International Quality Review

The Maldives National University

Review Report

October 2023

Contents

About this review

This is a report of an International Quality Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at The Maldives National University. The review took place from 27 to 30 June 2022 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Ms Gemma Long
- Professor Stephen Pratt (international reviewer)
- Dr Harry Williams (student reviewer)

The QAA Officer for this review was Dr Alison Felce.

International Quality Review (IQR) offers institutions outside the UK the opportunity to have a review by the UK's Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA). The review benchmarks the institution's quality assurance processes against international quality assurance standards set out in Part 1 of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG).

In International Quality Review, the QAA review team:

- makes conclusions against each of the 10 standards set out in Part 1 of the ESG
- makes conditions (if relevant)
- makes recommendations
- identifies features of good practice
- comes to an overall conclusion as to whether the institution meets the standards for International Quality Review.

A summary of the findings can be found in the section: Key findings. The section Explanations of the findings provides the detailed commentary.

The QAA website gives more information about QAA and its mission. A dedicated section explains the method for International Quality Review and has links to other informative documents. For an explanation of terms see the Glossary at the end of this report.

Key findings

Executive summary

The Maldives National University (MNU) is governed by The Maldives National University Act - 3/2011, which constitutes the establishment and functions of the university. Although MNU, the first public university in the country, was granted university status in 2011, the precursor to this university status was The Maldives College of Higher Education - an establishment founded by coalescing most of the government-funded higher education and training institutes that existed in the country since 1973.

MNU offers 105 courses (50% at undergraduate level, 10% at master's and postgraduate diploma level and 40% pre-degree and short course). It has just over 7,000 students of which 90% are undergraduate and 10% on are on 'higher' (postgraduate) degrees. At 73%, female students make up the majority of students in all faculties except the Faculty of Engineering, Science and Technology. There have been more than 33,000 graduates from MNU. In May 2022, the University employed a total of 555 teaching staff, with 285 full-time and 270 part-time members of staff. A small number are retained on a project/consultancy basis (eight staff). Teaching staff are distributed throughout MNU's faculties and departments with the largest (by headcount) being the School of Nursing, with 35 full-time and part-time staff members in May 2022, and the smallest being the Centre for Maritime Studies and the Centre for Educational Technology and Excellence, both of which have seven staff members.

The philosophy of MNU, grounded on iman and ilm (Faith and Knowledge), guides the functions of MNU. The vision of MNU is that 'The Maldives National University will perform and be acknowledged as the outstanding academic institution of the nation and one of the finest in the region'. The mission of MNU defines the overall purpose of the institution - 'to create, discover, preserve and disseminate knowledge that is necessary to enhance the lives and livelihoods of people and essential for the cultural, social and economic development of the society so that this nation shall remain free and Islamic forever'.

MNU offers a wide range of undergraduate and postgraduate academic programmes/ courses, and this information is communicated to the public through its website alongside printed pamphlets and through social media. The courses at MNU are offered through six faculties, three schools and two centres:

- Faculty of Arts
- Faculty of Education
- Faculty of Engineering, Science and Technology
- Faculty of Health Sciences
- Faculty of Hospitality and Tourism Studies
- Faculty of Shari'ah and Law
- School of Nursing
- School of Medicine
- MNU Business School
- Centre for Maritime Studies
- Centre for Foundation Studies.

The Centre for Education Technology and Excellence (CETE) provides support across MNU in teaching and learning matters.

MNU has five campuses:

- the central campus is located in Greater Male', the capital city (composing of six different buildings across Male')
- Hithadhoo Campus in Hithadhoo, Addu Atoll
- Thinadhoo campus in Thinadhoo, GDh Atoll
- Gamu Campus in Laamu Gan, Laamu Atoll
- Kulhudhuffushi Campus in HDh Kulhudhuffushi, HDh Atoll.

Work is currently underway to develop an additional campus at Lh Hinnavaru, Lh Atoll.

MNU also offers accessible and affordable higher education in the Maldives through its outreach centre (ORC) development strategy.

The 10 goals of the current strategic plan (2020-2025) are:

1   Academic Excellence
2   Exemplary Research and Innovation
3   Enhancing the Maldivian Identity
4   Quality People
5   Sustainable Finance
6   Fostering Good Governance and Leadership
7   Wider Engagement with Society
8   Foster a Conducive Working Environment
9   Student Empowerment and Success
10   National, Regional and International Cooperation.

MNU states that it is committed to supporting the development of the country, and its capacity-building is evident in the number of competent and dedicated MNU graduates in the workforce, and from the formal partnerships established with various government offices and the Memoranda of Understanding signed with government authorities, universities and other public and private entities including UN agencies.

MNU has introduced a number of explicit quality assurance mechanisms and processes at the University including initiating the work towards international quality recognition and seeking the services of QAA. Other initiatives include the passing of the first Quality Assurance Policy, the establishment of a central quality assurance committee, Faculty Quality Management Committees, the initial development of the Quality Assurance and Accountability Framework and the quality management certification of the Centre for Maritime Studies to ISO 9001:2015.

During 2021, The Policy and Quality Control Unit (PQCU) worked with University Deans and Heads to review numerous policies at MNU that were outdated and needed revisions. There were 11 policies identified and various levels of amendments were made. Additionally, MNU's infrastructure expansion efforts continue to grow, catering to the changing demands of its prospective students and the national developmental needs. For example, land at Addu Atoll, Fuvahmulah and Lh. Hinnavaru has been acquired to build MNU facilities. MNU also plans to acquire two more sites, at Laamu Gan and Hulhumale', which are in the pipeline and these efforts will contribute to the expansion of MNU facilities and also increase access to the University facilities across the country.

In reaching conclusions about the extent to which the Maldives National University (MNU) meets the 10 ESG Standards, the QAA review team followed the evidence-based review procedure as outlined in the handbook for International Quality Review (June 2021). The University provided the review team with a self-evaluation and supporting evidence. During

the four-day on site review visit, which took place from 27 to 30 June 2022, the review team held a total of nine meetings with the Vice-Chancellor, senior management team, academic staff, professional support staff, students, alumni and external stakeholders. The review team also had the opportunity to observe the University's online systems and visit one of the four atoll campuses.

In summary, the team found three examples of good practice and was able to make some recommendations for improvement/enhancement. The recommendations are of a desirable rather than essential nature and are proposed to enable MNU to build on existing practice which is operating satisfactorily but which could be improved or enhanced. The team identified two conditions that MNU must satisfy to achieve QAA accreditation.

Overall, the team concluded that The Maldives National University meets all the standards for International Quality Review **subject to meeting specific conditions**.

In July 2023, The Maldives National University submitted additional evidence with reference to actions taken to address the conditions. After considering the additional evidence, the review team concluded that The Maldives National University has addressed the conditions and thus it **meets** all 10 of the European Standards and Guidelines (2015), Part 1: Internal Quality Assurance.

QAA's conclusions about The Maldives National University

The QAA review team reached the following conclusions about the higher education provision at The Maldives National University.

European Standards and Guidelines

At the time of the review in 2022, The Maldives National University met eight of the 10 ESG Standards and Guidelines. The standards not fully met by The Maldives National University were:

- Standard 1.3 Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment
- Standard 1.9 Ongoing monitoring and periodic review of programmes.

Following submission of an action plan and additional evidence by The Maldives National University on 18 July 2023, the review team concluded that The Maldives National University has addressed the conditions and thus it now **meets** all 10 of the European Standards and Guidelines (2015), Part 1: Internal Quality Assurance.

Conditions

The QAA review team identified the following **conditions** that must be fulfilled before all of the European Standards and Guidelines can be deemed met at The Maldives National University:

- develop and implement policies and procedures which establish and enable a university-wide understanding of a student-centred approach to learning, teaching, and assessment (ESG Standard 1.3)

- develop, approve and implement periodic reviews of programmes (ESG Standard 1.9).

Following submission of an action plan and additional evidence by The Maldives National University on 18 July 2023, the review team concluded that the conditions above had been fulfilled and Standard 1.3 and 1.9 were therefore **met** at a threshold level.

Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following features of **good practice** at The Maldives National University:

- MNU's close links with industry exemplified by the systematic inclusion of external stakeholders in Faculty Advisory Committees and the improvement to programmes as a result (ESG Standard 1.2)

- the YouTube channel showing an 'Introducing MNU Admission Portal' video which is useful and informative (ESG Standard 1.8)

- the positive engagement in external review and audit processes and a positive attitude towards these exercises which MNU uses as opportunities to self-reflect and learn (ESG Standard 1.10).

Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations** to The Maldives National University:

- include student representatives on all faculty-level committees (Standard 1.1)

- systematically engage internal and external stakeholders in quality assurance, including the further participation of students, in the active management of education provision on committees at faculty level (ESG Standard 1.1)

- ensure the design, development and approval of new programmes fully comply with its policy (ESG Standard 1.2)

- ensure all relevant stakeholders, including students, are fully engaged in the design and development of new programmes (ESG Standard 1.2)

- ensure that the criteria for marking are published in advance and that they map onto the published grade boundaries (ESG Standard 1.3)

- put in place arrangements to ensure a consistent approach to the second marking and moderation of assessed work (ESG Standard 1.3)

- revise its current arrangements for the use of plagiarism-detection software (ESG Standard 1.3)

- revise the appropriateness and consistency of penalties applied to work submitted late (ESG Standard 1.3)

- revise its current arrangements for the consideration of student complaints (ESG Standard 1.3)

- conduct further work necessary to ensure the policies regarding student-centred learning and teaching are fully embedded and implemented across the University (ESG Standard 1.3)

- revise the current first-come first-served admissions process to ensure a transparent, consistent and standardised process (ESG Standard 1.4)

- monitor and report on student progression, recognition and certification data to enable effective management of student academic progress (ESG Standard 1.4)

- ensure that there are effective arrangements for the induction, training, and support of part-time staff across all faculties and campuses (ESG Standard 1.5)

- ensure that there are effective arrangements to identify and enable the sharing of good practice within and between faculties and campuses (ESG Standard 1.5)

- ensure all staff, full-time and part-time, are appraised in line with the relevant University policy (ESG Standard 1.5)

- revise the current process and criteria for promotion of academic staff to improve fairness and transparency (ESG Standard 1.5)

- develop support for students with special educational needs in a systematic manner through both policy and procedures to ensure a more inclusive student experience (ESG Standard 1.6)

- formalise and standardise pastoral support to ensure students are appropriately and consistently supported across all faculties and campuses (ESG Standard 1.6)

- collect and make accessible data on employability patterns of alumni for the benefit of students and their further choices (ESG Standard 1.7)

- ensure quality control of public information between marketing, faculty, schools and individual staff (ESG Standard 1.8)

- ensure all relevant programme information is consistently publicly available (ESG Standard 1.8)

- conduct further work necessary to ensure the policies and templates for programme reviews are fully effectively implemented (ESG Standard 1.9).

