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# Who does external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa serve, and who benefits?

A thesis  
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of the requirements for the degree  
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## Abstract

Quality assurance has been described as the single most significant policy to have emerged in the higher education sector in recent times. This research critically examines the question of who is served by external quality assurance policy for higher education in Sāmoa through an examination of the voices and values that determine policy, how these shape policy relationships and how academics respond to external quality assurance policy.

The conceptual framework for this research draws firstly on Kabini Sanga's (2004) conceptualisation of indigenous Pacific research as having particularities in terms of ontology, epistemology, axiology, and methodology, secondly on aspects of critical realist theory; and subsequently on elements of postcolonial critique and critical policy studies. This research used thematic analysis and an emergent analytical and contextually relevant tool to interpret the research findings.

The findings indicate firstly that four groups of policy actors influence decision-making on external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa. These groups include quality assurance policy officials as agents of the government, international consultants, university and academic leaders, and transnational quality assurance networks. Consultants and transnational quality assurance networks make up an influential part of the epistemic community that shapes how quality assurance policy officials think about quality assurance in higher education.

Secondly, the ideal of international recognition and neoliberal management principles such as effectiveness, efficiency, compliance and accountability underpin Sāmoa's external quality assurance policy, which is also marked by an absence of Sāmoa's cultural values. The close connection to skills and employment as a driver of neoliberal economic growth is apparent in Sāmoa's external quality assurance policy documents. This research suggests that the valorisation of the neoliberal values of effectiveness, efficiency, compliance and accountability in Sāmoa's external quality assurance policy results in a hegemonic, disconnected and transactional relationship between the government and the university.

Academics responded in various ways to external quality assurance policy. Their responses ranged from resistance to resignation to acceptance and affirmation. The reasons for acceptance by academics included the attraction of funding support, local and international recognition of qualifications, the perceived marketability of quality-assured status, and a sincere desire to improve the quality of their work. The reasons for resistance were influenced by a myriad of factors that can be categorised into relational aspects and value factors.

The findings of this research suggest that external quality assurance policy for higher education in Sāmoa is primarily enacted to drive economic growth through efficient and effective skills development and the aspirational purposes of obtaining a better life for Sāmoan people through international and local recognition of higher education qualifications. Overall, it is not evident from this research that external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa serves the purpose of enhancing teaching and learning in higher education.

The findings of this research have implications for how education policymakers in Sāmoa conceptualise policy solutions for quality higher education. This research directs attention to the need to conceptualise policy solutions that are framed within indigenous Sāmoan notions of quality and service for the Sāmoan people. Secondly, there are implications for considering alternative policy approaches that do not rest on neoliberal market principles but focus on social justice. Thirdly there are implications for rethinking the unrelenting drive for international recognition of Sāmoa's qualifications in view of the discussion on the subsequent hegemony and disconnectedness between those who work in higher education and those who make policy decisions about higher education quality in Sāmoa.

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*Journey*

Sometimes winding

Sometimes straight

At times the road vanishes

Only to reappear in unlikely places

Where is the way?

What is the destination?

Sometimes

Your only guide

Is what for

*F. T. A. Wright.*

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 The Research Problem

Quality assurance has been described as the single most significant policy to have emerged in the higher education sector in recent times (Mendiola, 2012). Its emergence as a global policy throughout the 1980s and 1990s was accompanied by a growing interest in higher education quality assurance as a research field (Lao, 2015; Steinhardt, Schneijderberg, Gotze, Baumann & Krucken, 2017). Of interest to my research is how the origins and uptake of quality assurance within highly developed countries have found their way to higher education in developing nations. The latent assumptions and structures that appear to be adopted within these different contexts are of concern. The recent adoption of quality assurance policies and practices in Sāmoa highlight this juxtaposition and requires dedicated research to understand its implications.

This section opens with a reflexive account of how my interest in this research topic developed over time. I then provide an overview of the problem statement by firstly drawing on ideas of the origin of higher education quality assurance and its adoption by countries around the world including Sāmoa, followed by an outline of the latent assumptions within the definition of quality assurance adopted in the Sāmoa national policy framework. The section concludes with support from the literature of the need for research on this topic.

My interest in quality assurance emerged from my experience working within tertiary education quality assurance in Sāmoa, during which time I was involved in various quality assurance initiatives. In ten years of working in higher education in Sāmoa, I have been involved in leading and coordinating various quality assurance activities such as national and international accreditation, institutional academic audit, programme accreditation, international benchmarking, student course evaluations, graduate surveys, development of national competency standards, teacher professional development standards, and development of quality assurance policies and guidelines.

In the last few years however, my sense of unease with the appropriateness of the quality assurance approach has crystallised and sharpened to the point where I felt the need to stop and reflect before I could continue. Where did this sense of unease originate? From my experience, I felt the design and implementation of quality assurance measures for higher education in Sāmoa was counterproductive because it seemed to orient university academics (who do the bulk, if not all of the teaching and research) towards compliance instead of excellence. The danger of fostering a compliance focus is that it orients teaching and research towards a minimal acceptable standard as opposed to striving for continuous development and excellence. There is also a risk that emphasis on producing the required indicators and ticking off a standards checklist encourages unproductive game-playing activities as observed in other higher education quality assurance contexts (Anderson, 2006; Cartwright, 2007; Newton 2010).

The second source of my unease stemmed from the misgiving that the model of external quality assurance policy implemented in Sāmoa may be fundamentally unable to drive developments in university teaching and research. The two main threats to the quality of higher education in Sāmoa is arguably related to the number of qualified teaching and researching staff and resourcing in terms of learning facilities and learning resources. Yet because the emphasis is on measuring and reporting against quality indicators, and not improvement of quality per se, the same issues tend to appear in quality monitoring reports year after year. Houston and Paewai (2013) aptly described the situation when they asserted, “rules and procedures for quality assurance are disconnected from teaching, learning and research advanced within universities, academic units and disciplines” (p. 274).

