THE MALDIVES NATIONAL
UNIVERSITY

Priorities for Excellence

Strategic Plan

2013 – 2017

Contents

About this Plan

One purpose of the Strategic Plan is to articulate a shared vision for the future of the university.

Planning is how MNU shapes and guides growth and development. MNU and its precursor institutions have always had plans to guide its activities and operations for development. Although, planning itself does not lead to progress and advancement, these plans have always been instrumental in ensuring that development is focused on achieving specific goals and targets. Additionally, strategic plans inspire and motivate staff. They instil confidence and articulate a shared vision for the future.

The first Strategic Plan of the university was of its precursor institution — The Maldives College of Higher Education. When this plan for 2000 – 2005 was about to run out a new plan focussing on Strategic Directions for the period 2004 – 2009 was published. Between 2000 and 2009, a number of operational or action plans were also published and followed. The Government had declared that the College would be transformed into a university by 2007 and the staff strove to formulate a plan entitled Operational Priorities for University Title. This plan sets out the targets to be achieved in the first, second and third year of university operation to fully qualify as a university by the criteria of the Quality Assurance Agency of UK. This latter plan is still current and should be used to guide operational priorities for the next three years.

In the development of this Strategic Plan, the initial task had been the development of the faculty/centre strategic plans. These plans were based on an examination of the existing visions, missions, institutional realities the external environment and the previous plans of the Faculties/Centres. This Strategic Plan has been distilled from the divisional strategic plans taking into account commonalities and special strategies. The wishes, goals and strategies of individual divisions varied from one to another within MNU. In formulating this Plan we have tried to balance the competing interests that are presented, weighed the various proposals, evaluated what is possible and determined what is desirable through discussion and debate.

This is a strategic time for strategic planning; there has been dramatic changes in the whole environment in which MNU operates. In all aspects of its operation, be it political, social, educational or economic, the changes taking place are unprecedented. At such a time, there is a tendency to be acquiescent and give in to fleeting educational fads and lose sight of the enduring and essential purpose of a university education. This Strategic Plan will provide continuity and a constant reference for university operation with its articulation of the long term enduring goals.

Strategic Planning

Strategic planning has become one of the main approaches for establishing the major directions and emphases of the University. These directions are usually termed as goals or aims. Strategies for achieving the goals are then considered and listed. The strategies enable actions to be formulated to achieve the goal within a stipulated time frame and a named person responsible for achieving the outcome. Resources are allocated to perform the action. Thus, in strategic planning, resources are concentrated in a limited number of actions all aligned to achieve the goal. Thus, budget is tied to the goals of the University. While strategic planning by itself may not lead the university from its current status to the envisioned state, not to do so would be to abdicate our responsibility.

History of strategic planning in MNU

Strategic planning grew out of the budget exercises in America in the 1950s and in the succeeding two decades it spread into major US corporations. By the 1980s, most public organizations were involved in strategic p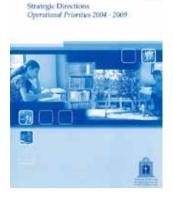lanning. Through the popularity of business administration and management training in the 1980s and 1990s, strategic planning quickly spread across the world. In October 1999, a year after the University was established, the Public Service Division was established by the Government. The Division made it mandatory for all public service institutions to carry out strategic planning. Initially, the government budget was supposedly tied to strategic planning but it could not be fully implemented.

The Maldives National University was in a favourable position with regard to strategic planning. The Maldives College of Higher Education was barely one year old and we had some of the best minds in the country. After much debate and discussion, the first plan was published. It charted the broad course of the University from 2000 till 2005. Annually, operation plans were developed to translate the strategies into do-able actions. In the early years since 2000, the manner of strategic planning changed. The plans became more focussed and shorter with the inherent decision points not explicitly stated in the document. MNU's second plan for the years 2004–2009, followed this style.
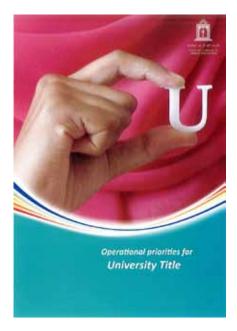
The world's oldest existing and continually running university is the University of Kaureein established in 859 CE in Fez, Morocco (Guinness Book of Records). MNU traces its origins to the more recent establishment of the Allied Health Services Training Centre on 1st September 1973 — the precursor to the Faculty of Health Sciences. The usefulness of an institution must be measured not in its tale of years, but on its impact on the people.