Explanation of the findings about The Maldives National University

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

Terms that may be unfamiliar to some readers have been included in a brief glossary at the end of this report. A fuller glossary of terms is available on the QAA website, and formal definitions of certain terms may be found in the operational description and handbook for the review method, also on the QAA website.

Standard 1.1 Policy for quality assurance

Institutions should have a policy for quality assurance that is made public and forms part of their strategic management. Internal stakeholders should develop and implement this policy through appropriate structures and processes, while involving external stakeholders.

Findings

1.1   The MNU established a Quality Assurance Policy (QAP) in March 2022. It was developed by a committee appointed by the Vice-Chancellor and approved at Academic Senate.

1.2   The QAP was developed relatively recently in response to both the IQR scoping stage and recommendations arising from a previous, albeit annulled, Maldives review by the Maldives Qualifications Authority (MQA). Its design was led by the Policy and Quality Control Unit (PQCU) and sets out how the policy will help the University achieve its vision. It commits to a quality management system and accountability framework founded on the principles of evidence-based decision-making that aims to guide members of the University in their work.

1.3   According to the QAP, the Vice Chancellor (VC) must oversee implementation of the policy, which is led by the PQCU, reporting to a new Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) and the Academic Senate. The terms of reference for the committee include monitoring, advising and providing assistance to Academic Senate on matters relating to academic quality. It also proposes that there will be Faculty Quality Management Committees which will oversee the faculty-level implementation of quality assurance and monitor quality standards for all courses including through annual reviews and preparation of an annual faculty quality assurance report.

1.4   Beyond the QAP there are other operational frameworks and processes that form part of the wider quality assurance system at MNU. The VC as the senior officer responsible for quality is supported in this function by the University Council and Academic Senate, the former with the authority to award degrees, and the latter explicitly remitted to quality assure all academic programmes. The MNU Act sets out the role of the Academic Senate as the 'highest committee' 'for monitoring and overseeing the education and educational activities of the University'. As part of its accountabilities, the Council is required to prepare an annual report detailing among other things the activities carried out to improve teaching and learning and brief statistics of the courses and students. The MNU Act also enables the University to make regulations for the administration and regulation of education, including regulations that 'determine the characteristics of lectures, classes, timings and conducting of examinations…issuance of certificates and awards…giving credit points'.

1.5   The Academic Senate has several subcommittees. For the purpose of quality assurance, these include the Quality Assurance Committee, the Higher Degrees Committee, the Library Committee and the Committee on Courses. The Higher Degrees Committee is responsible for postgraduate degrees with a research component of over 50% and with duties to develop policies and procedures, advise Academic Senate on higher degrees and enhance the quality of higher degree research. The Committee on Courses is responsible for approving new and revised courses on behalf of Academic Senate, for drafting policy and regulations and for monitoring and evaluating the delivery of curricula, standards and policies.

1.6   There is a Heads of Division meeting which involves academic and administrative heads. While it is mainly operational, it considers quality assurance matters such as the

outcomes of the QAA IQR Scoping Stage as part of its strategic duties; however, this meeting is not formally constituted and does not have terms of reference.

1.7   As part of a consistent approach to quality assurance, faculties are expected to have consistent internal management structures with Faculty Advisory Committees (FACs), Management Committees, Curriculum Committees and Academic Review committees. The FACs allow external stakeholders related to each faculty to give advice and counsel to the faculty on programme development and review, and on industry needs; the Faculty Management Committees focus on operational management including timetabling, recognising course excellence, processes to adhere to University policies and guidance, monitoring student learning and ensuring student feedback is addressed. Curriculum Committees review and update syllabi, review course offerings, and recommend proposals for new courses to the University's Committee on Courses, while Academic Review Committees consider assessment matters and student progress.

1.8   Information about quality assurance activities is specified in 'Standard Operating Procedures' such as those for monitoring assessment, and for the evaluation of teaching and learning, and these are supplemented by a quality assurance calendar.

1.9   The terms of references of committees show that their memberships are comprised of a broad diversity of staff and structured to ensure a healthy turnover of membership to secure and enhance the participation of the academic community. Student representatives are members of Academic Senate, University Council, the Higher Degrees Committee, Quality Assurance Committee, and the Library Committee. However, the terms of reference of faculty-level committees show that they do not benefit from student members which limits the ability of students to directly inform faculty decision-making for continuous improvement. The exception to this practice is the Faculty Quality Management Committees, which have recently been developed and will include two student representatives. The review team **recommends** that MNU include student representatives on all faculty-level committees.

1.10   The review team evaluated how well the above processes and policies worked in practice. The Quality Assurance Policy was developed in 2021-22 with representatives of the Academic Community. It is published on the University's website and is disseminated to all staff; however, the University recognises that there is scope to engage more extensively with stakeholders in the development of its quality assurance framework and related policies. The draft Quality Assurance and Accountability Framework (QAAF) recognises the role of engaging with external stakeholders to ensure the relevance and quality of curricula, but also in the process of quality assurance. However, since the framework remains in draft format, and is not yet approved or implemented, the review team **recommends** that MNU systematically engage internal and external stakeholders in quality assurance, including the further participation of students, in the active management of education provision on committees at faculty level. Notwithstanding this, students' representatives who met the review team were aware of the QAP, and both academic and academic support staff confirmed that they too had been involved in developing the draft policy.

1.11   The QAP specifies some helpful underpinning principles, such as fairness, continuous improvement, risk management, and stakeholder engagement, but it is unclear what these underpin since the QAP says little of the quality processes that the University runs. These are articulated instead in the terms of reference of committees and standard operating procedures for teaching and assessment. The statement of policy in the QAP is limited and brief; it says little of what the University will do with respect to quality assurance; however, it is more than sufficient in articulating the University's firm, unambiguous and high-level commitment to quality assurance. The University is in the process of collating further detail on quality assurance expectations, functions and processes into a QAAF. The QAAF was in draft at the time of the visit but nevertheless appeared to be a valuable document which

could have a key role in helping faculties and staff understand their responsibilities for quality assurance and how they are part of a wider University quality assurance framework. This finding supports the condition at paragraph 9.15 (ESG Standard 1.9).

1.12 The review team found that while the QAP had only recently been established, members of the University were able to articulate the benefits of the QAP and that it would aid transparency, operational consistency, and enhance quality assurance processes. It was generally recognised that the QAP is part of the University's wider aspirations to further enhance its reputation nationally and internationally. Some of the students were also aware of the QAP because they had found it while browsing the University website, rather than because they had been involved in its development.

1.13 The review team explored the role of the new Quality Assurance Committee reporting to Academic Senate which will replace more informal meetings such as the Heads of Division meetings. The finalised terms of reference for the Committee include developing the University's QAAF, monitoring professional body requirements, ensuring the use of annual quality reports, promoting innovation and enhancement in quality assurance, using internal and external data for quality assurance, attending to quality assurance recommendations on behalf of the Academic Senate and conducting triennial self-audits of quality assurance. These terms of reference are comprehensive and will allow the QAC good oversight of academic quality if the terms are met in full in the Committee's practice. The review team was also reassured to see the proactive planning of further quality assurance activity mapped to the QAC terms of reference. Minutes of the QAC, which had met three times in June 2022, were limited in their translation for the review team but showed that the committee was active in further developing the draft QAAF which would become significant in future as the locus for the University's internal quality standards.

1.14 With respect to the University's wider quality assurance framework, the Academic Senate develops an annual report detailing the new and revised courses that have been approved, and policies that have been considered and approved; in addition, minutes confirm its active role in approving policy and programmes. The University Council also develops and publishes an annual report of its work. The report details key achievements within the year, including statistics on how many students have enrolled and completed courses. It is expected that as part of its accountabilities, the annual report should cover activities carried out to improve teaching and learning. While activities were listed, it was unclear what impact these activities had and what had measurably improved in the translated samples of the reports from 2020 and 2021 made available to the review team. Senior staff told the review team that the annual report covers activities and developments to improve learning and teaching but that it is difficult for the University to say with certainty if learning and teaching has improved. In support of this, the next phase of its development of a quality assurance structure and culture is the setting of key performance indicators and targets.

1.15 FACs have diverse memberships including major national employers and relevant government representatives. Minutes confirm that the committees are effective in actively advising on courses and identifying where new courses are needed or existing courses revised. External stakeholders confirmed to the review team that they are able to have a good level of dialogue with the University about their industry needs and that it is evident to them the University plays a key role in addressing national issues, with examples given including research into the national schools salary structure and steps taken to enhance critical thinking in nursing courses.

1.16 Minutes of Faculty Management Committees confirm that they align with their remit for the more operational aspects of academic administration, including in one instance developing an action plan for the faculty that aligns with the MNU strategy, and in other

examples, consideration of subject and teaching evaluation mid-term survey result, exams and assessment scheduling and graduation planning. However, some evidence suggests that these meetings might not be taking place as expected and being replaced instead by general faculty meetings that consider operational matters.

1.17 Evidence provided to the review team shows Faculty Curriculum Committees actively consider course content, structure of courses including exit points and credit structures, and changes to enhance the student experience. While this is reassuring, some of the minutes provided in the sample dated back to 2014 for the Centre for Maritime Studies, which might suggest that Faculty Curriculum Committee meetings may not have been held in recent years (or simply, that the minutes were unavailable in translation). The review team found that Academic Review Committees manage student cases and any adjusted marks and awards, demonstrating their active management of student assessment and enactment of the assessment policy.

1.18 Staff that met with the review team recognised that teaching and assessment took place within a wider quality assurance framework. They were aware of the University's priorities as set out in the Strategic Plan, which included academic excellence and meeting national needs and believed that since it was the 'national' university there were high expectations upon the University to deliver excellent courses and graduates of a high standard. They were also aware of the committee and decision-making frameworks within the University and were informed of decisions through emails, the sharing of minutes, the University Gazette, these cascading information from Faculty Deans, and the intranet. There is evidence of broad adherence to the academic quality calendar and proactive action from the PQCU when quality assurance deadlines are missed. While academic staff were not universally familiar with the academic quality calendar, those that were welcomed the academic (and other) calendars that helped them organise their course administration. Academic support staff were also able to describe their role in supporting the University's ambitions for academic excellence, for example through community and stakeholder engagement, and a wide range of student support services.

1.19 Students told the review team that they are aware that some students can participate in committees, if they are elected to do so, and were aware that this could include participation in Academic Senate and the Quality Assurance Committee. The review team heard, however, that these opportunities were limited to students in Male' who were able to attend committee meetings and that students were unaware of how those on distributed campuses could become directly involved in University management. Nevertheless, students at a southern campus who met with the review team were able to describe how they could raise concerns with their local student representative and how issues could be escalated to representatives and managers in Male' if necessary.

