6.2 Items Showing Incongruence

Item 2, student pass rates and dropout rates should be used as ways of assessing the quality of courses produced disparate results from staff and students. While 61% of students agreed with the statement, 68% of staff disagreed with it. It is interesting that the majority of staff do not appear to be in favour of this type of performance indicator even as 'a way' of assessing quality, the assumption being that other measures of quality would also be used. This may reflect the knowledge staff have about the reasons extramural students withdraw which are often unrelated to the course itself and have much to do with students' personal and life circumstances. Performance indicators are also usually associated with a drive for efficiency, effectiveness and accountability (Harvey & Green, 1993), notions with which many academic staff are uncomfortable. The staff results support the skepticism

with which performance indicators as a measure of quality tend to be viewed in higher education (Vroeijenstijn, 1992; Fasano et al., 1995).

Sixty-five percent of students agreed that there is a double standard at Massey in that students are expected to hand in error free work but course materials often contain many errors (item 32). Staff were more equivocal about this, 51% disagreed, perhaps not wishing to put themselves and the university in a bad light. This item is about conformance with specifications - one of Crosby's basic tenets of quality management, and also one of the product quality criteria from the framework of quality distilled by Viljoen et al. (1990) from their research with extramural MBA students. It is also about fairness. This aspect of good practice is facilitated by improved word processing and editing facilities which should ensure that there is continuous improvement in this area of the university's operations.

Item 59 stated that student evaluation of courses should not be completed until after students have sat their examinations, with which 70% of students agreed, mirroring the anecdotal evidence available in the faculty. Again staff were equivocal about this, 51% disagreeing with the statement. As a final examination is an integral part of many courses, it seems both fair and logical that any course evaluation should include it. This is an issue that the university would need to address in relation to its SECAT programme whereby students evaluate course teaching and administration.

To further elucidate this scale, respondents were asked to rate 10 different ways that can be used to assist in the setting of standards for university Business Studies courses (item 117). The percentages, means and significant differences are summarised in Table 6.22, Appendix 14.

There was a significant difference at the $p < .01$ level between staff and all students for each of these ways of setting standards. However, between the two student groups there were only two differences. The low experience group placed more importance on professional bodies ($p < .01$), and the high experience group placed more importance on the individual

course controller ($p < .05$). These differences perhaps reflect an increasing level of institutionalisation the longer students are in the system and a greater acceptance of the university's prevailing culture.

Figure 6.1: Importance ranking for setting Standards in University Business Studies Courses.

Student Rank		Staff Rank
1	Professional bodies	3=
5=	Individual course controller	1
7	Student input and feedback	3=
2	External bodies e.g. NZQA	8
9	International quality standards e.g. ISO 9000	9
3	National university quality monitoring body	5
4	Relevant university department	2
8	Central quality control unit at each university	7
5=	International university quality monitoring body	6

These rankings are interesting and reflect the different orientation and motivation of the staff and student groups. The staff rankings reinforce the traditional English model of a university with its emphasis on academic freedom and the role of the academy in deciding curriculum and setting standards (Van Vught, 1993). Students, on the other hand, placed a greater emphasis on the importance of external bodies in setting standards, which reflects what Van Vught calls the French model, which is gaining currency in many countries (see Chapter 2). It also reflects the acceptance and popularity of quality standards generally.

For students studying in an applied faculty, too, the credibility and standing of their qualifications in the market place is a very important motivator for study, and recognition of the worth of those credentials by external bodies is perceived to enhance them.

It is worth noting that both respondent groups rated professional bodies highly, students rating it first, reflecting their vocational orientation to education. However, both groups

gave International Quality Standards, such as ISO 9000, the lowest rating, perhaps indicating the lack of relevance to education of such approaches.

This scale has shown that student and staff groups value student evaluation of teaching, staff more so than students; that it should be used for staff evaluation purposes; and that students feel more strongly than staff that it should occur after final exams. Peer evaluation from within the university is valued more highly than the use of outsiders for this purpose. Ease of credit transfer was strongly supported by both groups. Students, but not staff, also strongly supported RPL.

Staff did not support the use of performance indicators such as pass rates and dropout rates, whereas students did. This is consistent with student preference for using external bodies or authorities to set standards and staff preference for standard setting to be primarily the role of the individual academic and the relevant university department.

6.4.7 Scale G: Programme Integrity

There were 16 items on this scale which related to the university's reputation and standing in the national and international community, and the calibre of its students and staff. Of the seven items where there were no significant differences between students and staff, five showed high agreement, one showed moderate agreement, and the other showed high disagreement. These are summarised in Table 6.23. The results from the remaining nine items all showed significant differences, see Table 6.24. In addition, there were two items (14 and 58) on this scale where there were significant differences between the student groups.

Table 6.23: No Significant Differences, Staff and All Students, Scale G: Programme Integrity

Item	
<i>High agreement</i>	
21	The quality of teaching at Massey in the Business Studies Faculty is improving
82	Massey's reputation depends on setting high standards for students to achieve
90	It is important that Massey University's Business Studies courses are up to international standards
99	Massey's Business Studies courses are highly regarded by the business community
101	Staff who are highly regarded in academic circles contribute to course integrity
<i>Moderate agreement</i>	
88	It is more important for teaching staff to have industry/business experience than to be trained teachers
<i>High disagreement</i>	
25	The quality of assessment of student work is declining

Items 21, 82, 90, 99 and 101 all relate to the reputation of the institution, and all results showed a high level of agreement from students and staff. They confirm that respondents perceive that academic credibility of staff is important, and that although Massey's business studies courses are highly regarded by the business community, the university's reputation depends on setting high standards for students, and ensuring that its courses are up to international standards. There is also a perception that the standard of teaching in the faculty is improving.

There was only moderate agreement that it was more important for teaching staff to have business/industry experience than to be teacher trained, and this finding is discussed more fully below.

Both staff and students disagreed strongly that the quality of assessment of student work is declining. This is a positive result, given the findings from Scale C, which suggest that there are problems with marking in the faculty.

Table 6.24: Significant Differences Staff and all Students, Scale G: Programme Integrity

Item	Students	Staff	Level of Sig
6: Quality of student work is declining	d	a	.000**
14: Students pressure for higher grades when not warranted is pushing standards down	d↓	d	.020*
31: Large courses pose a threat to quality	d	a	.017*
37: Standard of teaching in the Business Studies Faculty is high	a↑	a	.025*
57: Teaching staff in the faculty should have regular contact through consulting or work exchange with business and industry	a↑	a	.027*
58: All teaching staff should be required to undergo teacher training	a↑	a	.000**
93: Courses in the faculty are of a high standard	a↑	a	.005**
102: Staff who are highly regarded in business/industry give a course its integrity	a↑	a	.009**
105: There is increasing pressure from students to receive high grades for only average work	d	a	.000**

Note 1: a = agree, ↑ = stronger agreement
d = disagree, ↓ = stronger disagreement

Note 2: ** significant at the p<.01 level
* significant at the p<.05 level

Two items from Scale G showed significant differences between high and low experienced students. Both groups of students, high 75% and low 64%, disagreed with item 14, that students pressure for higher grades when not warranted is pushing standards down. The strength of the disagreement from more experienced students may be a reflection of their greater confidence in their study ability, whereas low experience students are still feeling their way.

The same argument can be applied to item 58 which stated that all teaching staff should be required to undergo teacher training. Low experience students, 85%, agreed more strongly than high experience students, 76%. Again this may reflect the increasing confidence that

students develop in themselves with success (Cull, 1993) and experience (Marton, Hounsell, & Entwistle, 1997) so that the need to have a very good teacher to guide learning is perceived to be less acute as students become more experienced.

6.4.7.1 Items Showing Congruence

There were three items on this scale, items 57, 58 and 102 which related to staff experience, qualifications and credibility showing congruence and significant differences. For all these items, students agreed more strongly than staff. The results for items 57 and 102 indicate the importance both staff and students place on staff having regular working contact with the business and industry communities, as well as the importance of staff credibility in these sectors. Staff success working in the business and industry sector may well enhance credibility. The value staff place on this type of activity was reflected in the biodata section of the questionnaire where two thirds of staff reported that they had done outside consulting or advisory work in the past five years. It should also be noted that both students and staff agreed that it was more important for staff to have business/industry experience than to be trained teachers (see item 101 above). Staff credibility in the business sector, as well as their academic credibility, was identified by Bell and Shieff (1990) as an important component of quality in the MBA programme at Auckland University.

However, staff did not support so strongly a requirement on them to undergo some form of teacher training (item 58). While 85% of students agreed with the item, a much lower 57% of staff agreed. The actual percentage of staff who have undergone some form of teacher training is quite low (see section 6.2.2.3). While most of the reported studies relating to attributes of quality in either post-graduate or undergraduate business studies education (see for example, Bell & Shieff, 1990; Viljoen et al., 1991; Murgatroyd, 1993), identify teacher competence and instructional skills as important, teacher training is not specifically targeted. It must be acknowledged that teacher training does not necessarily make a good teacher, but it is a good place to start.

Notwithstanding this result, 74% of staff and 83% of students agreed that the standard of teaching in the faculty is high (item 37). Similarly, 80% staff and 90% students agreed that courses in the faculty are of a high standard (item 93).

Also in relation to standards, 55% of staff and 68% of students disagreed that student pressure for higher grades when not warranted is pushing standards down (item 14). See also items 6 and 105 below.

6.4.7.2 Items Showing Incongruence

Item 105 also referred to student pressure in relation to grades. It stated that there is increasing pressure from students to receive high grades for only average work. While 77% of students disagreed with this, 68% of staff agreed. Given this is a view sometimes expressed by staff, pressure from students for more feedback and more explicit information about why they did not achieve a higher grade may be being interpreted by staff as pressure for higher grades. It should also be noted that the staff results for this item and item 14 above appear to contradict each other.