In essence, I felt there was a need to examine external quality assurance policy where attention focuses predominantly on the measure of quality (the quality standards) and the mechanism of measurement (quality assurance processes), rather than the phenomenon being measured, which is actually the business of teaching and learning. If this doctoral journey was a search for answers, the beginning was certainly a coalescing of questions that have percolated in my consciousness over years of practice. It was imperative that I find an answer, or the path to one, through rigorous academic research. My questions

on higher education quality assurance for whom, by whom and for what purpose have led me to explore factors influencing the development of quality assurance policy and practice.

Accounts of the origin of quality assurance in higher education point to the accreditation processes of universities in the United States and links between universities in former colonies and colonial powers (Jarvis, 2017; Materu & Righetti, 2010; Rhoades & Sporn, 2002). Equally importantly, Olssen and Peters (2005) assert that emergence of quality assurance and audit processes for universities are due to the influence of neoliberal ideology in which “education is represented as an input-output system which can be reduced to an economic production function” (p. 324). During the 1980s, national mechanisms for external quality assurance of higher education emerged within a relatively brief time in countries such as New Zealand, Britain, Finland, France and the Netherlands. External quality assurance policy spread to Asia, eastern and western Europe in the 1990s (Lao, 2015), and has now spread to small countries, like Sāmoa (Martin, 2011). There is great similarity in the criteria, mechanisms and processes used in external quality assurance policy for higher education all over the world (Hayward, 2017).

In 2006, legislation enacting external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa was passed by the Sāmoan parliament. Since then several policy documents have been produced that set out the criteria and processes for external quality assurance of higher education in Sāmoa (Sāmoa Qualifications Authority, 2009; 2012). The production of such policy documents was accompanied by a flurry of international consultants and aid-funded initiatives, a phenomenon that is now considered standard practice in educational policy (Robertson, 2015). There is an assumption that the policy advice provided by international consultants and international organisations to help nations such as Sāmoa “compete more effectively in the global economy” (Robertson, 2016, p. 276) is the best option and the most desirable path forward.

The adoption of external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa seems to have taken place without an examination of the underlying assumptions about the influential voices that determine such policy, the underlying values, its impact on relationships and relationalities, and whom, or what such policy serves.

There is scope to examine such neglected questions, for as Blanco-Ramirez and Berger (2014) suggest, “it is unsettling that much of this activity happens without extensive enough exploration of the underlying assumptions about quality present in the policies and practices that are translated across national settings” (p. 89). Hence there is need for research that looks into the underlying assumptions about quality and quality assurance of higher education in the Sāmoan context.

The Sāmoa Quality Assurance Policies (SQA, 2009) defines quality assurance as “all activity which ensures that the educational services of an organisation are being delivered effectively and efficiently and are in line with published goals and objectives” (p. 4). The SQA definition assumes higher education is a commodity, for which the key concern is effective and efficient delivery in relation to a stated goal. What this goal is, how higher education institutions contribute to it, and how it influences national and institutional quality assurance policy, remain unexamined questions for Sāmoa. Moreover, Schindler, Puls-Elvidge, Welzant, and Crawford (2015) stress that “more research is needed to better understand the influence of culture on the use and meaning of quality terminology” and “whether the terms, quality and quality assurance, are applicable across cultures” (p. 3). Research in other jurisdictions also point to the incompatibility of contemporary quality assurance policy and societal and cultural values (Pham, 2019). Consequently, there is a need to examine the extent to which the accepted definition of external quality assurance is compatible with cultural notions of quality within a Sāmoan context.

Thus, there is need to examine how higher education quality assurance policy has been developed in Sāmoa, whose notions of quality determine its formulation, what values underpin such policy, how does it influence relationality, as well as who or what ultimately benefits its enactment in Sāmoa. This research responds to these gaps by critically examining higher education quality assurance policy in Sāmoa.

## 1.2 Significance of the topic

This research seeks to add to the existing body of literature in three main ways. Firstly, there is acknowledgement that external quality assurance of higher education is “under-theorised and under-

researched” (Newton, 2013, p. 8), and thus constitutes an emerging area of policy research (Steiner-Khamsi, 2016). Since external quality assurance policy emerged as a global policy driven by international actors such as the World Bank (Marginson, 2016), there has been limited critical research to examine its adoption and implementation. A recent call for more critical research into quality assurance in higher education noted that much published research to date focused on “describing systems, legitimating them, suggesting variants, and, more recently, examining impacts” (Harvey, 2022, p. 145). Relatedly, Robertson (2009) underscores the importance of rethinking higher education for developing countries such as Sāmoa to focus not on the notion of higher education as a commodity, but as a means of enabling developing countries to meet current social, economic, and political challenges. Hence there is need to add to the theorisation of quality assurance in higher education from a critical perspective, and for such theorisation to be informed by research in a context such as Sāmoa.

Secondly there is limited research on external quality assurance policy in higher education in the context of Oceanic island states such as Sāmoa. Johansson-Fua (2016) argues that island states such as those in Oceania have particular contexts and voices which so far have limited representation in education research. Spratt and Coxon (2020, p. 520) add that there is a need to understand “the context behind the context” of education in Oceania, using “Oceanian theories of relationality”. Furthermore, research into how external quality assurance policy mediates and influences “the relational context of Pacific cultures” (Armstrong, Johansson-Fua & Armstrong, 2021, p. 1) is largely missing from the conversation in external quality assurance policy for higher education. Critically, Johnson (2006) suggested that education in developing states is disadvantaged by limited research examining critical policy shifts which confines the ability of such to make cognizant policy choices. Hence this research aims to contribute to the literature on external quality assurance policy in Oceania using an approach embedded in Oceania theories of relationality, and in contextually situated understandings of how voice and values influence policy and policy relationships.

