# IMPROVING EDUCATION IN THE MALDIVES: STAKEHOLDER PERSPECTIVES ON THE MALDIVIAN EDUCATION SECTOR

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**MALDIVESRESEARCH**

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the discussions and findings of the Education Forum commissioned and run by MaldivesResearch. The Education Forum was attended by participants from across the country, representing all education stakeholder groups including teachers, parents, students, Ministry of Education officials and representatives from key businesses in the Maldives. The discussions at the forum were guided by five selected themes related to education in the Maldives:

- Education, Training and Industry: Does Education Meet Employer Needs?
- Qualifications and Quality Control in Education
- School Curriculum
- Language in Education
- Governance and Management of Schools and Colleges

The forum provided an opportunity for stakeholders to voice their concerns and engage with education policy makers in the country. The key findings of the forum conveyed the need for further research and capacity building in a number of key areas.

Raising the quality of education in the Maldives was identified as the biggest challenge due to the inconsistencies in education standards and practices across the country. While some standards are already set in place, further reviews and checks need to be undertaken to ensure the quality of teachers is standardised across the country and the functions and practices of quality control bodies are transparent and independently reviewed.

The opening of the Maldives National University (MNU) is seen as a significant step forward, however the services and resources of MNU should be expanded and strengthened in order to provide students an all-round university experience and to make MNU a better alternative to studying abroad.

Participants highlighted skills development as one of the key areas for improvement. School leavers are often ill-prepared to meet the demands of work environments and are

lacking in professional skills. Career guidance and work-based learning were identified as aspects where further investment was needed.

The new national curriculum, although comprehensive and holistic, should keep abreast of the socioeconomic changes in the Maldives. The national curriculum should be subject to periodic review and adequately supported by ensuring resources are available to support teachers. In addition, the curriculum should be more inclusive whereby all student needs, including those with special needs, are taken into account in the planning, implementation and review of the national curriculum.

In relation to discussion on language of instruction in schools, participants were of the view that Dhivehi was widely used in classrooms whilst teaching English medium subjects. Conducting research to assess the impact on primary school pupils of variations in the level of Dhivehi language support provided whilst teaching English medium subjects may be the way forward to address this issue. In addition, teacher training programmes should also be designed to address issues related to mixed language usage in schools.

School boards act as an important channel to feed information from school level stakeholders to policy makers. However, school board functions should be better guided and regulated in order to ensure that they are supported and utilised effectively. Governance training for school managers and school board members is identified as an important measure for capacity building.

This report also provides an overview of the contextual dynamics of the Maldives and a literature review on education in the Maldives in order to present as comprehensive a picture as possible of the issues related to education. The findings and the recommendations provided in the report are presented in the hope that it draws attention to the key issues, and informs and influences policy decisions on improving the education system in the Maldives.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades the Maldives has seen significant improvements in access to education; however, there are still many challenges impeding quality education in the Maldives. This study by MaldivesResearch was developed with a view to address a growing concern with the quality of education in the Maldives, and to gain an understanding of the issues within the education system in the Maldives from multiple stakeholders. A nationwide Education Forum was commissioned and organised by MaldivesResearch in order to meet the following fourfold objectives:

- To identify the key challenges facing the education sector in the Maldives, guided by five selected topics.
- To consult, discuss and collect the perspectives and concerns of all education stakeholder groups in the Maldives, including community and policy-level stakeholder groups.
- To provide a platform for the public to share, engage in and influence policy discussions on improving education in the Maldives.
- To draw attention to the key issues highlighted from the forum discussions, and inform and influence policy decisions on improving the education system in the Maldives.

This report presents the key findings from the Education Forum and provides policy recommendations identified from the forum discussions.

### *1.1 The Study: Maldives Education Forum*

An Education Forum titled 'Improving education in the Maldives: Stakeholder perspectives on the Maldivian education sector' was held in Male' on 30th June 2012. The full day forum was attended by 44 participants from across the country. Nineteen attendants from outside Male', including students, teachers, parent representatives and school principals participated in the forum, making the forum the first of its kind.

The aim of the education forum was to collect the opinions of various education stakeholder groups within the current education system in the Maldives, focussing on five topics of particular interest. In addition, the Education Forum was designed to provide a platform for public discussion and represent views from students, parents and teachers to education ministry officials. The framework for discussion was designed around five key areas of focus:

- Education, Training and Industry: Does Education Meet Employer Needs?
- Qualifications and Quality Control in Education
- School Curriculum
- Language in Education
- Governance and Management of Schools and Colleges

### *1.2 MaldivesResearch*

The forum was organised by MaldivesResearch, an independent public policy think-tank registered in the Maldives and the United Kingdom. The primary objectives of MaldivesResearch are to undertake research activities in the Maldives and to disseminate its findings on public policy developments in the Maldives. MaldivesResearch aims to foster knowledge and debate in public policy areas and contribute to the socio-economic development of the Maldives.

## 2. EDUCATION IN THE MALDIVES: THE CONTEXT

### *2.1 The Maldives*

The Maldives is an island nation situated in the Indian Ocean consisting of about 1,190 islands out of which only 200 are inhabited; about 90 islands are used as tourist resort hotels and a handful of islands used as industrial islands (VisitMaldives, 2013). Male' is the capital island and the country is served by three international airports. Maldivian islands themselves are very small, the biggest island being Gan, Laamu Atoll, with an area of $6.7km^2$ (DIRAM, 2007:3).

For administrative reasons, Maldivian islands are divided into 20 atolls and 7 provinces, with Male' categorised as a separate administrative division, and each province governed by a local government office. According to the latest census (2006) the population of the Maldives was 298,968 with a sex ratio of 103 males per 100 females. However, recent estimates suggest that the total population of the Maldives is closer to 374,000, out of which over 70,000 are expatriate workers (World Bank, 2012). The national language of the Maldives is Dhivehi, a language strongly influenced by Arabic, English and Singhalese. The official religion of the Maldives is Islam.

The main economic sectors in the Maldives are tourism, fisheries, manufacturing, transport, and other related services, out of which tourism and fisheries constitute the main industries bringing in foreign exchange earnings (ADB, 2004 cited in Salih, 2013:28). The country enjoyed commendable economic growth in to the $21^{st}$ century and consequently, was lifted out of the least developed countries list in 2011 (Salih, 2013). The latest Gross National Income per capita is US$5,720 (World Bank, 2013a), which is nearly 6 times the average figure for South Asia.

## *2.2 Education in the Maldives*

In the Maldives, formal education starts when children are at the age of 3 (Figure 1) and primary school education starts from the age of 6. Pupils spend 5 years at secondary level, finishing school education at 17 years of age.
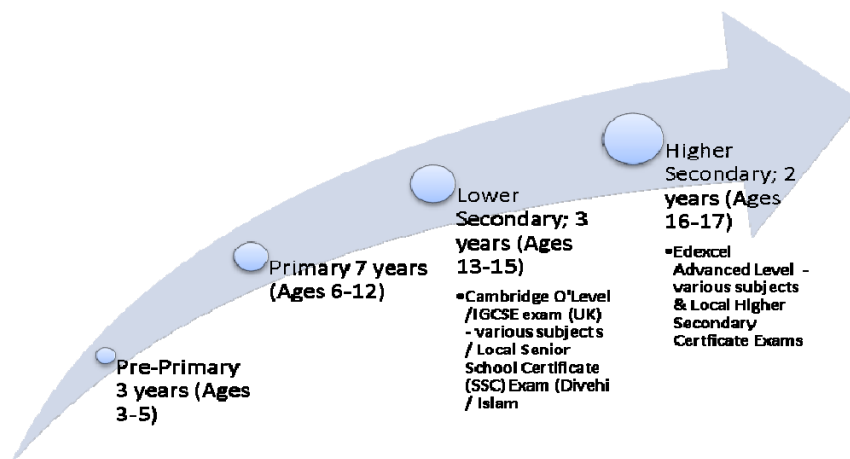


**Figure 1: Various Levels in School Education in the Maldives: Adapted from MoE (2010a)**

The Maldivian Constitution entitles all children to access primary and secondary education (Hussain, 2008:9). However, the compulsory education age range has yet to be given legal status, even though past initiatives have targeted all children attaining at least 7 years of primary education from the age of 6 and completing at the age of 12 (UNData, 2012). Literacy rate in the Maldives is a remarkable 96% (ranked 29th out of 121 countries) with little difference between male and female literacy rates (Nationmaster, 2012)

## *2.3 Student Population, Enrolments and Attainments*

Across the country there are four types of schools: state-run schools, state subsidized community schools, public-private partnership schools (PPPs) and private schools. Altogether, 375 schools provide education for just under 88,000 students, a quarter of the national population. Out of these schools, 58% are state-run. Male' has 6% of the total schools providing education for 41% of the student population. As these figures suggest, schools in the capital have significantly higher enrolment numbers than average. In terms of equality of access for both the sexes in education, gender parity in the Maldives education system is high across all levels of school education (see Figure 2 below).