A related item is number 6, the quality of student work is declining. 85% of students disagreed with this while 51% staff agreed. The results for students on these three items, 14, 105 and 6 are totally consistent but the staff results are not clear cut.

The results for item 31, large courses pose a threat to quality, are somewhat equivocal. While 56% of students disagreed, 59% of staff agreed. This probably indicates the greater awareness that staff have of the difficulties large courses pose in terms of organisation and servicing.

There was one dimension in item 118 that related to this scale, and both students (mean = 4.07) and staff (mean = 4.29) agreed that “lecturer credibility” was an important dimension of quality which confirms the literature in relation to quality in service industries generally

(see for example, Zeithaml, Parasuraman, & Berry, 1990), and quality in Business Studies programmes specifically (for example, Bell & Shieff, 1990; Viljoen et al., 1990; Murgatroyd, 1993).

Results from this scale have confirmed that lecturer credibility in terms of reputation in the business community and competence as a teacher are valued by students and staff. There was also strong agreement that Massey's Business Studies courses are highly regarded by the business community and that Massey's reputation depended on setting high standards for students to achieve. While students were clear that the quality of student work was not declining, this area produced some contradictory results from staff.

In the next chapter, implications and conclusions from the research are drawn. In addition, the strengths and limitations of the study are discussed and some further research ideas identified.

CHAPTER 7: BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER - IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

7.1 INTRODUCTION

The study reported in this thesis took place at Massey University, one of New Zealand's largest universities, and the only one with a substantial, national distance education programme. It focused on the meaning of quality in the Business Studies Faculty and had four objectives which were to:

- Determine the dimensions of quality as perceived by extramural students, teaching staff and senior managers for the faculty.
- Analyse areas of congruence and incongruence in the perceptions of quality of these three groups.
- Discuss the degree to which these dimensions illuminate the major construct of quality discussed in the literature.
- Identify areas of good practice.

A two stage research design was employed which yielded both qualitative and quantitative data. From discussions with students, staff and managers, the many quality themes that emerged were grouped into seven broad phenomenological scales which served as the basis for the questionnaire design. There were some interesting and significant differences among the perceptions of the three groups of subjects about quality in Massey University's Business Studies undergraduate, extramural programme. There were also some differences in perception between high and low experienced students although these were not so marked in the questionnaire results as discussions in the focus groups had indicated. In addition, there were some underlying issues which transcended scale boundaries and which emerged as pervasive themes. Fairness and equity and workload for both students and staff are examples of this. It was also apparent that there was a wide variation in the quality of

extramural papers offered by the faculty and a lack of consistency in course presentation and assessment practices.

This chapter focuses on the implications of the findings for good practice and quality improvement and draws conclusions about the research. It highlights the value of a cross perceptual approach in illuminating a complex construct such as quality and, in particular, shows how different stakeholders can attribute different value to the same dimension of quality. This has particular importance in relation to the satisfaction levels of the primary stakeholder group, that is students, and for improving the cost efficiency of the extramural operation, a significant consideration in times of shrinking resources. As in the previous two chapters, the discussion is structured around the seven scales.

7.2 SCALE A: COURSE STRUCTURE AND CONTENT

The discussions and questionnaire results for this scale fell broadly into two areas in relation to quality - course presentation and structure, and course content which includes the issues of relevance and student workload.

7.2.1 Course Presentation and Structure

All three groups of subjects consistently identified the same characteristics of a 'good' extramural course in terms of presentation and structure. However, it was also clear that not all courses met these criteria. This is an area where adhering to 'good practice' could result in enhancing students' perceptions of quality and also accrue other benefits to the faculty and the university by way of cost savings and increased effectiveness.

From the students' point of view, receiving materials that are coherently structured, well written with clearly stated aims and objectives and which are durable and easy to use, creates a positive impression, gets their study off to a good start and facilitates the learning process. This also helps to develop a positive image of the institution which is important in

students' overall perceptions of quality. This aspect of quality is part of what is variously defined as the dimension of tangibles (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry 1985), physical quality (Lehtinen & Lehtinen, 1982) and technical quality (Gronroos, 1990).

For students, the course materials are central to the extramural experience and are the linchpin of the learning process. It was clear that they valued a high degree of structure and guidance in the learning process itself, low experience students feeling this more acutely than high experience students. This also came through on Scale C: Assessment, and confirmed the findings in the literature about the need for structure and guidance for adults learning at a distance (see for example Rowntree, 1992; Morgan, 1993).

For the institution, transferring good practice throughout the organisation can be a useful and effective strategy for improving quality (Barnes, 1997; Wood, 1996) and increasing efficiency and effectiveness. There are three main reasons for this. First, it reduces duplication of effort. Something that has been proven to be effective and valued does not need to be 'reinvented' by someone else. Second, it has the potential to reduce costs by reducing student complaints and the need to seek clarification. It can further lower costs by reducing the amount of rework and scrap that results from 'faulty' study materials. Third, it may result in increased levels of job satisfaction on the part of academic staff who may find it easier to produce good quality study guides and therefore feel that they are making better use of their time and that their job is more rewarding.

However, neither staff nor students favoured a standard format for all courses, suggesting an appreciation of the need to be able to individualise courses to suit particular circumstances. A standardised approach tends to make quality control easier and can facilitate branding, an important notion in developing customer loyalty and retaining customers (students). This is potentially more profitable to the university than continually dealing with new and relatively inexperienced students. This could well be an issue that the university needs to consider further.

The Centre for University Extramural Studies (CUES) provides some assistance to academic staff for materials preparation. An Administrative Handbook, which is also available on Massey University's World Wide Web page, provides information about the administrative aspects of planning and teaching extramural papers. There is some basic information about course presentation and structure in this. A template for a course handbook and study guide is available on disk from CUES. These approaches are generic and not tailored to the needs of the faculty or the particular course. However, academics may seek individual assistance from the two teaching consultants at CUES.

In order to get an estimate of staff knowledge of the availability of the Administrative Handbook on the Web and the template for a course handbook and study guide, an informal survey of teaching staff was conducted in the largest academic department in the faculty. Of the 48 questionnaires distributed there were 30 replies, giving a response rate of 63%. Seven staff members did not have access to the World Wide Web, five knew that the Administrative Handbook was available on the Web, and none knew about the template. This suggests that CUES may have a communication problem and that it needs to be more proactive in marketing these services to the academic community.

Consistent with the collegial culture of the university, it is common for academics to share good practice on an informal basis. This has particular value within faculties or colleges as different disciplines tend to employ different teaching and learning techniques. While laboratory work is frequently used in Science, it is rarely used in Business, whereas case study analysis is used frequently in Business but rarely in Science. Harnessing good practice within faculties and sharing it in more formal ways, for example in a *Handbook of Good Practice*, may be a positive way of enhancing effectiveness and has the potential to increase student perceptions of quality.

7.2.2 Course Content, Relevance and Student Workload

The results of the research indicated that there were differences in perception among the three groups in relation to course content, relevance and workload.

Whilst all groups of subjects attributed a high value to courses being intellectually challenging and developing students' critical thinking abilities, managers and staff valued these aspects more highly than students. Managers in particular stressed this as an essential aspect of learning and were the only group to relate quality to aspiring to excellence and developing independent learners. Students tended to prefer a practical approach and felt that courses should be skills based rather than knowledge based which reflected their vocational orientation to education (Gibbs, Morgan, & Taylor cited in Morgan, 1993). Staff also had a sense of the importance of skills development, no doubt a reflection of the applied nature of Business as a discipline.

The question of relevance also produced some marked differences in perception. Students conceived of relevance as being something that they could learn from their study materials and apply immediately in their work situations. Staff viewed relevance in terms of the currency of material, i.e. being up-to-date and contemporary. They also felt that students should be able to apply it in their individual work situations.

Managers, however, tended to view relevance as the relationship of the material to the wider body of knowledge in the discipline and consequently students might not always be able to see the immediate relevance of what they were learning. They felt that making material too applied could compromise quality standards.

These perceptions echo Lampikoski's (1995) findings that students rate the benefits of a course of study to their work situations and career prospects more highly than managers and teachers. What is required in an applied faculty such as Business Studies, is an appropriate balance of theory and practice with every assistance given to students to apply the material.

Some students may have unrealistic expectations about how relevant courses will be to their immediate work situations. In order to enhance student perceptions of quality, it is important to set expectations at a realistic level. This can be achieved in various ways. In the first instance, information about the faculty's courses in handbooks and other marketing material, should state the relative balance between theory and practice. Second, course aims and objectives should make explicit the balance of theory and practice in a course and show how students will be encouraged to apply the material. This may be through assignments and exercises. In addition, the relevance of material, particularly some theoretical material, to the wider body of knowledge in a discipline should be clearly explained. The course writer may need to help students to make appropriate links to other learning and study material and to see how aspects of the course relate to the wider discipline, as this is an important part of a university education.

All participant groups agreed that the subjects taught in the Business Studies Faculty were subject to rapid change. These were often legal changes such as in Business Law, Accounting and Finance, or changes in practice and methods as is common in Management, Marketing and Human Resource Management. Therefore, as one student said, "having the same extramural course material year after year is a bad idea." The implication from this is that the university must have production systems that are capable of making the rapid responses necessary in disciplines where vocational and professional relevance are so important. Thus an industrialised approach with the expectation of a long shelf life for courses is counterproductive to meeting market needs. The Post-Fordist approach (Raggett, 1993) which is flexible, responsive and focused on meeting customer needs is appropriate for an applied faculty such as Business Studies. Furthermore, given the nature of the client group, any attempts to further industrialise the extramural production process may be detrimental to the faculty's well-being.