Thirdly this research aims to add to recent research on education policy in Sāmoa which so far has left higher education policy largely untouched. Recent research on education policy in Sāmoa has focused on values and globalisation (Tuia, 2019 & 2020; Tuia & Iyer, 2015), foreign aid (Sobhani, 2016), inclusive education (McDonald & Tufue-Dolgoy, 2013), and the use of information and communications technologies (Chan Mow, 2014). Hence this research on external quality assurance policy contributes to the literature in its examination of a policy that is being implemented and enacted in the higher education space. Fourthly, the experience of higher education teachers has limited treatment in the existing literature on quality assurance policy (Lieber, Stensaker & Harvey, 2015); hence this research also aims to examine academics' responses to external quality assurance policy.

Methodologically, this research aims to contribute to education policy research in the use of a critical lens to examine the implementation of external quality assurance policy in an island state. Oceania research has been described as being predominantly interpretivist (Burnett, 2012; Tualaulelei & McCaffery, 2019) hence my research will bring a critical perspective to the policy debate that is still emerging at this point in time. The potential contribution of critical realism alongside a Pacific research methodology is that it enables scrutiny of structure and agency, as well as wider economic, political, social and cultural mechanisms, and the consideration of how key policy actors reproduce, resist, or transform such mechanisms.

Finally, while there is research on the influence on aid relationships in primary and secondary education reform in Sāmoa (Coxon & Munce, 2008; Male, 2011), the influence of aid relationships on higher education and in particular, the adoption and enactment of quality policies, is yet to be examined. This research hopes to contribute to the research in the above-mentioned areas, through a critical examination of higher education quality assurance policy in Sāmoa.

### 1.3 Research Aims

This research aims to critically examine the question of who is served by external quality assurance policy, through an examination of the voices and values that determine policy, how this shapes policy relationships and how academics' respond to policy. This research aims to examine:

- The roles and influence of various policy actors in shaping external quality assurance policy for higher education quality assurance in Sāmoa.
- The values that underpin external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa, what influences such values, and how such values influence relationality between policy actors.
- Who or what does external quality assurance policy serve and who benefits from its enactment in Sāmoa?

### 1.4 Research Questions

Overarching research question:

Who benefits from higher education quality assurance policy enactment in Sāmoa?

Sub-questions:

1. Who determines how higher education quality assurance policy is decided and enacted in Sāmoa?
2. What is valued in external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa and how does this determine policy relationships?
3. How do academic leaders respond to external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa?
4. Who does external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa serve and who benefits?

## CHAPTER TWO: SETTING THE CONTEXT

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a contextual literature review of the events that have shaped higher education in Sāmoa, and the introduction of a quality assurance policy for higher education. Context is important in the analysis of educational policy enactment (Sanga, 2003; see also Rappleye & Un, 2018; Sanga, et al., 2022; Spratt & Coxon, 2020). Attention to the ‘context behind the context’ (Sanga, cited in Airini et al., 2010, p. 11) is important for understanding the contextual influences on how policy is enacted.

Hence this chapter provides the context for answering the research questions:

- Who determines how higher education quality assurance policy is decided and enacted in Sāmoa?
- What is valued in higher education quality assurance and how does this determine policy relationships?
- How do academic leaders respond to external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa?
- Who does higher education quality assurance policy serve and who benefits?

The chapter starts with an overview of education and learning during pre-contact times in Sāmoa, followed by analysis of the main points of education policy during colonial administration by Germany and New Zealand. The emergence of higher education institutions in Sāmoa and the region is discussed before a discussion of some of the socio-economic events of the 1990s and 2000s that set the stage for the introduction of quality assurance policy in 2006. The chapter closes with a summary of the main ideas that influenced educational development in the 1990s and 2000s in Sāmoa, and how these ideas prepared people’s thinking for the introduction of external quality assurance policy.

### 2.1 History of Education Policy in Sāmoa

The history of education in Sāmoa is also the history of contact with the outside world, commencing with the arrival of missionaries in the 1830s. This section provides an overview of what education was like in pre-contact Sāmoa, and Sāmoa under the missionary era.

### 2.1.1 Old Sāmoa

The adage it takes a village to raise a child was true for Sāmoan children before contact with Europeans and the western world. Sāmoan children were socialised into their roles by their parents, cousins, young people and other adults in their family and village circles. Young children learned their tasks from older children in the family. As Huebner (1989, p. 64) described, “Older siblings took on much of the responsibility of socializing younger siblings... the master craftsman, hunter, fisher etc. taught his or her skill to those who sought it.” Learning was inseparable from living, and the purpose of learning was to live and be harmonious within the web of social relations into which a Sāmoan child was born.

Socialization into Sāmoan society as a Sāmoan young man and young woman was strongly gendered, in preparation for their roles within the village polity. Young men learned to grow crops, build homes, hunt, fish for food, and prepare food for family groups (Meleisea & Meleisea, 1987). Similarly young women learned the various weaving skills for making everything from sleeping mats to blinds as well as fine mats used in social exchange and as a mark of wealth. Villages were organised into communities of women and men with different responsibilities. The women’s and men’s groups were organised according to rank, following the same chiefly ranking structure as that of the village (Meleisea & Meleisea, 1987).

The principles of the *vā* governed interpersonal relations in Sāmoan, or the sacred relational space between people which were maintained by reciprocity, respect and generosity (Vaai & Nabobo-Baba, 2017; Wendt, 1996). Sāmoa society was ordered along the dimensions of gender, with a sub-village of men and sub-village of women, which were both structured hierarchically according to chiefly rankings (Meleisea, 1987). Progression to leadership was through service to the family and the village, captured in the well-known Sāmoan proverb “O le ala I le pule o le tautua” (Latu, 2017, p. 59). The proverb referred to the accepted understanding that the path to leadership in the Sāmoan context was through service.

