THE IMPACT OF SERVICE QUALITY PERCEPTIONS ON THE SERVICE DELIVERY OF A FINANCIAL AID OFFICE AT A METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY

Brian Gallant

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of MAGISTER IN BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION in the BUSINESS SCHOOL at the NELSON MANDELA METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY

Supervisor: MS BEVERLEY GRAY

JANUARY 2009
DECLARATION BY CANDIDATE

NAME : BRIAN GALLANT

STUDENT NUMBER : 203040384

QUALIFICATION : MAGISTER IN BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

TITLE OF PROJECT : THE IMPACT OF SERVICE QUALITY PERCEPTIONS
                  ON THE SERVICE DELIVERY OF A FINANCIAL AID
                  OFFICE AT A METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY

DECLARATION:

In accordance with Rule G4.6.3, I hereby declare that the above-mentioned treatise /
dissertation / thesis is my own work and that it has not previously been submitted for
assessment to another University or for another qualification.

SIGNATURE: __________________________

DATE: 30 JANUARY 2009
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I hereby extend my appreciation and thanks to the following persons and institutions for their contribution and support, thus enabling me to successfully complete this study.

- Ms Beverley Gray for her guidance, motivation and commitment shown during this study. The professionalism and consultation sessions conducted was of great value.

- The Financial Aid Office of the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University for their assistance with the distribution and collection of the questionnaires.

- My family for all the sacrifices made and interest shown in this study.

- My colleagues and friends for their assistance, motivation and care shown during this study.
ABSTRACT

Greater access to education for many South Africans is inextricably linked to the development of the country and its collective ability to deal with the many socio-economic challenges it presently faces. The availability of financial aid at Higher Education Institutions to support financially needy and academically deserving students as part of a comprehensive programme to address the need for skills development, socio-economic backlogs and imbalances that exist in the country is supported by various Government Departments, private donors and Higher Education Institutions.

Financial Aid Offices responsible for the distribution of both public and private donor funding, face various challenges at South African universities in their endeavours to render quality service and prompt service delivery to their clients, the students who are the recipients of this funding.

The present study attempts to identify the most important service quality dimensions relevant to effective and efficient service delivery in the Financial Aid Office at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University.

Furthermore, this study aims to assess the performance of the Financial Aid Office to provide possible recommendations with a view to improving service delivery at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University.

Against this background, the primary objective of this study is to measure financial aid students’ perceptions of service quality with a Financial Aid Office at a Higher Education Institution and estimate the effect these perceptions have on service delivery.

All bursary and loan awardees from 2008, that is, only students who were successful in their financial aid applications for 2008, were invited to collect and complete a questionnaire at the Financial Aid Office at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University.
The measuring instrument used was a self-administered, structured questionnaire divided into two sections. Section A measured service quality perceptions of the Financial Aid Office of the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University and Section B measured personal data of the respondents.

A total of 500 questionnaires was distributed of which 228 were returned, yielding a final sample of 204 that could be statistically analysed. Descriptive statistics were used to analyse the empirical results.

Overall, the results show that respondents were, by and large, satisfied with the service rendered by the Financial Aid Office at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University. Thus, perceptions of the five service quality dimensions measured in this study were favourable, implying that respondents did not have any major problems with the present service offering of the Financial Aid Office.

It is important to note that while these results indicate favourable perceptions of service quality of the Financial Aid office at one point in time, they will not necessarily be permanent. The Financial Aid Office must therefore ensure that it continues to build on this valuable strength. Specifically, the Financial Aid Office should continue delivering this level of quality of service and concentrate on improving the service quality of the items in the questionnaire with the lowest mean scores.

Service quality is an important construct and needs to be assessed in Financial Aid Offices to ensure the desired outcome of producing more graduates, especially from financially needy and academically deserving backgrounds. Students, as customers, deserve the best service, as they would expect from any other service provider such as a bank or a supermarket.

The strengths of this Financial Aid Office can serve to assist other universities in providing a positive student experience through the delivery of a quality service.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Declaration</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Tables</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Figures</td>
<td>xi</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION, PROBLEM STATEMENT AND SCOPE OF THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY 1
1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM 4
1.3 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY 8
1.4 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY 9
1.5 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY 10
1.5.1 Secondary sources of data 11
1.5.2 Primary sources of data 11
1.5.3 The sample 11
1.5.4 The measuring instrument 12
1.6 SCOPE OF THE STUDY 12
1.7 DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS 13
1.7.1 Higher education institution 13
1.7.2 Financial aid office 13
1.7.3 Bursary 14
1.7.4 Loan 14
1.7.5 Student 14
1.7.6 Service quality 14
1.7.7 Service delivery 15
1.8 STRUCTURE OF THE TREATISE 16
## CHAPTER 2
SERVICES MARKETING, SERVICE QUALITY AND SERVICE DELIVERY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>PERSPECTIVES ON SERVICES MARKETING</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2.1</td>
<td>The eight Ps of services marketing</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2.2</td>
<td>Linking services marketing, operations and human resources</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2.3</td>
<td>Service characteristics</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2.3.1</td>
<td>Intangibility</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2.3.2</td>
<td>Heterogeneity</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2.3.3</td>
<td>Simultaneous production and consumption</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2.3.4</td>
<td>Perishability</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>THE NATURE AND IMPORTANCE OF SERVICE QUALITY</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3.1</td>
<td>The meaning and determinants of service quality</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3.2</td>
<td>Dimensions of service quality</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3.3</td>
<td>The ‘GAPS’ model of service quality</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3.4</td>
<td>Service quality in a non-business environment</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3.5</td>
<td>Customer satisfaction</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>SERVICE DELIVERY</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4.1</td>
<td>Factors that influence customer expectations of service</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4.2</td>
<td>Factors that influence customer perceptions of service</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>THE IMPORTANCE OF SERVICE QUALITY IN THE FINANCIAL AID OFFICE AT THE NMMU</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5.1</td>
<td>Aims and objectives of financial aid</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5.2</td>
<td>The National Student Financial Aid Scheme</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5.3</td>
<td>The financial aid office at the NMMU</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>SUMMARY</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION 45
3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN 45
3.2.1 The formulation of the research problem 46
3.2.2 Exploratory research 47
3.2.3 Secondary data (literature review) 48
3.2.4 Primary data (descriptive research) 49
3.3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY 50
3.3.1 The sample and response rate 50
3.3.1.1 Sample selection 50
3.3.1.2 Realised sample 51
3.3.2 The measuring instrument 54
3.4 SUMMARY 56

CHAPTER 4
EMPIRICAL RESULTS

4.1 INTRODUCTION 57
4.2 EMPIRICAL RESULTS 57
4.2.1 Dimensions of service quality 58
4.2.1.1 Assurance 58
4.2.1.2 Tangibles 60
4.2.1.3 Empathy 62
4.2.1.4 Responsiveness 64
4.2.1.5 Reliability 66
4.2.2 Service delivery perceptions 68
4.2.3 Summary of the results 70
4.3 SUMMARY 70
CHAPTER 5
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION 71
5.2 REVIEW OF THE STUDY 71
5.3 INTERPRETATION OF EMPIRICAL RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS 73
  5.3.1 Objectives of the study 74
  5.3.2 Dimensions of service quality 75
  5.3.2.1 Assurance 76
  5.3.2.2 Tangibles 76
  5.3.2.3 Empathy 77
  5.3.2.4 Responsiveness 78
  5.3.2.5 Reliability 79
  5.3.3 Service delivery perceptions 79
5.4 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY 80
5.5 CONCLUSION 80

LIST OF SOURCES 82

ANNEXURE A: QUESTIONNAIRE 86
LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.1: Age breakdown of respondents 52
Table 3.2: Number of years students have been receiving financial aid 53
Table 3.3: Bursary type available to students 54
Table 3.4: Number of items per dimension 56
Table 4.1: Assurance 59
Table 4.2: Tangibles 61
Table 4.3: Empathy 63
Table 4.4: Responsiveness 65
Table 4.5: Reliability 67
Table 4.6: Service delivery perceptions 69
Table 4.7: Summary of service quality dimensions 70
# LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2.1</td>
<td>Interdependence of marketing, operations and human resources</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2.2</td>
<td>Dimensions of service quality</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2.3</td>
<td>Gap 1: Between customer expectations and management’s perceptions of the expectations</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2.4</td>
<td>Gap 2: Between management’s perceptions of customer’s expectations and service quality specifications</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2.5</td>
<td>Gap 3: Between service quality specifications and service delivery</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2.6</td>
<td>Gap 4: Between service delivery and external communications to customers about service delivery</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2.7</td>
<td>Customer perceptions of quality and customer satisfaction</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3.1</td>
<td>Proportion of respondents per gender group</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3.2</td>
<td>Proportion of respondents per home language</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3.3</td>
<td>Dependent on financial aid to complete studies</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION, PROBLEM STATEMENT AND SCOPE OF THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Significant improvements to the funding of higher education for financially needy students as well as academically deserving students have been made in both the public and private sectors. The Department of Education (DE) has made a substantial investment in widening access to higher education. At present, one in every four rand budgeted has been for the tuition and living costs of students who would not otherwise have been able to attend university (Pandor 2008:3).

While the DE and other governmental departments remain the largest contributors to scarce skills funding, there is a discernable increase in funds from Corporate South Africa (Naicker 2008:5). According to the Financial Aid Office Manager at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU), Nedbank entered into an agreement with the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) and contributed R15 million to be distributed between the 23 Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in South Africa. Furthermore, Nedbank has again made funds available for the 2009 academic year (NSFAS: Financial Aid Office Manual for 2009:24). The purpose of these bursaries is to fund studies in critical and scarce skills within the banking and microfinance sector.

The NSFAS operates in terms of the National Student Financial Aid Act No. 56 of 1999 (NSFAS: Financial Aid Office Manual for 2009:4). The scheme administers funding for various Government Departments, Corporate South Africa, non-government organisations (NGOs) and HEIs and only funds undergraduate studies at registered public HEIs. The Financial Aid Offices at HEIs are the main link between NSFAS and the students who receive financial assistance from NSFAS.
The number of students assisted through the NSFAS increased from 107,586 (2006) to 113,616 in 2007 (NSFAS 2008:10), while the financial awards made by NSFAS to HEIs increased from R1.4 billion in 2006 to R1.7 billion in 2007 (NSFAS 2008:28).

Over time, it has become the task of the Financial Aid Offices at HEIs in South Africa to administer donor funding for the purpose of managing student bursaries and student loans. Gradually, as the NSFAS funding was improved by various donors, but more specifically since 1999 when the NSFAS was established by the South African government and all HEIs were required to establish a Financial Aid Office, the workload for these Financial Aid Offices also increased (NSFAS Act No. 56 of 1999).

It has been argued that this administrative burden prevents Financial Aid Offices from concentrating on their primary task of interacting with and informing students of the many types of funding options available and how they can be accessed, so that the student can make the right financial aid choices (Naicker 2008:5). More specifically, consultation between the student and the actual donor requirements and obligations takes place at the level of the Financial Aid Officer. This consultation is essential, particularly in respect of scarce skills funding, where the terms and conditions applicable to each fund are defined by the donor (Naicker 2008:5). Therefore, it can be argued that improved donor funding, a larger administrative task and increasingly more students to serve, can lead to service quality and delivery problems at Financial Aid Offices of these institutions.

Students who wish to study and are presently studying at HEIs for whom donor funding from the DE, other Government Departments and Corporate South Africa is earmarked, have the right to be informed, the right of being provided with the administrative service, the right to consultation and the right to the ultimate financial benefit, as well as the obligation to meet all the stated requirements of the funds (NSFAS Act No. 56 of 1999).
Additionally, students as well as donors who are responsible for tuition fees and other costs at HEIs are also entitled to efficient and effective support services, of which financial aid administration is but one such service. The key to ensuring good service quality is meeting or exceeding what customers expect from the service (Zeithaml, Parasuraman & Berry 1990:20).


On the other hand, service quality is a focused evaluation that reflects the customer's perception of the five dimensions of service quality (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry 1985:46; Zeithaml & Bitner 1996:123; Zeithaml et al. 1990:20). In support of this view, Zeithaml et al. (1990:26) further argue that the five dimensions of service quality are a concise representation of the core criteria that customers employ in evaluating the quality of the service and it is thus reasonable to speculate that customers would consider all five criteria to be important. For the purpose of this study, the second view will be adopted.

Gathering information about customers can come from several sources. One such source is the firm’s personnel, in particular, frontline personnel who come into direct contact with their employer’s customers and prospective customers on a daily basis. Frontline personnel are a critical source of information about customers because their understanding of customers will open opportunities for the employee and the firm to adjust to the required levels of the customer’s needs (Bitner, Booms & Mohr 1994:96).
According to Bitner et al. (1994:96), there are two basic ways that customer knowledge obtained by frontline personnel is used to improve service quality:

- To facilitate interactions with customers;
- To make service quality improvement decisions.

Furthermore, marketing research is a key tool for understanding customer expectations and perceptions of services. More specifically, finding out what customers expect is essential to providing service quality (Zeithaml & Bitner 1996:137). From the customer’s point of view, the most immediate evidence of service occurs in the service encounter, when the customer interacts with the firm (Bitner et al. 1994:95).