Another area where there were differences in perception was student workload. It was obvious that both students and managers felt that the expected workload in some courses was unrealistic. Students also perceived the inconsistency in the expected amount of

reading across papers as unfair. Staff tended to focus on the importance of including a range of additional readings in courses to complement the set text rather than looking at the overall quantity of reading required. If deep rather than surface learning (Chambers, 1992) is to be encouraged, this issue may need to be addressed as an excessive workload is related to a surface approach.

CUES has set a general printing limit of 1000 pages for a study guide. There are also some *guidelines* for an appropriate number of pages for study guides which are considerably lower than this. What is needed is a policy, either for the faculty or the university, which links a maximum number of pages to the different points value of papers. This would mean that a 12.5 point paper could have a maximum of a certain number of pages. For a 25 point paper the maximum would be higher. Whether or not a course used a text book should also be taken into account when calculating the page limits. This does not imply that reducing the size of some courses will necessarily improve their quality but it may encourage better learning. It would also encourage more consistency across papers and help diminish the feeling that some students have about being unfairly treated in terms of expected reading load.

An additional benefit of this relates to institutional costs. Reducing the size of courses reduces the costs of printing and dispatching them to students.

7.3 SCALE B: FACE-TO-FACE CONTACT

This scale again produced some interesting differences in perception. While both staff and students agreed that face-to-face contact did enhance overall quality, staff rated face-to-face contact more highly as a dimension of quality than students did. Managers who were HODs reflected the staff view. Although low experience students in the focus groups appeared to value face-to-face contact more than high experience students, this was not confirmed by the questionnaire. It was also clear that students preferred regional courses to

campus courses whereas staff preferred campus courses. The costs of attending campus courses were obviously a real issue for many students, especially those in the South Island. Approximately half the students and staff felt there was no necessity for compulsory courses.

Managers who were not HODs tended to the view that campus courses could be seen as an optional extra and that student to student contact could be as effective as staff-student contact. However, students did not support this latter view.

The Business Studies Faculty may need to give careful consideration to the face-to-face component of extramural courses in the light of these findings. As the costs of accessing face-to-face contact are high for many students, well designed courses, where students do not have to rely on a campus course to “put it all in perspective,” and which are supported by cheap and accessible technologies such as email and toll-free telephone facilities (see also Scale D, Communication), may well obviate the need for face-to-face contact in some courses. The university could also then use its campus facilities during the semester breaks for conferences and other events which would potentially reap more financial rewards than extramural courses do. In addition, reducing the commitment to face-to-face contact would also relieve staff workload which emerged from this research as an issue. Where a face-to-face component is considered necessary and where student numbers warrant it, regional alternatives to campus based courses should be offered.

However, it should be noted that this research was focused on the undergraduate programme and that these findings might not be applicable at the post-graduate level.

7.4 SCALE C: ASSESSMENT

This dimension provoked more heated discussion than any other in the student focus groups. It was obvious that many students felt unfairly treated in the way that their

assignments had been marked, and equity emerged as a very important issue in relation to overall assessment. There appeared to be a great deal of inconsistency in assessment practices across the faculty. The questionnaire results supported the focus group findings with nearly half of student respondents and almost 80% of staff indicating that marking standards across the faculty were not consistent and fair. Also almost half of students and staff said that there were often large marking inconsistencies within a paper. It is significant that students rated “fair assessment” as the second most highly valued dimension of quality. On the positive side, there was high disagreement from both students and staff that the quality of assessment of student work was declining (see Scale G). This would indicate that the standard of marking is at least holding its own, if not improving!

There was strong agreement from staff and students about what constituted good practice in relation to assessment. For example, feedback on assignments should be constructive and clearly identify strengths and weaknesses, assignments should be marked and turned around within three weeks, assessment should relate to course learning outcomes, and assignment topics should be unambiguous and directions clearly stated. These practices support the evidence in the literature which shows that not only are assignments the most important means for learning at a distance and for study success (see for example Rekkedal, 1995; Krane, 1995), but also that they are one of the most valuable channels of communication for students (Benson et al., 1991). However, it was clear that these practices were not applied consistently in the faculty, partly due to the resourcing issues in relation to marking that the HOD managers focused on in their discussions.

The Business Studies Faculty offers a large number of courses that have a relatively high number of students enrolled in them. This means that markers who are not the course controller or writer have to be employed. Good practice implies that marking criteria should be specified along with the assignment topic. Not only does this help to focus and guide students while they are preparing and writing their assignments, but it also provides the marking framework. However, markers also need training, on-going support and an appropriate level of empathy with the client group, i.e. mature, distance learning students,

and an understanding of the importance of assignments in the learning process. It is sometimes difficult to recruit appropriate people to mark, especially when the remuneration rates are relatively low, and post-graduate students in the various departments are often used for this purpose. While these individuals may be very good, and they are often excellent students in an academic sense, they may lack the maturity and the practical work experience to be able to provide the kind of support and feedback that is required for extramural students. They are also usually only available for one or, at the most, two years so a department has to recruit markers on an annual basis. An alternative approach is to recruit and train permanent part-time tutor/markers. Resources and time invested in their training is likely to have a better return than using post-graduate students.

Staff members too, do not necessarily have the required marking skills. For many, when they are recruited is the first time they have taught students learning at a distance and, as the questionnaire results showed, only about 20% of staff have teacher training. There is no requirement for staff to undergo any form of tutor training once appointed. In addition, while staff perceive the importance of marking, in reality it is often the task that they are most anxious to shed. Ensuring that staff have the appropriate skills and then encouraging them to do as much of their own marking as possible should help to improve quality in this area. Excellent assessment practices, especially in marking, assume an even greater importance if the opportunities for face-to-face contact are to be reduced.

The level of student and staff concern and the resourcing issues raised by the HOD managers, suggests that there is a major issue to address here and that a review of assessment standards and practices in the faculty is called for. This should include a consideration of the place of examinations. The faculty's reputation and credibility suffers and student perceptions of quality are diminished by practices that are perceived to be inequitable and unfair. In addition, improving performance in this area has the potential to increase staff job satisfaction levels because they should be dealing with fewer disaffected students and a reduced number of requests for assignment reassessments. In the interests of equity and good practice, there should be a faculty policy for assessment and marking

standards. This area is very important as it is so closely allied with the overall quality and reputation of the institution. Therefore it needs to be as transparent as possible.

A number of other issues emerged in relation to assessment. Students were more in favour of regular short assignments than staff were. While this would provide students with more regular feedback and reinforcement, it might significantly increase their workloads. It also poses a staff workload and marking problem in a faculty that is already stretched for resources in this area. Over-assessment, an issue which concerned managers, can also create a number of problems. What is important is that assessment is consistent with the course aims and objectives and that it samples the range of knowledge, practice and thinking skills that students should develop and apply in the course. This may mean a range of assessment techniques, and the reasons for doing this should be explained to students so they appreciate the value of using a variety of approaches. Both criterion-referenced, which students and staff seemed to favour, and norm-referenced forms of assessment could be used.

It is also important to students, particularly high experience students, that aggregated class results be sent out after every assignment. This is easy to do and should be faculty policy as it adds value to individual learning experience.

7.5 SCALE D: COMMUNICATION

It was clear from this scale that all groups perceived the impact on quality of communication and relationships with the university at every stage of student contact. This illustrates the importance of service as a process, that is, a series of inter-related activities, all of which are used by the recipient of the service to make judgments about quality (Gronroos, 1990; Lovelock, 1992). Pre-enrolment information and guidance, the enrolment process and the dispatch and receipt of course materials including text books, needed to be timely, as a late start jeopardised the student's progress in a course and put their workload

out of balance, as well as giving a negative cast to perceptions of quality. Equity was again an issue, with students feeling it was unfair when their studies were affected by poor university communication and service. In addition, all front line staff needed to be knowledgeable, friendly, capable of providing the required service accurately, and responsive to student needs. These characteristics correspond to three of Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry's (1985) five dimensions of service quality, i.e. reliability, responsiveness and assurance.

There are training implications for the university and the faculty from these findings. Central services such as enrolments and CUES, the five extramural regional offices and faculty and departmental offices, must all be adequately staffed with knowledgeable and helpful people, especially at the times when extramural students are seeking advice and information, i.e. November, December and January. Casual staff are often employed during these times to assist with processes such as enrolment, and they too must be equipped to meet extramural students needs.

The enrolment service came in for considerable criticism from students in the focus groups and many cited examples of slow service, delays in the enrolment process and even lost enrolments. This led to feelings of frustration, anger and inequitable treatment, especially when a student's course started late. However, the questionnaire results showed that nearly 80% of students thought that the service from the enrolment office was excellent and there is no doubt that it has improved greatly over the past year or two. In fact, students in the focus groups acknowledged this. Two thirds of staff, however, disagreed that the service provided by the enrolment office was excellent. The improvement in service to teaching staff has been somewhat slower than it has been to students and the staff responses may reflect this. In addition, academic staff often find themselves dealing with students who feel they have been given poor service over their enrolment and this may distort staffs' perception of the service. Continuing to improve the service of the enrolment office to the teaching departments and in particular, keeping them informed and up-to-date about the progress of the enrolment process each summer, would help to engender more positive

attitudes on the part of staff towards this important part of the university's service to both students and the academic community.

It was clear from the questionnaire results that staff and students had different perceptions about student communication difficulties with the university. While staff felt that students often did not know whom to contact, students disagreed with this suggesting that for students it was the contact itself that was important. Staff may find it frustrating when they are contacted about something that is not their responsibility, especially when there are multiple demands on their time. Ensuring that all written communications that go to students and the information on Massey's Web pages clearly indicate who they should contact for assistance might help to improve staff perceptions of this issue.