### 2.1.2 The missionary education era

The landfall of a British missionary by the name of John Williams in 1830 at Sapapalii, and the subsequent conversion of Sāmoan royalty in the form of Mālietoa Vainu'upo to the introduced religion heralded lasting changes to the pattern of learning and socialisation in Sāmoa.

The first schools were set up by the missionaries to teach Sāmoans to “read, write and understand the scriptures in their own mother-tongue” with the Bible as the main text of schooling (Auva'a, 2003, p. 51).

By 1861, activities such as daily school lessons during the week in addition to a Sunday school had commenced, undertaken by Sāmoan converts who served as village teachers and lay preachers (Turner, 1861). Reverend George Turner, an early missionary from the London Missionary Society (L.M.S.) in Sāmoa, recorded a tally for 212 Sāmoan teachers and lay preachers in the year 1861, one for every village. The new pastor's schools, as they came to be known, as well as teaching children and adults how to read, write and understand the Bible, also served the purpose of disseminating Western values and culture to a whole new generation of Sāmoan converts from 1830 onwards (Thomas & Postlethwaite, 1984, p. 205).

The Sāmoan Department of Education in a 1997 report recognised this system of pastors' schools as the origin of a formal system of schooling (Auva'a, 2003). The village pastor schooling model created by the L.M.S. mission was so successful that it was copied in parts of Papua New Guinea and elsewhere in the Pacific (Meleisea & Meleisea, 1987). I also recall during my childhood attending our village 'pastor's school' or 'aoga faifeau' that I attended in the late afternoons with other children on selected days of the week, where we were taught not only the Bible but also needlework and other sewing crafts by the pastor's wife.

Despite the foreign nature of schooling in Sāmoa and its eroding impact on Sāmoan society and culture (Afamasaga, 2001) the efforts of the missionaries had resulted in widespread literacy in the Sāmoan language among Sāmoans by 1900 (Tuia & Schoeffel, 2016). The curriculum of the mission schools reorganised Sāmoan understanding of gender roles and introduced new activities into the daily lives of

Sāmoans. Women learned new skills such as needlecraft and the domestic chores of a Victorian English female while men were taught the Christian roles of man as priest, pastor, and teacher (Auva'a, 2003).

### 2.1.3 Educational policy under German administration

Colonial administration brought different education practices commencing with colonial administration by Germany in 1900. The annexation of Western Sāmoa by Germany in 1900 saw little interference by Germany in the schooling efforts of the various missions (Tuia & Schoeffel, 2016) beyond setting up three state schools near the seat of colonial government. The Ifi Ifi (or Leifiifi) school was set up to educate the children of expatriates and foreigners (Lee-Hang, 2011) in addition to a separate school for Sāmoan children, and a boarding school for sons of chiefs of the surrounding districts (Coxon, 2007). Furthermore, schools set up by the French Marist missionaries served German families and educated children of mixed parentage (Lee-Hang, 2011).

Focused as it was on quelling any political dissension from the kingmaker traditions of Sāmoa, the German administration did little by to advance formal education in Sāmoa beyond the three administration schools. This may have been due in large part to the active work of the London Missionary Society, which had single-mindedly and effectively installed a Sāmoan L.M.S. pastor-teacher in every village by 1920, teaching numeracy, reading, and writing in Sāmoan, and scripture (New Zealand Parliament, 1920). A historian of Sāmoa under German administration noted that the limited involvement of the colonial authorities in education activities was possible due to the recognised authority of the “powerful L.M.S. mission which exerted great influence... through its schools” (Moses, 1972, p. 56). The extent and vigour of the L.M.S. schooling effort was such that by 1905, one quarter of the Sāmoan population had received schooling through its mission schools (Hempenstall, 2016).

There is evidence of Sāmoans exercising agency in shaping the future of education development at this early stage (Coxon, 2007). Of the three state schools set up by the German colonial administrators, two were in response to advocacy and a request from Sāmoan leaders. The villages around Apia wanted a

school for their children and offered to build it themselves in 1908 if the administration would provide the construction materials and teachers for the school. A year later, a boys' boarding school was added at the same Malifa location upon request from district chiefs that their sons should learn the colonial language and train to work in government roles.

#### 2.1.4 Education policy under New Zealand administration

When New Zealand troops invaded German-occupied Sāmoa in 1915 at the beginning of the First World War, New Zealand lost no time in appointing a Superintendent of Education to take over administration of the state schools. Although formal signing over of Sāmoa to New Zealand administration under a United Nations mandate did not happen until 1920, the operation of the state schools had quickly been resumed under the new administration in 1915.

New Zealand education policy for Sāmoa was initially not to impose too much disruption, apart from supporting the work of the various missions (New Zealand Parliament, 1922). However, in 1920, there was express intention of the New Zealand government to take over administration and control of the education system from the churches (New Zealand Parliament, 1920). While there was documented negative feedback from other missions, the L.M.S. mission in 1920 were supportive of the idea. The London Missionary Society made it clear in 1920 that their only concern was with the reasoning behind the proposed takeover of the education system. A representative of the society wrote of their perspective regarding an education system for the Sāmoans in 1920:

The idea is prevalent with quite a number of New Zealanders amongst us that the mission of the Sāmoan is to become a hewer of wood, a drawer of water, and a plantation labourer for the benefit of the white man. Men who reason thus know nothing of the genius of the Sāmoan character, and entirely underestimate their capabilities and their ideals... We welcome any educational scheme that will meantime fit him to cultivate his own land to the best advantage, either by his own labour or labour which he employs, and which will

prepare him to become a useful citizen of the empire. (New Zealand Parliament, 1920, p. 48).