In this chapter, the general overview of the study is presented, commencing with the background to the study and statement of the research problem. The purpose and objectives of the study are then clarified. The research design and methodology to be adopted for the study is briefly addressed. This is followed by the scope or limitations of the study and a list of definitions of key terms to be used. The structure of the treatise will conclude the chapter.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Naicker (2008:5) is of the opinion that higher education has so often served as the key to opening the door to a new world and a new life, and its role in the transformation of South African society and the economy cannot be underestimated. Furthermore, Naicker (2008:5) argues that in the current period in South Africa, as in many other developing countries, the ongoing cycle of poverty can be broken when the first generation in a family is given an opportunity to be educated to a level that allows the individual to be employed in a professional capacity.
Greater access to education for many South Africans is inextricably linked to the development of the country and its collective ability to deal with the many socio-economic challenges it presently faces (Naicker 2008:5).

Pityana (2007:5) agrees with the notion of support to financially needy students as part of a comprehensive programme to address the need for skills development, socio-economic backlogs and imbalances that exist in the country.

Government Departments as public institutions are charged with the responsibility of delivering services to the public (Matshabaphala 2008:3). Furthermore, the levels of efficiency and effectiveness in the delivery of public goods and services vary within Government Departments, units and teams (Matshabaphala 2008:3).

Liebenberg and Barnes (2004:8) argue that the higher education sector in South Africa should pay greater attention to the needs of customers if this sector is to succeed as students can consider various options of further education including international distance education. The higher education sector in South Africa comprises of 23 universities situated in eight of the country’s nine provinces.

Situated in Port Elizabeth in the Eastern Cape Province, the NMMU is part of the higher education sector as well as a public good. As a tertiary institution offering various degree, diploma and certificate programmes, the NMMU is also tasked to deal with skills development and ensuring access to higher education to assist South Africa to deal with socio-economic backlogs and imbalances.

In 2008, approximately 8 215 NMMU students out of a total student body of nearly 20 000 were granted financial aid in the form of bursaries and loans. Thus, the NMMU’s Financial Aid Office serviced in excess of 8 000 financial aid students in 2008 alone, not to mention the many enquiries
dealt with on a daily basis. It goes without saying that the NMMU’s Financial Aid Office is expected to deliver excellent service to the university’s clients.

However, a recent survey (Barnard & Nel 2007) revealed that students were not happy with the service rendered by the Financial Aid Office of the NMMU. Barnard and Nel (2007:35-36) highlighted the following concerns raised by students with regard to financial aid:

- Availability of information regarding financial aid;
- Assistance provided by staff in the Financial Aid Office;
- Time taken to receive feedback on a financial aid application;
- Availability of specific bursaries;
- Criteria applied in the allocation of bursaries;
- The type of communication used to communicate with students;
- The helpfulness and friendliness of administrative staff in the Financial Aid Office.

One recommendation emanating from the study was the implementation of programmes for all NMMU frontline administrative staff to assist them in improving their attitude and skills in terms of customer service excellence (Barnard & Nel 2007:65).

In the marketing of services, service quality is one aspect that relates to customer service excellence. While it is true that only the customer can be the judge of service quality, irrespective of the service provider (Gray 2007:25), improved perceptions of service quality result from a comparison of the consumer’s expectations, with the actual service performance (Parasuraman, Berry & Zeithaml 1990:34). Quality evaluations are, therefore, not made solely on the outcome of the service, but also involve evaluations of the process of service delivery, during which the customer with an expectation becomes a customer with a perception as well, and
possibly a changed expectation for the next encounter with the provider (Pitt & Jeantrout 1994:170).

After a complaint by a student to university officials at a Gauteng university about the quality of service in its Financial Aid Offices, an internal investigation was ordered to investigate the student’s complaint (Chuenyane 2008:2). The investigation revealed a scam with gross irregularities regarding the application and selection procedure with the NSFAS loan and bursary system. The scam included, inter alia, sexual favours for a loan, amendment of results for a fee and awarding a loan for a fee (Chuenyane 2008:2). As a result of these irregularities, the awarding of loans and bursaries did not have the desired effect of greater access to education for South Africans at this university.

The above example indicates that the Financial Aid Office faces various challenges at South African universities in its endeavour to render a quality service and prompt service delivery.

Non-profit service firms need to address the quality of their services, as failure to do so can lead to negative responses. Boshoff and Mazibuko (2008:14) argue that the dissatisfaction with service delivery within municipalities leads to violent responses from residents. Students sometimes express their dissatisfaction with university services with protests that may lead to violence on campuses.

The NSFAS, an institution established in accordance with the National Student Financial Aid Act No. 56 of 1999, is responsible for distributing funds to HEIs based on criteria stipulated by NSFAS. These funds are then distributed to financially needy and academically deserving students based on student applications and a strict selection process.
Against this background, the present study attempts to identify the most important service quality dimensions relevant to effective and efficient service delivery in the Financial Aid Office at the NMMU.

1.3 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Taylor (2007:7) argues that the dawn of democracy in South Africa in the early 1990’s brought an end to more than 100 years of higher education aimed primarily at the white population. Moreover, as higher education opened up more and more to black students, those who met the admission requirements struggled to find sufficient funding to study at HEIs, especially the more expensive, historically white institutions.

The DE has made a substantial investment through the establishment of NSFAS in 1996, in widening access to higher education (NSFAS 2008:6). In 2008, one in every four rand budgeted has been for the tuition and living costs of students who would otherwise not have been able to attend university (Pandor 2008:3).

As Taylor (2007:7) correctly points out, the establishment of the National Student Financial Aid Scheme through Act No. 56 of 1999 ensured the creation of a Financial Aid Office at each of South Africa’s 23 public HEIs to serve as partner of this scheme. Thus, Financial Aid Offices are relatively new to the higher education environment although similar functions were performed by other departments within universities. Because these offices manage millions of rands worth of donor funding from both the public and private sectors, they face numerous challenges on a daily basis (NSFAS 2008:28).

The Financial Aid Office of the NMMU was established through the merger of the University of Port Elizabeth and the incorporation of the Vista University Port Elizabeth Campus in 2004 and the Port Elizabeth Technikon in 2005 (A financial aid model for the NMMU 2005:1). The
constituent institutions of the merged NMMU operated under different policies and procedures with respect to the provision of financial aid to students, and more specifically, the allocation and administration of these loans were dealt with in terms of different systems operated at each institution (A financial aid model for the NMMU 2005:1).

Based on the Barnard and Nel (2007) study, there is a need to test student satisfaction with financial aid services at the NMMU in order for the Financial Aid Office to better understand student perceptions and expectations of service quality in the provision of this service.

This study aims to assess the performance of the Financial Aid Office to provide possible solutions with a view to improving service delivery at the NMMU. Students are, after all, a university’s customers and have options in the selection of a HEI at which to study (Liebenberg & Barnes 2004:7). More specifically, the business of higher education, as stated by Liebenberg and Barnes (2007:7), is extremely competitive today.

1.4 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

A study by Liebenberg and Barnes (2004:7) revealed that the higher education sector in South Africa would increasingly be forced to conduct its business in a manner similar to that of its private sector counterparts in order to survive and retain its market share. In order to succeed, greater attention will need to be paid to the customer, in this case the student, as students today are free to apply to an institution of higher education of their choice (Liebenberg & Barnes 2004:7).

The primary objective of this study is to measure financial aid students’ perceptions of service quality with a Financial Aid Office at a HEI and estimate the effect these perceptions could have on service delivery.

The following secondary objectives are linked to the main aim of the study:
To investigate service quality perceptions of students as customers of the Financial Aid Office at the NMMU;

To provide recommendations to the relevant university officials and Financial Aid Office staff that could possibly assist the NMMU in improving levels of student satisfaction;

To provide the Financial Aid Office with a basis for continuous assessment of its service delivery.

The research question posed in this study is to establish whether the service delivered by the NMMU’s Financial Aid Office is succeeding in meeting the needs of financial aid students, the group of customers this office serves. Additionally, to determine which quality dimensions rank in order of importance to assist the university in strategic planning purposes.

1.5 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

In order to realize the objectives of the study, a quantitative approach, which is objective in nature and concentrates on measuring phenomena, is preferred (Collis & Hussey 2003:13).

Furthermore, as stated by Collis and Hussey (2003:18), a quantitative approach involves collecting and analysing numerical data and applying statistical tests. Quantitative research is the precise count of some behaviour, knowledge, opinion or attitude, and therefore, in quantitative research, the concepts are converted into operational definitions and results appear in numeric form and are eventually reported in statistical language (Cooper & Schindler 2006:716).

The unit of analysis will be students who met the criteria for financial aid and were awarded bursaries and loans by the Financial Aid Office during the academic year of 2008 and between 2002 and 2007. Thus, the sample will comprise of students who have experience with the services offered by the Financial Aid Office at the NMMU.
The Financial Aid Office will provide the researcher with a list of these successful students. These students will be invited on a random select basis to collect a questionnaire at the Financial Aid Office, complete the questionnaire on their own and return it before a pre-determined date to the Financial Aid Office at the NMMU.

1.5.1 Secondary sources of data

The NMMU library services spread over their campuses was the main source of support for library books. Most of the journal articles that were requested were available online and PDF was the preferred format selected, otherwise hard copies were sourced from the open shelves at the South Campus library.

1.5.2 Primary sources of data

Exploratory research was conducted amongst two distinct bursary groups to ascertain any concerns and problems experienced with service delivery in the Financial Aid Office. Discussions were also held with the groups to gauge their understanding of the meaning of a quality service. The information obtained from these two groups assisted in the formulation of the research problem and finalisation of the questionnaire.

1.5.3 The sample

Students who were awarded a loan or bursary in 2008 were invited on a random select basis from the Financial Aid Office at the NMMU’s bursary and loan successful lists to collect and complete a questionnaire at its office. Staff working at the counter of the Financial Aid Office also identified bursary and loan awardees on a non-probability basis and invited them to complete a questionnaire at the counter, or return it completed at a later date. Students were invited through the SMS mobile telephone system on a random basis to collect and complete the questionnaire.
Once completed, it had to be returned to the Financial Aid Office by the deadline date communicated to the students.

Following this method of communication, a total of 500 questionnaires was distributed to awardees, of which 228 were returned and 204 could be statistically analysed.

### 1.5.4 The measuring instrument

The measuring instrument was constructed as a self-administered, structured questionnaire divided into two sections. Section A measured service quality while Section B measured the biographical data of the respondents. A total of 66 items were used to measure the five dimensions of service quality and service delivery perceptions.

For the purpose of this study, the five SERVQUAL dimensions proposed by Parasuraman et al. (1988) were utilised. While SERVQUAL has only five distinct dimensions, they nevertheless capture facets of all ten originally conceptualised dimensions (Parasuraman et al. 1988:24).

A seven-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly agree (7) to strongly disagree (1) was used to measure the 66 items of service quality and service delivery perceptions. Mean scores were calculated to analyse the empirical results.

### 1.6 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This study is confined to the assessment of service quality perceptions and its impact on service delivery of the Financial Aid Office of the NMMU only. The NMMU is a HEI established as a public HEI under the Higher Education Act 1997 (Act No. 101 of 1997). A person registered to study at a HEI is referred to as a student and not a customer. The service quality expectations of a student as a customer and the same student as a
customer of a business enterprise such as the national retail chain of
Clicks Stores that operates for profit, might be different.

A study by Liebenberg and Barnes (2004:14) suggests that the relationship
between lecturers (employees) and learners/students (customers) may not
be the same as in the case of the normal business environment.
Liebenberg and Barnes (2004:14) argue that the learner is not only the
customer, but also the ‘product’ of the HEI, suggesting that there could be
leadership and mentoring relationships that bring a new dimension to the
delivery of pure customer service.

Since the study is confined to the service provision of financial aid, only
students with a bursary or loan participated in the study. These students
generally understand the application process for financial aid up until the
point when the benefit of the bursary and/or loan is approved and paid to
the student.

1.7 DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS

For the purpose of this study, the following key concepts are defined.

1.7.1 Higher education institution

HEI refers to any HEI that is established, deemed to be established or
declared as public HEI under the Higher Education Act 1997 (Act No. 101
of 1997). The NMMU in the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Municipality in
the Eastern Cape of South Africa is a HEI.

1.7.2 Financial aid office

The Financial Aid Office is the administrative unit within the structures of a
HEI with the task of administering bursaries and loans on behalf of the
institution, public and private donors.
1.7.3 Bursary

A bursary refers to an amount of money awarded to a student to complete a specified qualification at a HEI, which the student is not required to pay back in compliance with the criteria and conditions set in the bursary conditions.

1.7.4 Loan

A loan means an amount of money awarded to a student to complete a specified qualification at a HEI, to defray the costs connected with his or her education, which the student will have to pay back in terms of conditions specified in a written agreement.

1.7.5 Student

A student means any person registered as a student at a HEI. For the purpose of this study, student will mostly refer to a recipient of financial aid.

1.7.6 Service quality

Zeithaml et al. (1990:26) suggested that consumer’s perceptions of service quality is a function of the following five service quality dimensions:

- tangibles
- reliability
- responsiveness
- assurance
- empathy

Parasuraman et al. (1988:16) indicate that these five dimensions are related to the discrepancy between consumers’ expectations and perceptions. Specifically, the authors considered that service quality, as
perceived by consumers, stemmed from a comparison of what consumers felt the service firm should offer based on their expectations, with their perceptions of the performance of firms providing the services.