There was high agreement from all groups that a helpful and friendly attitude from the course controller made a big difference to students' perceptions of quality. This needs to be supported as a good practice concept and built into any training academics might receive. However, there were some striking differences in perception in relation to isolation, highlighting the value of a cross perceptual study. Staff and managers perceived isolation as more of a problem than students did, which lends support to the findings on Scale B, Face-to-Face contact. What was even more illuminating was that there was an incongruence in perception between the two student groups about this dimension, low experience students agreeing, albeit at a fairly low level, that the university should do more about reducing the isolation of students and high experience students disagreeing. This suggests that any initiatives that the university makes towards reducing student feelings of isolation should be targeted at less experienced students, for example, ensuring that first year courses have email access to the course controller or tutor.

While the results from the questionnaire indicated that isolation was not a serious problem, the focus group results, especially with Dunedin and New Plymouth students, painted a rather different picture. Again targeting students in the more isolated areas of the country

with a phone call or letter from the course controller or the regional coordinator if one is available, might be very helpful for these students.

All student and staff groups agreed that an incoming toll-free line to the university would enhance the quality of service to students. The low experience group felt this much more strongly than the high experience group. Not unexpectedly, managers tended to view this as a resource issue. Not only would a toll-free line enhance communication but it would also reduce feelings of unfairness that students had when they had to phone the university over an issue that they perceive to be the university's fault. Massey has operated a toll-free line over the enrolment period in the past and from the customer point of view it was highly valued. Toll-free lines are now commonly offered by many businesses and services, including Massey's main competitor, The Open Polytechnic. This study indicates that the point is rapidly approaching where Massey cannot afford *not* to offer this service, and the feasibility of doing so should be investigated.

7.6 SCALE E: INSTITUTIONAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL INFLUENCES

This scale again produced interesting differences in perception among the three groups, as well as agreement about the effect on quality of some institutional and environmental influences. Both structural and cultural issues affected quality.

There was agreement from all groups that Massey's courses were good value for money but also a concern, especially from students, about the increasing cost of study. Students rated value for money more highly as a dimension of quality than staff did. It was also clear that there was a strong perception of students as customers from all groups. Consistent with this view, students and staff agreed that students would defect to other suppliers if Massey's service was poor. Students had a strong sense of this although, interestingly, managers, did not appear to view the threat of competition to the extramural programme as very serious.

Low experience students were much stronger in their view that they would defect if Massey's service was poor. This has some important implications for the institution and the faculty. Retaining customers is very much cheaper than recruiting new ones (Reichheld & Sasser, 1990; Lister, 1994). The longer a student stays with the university, the less it costs to service them and the more they are likely to spend on the university's products. In order to develop 'brand loyalty' in new and low experience students, it is critically important to understand and meet their needs.

It is clear from the results of this study that in comparison with high experience students, not only are low experience students more likely to defect, but also they need more structure in their study materials (Scale A), they are more aware of feelings of isolation, they strongly support the notion of a toll-free line (Scale D) and they value trained teachers more than high experience students do (see Scale G), highlighting the need for the support and collaboration of educators in the student's learning process (Burge, 1988). These pedagogical considerations raise an interesting problem for the faculty and the university, for these students mainly enrol in very large courses (usually at 100 level) which tend to pose the most challenges when it comes to offering student support. This would suggest that more resources need to be directed into the large enrolment courses in order to provide the kind of support that less experienced students require and also that the best teachers should be working on these courses. It is interesting that one of the staff concerns in the focus group was the lack of administrative support for large courses.

A number of other concerns that emerged on this scale also impact on this issue. Instructional design support is a case in point. All groups felt that there needed to be more instructional design support for the extramural programme, students no doubt because it would improve the quality of the courses that they received. Staff and managers agreed that the CUES staff did a good job but that two teaching consultants for the whole extramural programme was a totally inadequate resource. While it might be efficient, its effectiveness could be questioned. In addition, staff and HOD managers felt strongly that instructional designers would be better placed in the faculty as they were more effective when they

developed some content expertise. This would also facilitate better integration and a team approach, components of a TQM approach (Spanbauer, 1995). There was also a distinct preference for preparing materials in the departments and sending them to CUES camera ready, in other words, keeping the process of course development in the departments that had responsibility for delivering courses to students. This would assist continuous process improvement which is central to on going quality enhancement (Coate, 1990; Spanbauer, 1995).

The Business Studies Faculty needs to consider ways of addressing this issue, and the appointment of at least two instructional designers for the faculty would be a good start. If dedicated instructional design positions cannot be established, there are a number of extremely skilled and competent extramural teachers in the faculty, and it would be very useful if a way could be found of sharing their expertise. Perhaps two of three of them could be seconded into part-time instructional design positions. This could prove to be very effective, especially if they were staff with high credibility, but it might also be a relatively cost efficient way of providing additional instructional design support in a very targeted way. These staff could also play a useful role in a course audit process (see 7.7 Standards and Evaluation below).

Managers and staff also felt the need for more training and development for staff in the extramural area. Most staff recruited to the faculty have little or no extramural teaching experience and have to learn by doing, which can prove extremely inefficient and frustrating for them. A training video about extramural was a suggestion that came from one of the managers. Pairing a new staff member with an experienced and successful extramural teacher might also be helpful, and, as already suggested, a good practice manual for the faculty would also be a useful training adjunct. Staff should also be actively encouraged to attend appropriate training courses, supported financially by their departments.

Staff and HOD managers agreed that the promotion system still did not adequately recognise good extramural teaching and felt that research and publications output was still most highly valued for promotion purposes. As would be expected, students did not agree with this very strongly, probably because many of them do not have much knowledge of the issue. An innovative suggestion from one of the managers, to establish a prize for excellence in extramural teaching, could be considered by the university or by the faculty. Most of the grants and prizes currently awarded are for research. Such an award would send a strong message to students and staff about the value the university places on extramural teaching. Another consideration is that university culture tends to reward individual achievements. However, as quality improvements are often the result of a team effort, the faculty and the university should really consider better ways to recognise and reward teams (Lewis & Smith, 1994).

All respondent groups addressed the dual mode structure of Massey University, largely as a constraint. Students felt that they were disadvantaged compared with internal students and that they should not have to pay the same fees as internal students. This is an area where some explicit marketing could improve this perception. Extramural students should be told how their fees money and their government subsidy is spent, and what services they get that internal students do not, for example, study materials, the extramural library service and so on.

All groups were also very aware of the differences between internal and extramural students and their different learning needs, extramural students exhibiting more of the characteristics of adult learners: independence, maturity and experience (Shaw, 1982; Scriven & Ryan, 1994). However, they believed that it was important for there to be parity between the two modes so that standards were not compromised. Staff and managers felt that extramural teaching could, in fact, have a very positive impact on internal teaching by encouraging staff to organise and structure their teaching material.

Staff and managers were concerned about the multiple roles that academic staff had to play deriving from the dual mode, and the heavy workloads that this could create. There were a number of factors which exacerbated this. Staff complained about the lack of administrative support and inflexible and inefficient systems and the difficulties they sometimes had in finding out who could help them. The results of the informal survey reported under Scale A, indicate that there are some internal communication problems in the university. Production deadlines for extramural courses were particularly inflexible and created great pressure, especially when staff needed to be able to include up-to-date material if they were not to compromise quality. HOD managers tried to find ways of helping with workload issues but this was difficult given resource constraints. Other managers made the link between poor course design and a lack of time. The application of quality management tools such as flowcharting, fishbone diagrams and pareto charts (Coate, 1990; Williams, 1993) to help identify inefficiencies in processes and systems could indicate where improvement efforts would be most profitably directed.

Fundamental to addressing these issues is funding. As far as extramural funding goes, all extramural EFTSs, irrespective of programme or level, are funded at the lowest rate, i.e. the Arts/Commerce rate. The university is arguing the case at every opportunity to have extramural EFTSs funded at the equivalent internal rate. Thus an internal and an extramural post-graduate Science student would receive the same level of government subsidy instead of the extramural student being funded at the undergraduate, Arts/Commerce rate.

The findings of this research also imply that there has to be a fundamental acceptance in the university that resources have to be directed where they can get the best return, that funding will be transparent, that cross-subsidisation will be necessary and that given these caveats, principles of fairness will be adhered to. The Faculty of Business Studies attracts a large proportion of the university's students, many of whom are extramural, and consequently a large proportion of the government subsidy to Massey. In order to do this, it must be adequately funded so that it can keep offering high quality programmes that will continue to

attract high student numbers. Within the faculty too, funding must be fairly distributed. In the past, the faculty has been under-resourced, which has added to the workload of staff. The indications are that this issue is now being addressed.

Finally, managers discussed another resource issue which can militate against quality - academic freedom. The high level of autonomy and independence that academics enjoy can mean that courses are developed and offered which reflect an individual academic's interests but that do not necessarily meet market needs. Consequently, they may be uneconomic and this compromises efficiency and effectiveness. The faculty has tried to address this issue over the past year or so and should continue to be vigilant in this regard. New courses should only be developed when the need for them has been substantiated by market research. This implies good liaison and consultation with professional and employer groups, who are important stakeholders in higher education, as well as with students.

7.7 SCALE F: STANDARDS AND EVALUATION

When it came to standards, there were marked differences in perception between students and staff including managers. Students were clearly of the opinion that standards for university courses should be set and monitored by external bodies. This was driven by their concern for comparable courses across universities which would facilitate credit transfer and standardise qualifications in the marketplace. In line with this, they rated professional bodies, i.e. employers, as the most important in setting standards in university Business Studies courses, followed by external bodies such as NZQA. They also felt that strong internal control mechanisms should be in place and that this would make university teachers much more accountable for the courses that they teach.

This is consistent with a conception of quality as value for money (Harvey & Green, 1993) and with the French model for tertiary education described by Van Vught (1993). One of

the dangers of this approach is that education, especially a semi-industrialised form of education, can become a commodity and that the notion of quality as excellence, which is more consistent with traditional university culture, disappears. A concern that derives from this approach, was expressed by staff and managers as pressure from students for higher grades than was warranted and students being driven by “just passing the paper” (Scale G).

