

**THIRD EDUCATION AND TRAINING  
PROJECT  
REPUBLIC OF THE MALDIVES**

**STUDY ON EDUCATIONAL  
QUALITY,  
RELEVANCE AND EQUITY**

**FINAL REPORT**

**JOHN COOK**

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## **ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS**

<b>DPE</b>	Department of Public Examinations
<b>CAE</b>	Certificate of Advanced English
<b>ESQIS</b>	Educational Services and Quality Improvement Section (of MOE)
<b>FE</b>	Faculty of Education (of MCHE)
<b>IT</b>	Information Technology
<b>ITE</b>	Institute of Teacher Education (now FE of MCHE)
<b>HSC</b>	Higher School Certificate (the Year 12 External Examination in NSW)
<b>JSCE</b>	Junior School Certificate Examination
<b>MCHE</b>	Maldives College of Higher Education
<b>MOE</b>	Ministry of Education
<b>MRL</b>	Macquarie Research Limited
<b>NASAL</b>	National Assessment of Student Achievement Levels
<b>NSW</b>	New South Wales
<b>PIU</b>	Project Implementation Unit
<b>SCS</b>	Supervision and Co-curricular Section (now ESQIS)
<b>TETP</b>	Third Education and Training Project (World Bank assisted)
<b>TOR</b>	Terms of Reference

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Third Education and Training Program, financed by the World Bank, of which this project is part, has been designed to help improve the quality of student learning in the Maldives. The purpose of the present consultancy was outlined in general terms within the Terms of Reference as:

**...suggesting ways in which the linkage and congruence of the curriculum, assessment processes and the teacher training might be improved thus promoting educational quality, relevance and equity for Maldives students.**

From this general statement of purpose, the promotion of "...quality, relevance and equity" is considered to be the primary focus of the project and it is the advancement of these three constructs that remains central to the conduct of the project. In this regard, it is considered that all proposals for changes to the present system must meet the "**quality/relevance/equity**" criteria.

In conducting this study a number of key personnel from the MOE, including EDC and ESQIS and from MCHE and its Faculty of Education were interviewed and visits made to a number of primary and secondary schools in both Male' and the islands with a view to developing, iteratively, an accurate description of aspects of the Maldivian educational system relevant to the present project. It is on the basis of the descriptive statement devised in this way that a number of strategies for improvement of educational provision were identified and recommendations made.

The major problems facing Maldivian education are ones relating to personnel issues and the key factor in improving the quality of education in the country is in raising the level of competence and confidence of both teachers and students in English (but not at the expense of their facility in Dhivehi). Improving the standard of English will have direct "flow-on" effects to performance in other subjects thus contributing to an overall improvement in educational standards in the country. To this end, a number of recommendations are presented for changes to the O-Level English Language syllabus and examinations with possible "flow-on" proposals to other O-Level subjects. A major professional development for teachers is proposed aimed at raising the level of competence and confidence of all teachers in English to allow them to teach effectively in schools where English is the medium of instruction.

A new language program is outlined for primary schools with new courses in Dhivehi and English, designed to provide Maldivian students with the necessary language skills by the end of their primary schooling so that they are functionally bilingual. The rationale for such a program relates to the belief that English and Dhivehi are equally important for all Maldivian children to function effectively as contributing adults in a contemporary Maldivian society. In this regard, facility in English is seen as important for children to reach their potential as they climb the "educational ladder" and, particularly, if they undertake higher education studies at MCHE or overseas. Furthermore, in a country where tourism is the major industry, competency in English has obvious advantages for the local population employed in the industry. Equally important is Dhivehi, for it is this language that underpins the culture and the social mores of Maldivian society which, in turn, establishes a unique identity for the people of the Maldives. This language program is markedly different from the present courses and it is likely that there will be a shortfall, initially, in the numbers of suitably qualified teachers with the necessary language skills in

both Dhivehi and English. It is for this reason a phased implementation of this language program is recommended.

The feasibility of introducing a “standards-based” curriculum framework for use within Maldivian schools was canvassed and a proposal presented to judge the appropriateness of this curriculum model in the Maldivian context. This proposal recognizes that the current syllabuses are essentially “standards-based” curriculum documents although none of them have the outcomes stated in an explicit form nor do they have work samples that would clarify the acceptable standards for the respective courses. What is proposed in considering a move to a “standards-based” type of syllabus document and its application in Maldivian schools is an assessment of the curriculum framework using the experiences gained from work on modifications to the O-Level syllabuses and the proposed new language courses for primary school students.

The retention of the present mechanisms used in the end-of-Grade 7 assessment processes for Male’ schools and the island schools that determine progression to secondary schooling in Grade 8 is proposed, but with the addition of a systematic monitoring process designed to ensure the pass marks assigned by individual schools represent similar levels of achievement. This monitoring system would involve scrutiny of a sample of scripts from each school with a particular focus on scripts around the pass mark but could also involve scripts awarded marks indicating particular merit. It is suggested that the very existence of such a monitoring process when supported by the presently supplied marking schemes will ensure that schools will be seeking to adopt comparable standards for their pass marks.

Brief consideration is then given to a number of specific issues relating to ‘relevance’ and ‘equity’ that have not been considered previously but warrant mention and recommendations made. The ‘relevance’ issues relate to the suggested need for the O-Level examination papers to have a “regional flavour” and for the questions to incorporate situations that are within the life experiences of Maldivian students. The ‘equity’ considerations are of importance since, without exception, the key personnel interviewed during this consultancy referred to the disparity in the resources presently available to schools in Male’ and the Atoll schools. If educational provision in the Maldives is to take account of equity considerations, it will be necessary, first, to specify what is meant by ‘equity’. Two such specifications are given, one which will result in impossible targets being set, the other which may allow for achievable targets to be set and met.

Finally, for reasons of convenience, the various recommendations made throughout the Report are presented as a consolidated listing as one of the appendices to the Report.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

This consultancy and the report that has emanated from it would not have been possible without the active co-operation and support of the key personnel from the Ministry of Education, including EDC and ESQIS, from MCHC and its Faculty of Education and from Principals and staff of the schools visited. Without exception, these people provided open and full accounts of their experiences and views of education in the Maldives. There was no attempt to hide the problems being encountered, only a firm commitment to ensuring that all students have access to the best quality education available and that inequities in the educational provision be addressed and overcome.

No more was the passion for education and commitment to students more evident than in the small Community School on Bodufolhudhoo Island. Here, working with a minimum of resources and with over half of their small staff designated as 'Untrained', I had the privilege of observing high quality 'student-centred' learning with totally committed teachers working both the morning and afternoon sessions and then returning in the evening to assist their senior students with their English and Mathematics studies.

I was particularly grateful for the continuing feedback provided by ESQIS staff members, Mrs Aishath Akhmeema and Ms Fathimath Azza, despite their heavy work program in ESQIS. This feedback provided a much needed "local" perspective to a number of the proposals contained in this report and, in particular, that of a new language program for primary school students. Their contributions were significant although responsibility for what has been proposed remains with the writer.

In a similar manner, my former colleagues from the New South Wales Board of Studies, Mrs Robin Prowse, Mr G G (Sam) Weller, Dr Margaret Silink and Mrs Marcia Shepherd, provided via e-mail important input to various aspects of the project. Each of their contributions is gratefully acknowledged.

My special thanks are due, also, to Ms Liz Stone of Macquarie Research Limited for the administrative and logistical arrangements for this consultancy and, particularly, for her persistence over a number of months to get the consultancy "off the ground".

Lastly, I would want to make special mention to Mr Ismail Fayaz, Assistant Director, Policy, Planning and Research, for his advice, support and guidance throughout the whole period of this consultancy. Fayaz's quiet, yet determined and focused manner in his role as the MOE's Liaison Officer to the consultancy, ensured that the work remained "on track" and that the project timelines would be met. It has been a privilege to be associated with this highly professional officer.

# STUDY ON EDUCATIONAL QUALITY, RELEVANCE AND EQUITY

## I. INTRODUCTION

### Background

The Maldives, that takes its name from the Sanskrit word *Maladiv*, meaning a garland of islands, is an archipelago of some 1,200 islands formed in 26 natural atolls and grouped in double rows "...like a necklace of islands" set from north to south across the equator. There are 200 inhabited islands throughout these atolls together with another 80 islands with tourist resorts. The islands are grouped into 20 administrative regions called Atolls. The country's economy is based mainly on tourism and, to a lesser extent, fishing. Tourism accounts for 20% of its GDP and more than 60% of its foreign exchange receipts. Over 90% of government tax revenue comes from import duties and tourist related taxes. Importantly, 60% of the country's labour force is involved in "service" type occupations.

From the 17<sup>th</sup> Century the Maldives came under the protection first of the Dutch and then the British and in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century became a British protectorate. Over this period neither the Dutch nor British established a colonial administration in the country. The Maldives became a republic in 1968, three years after its independence.

In 1978, when President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom first took office, the country had no formal education system, although there were two secondary schools and an education infra-structure in place in the capital, Male'. President Gayoom made education one of his foremost priorities, recognising that free schooling together with parental and community pressure would lead increasingly to all children becoming students and, thus, the country would benefit. He gave instructions for the government to begin a process of establishing at least one primary school on every atoll and personally opened the first such school on South Miladhunmadulu Atoll in March 1979, just four months after his taking office.

### Educational Provision

At President Gayoom's instigation, education in the Maldives has been transformed from a small system of schools in the capital, Male' and a largely informal collection of educational facilities and structures in the islands to a national system of education. A curriculum relevant to the nation has been introduced and the goal of providing seven years of primary education for all Maldivian children was achieved in 2000.

In addition, 90 secondary schools<sup>1</sup> have been established on the atolls, thereby mitigating the necessity for children to move to Male' for their secondary schooling. The number of Grade10 students sitting for the overseas' O-Level examinations, now conducted by the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate, has risen from 102 in 1978 to 8,700 in 2003 (and with an estimated candidature of 11,000 by 2005). Total student

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<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Education, *Educational Statistics, Republic of Maldives 2003*, ISBN 99915-61-28-5, p.42.

enrolment in 2003 was 104,408, which represents a decrease of 1,812 students from 2002.<sup>2</sup>

Close to half of the population are below the age of 15 years with the median age of the total population being 17.3 years (2003 estimates). The implications of these statistics for education are most significant and will influence educational planning as programs of improvement are devised.

Notwithstanding the advances made in improving the access to both primary and lower secondary schools, particularly the atoll schools, the provision of education in the Maldives is complicated by the dispersion of the population across Male' and 20 widely separated Atolls. The remote nature of many islands within the various Atolls, has resulted in reliance being placed on Community Schools and Private Schools to provide basic education. In 2003, 79.5% of Grade 1 – 7 enrolments were from Atoll schools and, of these, 45.9% were enrolled in Community or Private Schools. In contrast, Male' with its very high participation in primary education, has 82.9% of students in Grades 1 – 7 enrolled in Government Schools.

Until recently, basic education was offered in Primary Schools (Grades 1-5) and Middle School (Grades 6-7). A recent policy change to increase the level of compulsory schooling from Grade 5 to Grade 7 has involved Middle Schools being phased out as the Primary Schools offer 7 years of basic education.

## **Educational Standards**

At the secondary level, Maldivian students have sat for external examinations at the completion of Grade 10 and Grade 12. These are the overseas' O-Level GCE/IGCSE Examination and the A-Level GCE Examination developed in the UK by the University of Cambridge Local Examination Syndicate and the Edexcel, London , respectively. Participation in these overseas' examinations as a means of maintaining standards and ensuring students completing their secondary school studies in the Maldives have access to further and higher education programs both in the Maldives through MCHE and abroad.

At the end of the primary level (Grade 7), there is a set of terminal tests in English, Mathematics, Social Studies and General Science designed to provide a mechanism for progression to Secondary School (Grade 8). There are three modes of administration of this testing program:

1. Schools in Male' set and mark their own tests;
2. Atoll schools sit for a common test in these four subjects prepared centrally by the AA Section of the MOE. The schools mark the students' papers internally to a marking scheme prepared by the MOE; and
3. Students from the various islands seeking a place in a Male' school for their secondary education undertake a special Grade 8

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<sup>2</sup> The 2003 Educational Statistics document reveals some interesting trends (see p.5) where, for a number of years, the enrolments in Male' schools have remained steady. In the atoll schools, however, there has been a significant increase in the numbers undertaking both lower and higher secondary schooling over a number of years. Between 2002 and 2003, these increases were not as large as to offset a relatively large decrease in the pre-primary and primary school numbers (1364 and 2461 respectively) for atoll schools.

Entrance Examination in English and Mathematics conducted by the DPE.