**Gender Parity in Education: Maldives 2011**



| GER (%) | PRIMARY MALES | PRIMARY FEMALES | LOWER SECONDARY MALES | LOWER SECONDARY FEMALES | HIGHER SECONDARY MALES | HIGHER SECONDARY FEMALES |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| GER (%) | 102 | 100 | 107 | 110 | 31 | 42 |
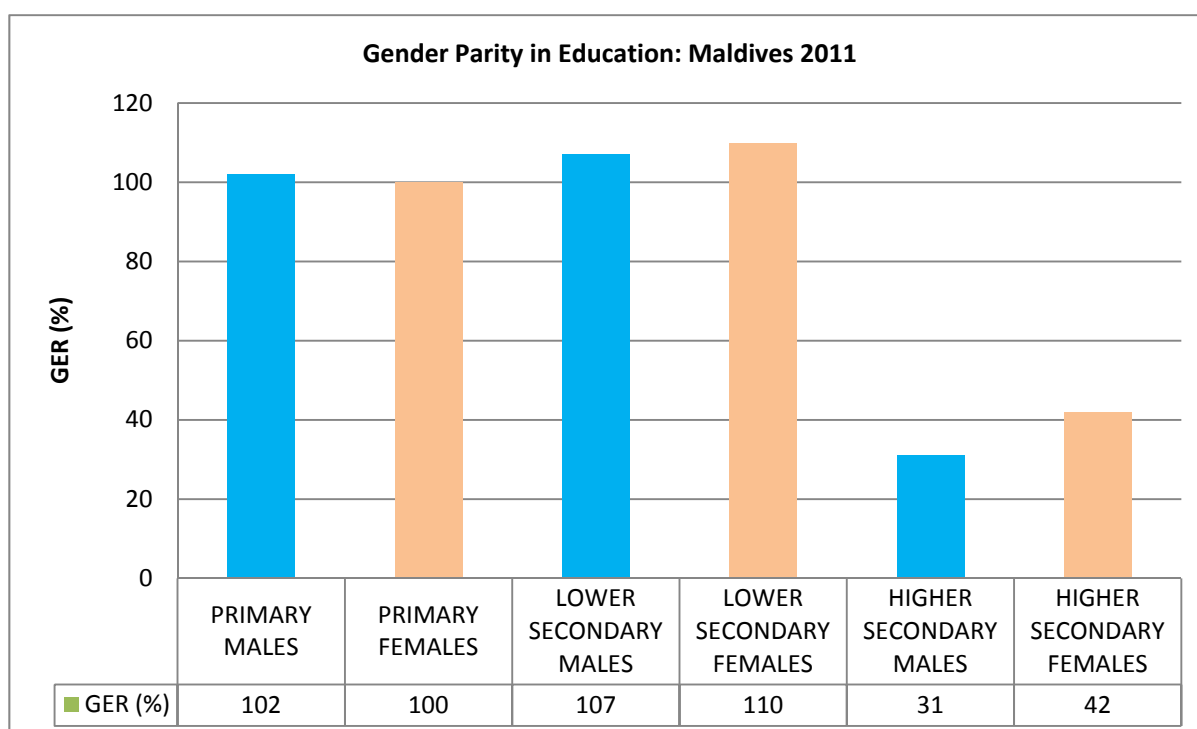
**Figure 2: Gross Enrolment Ratios for Males and Females in Education (2011). Source: DNP, Maldives (2012)**

National Gross Enrolment Ratios (GERs) for primary education in 2010 (Figure 3) suggest that the Maldives has a participation rate (106%) comparable to the rest of the World, including High Income countries. However, the Maldives GER for secondary education (69%), while comparable to the figure for the rest of the World (70%) and Small States (66%), and much higher than Low Income countries figure (41%), is considerably lower than the GER in High Income countries (101%). This flags secondary education as an area where the Maldives has much room for increased participation.
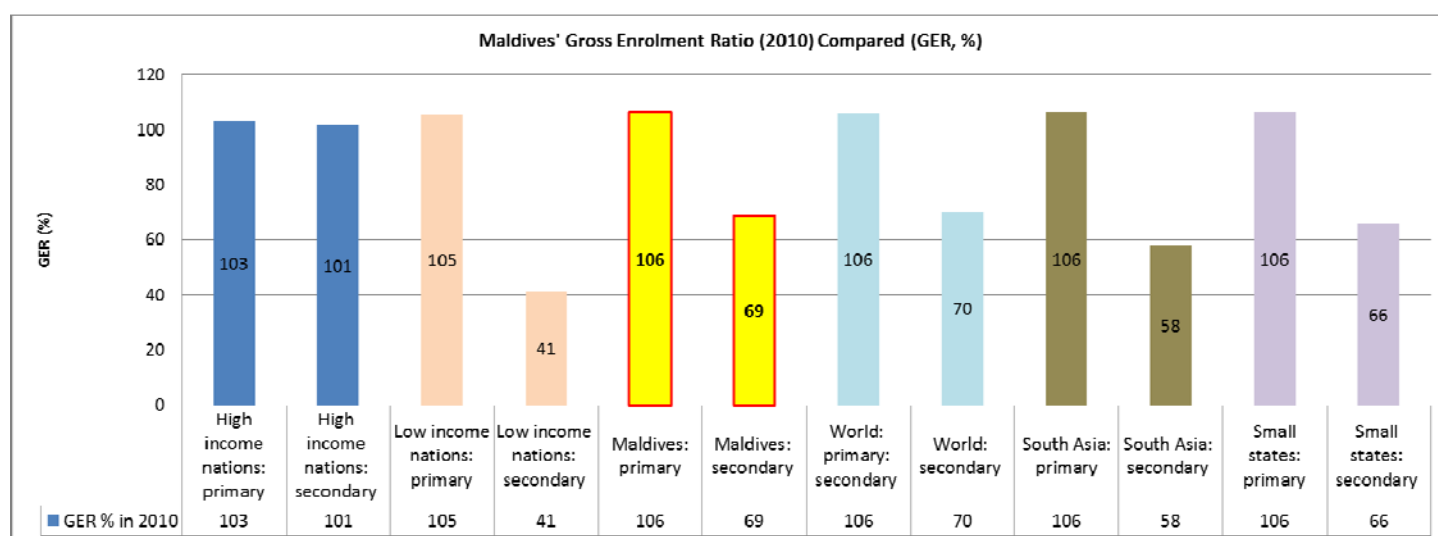
**Figure 3: GER (%) for Maldives and Other Countries. Source: World Bank WDI Database (2013) & MoE (2010b)**

A closer scrutiny of data suggests that the specific area that is failing to engage potential students is higher secondary education (see Figure 4), which targets 16-17 year olds. Lower secondary education (13-15 years) enrolment rates for the three years exceed even primary education figures. However, barring a gradual improving trend, the higher secondary education enrolment rates have been alarmingly low at 18% in 2009 and 36% in 2011. Such disengagement from education amongst young people may give rise to or contribute to many nationwide social issues such as high unemployment and high crime rates.
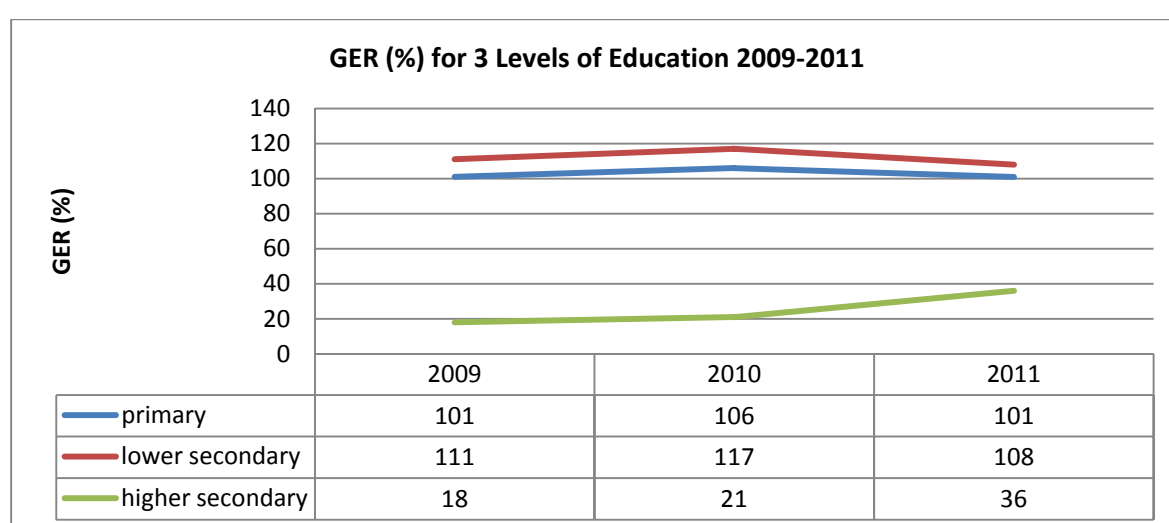


**Figure 4: Maldives' GER in the 3 Levels of School Education. Source: DNP, Maldives (2012)**

For tertiary education, the participation rate is even lower, at 13% of the eligible population (see Figure 5). This rate is also much lower than the rest of the world's GER (27%) and more than 50% below High Income countries. However, it is equal to the South Asian tertiary enrolment rate and higher than the rate for Small States.



| | Least developed countries | Small states | Maldives | South Asia | World | High income countries |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ■ GER (%) | 6 | 11 | 13 | 13 | 27 | 68 |
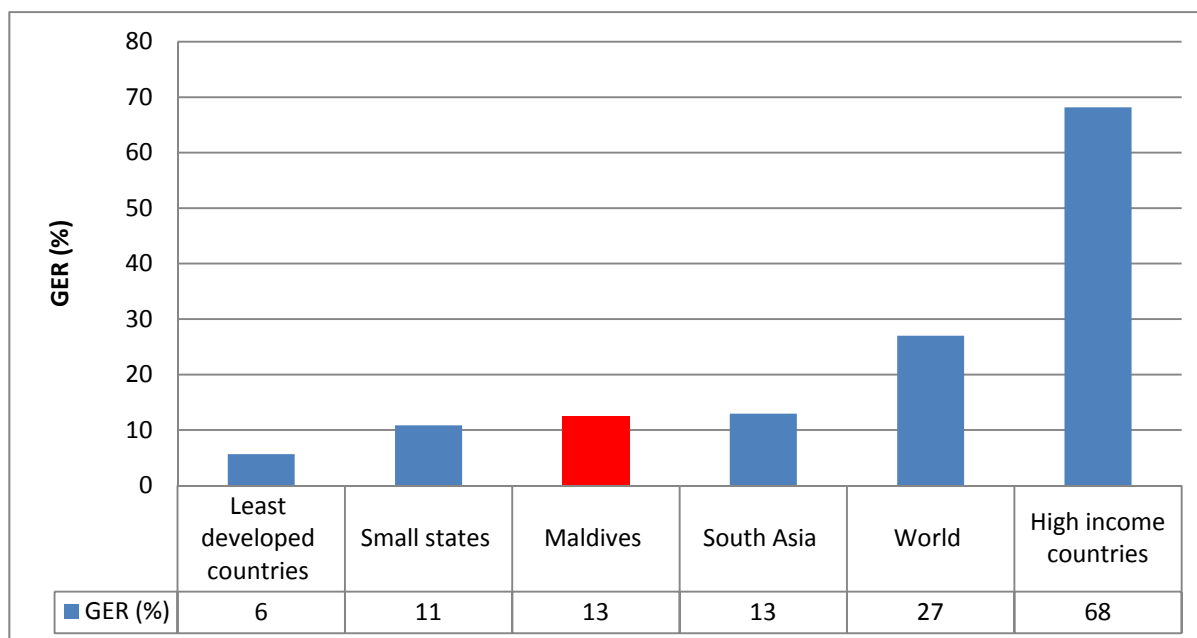
**Figure 5: GER (%) in Tertiary Education in Maldives and Other Countries (2008). Source: World Bank WID Database (2013)**