Also consistent with a standards-based approach, students agreed that pass rates and dropout rates should be used as ways of assessing quality. Staff rejection of this notion was high, reflecting the literature about the use of performance indicators in higher education (see for example, Paul, 1990b; Cave et al., 1991; Vroeijenstijn, 1992; Fasano et al., 1995).

Students also strongly felt that the university should give more credit for prior learning by recognising work experience which is one of the tenets of open learning (Paul, 1990b; Scriven & Ryan, 1994). However, staff were equivocal about this. This is an area where the faculty could perhaps do some further investigation using an appropriate consultation process with professional groups and student representatives.

Staff and managers were united in their belief that the best approach for monitoring quality was self review on a collegial basis with a high level of self responsibility. Quality control should be devolved to departments but linked to institutional aims and objectives. This was rooted in the belief that universities were different from other tertiary providers because they developed students’ critical thinking abilities, there was a strong interrelationship between teaching and research, and it was important to be part of the international community of scholars. There was strong support for the NZVCC Academic Audit Unit being the monitoring body and an equally strong conviction that using the NZQA unit standards approach would be totally inappropriate. In line with this approach, staff rated the individual course controller as the most important for setting standards in university Business Studies courses, and the relevant university department second.

Managers had a strong sense of the importance of stakeholder consultation in the setting of standards. This was also reflected in the staff ranking of professional bodies and students as third equal in setting standards. This is a particularly important issue when an institution is largely self regulatory, for without that consultation it risks alienation from the interests of external stakeholders. So the approach taken tries to preserve some of the notions of academic freedom and self responsibility that derive from the traditional English model of a university (Van Vught, 1993) whilst building in more efficiency, effectiveness and accountability measures.

The staff and manager perceptions mirror the path that Massey University has taken for quality assurance. It uses a definition of quality as fitness for purpose, (Harvey & Green, 1993; Woodhouse, 1995), it does not assume absolute standards, and the institution has the responsibility of developing its own quality systems and quality assurance processes (Barnes, 1997). Other countries use similar systems in higher education (Williams in Craft, 1992; Acherman, van Welie, & Laan in Teeter & Lozier, 1993).

On the face of it, students and the university take very different positions on this important dimension of quality, especially given the path that the university has chosen in relation to quality assurance. However, student perceptions could be enhanced by ensuring that information about how the university sets and monitors its quality standards is clearly and widely disseminated to all important and interested stakeholders. In addition, the consultation process with professional bodies, employer groups and student representatives should be open and transparent. At the faculty level, responsibility for auditing extramural courses is devolved to heads of departments, and all courses should be audited on a three year basis. A brief statement could be included at the front of all extramural courses about the auditing process and the date of the last audit given. If faculty instructional designers are appointed, they could be closely involved in the audit process. Such measures as these would help to assure students, employers and other interested parties about the quality of the extramural programme in the faculty.

All participant groups were conscious of the limitations of using student feedback in helping to set standards. There was strong agreement though that student evaluations should be used for staff appraisal and evaluation purposes. Students also had a strong preference for completing course evaluations after they had sat the exam and for this information to be collected by a central coordinating body within the university rather than the course controller. The university has now done this with Student Evaluation of Content, Administration and Teaching (SECAT).

One of the difficulties of SECAT, however, is that because of the lead time for extramural courses, changes on the basis of student feedback cannot be incorporated into a course for at least a year. Sometimes the value of the feedback has therefore lost its impetus. Such a practice also impacts negatively on the university's credibility.

7.8 SCALE G: PROGRAMME INTEGRITY

This dimension encapsulated the overall picture of the quality of the extramural programme in the Business Studies Faculty and focused on aspects of quality that referred to the faculty and the university's reputation. All groups had a sense of the importance of maintaining high academic standards and of the university being part of the wider academic community. It was important that Massey was recognised as a reputable institution. While staff and managers saw this as being important intrinsically to the university, students tended to focus on these aspects as they related to them personally. They wanted qualifications that would be well recognised in the marketplace and useful to their career development - another indication of their vocational orientation to education. A manager's suggestion that a measure of quality could be how well adapted students were to their careers is very pertinent to an applied faculty such as Business. Both Paul (1990b) and Spanbauer (1995) also see this as an indicator of institutional success in higher education.

Managers were particularly concerned about Massey's international reputation, and felt that high standards needed to be met in both teaching and research. As the university was judged by the calibre of the students it produced it must therefore develop students who were independent and intellectual thinkers who aspired to excellence. There was also a high level of agreement from students and staff that Massey's reputation was dependent on setting high standards for students to achieve and that it was important that Business Studies courses were up to international standards. The faculty can ensure that its extramural courses are up to international standards by having a sample of them audited on a regular basis by reputable overseas distance teaching universities. In order to minimise the costs of this, reciprocal auditing arrangements could be encouraged.

Managers also felt that the university must do well in any academic audits and make sure that it continuously improved its operations and processes. All groups perceived that the quality of teaching in the faculty was improving. Students interpreted requests for feedback from them as an improvement in quality.

An interesting difference in perception between staff/managers and students was in relation to the place of technology in enhancing quality. There was an apparent technology 'push' from staff/managers, although technology was noticeably absent from the student discussions. This finding is supported by the literature (see for example, Bowser & Shepherd, 1991; Lampikoski, 1995). Staff were particularly keen on computer technology and email as a way of enhancing communications with students, while a number of managers felt that extramural courses should be using CD Roms and video conferencing with international subject experts to enhance quality. There was a feeling that using leading edge technology in other university services too, such as enrolment, would enhance quality and reputation.

The advent of the Internet is changing the face of education delivery everywhere and facilitating the 'massification' of education. While questions about the Internet were not specifically asked of any groups of subjects, the university is now experimenting with

extramural courses on the World Wide Web. The Business Studies Faculty needs to be involved in this and getting appropriate courses on to the Web. It cannot afford to be left behind in this area.

For all groups, but for students and staff particularly, the faculty's relationship with the business community was important. There was high agreement that Massey's courses were highly regarded by the business community, an important consideration when many extramural students have their study sponsored by their employers. There was also high agreement that staff should be highly regarded and keep in regular contact with business and industry. Many staff do this and every effort should be made to encourage it even more as it has very positive benefits in keeping courses up-to-date and staff in touch with contemporary practice. A manager made the point that quality also meant being responsive to changes in market needs and offering courses that met those needs, another reason for being closely in touch with the business and industry community.

Students also felt that staff needed teacher training as well as business and industry experience, although both students and staff felt that business/industry experience was more important than teacher training. However, it should not be a question of either/or. Both are very important, especially as teaching accounts for one third of an academic staff member's responsibilities. The results of this survey suggest that a relatively small proportion of staff actually have some form of teacher training. Perhaps the time has come for the faculty to make it mandatory for academic staff who lack teacher or tutor training to attend a minimum number of training days annually related to developing teaching skills. All teaching staff could also benefit from regular refresher courses.

7.9 STRENGTHS OF THE STUDY

This study contributes to the body of knowledge about quality in distance education. In particular, it has shown that quality is a multi-dimensional construct and that examining it

by dimension makes it more manageable and understandable. Because the study takes a cross perceptual approach, it takes cognisance of the viewpoints of three important stakeholder groups, students, teaching staff and senior managers, and has identified areas of congruence and incongruence in their perceptions on each of the dimensions. This data triangulation has illuminated the meaning of quality in Massey University's undergraduate Business Studies, extramural programme and added depth to the study.

The research has identified areas of good practice that are valued by the three groups of stakeholders in the study. Building these into all extramural courses has the potential to increase organisational effectiveness. It has also indicated ways that customer (student) satisfaction could be increased. Furthermore, because it has the potential to increase teaching effectiveness within the Faculty of Business Studies, it could well lead to enhanced levels of job satisfaction.

The methodological triangulation of focus groups, interviews and questionnaire administration, has provided a balance of qualitative and quantitative approaches which adds strength to the study.

7.10 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

As the study was carried out on the undergraduate extramural programme, it would be unwise to generalise its findings to the postgraduate extramural programme. Post-graduate extramural students have different characteristics from undergraduate students and they may well have different conceptions of quality as well as different study needs, particularly in terms of support.

Only one faculty was used in the study, i.e. the Faculty of Business Studies. Therefore generalisations to other faculties within the university may have limited validity.

Although the student response rate was good and the results could be considered reliable, the staff sample at 48%, was a little disappointing and could impact on the reliability and validity of the findings.

Gender differences were not explored and may have yielded some interesting information.

7.11 FURTHER RESEARCH

There are a number of areas of future research emanating from this study.

1. Replicate the questionnaire in other contexts, for example, Business Faculties in other tertiary institutions. This will add to the reliability and validity of the findings from the present study. It would also be interesting to replicate the study in other faculties, for example Social Sciences, to see whether similar results are achieved.
2. Survey another important group of stakeholders, i.e. employers of Business Studies graduates, to ascertain their perceptions of quality and compare them with perceptions of the groups used in this study.
3. Sample post-graduate students in the Business Studies Faculty and compare their perceptions of quality with the undergraduate students in this study. There was a surprisingly small number of differences between high and low experience students in this study and it may be that differences in perception are more marked between post-graduate and undergraduate students.
4. Refine the questionnaire by examining the homogeneity of items within scales; examining the number of items on each scale with the intention of reducing overlap and repetitions; reexamining the taxonomy of scales to see whether an increase or decrease in scales best fits the items; including items about the Internet on the questionnaire.