Not long after this, a 1922 report to the New Zealand Parliament on the education efforts on behalf of the trustee nation articulated educational policy as to “encourage and supplement their work [of missions] and to take it further, in the hope that a satisfactory national system of education may be built up” (New Zealand Parliament, 1922, p. 8). In other words, educational policy in the early 1920s was really to support the educative efforts of the missions, with a noted absence of desire from the colonial administration to take it further.

In 1925, the New Zealand administrators had considered the question of what appropriate education for the Sāmoans entailed and had decided that not much was needed by way of western education. As reported to the New Zealand Parliament, the policy was “not to educate the Sāmoans to become European in their outlook, but to make them better Sāmoans, with a pride of race and a love of country and a desire to promote their material wealth by increased effort to develop their lands” (New Zealand Parliament, 1925, p. 3). Implicit in this reasonable sounding statement were the assumptions that the colonial government had the means and the knowledge to make Sāmoa’s thirty thousand strong population ‘better Sāmoans’ and secondly that they did not already have ‘pride of race’ nor a ‘love of country.’ The third message in the implied education policy was a strongly capitalist ethos, that the administration wanted Sāmoa to become a capitalist nation based on the accumulation of material wealth through the cultivation of land.

The consideration of the appropriate goal of education for the Sāmoans at this point did not consider a request that had been presented by a contingent of Sāmoan parliamentarians to the colonial administrators in 1920. The Sāmoan Parliament delegation to the New Zealand Parliamentary visit in 1920 outlined improvements they wanted to see in the fledgling education system which were: “to send Sāmoan young men to New Zealand for training to work in the public service and as teachers; to send some Sāmoan young men and women to be trained as medical professionals, in which professions they

would work upon return to Sāmoa” (New Zealand Parliament, 1920, p. 26). A total of thirty-three members of the Sāmoan Parliament signed the petition, signifying their awareness of the gaps in the education system and the steps it might take to address that gap. Little was done in response to this request for almost three decades. There may have also been a supposition that the Sāmoans should not be educated in the English language or English knowledge beyond rudimentary reading and writing. Coxon (2007) suggests that the colonial administration in Sāmoa purposefully “restricted the teaching of English” to prevent the emergence of a group of English-literate citizens that “might threaten New Zealand’s political authority” (p. 277).

By the mid-1930s, a partnership of sorts had been established between the administration and missions such that the administration supplied and paid for teachers in ‘Grade 2’ (primary) schools. In contrast, missions or the village would provide the school buildings. While there was a stated intent to “encourage the use of Sāmoans in their own government and education” (New Zealand Parliament, 1935, p. 18), there did not seem to be much action towards this goal beyond training Sāmoan teachers to teach in the primary schools.

Education policy to the mid-1940s did not differ much from the beginning of the New Zealand administration, with the missions given the freedom to expand schooling as they saw fit, while the administration concentrated on their four centrally administered schools and teacher training. By 1945, the five missions (London Missionary Society, Roman Catholic, Methodist, Latter Day Saints, Seventh Day Adventist) between them administered 326 pastor schools, forty-six boarding schools, and fifteen day schools. As reported in official documents, the majority of staff in the mission schools were Sāmoan, educating more than twenty-two thousand students in 1945 (New Zealand Parliament, 1945, p. 9). In contrast, the four Grade III administration schools enrolled less than 1,000 students while just under 12,000 students were enrolled at the dually administered Grade II under a partnership with the missions. Thus, by the mid-1940s, a system of education had evolved that included no less than six branches, five of which were mission-led in addition to the administration schools (Coxon, 2007). The expansion of

schooling however only taught students up to the lower or middle primary grades. As outlined in a report to the New Zealand Parliament in 1947, “the level of mass education in Sāmoan schools does not reach beyond the lower primary grades and... very few, indeed, have any secondary education, and almost none have done post-secondary study” (New Zealand Parliament, 1947, p. 25).

In 1945, an education review team from New Zealand led by Dr Clarence Beeby, Director General of education in New Zealand, in response to a United Nations mandate to prepare Sāmoa for self-government, had the task of deciding “the educational direction required to produce the future leaders of an independent country” (Coxon, 2007, p. 280). After visiting schools in Sāmoa and observing education in action, the team believed that a radical approach was needed to address what they described as “the problem of education” (Coxon, 2007, p. 280). The problem to which the United Nations mission referred was that in a decade and a half of German administration, and three decades of New Zealand administration, the schooling system had not progressed beyond what was considered the equivalent of lower primary. Further, “the educational programme has failed to produce a group of leaders possessing the high professional technical skills necessary for self-government,” (New Zealand Parliament, 1947, p. 42).

The subsequent programme of educational reform attributed to Beeby saw the creation of a highly selective system, with a narrow curriculum, designed to identify and train a selected group of individuals for leadership in an independent Sāmoa (Coxon, 2007).

## 2.2 The emergence of higher education and the first university in Sāmoa

The establishment of the Mālua institution for training London Missionary Society pastors in 1844 marked the beginning of higher education in Sāmoa (Auva’a, 2003). Faced with the task of spreading Christianity to the villages of Sāmoa, the L.M.S. missionaries decided to “train a Native ministry... to give these men an education fitted to make them not only evangelists but also teachers in the schools” (New Zealand Parliament, 1920, p. 47). By the 1920s, and the first visit of the New Zealand Parliamentary committee

charged with making decisions on Sāmoa's future as a territory, the L.M.S. mission had already been active in Sāmoa for almost one hundred years. Given the early beginnings of mission-centred higher education, it was not surprising that while the New Zealand administrators were trying to familiarise themselves with their new colonial territory in 1920, the L.M.S. missionaries operating as they had been for more than a century, were already speaking of:

A largely extended scheme of higher education which the L.M.S. have had in view for some years and for which they have been accumulating a sinking fund... to centralize the higher education at Mālua, and to form there an island university with a divinity school, so that competent pastors and schoolmasters may be there trained, that youths may be educated for government and commercial offices, and that the more ambitious may be equipped for a medical course, or other of the professions, at one of the Dominion universities. (New Zealand Parliament, 1920, p. 47).