The marking in each of these modes of examination is in terms of a pass/fail dichotomy with a mark of 40% set as the “pass mark”. Although there is provision for an audit of individual schools’ papers/scripts if it appears that the results are markedly inflated or depressed, it was noted that such an audit marking occurs infrequently. Importantly, there is no systematic monitoring of schools’ application of standards as set out in the marking schemes provided by the MOE.<sup>3</sup> This model of assessment does not have associated with it a formal certification process and, as a consequence, students leaving school after completing Grade7 at the end of their primary schooling have no formal qualification or recognition of their achievements that they might use in seeking employment and may well carry with them a stigma of failure.

## The Present Project

This project is part of the Third Education and Training Program that was designed to help improve the quality of student learning in the Maldives. The Terms of Reference (TOR)<sup>4</sup> for this project – *The Maldives Study on Education Quality, Relevance and Equity (Reference 103006)* – specify the focus the study in both general terms and in relation to a range of specific tasks that it is envisaged the Consultant will be required to undertake. The general terms of the project relate to:

**...suggesting ways in which the linkage and congruence of the curriculum, assessment processes and the teacher training might be improved thus promoting educational quality, relevance and equity for Maldives students.**

From this general statement of purpose for the project the promotion of “...quality, relevance and equity” is the primary focus of the project and it is the advancement of these three constructs that must remain central to the conduct of the project. In this regard, it is worthwhile that consideration of the specific tasks should keep this “**quality/relevance/equity**” requirement as an essential feature and that all proposals for changes to the present system must meet one or more of these criteria.

The more specific tasks relate to determining:

- The extent that the present assessment process at the end of primary schooling (Grade 7) is sound in a measurement sense and the extent to which these processes affect the nature and quality of teaching and learning in both Grade 7 and the earlier grades and the extent of its coverage of the national curriculum;
- The feasibility of adopting a *standards framework* in terms of both content and performance in the context of the present grade levels in Maldives schools;
- The implications of such a *standards framework* for the Educational Development Center with its responsibility for curriculum and textbook development for Maldives schools;

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<sup>3</sup> This feature of the present system is discussed further in a later part of this report (see p.26-27)

<sup>4</sup> These Terms of Reference presented in full as APPENDIX-A to this report.

- The implications for the *standards framework* model for pre-service and in-service teacher education programs in the Maldives context;
- The feasibility and value of developing a standards based test to enhance the present Grade 7 assessment system and to provide a credential for those who leave school at the end of Grade 7; and
- The plausible causes for the relatively low student achievement in the overseas' O-Level (GCE/IGCSE) examinations and suggest ways on how this situation might be addressed.

It can be seen from this listing of specific tasks that whilst there is a focus on primary schooling and, in particular, Grade 7, the scope of project involves Year 10 assessment processes including the external examination undertaken at this level of schooling. Given this situation, consideration needs to be given to the curriculum and teacher training implications in the secondary levels of schooling. Such an approach is considered to have considerable merit as it provides the basis for an integrated set of linkages between the curriculum and the assessment processes (and with teacher training programs) for all levels (grades) of schooling in the Maldives.

## Methodology

In considering the methodology for this project, it was considered essential that the nominated Consultant prepare a comprehensive and detailed description of the wide-ranging aspects of the Maldivian education system relevant to the present project for scrutiny, comment and endorsement by local personnel. Such a description was developed, by necessity, as an iterative process and, now, when finalised is considered to be not only accurate but, hopefully, there is a measure of local "ownership" of the statement. This description statement has served as the basis for focusing on the issues that have emerged in considering the specific project tasks.

The task of preparing this description statement required perusal of documentation held by the MOE and the conduct of a number of interviews with key personnel from the MOE, including ESQIS and EDC, and from the MCHE responsible for the curriculum and assessment policy and the practices at the various levels of schooling. Importantly, the process involved, also, interviews with school personnel and observation of classroom practices<sup>5</sup> thus, ensuring that the primary stakeholders had the opportunity to have their views considered and provided an opportunity to confirm the earlier views presented.

All interviews were documented and from these interviews and observations made during the various school visits, a series of "Working Papers" were prepared on key issues relating to the present project. These papers were then circulated to interested personnel within various units of the MOE for review and comment. The feedback obtained in this way provided a major source of input for this report and its recommendations.

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<sup>5</sup> These observations were in both primary and secondary schools in Male' and in two of the Atolls.

## **II. A DESCRIPTION OF ASPECTS OF THE MALDIVIAN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM**

In this section of the Draft Report aspects of the Maldivian educational system relevant to the present study of education quality, relevance and equity are presented based on feedback from key personnel within the MOE, including staff of ESQIS and EDC and from MCHE. The information obtained from these sources was supplemented by observations made in a number of school visits to primary and secondary schools in both Male' and the Atolls.<sup>6</sup>

### **Some Relevant Demographic Features**

Some current demographic and other features of the Maldives were provided during the interviews that were considered relevant to the provision of education in the country and are presented here:

- In 2003, the population of the Maldives was about 300,000 of which 27% live in the capital, Male';
- Of the total population, 44.9% are under the age of 15 years and the median age for the population is 17.3 years;
- There are nearly 200 islands inhabited within the 20 Atolls that comprise the country;
- Only three of the Atolls have a population that exceeds 5,000 and only 17 islands have a population more than 2,000;
- There are few "quality" jobs available on the islands but the few that are available include jobs in the education sector;
- These quality jobs in secondary schools are filled by expatriates;
- For full youth employment, appropriate educational reforms are essential;
- In the islands, the path to full employment lies in agriculture, fishing and handicrafts for which the present school curriculum is irrelevant;
- Because it is less expensive, most secondary schools offer the commerce stream of subjects without regard to future employment opportunities for the students. There is only limited access to the computer courses that are likely to have increasing relevance to contemporary societies, world-wide.

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<sup>6</sup> A full listing of these key personnel interviewed and the schools visited are presented in APPENDIX B to this report.

- The personnel and material resources available for schools in Male' and in the various islands differ markedly and this situation places considerable strain on any commitment to equity.

These features will set part of the context for suggestions and recommendations for improving the quality of Maldivian educational provision presented in a later part of this report.

## Manpower Issues

There was general consensus amongst those key personnel interviewed and this was confirmed in observations made in the schools visited that the major problems facing Maldivian education are directly related to manpower issues. The following account of the recruitment of prospective teachers in the late 1970s, related during one of the interviews with key personnel, provides a stark example of the type of manpower problems now being faced in Maldivian education:

In the late 1970s, the requirement for a rapid expansion of educational provision, particularly in the Atolls, resulted in some 1200 people of potential being brought to Male' where they undertook an intensive one-year course and then sent back to teach in the various island primary schools. At that time, the medium of instruction was Dhivehi and these new teachers had only completed Grade 5 or Grade 7.

In recent times there have been changes to Government policy with the medium of instruction now English<sup>7</sup> and there has been provision of secondary education in various Atolls. The staffing of these new secondary schools has been with a major complement of expatriate teachers who, initially, have been allocated some classes in the primary schools<sup>8</sup> to complete a full workload of teaching.

It is noted that the teachers originally trained in the 1970s are neither trained nor prepared for teaching in English but as permanent Government employees cannot have their services terminated. As a consequence, these teachers are being allocated to teaching Dhivehi and Islam only.

Such a situation illustrates clearly the complexity of the personnel problems that will be needed to be addressed as part of any attempt to introduce changes to educational provision in the Maldives aimed at improving its quality and having regard for relevance and equity considerations.

Other observations made regarding teachers were that there are a significant proportion of "untrained" teachers presently working in schools (33%)<sup>9</sup> and these are predominately

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<sup>7</sup> It should be noted that the change to English as the medium of instruction is still being phased in within some primary schools in the islands. The reasons for this are at least in part due to the lack of staff with the language skills in English.

<sup>8</sup> Initially, the new secondary schools cannot support a full teaching load for the expatriate teachers because in the initial years they do not have all Grades 8 – 10.

<sup>9</sup> MOE, Republic of Maldives, *Educational Statistics 2003 Maldives*: ISBN 99915-61-28-5, p44.

in the island schools. Furthermore, there is a substantial minority (36%)<sup>10</sup> who are expatriate teachers, mainly from Sri Lanka and India.

The use of expatriate teachers to address the shortfall in qualified teachers, particularly in secondary schools, is a relatively expensive option and there is substantial anecdotal evidence that it is not cost effective. It has been asserted that the English language skills of many of the expatriate teachers are not at a level that is needed for effective teaching in their subjects.<sup>11</sup> As a consequence, they tend to withdraw into a “comfort zone” characterised by an undue emphasis on rote learning<sup>12</sup> with little or no emphasis on the higher order skills fundamental to quality education. Furthermore, difficulties are being experienced by Maldivian students in understanding some expatriate teachers’ speech, particularly those from India, and this has resulted in their having discipline problems. This, in turn, has resulted in the teachers retreating to personal “comfort zones” with an emphasis on rote learning techniques, including regurgitation of what is in the textbook and away from a teaching style that encourages thinking and problem solving skills so important for a sound educational program.

It was noted in the island schools visited that there was a much larger proportion of unqualified teachers in the school than might be expected from perusal of the overall statistics. Furthermore, many of these teachers had difficulty in communicating in English and, as a consequence, using English as the medium of instruction represented a considerable challenge. Such a situation was a clear example of the extent and complexity of any in-service program that seeks to address the issues of raising the standard of English in Maldivian schools, particularly if consideration is to be given to the matter of equity when involving atoll schools including the small Community Schools in some of the islands.

## **Expanding the Base of Qualified Teachers**

The present initiatives by the Faculty of Education (FE) within the Maldives College of Higher Education (MCHE) to expand the provision for teacher training represent a positive move to address the shortfall of qualified teachers, particularly at the secondary level. This “local” solution to a national problem is considered to offer the best prospects for long-term success in meeting the personnel shortfall in Maldivian schools, particularly as it is providing some regional programs in a number of the Atolls.

It was noted that, in 2003, the FE had 505 places in teacher training and that the planned intake for 2004 is 1106. The *key to success* with these initiatives is to *increase the quantity* of qualified personnel available to teach in schools *without decreasing the quality* of the graduates of this expanded program. In this regard, it is noted that Foundation Courses have been introduced by the FE with a view to raising the standard of competence in English of secondary school graduates wishing to undertake a teacher training program. Whilst this initiative is seen by some as diverting scarce resources

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p44.

<sup>11</sup> To be fair, it should be noted that the problem with English language skills was observed, also, with some Maldivian primary school teachers. The general issue of the facility in English required to competently and confidently teach in Maldivian schools is discussed in a subsequent part of this report.

<sup>12</sup> A common form of this rote learning that was observed in the schools visited was a continual use of a Q&A technique of the teacher asking a series of questions and the class answering each question in unison.

away from the teacher training programs, it is considered that these Foundation Courses offer the most worthwhile approach to addressing the goal of all teachers in Maldivian schools being competent and confident in the English language thus providing a firm basis for raising the quality of education in the country.

The programs in which the FE are presently involved and the current plans for expansion of provision of teacher training recognise accurately the problems of language in the Maldives educational context and provide most useful insights into producing a long-term “local” solution for the country. The planning and implementation of the Faculty’s present programs display a commitment to quality, a passion for learning and a level of educational leadership<sup>13</sup> that underpin all successful initiatives and the Government could do no better than to use this resource to its fullest capacity. Importantly, any additional program that would be necessary to support Government initiatives to raise the quality of educational provision for Maldives students has, in the FE, an established infra-structure from which implementation could proceed.

It is considered that any initiative to upgrade teacher qualifications and thus, improve the quality of educational provision, must involve both pre-service and in-service training. The FE’s present programs address in large measure the pre-service components. The Faculty’s present in-service training programs, whilst considered appropriate in focus, are not adequate to meet the needs of all teachers presently employed in schools in the Maldives. Accordingly, the provision of adequate resources for such in-service training will require additional funding to ensure successful implementation of the program. If such provision were to be undertaken by the Faculty of Education (and this seems a reasonable option), the Faculty will require budget supplementation to ensure the program can proceed as planned.

The initiatives now in place for expanding the numbers of local qualified teachers, particularly in the islands, will have a number of effects, system-wide:

- It will reduce the reliance on expatriate teachers thus allowing for a more selective process where expatriates are still required to meet shortfalls;
- It will reinforce the provision of local teachers, particularly in the islands, who have been found more effective with local students; and
- Allow for an upgrading of English language skills, albeit as a gradual process.

## **Some Issues of Pedagogy**

Previously in this report reference has been made to an undue emphasis in Maldivian schools on “rote learning” techniques, a common form of which was a major part of the lesson being devoted to “Q & A” where the teacher asks a series of questions and the class answers in unison. Such a practice not only focuses on a rote learning technique but allows unmotivated students to escape involvement in the class’s learning. Observations made during school visits both in Male’ and in the Atolls showed clearly such a technique of Q&A was ineffective as a tool in learning and ensuring proper class control. As such, the practice should be actively discouraged.