To provide an overview of the quality of education in the country, primary school completion rates and secondary school attainments will be provided here. The primary school completion rate in the Maldives is high compared to most other countries, rating at 140% in 2005 and 114% in 2010 (Figure 6 below). Primary completion rate is the number of students who complete the final year of primary school (excluding repeating students) as a percentage of the total children of the official primary graduation age. Generally, a higher percentage shows high primary education completion in the country, thus the Maldives has a much higher rate than many developing countries. The Maldives' primary completion rates are also higher than the world's average and that of the High Income countries, which include the world's 70 richest nations or High-Income countries as defined by the World Bank (2013b). However, figures exceeding 100% also show that there is a relatively high number of students completing their primary education after their expected graduation age. As repeating students are not included, this indicates that the Maldivian primary schools

have a relatively higher number students of an older age than their expected age, perhaps because there are some children who start their primary school at an older age than expected.
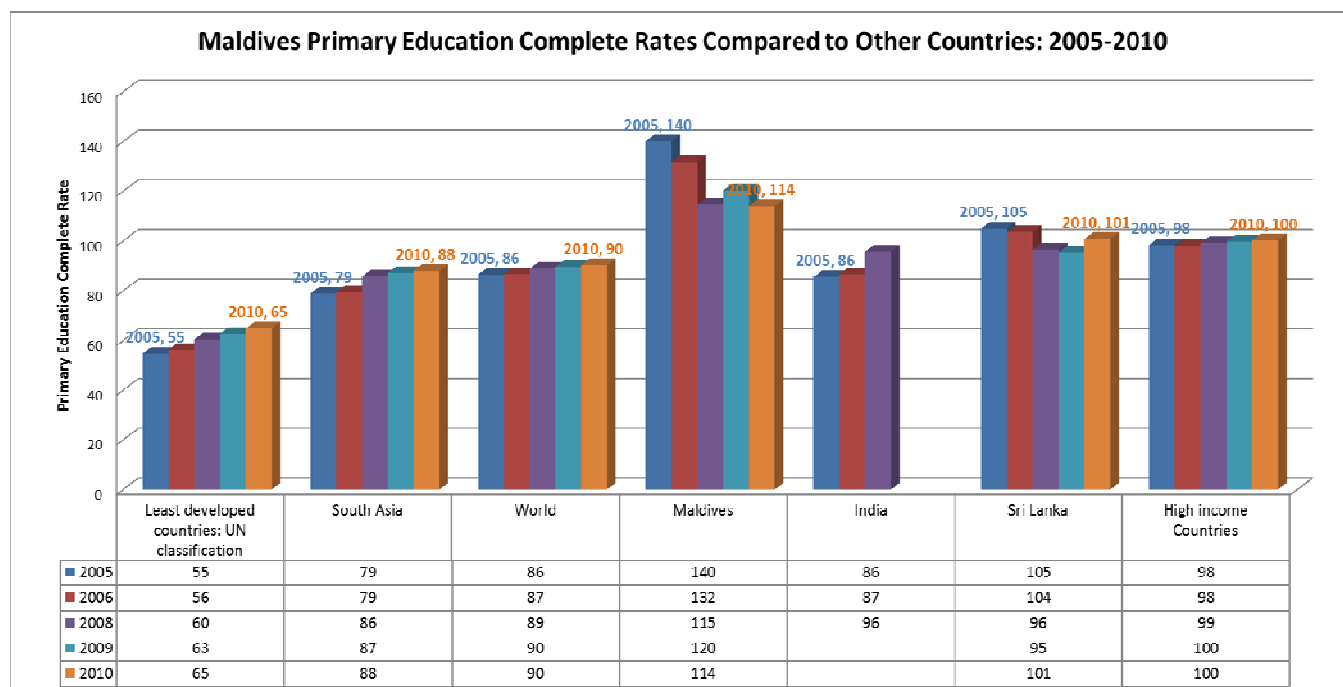


**Figure 6: Primary Completion Rate for the Maldives and Other Countries (2005-2010). Source: World Bank WDI Database (2013)**

In lower secondary school, the attainment rates have been a concern for some time. In the lower secondary grade 10 Cambridge IGCE/GCE examinations, only 27% of students achieved a pass (Grades A-C) in 5 subjects or more in 2008, although there has been some improvement in the pass rates between 2008 and 2011 (see Figure 7). More concerning is the fact that 16% of students did not achieve a single pass in 2011, despite an 8% improvement since 2008. The concern regarding the poor results in lower secondary education was underlined in the keynote speech by Dr. Hassan Hameed at the forum. Dr. Hameed noted that 6 million Maldivian Rufiyaa (est. US$390,000) had been spent on exam fees of students who had not achieved any passes in 2008 (Hameed, 2012).

**Pass Percentages in Cambridge IGCSE/GCE Ordinary Level Exams (Grade 10)**

| | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| ■ 5 or More Subjects | 27 | 32 | 35 | 36 |
| ■ No (Zero) Subjects | 24 | 23 | 19 | 16 |
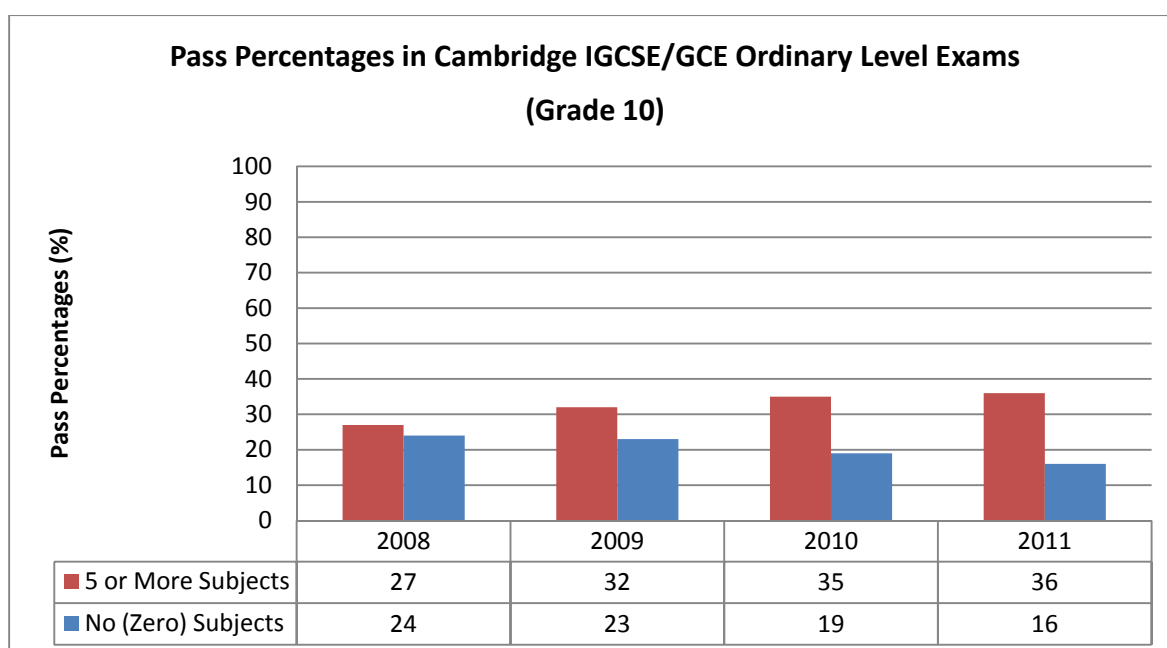
**Figure 7: Pass Percentages in the Cambridge IGCSE/GCE Ordinary Level Exams 2008-2011. Source: DNP, Maldives (2012)**