The plan known as "Operational Priorities for University Title" is the current planning document. Produced with much involvement from the University constituents, the document lists the actions considered necessary for university title as specified by the Qaulity Assuarance Agency (QAA) of UK for British universities. The actions were identified following a quality audit when benchmarked against QAA. QAA has since diluted the requirements.

The plan was undertaken when the University title was to be granted in 2006. It lists the operational priorities for the first three years from the time the University title is granted. Since then, many of the action items have been completed. However, it is still necessary to evaluate the status of the items to ensure that what remains to be completed should be undertaken or not given the current realities.

The impetus for strategic planning does not arise from the bureaucratic requirements but from a heartfelt conviction that one small group at the top cannot know the needs, aspirations and hopes of all stakeholders both internal and external. Universities have long been democratic institutions with real power devolved among committees. Shared governance has been the tradition of administration since its formation. At the same time, the external environment was witnessing rapid and dramatic changes, and the social demand for higher education was increasing while the financial resources were dwindling. Strategic planning provided the focus for the activities of the university in this constantly changing and challenging environment.

Additionally, planning has enabled MNU to be proactive in shaping its destiny while involving all stakeholders. The wide involvement of stakeholders has brought unique perspectives to the process. Their participation ensures commitment to mutual goals and a sense of organisational unity. This in turn, creates external advocacy for MNU as their role was more substantive than advisory. Written and widely available documents also lend stability to the institution as leadership changes, providing a shared vision for a successful future.

The first graduation of students in academic regalia was not held by MNU. This unique honour goes to the first President, Mohamed Ameen. The photograph shows Ameen with a graduand in law – Ibrahim Shihab – from an adhoc class of training he held.

The strategic planning process

Of the several models of strategic planning, the most well-known ones have their beginnings in the Harvard Policy model popularised by the Harvard Business School. This model depends on the systematic analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) analysis. Together with SWOT analysis, environmental scanning are the primary methods used in the first and subsequent strategic plans. The actual process of strategic planning for non-profit organizations such as universities have been popularized by many, including John Bryson (University of Minessota). Five ingredients of successful strategic planning have been noted: people, data, preparation, a structured planning process and resources. Since the number of stakeholders is large, a representative system is used to involve people from all impact areas of the university. As decisions on planning have to be based on evidence, reliable data are essential.

1 Faculties/Centres carry out stakeholder discussions, SWOT analysis and internal and external environmental scans

2 Faculties/Centres contribute towards a Vision which is agreed to by Heads of Faculties and Centres

3 Faculties/Centres formulate goals and strategies, and develop a Strategic Plan considering university-defining statements

4 Plans developed by Faculties/Centres are merged into a single document form the University Strategic Plan

5 The University Strategic Plan is discussed with proposed changes and revised in Heads meeting until agreement is reached

6 The University Council considers the draft Strategic Plan and amendments are brought until consensus is reached

Planning often creates change and paradigm shifts, hence a whole new way of looking at the status quo is required. In this task, the interviews and input from the staff and students have been sobering. In developing MNU's strategic plan, the focus has been on what works and what is possible given the local context. The process of planning is highlighted above. The environmental scans and the SWOT analyses were initially by faculties/centres. Then, using the University Act as primary defining instrument, faculty/centre strategic plans were developed and merged into a single document through a long and iterative process of discussion and modification until a consensus emerged at the University Council. The planning process has been very time consuming. In fact, this strategic plan has taken over a year to publish since the initial discussions.

To ensure that the goals of the Strategic Plan are achieved, bearings have to be taken continually. Annual operational plans identify the actions necessary to achieve the goals based on the strategies, the time limits and those responsible. The actions implemented are evaluated and adjustments made to maintain the course set by the Strategic Plan. This annual planning cycle forms the Plan–Do–Check–Adjust (PDCA) cycle popular in business planning for continuous improvement.