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<sup>13</sup> Some indication of the quality and commitment of FE staff lies in the fact that they have bid successfully for external funding for outside projects and this supplements a significant part of the Faculty’s budget. At present, this external funding amounts to \$US 500,000.

Another manifestation of the “rote learning” focus in schools is the reliance on textbooks as the sole reference source for students and the regurgitation of its contents as prepared answers to assignments and formal examinations. In making this assertion, however, it should be stressed that it is not being suggested that schools abandon the use of textbooks. Rather, it is suggested that whilst textbooks have a place in the teaching/learning environment, they are but one component of a total and varied program of resources and activities and are best used to support rather than dominate the learning process

A common feature of Maldivian schools, of which this Q&A technique is but one example, is that the focus of teaching relates to the ‘class’ rather than the ‘individual student’. As a result, the needs of the best and weakest subset of students in the class are being largely ignored.

Although the issues relating to the teaching of and learning in English are discussed in detail in a subsequent part of this report, it is worth noting here that current teaching practice in the subject involves little or no work on the development of language skills per se. Rather, at the secondary level, there is a focus on preparation for the formal examination at the end of the grade or the course (as for the O-Level examination). In contrast to the normal practice in Maldivian primary schools, there is little correction of students’ work or teacher comment on efforts by their students to meet the requirements of the subject. As a consequence, the essential skills development processes are being ignored.

There is a prevalence of after-school coaching/tuition, particularly in Male’, that simply assists students in meeting their homework assignment requirements, as distinct from facilitating students’ better understanding of the subject. Such practices are regarded by some in the educational community as an institutionally endorsed form of cheating!

The issues raised, above, impact directly on the quality of the educational programs currently in place in Maldivian schools and must be addressed if improvement to the quality of education is envisaged for the country.

## **Examination Performance**

There are three major examination programs currently in place for Maldivian students that are used as a mechanism to identify or select students for placement in secondary schools or higher education programs. These examination systems are:

1. The tests conducted in English, Mathematics, Social Studies and General Science for Grade 7 students to determine their eligibility for entry into Secondary School. There are three modes for this testing program:
  - a. Students from schools in Male sit for the tests that are set and marked internally within their schools;
  - b. Students from the Atoll schools sit for a common set of tests prepared by the ‘AA’ Section of the MOE. The papers are then marked internally at the school<sup>14</sup> using a marking scheme devised by the MOE. Where an

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<sup>14</sup> Where there is more than one primary school in an Atoll, some “cross marking” is undertaken to ensure a common standard is applied in the marking. Where there is a markedly high overall school performance, the

island school is seeking approval to introduce a Grade 8 at the school in the following year, these tests are externally supervised and the students' scripts are sent to MOE for marking<sup>15</sup>; and

- c. Students from the islands who wish to pursue their secondary studies in Male' sit for Grade 8 examinations in English and Mathematics. These examinations are conducted by the Department of Public Examinations (DPE).

In each of these modes of testing, the marking scheme is structured to give a pass mark of 40% in each subject and there are three grades of overall pass to the testing program:

- i. Passes in the four subjects, viz., the marks in each > 40;
- ii. Passes in three subjects (each > 40), the failed subject mark > 30 and the average mark for all four subjects > 40;
- iii Passes in three subjects (each > 40), the failed subject mark > 25 and the average mark for all four subjects > 40.

In the case of some special schools, mainly disadvantaged and remote schools, an additional grade of pass is specified, namely:

Passes in two subjects, the two failed subject marks each > 20  
and the average mark over all four subjects > 30.

2. The overseas O-Level Examinations for Grade 10 students that are conducted by the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate. These examinations are conducted in November of each year. These examinations had a candidature of 8,700 in 2003 and this is expected to rise by 1,000 students this year and reach a total of 11,000 by 2005. Maldivian students typically present for examination in six "overseas" subjects from an available range of 14 subjects and two local subjects, Dhivehi and Islam. Furthermore, in some subjects, e.g., Fisheries Science, project work comprises a significant part of the final assessment (~35%) and is subject to local scrutiny<sup>16</sup> before submission to the Cambridge Examining Authority.
3. The overseas' A-Level Examinations conducted by Edexcel London in the May/June period of each year. The candidature is relatively small with only 466 Grade12 students in 2003. These students were from schools in Male' and from Seenu Atoll.<sup>17</sup>

In addition to these major test/examination programs, the DPE administers a number of single subject examinations at the senior secondary level taken in some schools, the Certificate of Advanced English (CAE).

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student scripts may be called for by the MOE for further scrutiny. Such calls for further scrutiny occur only infrequently.

<sup>15</sup> The number of schools opting for this approval is small. In 2003, there were 6 schools applying for approval to introduce Grade 8 of which 4 were successful.

<sup>16</sup> The purpose of this local scrutiny is to ensure each project is the student's own work and there has been no unauthorized collaboration in the preparation process.

<sup>17</sup> MOE, Republic of Maldives, *Educational Statistics 2003 Maldives*: ISBN 99915-61-28-5, p8.

The involvement of Maldivian students in the O-Level and A-Level examinations conducted by the overseas' examining authorities was considered essential if the Maldives education was to maintain its credibility and its students are to have access to higher education programs, particularly overseas. Such a requirement is regarded as "non-negotiable" although the question still remains of whether the present arrangements are "value for money". In this regard, it is worth perusing the following table of pass rates by subject for the 2002 O-Level examinations<sup>18</sup>:

**TABLE 1: 2002 CAMBRIDGE O-LEVEL EXAMINATIONS  
ENTRIES AND PASS RATES BY SUBJECT**

<b>Subject</b>	<b>Total Entries</b>	<b>Pass Rate (%)</b>
English Language	6847	6.0
Geography	222	12.2
Economics	3279	18.5
Biology	2151	19.2
History	170	20.0
Mathematics	6373	24.6
English Literature	60	25.0
Chemistry	2005	25.6
Physics	1978	25.9
Commerce	3004	32.1
Principles of Accounts	3797	34.3
Fisheries Science	3262	47.6
Computer Studies	324	60.8
Art	448	69.6

A number of observations can be made from these entry statistics and the corresponding pass rates. First, the pass rate in English Language of 6.0% is the lowest of all subjects. Possible reasons for this situation are discussed in some detail in the next section of this Report. Second, with the exception of Computer Studies and Art, the pass rates in all subjects are less than 50%. In Computer Studies, it is claimed that only the highest performing students are selected to undertake the course and, in Art, the candidature "self selects" based on their "artistic talent".

Importantly from a vocational viewpoint, are the numbers of students presenting for an academic or professional program of studies rather than undertaking more relevant vocational studies. During interviews with key personnel it was asserted that:

<sup>18</sup> This is the latest set of O-Level examination results available at this time.

*“...most children in the islands are poorly served by the national curriculum which is geared more towards professional and academic studies ...Presenting students to examinations in which they know most of them will fail anyway will adversely affect their sense of worth ... In islands where secondary schooling is available ... mostly the commerce stream is available ... the few jobs that are available in the islands generally require a science background ...MCHE resources could be better utilized ... if school education is more relevant and of better quality”<sup>19</sup>*

Dr Hameed goes on to suggest that as a matter of some urgency a “...review of the curriculum be made to address the schooling-related factors in youth unemployment ... Proper education can relieve the youth from the scourge of a life cynicism and despair”.<sup>20</sup>

## **A “Gap” in Achievement between Grade 7 and Grade 8?**

A phenomenon reported by secondary school personnel in Male’ was that the achievement of graduating Grade 7 students, as reported by their primary schools, was somewhat inflated when compared with the students’ performance at the commencement of their secondary school studies. This problem was significant enough for the secondary schools to consider using some testing to confirm that students have been assigned to appropriate programs within the secondary school.

Interestingly, this phenomenon did not occur in the Grade 1 – 12 Atoll school visited. It would appear, therefore, that this phenomenon is restricted to Male’ primary schools and relates to ensuring their students have favourable access to secondary education. Given this situation, it may be necessary to institute procedures to ensure the performances of students from different schools are on a common scale of achievement.

## **The Problem in English**

The 2002 pass rate for Maldives students in English Language in the University of Cambridge O-Level Examination was 6.0%. By any set of criteria, such a result is unsatisfactory. For whatever reasons these Grade 10 students have been let down and their parents, the schools they attend and the Maldives Government need an explanation for such a dismal result and some assurance that processes are being put in place to address the problem.

Some observations are now presented that are considered relevant to both these O-Level English Language results and, importantly, the teaching of the subject throughout students’ schooling leading up to this terminal external examination. These observations are based largely on comments provided by key personnel within the Maldives’ Ministry of Education, the Maldives College of Higher Education and from principals and teachers of the schools visited during the consultancy period. In most cases, the comments made were reinforced by similar comments in other interviews.

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<sup>19</sup> Hameed H, *Youth Unemployment: the Real Issues*: May 2003, p 11-12.

<sup>20</sup> *ibid*, p12-13.

In all interviews conducted, there was general agreement that the teaching of English, as evidenced by the results in O-Level Examination, was encountering major problems. There was considerable consensus, also, as to the contributing factors to this situation. In this regard, it was asserted that:

- The present teaching of the subject is characterised by an undue focus on “rote learning” techniques and reliance on a textbook<sup>21</sup> at the expense of developing students’ thinking skills;
- A reason given for this undue focus on “rote learning” is that it allowed teachers more easily to remain in control of their classes and, hence, remain in a personal “comfort zone”;
- This situation was considered to be most critical amongst the expatriate teachers, particularly those from India;
- The challenge facing the Maldives system appears to be raising the competence and confidence of teachers to leave their “comfort zones” and encourage students to use thinking skills and not just regurgitate the contents of their textbooks and, in examinations, use prepared answers, often only partly relevant.

Whilst there is no doubt that these are major contributing factors to the problem, it is all too simple to just “blame the teachers”. The problem is much more complex and has a subtleness about it that warrants deeper consideration and investigation. In this regard, it is considered essential that the syllabus, its supporting documents and the examination paper itself be scrutinised by curriculum and assessment specialists with an English subject background who are independent of the current O-Level Examination processes, to ascertain the extent to which they are consistent with modern curriculum and assessment practices. To this end, the English Language syllabus and examination papers have been forwarded to such specialists in Australia and their reports are presented as APPENDIX C to this report. Furthermore, it is suggested, also, that these documents be examined by English subject specialists within the country (MCHE, EDC and ESQIS) to make judgments on the relevance of the various questions and the stimulus materials in the examination paper to the experiences of Maldives students and the Maldives context in general. The University of Cambridge authority notes that their test questions are designed to be “culture fair” rather than “culture free”. One reasonable interpretation of “culture fair” questions is that they are *equally unfair* to all candidates. It would be much better to have questions that are “*culture relevant*”!

As part of the scrutiny process of the examination papers seeking to make judgments of their relevance to the Maldivian context, as proposed above, it is suggested, also, that recent years’ examination papers be subjected to a close scrutiny to determine their efficacy as measuring instruments and the extent to which their structure and format are consistent with contemporary measurement practice.

## Some Curriculum Issues

An initial perusal of the syllabus document for the University of Cambridge O-Level English Language indicates that it is an “*examination syllabus*”<sup>22</sup> providing little or no

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<sup>21</sup>In making this assertion, however, it should be stressed that it is not being suggested that schools abandon the use of textbooks. Rather, it is suggested that whilst textbooks have a place in the teaching/learning environment, they are but one component of a total program of resources and activities and are best used to support rather than dominate the learning process.

curriculum information that might assist teachers in teaching the course. As such, it appears to be a document from an earlier time and certainly is at variance with contemporary documents from systems in developed countries.<sup>23</sup> There are no explicit statements of expected student outcomes for the course, the required standards of performance are not explicitly stated and there are no student work samples to clarify the various levels of standard.

Perusal of the Cambridge syllabus documents in other subjects reveals a similar structure to that for English Language and the comments made with respect to the English Language syllabus document hold, also, for the other subjects undertaken by Maldivian students as part of their O-Level examinations.

In contrast to these secondary syllabus documents, the primary school syllabus documents (Grades 1 – 7) prepared by the EDC are very detailed and prescriptive. In addition to the specification of content, there are detailed statements of aims and objectives that could serve as the basis for the development of a modern “standards-based” curriculum characterised by outcome statements and various standards associated with each outcome together with student work samples aimed at clarifying the standards.

Whilst the detailed content provided in these syllabus documents give teachers precise guidance on what to include in their lessons and, as such, is appropriate for teachers with only basic qualifications and experience, such an approach can reinforce the “rote learning” techniques that need to be addressed in any attempt to raise the quality of the education in the country.