Exploratory research by Parasuraman et al. (1985:47) revealed that the criteria used by consumers in assessing service quality fits ten potentially overlapping dimensions. These dimensions are reliability, responsiveness, competence, access, courtesy, communication, credibility, security, understanding and tangibles.

Zeithaml et al. (1990) in a follow up study reduced the ten dimensions to five dimensions namely: reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy and tangibles.

1.7.7 Service delivery

Lovelock and Wirtz (2007:53) identify service delivery as part of the service marketing system that consists of service operations, service delivery and other contact points of the service. Collectively, the visible part of service operations, service delivery and other contact points add up to what is called the service marketing system as described below (Lovelock & Wirtz 2007:53):

- Service operations are where inputs are processed and the elements of the service product are created.
- Service delivery is where the final assembly of these elements takes place and the product is delivered to the customer, often in the presence of other customers. In other words, the service is produced and consumed at the same time (Zeithaml et al. 1988:35).
- Other contact points of the service embraces all points of contact with customers, including advertising, billing and market research.
Service delivery is thus concerned with where, when and how the service product is delivered to the customer (Lovelock & Wirtz 2007:52). This subsystem embraces not only the visible elements of the service operating system - buildings, equipment and personnel - but may also involve exposure to other customers.

1.8 STRUCTURE OF THE TREATISE

The treatise is divided into five chapters structured as follows:

Chapter 1 provides the introduction and background to the study. An explanation of the problem area to be investigated and purpose for undertaking this study is motivated in this chapter. The objectives of the study are presented followed by a brief overview of the research design and methodology. The scope of the study and definitions of the most important terms are presented. The structure of the treatise concludes the chapter.

Chapter 2 addresses the literature review, with specific reference to services marketing in a HEI. Two important aspects of the study, namely service quality and service delivery, are also examined in this chapter.

Chapter 3 discusses the research design and methodology that is to be used in the study.

Chapter 4 presents the empirical results of the study.

Chapter 5 discusses the summary, conclusions and proposed recommendations of the study.
CHAPTER 2
SERVICES MARKETING, SERVICE QUALITY AND SERVICE DELIVERY

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Finding out what customers expect is essential to providing service quality, and marketing research is a key vehicle for understanding customer expectations and perceptions of services (Zeithaml & Bitner 1996:137). Moreover, Zeithaml and Bitner (1996:137) argue that in services, as with any offering, a firm that does no marketing research at all is unlikely to understand its customers. Furthermore, a firm that does marketing research, but not on the topic of customer expectations, may also fail to know what is needed to stay abreast with changing customer requirements.

In the present study, to improve service delivery in the Financial Aid Office at the NMMU, it is important to review the literature on services marketing, service quality and service delivery with the aim of better understanding the complexities of the service offering. These aspects are discussed in the sections that follow.

The importance of service quality in the Financial Aid Office and an overview of the Financial Aid Office operations conclude this chapter.

2.2 PERSPECTIVES ON SERVICES MARKETING

It is noted by Lovelock and Wirtz (2007:6) that the size of the service sector is on the increase around the world, in both developed and developing countries and that services account for between two-thirds and three-quarters of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in most of the more highly developed nations. Current figures for South Africa show that

Lovelock (2001:3) proposes the following definitions of services:

- **A service is an act or performance offered by one party to another. Although the process may be tied to a physical product, the performance is essentially intangible and does not normally result in ownership in any of the factors of production.**

- **Services are economic activities that create value and provide benefits for customers at specific times and places as a result of bringing about a desired change in - or on behalf of - the recipient of the service.**

In a later edition Lovelock and Wirtz (2007:15) define services as follows:

- **Services are economic activities offered by one party to another, most commonly employing time-based performances to bring about desired results in recipients themselves or in objects or other assets for which purchasers have responsibility.**

- **In exchange for their money, time and effort, service customers expect to obtain value from access to goods, labour, professional skills, facilities, networks and systems; but they do not normally take ownership of any of the physical elements involved.**

Service firms range in size from large international corporations such as airlines, banking and insurance to locally owned small business enterprises including restaurants, taxi operators and numerous business-to-business services (Lovelock 2001:6).

Governments and non-profit firms are also in the business of providing services. In many countries, universities, hospitals and museums are in public ownership or operate on a non-profit basis, but for-profit versions of
each type of institution also exist (Liebenberg & Barnes 2004:7; Matshabaphala 2008:3).

Many services require customers to participate actively in co-producing the service product (Lovelock & Wirtz 2007:19). Libraries, hair salons and hotels are examples of these. Customers place a value on their time and sometimes people are willing to pay more for faster service (Lovelock & Wirtz 2007:19).

2.2.1 The eight Ps of services marketing

The original four Ps associated with the marketing mix, namely product, price, place and promotion are extended by an additional four elements associated with service delivery (Lovelock & Wirtz 2007:22). These elements are physical environment, process, people and productivity and quality (Lovelock & Wirtz 2007:22). More specifically, these eight elements, which Lovelock and Wirtz (2007:22) refer to as the ‘eight Ps of services marketing’, collectively represent the ingredients required to create visible strategies for meeting customer needs profitably in a competitive marketplace.

The eight strategic elements of services marketing described by Lovelock and Wirtz (2007:22-25) are as follows:

(i) Product elements
If a product is poorly designed, it won’t create meaningful value for customers, even if the rest of the eight Ps are well executed. A service concept needs to be created that offer value and satisfy target customers better than those of the competitors.

(ii) Place and time
Delivering product elements to customers involves decisions on where and when the former are delivered to the latter, as well as methods and
channels employed. Speed and convenience of place and time have become important determinants of effective service delivery.

(iii) Price and other user outlays
Suppliers see pricing strategy as the mechanism to offset costs and to create a surplus for profits. Customers see price as a key part of the costs they must incur to obtain wanted benefits. Service marketers, therefore, must not only set prices that target customers are willing and able to pay, but also understand and seek to minimise other burdensome outlays that customers incur in using the service.

(iv) Promotion and education
No marketing programme can succeed without effective communication. Suppliers need to inform and educate potential customers about the benefits of the service, where and when to obtain it and how to participate in service processes to get the best results.

(v) Process
Creating and delivering product elements requires design and implementation of effective processes. Customers are often actively involved in these processes, especially when acting as co-producers. Badly designed processes lead to slow, bureaucratic, and ineffective service delivery, wasted time and a disappointing experience.

(vi) Physical environment
Service firms need to manage physical evidence carefully, because it can have a profound impact on customers’ impressions. The appearance of buildings, interior furnishings, equipment, staff member’s uniforms, signs, printed material and other visible cues all provide tangible evidence of a firm’s service quality.
(vii) People
Many services will always require direct interaction between customers and contact personnel. The nature of these interactions strongly influences how customers perceive service quality. Service firms thus need to devote significant effort to recruiting, training and motivating employees.

(viii) Productivity and quality
The strategies with the biggest potential payoffs may be those that seek to improve productivity and quality simultaneously. Improving productivity is essential for reducing costs and improving quality is essential for product differentiation and for building customer satisfaction and loyalty.

2.2.2 Linking services marketing, operations and human resources

Lovelock (2001:18) is of the opinion that based on the eight Ps of services model, marketing cannot operate successfully in isolation from other functions in a service business. Thus Lovelock (2001:18) believes that the three management functions which play central and interrelated roles in meeting customer needs are marketing, operations and human resources. Figure 2.1 illustrates this interdependency. Service firms must understand the implications of the eight components of integrated service management to develop effective strategies.
In the sections that follow, further reference is made on how process and staff influence customer perceptions on service quality and service delivery.

2.2.3 Service characteristics

According to Zeithaml and Bitner (1996:18), inherent differences exist between goods and services which result in unique management challenges for service businesses and for manufacturers that offer services as a core offering.

This section will highlight the four service characteristics very briefly as identified by Zeithaml and Bitner (1996:18-21).

2.2.3.1 Intangibility

Services cannot be seen, felt or tasted as can be done with tangible goods. Services are performances or actions rather than objects.
The above have the resultant effect that services cannot be inventoried, readily displayed or easily communicated to customers. Furthermore, quality may be difficult for customers to assess.

2.2.3.2 Heterogeneity

As employees are delivering services in the firm, and are also perceived to be the service by customers, it is understandable that no two services will be precisely alike as they are produced by employees. Furthermore, heterogeneity also results because no two customers are precisely alike as each will have unique demands or experience the service in a unique way.

The fact that services are heterogeneous across time, firms and people, consistent service quality cannot be ensured.

2.2.3.3 Simultaneous production and consumption

This means that the customer is present while the service is being produced and thus views and perhaps even takes part in the production process. Furthermore, it is also possible that customers interact with each other during the service production process and thus may affect each other’s experiences.

The above means that the quality of service will be dependent on what happens in this ‘production process’ based on the interactions between employees and customers.

2.2.3.4 Perishability

Perishability refers to the fact that services cannot be saved, stored, resold or returned (Zeithaml & Bitner 1996:21).
The fact that services cannot typically be returned or resold also implies a need for strong recovery strategies when things do go wrong (Zeithaml & Bitner 1996:21).

2.3 THE NATURE AND IMPORTANCE OF SERVICE QUALITY

Zeithaml et al. (1990:x) have worked since 1983 on three central questions:

- What is service quality?
- What causes service quality problems?
- What can firms do to solve these problems and improve their services?

It is therefore appropriate to consult their views and refer to their work and use the models developed by them in this discussion.

To answer the above questions, Zeithaml et al. (1990) conducted ongoing research and their findings and work over nearly three decades are referred to extensively in the literature on service quality, customer satisfaction and service delivery.

2.3.1 The meaning and determinants of service quality

Service quality can be defined as the discrepancy between customers’ expectations and perceptions (Zeithaml et al. 1990:20). The key to ensuring good service quality is meeting or exceeding what customers expect from the service (Zeithaml et al. 1990:20).

Zeithaml et al. (1990:19) identified the following four factors that influence expectations and are therefore potential determinants of expectations:

- Word-of-mouth communications refers to what customers hear from other customers.
- The **personal needs** of customers might moderate their individual expectations to a certain degree.
- The extent of **past experience** with using a service could also influence customers’ expectations levels.
- **External communications** from service providers play a key role in sharing customers’ expectations.

### 2.3.2 Dimensions of service quality

Zeithaml *et al.* (1990:21) developed ten dimensions as the criteria used by customers in judging service quality. The ten dimensions listed and defined below are not necessarily independent of one another. The set of ten general dimensions of service quality is exhaustive and appropriate for assessing quality in a broad variety of services (Zeithaml *et al.* 1990:20).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DIMENSIONS</th>
<th>DEFINITION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tangibles</td>
<td>Appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel and communication materials.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliability</td>
<td>Ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsiveness</td>
<td>Willingness to help customers and provide prompt service.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competence</td>
<td>Possession of the required skills and knowledge to perform the service.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courtesy</td>
<td>Politeness, respect, consideration, and friendliness of contact personnel.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credibility</td>
<td>Trustworthiness, believability, honesty of the service provider.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Security  Freedom from danger, risk or doubt.
Access  Approachability and ease of contact.
Communication  Keeping customers informed in language they can understand and listening to them.
Understanding the customer  Making the effort to know customers and their needs.

Follow-up research resulted in a refinement of the ten dimensions into five similar, but distinct dimensions of service quality, known as SERVQUAL (Parasuraman et al. 1988:5). The revised SERVQUAL captured facets of all the ten originally conceptualised dimensions. Parasuraman et al. (1988:6) refer to these five dimensions as follows:

Reliability  :  Ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately.
Responsiveness  :  Willingness to help customers and provide prompt service.
Assurance  :  Employees knowledge and courtesy and their ability to inspire trust and confidence.
Empathy  :  Caring, individualised attention given to customers.
Tangibles  :  Appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel and written materials.

Zeithaml and Bitner (1996:119) state that these five dimensions represent the way consumers arrange information about service quality in their minds. These five dimensions are applicable to all services and would be relevant for internal, departmental and firm services as well (Zeithaml & Bitner 1996:119).

Figure 2.2 illustrates the five dimensions of service quality.
The dimensions described above will give firms an opportunity to improve their quality of service as perceived by customers. The key to delivering high quality service is to balance customers’ expectations and perceptions and close the gaps between the two (Zeithaml et al. 1990:33). The SERVQUAL model can assist service firms to determine where and how serious the gaps are (Zeithaml et al. 1990:33). The next section will discuss the ‘GAPS’ model of service quality.

2.3.3 The ‘GAPS’ model of service quality

In most services, quality occurs during service delivery, usually in the form of an interaction between the customer and contact personnel of the service firm (Parasuraman et al. 1985:42). For this reason, service quality is highly dependent on the performance of employees, an organisational resource that cannot be controlled to the degree that components of tangible goods can be engineered (Zeithaml, Berry & Parasuraman 1988:35; Zeithaml et al. 1990).
It is evident from the literature that delivering high service quality produces measurable benefits in profit, cost savings and market share (Lovelock 1996:163).

Parasuraman et al. (1985) developed a service quality model indicating that consumer’s quality perceptions are influenced by a series of four distinct gaps occurring in organisations. These gaps on the service provider’s side, which can impede delivery of services that consumers perceive to be of high quality, are as follows:

Gap 1 : Difference between consumer expectations and management perceptions of consumer expectations.

Gap 2 : Difference between management perceptions of consumer expectations and service quality specifications.