Vision, Mission, Philosophy & Values

The Maldives National University will perform and be acknowledged as the outstanding institution of the nation and one of the *finest* in the region.

The MNU Vision

A vision statement describes the goal of the institution. It embodies what the institution aims to achieve, usually as the desired outcome in the long term. In envisioning the future of MNU, our purpose is to inspire and motivate our staff, to instil confidence, and celebrate our mission by articulating a shared vision of the future.

As the vision statement, MNU has adopted the vision of its precursor institution, viz, that of the Maldives College of Higher Education. This is because that vision still embodies what MNU aspires to be. Revision, merely for the sake of revision, is both pointless and futile. The vision of MNU is as follows:

The Maldives National University will perform and be acknowledged as the outstanding academic institution of the nation and one of the finest in the region.

This vision, articulated operationally from the point of view of the internal and external community of MNU, has both local and regional dimensions. In envisioning the future of MNU, it is our ardent desire that its performance in every aspect of its operation would be in keeping with that special position. Both nationally and regionally, MNU will achieve distinction for the quality of our teaching and learning, for the outstanding quality of the student experience and for the valuable contribution which our research and innovation makes to nation-building.

MNU is already the premier higher education institution in the Maldives in the eyes of our own community. That enviable position can only be maintained by continuous improvement in our operations and processes and by constant renewal of our commitment to our mission.

Professor Abdul Kalam, the former President of India, in a lecture at MNU said that to dream small is a crime. All successful men and women are big dreamers. They imagine what is not visible and then work with passion every day to achieve their vision, that goal or purpose.

The MNU Mission

The mission of the University defines the overall purpose of our institution — why it exists. The fundamental purpose of MNU is enshrined in Dhivehi in the Maldives National University Act. The unofficial translation of the mission of the Maldives National University is as follows:

The mission of the Maldives National University is to create, discover, preserve and disseminate knowledge that are necessary to enhance the lives and livelihoods of people and essential for the cultural, social and economic development of the society so that this nation shall remain free and Islamic forever.

The above mission is further expatiated in the MNU Act. The first and foremost objective of MNU is specified to be the discovery and dissemination of knowledge and skills. Thus, learning, teaching and research are the principal objectives of MNU. Other specific objectives as outlined in the Act are as follows:

1. to offer courses of higher education and training to those who have completed secondary education or equivalent in areas relevant to the development of the nation;

2. to carry out scientific research and investigations and disseminate the results of these endeavours for the benefit of the national and international communities;

3. to award baccalaureate, masterate and doctorate degrees and other certificates in relation to the education and training provided by the University;

4. to establish relationships of cooperation with institutions both inside the country and abroad;

5. to develop existing University resources and acquire new ones in the pursuit of the achievement of the University mission;

6. to utilize the resources of the University among the divisions in the most beneficial manner;

7. to promote and promulgate Islamic Dhivehi traditions and values;

8. to do anything incidental or conducive to the performance of the preceding functions.

Unless theory is complemented with skills, learning is inadequate. MNU goes to great lengths, sometimes overseas, to provide students with experiences that undergird theoretical knowledge. Otherwise, learning becomes inert and inapplicable.

Philosophy and Guiding Values

Everything MNU does is guided by the philosophy of the University — *iman* and *ilm*.

All activities of the university are based on our wordview or philosphy of knowledge, reality, and existence: *iman* and *ilm*. This fundamental belief guides and underpin everything MNU does throughout its life in all circumstances, irrespective of changes in its goals, strategies and actions. They are the essence of our institution, understood and respected by all employees.

First, we believe that education is incomplete until it is infused with the wisdom born of faith—*iman*. We seek to increase every student's spiritual awareness and personal commitment to Islam. We are committed to the application of ethical principles in all our dealings with all people. The University intends for all of its students to develop an intimate knowledge of ethics across its academic curriculum so that they will possess the necessary tools to transform the world and address forthrightly the moral questions confronting today's society.

Second, *ilm* is not confined to the acquisition of knowledge only, but also embraces socio-political and moral aspects. Islam invites its followers to exercise their intellect and use and apply their knowledge to attain the ultimate truth (*haqq*) of everything.