## Some Further Observations

Presented here are some other observations raised during the data gathering phase of the consultancy and considered to be relevant to this project particularly as it relates to the *equity* considerations.

Most of the personnel interviewed highlighted the differences between the provision of education in schools in Male’ and the Atoll schools.

“It is like education in two different countries”

was a comment heard more than once and this was reinforced time and again during the various visits to schools. The resources available in the Atoll schools were significantly less and inferior than that available in Male’. Furthermore, the qualifications of teachers in Male’ schools were, in general, higher than those of teachers in the islands as was their facility in English. Indeed, there is limited exposure to English in the islands and it has been suggested that primary school children in many island schools are proficient in neither Dhivehi nor English.

It has been suggested that the country-wide pass rate of 6.0% in the O-Level English Examination masks the full situation with significantly higher pass rates in some Male’ schools balancing zero pass rates in some island secondary schools.

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<sup>22</sup> The current syllabus document for O-Level English Language is titled – “*Syllabus for Examination in 2004*”.

<sup>23</sup> Examples of contemporary curriculum documents, which contrast sharply with the Cambridge syllabus documents, may be seen on the following website: [www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au](http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au)

The majority of “untrained” teachers have positions in primary schools throughout the country and 77.3% of these are in island schools.<sup>24</sup>

In both Male’ and the islands there is strong parental support for their children’s education and it was asserted that there is an increasing recognition amongst parents in the islands of the value in their children being competent in English. Such support could be a powerful positive agent in any program to improve educational standards in Maldivian schools provided direction could be given to parents on the best means of supporting their children’s educational endeavours. There are, however, two factors that need to be taken into account in developing any program to upgrade students’ English language skills:

- The Maldives does not have a tradition of reading in either English or Dhivehi; and
- English is not used as the primary means of communication in the home and in many homes is not used at all.

The importance of English in Maldivian students’ schooling should not be underestimated since facility in English becomes increasingly important as a student progresses through school with performance in all subjects being affected by the student’s competence in English.

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<sup>24</sup> MOE, Republic of Maldives, *Educational Statistics 2003 Maldives*: ISBN 99915-61-28-5, p46.

### **III. SUGGESTED STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF EDUCATIONAL PROVISION**

In this chapter of the Report some suggested strategies for improving the quality of educational provision in the Maldives are presented having regard to the “quality/relevance/equity” criteria specified in this project’s TOR. These suggestions and the associated recommendations are wide-ranging and the implementation of changes proposed will involve considerable personnel and materiel resources and, importantly, successful implementation will take time, particularly with *equity* being one of the considerations to be addressed.

It is considered that the key factor in improving the quality of education in the Maldives is raising the level of competence and confidence of both teachers and students in English (but not at the expense of their facility in Dhivehi). Improving the standard of English will have direct “flow-on” effects to performance in other subjects thus contributing to an overall improvement in educational standards in the country.

To this end, the following strategies are proposed specifically to address the issues of competence in English in the school setting.

#### **O-Level English Language Curriculum and Examination**

The present English Language syllabus and examinations undertaken by Maldivian students is from the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate and focuses mainly on the language skill of writing with even the ‘*Reading Comprehension*’ section having a significant writing component. Such an approach is considered to be somewhat unbalanced in terms of what students in the Maldives need from an English Language course. It is suggested, therefore, that consideration might be given for Maldivian students to present for examination in an alternative English course available through the Cambridge Examining Authority, namely, *English as a Second Language*. This course and its examination provides a more balanced coverage of the four language skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening and appears to be more appropriate to the Maldivian context. Importantly, being conducted through the Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate, the results from this alternative English course maintain the “currency value” as an international standard currently ascribed to the present results.

Advice to MOE staff from the Cambridge Authority is that a change to a presentation of ‘English as a Second Language’ for the Maldives would require a three-year lead-in time, presumably based on an intention to start the new course in Grade 8. Whilst such a strategy is ideal, it is considered that a “fast-tracking” strategy would be worthwhile given the critical nature of the present situation, as evidenced by the 6.0% pass rate in the subject for 2002 examination. Accordingly –

#### **RECOMMENDATION 1:**

**Urgent consideration be given to the introduction of ‘*English as a Second Language*’ as the English course studied for the overseas’ O-Level examinations taken by all Grade 10 students.**

**RECOMMENDATION 2:**

**An examination of the feasibility of “fast-tracking” the introduction of the *English as a Second Language* examination be undertaken, preferably with input from the Cambridge authority, with a view to the first examination in the new course being in 2005 or 2006 at the latest.**

No matter which English course is being undertaken, there is an urgent need to provide more curriculum advice to teachers on how to teach the course than is presently available from the Cambridge ‘Syllabus for Examination’ document. To this end, it is suggested that EDC, ideally in collaboration with the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate, develop support materials for the syllabus that are of a curriculum nature viz., that provide assistance to teachers in their teaching of the course. Such support materials would likely include statements of expected student outcomes for those undertaking the course, various standards of performance for each outcome and work samples to illustrate and clarify these performance standards. There are many exemplars of such materials, world-wide, that could facilitate such development locally.

Once a decision is made with respect to the previous recommendations, the following are proposed:

**RECOMMENDATION 3:**

**Support materials be developed by EDC for the English Language course in collaboration with the Cambridge Local Examinations syndicate, to assist teachers in teaching the course. Included as part of these materials will be statements of expected student outcomes, various standards of performance and work samples to illustrate and clarify these performance standards.**

**RECOMMENDATION 4:**

**Given the importance of English in the achievement in all subjects, consideration be given for the head of the English faculty in each school to be allocated additional duties with specific responsibility of coordinating exposure to the language in and outside the classroom and to act as a specialist resource for other teachers at the school.**

**RECOMMENDATION 5:**

**Subject to the successful development of these support materials for English, the development of these materials be extended to other O-Level subjects.**

The phased implementation of the preparation of these curriculum support materials, as recommended above, is considered to provide the best use of specialist personnel resources and is considered to be the approach most likely to yield long- term benefit to the system.

## **The Teachers**

Given the issues described in the previous chapter of this report, the means of addressing them appropriately and adequately is likely to involve the allocation of significant additional resources and will take time to implement fully. Furthermore, with the requirement for *equity* of educational opportunity in the systems and structures that will emerge throughout Male’ and island schools as efforts proceed to improve the *quality* of

educational provision, the process of implementation is likely to be a complex one. In such circumstances, it is highly desirable that the three criteria of:

### **Quality...Relevance...Equity**

serve as the guiding principles for all implementation strategies and that the feasibility of all such strategies be judged in terms of its contribution to each of these three criteria.

In seeking to address the issues of “teacher competence and confidence” that underpin the “rote learning” problems in schools and the undue reliance on the textbook in the learning process, both the secondary and primary school teacher training courses will need to focus on the more demanding requirements of preparing teachers who will be able to develop their students’ thinking and problem solving skills and not just regurgitate what is in the textbook or present, at examination, prepared and often irrelevant answers to the questions asked.

To achieve this upgrading of teacher skills it will be necessary to have at least four strategies in place:

1. Select more highly qualified and competent school graduates to undertake the available teacher training courses within the country. Alternatively, expand the “*Foundation Studies*” programs at MCHC to address the shortfall in competency in English of secondary school graduates;
2. In the short term<sup>25</sup>, select only those expatriate teachers whose English Language skills are of such a level that there is a high level of confidence that the teacher is able to teach with a “thinking/problem solving” focus;
3. Introduce extensive in-service training courses, particularly for teachers in the island schools, to assist teachers to upgrade their language skills and other qualifications to enable them to focus on a “thinking/problem solving” approach to student learning; and
4. Provide educational leadership training for principals and others in executive positions within schools to enable the schools’ policies and practices to be consistent with and empathetic to the emerging focus on thinking and problem solving skills in students’ learning.

It is considered that the courses for teacher training presently available through the Faculty of Education of MCHC provide a desired focus on student learning that is required to ensure a change to more sound educational practice, particularly as it relates to the teaching of English language. Furthermore, the present expansion of the Faculty’s teacher training programs and, in particular, its regional programs provide a basis for the comprehensive and coordinated program needed to effect the required changes to teacher training and, as a consequence, an up-grading of achievement levels in schools.

The rapid expansion of the provision of teacher training by the MCHC’s Faculty of Education coupled with a reported decline in overall student numbers<sup>26</sup> provides the

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<sup>25</sup> In the longer term, it is considered that the employment of expatriate teachers should be phased out and that Maldivian nationals should replace them. Such a “home-grown” option of addressing the issues of raising the quality of educational provision, with cognizance to relevance and equity issues, is the best approach of those available.

mechanism to phase out the contracted employment of expatriate teachers and make increased use of Maldivian nationals, particularly at the secondary level.

The third of these three strategies is the “sleeping giant”. The requirements for “up-grading” the skills of all teachers needing such training are as immense as they are complex and are wrought with many administrative and logistical problems, particularly in the Maldives with its many island schools. Whilst the MCHE’s Faculty of Education has programs in place that provide in-service training for teachers and these programs could serve as a model for wider implementation, the Faculty does not have the resources, at present, to mount such a program fully. Indeed, it is considered doubtful that, at present, an accurate estimate of the requirements is known.

Accordingly, the initial task to be undertaken is a *needs assessment* process to establish the parameters of this extensive in-service training program. Once this is known, the next step likely would be to devise a pilot program based on the FE model that samples, in a representative fashion, the range of island schools. In this way, the issues of equity might be addressed. It is the results, then, of this pilot program that will enable modifications to improve the delivery and outcomes of the program when it is implemented for all teachers.

Consistent with the proposals outlined above, the following recommendations are presented for consideration:

**RECOMMENDATION 6:**

**An active policy be adopted to select more highly qualified and competent school graduates to undertake the available teacher training programs at MCHE in Male’ and its Regional Centres.**

**RECOMMENDATION 7:**

**Rather than accept a lower standard of entry if there is a shortfall in numbers of students opting for entry to the various teacher training programs, continue with the *Foundation Studies* programs designed specifically to raise the standard of English of secondary school graduates.**

**RECOMMENDATION 8:**

**In the short term select only those expatriate teachers whose English Language skills are at such a level that there is confidence the teacher is able to teach in a student-centred environment.**

**RECOMMENDATION 9:**

**As a matter of urgency, conduct a *needs assessment* of the extent of the need for a professional development program for teachers, including all teachers from the islands, to upgrade their language skills and qualifications to enable them to focus on a “thinking/problem solving” approach to student learning.**

**RECOMMENDATION 10:**

**Implement progressively, as funding becomes available, the professional development program based on the findings of the needs assessment and having regard to the more urgent needs in island schools.**

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<sup>26</sup> It should be noted, however, that with success of these programs of reform, the retention rate should increase, particularly at the secondary level, which will slow the rate of any phasing-out program of expatriates.

**RECOMMENDATION 11:**

**As a parallel program with this teacher professional development, conduct a series of briefings for principals and school executives with the purpose of ensuring school policies actively support the initiatives on student learning that the teacher professional development program is advocating.**

## **New Language Courses for Primary Schools**

The low pass rates in the overseas' O-Level examinations in 2002 are of concern and, as noted for English Language, it is particularly disturbing. More importantly, it is indicative of a general problem with language teaching and learning in the Maldives.

This section of the Report builds on the views on language learning presented by an overseas' language specialist and confirmed and endorsed by a local language specialist. These views are presented as APPENDIX D to this Report.

What is presented here is an outline proposal for new language courses in Dhivehi and English, each of which is designed to provide Maldivian students with the necessary language skills by the end of their primary schooling so that they are functionally bilingual.