1.20 The development of the Quality Assurance Policy and the delineation of roles, including a recognised senior committee for quality assurance, will enable the University to continue to emphasise the strategic importance of quality assurance practice and enhance its consistency. The draft Quality Assurance and Accountability Framework is helpful in this regard, describing the quality management system and the internal and external quality assurance processes, and supporting staff in the University's development of a self-evaluative culture. It also acknowledges the importance of wider stakeholder engagement, which supports the recommendation in this section.

1.21 In light of the Quality Assurance Policy, the aim of which is well understood and endorsed by staff, the Standard 1.1 Policy for quality assurance is **met**.

Standard 1.2 Design and approval of programmes

Institutions should have processes for the design and approval of their programmes. The programmes should be designed so that they meet the objectives set for them, including the intended learning outcomes. The qualification resulting from a programme should be clearly specified and communicated, and refer to the correct level of the national qualifications' framework for higher education and, consequently, to the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area.

Findings

2.1   The University states that it is committed to designing courses of high quality. There is a five-stage process by which new programmes are developed and approved and this is outlined in the Approval of New and Revised Courses and Subjects Information Pack. The development of new programmes is overseen by the Committee on Courses, which ensures that new programmes map onto the Maldives National Qualification Framework (MNQF). Final approval of all new programmes must be obtained from the Maldives Qualifications Authority (MQA).

2.2   Ideas for new programmes are normally taken to the relevant Faculty Advisory Committee (FAC) by the Faculty Dean or Department/Centre Head. Given that FACs are comprised of mostly external stakeholders, including employers and industry representatives, this step allows MNU to obtain early feedback on the currency and likely impact of the new programme. Minutes from different FACs demonstrate MNU places significant emphasis on exploring the demand, viability, and structure of new programmes with industry links. For example, the minutes from the Faculty of Health Science FAC show deliberations around the introduction of a new programme in Occupational Health and Safety that will hopefully address a key skills gap in the Maldivian workforce. During the review visit, the team met with several FAC members who provided examples of how they had given direct feedback to MNU leading to the development of new programmes. The team identifies as **good practice** MNU's close links with industry exemplified by the systematic inclusion of external stakeholders in FACs and the improvement to programmes as a result.

2.3   Another key feature of the University's approach is its deep and meaningful relationships with the communities it serves. For example, as part of the Hithadhoo campus tour, the review team was taken to a collection of small shops which the University had recently built as part of an ongoing collaboration with the local council. These units are now being rented out to small business owners at a nominal fee to help generate economic activity. Another example, also from the Hithadhoo campus, comes in the form of a plan to build greenhouses on University land for community use. These examples and others impressed upon the team the importance placed by the University on being a good civic partner. The review team noted the significant impact of these close relationships between MNU and the communities in which it operates leading to positive social change and economic potential.

2.4   Where the outcome of early discussions between faculty members and the relevant FACs is positive, a formal proposal will then be taken to Academic Senate for initial approval. The formal proposal should outline the programme rationale, target audience, entry criteria, mode of delivery, and provide an indicative course structure. Complete proposals from two newly developed programmes (one in Occupational Health and Safety and another in Library and Information Management) show that the information requirements expressed in the Approval of New and Revised Courses and Subjects Information Pack are

met. Minutes from Academic Senate provided to the review team show that, with respect to the development and approval of new programmes, it exercises its role appropriately.

2.5   In the event that approval from Academic Senate is obtained, a Course Leader will be appointed to develop content for the new programme in collaboration with the relevant Faculty Curriculum Committee (FCC), which is responsible for approving new and revised programmes at a local faculty level. Minutes provided from each faculty/centre demonstrate an in-depth analysis of the proposed curricula and, in some cases, a line-by-line analysis by committee members. This demonstrating that the work of FCC does lead to positive changes in the development of new programmes.

2.6   Once approval from the relevant FCC has been obtained, the proposal should then be considered and approved by the Finance Committee. Despite this, during the review visit, the team heard from senior staff that some new programmes were approved at Finance Committee, while the long-term new programmes were approved at the Academic Senate instead. The team **recommends** that MNU ensure the design, development and approval of new programmes fully comply with its policy.

2.7   Academic Senate approves the course development and the Committee on Courses reviews the curriculum/course documentation submitted by the faculties for final evaluation and approval. There is a back-and-forth between the Committee on Courses and relevant faculty until such time as the programme submitted meets the requirements outlined in the Approval of New and Revised Courses and Subjects Information Pack. It is during this period that programme teams reach out to professional services staff to discuss the implications of the new programme, for example, whether the library has a sufficient range of learning resources. During the review visit, the team undertook campus visits of the main Male' campus and the Hithadhoo campus. This included a tour of the library facilities in Male' and Hithadhoo which the team found to be well stocked and staffed appropriately.

2.8   Several of MNU's programmes are accredited by Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs), including the Ministry of Transport and Civil Aviation, the Bar Council of the Maldives, the Maldives Nursing and Midwifery Council, the Maldives Medical and Dental Council, and the Maldives Allied Health Council. The Committee on Courses is responsible for ensuring that approval from any PSRBs has been obtained prior to submitting the new programme for approval with MQA.

2.9   The final decision as to whether a new programme (or revised programme) should be submitted to MQA for approval occurs at the Committee on Courses. Following this, the 'Application for Programme Approval' form is submitted to the MQA, which outlines the key features of the proposed programme, including its duration, mode of study, delivery modality, and language of instruction. This is accompanied by a standard set of programme approval documents, including copies of key student-facing policies and procedures, an overview of the proposed programme, its learning outcomes and level descriptors, as well as module outlines. The MQA will then issue a certificate confirming approval only after which the programme may be offered to students.

2.10 To support the programme development and approval process, the University has developed 'Course Approval Checklists' for the key bodies involved in approving new programmes. For example, the 'Course Approval Checklist for Course Developers*'* asks teams to reflect on whether the proposed course structure is coherent and provides students with clear opportunities to progress, whereas FACs are asked to consider whether the proposed course will meet the employment, future training, and personal development goals of prospective students.

2.11 While the team found the inclusion of external stakeholders, such as employers and industry representatives a clear example of good practice, it was difficult to identify how

students and student representatives fed into the development of new programmes. This was explored in meetings during the review visit and senior staff confirmed to the team that this was an area which could be improved. Therefore, the team **recommends** that MNU take steps to ensure all relevant stakeholders, including students, are fully engaged in the design and development of new programmes.

2.12 The team concluded that MNU has clearly defined processes and procedures for the design and approval of programmes. They are designed to meet the objectives set for them, including the intended learning outcomes, result in qualifications that are clearly specified and communicated, and refer to the correct level of the MNQF. The review team concluded therefore that Standard 1.2 Design and approval of programmes is **met**.

Standard 1.3 Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment

Institutions should ensure that the programmes are delivered in a way that encourages students to take an active role in creating the learning process, and that the assessment of students reflects this approach.

Findings

3.1   The University aims to design, develop, and deliver programmes that 'encourage active student involvement in the learning process and [include] the application of innovative student-centred approaches to teaching and assessment'. MNU has developed a range of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes that seek to fill the employment needs of the Maldives with particular focus on sectors important to the national and regional economy. Programmes have a structured curriculum, which are composed of individual subjects or modules/units, information on which is provided via the University website and also in student handbooks and subject outlines.

3.2   Programme content is delivered in various different ways, from face-to-face teaching to fully online learning, in addition to blended approaches. While teaching has historically taken place in person, the University is 'increasingly becoming aware of the emerging trends in learning delivery and hence, supports all the academic staff engaged in blended delivery'. This move to a more blended approach is supported in particular by the Centre for Educational Technology and Excellence (CETE), which provides not only technological pedagogical support for academic staff but is also responsible for designing the University's new virtual learning environment (VLE) and for monitoring its implementation and use.

3.3   Classrooms, workshops, and computer laboratories allow for the delivery of in-person teaching. The University also has several specialist facilities to support the delivery of technical material, for example, commercial kitchens support the delivery of MNU's hospitality-focused programmes. The University is in the process of investing in further equipment to allow more teaching staff to record content for asynchronous delivery. They have also started to equip classrooms and workshops with the needed audio-visual equipment to support further programmes delivering content in a blended manner. The provision of physical and other learning resources is covered in greater detail in Standard 1.6.

3.4   Teaching staff are encouraged to employ innovative and effective teaching and learning methodologies and are supported in this by the Training and Development Unit (TDU) and CETE. Student performance is monitored using a range of different assessment tools with the University's Assessment Policy outlining its approach to student assessment and other key information, including grade boundaries. Subject or module/unit learning outcomes are mapped to the overarching programme learning outcomes, which are themselves aligned to the MNQF.

3.5   There are policies and procedures in place for dealing with student complaints and academic appeals, which are also known locally as grade reconsiderations. Information on student complaints and grade appeals were included in the Student Handbooks seen by the review team. Students receive helpful feedback on all assessed work, largely now via the VLE, and this allows them to improve in time for their next assessment. There are arrangements for independent double-marking or moderation of assessed work and these are outlined in the University's Assessment Policy; however, they do not cover all assessed work.

3.6   The University does not have a teaching and learning strategy. Therefore, during the review visit, the team met with staff and students to explore how MNU's approach to

teaching, learning, and assessment is student-centred in practice. In meetings with senior and academic staff, the University was unable to provide a clear and consistent definition of what it considered to be student-centred teaching, learning, and assessment. When asked to identify how its teaching and learning was student-centred, senior staff seemed to suggest that the structure of the courses and in particular the role of the course coordinator, who can provide support and assistance to students, was evidence of a student-centred approach. Then in meetings with teaching staff, the team heard examples of teaching teams splitting assessment between theory-based exams and practical sessions. The review team did not consider this evidence of a student-centred approach to teaching, learning, and assessment and therefore sets a **condition** that MNU develop and implement policies and procedures which establish and enable a University-wide understanding of a student-centred approach to learning, teaching, and assessment.

3.7   Different programmes employ different pedagogical approaches and, during the review visit, the team heard several examples of how academic staff in different faculties approached teaching, learning, and assessment. For example, academic staff in the Faculty of Education (FE) highlighted using peer-to-peer teaching, whereas teaching staff in the Faculty of Hospitality and Tourism Studies highlighted their significant use of practical sessions in specialist faculties, including MNU's commercially equipped kitchens. The team concluded that teaching staff at MNU use a variety of pedagogical methods.