Building upon the above timeless philosophy, MNU is committed to the following values. All of us are expected to demonstrate these values in all our interactions with others including staff, students, alumni and the general public.

1. We are men and women of honour, honesty and integrity. We shall not tolerate those who lie, cheat or steal.

2. We accept service to the nation and others before self as the primary purpose for professional life.

3. We nurture and promote rational inquiry and critical thinking in all areas of human endeavour.

4. We are dedicated to life-long learning, emphasizing teamwork and leadership.

5. We stress self-discipline, personal responsibility and respect for Law.

6. We respect our people and uphold the good name of our institution.

7. We are dedicated to the principle of shared governance and decision-making.

A local poet is known to have said that education without values is akin to medical treatment without healing. In fact, learning without values makes for clever devils.

Goals and Strategies

Goal 1: Academic Excellence

The University aims to excel in all aspects of learning and teaching so that it is recognized as the best in the Maldives and the preferred destination of the highest calibre students.

To realize this Goal, the University will:

1. Maximise access and educational opportunity to, remote and international students through innovative, flexible and high quality local and distance education.
2. Provide quality student support and a contemporary and attractive learning environment that enhances students' educational experience.
3. Systematically review and update education and training programmes to ensure they meet the needs of students, industry, the professions and national accreditation so that outcomes are progressively improved.
4. Offer challenging intensive academic courses that combine disciplinary depth with interdisciplinary perspectives.
5. Foster a climate in which teaching is highly valued.
6. Encourage developments in programme design, teaching methods and assessment where appropriate to deliver excellence in education.
7. Provide outstanding part-time and flexible programmes through research-active staff to high calibre mature students.
8. Ensure independent professionally-validated student appraisal of all subjects taught in the University and use student feedback to improve the quality of teaching and learning.
9. Review regularly faculty curricula, modes of delivery and assessment to ensure that teaching and learning is informed by international best practice.
10. Use international quality benchmarking and quality assurance in all programme development, delivery and assessment.

The young represents the most valuable resource of the country. But, that is so only with the "right" education; students must know duties before rights and responsibilities before privileges.

Goal 2: Outstanding Research

MNU will enhance its local, national and international standing for excellence in research, particularly in the areas relevant to the nation.

To realize this Goal, the University will:

1. Respond to the needs of the community and the industry for knowledge and information to maximise beneficial social, cultural, economic, environmental and health outcomes.
2. Attract and retain high quality and motivated researchers and postgraduate students by establishing a research environment that is stimulating and provides professional support as well as quality infrastructure and equipment.
3. Establish a research centre.
4. Develop a commercial arm of MNU to promote research and consultancy.
5. Be proactive in identifying and informing areas of expertise.
6. Introduce and upgrade research skills of staff through training and establishing of mentoring systems to develop and support new researchers in their research efforts.
7. Value research output in the reward and recognition system of the University.
8. Develop external sources of funding to support research activities.
9. Establish links with industry, government departments and overseas universities to encourage joint research.
10. Establish mechanisms for publishing research.
11. Maintain research strength across the disciplinary range and encourage interdisciplinary research initiatives.
12. Enhance administrative services and support designed to facilitate research excellence and knowledge transfer.
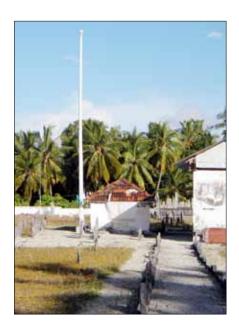13. Increase the number of doctorate programmes as a means of enhancing research training.

The preconditions for a research-intensive university do not exist in the MNU as yet. They are substantial numbers of postgraduate students, research staff and, of course, funds. In the planned period 2012–2016, these conditions will improve and the research goal can be achieved.

Goal 3: Enhancing the Maldivian Identity

MNU will maintain and enhance the Islamic Dhivehi Identity of the University..