The above quote indicates the earliest intentions for establishing a higher education institution in Sāmoa. The dream of 'an island university' lay dormant for another fifty years until a 1972 report written by the Australian ex-principal of Leulumoega Fou College recommended the church turn its attention to the training of teachers for the church secondary schools (Tui'ai, 2012). By this time, the L.M.S. mission had long evolved to become the definitively localized Congregational Christian Church of Sāmoa (CCCS). The report noted that graduates from the Teachers' Training College at Malifa were not equipped to teach at the upper secondary levels, which affected the quality of teaching that could take place at the three secondary schools run by the CCCS. However, the appointment of a London-educated Sāmoan academic named Dr Aiono Fanaafi Le Tagaloa as the CCCS Director of Education gave the idea momentum.

Shortly after taking up the post of CCCS Director of Education in 1975, a move away from her previous post of Director of Education for Western Sāmoa, Dr Le Tagaloa (Dr Larkin at the time) set the plans in motion to open in 1978 not just the training college, but a university offering an ambitious eight degree programmes (Tui'ai, 2012). Dr Le Tagaloa brought to reality the dream of an island university that had been

vocalized more than fifty years earlier in taking over the leadership role of the University of Sāmoa as Vice-Chancellor in 1981. The first university cohort graduated in 1982 and one of the graduates was accepted into the Master of Theology programme at the Australian National University. The Congregational Christian Church of Sāmoa, in their intention to establish the university, chose as a model the pioneering efforts of their Congregational brethren in America who had started their own institutions of higher education in response to being banned from 18<sup>th</sup> Century universities in England (Tuiai, 2012).

Despite the early promising start, the University of Sāmoa was plagued by issues that eventually led to its closure in 1986. The church could not fully commit to financially supporting the university due to the simultaneous launching of the university at the same time as other large projects. In addition, the fledgling university was located at Leulumoega Fou along Upolu's rural northwest coast, which put the institution at a location and transportation disadvantage. Tellingly, teachers from the CCCS attended the Teachers' Training College at Malifa in 1984 (Tuiai, 2012), perhaps in recognition of the declining standards at the church institute of higher education. In addition, the Government of Sāmoa went ahead in 1984 with its intention to set up the National University of Sāmoa (Iunivesite Aoao o Sāmoa), something that the government regarded as one of its responsibilities. Le Tagaloa's resignation as Vice-Chancellor in 1985 was perhaps the definitive sign of the institution's bleak future. Thus, the University of Sāmoa set up by the Congregational Christian Church of Sāmoa ended in 1986 after a short eight years in existence and the buildings and facilities reverted to the Leulumoega Fou College.

### 2.2.1 Emerging higher education in the region

At the same time as events were unfolding in Sāmoa in the higher education space, there were also higher education developments in the region that would come to be intertwined with developments in Sāmoa. The University of the South Pacific established in 1968 was a regional institution set up at the recommendation of a mission jointly sponsored by the governments of Britain, New Zealand, and Australia (Cowell, 1967). The team was tasked with recommending "what kind and level of institution is required to meet the higher education needs of the Region [sic] and we have unanimously come to the firm opinion

that what is needed is a fully autonomous university” (Morris Report, cited in Cowell, 1967, p. 165). The motivation behind the recommendation was the projected demand for university education in the region, in relation to the growing secondary education systems and the demand for qualified and skilled people to fill professional and technical roles in governance and business (Cowell, 1967, p. 166).

The first Vice-Chancellor of the new regional university in 1968 “set out to turn a dilapidated flying boat base at Laucala Bay into the campus of a viable regional university” serving the Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Niue, Sāmoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu (Naidu, 2018). The joining of the Republic of the Marshall Islands in 1991 signalled the potential for the University of the South Pacific to extend its services to the northern Pacific. The South Pacific Regional College of Tropical Agriculture at Alafua, Sāmoa became the USP School of Agriculture at the agreement of the government of Western Sāmoa as part of its support to the establishment of the regional university (Brosnahan, 1988, p. 56). The Alafua campus also became a distance learning node for the regional university, in Sāmoa (Coxon, 2007).

There is no question that there was political support from Sāmoa for the regional university at least in the initial stages. However, the political instability of the host nation Fiji seen in the 1987 military coup and the resulting loss of confidence seen in many nations withdrawing their students (Crocombe, 1988) may have solidified the intention of the Sāmoan government to fully establish its own university. Albert Wendt, a prominent Sāmoan academic may have echoed the thoughts of many when he commented that “our governments and donor government should ask themselves if they are willing to finance an institution which, I believe, is Fiji’s national university” (Crocombe & Crocombe, 1994, p. 127).

### 2.2.2 Sāmoa’s push for a national university

There is an indication that the establishment of the South Pacific regional university at the encouragement of and with funding support from donor governments (UK, New Zealand, and Australia) did not fully meet manpower needs at the national level within different member countries. The establishment of a national university in Sāmoa was seen as a priority in the 1981-1985 Education Development Plan period, in

addition to reforms targeted at improving educational equity (Male, 2011, p. 73). While the planned educational reforms of the 1980s did not eventuate, the set-up of the university was summarily executed with a mere budget of five Sāmoan tala in 1984 (Groves, 2019).