7.12 CONCLUSION

The research that forms the basis for this study focused on the undergraduate distance education programme in the Business Studies Faculty at Massey University, one of New Zealand's largest universities. In teasing out the dimensions of quality, the meaning of this construct has been illuminated and distilled. In this regard, the findings from the study have much in common with studies conducted elsewhere and reported in the international literature. This study has demonstrated the value of taking a cross perceptual approach and shown how different stakeholder groups attribute varying importance to different attributes of quality. It has the potential to add value to the teaching programme in the Business Studies Faculty as it has identified aspects of good practice as perceived by the three groups, and highlighted areas where quality improvements could be made. It is also possible that these findings will have relevance to other faculties within the university and Business Studies Faculties elsewhere. Further research will ascertain whether or not the findings are more widely applicable, and follow-up studies are planned.

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W.G. Zikmund

APPENDIX 1: SCHEDULE OF DISCUSSION TOPICS FOR FOCUS GROUPS AND INTERVIEWS

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS - QUALITY IN DISTANCE EDUCATION

Introduction

Thank you for coming.

Icebreaker-- Quick introduction - can you tell us who you are and something about yourself.

Experience as an extramural student/teacher - how many papers, what types etc. How long have you been with Massey?

Purpose

Part of much bigger research project focusing on the management of quality in distance education. Going to do a cross perceptual study looking at the perceptions of staff, students and what quality means to the policy makers in the university.

Will look at similarities and differences in their perceptions.

Where their perceptions coincide and where they might be different.

Need to design questionnaires to find out these perceptions.

This focus group will help me isolate important issues about which questions to ask and how to design the questionnaire.

Usually quality is assessed at the end of a course and today/tonight what I want to do is find out from you as teachers/students what the input quality elements are.

Clarification

Questions about the study?

Anything you would like to ask me?

Benefit

In the long run benefiting all students and staff... in the short term it may be of interest to you in your courses.

Ground Rules

Conducted pretty much like a tutorial - want everyone to contribute - I'm interested in everybody's opinion... no right or wrong answers - elements of brainstorming.

I want to keep the discussion going so I might at times move you on rather than getting bogged down in specific issues.

Prefer if one person at a time spoke... please let people finish what they're saying.

Jot down ideas you have so we can pick up on them later. You may wish to draw on experience from specific papers...

Any questions?

Get underway, feel free to discuss things openly.

- Q1 *Think about the extramural courses that you've been involved with and jot down what you believe constitutes quality in an extramural course, if it helps to concentrate on one course, do so - What are the attributes of quality? (Rank order them).*

Prompts:

- What does quality mean to you?
- Look at what you've written down and, I want you to tell me what constitutes QUALITY in an extramural course.
- What about course materials? How do they affect you in terms of quality?
- What about on campus courses? What do you think makes a high quality study guide?
- Communication. How does this affect quality?
- Assessment - does the type of assessment used on the course affect its quality?

- What about assignment feedback?
- Any thoughts on how other support can affect your feelings about the quality of a course?
- Has student workload got anything to do with quality?
- How important is face to face contact?

Group ranking of three(3) most important attributes of quality

Q2 *So, what makes one course better than another course?*

Prompts:

- It might help to think of a course which you don't perceive of as very good... what detracts from its quality? (Jot down your thoughts about this).
- What made you think it wasn't good?
- What are the features of a low quality course/Study Guide?
- Students: What turns you off a course?

Staff: Q3-5

Q3 *What threats to quality in extramural courses are there in Massey environment?*

- What impedes your ability to present quality courses?

Q4 *What encouragement/help/support do you get to develop and present quality extramural courses?*

Q5 *What help/support do you think you should get?*

Q6 *Has what you think about quality changed over time with your experience as an extramural teacher/student?*

Q7 *As teachers/student how do you think the University should assess the quality of its university extramural courses?*

- How might they measure it?, eg, quite often course controllers send out an evaluation form at the end of the year... is this useful?

Q8 *Standards are an aspect of quality. Do you think standards should be set against which courses are evaluated?*

Q9 *Who do you think should set standards for extramural courses? (user groups and staff?)*

Q10 *Do you think Massey adequately assesses the quality of its extramural courses?*

- can you explain why you think this?
- can you elaborate on what you mean?

Q11 *What do you think extramural students/teachers regard as quality in extramural courses?*

Q12 *Do you think the attributes of quality are different for internal and extramural courses?*

- how exactly?

Closing

So what do we as a group agree makes for a quality extramural course?

Really helpful... anything else anyone would like to add?

Got any comments about the courses you're doing this year?

Another cup of coffee?

COLLECT THE EARLY JOTTINGS.

APPENDIX 2: MAP OF NEW ZEALAND TO SHOW FOCUS GROUP LOCATIONS



APPENDIX 3: LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS FOR QUESTIONNAIRE

PRETEST

Department of Management Systems
Massey University
Palmerston North

15 May 1996

Dear

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the pilot run of the enclosed questionnaire which is part of my PhD research. The study examines the construct of quality in Massey's undergraduate Business Studies extramural programme.

As you work your way through the questionnaire please note on it any ambiguities and repetitions. If you think there are serious omissions, please also note these along with any other comments that you might wish to make. I would be grateful if you would indicate the time that it took you to complete the task on the top of the questionnaire form. Please return it to me in the enclosed pre-addressed envelope as soon as possible.

The questionnaire will be used to conduct an extensive survey of the teaching staff and a large sample of students in the Faculty. Therefore I would ask that you do not show it to anyone and that you keep its contents confidential.

Thank you for your co-operation.

Yours sincerely

Andrea McIlroy
Department of Management Systems

APPENDIX 4: QUESTIONNAIRE COVERING LETTERS AND BIODATA SECTIONS; QUESTIONNAIRE



**MASSEY
UNIVERSITY**

Private Bag 11222
Palmerston North
New Zealand
Telephone 0-6-350 5194
Facsimile 0-6-350 5661

**FACULTY OF
BUSINESS STUDIES**

**DEPARTMENT OF
MANAGEMENT
SYSTEMS**

15 June 1996

Dear Extramural Student

Attached is a survey questionnaire which asks for your opinion about a number of aspects of Massey University's undergraduate Business Studies extramural programme. The responses gathered from this survey will assist the Business Studies Faculty to improve the quality of its extramural courses.

I am conducting this survey as part of my PhD research and would be very grateful if you would take the time to complete the questionnaire and return it to me in the pre-addressed, postage paid envelope provided. As the survey is anonymous, do not identify yourself in any way. Individual responses cannot be identified in the results as only group data will be reported.

Thank you.

Yours sincerely

Andrea McIlroy
Department of Management Systems

STUDENT SURVEY

OF

UNDERGRADUATE BUSINESS

STUDIES EXTRAMURAL

PROGRAMME AT

MASSEY UNIVERSITY

June 1996

Background Information

Please provide the following information about yourself by ticking the appropriate box.

1. Please indicate your age:
- | | |
|----------|--------------------------|
| under 20 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 20 - 29 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 30 - 39 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 40 - 49 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 50 - 59 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| over 60 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
2. Are you:
- | | |
|--------|--------------------------|
| male | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| female | <input type="checkbox"/> |
3. How many years have you been enrolled as an extramural student?
- | | |
|--------------|--------------------------|
| 3 or less | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4-6 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7-9 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 10 - 12 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| more than 12 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
4. How many business studies extramural papers have you completed at Massey?
- | | |
|------------|--------------------------|
| 5 or less | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6 -9 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 10 or more | <input type="checkbox"/> |



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**FACULTY OF
BUSINESS STUDIES**

**DEPARTMENT OF
MANAGEMENT
SYSTEMS**

15 June 1996

Dear Colleague

Attached is a survey questionnaire which asks for your opinion about a number of aspects of Massey University's undergraduate Business Studies extramural programme. The responses gathered from this survey will assist the Business Studies Faculty to improve the quality of its extramural courses.

I am conducting this survey as part of my PhD research and would be very grateful if you would take the time to complete the questionnaire and return it to me in the pre-addressed envelope provided. As the survey is anonymous, do not identify yourself in any way. Individual responses cannot be identified in the results as only group data will be reported.

Thank you.

Yours sincerely

Andrea McIlroy
Department of Management Systems

STAFF SURVEY

OF

UNDERGRADUATE BUSINESS

STUDIES EXTRAMURAL

PROGRAMME AT

MASSEY UNIVERSITY

June 1996

Background Information

Please provide the following information about yourself by ticking the appropriate box.

1. Are you:
- | | |
|--------|--------------------------|
| male | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| female | <input type="checkbox"/> |

3. Which department are you in?
- | | |
|--|--------------------------|
| Accountancy | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Business Law | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Finance | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Human Resource Management | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Management Systems | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Marketing | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Property Studies | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Centres for Dispute Resolution and
Banking Management | <input type="checkbox"/> |

4. How many years experience do you have as a University teacher?
- | | |
|--------------|--------------------------|
| 3 or less | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4 - 7 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 8 - 11 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| more than 11 | <input type="checkbox"/> |

5. How many years have you been teaching business studies courses extramurally?

5 or less

6 - 9

10 or more

6. Do you have a teaching qualification?

yes

no

If yes please give the name of the qualification

7. In the past five years have you done any consulting or advisory work in a business or organisation outside the University?

yes

no

<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>strongly agree</i>	<i>agree</i>	<i>disagree</i>	<i>strongly disagree</i>

- 35. It is better to receive all course material in one on-enrolment posting
- 36. All course texts should be available for the start of a course
- 37. The standard of teaching in the Business Studies Faculty is high
- 38. Poor service from Massey will cause students to defect to other tertiary education providers
- 39. All course materials should be clearly and simply written with jargon kept to a minimum
- 40. More resources should be put into extramural teaching
- 41. All students in a course should receive their on-enrolment material at the same time
- 42. There is often a mis-match between the theory in course texts and workplace practice
- 43. Weekend regional courses are of more value than on-campus courses
- 44. Often it is only at an on-campus course that the course is put in perspective
- 45. Written assignments improve the quality of learning
- 46. Late arrival of course material detracts from the quality of a course
- 47. There is more demand from students now than in the past for high quality courses
- 48. Assignments should be marked and returned well before the next assignment is due
- 49. A summary of class results should be sent to students in the course after every assignment so that individual students can see where they stand
- 50. The information in course materials should be accurate and error free
- 51. All courses should employ a variety of assessment techniques eg oral presentations, essay and/or report writing, tests, exams
- 52. Early receipt of course material allows students to organise and plan their study effectively