The rationale for such a course relates to the belief that English and Dhivehi are equally important for all Maldivian children to function effectively as contributing adults in a contemporary Maldivian society. In this regard, facility in English is seen as important for children to reach their potential as they climb the "educational ladder" and, particularly, if they undertake higher education studies at MCHE or overseas. Furthermore, in a country where tourism is the major industry, competency in English has obvious advantages for the local population employed in the industry. Equally important is Dhivehi, for it is this language that underpins the culture and the social mores of Maldivian society which, in turn, establishes a unique identity for the people of the Maldives. In summary, this proposal involves:

- A greater emphasis on and a more coordinated approach to language study within the total curriculum for all Grades justified by the view that language competence underpins successful achievement in all subjects;
- The commencement of the proposed language program will commence in Grade 1 in primary school. This is consistent with the substantial research evidence that the earlier the exposure to language study, the greater will be the receptivity of the student and the higher the level of proficiency achieved;
- The development of new syllabuses in each of English and Dhivehi which will differ from the present syllabuses in these subjects in that, in addition to the course content, they will comprise "... explicit statements of knowledge, skills and understandings expected to be learned by students by the end of each Grade level (outcomes);
- There being an indication of various standards of performance that are expected for the outcome and, progressively, work samples will be prepared that are designed to assist in clarifying the various standards specified;

- A focus in these syllabuses on quality exposure to all four language skills – speaking, listening, reading and writing - as they are used in various modes of communication;
- The inclusion in the curriculum materials for these new courses of a wide range of “rich” support materials in both English and Dhivehi in order to ensure all four language skills are properly (adequately and appropriately) addressed;
- An initiative to address the dearth of quality books, particularly children’s fiction, in Dhivehi<sup>27</sup>. Ideally, the numbers of such books written in Dhivehi should match the number of texts available in English;
- The likelihood of the need for a selection process for teachers<sup>28</sup> in the initial stages of the program. Given the general level of qualifications, expertise and experience of primary school teachers in the Maldives, as reported and observed during this consultancy, implementation of this language program requires teachers who are both competent and confident in the use of both languages.
- The planning of the programs within each school in *holistic* terms, relating English and Dhivehi to the other subjects and to out-of-classroom activities. Whilst it is not feasible for the proposed language program to be of an *immersion* type of program,<sup>29</sup> it is considered that, as far as possible, successful immersion techniques should be employed within the proposed program;
- The planning and conduct of in-service activities for principals and school executives to ensure there is a common and positive approach to this new program as it is implemented in Maldivian schools. This is necessitated by the significant differences between the proposed language program and present practices in Maldivian schools;
- The development of a program for parents aimed at advising them of the importance of the home and its support to the success of this bilingual language program and how parents might actively support their children’s learning in this area;

The implementation of this bilingual language program is likely to be complicated by a number of factors, including:

- The lack of teachers who are competent and confident in both English and Dhivehi to staff the project fully in all primary schools;
- The likelihood that there might not be sufficient staff with the required range of expertise to develop properly the new syllabus documents for all Grades 1–7 in the short timeframe required;

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<sup>27</sup> Such books need to be both interesting and relevant to the experiences of Maldivian children. These criteria are considered to be best met if they are written by local authors.

<sup>28</sup> This selection process is particularly relevant in the envisaged context of an initial pilot project for this program and the likelihood of there being Atoll schools amongst those schools selected to be part of the pilot program.

<sup>29</sup> For example, as has been put in place with the very successful *English/French immersion program* in Quebec, Canada.

- The considerable material resources, in addition to these critical personnel resources that will be needed for the implementation of this program that may well have to be diverted from other programs;
- The lack of a “tradition of reading” in the Maldives. As a consequence, a lack of support to students, particularly from the home, might be expected;
- The time that will be required for a comprehensive implementation of this program. There are no quick solutions or “easy fixes” to the problems of language learning in the Maldives!

Notwithstanding these limitations, it is considered that implementation can proceed provided that there is a commitment to expanding the numbers of appropriately qualified and experienced personnel and the implementation plan calls for a phased introduction.

Accordingly, implementation of this bilingual language program is proposed in terms of the following overlapping phases:

### **PHASE 1: MATERIALS DEVELOPMENT**

It is necessary, firstly, to develop the new form of curriculum documentation. This will involve statements of outcomes and descriptions of standards together with student work samples that will be used to clarify these standards. This is a major task, which, if undertaken properly, will be both labour intensive and time-consuming to complete. It is suggested, therefore, that the initial curriculum development tasks should involve:

1. Preparing an overview of the total Grades 1 – 7 curriculum for the two subjects comprising this bilingual language program; and
2. The detailed set curriculum materials necessary for teaching Grade 1 students.

Setting such a target will not only allow the syllabus writers achievable tasks but, also, provide an experience in writing outcome and standards statements in a limited domain. This will allow for the writers to become increasingly familiar, competent and confident with the task of writing outcomes/standards statements thus providing increased expertise for the later writing tasks of the preparation of the detailed documentation for Grades 2 – 7. The task of preparing these syllabus materials is clearly the responsibility of the Educational Development Centre (EDC) but might be supplemented by other language specialists and practitioners from ESQIS and/or schools. Rather than starting from scratch and seeking to “re-invent the wheel”, it is suggested that the developers would access curriculum materials from other systems where similar initiatives have been introduced.<sup>30</sup>

On successful completion of the Grade 1-7 Overview and detailed documentation for Grade 1, the curriculum writers will then work progressively through the detailed documentation required for Grades 2 – 7 whilst at the same time look to providing student

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<sup>30</sup> In this regard, consideration might be given to perusing the syllabus documentation on the following website: [www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au](http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au) as this authority has recently moved to a *standards-based* curriculum and includes as part of its syllabus documentation outcomes and standard statements together with work samples to clarify the specified standards. Importantly, this is presented within a framework of a school structure/organisation of ‘Grades’. There are, also, many other sites where similar information may be obtained.

work samples corresponding to the various standards at Grade 1<sup>31</sup>. It is envisaged that this later work of the *Development Phase* of the program will continue as action in the other phases of the program commences.

## **PHASE 2: STAFF SELECTION AND TRAINING**

As it is unlikely that, at the present time, there are enough primary school teachers with the requisite language skills in both Dhivehi and English, it will be necessary, initially, to make a selection of teachers to work in the sample of schools that will comprise the pilot administration of the program (see below).

At the same time, it will be necessary to introduce a training program aimed at raising the level of language competence of teachers who will be involved directly either in the short or longer term in teaching the program. This training program will need to have, therefore, a pre-service and an in-service component and involve the MCHE and EDC. To this end, it will be necessary at the earliest time to involve those responsible for the teacher training programs in MCHE and EDC in the planning and conduct of the envisaged training.

An integral part of this training will need to involve school principals and executive staff to ensure they are fully aware of the intentions of the program and are in a position to actively support the initiative. Furthermore, it is considered essential for parents to be supported by providing briefings on the importance of the home in their children's learning and how they might assist in this important area. Ideally, it would be desirable, also, for there to be some continuing service, possibly through the school, for parents to receive advice and feedback on issues affecting their children's learning.

## **PHASE 3: PILOT IMPLEMENTATION**

For a number of reasons it is necessary to begin this bilingual language program with implementation on a pilot basis. A sample of primary schools from both Male' and the Atolls will comprise those involved in the pilot program, the number of the pilot schools being determined largely by the number of teachers with the necessary language skills available to teach in schools. Initially, the program will begin in Grade 1 and progress to the subsequent grades in the pilot school as students progress to these higher grades. Importantly, as the pilot implementation proceeds, the number of the schools involved can increase provided that there are teachers with the requisite language skills in both Dhivehi and English to staff the program and the program will always start at the Grade 1 level. Part of this pilot implementation phase is a continuing process of reflection, review and necessary change to effect program improvement.

## **PHASE 4: IN-SERVICE TRAINING OF TEACHERS**

Observations in primary schools, particularly in island schools, reveal that many teachers lack the necessary language skills to confidently teach in the English medium. Basic to the improvement of education in the Maldives, therefore, is the need to address the English language skills of all primary school teachers.

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<sup>31</sup> It should be noted that work on the student work samples for the respective Grades 2 – 7 cannot commence until students are actually undertaking the courses at these levels.

Concurrently with the pilot implementation phase, above, it will be necessary, therefore, to initiate a program for all primary school teachers aimed at raising their level of competence and confidence in using their English language skills in a classroom setting. It is envisaged that whilst this in-service will involve the four language skills of speaking, listening, reading and writing, there will be somewhat more emphasis on the oral/aural skills.

This phase of the proposed program of teaching Dhivehi and English, whilst not directly part of the language program itself, is considered an essential to the long term success of the language initiative and the improvement of the quality of education in the Maldives. It is, in fact, part of the proposed professional development program recommended in the previous section (Recommendation 9 refers). Given the numbers of teachers likely to be involved in this in-service training and the dispersion of the teaching service throughout Male' and the Atolls, this phase of the program will involve considerable allocation of resources and the extent of such resources should not be underestimated.

## **PHASE 5: FULL IMPLEMENTATION**

Subject to a successful pilot implementation program and the availability of enough teachers with the requisite language skills in both Dhivehi and English, full implementation is proposed. It cannot be stressed too much that the move to this full implementation phase is determined by the availability of teachers with competence and confidence in both languages to staff the schools. If this condition is not met the probability of the success of this bilingual language program will be severely lessened.

In presenting this outline proposal for a bilingual language course for primary school students in the Maldives, it must be acknowledged that what is being proposed is ambitious, will require extensive personnel and materiel resources and will take time to be established in all Maldivian schools. As a consequence, successful implementation will need to be underpinned by the traits of vision, commitment and patience for all associated with the program.

The following recommendations relating to this proposed new language program are now presented for consideration:

### **RECOMMENDATION 12:**

**Approval in principle be given for the proposed language program in Dhivehi and English for Primary School students, as outlined above.**

### **RECOMMEDATION 13:**

**Consistent with the substantial research findings on bilingual language programs, this proposed program commence for students in Grade 1.**

### **RECOMMENDATION 14:**

**Having regard to the likely availability of teachers required to teach this new program and the lead time required to prepare the curriculum materials, approval be given for the phased implementation of the program, as outlined in this Report.**

**RECOMMENDATION 15:**

Consideration be given to the feasibility of one of the teachers involved in the pilot program in each school being given the duties of *Language Coordinator* with, initially, whole-of-grade but ultimately, whole-of-school responsibility for coordinating exposure to languages both in and outside the classroom and as a specialist resource to other teachers in the school.

**RECOMMENDATION 16:**

Early consideration be given to developing an “outreach” program for parents specifically designed to provide advice on the importance of the home in their children’s learning and how they might best support their children in this new language program

## **A “Standards-Based” Curriculum Framework?**

From the 1960s researchers, administrators and governments, world-wide, in seeking to make judgments about the quality of educational provision, have made a major shift from consideration of educational *inputs* to a focus on educational *outputs*. The fundamental question asked is less often “*How much are we spending?*” and more often “*What are our children learning and how well are they learning it?*” This new focus with its emphasis on accountability for teachers, schools and systems has a widespread appeal both professionally and politically.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the Terms of Reference (TOR) for the present consultancy include the following amongst the specific tasks to be determined:

*“... The feasibility of adopting standards relating to curriculum content or framework appropriate for grade levels (content standards) and to the achievements expected of students at the various grade levels (performance standards)...*

*... The implications of a standard-setting approach for the Educational Development Center, the national agency with responsibility for curriculum and textbook development...*

*The implications of a standard-setting approach for pre and in-service teacher education ... given existing constraints...*

*... The utility of a performance standard certification test for those who leave school at the end of grade 7”*

Given these requirements, it is considered that the essential elements of an effective “*standards-based*” curriculum need to be articulated and suggestions presented that might enable such a system to be used in the Maldives. To this end, some comments are presented on issues relating to:

- “*student outcomes*”, a concept that underpins the notion of any “*standards-based*” curriculum and its associated processes for student assessment and reporting; and

- The features/characteristics that are considered to be the basic components of any effective standards-based model.

In presenting these comments, it is considered necessary, first, to define the term “*outcome*” as it is used in this paper and to highlight some of the features of this construct as it might apply in the context of schools in the Maldives. In this paper, “outcomes” are defined as:

**“Explicit Statements of knowledge, skills and understandings  
expected to be learned by students”**

Consistent with this definition is the concept of there being different levels of outcomes. In this context, outcomes may be considered to refer to the:

Course or Program

Unit of Work

Individual Lesson

It is important to note that for any operational system there are contextual features, including administrative and logistical requirements and limitations, which will impact on the interpretation and use made of outcomes. Importantly, the present organisational structure of Maldivian schools that is characterised by grade levels suggests that the individual grades might be the best way of interpreting “course or program” when using outcomes. Furthermore, the structuring of schooling into ‘grades’ means that any use of outcomes in the Maldivian curriculum is incompatible with a “pure” model of outcome based education (OBE).<sup>32</sup> Notwithstanding this incompatibility, outcomes can be a valuable tool for teachers at the program level in establishing a general sense of direction or educational intent. The following parameters for using *outcomes* are suggested as appropriate to the Maldivian context:

1. Outcomes be defined as explicit statements of knowledge, skills and understandings **expected**<sup>33</sup> to be learned by students;
2. Outcomes be related to the various grades of schooling;
3. Outcomes be derived from the syllabus content;
4. The number of outcomes for a particular grade level for a subject should be manageable.

The notion of the number of outcomes being manageable has some interesting implications and the decision of what represents a “manageable” number must take account of two often competing considerations:

- The larger the number of outcomes for a course (grade), the more difficult it is to make decisions based on the data they provide; and

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<sup>32</sup> For example, the OBE ideas proposed by William Spady *et al* and initially published in the 1980s.