Gap 3 : Difference between service quality specifications and the service actually delivered.

Gap 4 : Difference between service delivery and what is communicated about the service to consumers.

It is important to identify the causes of service quality shortfalls before a service can be substantially improved, as is the case in the present study.

These four gaps which will be defined in the discussion that follows, are the major causes of the service quality gap customers may perceive (Zeithaml et al. 1990).

**GAP 1: CUSTOMER EXPECTATION - MANAGEMENT PERCEPTION GAP**

Senior executives with the authority and responsibility for setting priorities may not always fully understand customers’ service expectations which may trigger a chain of bad decisions and sub-optimal resource allocations that result in perceptions of poor service quality (Zeithaml et al. 1990:38).
The size of Gap 1 in any service firm is proposed to be a friction of marketing research orientation, upward communication and levels of management (Zeithaml et al. 1988:37).

- **Marketing research orientation**
  - Marketing research is a key vehicle for understanding consumer expectations and perceptions of services and therefore the size of Gap 1 should depend greatly on the amount of marketing research conducted.
  - Another factor influencing the degree of marketing research orientation is the extent to which top managers interact directly with consumers.

- **Upward communication**
  The understanding of top managers of the consumer may depend on the extent and types of communication received from customer-contact personnel and from non-company personnel who represent the company and its services. Relevant communication in this regard will be reports of problems and exceptions in service delivery, performance reports on contact personnel and financial information that would signal inferior or superior performance.

- **Levels of management**
  The greater the number of layers between customer-contact personnel and top managers are, the larger Gap 1 is expected to be.
Figure 2.3: Gap 1: Between customer expectations and management’s perceptions of the expectations


GAP 2: MANAGEMENT PERCEPTIONS - SERVICE - QUALITY SPECIFICATIONS GAP

The size of Gap 2 in any service firm is proposed to be a function of management commitment to service quality, goal setting, task standardisation and perception of feasibility (Zeithaml et al. 1988:39).

- Management commitment to service quality
  The absence of total management commitment to service quality is due to the emphasis on other objectives such as cost reduction and short-term profit that can be more easily measured.

- Goal setting
  The development of service goals involves defining service quality in ways that enable providers to understand what management wants to deliver. To reduce the size of Gap 2 will require the existence of a formal quality programme that includes the identification and measurement of service quality standards.
- **Task standardisation**
  Managers must ensure more standardisation of tasks for service delivery to reduce Gap 2.

- **Perception of feasibility**
  Variables related to this construct include the organisational capabilities and systems for meeting specifications and the degree to which managers believe expectations can be met economically.

![Figure 2.4: Gap 2: Between management’s perceptions of customer’s expectations and service quality specifications](image)

**Source:** Zeithaml et al. (1990:41).

**GAP 3: SERVICE - QUALITY SPECIFICATIONS - SERVICE DELIVERY GAP**

This is the discrepancy between the specifications for the service and the actual delivery of the service. Zeithaml et al. (1988:41) refer to it as the ‘service performance gap’, that is, the extent to which service providers do not perform at the level expected by management. Furthermore, the service performance gap occurs when employees are unable or unwilling to perform the service at the desired level.
The main theoretical constructs proposed to account for the size of Gap 3 are listed below.

- **Teamwork**
  The following aspects are critical to teamwork: The extent to which employees view other employees as customers, the extent to which employees feel management cares about them, the extent to which employees feel that they are cooperating rather than competing with each other, and the extent to which employees feel personally involved and committed.

- **Employee-job fit**
  Zeithaml et al. (1988:42) and (1990:43) argue that service quality problems occur because contact personnel are not well suited to their positions. Personnel holding these jobs are frequently among the least educated and lowest paid employees in their companies.

- **Technology-job fit**
  Appropriate and reliable technology must be provided for high quality service delivery.

- **Perceived control**
  If service employees perceive themselves to be in control of situations they encounter in their jobs, they experience less stress which in turn lead to higher performance.

- **Supervisory control systems**
  The use of output control systems and behavioural control systems encourages employee performance that is consistent with customer expectations of quality service.
Role conflict
If the expectations of senior executives, immediate supervisors and customers are incompatible or too demanding, employees experience role conflict; the perception that they cannot satisfy all the demands of all these individuals. Compensation tied to delivery of service quality can reduce role conflict.

Role ambiguity
This occurrence will exist when employees are uncertain about what managers or supervisors expect from them and how to satisfy those expectations or because they do not know how their performance will be evaluated and rewarded.

Figure 2.5: Gap 3: Between service quality specifications and service delivery

Source: Zeithaml et al. (1990:42).

GAP 4: SERVICE DELIVERY - EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS GAP

A key determinant of customers’ expectations is the service providers’ external communications. Promises made by a service company through its media advertising, sales force and other communications raise expectations which serve as the standard against which customers assess service quality. A discrepancy between the actual service and the
promised service therefore has an adverse effect on customers’ perceptions of service quality (Zeithaml et al. 1990:43).

Zeithaml et al. (1988) propose that horizontal communication and propensity to overpromise within a firm affect the size of Gap 4.

● Horizontal communication
If high service quality is to be perceived by the consumer, horizontal communication among departments is necessary. One obvious form of coordination necessary in providing service quality is consistency in policies and procedures across departments and branches.

● Propensity to overpromise
An intuitive explanation for Gap 4 is that many service firms feel pressured to acquire new business and to meet or beat competition and therefore tend to overpromise (Zeithaml et al. 1988:45).

Figure 2.6: Gap 4: Between service delivery and external communications to customers about service delivery

Source: Zeithaml et al. (1990:44).

2.3.4 Service quality in a non-business environment

It is argued by Lovelock and Wirtz (2007:6) that for-profit and not-for-profit services differ in their underlying goals, although both want to create value for their various stakeholders. For-profit businesses seek to achieve financial profits subject to social constraint, whereas not-for-profit service suppliers seek to achieve social profits subject to financial constraints.
Service quality in higher education, Government Departments and municipalities are discussed with the same theory and service quality research methods and models as that of private firms (Boshoff & Mazibuko 2008:14-24; Liebenberg & Barnes 2004:7-15; Matshabaphala 2008:3-10).

Government Departments as public institutions are charged with the responsibility of delivering services to the public. The levels of efficiency and effectiveness on the delivery of public goods vary within Government Departments, units and teams (Matshabaphala 2008:3).

Liebenberg and Barnes (2004:8) argue that the higher education sector in South Africa should attend more to its customers needs in order to succeed. The authors state that the market share of public institutions is being reduced or at least competed for as technology with free access to the Internet allow students to continue their studies at any institution in the world without leaving their homes. This and other developments is making the business of higher education extremely competitive.

Non-profit or non-business environment service firms need to attend to the quality of their services as failures can lead to negative responses (Boshoff & Mazibuko 2008:14).

2.3.5 Customer satisfaction

Zeithaml and Bitner (1996:123) state that perceived service quality is a component of customer satisfaction on the one hand and a focused evaluation that reflects the customer’s perceptions of the five specific dimensions of service on the other hand.

Figure 2.7 illustrates the distinctions between service quality and customer satisfaction. As shown, service quality is a focused evaluation that reflects the customer’s perception of the five specific dimensions of service (see section 2.3.2). Satisfaction, on the other hand, is more inclusive, it is
influenced by perceptions of service quality, product quality and price as well as situational factors and personal factors (Zeithaml & Bitner 1996:123-124).

**Figure 2.7: Customer perceptions of quality and customer satisfaction**

![Diagram showing customer perceptions of quality and customer satisfaction]


**2.4 SERVICE DELIVERY**

Service delivery is concerned with where, when and how the service product is delivered to the customer (Lovelock & Wirtz 2007:53).

More specifically, Lovelock and Wirtz (2007:53) identify service delivery as part of the service marketing system that consists of service operations, service delivery and other contact points (also see section 1.7.1 in Chapter 1).

Service delivery is also referred to as the ‘moment of truth’ when the service provider and the service customer confront one another (Lovelock & Wirtz 2007:50).
The factors that influence customer expectations of service and the factors that influence customer perceptions of service are discussed in the following section.

2.4.1 Factors that influence customer expectations of service

Expectations play such a critical role in customer evaluation of services and it is important to understand the factors that influence them. Zeithaml and Bitner (1996:82-88) list the following factors:

- **Sources of desired service expectations**

  Personal needs, those states or conditions essential to the physical or psychological well being of the customer, are pivotal factors that shape the level of desired service. Enduring service intensifiers are individual, stable factors that lead the customer to a heightened sensitivity to service.

- **Sources of adequate service expectations**

  Transitory service intensifiers are temporary, usually short-term individual factors that make the customer more aware of the need for service. Problems with the initial service can lead to heightened expectations. Performing a service right the first time is very important, because customers value service reliability above all other dimensions (Parasuraman et al. 1990:31). Perceived service alternatives are other providers from whom the customer can obtain service. The customers’ perception that service alternatives exist raises the level of adequate service and narrows the zone of tolerance. Customers’ self-perceived service role refers to the degree to which customers exert an influence on the level of service they receive.
Customer expectations are partly shaped by how well they believe they are performing their own roles in service delivery. 

**Situational factors** are service performance conditions that customers view as beyond the control of the service provider. These factors temporarily lower the level of adequate service, therefore widening the zone of tolerance. 

**Predicted service** refers to the level of service customers believe they are likely to get. If customers predict good service, their levels of adequate service are likely to be higher than if they predict poor service.

### 2.4.2 Factors that influence customer perceptions of service

Zeithaml and Bitner (1996:104-116) identified various factors that influence customer perceptions of service. Four factors influencing customer perceptions of service will be referred to in this section.

- **Service encounters or ‘moments of truth’**

  The most vivid impression of service occurs in the service encounter, when the customer interacts with the service firm. It is in these encounters that customers receive a snapshot of the organisation’s service quality, and each encounter contributes to the customer’s overall satisfaction and willingness to do business with the organisation again.

- **The evidence of service**

  As services are intangible, customers are searching for evidence of service in every interaction they have with an organisation. **People, process and physical evidence** are the major categories of evidence as experienced by the customer. These categories together represent the service and provide the evidence that tangibilises the offering.
• Image

Other than impressions from the immediate service encounter and evaluations of service evidence, customer perceptions can be influenced by the image or reputation of the organisation. Organisational image is defined as perceptions of an organisation reflected in the associations held in customer memory.

A very positive image will serve as a buffer against incidents of poor service. If a customer has an overall very positive image of the organisation, one bad experience will most likely not be fatal.

• Price

The price of a service can also greatly influence perceptions of quality, satisfaction and value. As services are intangible and often difficult to judge before purchase, price is frequently relied on as a surrogate indicator that will influence quality expectations and perceptions.

2.5 THE IMPORTANCE OF SERVICE QUALITY IN THE FINANCIAL AID OFFICE AT THE NMMU

Bursaries and scholarships are of prime importance in attracting and retaining students at universities, particularly in the Eastern Cape with its high levels of poverty and unemployment (Bursary and scholarship requests 2007:1). On 1 January 2005, the NMMU was formed by the merger of the University of Port Elizabeth (incorporating Vista University, Port Elizabeth Campus in 2004) and the Port Elizabeth Technikon, creating an institution with approximately 23 000 students (A financial aid model for the NMMU 2005:1).

The constituent institutions of the merged NMMU operated under different policies and procedures with respect to the provision of financial aid to
students. All the institutions received funding from the NSFAS (see section 2.5.2) to provide loans to needy and academically deserving students. However, the allocation and administration of these loans were dealt with in terms of different systems (A financial aid model for the NMMU 2005:1).

How students view the services provided by the Financial Aid Office and to identify common service failure points to improve service delivery at the NMMU is an important assessment given the above history and background.

2.5.1 Aims and objectives of financial aid

The provision of financial aid to students has a threefold aim and is covered by the following objectives:

- To recruit top students to the university;
- To promote and reward academic excellence at the university;
- To enable students who are both financially needy and academically deserving to gain access to the university.

The first two objectives are met by providing merit bursaries to prospective and current undergraduate students, while the third objectives are met by allocating loans under the NSFAS.

The university administers a number of bursaries on behalf of companies and trustees with specific requirements and criteria. These bursaries and funds are advertised as and when they become available.

2.5.2 The National Student Financial Aid Scheme

NSFAS was established by the NSFAS Act (Act No. 56 of 1999) to:
● provide for the management, governance and administration of the NSFAS;
● provide for the granting of loans and bursaries to eligible students at public higher education institutions;
● provide for the administration of such loans and bursaries; and
● provide for the recovery of loans.

The NSFAS expresses the South African government’s desire to impact on South Africa’s racially skewed student diplomat and graduate populations by providing a sustainable financial aid scheme that enables academically deserving and financially needy students to meet their own and South Africa’s development needs (Act No. 56 of 1999).

The Financial Aid Office at the various universities administers the funds allocated by NSFAS to the institutions through:

● inviting student applications;
● selecting successful candidates;
● allocating funds to students;
● reporting to NSFAS on the administration of funds and the performance of selected candidates.

