

Developing a robust internal quality assurance system: challenges, dilemmas and opportunities in a Small Island Developing State University

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AIM:

A reflection on how MNU organised itself to develop a 'fit-for-purpose' internal quality assurance framework

Introduction

- The Maldives is a small island developing nation.
- Over 1190 coral islands spread across 90,000 km², of which 200 are inhabited.
- Population - 382,751 in 2022 (MBS, 2023).
- **Geographical disparity**
- **Limited resources & central-periphery disparities exist.**



Figure 1: Islands of the Maldives, Source: <https://visitmaldives.com/en>

The Maldives National University

- **Premier HEI** in the country.
- Origins date 50 years back.
- **Public university** –The Maldives National University Act (3/2011).



Figure 2: Male' Campus of MNU, Source MNU

- 11 Faculties/Schools/Centres & 5 campuses across the country providing quality higher education – AdvCert to PhD.
- Over 140 courses, accredited by the Maldives Qualifications Authority (MQA).
- Multiple-modalities, over 6000 students.
- Undergone International Quality Review by the QAA.
- Seeking international accreditation to courses.
- Quality Assurance (QA) processes – exogenously initiated.
- **Prompted an expansion of internal QA processes aligned with the MNU mission and vision and Strategic Plans.**

To develop and sustain a robust, 'fit-for-purpose' internal quality assurance system we need to reflect on our strengths, richness of our experiences, and the commitment of staff that makes a community of practice

For us, by us

Challenges and Dilemmas

- **Limited knowledge and expertise of QA** in Higher Education (Waheed, 2013).
- Limited staff, time, awareness of QA and its connectedness to the various aspects of university services.
- Stagnancies in policy formulations and revisions.
- **Mindset and attitudes** about approaches to teaching and learning.
- A label of 'exclusivity'.
- Privatisation of higher education in the country.
- Public attitude and national approaches to QA in HE (Waheed, 2013).



Figure 3: Capitalising MNU's internal expertise – staff and students, Source MNU

Opportunities

- A Sound and well-developed Strategic Plan (10 Goals and associated strategies) exist.
- Gaps filled via literature reviews of best-practice, networking and international collaborations.
- Staff and students involved in working groups - transparency, collaborations & learning from each other.
- Quality management & quality culture – **synergistic and operative solutions.**
- The collegial, bureaucratic, political and anarchical dimensions (Birnbbaum, 1988) of QA development processes.
- Policy borrowing, adapting, contextualizing, mimicry, benchmarking to best-practice models.
- **Context is critical** in ensuring legitimacy – The MNU staff are the most knowledgeable of our local context and limitations.



Figure 4: MNU Open Day 2022, Source MNU

The Quality Assurance and Accountability Framework - QAAF

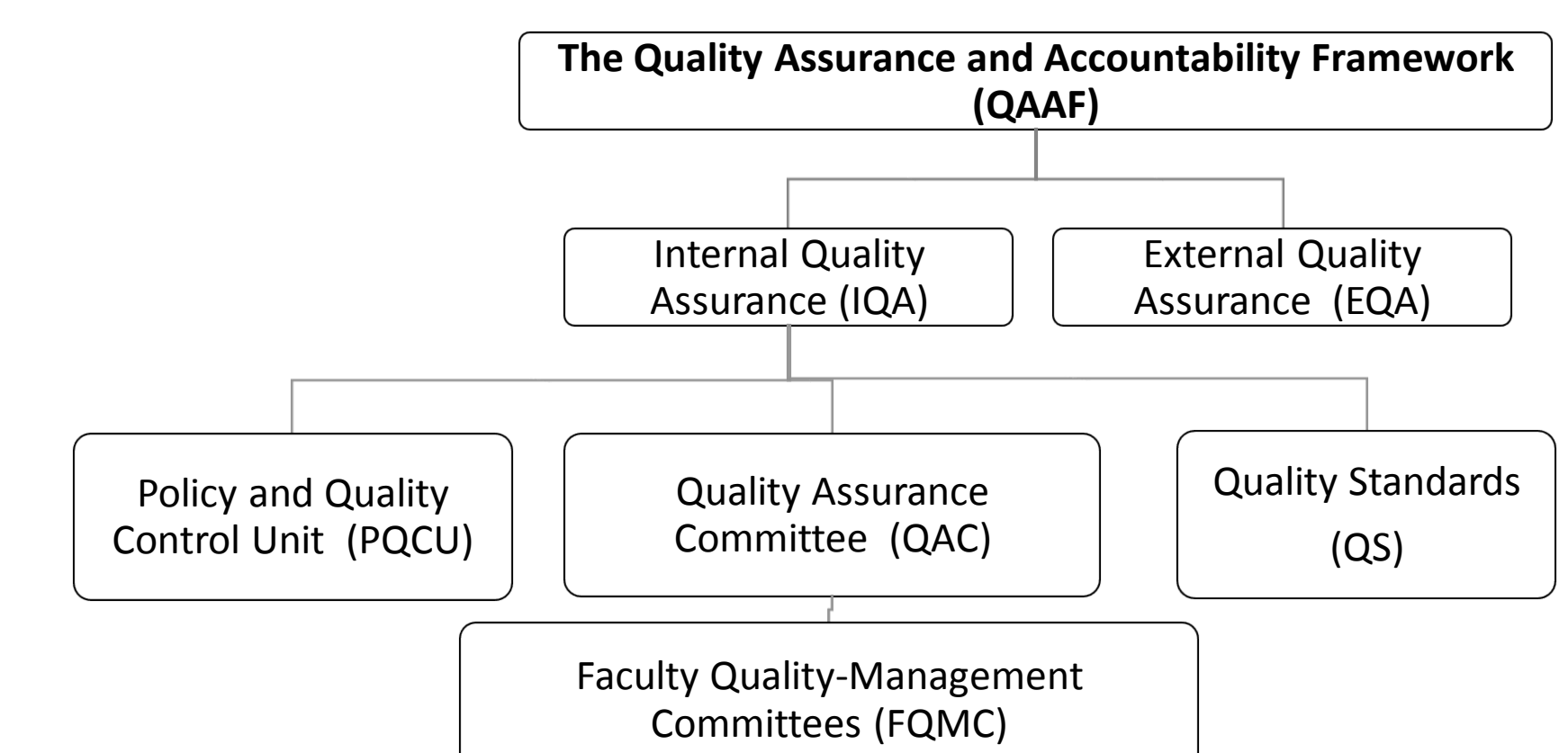


Figure 5: The Quality Assurance and Accountability Framework (QAAF) of MNU

- **Outcome:** establishment of a robust, well coordinated internal QA system with **maximum effectiveness and participation**

References

- Birnbbaum, R. (1988). How Colleges Work. The cybernetics of academic organization and leadership (San Francisco, CA, Jossey-Bass).
- MBA (2023). <https://statisticsmaldives.gov.mv/yearbook/2023/#>
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