To realize this Goal, the University will:

1. Promote ways in which our Islamic Dhivehi Identity can be made obvious in art, symbol, sign , ceremonies and public events.
2. Establish programmes to promote the University's cultural tradition among the University community.
3. Recruit faculty and staff who are in support of the mission and philosophy of the University and its interaction with the Maldivian intellectual heritage.

Maldives have been settled over thousands of years. The past generations have left their stories and culture in our archeological remains most of which are yet to be discovered or studied. We need to "connect" with our forefathers to appreciate how they delivered the pristine environment intact to us, so that we may do so to our progeny.

A casual glance at the faces of our people leaves us with no doubt that our forefathers hail from different lands. Yet, we have remained free and peaceful for thousands of years. The glue which bound us together is the common culture and history. We need a renewed commitment to study our past and take pride in the great many people who have shaped our history.

Goal 4: Quality Staff

The University aims to attract and retain talented people who have a commitment to the mission and values of the University.

To realize this Goal, the University will:

1. Increase academic staff with doctorate qualifications to at least 20%.
2. Enhance the attractiveness of the benefits package for all staff.
3. Upgrade all teaching staff to at least graduate level.
4. Formulate a detailed staff development plan and a time-line to achieve these goals.
5. Provide high quality professional development and support services to assist staff improve their teaching skills.
6. Establish transparent recruitment, transfer and promotion policies and procedures.
7. Take initiatives to enhance the status of University staff.
8. Institute a reward scheme for excellent performance.
9. Enhance the collegiality and teamwork of all staff with appreciative and constructive feedback and open, effective and timely communication.
10. Maintain a safe work environment free from physical and emotional harm.
11. Enhance the management of human resources and support services.
12. Encourage self-learning and life-long learning as a necessary and viable form of staff development.
13. Develop library staff and organisation to ensure that Library Services builds on its reputation as the premier academic library service.

Dedicated university teachers make a great university. In fact, even in this day and age, at higher levels of learning, students seek a particular teacher just as in medieval times. A good teacher can teach even under a tree as was the case in classical times. All the rest are, at times, mere embellishments.

Goal 5: Sustainable Finance

The University will improve its financial sutainability by increasing income generation from diversified sources.

To realize this Goal, the University will:

1. Convince the government and the opinion-makers about the usefulness of the university for the well-being of the nation.
2. Diversify funding sources through the establishment of public-private partnership projects and establishment of externally funded Chairs.
3. Establish a cost-sharing mechanism for as many programmes as desirable.
4. Ensure that faculty/centre funds and resources are both effectively and optimally utilized.
5. Promote faculty/centre activities to attract funding from non-governmental sources.
6. Establish procedures to "sell" consultancy services and engage in other enterprise operations.
7. Improve financial planning and resource allocation to meet academic objectives for recurrent activities and strategic investment in capital and staff costs.
8. Develop and establish University's endowment schemes, investments in shares and securities.
9. Activate alumni association to make individual donations for earmarked projects.
10. Seek international funding for Student and staff mobility regionally and internationally.

By the end of the plan period, the University would have made great progress towards the establishment of a medical faculty. Other areas including radiography and medical technician training are equally in high demand as a nation.

Goal 6: Transforming Management

Transform the administrative and managerial culture and processes to enable MNU to be effective and efficient.

To realize this Goal, the University will:

1. Review and refine our system of governance, administrative and management systems to enhance decision-making and accountability, consistent with the values of the University.
2. Implement regular financial and management audits.
3. Review delegation of authority and accountability structures and review and improve reporting structures.
4. Rationalize components and activities across programmes to develop coherences among programmes and ensure that institute resources are effectively utilized to support its strategic objectives.
5. Ensure that institute administration is client-focused and highly professional.
6. Support devolved planning and decision making at all levels, together with overall strategic leadership and an effective accountability structure across the University.
7. Provide development and training opportunities to administrative staff to assist them in their professional development and to improve organizational efficiency and effectiveness.
8. Groom interested staff with aptitude for leadership positions.
9. Continually review existing organizational and reporting framework within the University to improve efficiency.
10. Enhance the planning process through more integrated planning and better information inputs.
11 Develop planning of student numbers, staff, research activity, buildings and facilities.
12. Monitor progress in the implementation of the Strategic, Divisional and Service plans on an annual basis and three-year basis.
13. Take forward the rolling programme of reviews of academic and service divisions and faculties and departments.
14. Provide outstanding services to library users in support of research, teaching, and learning.
15. Endeavour to secure the future of the diverse funding streams which currently support the collections, through meeting funders' targets and through maintaining the visibility of the significance and potential of the collections.