- | | <i>1</i> | <i>2</i> | <i>3</i> | <i>4</i> | |
|-----|--|--------------|-----------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| | <i>strongly agree</i> | <i>agree</i> | <i>disagree</i> | <i>strongly disagree</i> | |
| 53. | A range of readings which complement the set text should be included with the course | | | | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 54. | The quality of courses is compromised if the quantity of readings is excessive | | | | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 55. | It is often difficult for students to make contact with their course controller | | | | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 56. | Because students now pay a greater proportion of their fees they see themselves as customers with customer rights | | | | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 57. | Teaching staff in Business Studies should have regular contact through consulting or work exchanges with business and industry | | | | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 58. | All teaching staff should be required to undergo teacher training | | | | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 59. | Student evaluation of courses should not be completed until after students have sat their examinations | | | | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 60. | Course materials should consistently refer to the text | | | | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 61. | Trying to make contact with the right person at the University is often a frustrating and expensive experience for students | | | | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 62. | It is unfair that extramural students pay the same fees as internal students | | | | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 63. | The relative importance of all course reading should be indicated eg essential, important but not essential, optional | | | | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 64. | University courses should be knowledge-based rather than skills-based | | | | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 65. | Student study groups enhance the quality of learning | | | | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 66. | A variety of teaching techniques such as lectures, group work, case studies, videos, adds value to the learning experience at on-campus and regional courses | | | | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 67. | The University should provide more instructional design support for staff developing extramural course materials | | | | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 68. | There is no justification for expecting students to purchase multiple texts for a course | | | | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 69. | Being able to use the library and access additional resources is an important aspect of on-campus courses | | | | <input type="checkbox"/> |

	<i>1</i> <i>strongly agree</i>	<i>2</i> <i>agree</i>	<i>3</i> <i>disagree</i>	<i>4</i> <i>strongly disagree</i>	
70.	Assignments are of more value if they are practical and related to students' work situations				<input type="checkbox"/>
71.	The University should use peer assessment to evaluate lecturers' teaching performance				<input type="checkbox"/>
72.	Course materials should be presented in such a way that they are durable and robust				<input type="checkbox"/>
73.	The University should do more to reduce the isolation that many extramural students feel				<input type="checkbox"/>
74.	Courses should be practical and relevant to the business world				<input type="checkbox"/>
75.	Good extramural teaching is not valued highly enough by the University				<input type="checkbox"/>
76.	Academics from other Universities should moderate Massey's extramural courses				<input type="checkbox"/>
77.	Inflexible systems at the University work against responsiveness to the needs of extramural students				<input type="checkbox"/>
78.	Regional/local support for extramural students enhances quality				<input type="checkbox"/>
79.	Communication difficulties with the University detract from the quality of its courses				<input type="checkbox"/>
80.	Personal communication with the University improves the quality of the extramural experience for students				<input type="checkbox"/>
81.	Assessments should focus on students reaching prespecified criteria or standards rather than comparing them to other students in the class				<input type="checkbox"/>
82.	Massey's reputation depends on setting high standards for students to achieve.				<input type="checkbox"/>
83.	Courses that do not have a final examination lower standards				<input type="checkbox"/>
84.	Texts should either be written about or highly relevant to New Zealand				<input type="checkbox"/>
85.	There is considerable inefficiency and wastage in the University's systems				<input type="checkbox"/>
86.	Assignments should be closely related to the course material				<input type="checkbox"/>
87.	Course materials should be up-to-date/current				<input type="checkbox"/>

<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	
<i>strongly agree</i>	<i>agree</i>	<i>disagree</i>	<i>strongly disagree</i>	

- 88. It is more important for teaching staff to have industry/business experience than to be trained teachers
- 89. Assignment topics are often ambiguous
- 90. It is important that Massey University's Business Studies courses are up to international standards
- 91. Marked assignments should be returned within three weeks
- 92. Courses should be based on contemporary, international literature and knowledge
- 93. Courses in Business Studies at Massey University are of a high standard
- 94. Lecturers should anticipate areas of learning where students commonly have difficulty and try to find ways to help students overcome them
- 95. A positive and helpful attitude from the course controller is an important determinant of quality
- 96. Examinations are the fairest form of assessment
- 97. A weekly timetable should be included with every course to guide students and keep their study on target
- 98. Full information about course requirements such as due dates for and type of assignments, previous level of study required, whether access to a computer is needed, should be available to students when they are making their enrolment decisions
- 99. Massey's Business Studies courses are highly regarded by the business community
- 100. Getting students to complete and return a personal profile is a good way to establish initial communication in a course
- 101. Staff who are highly regarded in academic circles contribute to course integrity
- 102. Staff who are highly regarded in industry/business circles give a course its integrity
- 103. The University should give more credit for prior learning by recognising work experience that is relevant to a course

115. Please indicate what you consider to be an appropriate workload per week for a paper. Tick the appropriate box

	6-10 hrs	11-15 hrs	16-20 hrs	20-24 hrs
Single semester 10 points	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Single semester 15 points	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Single semester 20 points	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Double semester 15 points	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Double semester 20 points	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

116. Rate the following media in terms of their effectiveness in enhancing the quality of extramural courses. Please circle the number that best represents your opinion

	not effective at all			extremely effective	
	1	2	3	4	5
Printed course materials	1	2	3	4	5
Television	1	2	3	4	5
Videos	1	2	3	4	5
Audiotapes	1	2	3	4	5
Interactive computing eg e-mail, bulletin boards	1	2	3	4	5
Teleconferences	1	2	3	4	5
Video conferences	1	2	3	4	5
Computer software	1	2	3	4	5

117. The table below lists a number of ways that can be used to assist in the setting of standards. Indicate on the scale the relative importance of each in setting standards for University Business Studies courses. Please look through all of the options before responding by circling the number that best represents your opinion.

	not important at all			extremely important	
	1	2	3	4	5
a. Professional bodies eg NZ Society of Accountants	1	2	3	4	5
b. Individual course controller	1	2	3	4	5
c. Student input and feedback	1	2	3	4	5
d. External national bodies eg NZQA	1	2	3	4	5

e.	International Quality Standards eg ISO 9000 Series	1	2	3	4	5
f.	National University quality monitoring body	1	2	3	4	5
g.	The relevant University department, eg Marketing, Management Systems	1	2	3	4	5
h.	A central quality control unit at each university	1	2	3	4	5
i.	An international University quality monitoring body	1	2	3	4	5

118. Please rate the following as dimensions of quality in business studies extramural courses. Circle the number that best represents your opinion

	not important at all			extremely important	
Course design	1	2	3	4	5
Face to face contact	1	2	3	4	5
Course content	1	2	3	4	5
Relevance to work situation	1	2	3	4	5
Value for money	1	2	3	4	5
Fair assessment	1	2	3	4	5
Intellectual challenge	1	2	3	4	5
Rapid service	1	2	3	4	5
Responsive service	1	2	3	4	5
Ease of communication	1	2	3	4	5
Personal contact with lecturer	1	2	3	4	5
Lecturer credibility	1	2	3	4	5

**Please return your completed questionnaire
in the pre-addressed, envelope provided. Thank you**

APPENDIX 5: FOLLOW-UP REMINDER LETTERS TO QUESTIONNAIRE PARTICIPANTS



**MASSEY
UNIVERSITY**

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Telephone 0-6-350 5194
Facsimile 0-6-350 5661

**FACULTY OF
BUSINESS STUDIES**

**DEPARTMENT OF
MANAGEMENT
SYSTEMS**

12 July 1996

Dear Extramural Student

Two weeks ago I sent you a questionnaire which asked for your opinion about a number of aspects of Massey University's undergraduate Business Studies Extramural programme. The results from the survey will assist us to improve the quality of our extramural programme.

As the survey is completely anonymous, I have no way of knowing whether or not you have completed and returned your questionnaire. If you have already done so, thank you. If you have not yet returned your questionnaire I would greatly appreciate you doing so as soon as possible. The better the response from the survey, the more valid the results. Let your opinion count!

With best wishes for your second semester studies.

Yours sincerely

Andrea McIlroy
Department of Management Systems



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Facsimile 0-6-350 5661

**FACULTY OF
BUSINESS STUDIES**

2-

DEPARTMENT OF
MANAGEMENT
SYSTEMS

12 July 1996

Dear Colleague

Two weeks ago I sent you a questionnaire which asked for your opinion about a number of aspects of Massey University's undergraduate Business Studies Extramural programme. The results from the survey will assist us to improve the quality of our extramural programme.

As the survey is completely anonymous, I have no way of knowing whether or not you have completed and returned your questionnaire. If you have already done so, thank you. If you have not yet returned your questionnaire I would greatly appreciate you doing so as soon as possible. The better the response from the survey, the more valid the results. Let your opinion count!

With best wishes for the second semester.

Yours sincerely

Andrea McIlroy
Department of Management Systems

**APPENDIX 6: CONFIRMATION LETTER TO FOCUS GROUP
PARTICIPANTS**



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**FACULTY OF
BUSINESS STUDIES**

**DEPARTMENT OF
MANAGEMENT
SYSTEMS**

22 November 1993

Dear

Thank you for agreeing to take part in a focus group interview with other extramural business studies students on Saturday 27 November in Auckland at 2pm.

Attached is an information sheet about the research and details and a map of where the interviews will be held. Light refreshments will be provided. After the interview you will be sent an ex gratia payment of \$20.00.

I look forward to meeting you on Saturday.