With regards to tertiary education, in 2011 the country had sixteen institutes providing further, vocational and higher education courses, of which five were government owned. There is currently one university, the Maldives National University (MNU), which is government-run and in 2011 accounted for 45% of total tertiary education enrolments - 4,347 students out of 9,554 in the country (DNP, 2012). Generally, the sector delivers programmes ranging from one year diplomas to four year honours degrees and two year Masters programmes (UNESCO-IBE, 2011). In addition, MNU launched its first doctoral degree programmes in 2012. In terms of trends in student numbers, a positive pattern has emerged at this early stage of tertiary education in the Maldives. Compared to the statistics in 2010, there was a considerable increase in enrolment numbers and graduate outputs in 2011, both of which increased by more than 60% and 50% respectively (see Figure 8). This trend should continue in order to be at par with other comparable countries (see Figure 2, p.10). At the same time, a concern has to be raised at the sharp increase in dropouts, which amounted to a threefold increase to 1,591 students in 2011. It may be worthwhile monitoring the dropout numbers and analysing the reasons for students not completing their studies in the future.
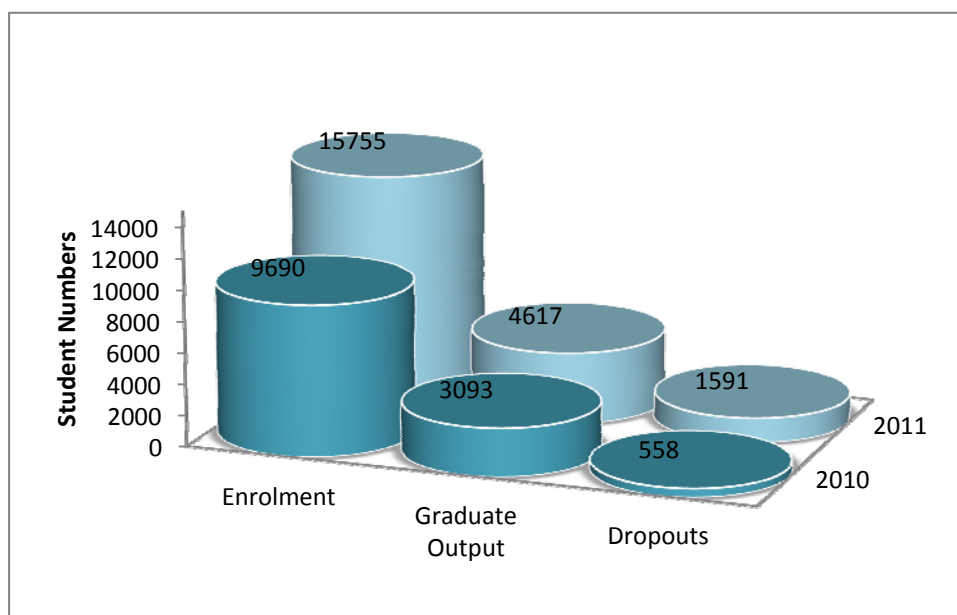
**Figure 8: Student Numbers in Tertiary Education 2010-2011; Calculated from: DPN (2010) and DPN (2011)**

### *2.4 Resource Input*

In terms of resource input into education, in 2009 the Maldives spent a relatively large percentage of its GDP (7.8%) on education, significantly higher than its 2008 spending as a percentage of GDP (see Figure 9). The 2009 spending was close to three times the proportion of GDP spent across South Asia (2.7%) and half as much again as that spent on average across the world as a proportion of GDP. The 2009 expenditure in the Maldives (7.8%) was even higher than the GDP proportion spent by High Income States (5.6%). However, the World Bank (2012) reports that more recently the expenditure has been decreasing overall. Compared to 2008, 2011 saw a sharp fall of the total public expenditure on education by 12% to 1,098 Million Rufiyaa. This may present a challenge to any improvements in education, for instance in tackling the low participation in higher secondary education described earlier.

**Figure 9: Public Expenditure on Education in the Maldives as a % of GDP: 2008-2009; Source: World Bank Databank, 2013**

Teachers form an important part of the state input into education. The Maldives had a student-teacher ratio of 12:1 in 2011 (DNP, 2012), which is amongst the world's lowest ratios (World Bank, 2012). One reason for this is because many island communities are small and have small student populations. Based on the figures in 2011 (DNP, 2012), amongst this pool of teachers 15% were untrained and there has been a significant reliance on expatriate teachers (31%), especially in secondary education (61%). In primary schools, altogether 371 (10%) teachers were expatriates. The World Bank (2012) argues that this creates issues such as students being taught by those who have limited knowledge about local needs, contexts and culture. This situation is also the case in the rural communities where the expatriate teachers take up 33% of posts.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

### *3.1 Literature Review and Methodological Rationale*

Past research into perceptions of the education sector prevalent in the Maldives has led to the identification of ways of improving the experiences of stakeholders. In a survey conducted by Booth *et al.* (2008) focussing on student teachers' perceptions of what enhances learning in primary schools in the Maldives and Fiji, open ended survey questions were used to obtain data. Respondents completed a three question paper-based survey, which was completed in classrooms by student teachers. The study led to the identification of ways of managing teaching resources better, changing behaviour and perceptions that may have undesired effects on pupils, and ways of improving the learner experience in classrooms.

Voluntary Service Overseas, a UK-based international organisation, published an extensive and in-depth case study (VSO, 2009) into the difficulties faced by school leaders in the Maldives atolls (i.e. outside the capital, Male') in the leaders' efforts to improve the quality of education in the Maldives. The researcher in the study relied on conference discussions, oral stories, interviews and observation of school processes (lessons, training sessions and analysis of documentation) to gather data. The research report refers to discussion group methods as "the most productive" because participants would feel less threatened in such an atmosphere. In our research, we used this method as the main form of data collection for the same reason. Similar to the discussion groups in the VSO case studies, we allowed debate to take place in the local language as opposed to English in order to remove the constraints associated with the use of a foreign language. However, we did not use a multi-method approach due to time, the size of the budget and practical constraints. Nevertheless, triangulation of perceptions occurred through the structure of participant grouping, which ensuring that each discussion group had at least one representative from each of the main stakeholder groups. In addition, the use of notes from the note-takers and the notes from forum participants allowed us to triangulate the data.

Another study worth referring to is Shareef's (2005) study on distance education in the Maldives. In this study, students' perceptions of computer-based distance education system

were examined. The study lends support to the idea that educational improvement-oriented research should consider views of students (Shareef, 2005: 160), who are the most direct stakeholders in an educational service. Hence, our research ensured students were invited to the forum and their views formed an important part of the data.

As already indicated, stakeholders' perceptions form the bulk of our data but this study should be not treated as an attempt to generalise the participants' views as representative views of the main stakeholder population. For this reason, our study may be described as interpretevist. Our aim was to analyse the stakeholders' views in order to gain a glimpse into the way the education systems and services in place are understood. By doing so, we also aim to unravel issues that stakeholders have experienced in either delivering or using the services. Education policy makers, implementers and benefiters alike would then have access to our observations and the recommendations that we make to better inform plans and delivery and, equally importantly, understand the services better in the future.

### *3.2 The Forum Format and Data Collection*

Prior to the forum, the following critical tasks were completed:

- *Advertising for and recruiting note-takers for forum discussions.* MaldivesResearch aimed to recruit two note-takers for each of the five discussion groups so that the accuracy of notes could be verified by comparing each note-takers' note. However, although at least one note-taker was available for each group, only one group had two note-takers. This limited the extent to which we could triangulate the accuracy of data. All six note-takers recruited had completed secondary education, while some had completed bachelors' degrees at university level. The forum leaders conducted a note-taker training session, where the note-taking process was explained and practice exercises were completed.

- *Producing forum/research question leaflets for participants.* A package of resources was compiled in advance for the participants. Some of the critical resources such as the forum agenda, the research/forum questions and the National Curriculum outline were produced in both English and Dhivehi, the local language, and e-mailed to the participants a few days before the forum so that they had an opportunity to study and familiarise themselves with the research questions in

advance. The translation of the original questions was first undertaken by an expert translator and then checked for accuracy by an independent English Language teacher and a researcher, both Maldivians. Finally, the MaldivesResearch project team checked the documents to ensure that they captured the intended meanings of the research and prompt questions.

### 3.3 Data Collection

Participants were allocated into groups (Appendix C, p.48) and given specific topics to discuss.

All discussion groups had the research questions and resources ready for them as they arrived and were reminded of the necessity to discuss the topics and the research questions as openly and as impartially possible. Four researchers from MaldivesResearch, who led the forum, monitored the discussions and clarified any ambiguities and questions that arose during the discussions. In addition, two project coordinators' based in the UK were available for forum organisers via Skype to deal with any queries. Following the discussions of each of the two topics for each group, each group had their own nominated leader taking their own notes for feeding back to the forum discussion in the afternoon

### 3.4 Limitations and Challenges

This study by design was aimed at collecting the views of stakeholders from grassroots to policy level, to allow stakeholder groups to identify problems and suggest solutions. Whilst we are optimistic about the potential contribution this study may make to policy formulation, it is not without its limitations. Discussions were primarily aimed at opening up dialogue and identifying problems and suggesting solutions from a Maldivian perspective, which we understand may not present the most prioritised issues or the most feasible solutions in all cases. Whilst we sought to collect a representative sample of stakeholders to take part in the forum, we recognise that the problems identified by individual participants may not be representative of the views across the population and can be subjective views. The views of the participants may also be influenced by more dominating participants or by participants who are already involved in policy making.

The forum was not intended to cover all the issues related to education in the Maldives and we selected five specific themes in order to cover areas which are of most relevance and interest, and within the scope of our research enquiry. We recognise that our selective bias in the topics may appear to emphasize particular issues and this may be considered a limitation. However, considering the scope of our research, it is hoped that the topics selected covered key areas relevant to the current education system in the Maldives. In the proceeding chapter we provide further explanation on the selection of the specific themes and questions for the forum.

We also encountered a few practical challenges whilst planning, designing and implementing the study, particularly because the majority of the project team was based in the UK. Participants' feedback noted that forum questions could have been sent to them in advance. However, the fact that participants did not receive the questions too far in advance may have made the data more valid because it did not allow participants to prepare set answers. Whilst this report was written using the notes from note-takers, presentation slides, and participant notes, we do recognise that note-takers notes may also be subjective and the quality of notes was not uniform across the board. However, the variety of note-keeping methods we used (such as presentation slides, participant notes, moderator's notes) ensured that the authenticity of the forum discussions was maintained.