Along with the amplified attention to higher education, the government of Sāmoa outlined its intention to merge the Western Sāmoa Teachers' College and the National University of Sāmoa (Ministry of Education, Sports & Culture, 1995). The first of two things apparent in such a direction was the indicated expansion of Sāmoa's higher education and second was the expected levelling up of teacher education qualifications with the transition of the national Teachers' College to a university faculty.

In response to the World Bank's disregard of development for the post-secondary and higher education sector, Sāmoan policy makers ignored the World Bank's advice, and went ahead with a policy decision to set up a dedicated taskforce and planning programme for the post-secondary sector which included higher education. It is clear from the policy document that the government of Sāmoa intended to focus more attention on all forms of post-secondary education and training, with development to be guided by "a set of general aims and policies" (Ministry of Education Sports & Culture, 1995, p. 7) and the steering of a National Training Council.

By 2005, a sector evaluation report indicated the expansion of programmes offered at the National University of Sāmoa. The evaluation reported higher education developments such as the expansion of offerings to include programmes in the humanities, commerce, nursing, education, and Sāmoan studies (Government of Sāmoa & PRIDE Project, 2005, p. 36). The extent of progress in higher education was evident in the following quote from the sector evaluation study.

Having been established by an Act of Parliament in 1984, NUS has since expanded in scope to include the Faculty of Arts, the Faculty of Commerce, the Nursing School, the Faculty of Education and the Institute of Sāmoan Studies. (Government of Sāmoa & PRIDE Project, 2005, p. 45).

The above quote indicates that in the decade since the World Bank's advice to exclude the higher education sector from funding and development assistance, government decision-makers had gone ahead in the opposite direction.

The Sāmoa Director of Education was an influential leader in the establishment of the national university. The Director of the Department of Education was a British-educated academic who had received her doctorate at the University of London in 1960 after being schooled at the colonial administration schools in Sāmoa followed by secondary education in New Zealand. Le Tagaloa's motivation for seeing the dream of a Sāmoa university come to fruition was no doubt influenced by her academic socialisation in England, evident in the following quote.

In these times, there is no country, no government, no church which can retain their authority, language, and beliefs without a university. Even though it is expensive, if it is well planned the benefits outweighs the costs. There is no other educational institution that... gives the true identity to a Sāmoan. In the same way the behaviour, the mind, the heart and language of the Europeans, Russians and Japanese is dependent on their universities... This is an important historical event since the 150 years the gospel arrived in Sāmoa. (Le Tagaloa, 1981 Education Report, cited in Tuiai, 2012, p. 154).

Le Tagaloa was the inaugural Vice-Chancellor of the doomed mission-initiated University of Sāmoa for three years before she resigned, a year later taking up the office of Vice-Chancellor of the new National University of Sāmoa in 1984 (Tuiai, 2012). The other supporter and driver for the National University of Sāmoa was the Minister of Education, Le Mamea Ropati Mualia, who was responsible for tabling the Cabinet proposal to set up the university (Groves, 2019). Educated as a pharmacist at Otago University and a successful businessman upon his return to Sāmoa, Mualia was a firm believer in a national institution of higher education as a symbol of national prestige and a training ground for Sāmoa's growing workforce.

### 2.2.3 Higher education not a priority for donor organisations

Various development partners advised the government of Sāmoa during the 1980s and 1990s against diverting much-needed resources to the development of higher education. The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) advised Sāmoan policymakers against the establishment of a national university in the 1980s (Japan International Cooperation Agency, 2004). However, the JICA position on investment in higher education seems to have reversed a decade later when they supported and funded the construction of a new campus in 1995 (Japan International Cooperation Agency, 1995).

The second dissenting view regarding further development of higher education in Sāmoa came from the World Bank in a series of education review reports in the 1990s. Sāmoa was at the time recovering from the effects of successive cyclones and the World Bank stepped in at the request of the Sāmoa government to assess the damage and advise on recovery. The World Bank concentrated its advice on strengthening primary and secondary education and spared little advice for higher education except to recommend stricter measures for monitoring the cost-effectiveness of proposed university scholarships (World Bank, 1992). Some have argued that the World Bank preference in the 1990s to disregard higher education in favour of investment in primary education was based on a flawed piece of research based on rate of return on investment analysis (Rappleye & Un, 2018). Significantly, the World Bank also recommended that education and training at the university level should be undertaken at regional institutions (World Bank, 1992).

A subsequent World Bank report to the Sāmoan government in 1993 expanded on the rationale for advising against further expansion of higher education (World Bank, 1993). The World Bank's advice to focus further development on education sectors that were more likely to bring a return on investment was consistent with its overall focus in the nineties on assistance to developing commercially viable economies (Luaiufi-Moli, 1995). This 1993 World Bank report gave higher education the dubious distinction of having "a very small contingent" (p. 29), forecast a poor outlook for technical and vocational

education and was pessimistic about the sector's future capacity to respond to the skills and training needs of an emerging economy (World Bank, 1993, p. 31).

Reinforcing its previous recommendation, the World Bank advised that the focus of educational development and support should be on primary, secondary and vocational education and not on higher education. Specifically, "the allocation of resources of higher education should be increased only moderately and efforts should be made to recover costs as much as possible, because resources are demonstrably much more productive elsewhere in the system, (World Bank, 1993, p. 33).

The advice of the World Bank review was thus to concentrate scarce resources including development aid on improving the quality of primary, secondary, and vocational education and training. For higher education, the advice was financing on a cost-recovery basis or using a student loan mechanism as well as continuing to send university students overseas. The rationale was that nearby universities including the regional University of the South Pacific were better resourced with economies of scale to support expensive programmes, providing the preferable option rather than trying to offer such programmes in the country.