<sup>33</sup> The distinction is drawn here between *expected* outcomes and *actual* outcomes achieved by the student. This is another difference with the outcomes theorists but the *expected* approach is considered to be more useful in the present context although students of semantics might suggest that what is being referred to is not an *outcome* but an *objective*.

- Reducing the number of outcomes for a course to a manageable number requires the outcomes to be necessarily more general if comprehensiveness is to be retained.

Outcome statements in themselves are inadequate in making judgments about student achievement. An effective standards-based curriculum needs associated with each of its outcome statements, an indication of various standards of performance that will be expected and work samples that will assist in clarifying the various standards specified. Thus, a properly developed standards-based curriculum will include not only the course content but a series of expected outcome statements, each of which will have associated with it specified standards of acceptable performance with related student work samples to elaborate and clarify each standard specified.

Furthermore, somewhere in the process of assessing student achievement using these materials there has to be a feature of *professional judgment* by the teacher. Without this professional judgment component, the process is flawed! The use of teachers' judgments using these materials represents a sound and proper way in which valid measures of student achievement can be derived. The teacher is not called upon to make a judgment of absolute worth of a student's work – in terms of a pass/fail dichotomy. Rather, the teacher is called on to make a professional judgment of equivalence of the student's work with one of a set of reference work samples specifying defined standards for the course. This is a task that teachers have been found to undertake successfully in both a consistent (reliable) and an accurate (valid) manner.

The reporting of students' achievements at the end of each grade level is likely to involve some changes to current practice. One approach might be for the teacher to indicate each student's standard of achievement in each of the major content areas of the course by reference to the following scale that relates to the various outcomes:

*Beginning ... Developing ... Consolidating ... **ACHIEVED** ... Working Beyond*

A short explanation (definition) is associated with each of these terms and the standard to which they refer is specified by student work samples. Thus, teachers making judgments about their students' achievements use these work samples to ascertain equivalence with their students' work and thereby designate the level or standard each student has reached.

Reporting student achievement in this qualitative manner does not mean the traditional use of marks is abandoned. Rather, these qualitative processes will provide a meaning to any marks awarded by teachers on any assessment task they might give their students. This meaning is by reference to and in terms of what students are expected to learn as a result of undertaking the particular course in question.

The present syllabuses used in the Maldives are essentially standards-based curriculum documents, although none of them have the outcomes stated in an explicit form nor do they have work samples that would clarify the acceptable standards for the respective courses. The overseas' O-Level syllabuses that are used as the basis for program of study for Grade10 students in the Maldives, are considered to be deficient as curriculum documents<sup>34</sup> for present-day programs and it is suggested that development work should

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<sup>34</sup> viz., in that they provide assistance to teachers in teaching the course and not just in preparing for the terminal examination.

begin at an early date to add to these syllabuses explicit statements of what students are expected to learn by undertaking these courses and that the standards of acceptable performance be specified by reference to work samples.

Such a program appears to be within the roles of the EDC and ideally would be best undertaken as a collaborative project with the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate.<sup>35</sup> The magnitude of such a project is large and there would be a heavy additional workload, locally, but it is considered to be an important element of any attempt to improve the quality of educational provision in this country.

The following recommendations are now presented regarding the possible introduction of a “standards-based” framework for curriculum, as described above, for use within the Maldivian educational system. In making these recommendations it will be noted that Recommendations 3, 4 and 13 already include reference to this form of curriculum in the proposed documentation for the O-Level courses and for the proposed new courses in Dhivehi and English for primary school students. As such, work on these documents will provide valuable input to the general issue of the feasibility and utility value of “standards-based” curricula to Maldivian education. Accordingly,

**RECOMMENDATION 17:**

**An investigation be undertaken by EDC of the feasibility and utility value of introducing a “standards-based” curriculum framework for use within Maldivian schools using the experiences gained from work on the O-Level syllabuses and the proposed new language courses for primary school students.**

**RECOMMENDATION 18:**

**Subject to the findings of this investigation, a decision then be taken to progressively modify all curriculum documentation used in Maldivian schools to reflect a “standards-based” format and structure.**

**RECOMMENDATION 19:**

**Subject to a decision to proceed with the “standards-based” curriculum model, negotiations be initiated with the Faculty of Education within MCHE to ensure that this aspect of curriculum design is included in its pre-service teacher training courses.**

**RECOMMENDATION 20:**

**EDC ensure the implications of the “standards-based” curriculum model are included in their in-service professional development courses.**

## **End-of-Grade 7 Assessment Procedures**

The three modes of assessment used for determining students’ progression to secondary schooling (page 9) and the reporting of “gap” phenomenon in Male’ schools (page 11) are considered to warrant some comment and action taken to ensure students from all schools’ are awarded grades that are on similar scales. At present, a marking scheme is provided to island schools as the basis for their marking of their students’ scripts in the

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<sup>35</sup> The Cambridge authority must have a wealth of work samples from candidate scripts from past years’ examinations.

four tests they undertake and where markedly aberrant school results are observed, the scripts may be required to be sent to the MOE for scrutiny.

Given the fact that, in the island schools, there is some “flexibility” in the application of the provided marking scheme to essentially determine who should undertake secondary schooling and, in some Male’ secondary schools, the “gap” phenomenon has been observed, immediate action is necessary. Such action can be either to:

- Introduce a common external examination for all Grade 7 students in both Male’ and island schools; or
- Institute a systematic monitoring of each school’s awards, with a particular focus on where they establish their pass marks.

Although the idea of a common external examination might have an appeal to some and would certainly ensure a common standard is applied to all schools’ results, it is not regarded as a viable option in terms of its *cost effectiveness*. It would be relatively expensive to implement properly and what it would achieve in terms of addressing the present situation is simply not worth the outlay. In simple terms it would be “...using a steam-roller to crack a nut!”

Furthermore, such an approach could have significant negative effects on the long term targets for educational provision in the Maldives. An external examination brings with it potential for formal certification at that level and would make it easier for students to leave after completing the primary school stage of their education. In a country where, over the past 25 years, a national system of education has been established and provision of a 7-year primary education program established for all its children, it would seem reasonable that the Government will wish to continue to expand its goal of educational provision for all into secondary education. Rather than establish a formal barrier at the end of Grade 7 with a formal national external examination, the present modes of determining progression into Grade 8 and secondary education, therefore, should be retained.

Whist retaining the present model for end-of-year assessment in Grade 7, it is considered that a systematic monitoring process be put in place to ensure a measure of comparability in the awards of different schools. To this end, it is suggested that for all schools a small sample of student scripts in each of the four subjects be called for after they have been marked and the results established. The scripts selected to comprise the samples from each school should focus on those around the pass mark (40) but should consider, also, scripts awarded marks indicating particular merit. This monitoring process might be coordinated by ESQIS as part of its responsibilities but might require some supplementation of personnel on a seasonal basis to complete the work. In the interests of integrity of the process ESQIS staff should make the selection of the scripts to be part of this proposed monitoring process and it should not be left to the schools to make the selection. Accordingly,

**RECOMMENDATION 21:**

**The present end-of-year assessment procedures for Grade 7 students used to establish their progression to secondary school (Grade 8), be retained.**

**RECOMMENDATION 22:**

**A systematic monitoring process be developed and conducted by ESQIS designed to ensure the pass marks assigned by individual schools for the end-of-year testing program for Grade 7 students represent similar levels of achievement.**

**RECOMMENATION 23:**

**Selection of scripts for this monitoring process to be the responsibility of ESQIS and not that of the schools involved.**

**RECOMMENDATION 24:**

**In the longer term, work samples to be developed from actual student scripts to illustrate the standard of achievement at the pass mark level and help clarify the supplied marking schemes.**

It is suggested that the very existence of such a monitoring process when supported by the presently supplied marking schemes and the envisaged work samples will ensure that schools will be seeking to adopt comparable standards for their pass marks.

## **IV. RELEVANCE AND EQUITY CONSIDERATIONS**

In this Chapter of the Report, brief consideration is given to a number of specific issues relating to 'relevance' and 'equity' that have not been considered previously but warrant mention and have recommendations made.

### **Relevance**

During the various discussions with key personnel from MOE, including EDC and ESQIS, and MCHE and FE and from personal perusal of past examination papers, numerous examples of questions were raised where the subject matter was outside the normal experiences of Maldivian students. In this regard, it is understood that students may well have read about a particular feature or situation but, if it is not part of their normal experience, questions based on such features or situations are simply not fair. For example, in a country without a train system, questions about a railway station are outside the life experiences of most Maldivian students and, as a consequence, should not be part of examinations these students undertake. In a similar vein, the Physics question dealing with the resolution of forces on a ski-lift presents unintended difficulties for all but the very best students in the subject because of the absence of such structures in the country.

Furthermore, it is suggested that the O-Level examinations in History and Geography could well have a "regional flavour" which would certainly have the effect of increasing these subjects' candidatures and provide a basis for a general liberal arts education stream in secondary schools. Similarly, a regional emphasis in Commerce would appear to be a move in the right direction.

It is understood that the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate has indicated it is prepared to consider adapting its examination papers to meet a requirement for a regional emphasis. Accordingly, it is recommended –

#### **RECOMMENDATION 25:**

**Subjects where a local emphasis is considered appropriate be identified by EDC staff prior to negotiations being arranged with the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate.**

#### **RECOMMENDATION 26:**

**A survey of recent years' examinations in all subjects be undertaken by EDC staff with a view to assembling a comprehensive listing of examples of questions and stimulus materials considered inappropriate for Maldivian students on the grounds of their being outside the normal life experiences of these students. (These examples would be used as part of the proposed negotiations with the Cambridge authority)**

#### **RECOMMENDATION 27:**

**Negotiations be initiated with the Cambridge authority with a view to adapting BOTH syllabuses and examinations to have a regional emphasis as identified by EDC.**

The action required to address these issues is minimal but the impact that the changes made might have in terms of relevance of the courses and examinations is far-reaching.

## Equity

Without exception, the key personnel interviewed during this consultancy referred to the disparity in the resources presently available to schools in Male' and the Atoll schools. This feature was reinforced during the visits to schools<sup>36</sup> in Male' and then in the islands.

If educational provision in the Maldives is to take account of equity considerations, it will be necessary, first, to specify what is meant by '*equity*' in this context. If it is intended to mean that all islands will have a secondary school and all schools, primary and secondary, will have the same facilities, curriculum offerings and qualified/experienced teachers, impossible targets have been set by this specification. Where some islands do not even have a jetty, the viability of a secondary school on these islands is a "luxury" that cannot be justified. Even the lesser target of a secondary school in each Atoll might not be a cost-effective option, given the numbers of students involved.

If by '*equity*' it is meant that students will have access to schooling that will allow them to reach their educational potential, then the specification may allow for achievable targets to be set and met. It is important to recognize, however, in any operational education system there are constraints that must be taken into account including:

- All government spending on education is limited to a finite budget which is bid for competitively with other government Departments/Ministries;
- Any program of reform in education has to bid for funding as part of the priorities established as whole-of-government spending;
- Programs of educational reform always take time to implement fully and the intended program outcomes may not be evident even when the program is fully operational;

What is needed, therefore, is some innovative thinking to develop alternatives that are both cost effective and meet the requirements of equity in terms of providing students with access to the level of education commensurate with their potential. For example, if community demands for a secondary school on each Atoll cannot be met because the numbers of students are not enough to make this a cost effective option, the alternative of sending students from remote islands to adjoining Atolls for their secondary education needs to have associated with it, for reasons of equity, provision of appropriate and safe living facilities and financial support.

One area that is basic to the improvement of the quality of educational provision in the Maldives and has major equity implications is that of teacher qualifications and facility in English of teachers. It is suggested that the up-grading of the qualifications of all teachers to ensure that there are no teachers in the system designated as "untrained" and that all teachers are sufficiently competent in English to use the language effectively as the medium of instruction, requires extensive professional development. In the view of some, such a program is a near impossible task given the personnel that need such professional development. Importantly, such an initiative will take time to implement, involve

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<sup>36</sup> The comment should be made, however, that in the small Community School visited, in quite primitive conditions, with teachers working both the morning and afternoon sessions and with half of its teachers designated as "Untrained", examples of high quality "student-centred" learning were observed. Indeed, it is truly wonderful to see what was being done with such limited resources!

considerable resources and with success not necessarily guaranteed. To accept the present situation and not to address the problem because of its magnitude and complexity is not an available option. What is necessary is for planning to be undertaken to determine what can be achieved with the level of resources available and implementation then to proceed with this as the desired outcome.

The key to success, therefore, lies in establishing achievable goals for the overall program of improving the quality of the country's educational provision in terms of the resources allocated to the program and having regard to the essential equity parameters. Once these goals have been established, changes to them should only occur if there is a major change in policy at a government level. The old saying appropriate to this situation is:

Make a plan and stick to it!