## 4. THE EDUCATION FORUM

### *4.1 Topics of the forum*

The Maldives' education system is currently undergoing a profound transformation, particularly in regard to the recent amalgamation of vocational training and higher education provision into the nation's first university, Maldives National University (MNU) and Maldives Polytechnic. There is also the imminent implementation of changes to the national school curriculum by the Education Development Centre of the Ministry of Education (MoE). Participants in the forum were invited to discuss key questions under the five themes of:

1. Education, Training and Industry
2. Qualifications and Quality Control in Education
3. School Curriculum
4. Language in Education
5. Governance and Management of Schools and Colleges

### *4.1.1   Education, Training and Industry*

This topic relates to the link between education both at school and tertiary levels, and the needs of the country's industries. Sheryn (2011) suggests that there is scarcity of human resources related to the gap between education and industry's need for sufficiently qualified and skilled human resources. Through the stakeholders' voice in the form of responses to questions on the school leavers' skills, and examples of skills needed, the forum aimed to explore this deficit.

### *4.1.2   Qualifications and Quality Control in Education*

The public in many countries may expect assurances in the quality of education. For instance, in Singapore, school ranking systems and external inspections were heavily relied upon in the 1990s, but were then superseded by an externally validated self-assessment system (Ng, 2007). In the Maldives, there is currently a drive supported by UNICEF to introduce CFBS (Child Friendly Baraabaru Schools), a holistic quality indicators framework (MoE-UNICEF, 2010), within which a school quality assurance system will

cater for self-assessment and external validation of schools' self-assessment. The MoE Education Supervision and Quality Improvement Division (ESQID) aims to launch this system in 2013. In the forum, questions were asked in order to ascertain the level of awareness about any existing quality control systems and attitudes towards such controlling and monitoring.

One notable development in the country's education over the last decade has been an increase in the number of qualifications available to the public. There is now increasing private sector involvement, where qualifications endorsed by the individual educational institutions themselves as well as internationally endorsed qualifications are available. Hence, there is a need for some coherence and standard-setting for the benefit of individual education-seekers. This need is seen to be critical in order to obtain vital information needed to ascertain the validity of international and local qualifications available in the Maldives and to distinguish between genuine and invalid qualifications and accreditation bodies abroad. The government authority in charge of the much needed vetting of qualifications is the Maldives Qualifications Authority (MQA) and an important part of its function is to ensure *"that students, employers, education providers and the community at large easily understand the learning outcomes involved in various qualifications"* (MQA, 2010). In addition, it is expected that the authority will play a vital role in making sure that the plethora of qualifications available are genuine and provide the knowledge and skills that they claim to provide. Through the relevant research question and its prompts (Appendix D, p.49), the forum sought to collect views related to the quality of the services provided by MQA.

### *4.1.3 School Curriculum*

The forum took place at a time when a four year-long National Curriculum reform process was nearing completion. The Educational Development Centre (EDC, 2011) envisages the implementation of the first phase of the new curriculum in 2013. Our forum attempted to focus on the coverage of the curriculum in terms of learners with special needs and the relevance of the curriculum to contemporary social, economic and political issues.

### *4.1.4    Language in Education*

We also attempted to collect stakeholder perceptions about using Dhivehi (the local language), English and Arabic as the medium of instruction in schools. In addition, the questions under this topic included those related to the introduction of more international languages in the school curriculum.

English medium schools in the Maldives were introduced in the country in the early 1960s (UNESCO-IBE, 2011) and today almost all schools use English as a medium of instruction apart from in the subjects of Islam (the study of the Islam) and Dhivehi (the study of the national language). There is one Arabic medium school, which specialises in Islam and Legal studies amongst others. Dhivehi medium schools operated in the past at primary school level but have been gradually replaced with English medium schools. Opportunities to learn foreign languages apart from English and Arabic in the school system have been scarce until 2009. Reforms to the curriculum opened up possibilities for students to learn a foreign language in addition to English (UNESCO-IBE, 2011).

### *4.1.5    Governance and Management of Schools and Colleges*

The purpose of this final topic was to establish whether, in the view of the participants, there are sufficient opportunities for stakeholders to engage with and contribute to the processes of governance and management in schools and colleges.

In 2010, for the first time the MoE announced a requirement for all schools to be governed by their individual school boards at school level (MoE, 2011). Due to initial difficulties in implementation, school boards' functions were changed from governance to advisory roles whereby boards were required to:

- undertake strategic decision-making and assessment of the school's performance
- advise schools in their activities and approve school's activity calendars (including fund-raising activities)
- advise schools in the running of their Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs)
- contribute to the improvement of the students' performance and conduct
- advise schools on budgetary matters

- ensure that schools follow regulatory requirements in project tenders and bidding processes
- provide guidance in management staff recruitment matters; and
- formulate and implement a governance framework for school boards and communicate board activities to the schools and the public.

Boards may be composed of parents, the principal, PTA representatives, the school's financial managers, teachers and administrative staff members, and a representative from the MoE. The World Bank (2012) report on the Maldives education system, citing examples from other small nations such as the Seychelles and Trinidad and Tobago, essentially advocates such school-based management systems on the basis of the cost and procedural effectiveness of such systems. However, the report also highlights the need for empowerment and capacity building in small island communities so that stakeholders such as parents can fully contribute to school boards.

Some of the questions in the forum also covered questions related to the appeal and quality of the country's tertiary education providers.

### 4.2 Stakeholder Groups: Forum Participants

When identifying the invitees for the forum, attention was paid to the representation of those from society who benefit directly from the education services and those who are directly involved in day-to-day education provision. Substantial attention was paid to balance private and public sector participation. Care was given to ensuring regional representation from the Northern Provinces, the Southern Provinces and Male', the capital. Another consideration was to include participants from all levels of education, in terms of pre-school, primary, secondary, further (vocational) and higher/university level education. However, in the student category, invitations were sent only to secondary and higher level students, and not to primary and lower school children as the forum relied on in-depth discussions of issues in a format not easily accessible to the involvement of such young participants.

Having considered the above criteria, the following seven categories of stakeholders were invited to the forum:

- Teachers from schools, colleges and the National University
- Students from schools, colleges and the National University
- Parent Teacher Association representatives from schools
- Distinguished educationalists

- Principals and senior managers from schools, colleges and the National University
- Education Ministry officials
- Private and state business sector individuals

Altogether 55 invitations were sent to participants across the country and 44 participants attended the forum (see Appendix A, p.44). This was seen as a positive response and a high participation rate (80%) in the forum.

In deciding the institutions and schools to invite, schools statistics provided by MoE (2010) were consulted. One main factor considered in the case of schools was the size of the student population. Schools with higher student numbers in each region (Male', the Northern and Southern atolls) were given a higher priority. Other factors taken into account were the transport facilities in the atolls. This was for easier transportation of representatives to Male' as MaldivesResearch, via the sponsors, bore the transport and accommodation cost of the participants from the atolls. Private organisations were chosen after considering the length of time they had been in operation in the Maldives. Government departments which had a direct policy influence on the topics of the forum were also invited. A special category of 'distinguished educationalist' was included to obtain the views of prominent personnel who had contributed to the education sector continuously over a long period of time. Five such individuals were invited and one attended the event.

# 5.   KEY FINDINGS

This section of the report provides a summary of the discussions that took place at the forum and highlights the key issues identified by the various stakeholders. Based on the discussion points, this section also sets out key recommendations to further improve the education system in the Maldives.

## *5.1 Education, Training and Industry: Does education meet employer needs?*

Focusing on education, training and industry, participants explored the linkages between secondary education and industry needs in the Maldives.  In line with Sheryn's (2011) assertions (p.211), there was a general consensus amongst participants that skills development and training for business and industry needs was lacking in secondary education, despite the fact that over 70 per cent of students choose to study within the Business stream at secondary level. Whilst it was agreed that students cannot be prepared for very specific fields at secondary level of education and that there are variations in student numbers and resources across the country, the key skills necessary for the key Maldivian employment sectors are identifiable.

It was argued that school teaching in the Maldives was too result-oriented, whereby parents and teachers emphasise grades over learning, resulting in a lack of focus on other activities that develop skills, such as extra-curricular activities and practical learning. Although work ethics such as punctuality, commitment, respect and responsibility are ethics students also learn in school environments (or within the school system), these ethics were recognised as significantly lacking in school leavers when they enter work environments. Business skills such as communication, customer service, time-management, and leadership skills were discussed as the key skills that need to be focused on in order to better prepare students for the work environment.

In the past, secondary students were encouraged to complete fifteen days of work experience prior to leaving school, but this scheme is no longer practised or monitored in schools. The need for vocational training was also stressed by participants. Vocational training, whereby students are allowed to undertake learning through practical or work-

based learning and apprenticeship programmes, particularly in key employment sectors, was suggested as ways of allowing students to gain relevant experience and skills.

The discussions concluded that the lack of focus on professional skills and work ethic necessary for the work environment proves to be disadvantageous to both students and employers and there is great scope for further research and development in this area.

### *5.2 Qualifications and Quality Control in Education*

Quality control in education in the Maldives is overseen by the Supervision and Quality Improvement Division (ESQID) of the MoE. Internally, some schools also have their own mechanisms set up for quality assurance. However, participants noted that quality control/assurance is not maintained across the board and there are gaps within the current framework and practices of ESQID and schools.

The failure within the quality control system in schools is evident given the relatively high number of students that are promoted to a higher grade despite failing compulsory subjects and this is seen as a long unchecked practice within the schooling system of the Maldives. Teachers and parents at the forum raised concerns as to why in some schools there are illiterate students in grades as high as grade five. Participants noted that the current student support activities in schools focus excessively on brighter students and neglects students who fall behind or are low achievers. Students are distributed across a grade based on their level of achievement and more often than not, schools fail to provide the additional support needed by low achieving students.

Whilst all participants agreed that a quality assurance body such as ESQID is integral, ESQID's robustness and independence was questioned. As ESQID is the only quality assurance body in the education sector and falls under the remit of the MoE, questions were raised whether its assessments are free from influence from the senior officials of the Ministry and whether ESQID itself was monitored and supported. Some representatives from the MoE highlighted a lack of trained staff and budget as key reasons hindering the successful implementation of the quality control initiatives of ESQID. If the lack of resources continues to be a significant issue, there may be implications for the success of

ESQID's quality initiative, CFBS (see p.21), to be launched in 2013. Furthermore, even if CFBS is implemented, it can be argued that without at least the professional independence the participants called for, the public's trust in the system may be put at risk. It is important that CFBS includes the external verification of internal school self-assessments as this may be a critical issue of nationwide standards as suggested by the participants.