3.8   There are regular reviews of syllabus content, and this occurs at the end of each teaching period. The review asks teaching staff to consider whether (1) the course objectives are appropriate and assessable; (2) the syllabus contains necessary components and is appropriate to the level of the course; (3) any textbooks and other required/recommended materials listed are appropriate; (4) whether learning outcomes are assessed through the assessment tasks; (5) if student assessments match the stated goals and outcomes and address the level of the course; (6) whether opportunities are provided for students to have interaction with the course content on multiple levels.

3.9   Student feedback is another mechanism by which the University monitors and evaluates teaching and learning. The Policy and Quality Control Unit (PQCU) conducts a Subject and Teaching Evaluation at the end of each term and has two main parts: (1) content and skills in the subject outline, and (2) lecturer characteristics, including planning, teaching and learning pedagogies, and interactions and responsiveness. The results from the surveys are shared with the relevant Faculty Dean or Head of Department and are used to develop faculty-level action plans. The review team considered that the process of asking for student feedback in such a systematic way was a positive step forward. However, the team also noted that the quality of the finalised action plans was variable, especially in terms of their depth of analysis. The University may wish to consider this moving forward.

3.10   The University's Assessment Policy sets out broad parameters surrounding the assessment of student learning in subjects (modules/units). For example, the Assessment Policy clarifies the minimum pass mark for any piece of assessed work, which is 50%, the University's style of assessment, and the amount of assessment any one student can expect. All assessments must be approved by the relevant Faculty Dean or Head of Department in advance of the course being taught. This involves academic staff reflecting on each assessment task, the clarity of instructions, whether they are self-explanatory and clear and the appropriateness to the level of the course. To ensure that students can demonstrate the extent to which the intended programme learning outcomes have been achieved, staff are also asked to map planned assessment tasks against the programme learning outcomes. This process of assessment validation is also monitored by the PQCU. In the QA calendar it is noted when the faculties are to provide the Assessment Validation Reports ensuring this process is completed. This is monitored each semester.

3.11   The Assessment Policy also states that information on how each assessment task will be marked should be published ahead of the assessment taking place. In meetings with senior staff and teaching staff, the team heard marking criteria should, as a matter of routine, be included in subject outlines. However, an analysis of subject outlines submitted to the review team found that very few included marking criteria and, where they did, the marking boundaries did not then map onto the published grade boundaries in the Assessment Policy. The risk therefore is that students completing assessment are unclear what they need to do in order to achieve a certain mark. The team **recommends** therefore that MNU ensure that the criteria for marking are published in advance and that they map onto the published grade boundaries.

3.12   Student performance is monitored using several different assessment tools. The team met with academic staff from across MNU during the review visit and determined that staff involved with assessment are familiar with existing testing and examination methods and that they receive support in developing their own skills in this field. Support is provided principally by the University's TDU and CETE. The latter has been principally responsible for enabling the shift from in-person teaching to a more blended approach not least in response to the COVID pandemic.

3.13   Students receive developmental feedback on all assessed work. The established deadline for this, as set out in the University's Assessment Policy, is three weeks following the date on which the task was due. Feedback is normally returned using the Learning Management System (LMS) and the plagiarism-detection software package. During the review visit, the team met with students and student representatives who reported that they were mostly happy with the quality of the feedback they had received. Academic staff were clear that there was a three-week period in which feedback should be returned and students confirmed that this was almost always adhered to and, in many cases, feedback was returned well ahead of schedule. Where feedback was late, students and student representatives confirmed that they had received timely explanations as to why this had happened.

3.14   Student work is only double-marked or moderated when it is either marked as failing or, alternatively, when the assessed work is from a large student cohort with at least 100 students, where 35% or more obtain either a distinction (or higher) or a failing grade. During the review visit, the team heard from senior staff that it is currently within the remit of the ARC to identify where double-marking/moderation is necessary; however, the University has plans to introduce module/unit-level assessment boards which will take over this role in the future. The review team concluded that because only a small fraction of student work is double marked/moderated there is a risk that student work could be assessed inconsistently. The team **recommends** MNU put in place arrangements to ensure a consistent approach to the second marking and moderation of assessed work.

3.15   The University uses industry standard plagiarism-detection software to identify cases of academic misconduct. However, during the review visit, the team heard that there was little consistency in its use. For example, in the Faculty of Education, the review team was told that staff should look at the similarity report and then take an informed decision thereafter as to whether a penalty should be applied. In other faculties, teaching staff will start to automatically deduct marks from assessed work once the similarity score passes the 10% threshold and, in the Business School, the team was told that if a student obtained a similarity score of 50% (or higher) then the student will automatically fail the assessment. The review team considered that this inconsistent approach could lead to a perceived unfairness in the process of assessment. The team **recommends** that MNU revise its current arrangements for the use of plagiarism-detection software.

3.16 There are policies in place to deal with the late submission of assessed work; however, developing these policies is also devolved to individual faculties. For example, in the Faculty of Engineering, Science, and Technology, there is a 5% deduction in marks for work submitted after the deadline whereas, in the Faculty of Arts, there is a 10% deduction in marks for work submitted within 24 hours of the deadline and an additional 10% penalty is then applied per day thereafter with work no longer accepted after five days. Information on which late submission policy applies should be included in the individual subject outlines; however, an analysis of subject outlines provided to the review team found this was rarely the case. The review team considered these inconsistencies could lead to an inequitable student experience and therefore **recommends** that MNU revise the appropriateness and consistency of penalties applied to work submitted late.

3.17 To enable a sense of learner autonomy, students have the option to supplement their studies by taking elective subjects. These may be from any area of study or subjects from another programme but only if approved by the relevant Course Coordinator in advance.

3.18 The University has procedures to deal with student complaints and academic appeals or as they are known locally, grade reconsiderations. For non-academic complaints, students are encouraged initially to contact the Student Administrative Services or Student Support Services and to resolve their complaint informally. If they remain unsatisfied, students may appeal to the relevant Faculty Dean or Head of Department. At this point, the student complaint may then be heard by a faculty-wide committee, the Academic Review Committee (ARC). According to Reconsideration of Grades in Examination Rules 7.2 and 7.3, students who are dissatisfied with the ARC decision can appeal to the Vice-Chancellor who will assign it to the Appeals Committee for their consideration. The review team questioned whether hearing a student complaint at a faculty-wide committee is proportionate or appropriate and that, in some cases, knowing that their complaint could be heard by a large number of staff members may deter some students from submitting a complaint in the first place. With this in mind, the review team **recommends** therefore that MNU revise its current arrangements for the consideration of student complaints.

3.19 The Assessment Policy sets out the broad approach for appealing assessed marks and grades. Where students have 'grievances concerning assessable work they should approach the subject lecturer' to request either an explanation of the mark or remarking. If this is refused, the student should then contact the Subject Coordinator, Course Coordinator, and Faculty Dean or Head of Department, in this order. Where there has been a lack of due process in the reassessment procedure, students may formally appeal to the ARC to review the matter but while ARC will rule on any procedural irregularity, it will not reassess individual marks. There are faculty-specific rules around submitting an appeal against an assessed mark and this information is included in the relevant student handbook and subject outline.

3.20 The University creates, discovers, preserves and disseminates knowledge to enhance the lives and livelihoods of people of the Maldives. While it is clear that students are happy and are mostly obtaining good outcomes, the review team has identified several areas that MNU will need to address. These include recommendations around key policies that relate to the late submission of assessed work, the use of plagiarism-detection software, the approach to second marking and moderation of assessed work, and the consideration of student complaints.

3.21 The review team concluded that Standard 1.3 Student-centred learning, teaching, and assessment is **not met but it is capable of being met on the condition** that MNU develop and implement policies and procedures which establish and enable a University-wide understanding of a student-centred approach to learning, teaching, and assessment.

3.22 Following submission of further evidence by MNU in July 2023, the review team acknowledges the significant amount of work undertaken by the University in order to meet this standard more fully. In particular, the review team is pleased to see the University has developed and formally approved a Teaching and Learning Policy which clearly outlines their approach to student-centred teaching and learning. There is clear evidence demonstrating the University has begun the process of communicating the changes to how it approaches teaching, learning, and assessment starting with orientation and training sessions for academic staff. The University has made further policy changes, including the development of a new Student Voice Policy, that it hopes will enable students and student representatives to engage in the University's development, quality assurance and enhancement of their educational experience. The review team was also pleased to see that the University has made significant progress on several other recommendations under this standard, in particular the recommendations on ensuring a consistent approach to second marking and moderation (see para 3.14), revising the appropriateness and consistency of penalties applied to work submitted late (see para 3.16), and ensuring that the criteria for marking are published in advance of assessment deadlines (see para 3.11). Given that these policy changes are relatively recent, more time will be needed before effectiveness of implementation can be fully evaluated. However, given that there is now a stronger policy base upon which the University can build, the review team has concluded the condition has been addressed and the standard is met at a threshold level. The review team **recommends** that there will be further work necessary to ensure the policies regarding student-centred learning and teaching are fully embedded and implemented across the University.

Standard 1.4 Student admission, progression, recognition and certification

Institutions should consistently apply pre-defined and published regulations covering all phases of the student 'life cycle', for example student admission, progression, recognition and certification.

Findings

4.1   The policies and processes relevant to student admission, progression, recognition and certification include the Academic Calendar which informs prospective students when and how to apply. Admission is governed by the Student Admissions Policy and administered by Student Administrative Services (SAS) as outlined in the admission procedures. There are two admission periods each year with provisions for an extension of the admission periods. Successful applicants are then given an offer letter and instructed to register. Unsuccessful applicants are also informed. Students reported being able to find relevant information about courses and modules prior to admission. They found information on course structure, modules, workloads and payments useful to know but suggested more detailed information on modules be made available.

4.2   There are two types for admission into courses: first-come, first-served and merit-based admission, set out in the Student Admissions Policy. In both types, applicants must meet the minimum qualifications requirements as required by the individual faculty and course. The first-come, first-served method offers a place in the course to students in the order in which they apply. This method ensures that MNU offers eligible students a place so the student knows they have secured an offer at MNU and may be less likely to seek an offer from another institution. In the merit-based method, all applications are held until the end of the application period, after which the Selection Committee will assess all applications, providing offers based on merit until the quota has been filled. If a quota has been reached on a given course, students will be informed they are on a waiting list. To date, the large majority of courses do not have excess demand and the merit-based method has not been implemented, meaning all potential students who meet the minimum course requirements are offered a position in the course. However, for several courses, for example, Nursing, which is a high demand course, the merit-based method is used. The review team **recommends** that MNU revise the current first-come first-served admissions process to ensure a transparent, consistent and standardised process.

4.3   The Admissions Committee meets and decides which courses will accept admissions on a first-come, first-served basis or merit-based approach for the next semester. Depending on demand for courses, the type of admissions (first-come, first-served basis or merit-based) can change from semester to semester. Stakeholders believe, possibly incorrectly, that most course recruitment is merit-based. At present, there are no policies for applicants to appeal the admission decisions although, currently, applicants can write directly to the Vice-Chancellor.