## APPENDIX A

### MALDIVES STUDY ON EDUCATIONAL QUALITY, RELEVANCE AND EQUITY – TERMS OF REFERENCE

#### ***Background***

In recent years Maldives has made immense strides in improving access to primary and lower secondary education and to promoting teacher education. The present project, the Third Education and Training Project has been designed to help improve the quality of student learning in the Maldives. Towards this end, it has supported teacher training, curriculum development, textbook writing illustration and publishing, improvement, the introduction of a system of national assessment of educational achievement levels and initiatives to improve the public assessment system.

Currently, the educational system appears to be inequitable in terms of students' outcomes. The present Grade 10 terminal examination tends to identify a minority (less than 10 per cent of the age cohort) of academic able students. Large numbers of students do not get the opportunity to progress beyond grade 7 and enter the lower secondary school due to limitation of access at secondary education and poor academic performance at the end of primary cycle. Of those who succeed and who remain in school to take the "O-level" examination, DPE statistics suggest that a large majority fail the examination, a mandatory requirement for progressing to the A level examination, the gateway to the much prized fellowships. As a result of both high stakes tests (Grade 7 and O-Level), the vast majority of students leave school without any formal qualification or recognition of achievement that might be of use in seeking employment. Furthermore they carry with them the stigma of school failure.

If the present situation is to be redressed it will require closer cooperation and harmonious operation of the three key dimensions of the educational system, curriculum development, teacher training and formal assessment.

In the light of these issues a study is proposed to explore the possibility of setting an educational standard intended for all students that specify expected student proficiencies at different levels. It is generally accepted the adopting standards is unlikely to have an impact unless other major instructional mechanisms notably teacher training and assessment are aligned with them.

#### ***Tasks***

The proposed study is designed to suggest ways to improve the linkage between curriculum, teacher training and assessment in the interests of promoting educational quality relevance and equity.

More specifically it will seek to determine: -

1. The extent to which the present assessment system at the end of primary cycle is technically adequate, and the extent of the impact of this assessment system on:
  - The nature and quality of teaching
  - Learning in earlier grades, and

- The extent of coverage of the national curriculum.
2. The feasibility of adopting standards relating to curriculum content or framework appropriate for grade levels ( content standards) and to the achievements expected of students at the various grade levels (performance standards )
  3. The implications of a standard-setting approach for the Educational Development Centre, the national agency with responsibility for curriculum and textbook development
  4. The implications of a standard-setting approach for pre and in-service teacher education (e.g. training programs) given existing constraints ( e.g. differences in teaching qualifications, linguistic competencies )
  5. The utility of a performance standard certification test for those who leave school at the end of grade 7.
  6. The ways to enhance the present grade 7 test from a pass/fail method to a more comprehensive assessment system that specifies levels of performance standards in key subject areas such as literacy and numeracy, and suggesting a methodology for determining the number of achievement levels and the descriptors to be assigned to each level, and giving examples of levels and descriptors drawn from other countries. The plan should address systemic restructuring to implement such an assessment mechanism with its implications to curriculum development, teacher training and assessment at Atoll/Island level.
  7. The plausible causes for the low student attainment at O-Level examination and suggest ways to improve student attainment.

### **Outcomes**

A report on Enhancing Education Quality, Relevance and Equity which will; 1) Suggest ways in which the Education Development Centre (EDC), the Faculty of Education (FE), Educational Supervision and Quality Improvement Section (ESQIS) and the Department of Public Examinations (DPE) can work more closely to help ensure greater alignment of curriculum and textbook content with pedagogical approaches and with formal assessment in the interests of improving learning outcomes. 2) Recommend ways in which pertinent information is exchanged, 3) Determine the extent to which the present assessment system at the end of primary cycle is technically adequate, 4) Determine the feasibility of adopting content standards and performance standards, 5) Determine the implications of a standard-setting approach for the Educational Development Centre, 6) Determine the implications of a standard-setting approach for pre and in-service teacher education, 7) Determine the utility of a performance standard certification test for those who leave school at the end of grade 7, 8) Determine the ways to enhance the present grade 7 test from a pass/fail method to a more comprehensive assessment system, 9) Determine the plausible causes for the low student attainment at O-Level examination and suggest ways to improve student attainment.

A draft report includes the above points shall be submitted by the consultant no later than two weeks after the completion of the consultancy. A final report acceptable to the client shall be submitted by the consultant within 4 weeks after the completion of the consultancy.

***Personnel***

The consultant selected would have at least:

1. A Masters' degree in education, a Doctorate is preferable.
2. Ten years experience in curriculum development, assessment and teacher training.
3. Knowledge and experience with examination and assessment systems in different countries.

***Timing***

The consultant would work for a total of 45 days in December/January 2003/2004. He or she would be required to pay site visits to schools in remote atolls and in Male to develop an appreciation of the context in which education is offered and of the constraints confronting the system.

***Financing***

Funding will be provided from IDA under the Third Education and Training Project administered by the Ministry of Education.

***Government Support***

The Educational Planning, Statistics and Technology Services Section and/or Educational Supervision and Quality Improvement Section of the Ministry of Education will provide office space, logistic support and counterpart staff to work with the consultants during the period of consultancy.

## **APPENDIX B**

### **A LISTING OF KEY PERSONNEL INTERVIEWED AND THE SCHOOLS VISITED DURING THE CONSULTANCY PERIOD**

The following listing is of the key personnel from the MOE, including EDC and ESQIS, and from the MCHE and its Faculty of Education interviewed during the period of this consultancy. In addition, the schools visited and the school personnel with whom discussions were held are detailed. The presentation in this listing is in order of date of the interview/visit.

#### **1. Key Personnel Interviewed**

Dr Mahamood Shaugee, Minister of Education

Ms Khadeeja Adam, Assistant Director General, Policy, Planning and Research, MOE

Mr Ismail Fayaz, Assistant Director, Policy, Planning and Research, MOE

Dr Hassan Hameed, Rector, Maldives College of Higher Education

Dr Abdul Muhsin Mohamed, Head, ESQIS and Head of the Department of Higher Education

Mrs Aishath Akhmeema, Senior Supervisor, Quality Improvement Research, ESQIS

Ms Fathimath Azza, Supervisor, School Supervision, ESQIS

Mr Mohamed Fakhmee, Primary School Principal deployed temporarily in MOE

Mr Ibrahim Ismail, Executive Director, Administration Section and Head of Centre for Continuing Education

Mr Mohamed Maseeh, School Administration Section, MOE

Dr Ahmed Shareef, Dean, Faculty of Education, MCHE

Ms Zahiya Zareer, Head, Educational Development Centre

#### **2. Schools Visited (and Personnel Interviewed)**

Imaduddin School – Mr Abdullah Zameer (Principal)

Ms Juwairiya Ibrahim (Senior Assistant Principal)

Iskandhar School - Ms Shifa Mohamed (Principal)

Ms Fathimath Nadhiya Hussain (Assistant Principal)

Aminiya School

Mdm M K Welikala (Principal)

Ms Sameera Ali (Deputy Principal)

Dharumavantha School -

Mr R M B P Ambogema (Principal)

Ms Mausooma Ali (Assistant Principal)

Mr Zubair Mohamed (Assistant Principal)

Baa Atoll Education Centre -

Mr S Thadchanamoorthy (Principal)

Ms Fathimath Hilmy (Headmistress)

Mr Ahmed Wafir (Acting Assistant Principal)

Bodafulhudhoo Island Community School -

Ms Madheeha Ahmed (Supervisor)

Mr Moosa Nimaal (Social Studies Teacher)

## **APPENDIX C**

### **COMMENT ON THE O-LEVEL ENGLISH LANGUAGE SYLLABUS AND EXAMINATION PAPER**

Presented as this Appendix are comments on the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate's O-Level English Language syllabus and examination papers. These comments have been prepared by two experienced educators with a subject background in English and with particular expertise and experience in curriculum development and examination setting and marking. These two reviewers are:

1. **Mr G G (Sam) Weller**, who was formerly the President of the NSW Board of Studies, the statutory authority responsible for the curriculum and examinations for all schools in New South Wales. Mr Weller's career included his appointment as General Manager (Curriculum) with the Board of Studies prior to which he had distinguished service with the State Department of School Education as an Inspector of Schools and Staff Inspector with specific responsibilities for English and History. Mr Weller was closely involved, also, with a number of major national curriculum initiatives as the projects' Executive Officer.
  
2. **Mrs Marcia Shepherd**, who is presently appointed as Head Teacher (English) at Sydney Boys' High School, one of Sydney's prestigious academically selective secondary schools. Mrs Shepherd has had considerable experience in both examination paper setting and marking where she has been a long serving member of the Board of Studies' HSC English Examination Committee and as Supervisor or of Marking in the Contemporary English (nomenclature now changed)

#### **Mr Weller's Comments**

##### **1. My Ideal Syllabus**

A syllabus is a summary of a course of study to be undertaken by students. It refers here to a document that is prepared by an educational authority established by local, provincial, state, or national government. It forms the basis of detailed and class specific programs of teaching and learning that teachers prepare for their students. Syllabuses are normally subject based and cover a year's work though it is useful for a syllabus to show in outline where and how it fits into the total primary or secondary school subject curriculum. A syllabus is not meant to tell teachers how to teach but what to teach. Syllabus writers sometimes confuse the two matters and presume to tell teachers how to teach.

It is vital that a syllabus be clear and concise for it is not uncommon for syllabus writers to include far more detail than is necessary or to require more than can be managed successfully by teachers.

A syllabus must be unambiguous about the key subject matter and skills to be learned and mastered by the students. -Such subject matter should be organised logically and simply in keeping with that subject's central concerns and be appropriate to the range of abilities of the students. This will require some flexibility which can be presented by statements of minimum and extended requirements.

Students must be the focus of syllabus writers' attention. Therefore, subject matter and skills are best expressed as student outcomes rather than the more traditional means of teacher objectives. Most importantly, the subject matter and skills requirements must be capable of assessment, not necessarily by formal written examinations.

Syllabus writers are inclined to emphasise the values and attitudes that are believed to derive from a study of their subject. Values are critically important but they can easily be overstated, vague or, worse, open to political and social bias. If included in a syllabus it should be stressed that they are not to be - indeed, they cannot be - formally assessed, especially through external assessment means. In brief, a syllabus may have the following inclusions, not necessarily in this order:

*\* Statement of Aims:*

There should be some 5 or 6 key aims that clarify and define the broad purposes of studying the subject. The aims should focus on subject matter, skills and values of the year's work.

*\* Student Outcomes*

These express in broad yet precise and assessable terms what students should know and be able to do at the conclusion of the course. They should be set out in line with the syllabus's organisational structure, eg, Writing, Reading, and their number kept manageable - perhaps 5 or 6 per Aim. Teachers will break these down to lesson and unit appropriate outcomes.

*\* Subject Matter/Skills*

This spells out the content to be covered by students, eg, grammar, reading, writing, listening and speaking requirements. In some syllabuses separate sections for subject matter and skills are preferable, eg, History. In an English Language syllabus they are more useful when presented in an integrated way.

*\* Assessment*

This section sets out requirements as determined by the local educational authority. It may include references to the type of assessment to be used, eg, internal and external assessment and examination requirements and state requirements for assessment tasks, components, specifications and weightings to be applied. It is critical that the assessment requirements reflect closely the aims and content of the syllabus.

*\* Reporting*

This section sets out the educational authority's reporting policy and related requirements, if any. While the method of student reporting is often a subject of controversy the syllabus should be clear in stating what is to be reported and how. This is especially so where all students under its umbrella are assessed by an authority external to the school. In this case it is vital that the syllabus expressly states whether student reports are to be standards or rank based, whether marks or grades are to be used and whether or not a pass/fail concept applies and if so how it is determined and how reported.

*\* Glossary*

A glossary can be very useful particularly where a subject contains technical words requiring unambiguous definition or where new concepts and terms are being introduced. Curriculum jargon needs to be avoided.

*\* Other*

Table of Contents, Index, Introductory Comment, etc., may be included.

## **2. Cambridge English Language Syllabus – Weaknesses**

The document is not a curriculum syllabus. Indeed, it is called "Syllabus for Examination". While it has aims and objectives it remains entirely examination focussed. In other words it is guide and set of requirements for the O-Level examination. As such it is of limited use to teachers seeking to develop a relevant course of study. There is no help for teachers, except by inference, as to what they should teach. Nor would students know what was expected of them. Read together with past examination papers experienced teachers may be able to work out what is required and develop an appropriate teaching course or program, but it would not be easy and, unfortunately, would encourage the heavy reliance on a single textbook which would become the de facto syllabus.