The quality control mechanisms in the Maldives are in need of a thorough review as the mandated body, ESQID, and the internal quality control in schools appears to be inconsistent, unregulated and ineffective. Participants were of the view that quality control in education is currently not fit-for-purpose because of the disparity in the standard of education across schools in Male' and other islands; the lack of resources and autonomy needed for ESQID to successfully implement its initiatives; and an absence of effective quality assurance practices within schools.

As part of the discussion on quality control, participants also discussed the role of Maldives Qualification Authority (MQA) in the quality control of qualifications. MQA is the government body mandated to assure the quality of post-secondary qualifications. Currently, qualification validation by MQA is an essential part of pre-employment screening for government and most private sector jobs. Therefore, MQA's engagement with the public is significant in its role in assisting education seekers and training providers.

Discussions on MQA mainly concerned its transparency, accessibility and efficiency in their service delivery to the public. The MQA website stands as a useful tool to access information on the current national qualification framework; however, participants noted that there is a general lack of awareness and knowledge amongst the public and more importantly, training providers, regarding the difference between various levels of qualifications and how to use the national qualification framework as a guidance for their own verification. Participants argued that this discrepancy in information is reflected in the way training providers misinform post-secondary education seekers into enrolling on unaccredited qualifications. The accreditation procedure by MQA was also scrutinised by most participants as inconvenient because of the amount of paperwork, length of procedure and the discrepancies in the information provided by the MQA.

Some participants also argued that the current national framework is too rigid and lacking in clarity. For instance, the MNQF does not differentiate clearly between Level 7 Bachelor's degree and Level 8 Bachelors' degree with Honours. Participants agreed that the current MNQF requires further clarification on the qualification categories in order to provide more clarity to education seekers and training providers. Whilst participants recognise the public engagement initiatives undertaken by the MQA, all participants agreed that the MQA should increase its engagement in public advocacy and knowledge transfer.

### 5.3 The School Curriculum

A new National Curriculum is to be implemented in 2013 in the Maldives and a summary of the proposed new curriculum was provided for participants to discuss and review. The key issues discussed in relation to the curriculum were the school subjects, and whether the curriculum provides a balanced framework to meet the needs of the education system of the Maldives, the Maldivian context and the students.

Participants agreed that the subjects covered in the proposed National Curriculum covered a reasonable spectrum of areas; however, there were concerns as to whether the National Curriculum met the needs of young people and their future prospects. Participants argued that strict demarcations of subject areas into 'Arts', 'Business' and 'Science' streams should be made redundant. The reasons given for discontinuing 'streaming' was because of the common misconceptions attached to specific streams such as 'Arts' stream subjects being seen as easier subjects to score higher marks in and 'Science' stream subjects being seen as more relevant for brighter students. These misconceptions were argued to influence student's choice of subjects. Participants argued that there should be greater flexibility and variety of subjects for students to choose from so that their interests and future aspirations are best met.

The National Curriculum was also seen to have little relevance to the current socioeconomic context of the Maldives. Some participants argued that increased focus on spiritual education from the schools could deter young people from risky behaviour and

that the national curriculum needs to be amended to include greater emphasis on improving spiritual education. It was mentioned that the current Islamic education focused more on the history of Islam instead of the practical aspects of Islam. Practical aspects such as prayers and Islamic *Ageedha* were argued as the key areas of spiritual education that needs to be strengthened and better reflected in the proposed national curriculum.

Participants also argued that education should be in touch with the changing socioeconomic and political landscape of the Maldives. Social science subjects such as Politics, Economics and Law were seen as subjects which could be better integrated into the curriculum, at the appropriate age. There was divided opinion whether Politics as a subject should be taught at schools due to the volatile political environment of the country and questions over whether political discussion of any sort should take place in school environments. However, participants agreed that it was important for young people to learn that Politics is not always controversial or 'dirty' and to teach young people the values of good governance, types of governments, human rights and the use of collective action.

Participants emphasised the importance of making subject content age appropriate, whether it is religion, politics or law, and the need for greater emphasis on social science subjects given the current dynamics of the Maldives.

Another point of heavy debate amongst participants was whether the current education system provides an open and free platform for students to debate and discuss societal issues and subjects relevant to Maldivian society. Some argued that students are given the freedom to question and discuss most age-appropriate subjects at schools, whilst others argued that discussion is very much chosen and restricted by teachers. Speaking in relation to the political divide in the Maldives, some participants argued that freedom of expression allows students to become more confrontational in schools, and can contribute to further conflict in the country. Religious debate was also one topic where participants disagreed. Whilst it was agreed that religious debate is useful at schools, participants disagreed whether religious debate should have set limitations especially given the fact students have open access to a plethora of religious information and debates on the internet.

The National Curriculum was also discussed in relation to students with special needs or disabilities. In the Maldives children with physical disabilities are supported, but with significant variations across the nation. It was seen that currently, there are no mechanisms established within the education sector to identify or address the needs of students with disabilities in terms of curriculum or resources. It was argued that even if parents provide evidence of disability, teachers are often unaware or untrained to deal with disability. Although a few Male'-based schools such as Imaadhudheen School provide specialised classes for children with autism and some teachers are currently receiving training in working with children with disabilities, overall there is much to be done to integrate students with special needs into the wider learning environment.

### 5.4 Language in Education

Discussion on the language of instruction used in schools was identified as an emotional topic for most Maldivians because, since the 1960s, the language of instruction in schools in the Maldives has been English; and also because of the conventional notions in the country that to be educated or intelligent one has to be fluent in English. Participants, including teachers, students and MoE officials agreed that it is almost impossible to teach younger children, especially students from pre-school level to grade 3 entirely in English Language; and the use of Dhivehi by teachers in classrooms in English medium subjects is common. Yet, English medium schools continue to enforce and require teachers and students to communicate in English Language during all classes except during Islam and Dhivehi subjects. This discrepancy between what is practised in reality and what is formally imposed by the MoE was heavily discussed amongst the participants.

Participants argued that it is no longer feasible to impose English Language as the primary language of instruction in Maldivian schools because in reality Dhivehi language is widely used to communicate in classrooms. Some teachers noted that in order to ensure their students understand lessons, teachers are often required to explain concepts in Dhivehi but in discretion. It was also argued that using Dhivehi language in schools was not only an important part of upholding Maldivian identity and culture, but is essential during the formative stages in a child's intellectual growth. The use of Dhivehi was seen by participants as integral in order to allow students to grasp concepts, express themselves and

habituate in a learning environment, particularly in the case of younger children. It can be argued that this view has implications for the use of expatriate teachers in primary schools (see p.16). A question arises then about the proportion of pupils not receiving such Dhivehi language support because they are taught by teachers who do not speak the Dhivehi. In addition, this point needs to be considered by primary school curriculum developers and developers of local teacher training programmes. Training programmes may have to consider what linguistic (both Dhivehi and English) skills are required by future teachers if primary education is to continue in English with Dhivehi language support.

Some participants, particularly parents amongst the allocated discussion group, presented arguments in support of the use of English Language as the language of instruction in schools. Their argument was that whilst the use of Dhivehi Language is inevitable in many circumstances, Maldivian students eventually prepare to undertake GSCE examinations and/or A-level examinations both of which are in English Language. In addition, it was argued that the use of English Language from the early stages builds student confidence in using English Language, particularly in Maldivian work environments where the use of English Language is commonplace. Fluency in English Language as result of studying in English medium has also proved to be an advantage for Maldivian students when they apply for studies abroad.

Despite the varied views expressed on the type of language of instruction in schools in the Maldives, participants concluded that there was not a strong enough case to use Dhivehi as the only language of instruction in schools. The table below was presented by participants, suggesting Dhivehi to be the language of instruction at pre-school to early primary school level and mixed medium of instruction from grade 4-5. From grade 7-12 participants preferred English as the language of instruction with foreign language options introduced from grade 9 and above.

| Stage | Language of instruction |
|---|---|
| Foundation (UKG, LKG) | Dhivehi |
| Key Stage 1 (Grade 1, 2 and 3) | Dhivehi |
| Key Stage 2 (Grade 4, 5 and 6) | Mixed medium with English as the language of instruction for selected subjects and Dhivehi as the language of instruction for selected subjects |
| Key Stage 3 (Grade 7 and 8) | English |
| Key Stage 4 (Grade 9 and 10) | English as the language of instruction with option to study foreign languages |
| Key Stage 5 (Grade 11 and 12) | English as the language of instruction with the option to study foreign languages |

**Table 1: Languages of Instruction in Schools**

On the subject of teaching foreign languages in the Maldives, participants were of the view that providing the option to choose foreign languages at secondary school level would prove to be beneficial for students. The foreign languages offered should reflect the changing labor market and be relevant to the demands of the tourism sector in the Maldives. For example, with the increase in tourists from China, Cantonese or Mandarin could be offered at secondary or postsecondary level. All participants agreed that introducing a foreign language in addition to English Language at an early age (preschool or primary) might hinder successful learning of English Language and/or Dhivehi, especially given the ongoing concerns related to inconsistent use of language of instruction in schools. Hence, the argument that foreign language option should be provided at secondary level of education or higher. Participants did not discuss what languages (e.g. regional languages in South Asia or tourism-related languages) could be offered in the curriculum. A question then arises regarding making decisions about the set of foreign languages to be made available in the curriculum.

## 5.5 Governance and Management of Schools and Colleges

The final discussion topic of the forum was aimed at understanding stakeholder views on the governance and management of schools and colleges in the Maldives. This discussion primarily focused on the role of school boards as an instrument through which multiple stakeholders can contribute to the decision making process of school policies.