2.5.3 The financial aid office at the NMMU

The Financial Aid Office is one of six departments under the Directorate of Student Affairs. The others being:

● Student Health
● Sport
● Student Development and Governance
● Arts and Culture
● Student Housing
The Financial Aid Office renders their services on the various campuses of the NMMU with identifiable office space on the following campuses:

- Missionvale
- George - Saasveld
- North
- South

The Financial Aid Office is headed by a Senior Manager reporting to the Executive Director: Student Affairs. The total number of employees spread over the various campuses consists of:

One Senior Manager
One Manager
Two Senior Financial Aid Officers
Five Financial Aid Officers
Four Financial Aid Clerks
One Financial Aid Administrative Clerk
One Compliance Officer (contract position)

The Financial Aid Office embarked on a staff training programme during 2007 to train all staff on the computerised financial aid subsystem (ITS). Regular bi-annual strategic sessions were held since June 2006 and a business process was developed to indicate document flow with the relevant Integrated Tertiary Software or computerised financial aid subsystem. A teambuilding session was also arranged at the end of 2007.

The Financial Aid Office developed various marketing and resource material which includes:

- Application forms for loans and bursaries
- Bursaries and financial aid booklet
- Information brochures
Posters

The Financial Aid Office developed various partnerships with other internal departments, these include the following:

- Finance
- Marketing
- Admissions
- Student Counseling
- Exams
- Residences
- SRC and
- Faculty Officers

The cost of living in 2008 and the increasing cost of higher education in South Africa make the financial aid service an important one to assist students and their families to make higher education affordable. Students who are presently receiving bursaries from donors administered by the NMMU make both the donor and the student customers, not only of the Financial Aid Office, but the university as well. For the customer, this creates an expectation that certain services will be delivered by the Financial Aid Office, for example:

- Payment of tuition fees
- Payment of books
- Payment of accommodation
- Payment of monthly allowance
- Payment of meals
- Provide donor with progress reports
- Other specific requirements

The customer, on the other hand, has the obligation to:
• Meet the specific donor requirements as stated in the bursary and loan agreement documents;
• Meet the relevant academic requirements;
• Apply before the due date for the renewal of the bursary and loan;
• Hand in the relevant and required supporting documents for the bursary and loan;
• Inform the Financial Aid Office and donor of any programme and module changes and cancellations;
• Adhere to all the relevant university policies and procedures.

2.6 SUMMARY

This chapter presented an overview of services marketing issues relevant to the present study. The nature and importance of service quality was discussed with an explanation provided of the service quality ‘gaps’ model. Service delivery was addressed by means of the various expectations and perceptions customers have of services. The chapter was concluded with an overview of the financial aid function at the NMMU. The next chapter addresses the research design and methodology followed in this study.
CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Research is very largely a problem-solving activity (Thomas 2004:1). Moreover, research according to Collis and Hussey (2003:1) is a process of enquiry and investigation which is systematic, methodical and increases knowledge.

Therefore, research is the process of obtaining and analysing data in order to answer questions, solve problems or test hypotheses and so contribute to understanding and knowledge (Thomas 2004:3).

The present study aims to assess the service quality perceptions of students of the Financial Aid Office at the NMMU and to provide possible solutions to improve service delivery in this office. How the students view the services provided by the Financial Aid Office and the identification of common service failure points is important to realize the above objective.

The purpose of this chapter is to explain the research design and methodology that was followed to solve the research problem of this study.

3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

The following components (Gray 2007:166-167) will be discussed in the sections that follow with a view to reaching conclusions about the research problem:

- Formulation of the research problem
- Exploratory research
- Secondary data (literature review)
- Primary data (descriptive research)
Collis and Hussey (2003:113) state that the research design will guide and focus the research.

3.2.1 The formulation of the research problem

On 1 January 2005, the NMMU was formed through a process of mergers initiated by the National Department of Education in South Africa. The constituent institutions of the newly merged university namely, the University of Port Elizabeth (incorporating the Vista University Port Elizabeth Campus in 2004) and the Port Elizabeth Technikon, managed and operated under different policies and procedures with respect to the provision of financial aid to students.

Recent news reports through the media and national television in South Africa identified student financial aid as one of the reasons for student unhappiness at HEIs in South Africa. For example, Chuenyane (2008:2) claimed that students at a Gauteng university paid Financial Aid officials to process their applications even though the students did not meet the requirements.

A study conducted to measure student’s experiences with student support services at the NMMU also revealed concerns with the provision of student financial aid (Barnard & Nel 2007). Most notably, as mentioned in section 1.2, students indicated a number of shortcomings ranging from the availability of information on financial aid, to the helpfulness and friendliness of Financial Aid office staff.

Against this background, and given the historical nature of the university, the need to test student satisfaction in their use of student financial aid services at the NMMU in order for the Financial Aid Office to understand student perceptions and expectations becomes relevant. The main aim of the study is to determine the service quality perceptions financial aid students have of the Financial Aid Office at the NMMU.
The research problem and objectives of this were stated in section 1.2 and 1.4 of Chapter 1 respectively. Briefly, the main objective is to measure financial aid students’ perceptions of service quality with the Financial Aid Office at the NMMU and estimate the effect these perceptions could have on efficient and effective service delivery by this office.

3.2.2 Exploratory research

In exploratory research, the focus is on gaining insights and more knowledge of the subject area to be investigated (Collis & Hussey 2003:11). Different techniques such as case studies, observation and historical analysis can be used which provide both quantitative as well as qualitative data (Collis & Hussey 2003:10).

Exploratory research was conducted with two distinct bursary groups to determine any problems and/or concerns they might have been experiencing with regard to service delivery in the Financial Aid Office at the NMMU. Discussions were also held to assess the groups’ understanding of the meaning of a quality service.

One group of four senior students represented a larger group of 180 students from first year level to final year students, with a list of their concerns. The other group totalling 80 students, consisted of all the bursary holders within a specific career field representing students from the first year of study to the fourth and final year of study.

Students from both groups raised the following practical concerns:

- Notification to successful loan and bursary applicants must be communicated before the registration dates for the following academic year.
- The refund of registration fees paid in 2008 did not take place as promised.
• Sufficient provision must be made for the transfer of money to facilitate the payment of printing and photocopying from bursaries to be used in the computer laboratories and the library respectively.
• A transport allowance must be provided for non-resident students from the bursary or loan fund.
• Criteria for a bursary or loan is not clear. (The bursary and loan criteria for selection and continued assistance must be stipulated and outlined in a more clear manner.)
• The bursary and loan must increase in accordance with the rate of inflation.
• Special accommodation arrangements must be made for bursars.
• The funding agreement must be revised.
• Tutors must be provided to first year students.
• Monthly allowances must be available from January to October and not from March to November as is presently the case.
• Meal allowances must be paid in cash and not in the form of a meal voucher.
• The closing dates for application must be clear and communicated well in advance to current students and prospective students.

While accommodation of these concerns falls outside the scope of this study, where relevant, cognisance was taken of some concerns and were incorporated into the questionnaire design.

3.2.3 Secondary data (literature review)

A secondary source as defined by Welmann and Kruger (1999:36) provides second-hand information about events. Such a source has not witnessed the events himself or herself, but has obtained the information either from someone else who did experience the event or who has himself or herself obtained the information from a person who had indeed experienced it first hand (Welmann & Kruger 1999:36).
The NMMU library services spread over the various campuses was the main source of support for library books and journal articles. The South Campus library was instrumental in locating books from the other campus libraries.

3.2.4 Primary data (descriptive research)

Primary data are obtained by researchers for the specific purposes of their research project (Thomas 2006:92). Furthermore, the availability of original data is crucial to the successful outcome of the research (Thomas 2006:92).

According to Collis and Hussey (2003:52-53), the positivistic paradigm is a research philosophy based on the natural sciences, alternatively also named quantitative research. The positivistic paradigm focuses on facts, casual relationships and fundamental laws according to external objects. A deductive approach is adopted and quantitative data are collected (Collis & Hussey 2003:52-53).

Collis and Hussey (2003:46-79) note that the assumptions underpinning the positivistic paradigm are as follows:

- Ontological assumption: Reality is objective and singular quite apart from the researcher in the study;

- Epistemological assumption: Researcher is independent from what is being researched;

- Axiological assumption: The process of research is value-free and unbiased;
Rhetorical assumption: The language of research is formal and based on a set of definitions. There is no personal voice and quantitative words are used;

Methodological assumption: The research process is of a deductive nature where generalizations lead to prediction, explanation and understanding. High levels of reliability and validity are often achieved.

In the present study, the responses of the respondents will be quantified. The research approach will therefore fall within the quantitative paradigm.

3.3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research methodology refers to the overall approach to the research process, from the theoretical underpinning to the collection and analysis of the data (Collis & Hussey 2003:55).

This section will discuss the sample selected and the measuring instrument in order to understand the research methodology in the present study.

3.3.1 The sample and response rate

The Financial Aid Office at the NMMU participated in the study to obtain scientifically valid results.

3.3.1.1 Sample selection

The Financial Aid Office at the NMMU assisted with this process by making their bursary and loan successful list available and inviting students from this list to collect and complete a questionnaire at their offices. Staff working at the counter of the Financial Aid Office also identified bursary
and loan awardees and invited them to complete a questionnaire at the counter, or to return the questionnaire at a later date.

Students were invited through the SMS mobile telephone system on a random basis to collect and complete the questionnaire. Once the self-administered questionnaire had been completed, it had to be returned to the Financial Aid Office.

3.3.1.2 Realised sample

A total of 500 questionnaires was distributed to awardees, 228 were returned and 204 could be statistically analysed. Because anonymity of respondents was guaranteed, thus it was not possible to carry out any telephonic follow-ups to obtain missing data. This translated into a response rate of 40.8%.

The demographic composition of the realised sample is depicted in Figures 3.1 to 3.3 and Tables 3.1 to 3.3 with the relevant discussion.

**Figure 3.1: Proportion of respondents per gender group**

At 58%, the majority of the respondents were female (n = 119), while 42% were males (n = 85).
Table 3.1: Age breakdown of respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17–20</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>32.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21–23</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>55.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25–28</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>10.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29–32</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33–36</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37+</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>204</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As indicated in Table 3.1 above, most of the respondents who completed the questionnaire were slightly older, namely between the ages of 21 and 23 years (55.4%). However, as can be expected, a relatively high percentage of respondents were still under 20 years of age (32.4%) due to the predominance of first and second year students in the sample.

Figure 3.2: Proportion of respondents per home language

As indicated in Figure 3.2 above, Xhosa (72.5%) is the predominant home language spoken by the respondents. This is followed by English and Afrikaans.

Figure 3.3: Dependent on financial aid to complete studies
Figure 3.3 indicates that an overwhelming majority of respondents (98.5%) are dependent on receiving financial aid to complete their studies (n = 201). This result was not unexpected since the survey was conducted amongst students currently receiving financial aid from the university.

### Table 3.2: Number of years students have been receiving financial aid

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>38.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>32.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>12.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>9.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>204</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the number of respondents presently receiving financial aid, Table 3.2 indicates that the majority of the sample has been receiving financial aid for only one year (38.2%) while 61.8% received financial aid for more than one year. The assessment of service quality can be concluded was done by a majority of students who used financial aid previously and not only in the current year of assessment as more students (61.8%) received financial aid more than once and is thus familiar with the procedures in the Financial Aid Office.

### Table 3.3: Bursary type available to students
Table 3.3 shows that the majority of the respondents make use of NSFAS bursaries and loans, 52.9% Department of Education and 35.8% Eastern Cape Province category. Of the three respondents making use of ‘Other’ bursaries, two did not specify and the remaining respondent makes use of the Rural Education Assistance Programme bursary. This response trend is in line with the number of bursaries and donor funding available within the various categories of bursaries and loans administered by the Financial Aid Office. This can also be tested against the fund allocations for these categories. The absence of Nursing Science respondents is due to their involvement in hospital services and being accommodated in residences near hospitals and could not respond to the call to collect a questionnaire.

3.3.2 The measuring instrument

A survey is a positivistic methodology whereby a sample of subjects is drawn from a population and studied to make inferences about the population (Collis & Hussey 2003:66). The measuring instrument used in the present study was a questionnaire. Collis and Hussey (2003:173) refer to a questionnaire as a list of carefully structured questions, chosen after considerable testing, with a view to eliciting reliable responses from a chosen sample. Furthermore, the aim is to find out what a selected group of participants think, feel or do.

The measuring instrument for this study was derived from the literature review that customers judge service quality based on the five dimensions
as defined by Parasuraman et al. (1988:24) and Zeithaml et al. (1990:26). Furthermore, the exploratory research exercise provided useful insight and understanding.

These dimensions were used to assess service quality in the Financial Aid Office of the NMMU, namely:

- Tangibles
- Reliability
- Responsiveness
- Assurance
- Empathy

The measuring instrument was a structured, self-administered questionnaire consisting of two main sections. Respondents were requested to complete the questionnaire either at the Financial Aid Office or else a suitable place of the student’s choice and then return it by the deadline date.

Questionnaire items were generated to measure each of the dimensions to assess service quality as well as effective and efficient service delivery (see Annexure A for the questionnaire used in this study). The questionnaire included items based on the literature study, exploratory research and self-generated questions. Section A measured service quality perceptions of the Financial Aid Office of the NMMU and Section B measured personal data of the respondents.

A seven-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7) was used to measure the 66 items of service quality. Mean scores, agree percentages, neutral percentages and disagree percentages were calculated to indicate the level of satisfaction, room for improvement or the level of attention needed.
Table 3.4 indicates the dimensions of service quality and number of items per dimension.

**Table 3.4: Number of items per dimension**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimensions of service quality</th>
<th>Number of items per dimension</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tangibles</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliability</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsiveness</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assurance</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empathy</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A further ten items were used to measure effective and efficient service delivery.