A further problem implicit in the Cambridge approach is that it is powerfully assessment centred. Assessment should flow from the curriculum blueprint (syllabus) which, if properly approached, is based on the fundamental question - "what should our students know and be able to do?" Only when that is determined should the assessment program be developed. In this way the syllabus requirements determine the nature of the assessment program. Another way of looking at this is to examine the Cambridge examination and if it were to be found deficient one could conclude that the students who had sat the test had, by definition, followed a deficient course because the course was based on the examination rather than the examination on the course. Given that the examination is somewhat dated and that its content is of questionable currency and relevance to isolated students one would have to have serious doubts about the program being offered to students.

The provision of Grade Descriptors is a useful device for teachers. It is designed to give them an idea of the full range of standards of written response. The problem is that a key element is missing, namely the scripts from which the descriptors were drawn. For a full understanding of grade standards teachers must have both elements. Such detail is not normally part of the syllabus but can best be presented as supplementary teaching material. The inclusion in such material of exemplary examiners' guidelines and comments via detailed marginalia would be a further help for teachers.

## **3. Cambridge English Syllabus – Strengths**

The document has some strengths. It is brief, clearly expressed and single minded. There are no obvious signs of social or political bias nor would anyone have cause to believe it culturally insensitive. It includes the basic aims and assessment objectives one would expect from such a course and its grade descriptors and list of books that "may be useful" - an interesting phrase - is worthwhile, if limited. However no dictionary is listed, nor are any of the recognised expert language texts or style manuals which would stretch teachers and the more able students.

## **4. Cambridge Examination Papers**

As already stated the examinations are somewhat dated compared with tests commonly set in Australia. Furthermore there are references in the comprehension sections to places and things outside the immediate knowledge and experience of isolated students. This deficiency is readily overcome by use of illustration and a glossary of terms. It would have been worthwhile to base some of the examination tasks on specific literary genres - poetry, short story extracts etc. In this way some connection to literature study can be supported. The total reliance on external assessment is questionable. Although the problem of internal assessments - particularly their standardisation across schools - is well known, school information added to external data is most useful in presenting a more balanced picture of student achievement. It would also help to overcome the specific assessment issues faced by the students of Maldives.

On the other hand the papers have some strong features. There is no sense of "dumbing down" in the comprehension section (unlike some Australian examples). The reading level compares more than favourably with the BOS Reference Test in English. The precis section of the comprehension question is a particularly useful instrument for showing students' understanding. The writing tests, while not very imaginative appear to be appropriate to the age of the students and the assessment

objectives. As stated above the tests seem to be culturally sensitive and politically and socially unbiased.

## 5. Other Comments

In the context of the Maldives I would most strongly suggest a teachers' handbook to accompany the syllabus. This document would be advisory in nature and would focus on how to teach the syllabus. It would include suggested yearly or term programs for the teacher, some suggested lesson types and lesson notes, detailed examination and reporting guidelines as noted above, more extensive reading suggestions for teachers and students, assessment exemplars, student scripts identifying a range of standards and marking guidelines. Such a document could also provide useful information on classroom routines, questioning, student interaction, oral activities, language games, spelling quizzes, vocabulary exercises, homework and so on.

### Mrs Shepherd's Comments

After reading all of the material, I think the key is the teaching methodology although there are problems with the examination too ...so excuse me if I seem to be stating the obvious at any time.

The teaching seems to be too dry and runs the risk of being boring. Are the students using the language in speaking, listening, viewing, reading and writing? The language must be used in a context and what is the context for these students? Is it derived from their own surroundings and then beyond to other imagined or researched contexts? If they are doing another country's exams they may well be expected to try to have an understanding of that culture so that any examination they come across will make sense. I get the impression that they are doing this work in a cultural vacuum but I may be a little harsh since I haven't seen the teaching materials.

They could be using writing, films, television shows, comics – all sorts of things to make the language live. They certainly should be talking going on in which the language is used and played with in multiple contexts. Heavens, if you can't make English interesting you have a problem!

Looking at the 'OBJECTIVES': I balked at Objective IV - "and with confidence" - how do they assess 'confidence'? And at Objective XII - "present finished work clearly and attractively" - should this be an objective that is assessed? When we get to the exam there is no indication that it has a mark value anyway.

Overall the exam seems to me to be very narrow.

- Candidates are only asked to respond to print material e.g. no photos or cartoons to respond to;
- The material is very 'dry' and probably has little to do with experience these students might be expected to have had;
- The vocabulary might be too specialised for these students – how extensive is their working vocabulary?
- There seem to be too many retrieval questions in the comprehension section;
- There seem to be too many one-mark questions as well –even when a candidate is asked to write an answer in their own words there is only one mark for it;
- If they are asked to write a longer answer it does not specify how many words are wanted or how many lines and there are still only one or a couple of marks available. If you are a novice like these students this would be a problem to understand the examination game.
- Toward the end of the exam there are clumsy instructions for the 25 mark question

The 'WRITING' question is scaffolded which maybe of help to inexperienced users of language but would narrow the possibility of students to use their own wits to create their response. I may be seeing this through the eyes of an English teacher rather than a teacher of a foreign language. The standard of this work does not seem very sophisticated and there is no writing or other studied texts to give the students a chance to be examined on any 'prepared' work.

## APPENDIX D

### LANGUAGE LEARNING – WHEN SHOULD IT START?

**Dr Margaret Silink, Inspector (Languages) Board of Studies, New South Wales**

The acquisition of a language is a cumulative process. The value of the early introduction of a second language cannot be underestimated. Proficiency in languages other than the first language is important since it:

- (i) enriches the community intellectually, educationally and culturally
- (ii) contributes to economic, strategic, scientific and technological developments
- (iii) contributes to social cohesiveness through better communication and understanding
- (iv) enhances the multicultural nature of many of today's societies, and
- (v) espouses values of tolerance of cultural and linguistic diversity.

Contrary to some claims that the early commencement of second languages learning interferes with a child's development in his/her first language, contemporary research confirms earlier findings that language learning contributes positively to general intellectual ability. It has been demonstrated that second (and subsequent) language learning accelerates cognitive development, both verbally and non-verbally, and develops higher order thinking skills, mental dexterity and decoding skills. It leads to higher order linguistic skills and understanding and enhances literacy in the first language. Research has also shown that metalinguistics awareness is increased and reading readiness is improved.

There is general acknowledgement that the earlier the exposure to second and subsequent language learning, the greater will be the receptivity of the student and the higher the level of proficiency achieved. Younger students learn to communicate more easily in another language and they exhibit greater facility in pronouncing a second language since they experience less interference from their first language. Younger students are more open to new language experiences, they are more flexible, more open-minded and more tolerant. They do not perceive differences in people, and they have no preconceived ideas and no prejudices, and they are not judgemental.

It should be noted that in the majority of countries in Europe, second language learning is mandatory from an early age and subsequent languages are introduced at various stages throughout schooling.

The benefits of the early introduction of second language learning are enormous. For it to be effective, however, there must be commitment to continuous, sequenced, high quality language courses, delivered optimally from the early years of schooling and beyond. Courses offered piecemeal or for short bursts without any continuity are less effective, since they cannot achieve the desired level of competence and proficiency.

Good quality resource material in the form of textbooks and supplementary materials as well as good, proficient teachers to teach are also very important. Furthermore, a most significant contribution can be made by parents towards enhancing early language skills in children. In this regard, parent education sessions need to be conducted in order to promote linguistically challenging environments for children in their early years.

## APPENDIX E

### THE REPORT'S RECOMMENDATIONS

Presented as this Appendix is a consolidated listing of the recommendations made throughout this report.

**RECOMMENDATION 1:**

Urgent consideration be given to the introduction of '*English as a Second Language*' as the English course studied for the overseas' O-Level examinations taken by all Grade 10 students.

**RECOMMENDATION 2:**

An examination of the feasibility of "fast-tracking" the introduction of the *English as a Second Language* examination be undertaken, preferably with input from the Cambridge authority, with a view to the first examination in the new course being in 2005 or 2006 at the latest.

**RECOMMENDATION 3:**

Support materials be developed by EDC for the English Language course in collaboration with the Cambridge Local Examinations syndicate, to assist teachers in teaching the course. Included as part of these materials will be statements of expected student outcomes, various standards of performance and work samples to illustrate and clarify these performance standards.

**RECOMMENDATION 4:**

Given the importance of English in the achievement in all subjects, consideration be given for the head of the English faculty in each school to be allocated additional duties with specific responsibility of coordinating exposure to the language in and outside the classroom and to act as a specialist resource for other teachers at the school.

**RECOMMENDATION 5:**

Subject to the successful development of these support materials for English, the development of these materials be extended to other O-Level subjects.

**RECOMMENDATION 6:**

An active policy be adopted to select more highly qualified and competent school graduates to undertake the available teacher training programs at MCHE in Male' and its Regional Centres.

**RECOMMENDATION 7:**

Rather than accept a lower standard of entry if there is a shortfall in numbers of students opting for entry to the various teacher training programs, continue with the *Foundation Studies* programs designed specifically to raise the standard of English of secondary school graduates.

**RECOMMENDATION 8:**

In the short term select only those expatriate teachers whose English Language skills are at such a level that there is confidence the teacher is able to teach in a student-centred environment.

**RECOMMENDATION 9:**

As a matter of urgency, conduct a *needs assessment* of the extent of the need for a professional development program for teachers, including all teachers from the islands, to upgrade their language skills and qualifications to enable them to focus on a “thinking/problem solving” approach to student learning.

**RECOMMENDATION 10:**

Implement progressively, as funding becomes available, the professional development program based on the findings of the needs assessment and having regard to the more urgent needs in island schools.

**RECOMMENDATION 11:**

As a parallel program with this teacher professional development, conduct a series of briefings for principals and school executives with the purpose of ensuring school policies actively support the initiatives on student learning that the teacher professional development program is advocating.

**RECOMMENDATION 12:**

Approval in principle be given for the proposed language program in Dhivehi and English for Primary School students, as outlined above.

**RECOMMENDATION 13:**

Consistent with the substantial research findings on bilingual language programs, this proposed program commence for students in Grade 1.

**RECOMMENDATION 14:**

Having regard to the likely availability of teachers required to teach this new program and the lead time required to prepare the curriculum materials, approval be given for the phased implementation of the program, as outlined in this Report.

**RECOMMENDATION 15:**

Consideration be given to the feasibility of one of the teachers involved in the pilot program in each school being given the duties of *Language Coordinator* with, initially, whole-of-grade but ultimately, whole-of-school responsibility for coordinating exposure to languages both in and outside the classroom and as a specialist resource to other teachers in the school.

**RECOMMENDATION 16:**

Early consideration be given to developing an “outreach” program for parents specifically designed to provide advice on the importance of the home in their children’s learning and how they might best support their children in this new language program

**RECOMMENDATION 17:**

An investigation be undertaken by EDC of the feasibility and utility value of introducing a “standards-based” curriculum framework for use within Maldivian schools using the experiences gained from work on the O-Level syllabuses and the proposed new language courses for primary school students.

**RECOMMENDATION 18:**

Subject to the findings of this investigation, a decision then be taken to progressively modify all curriculum documentation used in Maldivian schools to reflect a “standards-based” format and structure.

**RECOMMENDATION 19:**

Subject to a decision to proceed with the “standards-based” curriculum model, negotiations be initiated with the Faculty of Education within MCHE to ensure that this aspect of curriculum design is included in its pre-service teacher training courses.

**RECOMMENDATION 20:**

EDC ensure the implications of the “standards-based” curriculum model are included in their in-service professional development courses.

**RECOMMENDATION 21:**

The present end-of-year assessment procedures for Grade 7 students used to establish their progression to secondary school (Grade 8), be retained.

**RECOMMENDATION 22:**

A systematic monitoring process be developed and conducted by ESQIS designed to ensure the pass marks assigned by individual schools for the end-of-year testing program for Grade 7 students represent similar levels of achievement.

**RECOMMENATION 23:**

Selection of scripts for this monitoring process to be the responsibility of ESQIS and not that of the schools involved.

**RECOMMENDATION 24:**

In the longer term, work samples to be developed from actual student scripts to illustrate the standard of achievement at the pass mark level and help clarify the supplied marking schemes.

**RECOMMENDATION 25:**

Subjects where a local emphasis is considered appropriate be identified by EDC staff prior to negotiations being arranged with the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate.

**RECOMMENDATION 26:**

A survey of recent years’ examinations in all subjects be undertaken by EDC staff with a view to assembling a comprehensive listing of examples of questions and stimulus materials considered inappropriate for Maldivian students on the grounds of their being outside the normal life experiences of these students. (These examples would be used as part of the proposed negotiations with the Cambridge authority)

**RECOMMENDATION 27:**

Negotiations be initiated with the Cambridge authority with a view to adapting BOTH syllabuses and examinations to have a regional emphasis as identified by EDC.