Participants agreed that school boards, though functional, are ineffective in creating equal opportunities for teachers, students and parents to contribute to the decision making process. A number of reasons were identified and discussed for the school boards' ineffectiveness. Firstly, school boards impartiality and transparency were often questionable. Participants argued that school boards have become political and in many instances, school boards have acted beyond their mandate to implement personal agendas of board members. Secondly, participants argued that school boards are often dominated by a few individuals. Students were particularly underrepresented and unheard in school boards as reflected by a student participant. Thirdly, it was noted that currently school boards are unregulated and lack guidelines or structure for their mandate and role in school establishments. The lack of guidelines is believed to create conflict between school managers and the school board, and allows school boards to work outside their mandate.

Participants also highlighted the need to make school boards a better avenue for parents, teachers and students to communicate and collaborate on solving school issues in an open environment, and the importance of school boards to act as a channel to feed information, ideas and concerns from school level stakeholders to the policy makers at the MoE. The suggestions given to improving school boards include creating strict guidelines to ensure equal participation and representation of all school stakeholder groups.

It appears that the participants support stakeholder involvement in governance (see World Bank (2012), p.24). However, the simple existence of school boards neither leads to the benefits of school-based governance nor does it ensure local community involvement. Not all participants appear to be aware of the existing regulations on school board composition. This suggests there is a need for research to verify the public's awareness of existing school governance systems and perhaps monitor the implementation of the regulations. In addition, the possibility of including students in secondary school boards may need to be explored. At the same time, governance training of school managers, board members and local empowerment programmes (p.24) as suggested by World Bank (2012) may need to complement successful implementation of school board systems. This may help to minimise friction between board members and school managers described by some forum participants.

### *5.6 Further and higher education and training*

As part of final topic, some of the discussions covered tertiary education and training opportunities in the Maldives. There was divided opinion amongst participants as to whether Maldivian further and higher education and training opportunities are able to compete with overseas offers in terms of quality and value for money. Whilst some argued that that higher education and training opportunities in the Maldives do not compete with overseas offers by any standards, some argued that some of the courses offered by the Maldives National University (MNU) are on a par with similar courses offered in the South Asia.

The general view about the scope of higher education and training opportunities in the Maldives was that it is limited. Participants noted that courses available are often related to business, IT and teaching, with limited opportunities for higher education or training beyond these fields of studies. It was noted that despite the increase in private education and training providers, there is still limited opportunities for training in non-government funded sectors such as construction. The focus on academic education rather than skills training and vocational training by both the private and public education providers was noted as one of the key reasons why tertiary education and training opportunities are limited in scope in the Maldives.

Recognising that MNU is still a developing institution facing a number of challenges, participants were positive on MNU's future prospects and scope in developing higher education opportunities in the Maldives. However, younger participants (including MNU students) noted that currently the MNU functions as a university by name only without the basic provisions expected from a university such as library resources, qualified lecturers and other student services. As suggested by Shareef's study (2005), students' views, as direct benefactors of education, provide useful information about quality of services (see p.17). It may be necessary to conduct in-depth and nationwide research into learner views and experiences to identify positives and shortcomings in the quality of lecturers and resources in Maldivian tertiary education provision.

As part of the discussion participants also discussed the barriers against making Maldivian higher education and training the best option for Maldives learners, parents and employers, and what follows is a brief overview of the identified barriers.

- *Barrier 1 – Lack of funds to pursue higher education and training in the Maldives.* Students are unable to obtain subsidised loans and the current loans offered are limited. It is worthwhile noting that there has been decreasing public investment in the Maldives (see p.15 for description of World Bank (2012) research). If further student-focused research shows a shortage of higher education study funds, there may be a need to reverse the trend of decreasing public expenditure on education.
- *Barrier 2 – Lack of flexibility and variety of courses offered by education providers.* MNU focuses on government funded training areas.
- *Barrier 3 - Lack of student resources and qualified trainers/lecturers.* Text books and reference material are limited to non-existing in some islands. Lecturers are often qualified with just an undergraduate or postgraduate degree without any teacher training or previous experience in teaching.
- *Barrier 4 – Study environment.* Most students have limited study space at home and at the learning institution.
- *Barrier 5 – Lack of standard setting.* No independent regulatory body or standards in place to assure the quality of courses and standard of delivery at higher levels, which is needed to add confidence to the system and ensure the higher education qualification achieved through MNU are accepted internationally. It should be noted as discussed earlier, that MQA (see p.222) does have a mandate to carry out a quality regulation function, even though the forum participants observed that much work is needed in this area.

In addition to the barriers identified by the forum participants, a further barrier may be in the form of poor secondary school results identified earlier (p.14). Unsatisfactory school results may mean school leavers do not have the academic aptitude to pursue further and higher education. It is worthwhile investigating in the future if these barriers are responsible for the sharp increase in dropouts in Maldives tertiary education described in Section 2 (p.15).

# 6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Education Forum was designed to provide an open platform for discussion for all education related stakeholder groups in the Maldives, including representatives from across the country. The forum aimed to discuss and identify the challenges within the education sector in the Maldives. Based on the discussions, this report recommends the following:

### 6.1 Education and Skills Development

- Research should be undertaken to develop a framework for skills development and career pathways within the Maldivian context. This research should develop a skills strategy for the Maldives.
- Career guidance should be provided to students from secondary level in order to inspire students and allow them to explore the different career paths available after secondary education.
- Apprenticeship programmes or work-based exercises should be integrated as part of the learning experience in schools.
- Parents and teachers should work together to develop students' work ethic and soft skills, both at home and at school.

### 6.2 Quality control

- A review of the quality control institutions and mechanisms within the current education system should be undertaken to identify the gaps within the system and take appropriate action.
- The current quality control bodies, ESQID and MQA, should be given full autonomy in order to set regulations and standards independent from the MoE.
- Minimum standards should be set and implemented in recruiting teachers and lecturers and teacher reviews should be undertaken periodically to assess teaching standards.
- MQA processes and regulations should be standardised, transparent and accessible.
- Maldives National Qualification Framework should be reviewed in order to ensure it is clear and fit for purpose.

### *6.3 School Curriculum*

- The content of the national curriculum should be subject to periodic review to keep it relevant to the changing socioeconomic landscape of the Maldives.

- Mechanisms to regularly review and streamline the national curriculum should be established or updated.

- The national curriculum should be more inclusive whereby all student needs, including those of children with special needs, are taken into account in the planning, implementation and reviewing of the national curriculum.

### *6.4 Language in Education*

- Further research should be conducted to identify the extent to which primary school education pupils receive Dhivehi language support whilst studying English medium subjects and to find out the implication of some students not receiving such support because they are taught by expatriates.

- Teacher training programmes should be designed to address issues related to mixed language usage in schools. Training programmes may also need to consider what linguistic (both Dhivehi and English) skills are required by future primary school teachers.

- Relevant organisations (tourism, trade authorities and private bodies, etc.) should provide guidance to educational institutions as to what foreign languages are most relevant to the Maldivian socioeconomic contexts.

### *6.5 Governance and management*

- Research should be conducted to verify the public's awareness of existing school governance systems and regulations.

- The implementation of the school board regulations should be monitored.

- The possibility of including students in secondary school boards should be considered.

- Governance training to school managers, board members and local empowerment programmes should be provided (see p.24).

### *6.7 Higher education and training*

- Government and private higher education providers should actively seek to work together to set standards and share knowledge in cross-cutting areas.

- The scope of courses offered by MNU should be broadened to include courses related to the needs of employers and industry.

- MNU and other education providers should explore and lobby for financial support opportunities for students to seek higher education and training.

- MNU should actively seek to build relationships with overseas institutions.

- Student support including study space, library resources and student services should be reviewed and further developed in order to ensure that students receive a well-rounded university experience.

- The decreasing public sector investment in education should be reversed. The Maldives achieved successful literacy rates and primary school education completion rates possibly due to the relatively high investment in primary education between 2003 and 2009. What is needed is a similar increase in overall education expenditure as a percentage of GDP, particularly investment in higher education. An increased overall education budget will:
    - o Increase the quality of secondary education and address the lower secondary school attainment rates;
    - o Support the expansion of the tertiary education sector in order to meet the needs of the socioeconomic realities; and
    - o Address the disparity in quality of education (see discussion on education quality p.288) between Male' and other atolls.

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## APPENDIX A: STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPANTS IN THE EDUCATION FORUM

| • **15 Participants from Schools in Male', the Capital** | |
|---|---|
| **Iskandhar School (State Primary School)** | **Al-Madhrasathul Arabiyyathul Islamiyya (Arabic Medium, Primary to Advanced Level)** |
| 1 PARENT | 1 PARENT |
| 1 PRINCIPAL OR MANAGER | **IMAADHUDDIN (State Primary School)** |
| **Madhrasathul Ahmadhiyya (Community School, Pre-School to Advanced Level)** | 3 PARENTS |
| 1 A-LEVEL STUDENT (typically 16-19 year olds) | **Sheikh Abdurahman Pre-School, Villimale'** |
| 1 TEACHER | 1 PARENT |
| **Hulhumale' Pre- School (Private)** | **Thaajuddin School (State primary School)** |
| 1 TEACHER | 2 PARENTS |
| 1 PARENT | |
| **Centre For Higher Secondary Education (State School, Advanced Level (typically for 16-19 year olds)** | |
| 2 A-LEVEL STUDENTS | |
| • **7 Participants from Schools in the Northern Atolls** | • **7 Participants from Schools in Southern Atolls** |
| **Ameeru Ameen School, HDH Kulhudufushi** | **GDH. Atholhu Thauleemee Marukazu, Thinadhoo,** |
| 1 TEACHER | 1 TEACHER |
| 1 PARENT | 1 PARENT |
| **Lh. AtholhuThauleemeeMarukazu, Hinnavaru, Lhanviyani Atoll** | 2 A-LEVEL STUDENTS |
| 1 TEACHER | 1 PRINCIPAL / MANAGER |
| 1 PARENT | **Nooraanee School, Hithadhoo , Addu Atoll** |
| 2 A-LEVEL STUDENTS | 1 TEACHER |
| 1 PRINCIPAL / MANAGER | 1 PARENT (FROM PTA) |
| • **6 Officials from the Ministry of Education (MoE)** | • **1 Distinguished Educationalist** |
| The Permanent Secretary | Dr. Abdul Muhsin Mohamed |
| 3 members of National Curriculum Development Staff (Mathematics , Dhivehi (local language), Technical Vocational Education), Education Development Centre (EDC) | |
| Director, Maldives Qualification Authority  (MQA) | |

| | |
|---|---|
| Director, Maldives Qualification Authority (MQA) TVET Authority | |
| • **4 participants from colleges and the national university** | • **4 participants from 4 Business Organisations** |
| **Maldives National University (State owned)** | Human Resources Manager, ADK Hospital |
| 1 Lecturer | Legal Secretary, Universal Pvt. Ltd: Human Resources |
| 1 Student | Director of HR, Villa Group |
| **Cyrix College (private college)** | Human Resources Manager, State Trading Organisation |
| 1 Lecturer | |
| 1 Student | |