4.4   The Student Handbook provides information on general orientation as well as announcements in the media. Once registered, students can check their course registrations, grades and course structure on the Student Management System 'Self-service'. Students report satisfaction with 'Self-service' and commented that the system has vastly improved over the years. Students confirmed they could register on all their modules. Students also confirmed that they could track their individual module grades and their overall programme structure and progress. If students needed assistance, they could call Information Technology Services, use email, phone or a help desk; they can also visit Student Administration Services in person to get help.

4.5   Prior learning is acknowledged in the Academic Policy: Recognition of Prior Learning and Transfer of Credit. The process is undertaken by the respective faculty by completing an application form which will be confirmed to the student via the Registrar's Office. Financial assistance is available in the form of scholarships for both postgraduate and undergraduate students as well as for some discipline-specific scholarships, for example, healthcare scholarship which can include accommodation.

4.6   The tracking of student progress has generally been the role and responsibility of the course coordinators. Subject coordinators monitor progress of students on a particular subject. Heads of Departments are also tasked with monitoring across courses and subjects. This means that advising and monitoring of student progress has been inconsistent, with variable use of data. For example, the Faculty of Education collects student feedback twice a semester: mid-semester and end of semester. However, the data for the cohort and individual student progress is not tracked. The Centre for Educational Technology and Excellence (CETE) assists with providing subject coordinators with feedback about students not logging onto the Learning Management System (LMS) and lecturers inform subject coordinators if students are not attending lectures; subject coordinators can then investigate why students are not attending. However, there is significant variability about the extent to which this is carried out systematically. Senior staff acknowledged that MNU has not been monitoring retention rates of students but through the QAA process acknowledge it is a learning opportunity and an activity that needs to be undertaken going forward. As such, there has been inconsistent use of data that is available and it is faculty dependent with a heavy reliance on course coordinators. Feedback is used and analysis done in a reactive manner and the 'loop' is not being closed. Communications with students on course progress needs strengthening.

4.7   Relatedly, it is very difficult at present for MNU to identify the support needs of students, especially students with disabilities or special needs. There are several initiatives in this area. In terms of assessment and examination, subject coordinators and lecturers are emailed if any student needs support or assistance. There are implicit guidelines promoting equity and inclusivity. This aspect could be strengthened with explicit policies addressing the needs of these students.

4.8   As noted under Standard 1.3, MNU has close links with industry, exemplified by the systematic inclusion of external stakeholders in FACs and the improvement to programmes as a result. The external stakeholders that the team met were not aware of the formal Alumni Association promoted on the MNU website.

4.9   Based on paragraphs 4.6, 4.7 and 4.8, the review team **recommends** that MNU monitor and report on student progression, recognition and certification data to enable effective management of student academic progress.

4.10 After completing all the requisite courses, students can apply for graduation and the Registrar sends a list of eligible graduands to the University Council to approve. Higher performing students are recognised for their efforts - for those students attaining first place (best students in each cohort with a minimum Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) of 3.5 are awarded the President's Award) or distinction awards (graduands whose CGPA are above 3.00 and who completed the course with less than 15% advanced standing).

4.11 MNU does consistently apply pre-defined and published regulations covering student admission, progression, recognition and certification and publishes information about their activities, including programmes, which is clear, accurate, objective, up-to date and readily accessible. Notwithstanding the recommendations, the review team concludes that Standard 1.4 Student admission, progression, recognition and certification is **met**.

Standard 1.5 Teaching staff

Institutions should assure themselves of the competence of their teachers. They should apply fair and transparent processes for the recruitment and development of the staff.

Findings

5.1   The University employs a significant number of teaching staff.

5.2   The recruitment, selection, and appointment of all teaching staff is subject to the Maldives Civil Service Regulations (2010) and overseen by the Human Resource Department. For teaching staff, there is an expectation that they should hold a qualification that is at the same level of the qualification they are teaching, if not higher. To enable this, the University has introduced a policy allowing staff to take 120 days paid leave if they are pursuing a higher degree. Between January 2021 and May 2022, a total of 22 staff members had taken paid leave or study leave for the purposes of pursuing a higher degree. The University also pays tuition fees to a certain amount for all staff who wish to upgrade their qualifications.

5.3   There is an induction programme for new staff and support is provided on an ongoing basis. While the induction programme for new full-time staff is overseen by the central Human Resources Department, the induction of new part-time/contract staff is largely the responsibility of individual faculties and departments. To explore the arrangements for induction more fully, the team met with both full-time and part-time/contract teaching staff. Full-time teaching staff were largely content with the induction and support offered by MNU in their first few days and weeks in post. The picture for part-time/contract staff was less positive. While the review team heard that some faculties were particularly helpful and provided new part-time staff with a significant amount of support, other faculties were less supportive and this led to a small number of part-time/contract teaching staff feeling unwelcome. Therefore, the team **recommends** that MNU ensure that there are effective arrangements for the induction, training, and support of part-time staff across all faculties and campuses.

5.4   The University recognises the importance of continuous professional development (CPD) and the institutional approach to CPD is outlined in the Staff Development Policy. The Training and Development Unit (TDU) is responsible for planning and overseeing CPD provided by the University. The University has also recently established a CETE which, in collaboration with the TDU, is tasked with driving forward the University's move to deliver elements of some programmes online rather than exclusively in person.

5.5   There are some arrangements in place to enable the sharing of good practice across the University; however, these are mostly informal (see paragraph 10.5 'Anthara', good practice seminars). During the review visit, the team heard from several members of teaching staff that while there were clearly identifiable examples of good practice, there was not a formal mechanism that would enable the sharing of this good practice between faculties and campuses. Therefore, the team **recommends** MNU ensure that there are effective arrangements to identify and enable the sharing of good practice within and between faculties and campuses.

5.6   There is an appraisal process for teaching staff and this occurs twice a year. Teaching and research-focused staff are appraised on their (1) educational excellence, (2) research work, (3) administration, engagement and leadership. There is also an ongoing programme of peer observations, although these peer reviews do not form part of the formal appraisal process. During the review visit, the team heard from a range of teaching staff who

confirmed that, in the majority of cases, the appraisal process was working and helped them to develop as academics; however, the team also heard from a part-time lecturer who, despite having worked for MNU for over a decade, could only recall going through the appraisal process once. While this was the only example the review team found of the appraisal process not being implemented fully, it is noteworthy not least because of the part-time lecturer's length of service. With this in mind, the review team **recommends** that MNU ensure all staff, full-time and part-time, are appraised in line with the relevant University policy.

5.7 There are opportunities for promotion. The University uses an academic performance indicator (API) point system to assess the performance of teaching staff. In this system, the main responsibilities of teaching staff are split into three main categories: (1) activities relating to teaching and learning; (2) activities relating to curriculum and professional development; and (3) research and academic activities. Points are allocated for each activity in the API point system. For example, teaching staff are awarded 15 points per paper published in a refereed journal. Spine point promotions within an academic rank can be made when a member of staff reaches the specific service duration requirement and they maintain the API at a specified rate during this period. For example, spine point promotion at the level of Senior Lecturer requires 60 points from category 1 (activities relating to teaching and learning), 20 points from category 2 (activities relating to curriculum and professional development), and 30 points from category 3 (research and academic activities).

5.8 Applications for promotion are opened annually. Applications for promotion are made to the Promotion Board, which includes the Vice-Chancellor, two Deputy Vice-Chancellors, six Faculty Deans/Centre Heads, and two other members appointed at the discretion of the Vice-Chancellor. Promotion to Senior Lecturer and below (Associate Lecturer and Lecturer) requires only a majority of committee members in favour, whereas, promotion to either Associate Professor or Professor requires at least 75% approval. The review team concluded that while the API points system was transparent by virtue of the list of activities and their point value being freely available, deciding on promotion cases by anonymous ballot in-committee was not transparent and, in some cases, could be seen as unfair. Therefore, the review team **recommends** that MNU revise the current process and criteria for promotion of academic staff to improve fairness and transparency.

5.9 The University's research activities are overseen by the Research Development Office (RDO). This includes administering MNU research grants, conference funding and the newly introduced book-writing grants. The University Research Grants Committee (UGRC), which is Chaired by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Enterprise), oversee applications for research grant money. Between 2020 and 2021, a total of 28 research grant applications were received and 12 grants were made. Conference funding is also available and in 2020 and 2021, a total of six conference grants were awarded. In 2021, the University introduced book-writing grants which are available to both staff and to students. Since 2021, there have been 24 applications and 14 book-writing awards made.

5.10 The review team concluded that while there are several recommendations in this area, the University's policies and procedures for staff recruitment, professional development, and performance review are appropriate. Therefore, the review team concludes that Standard 1.5 Teaching staff is **met**.

Standard 1.6 Learning resources and student support

Institutions should have appropriate funding for learning and teaching activities and ensure that adequate and readily accessible learning resources and student support are provided.

Findings

6.1   MNU follows the Maldives National Qualifications Framework (MNQF) to provide learners, employers and education providers with qualifications that are nationally standardised and quality assured. This ensures an appropriate staff:student ratio, as well as ensuring staff are appropriately qualified.

6.2   Roles and responsibilities for providing academic advice are detailed in a policy document, namely the roles and responsibilities of course coordinators and subject coordinators.

6.3   The University has a main campus on Male' and four regional campuses; Hithadhoo Campus in Hithadhoo, Addu Atoll; Thinadhoo campus in Thinadhoo, GDh Atoll; Gamu Campus (GC) in Laamu Gan, Laamu Atoll; and Kulhudhuffushi Campus (KC) in HDh Kulhudhuffushi, HDh Atoll. There are plans for further investment in this infrastructure. MNU central campus consists of several buildings with various classrooms. In addition to the campuses, 18 outreach centres have been established to bring learning and teaching into the communities.

6.4   The learning resources and general facilities viewed by the review team show MNU is relatively well equipped for the Maldives/Small Island Developing State context. MNU's libraries have over 150,000 physical resources, 200,000 eBooks and have subscriptions to a number of electronic journals' databases. Given the fact that many students study on a part-time basis and that MNU is a multi-campus institution, the library has a large collection of physical and online resources. The library also runs information sessions and workshops, in collaboration with Student Support Services. Lending policies are in place, which are fair and communicated to both staff and students. Renovations are being undertaken to the Male' Campus Library.

6.5   Specialist equipment and learning facilities exist for courses that require them. These include science laboratories (Biology, Physics and Chemistry), kitchens for hospitality courses, demonstration rooms, training rooms, practical rooms and an e-studio and journalism studio.

6.6   MNU offers accommodation services to students through MNU Dhanaal service. Accommodation facilities are appropriate, with adequate space and shared bathroom and kitchen facilities.