**3.4 SUMMARY**

In this chapter, the research design and research methodology was discussed. A detailed explanation of the four research design components used in the study was presented.

The selection of the sample and measuring instrument used was addressed in the research methodology section of the chapter.

The next chapter focuses on the data analysis and empirical results that emanated from the study.
CHAPTER 4
EMPIRICAL RESULTS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter dealt with the research design and methodology followed to investigate perceptions of service quality with a Financial Aid Office of a university by its customers, namely students as recipients of financial aid. Data analysis is the next step required in this process.

The measuring instrument used and the data gathered from the sample were subjected to statistical analysis. This chapter focuses on the empirical results of the study.

4.2 EMPIRICAL RESULTS

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the primary objective of this study was to measure financial aid students’ perceptions of service quality with a Financial Aid Office at a HEI and estimate the effect these perceptions have on service delivery.

It is clear from the literature (Parasuraman et al. 1985:46; Zeithaml & Bitner 1996:123; Zeithaml et al. 1990:20) that service quality reflects the customers’ perceptions of the five dimensions which are used in evaluating the quality of the service. The delivery of high service quality will produce measurable benefits in profit, cost savings and market share (Lovelock 1996:163). Furthermore, a discrepancy between the actual service and the promised service has an adverse effect on customers’ perceptions of service quality (Zeithaml et al. 1990:43).

The following sections highlight the major findings of Section A which measured service quality perceptions with the Financial Aid Office bursary and loan awardees at the NMMU. The results for each dimension are
discussed in this section. Descriptive statistics for each of the five service quality dimensions are summarised in Tables 4.1 - 4.5.

4.2.1 Dimensions of service quality

Service quality, as perceived by consumers, stemmed from a comparison of what consumers felt the service firm should offer based on their expectations, with their perceptions of the performance of firms providing the services (Parasuraman et al. 1988:16).

As mentioned in Chapter 3, the questionnaire made use of a seven-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7) to measure perceptions of service quality. In total, 66 items were used to measure the five dimensions of service quality. From a distribution of 500 questionnaires, a realised sample of 204 questionnaires could be statistically analysed. The results of Section B, which measured respondents’ personal data, was presented in the previous chapter.

4.2.1.1 Assurance

The questionnaire contained 13 items to measure the service quality dimension Assurance (ASS1-ASS13). As shown in Table 4.1, a mean score of 5.77 was obtained for this dimension, thus indicating that a high level of service quality was perceived for the dimension Assurance. In other words, in this study as with the theory, the majority of respondents (84.43%) agreed that staff in the Financial Aid Office had a high level of knowledge and courtesy, as well as the ability to inspire trust and confidence in them as customers.
Table 4.1: Assurance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Item Code</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>% Agree Total</th>
<th>% Neutral</th>
<th>% Disagree Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Difficult concepts in financial aid documents are satisfactorily explained by the Financial Aid Staff when asked to do so</td>
<td>ASS1</td>
<td>5.63</td>
<td>82.35</td>
<td>12.75</td>
<td>4.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Aid Staff can capably answer any queries that I have regarding available Student Financial Aid</td>
<td>ASS2</td>
<td>5.67</td>
<td>84.31</td>
<td>9.31</td>
<td>6.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Aid Staff are helpful and courteous at all times</td>
<td>ASS3</td>
<td>5.57</td>
<td>80.39</td>
<td>12.25</td>
<td>7.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Aid Staff are friendly when assisting students</td>
<td>ASS4</td>
<td>5.55</td>
<td>78.92</td>
<td>9.80</td>
<td>11.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Aid Staff have a reputation for providing excellent service</td>
<td>ASS5</td>
<td>5.47</td>
<td>76.47</td>
<td>14.71</td>
<td>8.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My student account is always up to date with my financial allocations</td>
<td>ASS6</td>
<td>5.94</td>
<td>87.75</td>
<td>8.33</td>
<td>3.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Aid Staff can be trusted to solve any queries I might have</td>
<td>ASS7</td>
<td>5.76</td>
<td>84.80</td>
<td>7.84</td>
<td>7.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I always receive individual attention from the Financial Aid Staff</td>
<td>ASS8</td>
<td>5.92</td>
<td>89.71</td>
<td>7.84</td>
<td>2.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Financial Aid electronic messages are clear and understandable</td>
<td>ASS9</td>
<td>5.90</td>
<td>86.76</td>
<td>10.29</td>
<td>2.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Financial Aid letters are easy to read</td>
<td>ASS10</td>
<td>6.01</td>
<td>89.71</td>
<td>6.86</td>
<td>3.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Financial Aid notice board material is up to date and relevant</td>
<td>ASS11</td>
<td>5.55</td>
<td>78.92</td>
<td>10.78</td>
<td>10.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Financial Aid serving area is clean and litter-free</td>
<td>ASS12</td>
<td>6.09</td>
<td>89.71</td>
<td>6.37</td>
<td>3.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Financial Aid counter/window is accessible</td>
<td>ASS13</td>
<td>5.97</td>
<td>87.75</td>
<td>9.31</td>
<td>2.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Financial Aid letters are easy to read</td>
<td></td>
<td>5.77</td>
<td>84.43</td>
<td>9.73</td>
<td>5.84</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

More specifically, Assurance was evaluated highly in terms of the manner in which staff explain difficult concepts in documents, answer queries and give individual attention. In addition, the staff are helpful, courteous and friendly, and provide excellent service. The Financial Aid Office maintains up-to-date student accounts and notice board material and sends clear, understandable electronic correspondence. Its serving area is clean and litter-free and the counter is accessible.
As can be seen in Table 4.1, the two highest mean scores for perceived quality of the service were attributed to communication, that is, letters sent by the Financial Aid Office are easy to read (6.01) and cleanliness of the service area (6.09).

4.2.1.2 Tangibles

The Tangibles dimension contained 11 items in the questionnaire to measure physical evidence of the service (TAN1-TAN11). Table 4.2 shows a mean score of 5.82 which indicates a high level of physical evidence was perceived for the dimension Tangibles. Thus, for the purpose of this study, the majority of respondents (83.87%) agreed that a high level of tangible evidence of the physical facilities, equipment and appearance of staff was present in the Financial Aid Office. This result corresponds with the theory that Tangible evidence provides physical representations or images of services that customers, particularly new customers, will use to evaluate quality (Zeithaml & Bitner 1996:122).
### Table 4.2: Tangibles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency Distribution</th>
<th>Questionnaire Items</th>
<th>Item Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>n</em> = 204</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mean</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>% Agree</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>% Neutral</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>% Disagree</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Description</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Item Code</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| 5.65 | 80.39 | 6.37 | 13.24 | The funding that has been provided to me by the Financial Aid Office is sufficient to cover my financial needs for the duration of my studies | TAN1 |
| 5.83 | 74.51 | 11.27| 14.22 | The bursary booklet provides information on bursaries and loans that is easy to understand | TAN2 |
| 5.34 | 75.98 | 7.35 | 16.67 | Financial Aid notices, posters and advertising material placed around the campus are visible enough | TAN3 |
| 6.18 | 92.65 | 3.43 | 3.92 | The location of the Financial Aid Office makes it easy to find | TAN4 |
| 5.75 | 85.29 | 9.31 | 5.39  | The Financial Aid counter service stations are accessible and customer friendly | TAN5 |
| 5.94 | 84.80 | 12.75| 2.45  | The Financial Aid Staff are neatly dressed | TAN6 |
| 6.10 | 91.18 | 6.37 | 2.45  | The Financial Aid service area presents a clean and tidy environment | TAN7 |
| 5.73 | 83.33 | 10.29| 6.37  | Financial Aid provides relevant information on the availability of bursaries and loans | TAN8 |
| 6.23 | 90.20 | 4.90 | 4.90  | Application forms for bursaries and loans are always available from the Financial Aid Office before the closing date | TAN9 |
| 5.79 | 86.27 | 8.82 | 4.90  | The Financial Aid service area creates an impression of professionalism | TAN10 |
| 5.51 | 77.94 | 14.22| 7.84  | Financial Aid notices, posters and advertising material placed around the campus are informative enough | TAN11 |
| 5.82 | 83.87 | 8.65 | 7.49  |                                                      |           |

In particular, respondents evaluated *Tangibles* in terms of the actual funding amount provided to them to finance their studies, the provision of an information booklet and the placement of notices and advertising material around the campus. The Financial Aid Office is easy to find, its counter service stations are accessible and customer friendly and the staff are neatly dressed. Application forms are readily available. A clean and tidy environment is present in the service area. The Financial Aid Office creates an impression of professionalism.
The three highest mean scores for physical evidence of the service, as shown in Table 4.2, were for readily available application forms (6.23), easily accessible location (6.18) and as with Assurance, cleanliness of the service area (6.10).

4.2.1.3 Empathy

The questionnaire contained 11 items to measure the service quality dimension Empathy (EMP1-EMP11). As shown in Table 4.3, a mean score of 5.65 was obtained for this dimension, thus indicating that a high level of service quality was perceived for the dimension Empathy. Therefore, in this study, the majority of respondents (80.7%) agreed that staff in the Financial Aid Office treated customers as individuals through their caring and individual attention given to customers.
### Table 4.3: Empathy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item Code</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EMP1</td>
<td>The Financial Aid office is easily accessible by telephone</td>
<td>5.41</td>
<td>69.61</td>
<td>20.10</td>
<td>10.29</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EMP2</td>
<td>The Financial Aid Office is conveniently located on my campus</td>
<td>5.94</td>
<td>88.24</td>
<td>4.90</td>
<td>6.86</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EMP3</td>
<td>The Financial Aid office hours are acceptable to me as a customer</td>
<td>5.96</td>
<td>88.73</td>
<td>3.92</td>
<td>7.35</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EMP4</td>
<td>I receive individual attention from the Financial Aid Staff</td>
<td>5.77</td>
<td>86.27</td>
<td>8.33</td>
<td>5.39</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EMP5</td>
<td>Financial Aid Staff show sincere interest in assisting me with any problems that I might encounter concerning the Financial Aid awarded to me</td>
<td>5.75</td>
<td>82.35</td>
<td>10.78</td>
<td>6.86</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EMP6</td>
<td>The response time after application for Financial Aid is adequate</td>
<td>5.53</td>
<td>81.37</td>
<td>7.84</td>
<td>10.78</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EMP7</td>
<td>Waiting time at service counter is reasonable</td>
<td>5.44</td>
<td>75.49</td>
<td>11.27</td>
<td>13.24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EMP8</td>
<td>Electronic information on financial aid is readily accessible on the Intranet</td>
<td>5.64</td>
<td>79.41</td>
<td>13.73</td>
<td>6.86</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EMP9</td>
<td>Financial Aid Staff recognize me as a regular visitor to the Financial Aid Office</td>
<td>5.11</td>
<td>67.65</td>
<td>17.16</td>
<td>15.20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EMP10</td>
<td>Financial Aid Staff treat me with respect as a customer</td>
<td>5.73</td>
<td>82.35</td>
<td>9.80</td>
<td>7.84</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EMP11</td>
<td>Financial Aid Staff show understanding for my need for financial aid</td>
<td>5.88</td>
<td>86.27</td>
<td>8.82</td>
<td>4.90</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

More specifically, **Empathy** was evaluated highly in terms of individual attention given to customers, accessibility by telephone, the location of the Financial Aid Office and the office hours provided. Furthermore, the Financial Aid Staff show interest in customers, respond to applications, provide electronic information and treat customers with respect. The waiting time at the service counter is reasonable, customers are recognised as regular visitors and Financial Aid staff show understanding for financial aid need.
The two highest mean scores for *Empathy*, as seen in Table 4.3, show that respondents were most in agreement with the office hours (5.96) and convenient location of the Financial Aid Office (5.94).

### 4.2.1.4 Responsiveness

The *Responsiveness* dimension contained 10 items in the questionnaire to measure the willingness to help customers and to provide prompt service (RES1-RES10). Table 4.4 shows a mean score of 5.62 which indicates a high level of willingness to help was perceived for the dimension *Responsiveness*. Thus, for the purpose of this study, the majority of respondents (79.85%) agreed that a high level of attentiveness and promptness in dealing with customer requests, questions, complaints and problems is evident. This result corresponds with the theory that *Responsiveness* is communicated to customers by the length of time they have to wait for assistance, answers to questions or attention to problems.
Table 4.4: Responsiveness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>% Agree Total</th>
<th>% Neutral</th>
<th>% Disagree Total</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Item Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.57</td>
<td>79.41</td>
<td>14.71</td>
<td>5.88</td>
<td>When I have a problem with a bursary/loan matter, staff help to resolve the problem quickly and efficiently</td>
<td>RES1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.84</td>
<td>88.73</td>
<td>6.86</td>
<td>4.41</td>
<td>Financial Aid Staff are always willing to help students with queries</td>
<td>RES2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.54</td>
<td>79.41</td>
<td>14.22</td>
<td>6.37</td>
<td>I always receive prompt service at the Financial Aid Office</td>
<td>RES3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.04</td>
<td>87.75</td>
<td>6.86</td>
<td>5.39</td>
<td>I am always informed by the Financial Aid Office of outstanding documents that I am still required to hand in</td>
<td>RES4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.68</td>
<td>80.88</td>
<td>11.76</td>
<td>7.35</td>
<td>I always receive correspondence regarding my bursary/loan application</td>
<td>RES5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.83</td>
<td>87.25</td>
<td>7.35</td>
<td>5.39</td>
<td>Counter assistance is always available at the Financial Aid Office</td>
<td>RES6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.35</td>
<td>69.61</td>
<td>24.02</td>
<td>6.37</td>
<td>Electronic mail queries are always answered promptly by the Financial Aid Office</td>
<td>RES7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.49</td>
<td>75.00</td>
<td>19.61</td>
<td>5.39</td>
<td>My written requests are always responded to promptly by the Financial Aid Office</td>
<td>RES8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.10</td>
<td>90.20</td>
<td>4.41</td>
<td>5.39</td>
<td>The Financial Aid Office provides me with written proof that my application was received</td>
<td>RES9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.80</td>
<td>60.29</td>
<td>16.18</td>
<td>23.53</td>
<td>Counter assistance at the Financial Aid Office is not held up by long queues</td>
<td>RES10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.62</td>
<td>79.85</td>
<td>12.60</td>
<td>7.55</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In particular, respondents evaluated Responsiveness in terms of prompt service, willingness to help students, resolve bursary and loan problems and provide correspondence regarding loans and bursaries. The Financial Aid Office informs customers of outstanding documents, provides continuous customer assistance, answers electronic mail queries, responds to written requests from customers and provides proof that an application was received.