Yours sincerely

**Andrea McIlroy
Department of Management Systems**

APPENDIX 7: INFORMATION SHEET FOR FOCUS GROUP

PARTICIPANTS

INFORMATION SHEET FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Research Project Title: A cross-perceptual study of quality in university distance education undergraduate business studies courses.

This project is about what constitutes quality in distance education courses and I am particularly interested to find out what students perceive as quality in their extramural courses.

I am doing this research for my PhD study and you are welcome to contact me if you would like to talk about the project:

Andrea McIlroy
Lecturer
C/- Department of Management Systems
Massey University
PALMERSTON NORTH
Ph (06) 3569099 ext 8748
Fax (06) 3505661

As a participant in a focus group interview you will need to be present with me and six or seven other extramural business studies students from your area for one-two hours. The interview will be in Auckland/New Plymouth/Dunedin on at in

The discussion will be open and unrestricted and will be tape recorded and then transcribed. The tape and/or transcript will be made available to you if you request it. When the research has been completed you will be given access to a summary of the findings.

If you take part in the study, you have the right to:

- * refuse to answer any particular question, and to withdraw from the study at any time.
- * ask any further questions about the study that occur to you during your participation.
- * provide information on the understanding that it is completely confidential to the researcher. All information is collected anonymously, and it will not be possible to identify you in any reports that are prepared from the study.

No preparation for the interview is required and I hope that you will enjoy the opportunity to talk about aspects of your extramural study.

APPENDIX 8: CONSENT FORM FOR FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS



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**FACULTY OF
BUSINESS STUDIES**

**DEPARTMENT OF
MANAGEMENT
SYSTEMS**

CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS

Research Project Title:

A cross-perceptual study of quality in university distance education undergraduate business studies courses.

I have the Information Sheet for this study and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions about the study have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I also understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time, or to decline to answer any particular questions in the study. I agree to provide information to the researcher on the understanding that it is completely confidential.

I wish to participate in this study under the conditions set out on the Information Sheet.

Signed: _____

Name: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX 9: LETTER AND INFORMATION SHEET FOR SENIOR MANAGERS



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New Zealand
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**FACULTY OF
BUSINESS STUDIES**



**DEPARTMENT OF
MANAGEMENT
SYSTEMS**

1 December 1994

Dear

I am conducting my PhD research on dimensions of quality in extramural courses. My study is a cross perceptual one which examines the perspectives of three different groups - senior managers, teaching staff and students at Massey University.

As a senior manager in the University, your views on this topic are of considerable relevance to the study. I would therefore appreciate the opportunity to interview you. This would take approximately one hour at a time convenient to you.

The study has been approved by The Human Ethics Committee and an Information Sheet is attached. My supervisors are Professor Tony Vitalis and Dr Mervyn Probine from the Department of Management Systems.

I will phone you in two or three days to see if you are able to participate.

Yours sincerely

**Andrea McIlroy
Lecturer
Department of Management Systems**

INFORMATION SHEET FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Research Project Title: A cross-perceptual study of quality in university distance education undergraduate business studies courses.

This project is about what constitutes quality in distance education courses and I am particularly interested to find out what senior managers in the University perceive as quality in extramural courses. I am also conducting research with students and staff on the topic of quality in distance education. The perceptions of these 3 groups will be analysed and generic dimension of quality identified.

I am doing this research for my PhD which is being supervised by Professor A Vitalis and Dr M Probine.

You will need to be available for approximately one hour for a semi-structured interview with me. The discussion will be open and unrestricted and will be tape recorded and then transcribed. The tape and/or transcript will be made available to you if you request it. When the research has been completed you will be given access to a summary of the findings.

If you take part in the study, you have the right to:

- * refuse to answer any particular question, and to withdraw from the study at any time.
- * ask any further questions about the study that occur to you during your participation.
- * provide information on the understanding that it is completely confidential to the researcher. All information is collected anonymously, and it will not be possible to identify you in any reports that are prepared from the study.

No preparation for the interview is required.

Further information is available from me:

Andrea McIlroy
Department of Management Systems
ext 4377

APPENDIX 10: CONSENT FORM FOR SENIOR MANAGERS



**MASSEY
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**FACULTY OF
BUSINESS STUDIES**

**DEPARTMENT OF
MANAGEMENT
SYSTEMS**

CONSENT FORM FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Research Project Title:

A cross-perceptual study of quality in university distance education undergraduate business studies courses.

I have read the Information Sheet for this study and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions about the study have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I also understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time, or to decline to answer any particular questions in the study. I agree to provide information to the researcher on the understanding that only group data will be reported. I also agree to the interview being tape recorded on the understanding that I can request that the tape recorder be turned off at any time. I also know that I can request a copy of the tape transcript.

I am happy to participate in this study under the conditions set out on the Information Sheet.

Signed: _____

Name: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX 11

Table 6.7: Significant Differences High and Low Experience Students on all Scales

Scale	Question	Low	High	Level of Sig
G	14: Student pressure for higher grades when not warranted is pushing standards down	d	d↓	.048*
E	38: Poor service will cause students to defect	a↑	a	.003**
C	49: A summary of class results should be sent after every assignment	a	a↑	.016*
G	58: All teaching staff should be required to undergo teacher training	a↑	a	.050*
A	60: Course materials should consistently refer to the text	a↑	a	.049*
D	73: The university should do more to reduce the isolation that many students feel	a	d	.020*
E	104: The quality of the extramural programme is being compromised because of inefficient admin support	d	d↓	.039*
D	110: A toll-free line to the university would enhance quality of service	a↑	a	.002**

Note 1: a = agree, ↑ = stronger agreement

d = disagree, ↓ = stronger disagreement

Note 2: ** significant at the p<.01 level

* significant at the p<.05 level

APPENDIX 12

Table 6.8: Dimensions of Quality in Business Studies Extramural Courses: Student and Staff Ratings.

Dimension	1	2	3	4	5	Mean
Course design	0	0	5	36	59	4.55
	<i>0</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>36</i>	<i>52</i>	<i>4.40</i>
Face-to-face contact	2	12	34	33	19	3.55 **
	<i>10</i>	<i>34</i>	<i>35</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>9</i>	<i>2.77</i>
Course content	0	0	2	40	58	4.56
	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>32</i>	<i>64</i>	<i>4.58</i>
Relevance to work situation	0	10	27	53	10	3.63 **
	<i>1</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>21</i>	<i>39</i>	<i>35</i>	<i>4.04</i>
Value for money	0	5	36	43	16	3.70 **
	<i>1</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>22</i>	<i>37</i>	<i>35</i>	<i>4.01</i>
Fair assessment	0	2	3	43	52	4.46
	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>35</i>	<i>60</i>	<i>4.55</i>
Intellectual challenge	0	0	6	40	54	4.48 **
	<i>0</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>51</i>	<i>30</i>	<i>4.08</i>
Rapid service	2	3	32	44	19	3.76
	<i>0</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>27</i>	<i>42</i>	<i>28</i>	<i>3.95</i>
Responsive service	0	3	11	59	27	4.10
	<i>0</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>15</i>	<i>50</i>	<i>34</i>	<i>4.16</i>
Ease of communication	0	5	14	48	33	4.10
	<i>0</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>19</i>	<i>44</i>	<i>35</i>	<i>4.13</i>
Personal contact with lecturer	0	6	24	52	18	3.81**
	<i>7</i>	<i>26</i>	<i>37</i>	<i>19</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>3.02</i>
Lecturer credibility	0	5	8	41	46	4.29
	<i>1</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>18</i>	<i>39</i>	<i>37</i>	<i>4.07</i>

Note 1: Scale 1 = not important at all, 5 = extremely important

Note 2: Student percentages and means are shown in italics

Note 3: ** significant at the p<.01 level

Note 4: There were no significant differences between the two student groups

APPENDIX 13

Table 6.11: Student and Staff Estimates of Weekly Workload

	6-10 hrs	11-15 hrs	16-20 hrs	20-24 hrs	Significance Difference
Single semester 10 points	83	17			.095
	<i>91</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>1</i>		
Single semester 15 points	12	76	12		.000**
	<i>38</i>	<i>57</i>	<i>5</i>		
Single semester 20 points	4	27	58	11	.000**
	<i>15</i>	<i>40</i>	<i>41</i>	<i>4</i>	
Double semester 15 points	75	18	5	2	.694
	<i>78</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>0</i>	
Double semester 20 points	40	40	15	5	.682
	<i>41</i>	<i>43</i>	<i>14</i>	<i>2</i>	

Note 1: student percentages are shown in italics

Note 2: ** significant at the $p < .01$ level

Note 3: there were no significant differences between the two student groups

Note 4: for a single semester paper the expected workload is one hour per point per week: for a double semester paper the expected workload is half an hour per point per week.

APPENDIX 14

Table 6.22: Importance in Setting Standards in University Business Studies Courses.

	1	2	3	4	5	Mean
Professional bodies	6	8	19	51	16	3.62 **
	2	5	16	37	40	4.07
Individual course controller	6	10	40	44	0	4.22 **
	3	16	34	33	14	3.40
Student input and feedback	11	27	51	11	0	3.62 **
	3	14	39	32	12	3.36
External national bodies	20	19	29	29	3	2.75 **
	1	8	25	41	25	3.81
International Quality Standards	27	20	32	18	3	2.50 **
	7	18	29	32	14	3.28
National university quality monitoring body	8	14	46	26	6	3.08 **
	1	7	23	48	21	3.80
Relevant University department	3	19	49	29	0	4.03 **
	1	8	28	48	15	3.68
Central quality control unit at each university	19	18	32	25	6	2.83 **
	3	15	39	32	11	3.34
International university quality monitoring body	19	16	29	27	9	2.92 **
	6	15	31	30	18	3.40

Note 1: scale 1 = not important at all, 5 = extremely important

Note 2: student percentages and means are shown in brackets

Note 3: significant at the **p<.01 level