6.7   Facilities exist for extracurricular activities. These facilities include a physical education hall, cafeteria, meeting rooms, and prayer rooms.

6.8   The Student Union is well financed. The review team confirmed with students at both Male' Campus and Hithadhoo Campus that students perceived MNU supported them. Initiatives developed by the Student Union received financial support with Hithadhoo students mentioning several examples.

6.9   There is IT support so students can deal with the administrative (grades, course progress, course structure, credits and teaching schedules) and academic parts of their studies. Online technical support is provided through the MNU website. An IT helpdesk is

available to students should they require it. Online student enquiries are sub-divided into nine categories and the IT Department provides the necessary support and tracks student requests. The Learning Management System (LMS) engages with a plagiarism-detection software package to support academic integrity.

6.10 The Centre for Educational Technology and Excellence (CETE) and Training and Development Unit (TDU) conduct the LMS training. Student Support Services (SSS) provide workshops, training and counselling and facilitate extracurricular activities. The Dean of Students meets with staff to identify training needs for students, based on students' results in the previous semesters. For example, mathematics and numeracy skills were identified as an important area for training. Study skills workshops are held for students throughout the semester. Training in referencing skills is popular with students. SSS gather student feedback after each training session and make improvements based on the feedback.

6.11 There is an orientation programme for new students which covers use of the learning facilities and a range of programme-specific information. This also covers roles and responsibilities of students.

6.12 At the outbreak of the COVID pandemic, policies and procedures were implemented to facilitate student learning. Extra support was provided by initially surveying students to understand their needs and undertake teaching and learning online. Numerous students were provided with devices, internet access was provided free of charge to staff and students and further training was offered for both staff and students, for example, through online help in LMS forums. Online library resources were promoted so that these resources could be accessed from any location. Students at the Hithadhoo campus reported lower satisfaction with communication surrounding learning during COVID. Academic research was undertaken, particularly by the Faculty of Education, to better understand the impact on education in the Maldives. This research was shared among colleagues and was published.

6.13 As noted earlier in the report, there is little systematic support for students with additional needs (see paragraph 4.7). Senior staff acknowledged this is an issue, although also commented that they could not identify many students with special needs. This may be a cultural issue as society believes these students should be mainstreamed. Several anecdotes were provided of the challenges of addressing the learning needs of students with disabilities. One of the main initiatives was to try to make assessment tasks flexible to ensure students could cope during the COVID pandemic. Examination Rules Chapter 8 (Special Arrangements in Examinations for Students with Permanent or Temporary Disabilities) gives the procedure followed in exams. The review team **recommends** that MNU develop support for students with special educational needs in a systematic manner through both policy and procedures to ensure a more inclusive student experience.

6.14 Academic staff commented that they undertake subject reviews to keep the content of the modules relevant. While not many staff are undertaking higher research degrees, they use their industry contacts to keep up to date with the latest theory and practice. Examples were provided for the Finance discipline, for example tax law changes, accounting standards, and finance updates.

6.15 As noted earlier, pastoral support is often provided by the course coordinators. Staff training for pastoral support is carried out through a mentoring system with an experienced member of existing staff, although this varies from school to school. In some schools, new staff are not assigned subject coordination roles in their first semester. As new staff become more experienced, they move from subject coordination to course coordination and gain more experience in department meetings and in discussions with Heads of Departments. Some of the staff the review team met said that it would be useful to have training for course coordination. Students confirmed that pastoral support and academic advising is undertaken

predominantly by course coordinators. The review team **recommends** that MNU formalise and standardise pastoral support to ensure students are appropriately and consistently supported across all faculties and campuses.

6.16 MNU has recognised that it needs to provide career support which would include opportunities to help students who wish to consider alternative career options. An inaugural one-day Careers' Fair was held in early 2022 in Male'. More than 2,500 employment opportunities were discussed during the fair as students spoke to employers. The Marketing Department under the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (DVC) Research and Enterprise was responsible for organising the Fair; other departments within MNU, including Human Resources, were involved. The event was publicly advertised and students were directly invited. Faculty Deans were asked to invite at least two organisations they interact with to be involved in the Fair. Participation was free and the aim was to be as inclusive as possible. MNU courses were also promoted at the event. An additional benefit of holding the Careers' Fair is that some organisations discussed potential corporate training programmes to be delivered by MNU, for example, The Maldives Airports Company Limited (MACL) working with the Faculty of Hospitality and Tourism Studies. Going forward, the plan is to hold the Careers' Fair twice a year and it may become a multi-day event. Alumni will also be more involved in future iterations. However, feedback from the students at Hithadhoo Campus suggested that there was limited opportunity for them to be involved in the Fair. The review team noted the success of the Careers' Fair and MNU's future plans and agreed that it was a positive development for the University, its students and external stakeholders (see paragraph 7.20 re provision of careers advice by Student Support Services).

6.17 The review team found that MNU has appropriate funding for learning and teaching activities and ensures that adequate and readily accessible learning resources and student support are provided, therefore, Standard 1.6 Learning resources and student support is **met**.

Standard 1.7 Information management

Institutions should ensure that they collect, analyse and use relevant information for the effective management of their programmes and other activities.

Findings

7.1   The review team analysed the University's policies and processes relevant to this Standard. The University recognises the significance of management data for the effective function of the University and its programmes and this is reflected in the MNU Act which explicitly remits the University Council to 'manage the information mechanism'. In the self-evaluation document provided for the review, the University noted that it 'gathers information from various sources to inform decision-making and for strategic planning purposes' but with no further elaboration.

7.2   The University collects student population data during admission, enrolment, and the programme of study. There is no specific process for the use of demographic data or locations for its analysis.

7.3   Both staff and students can access a Student Information Management system which enables staff to add and edit data about students and their attainment, and for students to view their grades, register for courses and develop academic plans. There are various levels of authority for access to the system (for example, right to view, right to modify and so on).

7.4   The University uses an exam portal in its student information system for the management of exam populations and papers. Faculty Management Committees are responsible for monitoring student learning experiences and student progress. In addition, Faculty Academic Review Committees must consider student progression based upon student assessment data.

7.5   The Policy and Quality Control Unit (PQCU) conducts teaching evaluation surveys (Subject and Teaching Evaluation survey) across all students towards the end of each academic term in accordance with Standard Operating Procedures for Evaluation of Teaching and Learning. The survey asks students about the taught content and the teaching of their courses. Faculties analyse the data for each course, and the PQCU analyses data for each faculty and works with each to prepare an action plan. Academic Senate, Quality Assurance Committee and meetings of Heads of Division receive student survey evaluation reports and reinforce the expectation that faculties develop action plans.

7.6   The University uses a virtual learning environment as a repository for learning resources and for enabling students to submit assessments given its integration with plagiarism-detection software. It also uses library information software to manage access to materials and has a portal to manage the submission of journal articles, although there is no specific formal process for the use of this data. Students are, however, asked about learning resources in Subject and Teaching Evaluation surveys.

7.7   While it is not current practice, the University plans to gather graduate destination and progression data from alumni and employers. The Student Support Service provides careers advice for students and a graduation survey gathers data on whether graduates are in full-time or part-time employment, or currently unemployed.

7.8   The University noted its plans to develop a general 'information management plan incorporating policies, procedures, training and technology that will provide a higher-level

direction' and to support alignment with this Standard and a means for tracking student information including use of alumni and graduate employment data.

7.9   The review team evaluated how well the above processes and policies worked in practice. It noted that the University presents an annual report to the Maldives Parliament which includes data on enrolments per course, faculty and school, enrolment trends, enrolments per campus and outreach centre, costs per student, completion rates per course, faculty and school, academic staff data, and financial data. This indicates that there are secure processes for the collection and presentation of some types of data.

7.10   The review team explored how data informs strategic planning. The University uses student population data at a generic level to inform the course portfolio and its management, for example, which programmes it is viable to run in various locations and how to staff them. The University additionally provided the review team with a copy of its Preliminary Regional Development Plan for Great Male' Area (2016) which, while dated, demonstrated the use of University enrolment and growth data in informing strategic planning, for example, the planned expansion of space and infrastructure. The analysis of data with respect to student characteristics is limited.

7.11   Student performance data shows variable completion rates which are high in some areas (95.5% in School of Nursing) and low in others (only 39.5% in Faculty of Education) but otherwise ranging between 60-85%. The University provided a reasonable explanation for the anomalously lower completion rates in the Faculty of Education, including external and contextual factors.

7.12   Faculty Academic Review Committees are remitted to consider student performance and progression and the review team verified that these committees finalise mark sheets and consider student cases including students at grade boundaries. However, minutes considered by the review team did not show broad monitoring of student progress for the identification of weaker students or those needing additional support. Faculty Management Committees are also responsible for the evaluation of student experience and student progression; however, minutes do not reflect that they analyse student data for progression. Notwithstanding this, the review team heard examples where course teams had monitored student attendance and exam results and taken action to provide additional support to students as a result. Academic staff also described how they used assessment results to inform immediate and future changes to courses by identifying students that needed more support, revision classes or further help and had tailored their teaching methods accordingly.

7.13   PQCU presents the results of the Subject and Teaching Evaluation surveys to Academic Senate and the informal Heads of Division meeting and recommends actions in response. The review team found evidence that the PQCU works with departments to develop action plans in response to student feedback data. Faculty action plans are discussed with the Quality Assurance Controller and the DVC Academic Affairs to identify support required. The University intends that in future, Subject and Teaching Evaluation survey results will also be provided to the new Quality Assurance Committee and the Faculty Quality Management Committees with the latter monitoring the faculty action plans developed in response to the surveys. It is also planned that through the development and implementation of the QAAF, data will have a key role in continuous improvement, and the Quality Assurance Committee will use data to inform strategic areas and identify where action is required. This finding supports the condition at paragraph 9.15.

7.14   Most academic staff that met with the review team confirmed that they receive and find useful the Subject and Teaching Evaluation survey results related to their teaching, and which are also provided to the relevant Dean. In particular, academic staff noted the survey results were helpful for first-time lecturers, and that they all encourage students to complete

the surveys. The review team heard specific examples of where courses had been changed in response to feedback. Academic support staff were also able to provide examples of where the survey improves their services but noted that their relationship with students was more informal, with students reporting direct to their offices to raise issues and make suggestions, or discussing them at student representative meetings.

7.15 Students who met the review team were familiar with the survey and had ideas about how response rates might be improved, for instance, if all students completed the survey during a class, or if the survey deadlines were moved so that they did not coincide with exams. The length of the survey deterred some students from completing it, and it was understood students had other demands on their time, including their employment alongside their studies. Students told the review team that they did not see the survey results or know in detail what happened to them, but thought they might be shared with government authorities. They could, however, describe examples of where courses had improved as a consequence of feedback they had given. The University told the review team that the Standard Operating Procedures for Evaluation of Teaching and Learning commit to providing survey data to students. Although the document itself does not verify this, it does however encourage staff to indicate in subject outlines where changes have been made to courses in response to student feedback so that it is evident to students that their feedback results in direct action and changes to courses.