As can be seen in Table 4.4, the two highest mean scores for perceived quality of the service were attributed to the sharing of information and communication in that respondents are always informed of outstanding
documents (6.04) and written proof is provided that an application was received (6.10).

4.2.1.5 Reliability

The questionnaire contained 11 items to measure the service quality dimension Reliability (REL1-REL11). As shown in Table 4.5, a mean score of 5.69 was obtained for this dimension, thus indicating that a high level of service quality was perceived for the dimension Reliability. In other words, in this study as with the theory, the majority of respondents (79.14%) agreed that staff in the Financial Aid Office had the ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately.
Table 4.5: Reliability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item Code</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>% Agree</th>
<th>% Neutral</th>
<th>% Disagree</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>REL1</td>
<td>5.66</td>
<td>78.43</td>
<td>14.22</td>
<td>7.35</td>
<td>My Financial Aid application form is never misplaced by the Financial Aid Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REL2</td>
<td>5.83</td>
<td>84.80</td>
<td>9.31</td>
<td>5.88</td>
<td>The financial benefits from a bursary/loan are clearly defined by the Financial Aid Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REL3</td>
<td>5.86</td>
<td>83.82</td>
<td>11.76</td>
<td>4.41</td>
<td>My application for financial assistance, if submitted by the closing date, is responded to before the following academic registration period</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REL4</td>
<td>5.52</td>
<td>75.98</td>
<td>12.75</td>
<td>11.27</td>
<td>My financial Aid benefits are paid on time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REL5</td>
<td>5.88</td>
<td>88.73</td>
<td>6.86</td>
<td>4.41</td>
<td>I can depend on the Financial Aid Staff to provide me with the correct information regarding their services when required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REL6</td>
<td>5.81</td>
<td>81.86</td>
<td>10.78</td>
<td>7.35</td>
<td>The Financial Aid Office notifies me when my application has been approved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REL7</td>
<td>6.06</td>
<td>90.20</td>
<td>6.86</td>
<td>2.94</td>
<td>Financial Aid Staff provide me with the correct application forms and relevant supporting documentation for my bursary/loan application</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REL8</td>
<td>5.94</td>
<td>83.82</td>
<td>11.76</td>
<td>4.41</td>
<td>The correct amounts as per bursary/loan agreement are paid promptly into my student account after the registration process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REL9</td>
<td>5.28</td>
<td>68.14</td>
<td>20.59</td>
<td>11.27</td>
<td>When Financial Aid Staff promise to call me when my query has been solved, they do so promptly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REL10</td>
<td>5.41</td>
<td>70.59</td>
<td>23.04</td>
<td>6.37</td>
<td>Incorrect financial allocations are reversed promptly and accurately on my account</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REL11</td>
<td>5.38</td>
<td>64.22</td>
<td>32.84</td>
<td>2.94</td>
<td>When I change from one bursary/loan scheme to another, the Financial Aid Staff ensure that these changes are processed accurately and promptly</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

More specifically, Reliability was evaluated highly in terms of how financial aid benefits are defined, responses to financial aid applications, the payment of financial aid benefits and that application forms are not misplaced. In addition, the staff provide the correct information, inform successful applicants for bursaries and loans, provide the correct application form and required documents and allocate the correct amount of the bursary and/or loan to the student account. The Financial Aid staff process bursary and loan changes correctly, do financial reversals promptly and inform customers when a query has been solved.
68

The highest mean score for Reliability, as seen in Table 4.5, shows that respondents were most in agreement that Financial Aid staff provide customers with the correct application forms and relevant supporting documentation (6.06).

### 4.2.2 Service delivery perceptions

As previously pointed out in Chapter 2, service quality is highly dependant on the performance of contact personnel (Zeithaml et al. 1988:35). In the case of the Financial Aid Office, as Zeithaml et al. (1988:35) correctly point out, quality occurs during service delivery, but delivering consistently good service quality is difficult.

The questionnaire contained 10 items to measure respondents’ perceptions of Service Delivery in the Financial Aid Office (SED1-SED10). As shown in Table 4.6, a mean score of 5.72 was obtained for Service Delivery. This indicates that the majority of respondents (83.33%) in this study were satisfied with the level of service delivered by this office.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>% Agree Total</th>
<th>% Neutral</th>
<th>% Disagree Total</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Item Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.76</td>
<td>83.82</td>
<td>8.82</td>
<td>7.35</td>
<td>I find the Financial Aid Office Staff sufficiently competent to render a good quality service to students</td>
<td>SED1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.97</td>
<td>87.75</td>
<td>5.39</td>
<td>6.86</td>
<td>I find the Financial Aid office Staff sufficiently computer literate to answer all my questions regarding Financial Aid</td>
<td>SED2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.47</td>
<td>77.94</td>
<td>11.76</td>
<td>10.29</td>
<td>The Financial Aid Office Staff make me feel welcome in the office at all times</td>
<td>SED3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.56</td>
<td>79.41</td>
<td>11.27</td>
<td>9.31</td>
<td>The Financial Aid Office Staff provide friendly customer service to students</td>
<td>SED4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.05</td>
<td>90.69</td>
<td>5.88</td>
<td>3.43</td>
<td>The Financial Aid Office provides a valuable service to students</td>
<td>SED5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.62</td>
<td>82.35</td>
<td>7.84</td>
<td>9.80</td>
<td>The Financial Aid Staff treat me as a valued customer</td>
<td>SED6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.81</td>
<td>84.80</td>
<td>8.33</td>
<td>6.86</td>
<td>I am satisfied with the overall service rendered to me by the Financial Aid Office</td>
<td>SED7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.66</td>
<td>79.41</td>
<td>16.18</td>
<td>4.41</td>
<td>The information brochures issued by the Financial Aid Office is reliable</td>
<td>SED8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.73</td>
<td>83.33</td>
<td>10.78</td>
<td>5.88</td>
<td>On the whole, I am satisfied with the Financial Aid Staff I have encountered during visits to Financial Aid</td>
<td>SED9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.55</td>
<td>83.82</td>
<td>5.88</td>
<td>10.29</td>
<td>The Financial Aid Office Staff render a speedy service to students</td>
<td>SED10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.72</td>
<td>83.33</td>
<td>9.22</td>
<td>7.45</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall, the majority of respondents agreed that staff in the Financial Aid Office were sufficiently competent and computer literate to render a good service and answer respondents’ questions. Respondents agreed that Financial Aid staff made them feel welcome at all times, provided friendly customer service, treated them as a valued customer and rendered a speedy service. At present, respondents are satisfied that the brochures issued by the Financial Aid Office are reliable.

Overall, the results show that respondents were satisfied with the service rendered by the Financial Aid Office and its staff. As expected, this office
also provides a valuable service to students of the NMMU and as Table 4.6 shows, obtained the highest mean score (6.05) for this item.

### 4.2.3 Summary of the results

Finally, Table 4.7 presents a summary of the results for the five dimensions of service quality. It is evident from the table that the *Tangibles* dimension obtained the highest mean score (5.82) and the *Responsiveness* dimension the lowest mean score (5.62).

**Table 4.7: Summary of service quality dimensions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service Quality Dimensions</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>% Agree Total</th>
<th>% Neutral</th>
<th>% Disagree Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assurance</td>
<td>5.77</td>
<td>84.43</td>
<td>9.73</td>
<td>5.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tangibles</td>
<td>5.82</td>
<td>83.87</td>
<td>8.65</td>
<td>7.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empathy</td>
<td>5.65</td>
<td>80.70</td>
<td>10.61</td>
<td>8.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsiveness</td>
<td>5.62</td>
<td>79.85</td>
<td>12.60</td>
<td>7.55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 4.3 SUMMARY

In this chapter, the empirical results were reported. More specifically, the general perceptions of service quality of students in the Financial Aid Office of the NMMU were discussed.

In the next chapter, the summary, conclusions and recommendations will be presented. Managerial implications of these empirical findings for the NMMU's Financial Aid Office will also be discussed.
CHAPTER 5
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In this, the final chapter, an overview of the study is presented together with an interpretation of the empirical results in relation to the objectives of the study. The limitations of the study and recommendations for future research conclude the chapter.

5.2 REVIEW OF THE STUDY

As indicated in Chapter 2, service quality research is important in order to improve service delivery in a firm (Zeithaml & Bitner 1996:137). Previous research indicated that the five service quality dimensions and their underlying attributes are not uniformly important to customers. It is thus important to gather data on the relative importance of these service quality dimensions to target markets.

Measuring the relative importance of service quality dimensions and attributes will assist in the channeling of resources and the development of a service improvement plan.

The above is also true for the Financial Aid Office of a university and more specifically the NMMU. Improved service quality will undoubtedly contribute to a positive student experience at a university. Positive student experiences will assist the university in attracting students. Students are customers and in a highly competitive higher education environment with public, private and the international environment competing for students, a positive student experience with service quality can become a valuable competitive advantage. As indicated by Lovelock (1996:163), the delivery of high service quality will produce measurable benefits in profit, cost savings and market share.
Given the strategic objectives of the DE to improve skills development through access to universities, the amount of money allocated to Financial Aid Offices as indicated in section 1.1 namely R1,7 billion to assist financially needy and academically deserving students and the substantial contributions to HEIs from both public and private donors, it is important to understand and have knowledge of service quality perceptions of the Financial Aid Office of a university. This study was done with the Financial Aid Office of the NMMU.

The purpose of this study was to assess the performance of the Financial Aid Office to provide possible solutions with a view to improving service delivery at the NMMU.

The objective was achieved by measuring service quality perceptions of financial aid students at the NMMU and its influence on service delivery.

During the exploratory research that was part of the study, discussions were held with two distinct student bursary groups where service quality and service delivery concerns were raised. These discussions were incorporated in the measuring instrument.

The measuring instrument consisted of a structured questionnaire, divided into two main sections to be self-administered by respondents at the Financial Aid Office or a suitable place of the student’s choice. This had to be returned by the due date to the Financial Aid Office and was collected at a specific date by the researcher to do the required statistical analysis.

Only students receiving a bursary or a student loan in 2008 participated in the sample that was randomly selected from the lists provided by the Financial Aid Office. Students were invited through the SMS mobile telephone system as well as at the counter of the Financial Aid Office. Only 204 questionnaires could be statistically analysed.
The 66 items developed in the questionnaire to measure service quality were linked to a seven-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly agree (7) to strongly disagree (1). Mean scores were calculated to indicate the level of satisfaction, room for improvement or the level of attention needed.

A total of 500 questionnaires were distributed to awardees of which 228 were returned and 204 could be statistically analysed. This translated into a response rate of 40,8%.

It was derived from the literature review that customers judge service quality and service delivery on the five dimensions as defined by Parasuraman et al. (1988:24) and Zeithaml et al. (1990:26).

These dimensions were used to assess service quality in the Financial Aid Office of the NMMU namely:

- Tangibles
- Reliability
- Responsiveness
- Assurance
- Empathy

Interpretation of the empirical results and the proposed recommendations emanating from the study are provided in the next section.

5.3 INTERPRETATION OF EMPIRICAL RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As indicated in the introduction of this chapter, the empirical results in relation to the objectives of the study and the recommendations will be discussed in this section.
After referring to the objectives of the study, the discussion will continue under the headings of the five dimensions that were used to assess service quality and the dependent variable of efficient and effective service delivery. In each case the lowest two mean scores will be highlighted, interpreted and possible recommendations made.

### 5.3.1 Objectives of the study

The primary objective of the study was to measure financial aid students’ perceptions of service quality of a Financial Aid Office at a HEI and estimate the effect these perceptions have on service delivery.

The secondary objectives linked to the main aim of the study:

- To investigate service quality perceptions of students as customers of the Financial Aid Office at the NMMU;
- To provide recommendations to the relevant university officials and Financial Aid Office Staff that could possible assist the NMMU in improving levels of student satisfaction;
- To provide the Financial Aid Office with a basis for continuous assessment of its service delivery.

The empirical results were presented in Chapter 4.

The following sections will give meaningful inferences on the basis of the analysis and findings.