Both fishing and agriculture are vitally important for food security and development. With the establishment of Laamu Atoll Campus, the University must engage fully in both training and research in these fields. However, both areas are capital intensive in our context.

Goal 7: Wider Engagement with Society

The University will develop, enhance and sustain mutually supportive relationships with the wider community, industry, commerce and the government

To realize this Goal, the University will:

1. Leverage university strengths and resources to find and promote innovative and sustainable solutions to national and stakeholder needs and community challenges.
2. Enhance visibiltiy of MNU strengths by participating in nationally siginificant debates and issues.
3. Foster and reward the application of expertise and knowledge to community issues and build up a mechanism to support engagement.
4. Identify, develop and reinforce collegial and supportive relationships among MNU alumni, nationally and internationally.
5. Advance and sustain the University's interaction with the community through its libraries and collections.
6. Foster structured strategic relationships with specific high schools.
7. Launch popular short-term community access programmes with open entry.
8. Create learning partnerships with other regional, national and international tertiary education providers and organisations for the mutual benefit of students and staff.
9. Activate alumni association to enhance engagement with the community.
10. Seek accreditation of University programmes at overseas institutions.
11. Promote networking, partnerships and research collaboration with reputed international universities.

Over the years, so many important members of the community have contributed to the management and administration of the Univeristy by getting themselves involved in the University Council. Their impact has been invaluable in steering the institution towards a brighter future.

Goal 8: Improving our Facilities and Infrastructure

The University will provide an aesthetic amenity with high levels of functionality to promote academic enterprise.

To realize this Goal, the University will:

1. Ensure that infrastructural support is provided to cater to high quality teaching with particular attention to subject requirements and student needs.
2. Cater to effective utilization of teaching facilities through better management.
3. Ensure the provision of an appropriate physical environment suited to the teaching and learning needs of the institutes.
4. Establish schedules, procedures and standards for ongoing development and maintenance of physical facilities.
5. Audit space needs and usage on a regular basis to encourage the most efficient use of the physical facilities.
6. Encourage energy management and environmental awareness throughout the University.
7. Obtain land and invest on infrastructure consistent with the planned growth of the student numbers in Male' and in all atolls.
8. Review the quality and current usage of teaching facilities across the University and make recommendations on the best use of the available space.
9. Extend the stock of residential accommodation for staff housing in the interests of recruitment and retention of high-quality academic staff.
10. Continue to develop the capital planning of the University to ensure close alignment with academic priorities.
11. Provide high-quality, modern, and cost-effective IT services and training that supports education and research and meets the needs of the University and its members.

There are niche areas in which MNU can excel. This is particularly so in areas where Maldives has comparative advantages such as hospitality, tourism and fishing. The marine environment and the island geography also lend themselves for scientific research endeavours.

Goal 9: Increasing Student Success

Deliver outstanding facilities and services and manage them effectively and responsively for the benefit of staff, students and users beyond the University.

To realize this Goal, the University will:

1. Strengthen student support services as a unit or division.
2. Provide advisory services for students in relation to jobs, accommodation and such other issues.
3. Further develop ICT systems in support of student services
4. Provide technology and facilities to support student learning.
5. Develop a scholarship policy.
6. Provide quality student support and a contemporary and attractive learning environment that enhances students' educational experience.
7. Create an environment to facilitate student recreational activities.
8. Develop a student advising system.
9. Establish a student welfare system.

The University is bound legally to preserve the traditional arts and crafts of the Maldives so that the future generations can experience the rigour and the meticulous workmanship that make these so sought after.

The mission of the Maldives National University is to create, discover, preserve and disseminate knowledge and skills that are necessary to enhance the lives and livelihoods of people and essential for the cultural, social and economic development of the society so that this nation shall remain free and Islamic forever.