7.16 MNU recognises that the response rates to the Subject and Teaching Evaluation surveys are lower than they would like and it plans to work with the Student Union to encourage more students to participate. It is aware that students find the survey too long and they are considering how to streamline it while also exploring how they might use its dissemination through the VLE and to make its completion mandatory, for instance, if students want to access their results.

7.17 The University is responsive to feedback on its learning resources. Subject and Teaching Evaluation survey data shows that students are broadly satisfied with resources across all faculties but the satisfaction levels are lower in this area. Term 2 Subject and Teaching Evaluation survey results in 2021 also showed low scores for students' satisfaction with resources and that this was the subject of a recommendation in the internal survey evaluation report.

7.18 In 2020 the Centre for Educational Technology and Excellence (CETE) conducted a review of usage of the VLE. The review looked at site content and not site usage or learner analytics. Staff described how subject coordinators and administrators monitor VLE sites, who is using them and when. This informs adjustments to the sites and how content is managed.

7.19 The library gathers data for management purposes on the number of students using their libraries and their different facilities but they cannot match that data to students' courses or their registered campus location. Staff who met the review team explained that library services had run student surveys in the past and used suggestion boxes but recognised that they could do more. The review team heard that in recent years, students were being encouraged to use the VLE and this led to concern that they were relying on materials uploaded to the VLEs and using libraries less. Other staff explained that the increase in student numbers meant that the library at a regional campus visited by the review team needed to be expanded and a new building is planned.

7.20 The Student Support Services provides career advice although the review team heard that students were more likely to approach their course coordinators for advice. The review team found very limited use of student and alumni career and progression data which the University might also use for management purposes. It found that while the Business School

had surveyed its alumni, and that nursing careers were tracked by the national nursing board, these activities at faculty level were not part of a wider University data collection process, although staff who met with the review team were aware that the University wanted to enhance its relationship with alumni. Students had the impression that there were strong career trajectories for some disciplines such as nursing and teaching, and noted that, in the Business School, students networked with alumni to identify career options. The review team **recommends** that the University collect and make accessible data on employability patterns of alumni for the benefit of students and their further choices.

7.21 The University collects, analyses and uses student recruitment data and student feedback data sufficiently for the effective management of programmes which enables it to meet this Standard. Use of student demographic data beyond data on students' regional distribution, is weaker, as is use of data on learning resources and careers data which leads to a recommendation in this area. The conclusion of the review team is that Standard 1.7 Information management is **met**.

Standard 1.8 Public information

Institutions should publish information about their activities, including programmes, which is clear, accurate, objective, up-to-date and readily accessible.

Findings

8.1   MNU publishes a wide range of information through a variety of channels to communicate its mission to contribute to the cultural, social and economic development of the society. Specific information disseminated includes the institution's vision and mission, activities undertaken, research conducted and the programmes offered. TV is being used as a distribution channel to promote the University and provide information to current and potential students. Social media statistics are tracked to better understand which platforms people are engaging with.

8.2   The marketing function is primarily the responsibility of the Marketing Department which falls under the responsibilities of the DVC Research and Enterprise who is ultimately responsible for the University publications, digital publications and managing the information systems at MNU. A Marketing Strategy has been developed to promote programmes and motivate applications, which have shown a decline in recent years. An Information Officer is assigned to ensure that the information requested by the public is provided in a timely manner and is accurate and adequate.

8.3   The Marketing Department source information from, and communicate with, the faculties and schools to promote courses, disseminate course announcements and advertise their activities. Some faculties and schools have their own social media accounts where they post content or re-post content specific to their school from the main MNU social media accounts. Faculties assign the marketing role to an internal faculty member from each faculty who is the focal point for marketing and liaises with the Marketing Department for central oversight. Some schools produce content and send it to the Marketing Department who verify and publish the information. Other sections, for example CETE, have individuals who are responsible for their own areas and they have no oversight of individual social media accounts and do not refer to the Marketing Department. Hence, the degree of quality control varies from faculty to faculty and section to section. There is no policy and/or standardised process in place regarding what is authorised to be published publicly. The review team **recommends** that MNU ensure quality control of public information between marketing, faculty, schools and individual staff.

8.4   Faculties/schools and support departments generally acknowledge there are marketing and design standards to follow. These standards are normally circulated and the Marketing Department meets regularly to discuss these matters and communicate with faculty. A Visual Identity Manual (Style Guide) is in place although it is dated 2002 - it was issued by Maldives College of Higher Education - and should be reviewed.

8.5   The MNU website is up-to-date and is the main source of information about MNU. Students reported they found information on the programmes offered, the selection criteria, application procedures and registration process on the website. The review team found examples of overview of programmes, course information admission criteria, programme structure, course fees, qualifications they would be awarded and possible careers for each programme.

8.6   However, intended learning outcomes of the programmes and the teaching, learning and assessment procedures used could not be found from the external website although

they are available for registered students. The review team **recommends** that MNU ensure all relevant programme information is consistently publicly available.

8.7 Other important information and documents such as the student handbook, the academic calendar, forms, policies and other documentation were up-to-date and able to be read or downloaded from the MNU website. The website also provides contact information for further enquiries. The website is straightforward to navigate. The Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) webpage is also a good initiative. The chat function on the website is also useful.

8.8 Apart from the MNU website, MNU uses a range of social media platforms to communicate to prospective and current students, as well as other stakeholders such as alumni and the public. The Marketing Department have been active in developing course flyers as well as maintaining a range of distribution channels to position MNU as the tertiary institution of choice in the Maldives. Facebook, Twitter (now X), Instagram and YouTube have been used extensively to hold virtual open days, announce enrolment dates, programme offerings and student exhibitions. The review team identified as **good practice** the YouTube channel showing an 'Introducing MNU Admission Portal' video which is useful and informative.

8.9 Student enrolments, pass rates and graduates are shown in the annual report for the past five years. The annual reports from 2011 to 2021 are available on the MNU website for the public to view.

8.10 Employers and other stakeholders also reported they can find out what they need, or at least who to contact if they had a query about MNU.

8.11 MNU publishes information about its activities, including programmes, which is clear, accurate, objective, up-to-date and readily accessible. Therefore, the review team concludes that Standard 1.8 Public information is **met**.

Standard 1.9 Ongoing monitoring and periodic review of programmes

Institutions should monitor and periodically review their programmes to ensure that they achieve the objectives set for them and respond to the needs of students and society. These reviews should lead to continuous improvement of the programme. Any action planned or taken as a result should be communicated to all those concerned.

Findings

9.1   The Committee on Courses, a subcommittee of Academic Senate, is responsible for approving new courses and amendments to existing courses. There is a clearly articulated process it uses for approvals, but there is no specification for how often courses should be reviewed or information that should be considered as part of a course review.

9.2   Responsibilities for reviewing education are allocated within the University. Faculty Curriculum Committees are responsible for making recommendations for curricula changes, for reviewing and updating syllabi, for reviewing course offerings, and for implementing periodic reviews of existing courses. Faculty Advisory Committees (FACs) comprise stakeholder representatives of each faculty and are remitted to advise on course reviews and the quality assurance of courses. Faculty Management Committees are responsible for monitoring 'student learning experiences and progress and can make recommendations to address issues identified'. Further, in the process of 'departmentalisation' and the standardisation of academic departments in recent years, the University clearly articulated that Heads of Department were responsible for getting feedback on, and evaluating, subjects.

9.3   While the Committee on Courses and Faculty Curriculum Committees (FCCs) provide the means for evaluating courses and processing changes, MNU acknowledges that the practice and frequency of reviewing courses is not specified or consistent, and that some courses have not been reviewed for some time. Notwithstanding this, there are some local examples within faculties of review processes, although these appear to be course/module reviews, not full programme reviews.

9.4   MNU monitors and evaluates the quality of courses predominantly through the Subject and Teaching Evaluation surveys which it runs once a term and results in each faculty developing an action plan.

9.5   The review team evaluated how well the above processes and policies worked in practice.

9.6   Action plans resulting from Subject and Teaching Evaluation surveys are prepared for Academic Senate and Heads of Division meetings. Evidence shows that some Management Committees actively evaluate mid-term survey results and identify actions to be taken forward. In addition, reports of the results of Subject and Teaching Evaluation surveys are comprehensive and, where weaknesses are identified, faculties are required to develop action plans with the Policy and Quality Control Unit (PQCU). (This is further explored at paragraph 7.13).

9.7   The Committee on Courses has an information pack that sets out its duties and processes but it does not specify how often courses should be reviewed or information that should be considered as part of that review.

9.8   Faculty Curriculum Committees provide evidence of the review of courses including updates to learning outcomes, the management of late assignments and reading lists, but they do not provide evidence of a schedule for reviewing all courses. Faculty Curriculum Committees are expected to meet at least once per term. In one faculty, the committee's work is supplemented by a designated process for how course changes should be presented but there are no specific requirements for what aspects of a course should be reviewed. In some instances, FCCs consider feedback from the Committee on Courses and agree how to adjust programme proposals accordingly which demonstrates alignment with the course change process. There is evidence too that FACs are consulted on course changes.

9.9   Faculty Management Committees are remitted to monitor the student progress and student learning experience, which suggests some analysis of student success, attainment and progression. However, this is not evident from the sample of minutes provided to the review team. A set of minutes of a (generic) Management Committee (it was not faculty specific) shows that reviews of one curriculum per department is expected.

9.10   Documents presented as evidence of a regular review process in one department are in fact a record of a course change proposal, and do not demonstrate evidence of a regular review process. The University informed the review team that 'some faculties review courses on a regular basis' and while evidence of minutes approving course revisions suggests this to be true it is unclear whether these are evidence of selected reviews or whether all programmes are reviewed on an ongoing or cyclical basis. Further, the University acknowledges that 'there are no mandated course review schedules for all courses'.

9.11   The review team explored the circumstances that would initiate a course review and it heard there are reviews of new courses after their first cycle, but that otherwise course reviews were initiated by a Head of Department or course coordinators identifying any need for change depending on how well a course was working. The process subject lecturers use to identify or review how well a course works is not clear. Academic staff told the review team that the processes would vary by faculty or by the external accreditation process for some disciplines, and some staff felt that changes were continuous.