Moreover, valuable recommendations will follow the interpretations made by the researcher.
5.3.2 Dimensions of service quality

All the five dimensions as well as service delivery perceptions received a high level of satisfaction. Given the fact that 61,8% of the respondents received financial aid for more than one year make it more significant as they could evaluate the service quality against previous years as well. The Financial Aid Office should continue with this trend and concentrate on improving those aspects of service quality that obtained the lowest mean scores. This will be highlighted later in this section.

Furthermore, the tangibles dimension received the highest mean score on service quality which evaluates physical facilities, equipment and appearance of staff. It is important to maintain the current standard of service quality and even to create opportunities to improve the levels of service quality where possible.

Moreover, responsiveness received the lowest mean score indicating that attention must be given to the willingness to help customers and to provide prompt service. The Financial Aid Office will need to listen and respond to the requests, questions, complaints and problems from students receiving bursaries and loans. This is already the case as discussed in Chapter 4, but should be ongoing although the service quality perception of this dimension can be raised to the levels of the service quality perceptions of the other four dimensions.

The following sections will attend to all five dimensions and the lowest mean scores for the items listed in the dimensions will be discussed in order to make the required recommendations for possible improvement of the service quality perception.
5.3.2.1 Assurance

The study revealed that the Financial Aid Office should continue to work on its reputation for providing excellent service. Furthermore, the friendliness of Financial Aid Office staff should be enhanced when assisting students and the relevance of notice board material should be monitored.

The Financial Aid Office handles a very important aspect of a student’s life, which is money, in order to provide for the student’s financial need. Insecurity regarding financial matters will lead to frustration and unhappiness within the student.

Perhaps the operational arrangements within the Financial Aid Office may lead to expressions of staff not being friendly and the reputation for not providing an excellent service and should thus be continuously reviewed.

The Financial Aid Office should endeavour to inspire trust and confidence between their staff and the students and ensure these high levels of trust and confidence is not broken. Students need to be made further aware of how they are evaluated for a specific bursary and a loan.

Closely linked to notice board material is the relevance thereof and attention should be given that notice board material is administered more frequently.

5.3.2.2 Tangibles

The results indicate that students are concerned with the visibility of financial aid notices, posters and advertising material placed around the university. Furthermore, concern was also expressed with the content of the above listed material.
If attention is not given to the tangibles dimension, it can destroy a good strategy that is currently in place. The Financial Aid Office should attend to the communication material that is used to inform and invite students to apply for bursaries and loans. A dedicated staff member should be considered to ensure that communication material is relevant, clear and well received by students to enhance service quality.

5.3.2.3 Empathy

Financial Aid staff must strive to consistently recognise students as regular visitors to the Financial Aid Office as well as be accessible by telephone.

Students are looking for a caring and individualised attention when they need to return to the office to finalise documentation and/or to solve problems in the administering of their loan and bursary. Furthermore, they want to feel understood by Financial Aid staff.

The Financial Aid staff need to ensure that regular visitors are recognised by giving them a return letter or card that they must present so that staff members understand why they return. It is possible that students are being asked to explain their situation at every return visit and hence, the low mean score in this case.

The Financial Aid Office is not administered by a central switchboard system or a call centre to deal with telephone enquiries. This can lead to one number being called with the negative effect of an always busy tone. Moreover, the telephone can ring for too long or is not answered at all.

It is evident that the Financial Aid Office needs to attend to telephone enquiries from students and other departments within the university, public enquiries and donors. This makes it important that an urgent investment be made in a call centre system to deal specifically with telephone enquiries.
5.3.2.4 Responsiveness

Responsiveness is communicated to customers by the length of time they have to wait for assistance, answers to questions, or attention to problems.

Students expressed the opinion that counter assistance needs more attention, and this is the lowest overall rating for the study. All students normally want their financial benefits, payment of tuition fees, books, accommodation and meals during and immediately after registration. This is a peak period at the university and is normally associated with long queues. Furthermore, new entrants not familiar with university procedures and new enquiries for financial aid will visit the Financial Aid Office more than once during this period.

The Financial Aid Office needs to ensure the availability of more staff members at the service counter during this period. Once again, the mode of operation in dealing with long queues needs the urgent attention of the Financial Aid Office. It should be possible to finalise and approve the applications of senior students the previous year and then only attend to those of newcomers at the beginning of the following year and during registration periods. Students with exceptional problems can be attended to when they are due for registration.

A further low mean score is the response of the Financial Aid Office to electronic mail queries. As all registered students are provided with an electronic mail address at the university, it is thus obvious that they will tend to use it.

The electronic mail system can be used to the advantage of the Financial Aid Office as it can relieve the service counter with a number of enquiries. The Financial Aid Office must again ensure that a specific staff member be tasked to respond to electronic mail queries.
5.3.2.5 Reliability

This dimension refers to the ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately.

The Financial Aid Office staff should continue to respond to queries from students and in their promptness and accuracy when students change from one bursary or loan scheme to another.

Discrepancies between the actual service and the promised service have an adverse effect on customer’s perceptions of service quality.

It is therefore important for Financial Aid Office staff to act promptly and accurately to the requests from students. The requests should be attended to when the enquiry is made at the service counter or telephonically.

Furthermore, the mode of operation within the Financial Aid Office need to be attended to as different staff members deal with the same student and responsibility to attend to a request can easily be shifted amongst staff.

5.3.3 Service delivery perceptions

The analysis revealed that the Financial Aid staff should do more to make students feel welcome in the Financial Aid Office. Students are customers, as explained earlier in the chapter, and want to be treated as such and not as objects or a student number.

Financial Aid staff can practice the normal courtesy of greeting and asking well-being and offer a seat if not a counter service enquiry.

Furthermore, the speed of service delivery is slower than expected and students feel that this is an area of concern. The energy and enthusiasm
expressed by Financial Aid staff need attention as this can lead to the long queues currently being experienced by students.

## 5.4 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The present study achieved both the primary and secondary objectives as indicated in Chapter 1 and repeated in Chapter 5.

Service quality is an important construct in the services marketing literature. Financial aid is an important support service at HEIs. The present study, as with any other study, however successful, poses certain limitations that should be considered when conducting future research.

The present study did not include the Financial Aid staff to determine their opinions of service quality of the Financial Aid Office as a service provider. The perceptions of students were measured and recommendations were made based on the empirical results from the measuring instrument in which only students participated.

The ‘GAPS’ model of service quality as discussed in Chapter 2 is a clear indication that valuable insights could have been obtained if the Financial Aid staff also participated in this study.

The study furthermore only concentrated on students receiving financial aid in 2008. A university wide study of all students could have given a different picture of the service quality perceptions of the Financial Aid Office.

## 5.5 CONCLUSION

University graduates can contribute to the solving of the current skills shortage problem in South Africa. While both public and private donors contribute to financial aid for greater access to higher education, the
Financial Aid Offices at universities are administering more money on behalf of the funders and consequently face greater challenges.

Service quality is an important construct and needs to be assessed in Financial Aid Offices to ensure the desired outcome of producing more graduates, especially from financially needy and academically deserving backgrounds. Students, as customers, deserve the best service, as they would expect from any other service provider such as a commercial bank or retail supermarket.

It is in the best interests of universities to ensure a positive student experience for their students as customers. The Financial Aid Office can assist universities in providing a positive student experience by delivering a quality service to their customers.

Service quality research should be an ongoing process to ensure continued adjustments to a service improvement plan of the Financial Aid Office.
LIST OF SOURCES


ANNEXURE A:
QUESTIONNAIRE
The following questions refer to how you feel about the quality of the overall service rendered by the Financial Aid Office.

SECTION A
SERVICE QUALITY PERCEPTIONS OF THE FINANCIAL AID OFFICE AT THE NMMU
This section relates to your visits as a student (customer) to the Financial Aid Office. How satisfied were you as a customer during your visits to the Financial Aid Office. The following statements refer exclusively to your experiences with the Financial Aid Office.

There are no right or wrong answers. Each statement has seven alternatives, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7). Please indicate the extent of your agreement or disagreement with each statement by marking an X in the appropriate block. Your response to each statement best describes how you feel about this visit (usually, it's the response that comes to mind first).

PLEASE RESPOND TO ALL STATEMENTS.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat disagree</th>
<th>Neutral or no opinion</th>
<th>Somewhat agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Waiting time at the service counter is reasonable.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I find the Financial Aid Office staff sufficiently competent to render a good quality service to students.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Financial Aid notice board material is up to date and relevant.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I find the Financial Aid Office staff sufficiently computer literate to answer all my questions regarding Financial Aid.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am always informed by the Financial Aid Office of outstanding documents that I am still required to hand in.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Financial Aid Office staff make me feel welcome in the office at all times.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Financial Aid Staff are neatly dressed.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Financial Aid Office staff provide friendly customer service to students.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My written requests are always responded to promptly by the Financial Aid Office.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electronic information on financial aid is readily accessible on the Intranet.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Financial Aid Office provides a valuable service to students.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Financial Aid counter/window is accessible.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Aid Staff treat me with respect as a customer.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Financial Aid Staff treat me as a valued customer.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Aid Staff have a reputation for providing excellent service.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am satisfied with the overall service rendered to me by the Financial Aid Office.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My application for financial assistance, if submitted by the closing date, is responded to before the following academic registration period.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I receive individual attention from the Financial Aid Staff.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The information brochures issued by Financial Aid are of a high standard.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Financial Aid information provided by the Financial Aid Office is reliable.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I always receive prompt service at the Financial Aid Office.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On the whole, I am satisfied with the Financial Aid Staff I have encountered during visits to Financial Aid.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The funding that has been provided to me by the Financial Aid Office is sufficient to cover my financial needs for the duration of my studies.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Aid Staff show sincere interest in assisting me with any problems that I might encounter concerning the Financial Aid awarded to me.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Aid notices, posters and advertising material placed around the campus are visible enough.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Financial Aid Office provides me with written proof that my application was received.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Financial Aid Office electronic messages are clear and understandable.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The location of the Financial Aid Office makes it easy to find.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The correct amounts as per the bursary/loan agreement are paid promptly into my student account after the registration process.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Financial Aid Office service area presents a clean and tidy environment.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Financial Aid Office staff render a speedy service to students.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Financial Aid Office is easily accessible by telephone.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extent of agreement</td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Somewhat disagree</td>
<td>Neutral or no opinion</td>
<td>Somewhat agree</td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Application forms for bursaries and loans are always available from the Financial Aid Office before the closing date.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Aid Staff show understanding for my need for financial aid.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Aid notices, posters and advertising material placed around the campus are informative enough.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Financial Aid application form is never misplaced by the Financial Aid Office.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Aid Staff can be trusted to solve any queries I might have.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The financial benefits from a bursary/loan are clearly defined by the Financial Aid Office.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can depend on the Financial Aid Staff to provide me with the correct information regarding their services when required.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Aid Staff recognise me as a regular visitor to the Financial Aid Office.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Aid Staff can capably answer any queries that I have regarding available Student Financial Aid.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Aid Staff are helpful and courteous at all times.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The response time after application for Financial Aid is adequate.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Financial Aid Office notifies me when my application has been approved.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Aid Staff provide me with the correct application forms and relevant supporting documentation for my bursary/loan application.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Financial Aid serving area is clean and litter-free.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Financial Aid Office is conveniently located on my campus.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When Financial Aid Staff promise to call me when my query has been solved, they do so promptly.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incorrect financial allocations are reversed promptly and accurately on my fee account.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I change from one bursary/loan scheme to another, the Financial Aid Staff ensure that these changes are processed accurately and promptly.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I have a problem with a bursary/loan matter, staff help to resolve the problem quickly and efficiently.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Aid provides relevant information on the availability of bursaries and loans.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Aid Staff are always willing to help students with queries.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I always receive correspondence regarding my bursary/loan application.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The bursary booklet provides information on bursaries and loans that is easy to understand.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counter assistance is always available at the Financial Aid Office.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Financial Aid service area creates an impression of professionalism.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electronic mail queries are always answered promptly by the Financial Aid Office.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counter assistance at the Financial Aid Office is not held up by long queues.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficult concepts in financial aid documents are satisfactorily explained by the Financial Aid Staff when asked to do so.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Financial Aid benefits are paid on time.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Aid Staff are friendly when assisting students.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Financial Aid counter service stations are accessible and customer friendly.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My student account is always up to date with my Financial Aid allocations.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Financial Aid letters are easy to read.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Financial Aid Office hours are acceptable to me as a customer.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SECTION B: PERSONAL DATA

Please complete this section.

The information will be used for statistical purposes only. Place an X in the appropriate blocks which are relevant to you.

1. I am dependant on Financial Aid to complete my studies.

   YES 1   NO 2

2. Please indicate your gender.

   MALE 1   FEMALE 2

3. Please indicate your age group.

   17-20 1   21-24 2   25-28 3   29-32 4   33-36 5   37+ 6

4. Please indicate your home language.

   Xhosa 1   English 2   Afrikaans 3   Zulu 4   Other (please specify)______________ 5

5. Please indicate your bursary type.

   FUNDZA LUSAHKA 1
   SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT 2
   NURSING SCIENCE 3
   NSFAS: DE 4
   NSFAS: EC PROV 5
   HONOURS BURSARY 6
   OTHER BURSARY 7

   Please specify.

6. Please indicate how many years you have been receiving Financial Aid.

   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

THANK YOU FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY.