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

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in
Education

at Massey University, Palmerston North,
New Zealand

Ahmed Ali Maniku
2008
DECLARATION

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

Ahmed Ali Maniku
ABSTRACT

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

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

The findings confirm that a combination of global, national and institutional factors influenced quality assurance policy processes in the Maldives. From the global context, globalisation and internationalisation of higher education trends affect quality assurance policy. At the national level, the desire for higher quality education found expression in the state's reassertion of its role in protecting public interest in regulating the sector through formal quality assurance. The social demand for international comparability has also lead to a growing trend of transnational quality assurance practices. The creation of the Maldives College of Higher Education was shown to be the principal impetus in quality assurance development. This national college played a lead role in developing a quality assurance model that tends to promote a regulatory compliance to quality. The study argues for a more inclusive model that acknowledges external compliance but also seeks to assure quality of teaching and learning leading to improved student outcomes.
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This thesis is the product of a long journey. I am indebted to a number of people for their blend of friendship, support and guidance, which has sustained me throughout this exciting and at times trying personal journey.

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# LIST OF COMMONLY USED ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

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