9.12   Staff and some students who met with the review team were able to describe elements of the process for changing courses which included Academic Senate, the Committee on Courses, and approval by the MQA, but were unable to confirm that changes were part of an ongoing monitoring process. Students were also able to give examples of where programmes had improved, presumably in response to feedback or a review. Industry representatives actively advise on course changes through the FACs, the MQA reaccredits programmes with changes of more than 20%, and local communities also inform the types of courses that should be run in regional locations. Professional support staff were able to describe processes whereby academic staff are able to update the lists of resources that they need for their course in light of course changes, and students evidently understood that the Subject and Teaching Evaluation surveys sometimes resulted in course changes. The review team therefore had ample evidence that course changes were happening, but it found that they were occasional and not yet part of a systematic process.

9.13   The University noted that it had recently established a QAC and would implement Faculty Quality Management Committees (FQMCs). The QAC will make use of assessment data in order to identify action required and FQMCs will, according to their draft terms of reference, 'monitor annual reviews of undergraduate and postgraduate courses and manage the outcomes of the reviews'.

9.14   These new decision-making forums are intrinsically linked to the QAAF that remained under development at the time of the review visit. MNU recognises that it needs to strengthen its course review processes and in a draft QAAF it is suggested that the PQCU

will further develop quality assurance processes and performance standards and coordinate internal self-evaluation. The University hopes that the framework and its internal quality standards would identify how it measures quality and impact, and clarify accountabilities in the University with more systemic processes. Academic staff noted that the framework would make the strategic plan easier to achieve and would synchronise quality assurance work across the faculties.

9.15 The review team found that while there was good evidence that the University sometimes reviewed its programmes and the process for approving changes was clearly articulated and appropriate, there was no mandatory requirement for courses to be reviewed, a frequency set for these reviews, a process by which reviews must take place, or information on how the outcomes of any programme reviews should be reported. Consequently, the University lacks a means of assurance that reviews are taking place and cannot track their impact. Taking account of the implementation of the Quality Assurance Committee and the development of the Quality Assurance and Accountability Framework, the review team determined that Standard 1.9 Ongoing monitoring and periodic review of programmes is **not met but it is capable of being met on the condition** that the University develops, approves and implements periodic reviews of programmes.

9.16 Following submission of further evidence by MNU in July 2023, the review team acknowledges the significant amount of work undertaken by the University in order to meet this standard more fully. In particular, it is clear that the University has developed a clear Course Review Manual which sets up systematic approaches for programme monitoring and evaluation at MNU. Two levels of course reviews are developed, including the Annual Course Review and the Periodic Course Review. The Annual Course Review will be conducted to review, reflect and evaluate delivery of the course and its subjects including the performance of students. The Annual Course Review will be guided by the Curriculum Development and Review Policy (CDRP). Faculty Curriculum Committee (FCC) and Committee on Courses (CoC) will review the reports to recommend any changes that may be needed based on the annual review. The output of this continuous monitoring process is captured in the minutes of programme committee meeting/s and an action plan. In response to the Maldives Qualifications Authority (MQA)'s Programme Accreditation requirements, the Periodic Course Review will be conducted for all courses on a five-year cycle. The Periodic Course Review will consider all aspects of the course under review, including all Annual Course Review reports and associated action plans. The Periodic Course Review reports will be approved by Committee on Courses (CoC) and finally sent to MQA to feed into MQA's reaccreditations of courses. Clear templates and checklists are provided for conducting annual course review and periodic course reviews. Staff roles and responsibilities are clearly articulated in the documents and relevant training for staff to understand the review procedures are provided.

9.17 MNU reported that five programmes have been included in the pilot phase to test the effectiveness of the programme review system. One example of a completed annual review report was provided as evidence to demonstrate that the Annual Course Review includes clear consideration in learning, teaching, staffing, resources, and curriculum.

9.18 More time will be needed before the effectiveness of implementation can be fully evaluated. However, given that there are clearer policies and templates in place to ensure the programme review procedures will be conducted in a structured manner, the review team has concluded the condition has been addressed and the standard is **met** at a threshold level. The review team **recommends** that there will be further work necessary to ensure the policies and templates for programme reviews are fully and effectively implemented.

Standard 1.10 Cyclical external quality assurance

Institutions should undergo external quality assurance in line with the ESG on a cyclical basis.

Findings

10.1 MNU is required to undergo a periodic external institutional review by the MQA every three years from 2022. One of the characteristics of the MQA's institutional audit is the principle of continuous improvement and, consistent with this, the process requires the University to prepare a self-evaluation report.

10.2 In addition to this University-level process, the University also participates in the external reviews of some of its regulated programmes, including nursing, physiotherapy, laboratory sciences, psychology, counselling and medicine.

10.3 The University last engaged in an external institutional review in 2017. It used a self-evaluation committee to develop its self-evaluation report and in doing so it recognised a need to strengthen its education provision outside the Male' region and improve the flexibility of its delivery to better meet the needs of marginalised communities. While the external review report was later annulled, the University accepted many of the recommendations as part of its drive for continuous improvement. For example, it has developed a policy for quality assurance, has further involved regional campuses in operational planning, has developed a workload policy and extended student participation in committees including to the new Quality Assurance Committee and the Faculty Quality Management Committees. The review team found other examples of where the University has responded positively to external reviews, including changing modules to align with revised requirements from the Maldives Nursing and Midwifery Council.

10.4 In recognition of the considerable regard which the University places on external audits and reviews, it has introduced standard operating procedures for preparing for such exercises which include the development of self-evaluation reports and internal workshops with a wider range of internal stakeholders including campus managers, representatives of the Student Union and heads of Divisions.

10.5 In preparation for this full IQR review stage, the University has taken and implemented the recommendations from the IQR scoping stage report, including the development of a quality assurance policy; and developing a mechanism for identifying and disseminating good practice through 'Anthara', good practice seminars (see paragraph 5.5).

10.6 The review team found evidence that MNU enters into not just external audits that are mandatory, but into others volitionally, including this International Quality Review. It also heard of other examples, including accreditation exercises with the American Bar Council and running courses accredited by the Association of Accounting Technicians. However, a small number of staff at a regional campus who met the review team were not confident that external reviews comprehensively considered the regional campuses and they had not participated directly in such exercises.

10.7 Notwithstanding this, the review team found ample direct evidence of positive engagement in external review and audit processes and a positive attitude towards these exercises which it considers opportunities to self-reflect and learn. The review team identifies this positive engagement in external review and audit processes and the positive attitude towards these exercises which MNU uses as opportunities to self-reflect and learn as a feature of **good practice**.

10.8 The University is required to participate in several types of external review processes and evidence shows it does so proactively and positively. It also volunteers to participate in some types of external review including this International Quality Review. The review team concludes therefore that Standard 1.10 Cyclical external quality assurance is **met**.

Glossary

Action plan
A plan developed by the institution after the QAA review report has been published, which is signed off by the head of the institution. It responds to the recommendations in the report and gives any plans to capitalise on the identified good practice.

Annual monitoring
Checking a process or activity every year to see whether it meets expectations for standards and quality. Annual reports normally include information about student achievements and may comment on the evaluation of courses and modules.

Collaborative arrangement
A formal arrangement between a degree-awarding body and another higher education provider. These may be degree-awarding bodies with which the institution collaborates to deliver higher education qualifications on behalf of the degree-awarding bodies. Alternatively, they may be other delivery organisations who deliver part or all of a proportion of the institution's higher education programmes.

Condition
Conditions set out action that is required. Conditions are only used with unsatisfactory judgements where the quality cannot be approved. Conditions may be used where quality or standards are at risk/continuing risk if action is not taken or if a required standard is not met and action is needed for it to be met.

Degree-awarding body
Institutions that have authority, for example from a national agency, to issue their own awards. Institutions applying to IQR may be degree-awarding bodies themselves, or may collaborate to deliver higher education qualifications on behalf of degree-awarding bodies.

Desk-based analysis
An analysis by the review team of evidence, submitted by the institution, that enables the review team to identify its initial findings and subsequently supports the review team as it develops its review findings.

Enhancement
See **quality enhancement**.

European Standards and Guidelines
For details, including the full text on each standard, see www.enqa.eu/index.php/home/esg.

Examples of practice
A list of policies and practices that a review team may use when considering the extent to which an institution meets the standards for review. The examples should be considered as a guide only, in acknowledgment that not all of them will be appropriate for all institutions.

Externality
The use of experts from outside a higher education provider, such as external examiners or external advisers, to assist in quality assurance procedures.

Facilitator
The member of staff identified by the institution to act as the principal point of contact for the QAA officer and who will be available during the review visit, to assist with any questions or requests for additional documentation.

Good practice
A feature of good practice is a process or way of working that, in the view of a QAA review team, makes a particularly positive contribution to the institution's higher education provision.

Lead student representative
An optional voluntary role that is designed to allow students at the institution applying for IQR to play a central part in the organisation of the review.

Oversight
Objective scrutiny, monitoring and quality assurance of educational provision.

Peer reviewers
Members of the review team who make the decisions in relation to the review of the institution. Peer reviewers have experience of managing quality and academic standards in higher education or have recent experience of being a student in higher education.

Periodic review
An internal review of one or more programmes of study, undertaken by institutions periodically (typically once every five years), using nationally agreed reference points, to confirm that the programmes are of an appropriate academic standard and quality. The process typically involves experts from other higher education providers. It covers areas such as the continuing relevance of the programme, the currency of the curriculum and reference materials, the employability of graduates and the overall performance of students. Periodic review is one of the main processes whereby institutions can continue to assure themselves about the academic quality and standards of their awards.

Programme of study
An approved course of study that provides a coherent learning experience and normally leads to a qualification. UK higher education programmes must be approved and validated by UK degree-awarding bodies.

Quality enhancement
The process by which higher education providers systematically improve the quality of provision and the ways in which students' learning is supported.

QAA officer
The person appointed by QAA to manage the review programme and to act as the liaison between the review team and the institution.

Quality assurance
The systematic monitoring and evaluation of learning and teaching, and the processes that support them, to make sure that the standards of academic awards meet the necessary standards, and that the quality of the student learning experience is being safeguarded and improved.

Recognition of prior learning
Assessing previous learning that has occurred in any of a range of contexts including school, college and university, and/or through life and work experiences.

Recommendation
Review teams make recommendations where they agree that an institution should consider developing or changing a process or a procedure in order to improve the institution's higher education provision.

Reference points
Statements and other publications that establish criteria against which performance can be measured.

Self-evaluation document
A self-evaluation report by an institution. The submission should include information about the institution as well as an assessment of the effectiveness of its quality systems.

Student submission
A document representing student views that describes what it is like to be a student at the institution, and how students' views are considered in the institution's decision-making and quality assurance processes.

Validation
The process by which an institution ensures that its academic programmes meet expected academic standards and that students will be provided with appropriate learning opportunities. It may also be applied to circumstances where a degree-awarding institution gives approval for its awards to be offered by a partner institution or organisation.

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