In terms of the 7 target stakeholder categories, the overall numbers of participants were:

| Target Stakeholder category | Number of actual participants | No of participants formally invited or requested from institutions |
|---|---|---|
| Teachers and Lecturers | 9 | 10 |
| Students (University, Colleges and Higher Secondary / A Level) | 9 | 10 |
| School Parents (Parent-Teacher Association representatives) | 13 (3 more than the target) | 10 |
| Education managers principals and senior managers | 3 | 5 |
| Education Ministry officials | 6 (7 including the distinguished educationalist, also MoE official) – 1 more than the target) | 5 |
| Private and State Business sector individuals | 4 | 5 |
| Distinguished Educationalists | 1 (4 short of the target) | 5 |
| **Totals** | **45\*** | **50** |

*We refer to 44 participants as the number of participants attended in the chapters because one participant was absent during the afternoon session.

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# APPENDIX B: FORUM PROCEEDINGS

## Keynote Speech

A keynote speech by Dr. Hassan Hameed, the rector of the Maldives National University, preluded the discussions of the forum's research topics and questions. The speech presented:

1)  New proposals against the continuation of streaming secondary education into the streams of Science, Commerce and the Arts.
2)  Proposals for replacing Cambridge International GCE exams with a Maldivian national secondary suite of examinations and
3)  A comparison of the advantages of delivering primary education in a) children's first language and b) in the English Language; proposals for introducing Dhivehi, the Maldivian national language as the medium of instruction.

The keynote speech was a stimulating and thought-provoking inauguration to the discussions, covering some of the research questions in the forum.

## Discussions and Lunch Time Talk

After an ice-breaker activity, the discussions and the feedback for the groups followed the following format:

- Morning:
  - 75 minutes: each group discussed their first topic
  - After a 15 minutes, break each group discussed their second topic

Following the discussions of each of the two topics, each group had their own nominated leader taking their own notes in order to feedback to the wider forum in the afternoon.

  - Before the afternoon session, one of MaldivesResearch's Trustees, Professor Hassan Ugail (University of Bradford) delivered a talk on "Issues on Modern Education Systems"

- Afternoon:
  - Each group presented a summary of the discussions of their allocated topics to the forum, followed by Q&A. The feedback was presented on flipcharts, which were retained by MaldivesResearch as data for analysis.

The forum was concluded with summarising comments (treated as data) from each group and a presentation of the next steps by forum moderators, Ms. Mariyam Shiuna and Mr. Ahmed Afaal.

## APPENDIX C: PARTICIPANTS AND DISCUSSION TABLE ALLOCATIONS

Participants were allocated into discussion topic tables as shown below.

| Group No / Table No | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Topic allocation** | Topic 1 Education, Training & Industry) | Topic 2 | Topic 1 | Topic 4 Languages in Education | Topic 4 |
| | Topic 2 (Quality of Education) | Topic 3 (the new School Curriculum and needs) | Topic 3 | Topic 5 Educational Governance and Management | Topic 5 |
| **No. of participants** | 8 | 9 | 8 | 9 | 9 |
| **Stakeholders in the discussions** | 1 student<br><br>2 teachers<br><br>2 parents<br><br>1 principal / education manager<br><br>2 Education Ministry officials | 2 students<br><br>2 teachers<br><br>3 parents<br><br>1 Education Ministry official<br><br>1 Business / Industry rep | 2 students<br><br>1 teacher<br><br>3 parents<br><br>1 Education Ministry official<br><br>1 Business / Industry rep | 1 student<br><br>1 teacher<br><br>3 parents<br><br>1 principal / education manager<br><br>1 Education Ministry official<br><br>1 Business / Industry reps<br><br>1 Distinguished Educationalist | 2 students<br><br>2 teachers<br><br>2 parents<br><br>1 principal / education manager<br><br>1 Education Ministry officials<br><br>1 Business / Industry rep |

**Table 2: Research Topic Allocations per Table and Group Members**

## APPENDIX D: RESEARCH TOPICS AND QUESTIONS

**Topic 1: Education, Training and Industry: Does Education meet employer needs?**

**1A. Does the current secondary education provide the right skills and knowledge for business and industry in the Maldives? If not, what is missing from the current education system? How can the system be made more relevant to business needs?**

**Prompt questions:**

**1A1.** Does your institution get satisfactorily skilled/trained people from amongst recent school leavers?

**1A2.** As employers do you feel students are prepared for the Maldivian job market upon leaving the school system?

**1A3.** What work/business skills (customer service, communication, IT, administration, and management) are new employees required to have, example for your institution?

**1B. Should vocational education be further developed in the Maldives to provide practical work experience to students?**

**Prompt questions:**

**1B1.** In some schools under- achievers are provided work skills. Do you think all students should be equally given the opportunity to acquire work skills necessary for their interested field of work?

**1B2.** In the past some secondary schools (e.g. Aminiya School) required students to undertake 15 day work experience placements. Is this an on-going practice and if so how effective has this been?

**1B3.** Would apprenticeships work in the Maldives? Why? Why not?

**Topic 2: Quality Control and Qualifications in Education**

**2A.  Is the quality control in education in the Maldives fit-for-purpose?**

**Prompt questions:**

**2A1.** Who monitors teaching, assessment, qualifications and services at educational institutions? Is there a regular and robust quality control mechanism? Is it needed? Why & why not?

**2A2.** Should there be more, less, or different quality control in education by the regulator and the government?

**2A3.** What can be done to improve quality control?

**2B.   How much is the information provided by MQA used by students, parents and employers?**

> Maldives Qualifications Authority (MQA): According to MQA, the Maldives
> National Qualifications Framework (MNQF) – *"ensures that students, employers,*
> *education providers and the community at large easily understand the learning*
> *outcomes involved in various qualifications."* (MQA, 2010)

**Prompt questions:**

**2B1.** How accessible is the information provided by MQA to the public? Do you use such information?

**2B2.** How can the information provided by the MQA be better used?

**2B3.** What can be done to make the information more useful and effective?

**Topic 3: The National Curriculum**

(Summary sheets on the proposed new national curriculum were made available to support discussion.)

**3A.   Does the proposed new National School Curriculum meet the needs of young people and the Maldives?**

**Prompt questions:**

**3A1.** Are there sufficient subjects and appropriate levels of focus and discussion on the key areas relevant to the Maldivian society?

**3A2.** Does the curriculum meet the needs of students with special needs?

**3A3.** How can the proposed curriculum be improved?

**3B.    Should the school curriculum cover social issues of relevance to our country such as politics, legal studies, religious, environmental, economic and social change?**

**Prompt questions:**

**3B1.** Should any of these topics be covered?  Why (not)?

**3B2.** Are these topics adequately /appropriately covered in education?

**3B3.** How can such topics be delivered in an ethical and impartial way, and what age are these topics most appropriate to be taught at?

**3B4.** Do we provide our students an open and free platform to explore, discuss and debate current subjects/issues/concerns and sensitivities in the Maldives in an appropriate way?

## Topic 4: Languages in Education

**4A.    What should the language of instruction be in Schools - Dhivehi, English or Arabic, and why?**

**Prompt questions:**

**4A1.** Is there a case for reverting back to Dhivehi as the medium of instruction? Would students find it easier or more difficult when a new concept is explained in Dhivehi?

**4A2.** Do teachers follow the official medium of instruction (e.g. English or Arabic), or do they mostly use Dhivehi?

**4A3.** What language do students, parents and teachers prefer and why?

**4B.    Should educational institutions focus on teaching more foreign languages, and if so, at what age?**

**Prompt questions:**

**4B1.** Should the focus be on SAARC regional languages to support business and trade, or Cantonese or Mandarin, to benefit from further growth in China?

**4B2.** Would students benefit from learning languages (e.g. European, Japanese and Chinese) relevant to our tourism industry, starting from primary school? In which way(s)?

## Topic 5: Governance and Management of Schools and Colleges

**5A.  Is Maldivian higher/further education and training competing with overseas offers in terms of quality and value for money?**

**Prompt questions:**

**5A1.** What opportunities are there in further education and higher education in the Maldives?

**5A2.** Are there sufficient opportunities to pursue further/higher education in the Maldives?

**5A3.** What are the barriers against making local further/higher education and training the best option for Maldivian learners, parents and employers?

**5B.  Do the current governance systems (e.g. school boards) in the education sector provide teachers, parents and students with sufficient opportunities to contribute to the running and decision making of education establishments?**

**Prompt questions:**

**5B1.** How can education boards at schools, colleges and universities be improved?

**5B2.** Who should feature in such boards?

**5B3**. Which members should be <u>appointed</u> and which members should be <u>elected</u> to education related boards?

**---END---**