The only exception to this measure related to Sāmoan language, culture, and history programmes which the report avoided mention of outsourcing. The only area of higher education pinpointed as a priority for improvement and therefore the only area that merited support was teacher education – because it had a direct impact on the quality of primary and secondary education (World Bank, 1993).

Crocombe and Crocombe (1994) were critical of the actions of donor countries in supporting the regional University of the South Pacific at the expense of any support they might have had for country institutions like the National University of Sāmoa. They argued that it was "because of the power of external donors that most of the proposals of island governments for national universities have not materialised" (Crocombe & Crocombe, 1994). Such sentiments reflected the perception of higher education practitioners at the time regarding the response of external donors towards development of higher education within the individual nation states of the Pacific.

#### 2.2.4 Political motivation for a national university

The establishment of the National University of Sāmoa had a political motivation tied to Sāmoa's aspirations for development. In explaining the political motivation for the establishment of the National University of Sāmoa, the Sāmoan Minister of Education at the time referred to the expanding population of Sāmoa, the need to have a strategy for educating its people and training Sāmoa's "manpower" (Mualia, 1988). Mualia also referred to the concern with cultural and language preservation and meeting the challenges of a bilingual and bicultural future. In speaking of such concerns, Mualia (1998) expressed the sentiments of many previously colonized polities who in looking to the future realise that the pathway to sustainable development includes a sustainable view of education development, one in which higher education plays an important part (Thaman, 2014).

In the 1995 strategic plan for the education sector, there was a specific intention to merge the teachers' college and the programme of advanced courses that was the beginning of the national university (Ministry of Education Sports and Culture, 1995). The National University of Sāmoa was duly set up in 1984 with a staff of eighteen and an initial budget allocation of five Sāmoan tala (Groves, 2019). Groves (2019) suggests that the establishment of the National University of Sāmoa was supported by an analytical report indicating that Sāmoa's public sector workforce needs were not being met by the University of the South Pacific.

### 2.3 The beginning of external quality assurance in Sāmoa

External quality assurance policy for higher education in Sāmoa seems to have arrived indirectly through re-aligned policy strategies for education from 1995. The stated intention in Sāmoa's education strategies from the 1990s referred to coordination of national training initiatives to be better informed by skills needs within the country. Just after the turn of the century, the intent had morphed into what is now external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa; this section provides background on how this eventuated.

### 2.3.1 Discussion of a National Training Authority

In 1992, prior to the development of the ten-year education policy document (Ministry of Education, Sports & Culture, 1995), the Sāmoa Commissioner of Labour had suggested the idea of a National Training Authority at a sub-regional seminar on policies and programmes for vocational training (International Labour Organization, 2019). The International Labour Organization (ILO) (2019) report is clear on the point that “the need for a National Training Authority in Sāmoa had been raised by the Commissioner of Labour at a sub-regional seminar on Vocational Training Policies and Programmes held in Tonga in 1992” (p. 84). It is possible that it was this same idea that was picked up by the developers of the 1995-2005 education policy document, when they conceptualised an advisory council to advise on policies and programmes for vocational education and training in Sāmoa. The idea of a coordinating and policy advisory body may have also received support from a Post-Secondary Education and Training Cabinet-select committee in 1998 (International Labour Organization, 2019, p. 84).

Furthermore, the scope of the new organisation’s work as spelled out in the 1995-2005 education policies referred to “standards of technical and vocational courses” and “policies covering all aspects of post-secondary education and training” (Ministry of Education, Sports & Culture, 1995, p. 17). The reference to standards and policies for post-secondary education and training in the 1990s education policy document pre-empted a focus on standards that would later be expressed in the adoption of external quality assurance policy a decade later.

### 2.3.2 Set-up of the National Training Council

The 1995-2005 Sāmoa Education Policies document was the first comprehensive policy for the development of education in Sāmoa (Ministry of Education, Sports & Culture, 1995). The development of the policy was an off-spin of the Education Policy and Planning Development Project, itself a response to the 1992 World Bank system-wide review of the Sāmoa education system. The 1995-2005 Sāmoa Education Policy was the first strategic policy framework developed to clearly communicate strategic

priorities, responsibilities, and operational programmes of the government organisation responsible for education. The World Bank 1992 review of the Western Sāmoa education sector advised on the formulation of this document.

It would be expected that reading of the brand-new (in 1995) Sāmoa Education Policies 1995-2005 would show repetition of the themes and recommendations convincingly proposed in the World Bank review reports of 1992 and 1993. As outlined previously, the World Bank reports had been clear in its recommendations for Sāmoa to focus on primary and secondary education, with not much thought for higher education except to turn higher education into a user-pays system with more accountability. Surprisingly however, Sāmoa's policy makers decided to go in a different direction.

Disregarding the World Bank's (1992) recommendation to leave higher education out of development priorities, Sāmoa's education strategic plan of 1995 (Ministry of Education, Sports & Culture, 1995) identified the post-secondary sector as a priority. The education ministry's operational focus for tertiary education for the 1995-2005 period was the "formulation of a set of general aims and policies which will encompass all aspects of the post-secondary sector: university, polytechnic and teacher education, vocational, non-formal and on-the-job training" (Sāmoa Ministry of Education Sports and Culture, 1995, p. 7). Also identified in the same strategic policy document was the intention for central coordination of the post-secondary education and training sector and better focus its activities on supporting national development.

The flagged planning would be undertaken by a selected taskforce, identified as a "National Training Council" comprised of government and non-government representatives (Ministry of Education Sports and Culture, 1995, p. 31). The purpose of the planning activity for the 'post-secondary' sector at this early stage was identified as firstly, ensuring efficient resource allocation by removing course duplication, ensuring linkage between secondary education and post-secondary education and training, and thirdly ensuring that workforce entrants possess the requisite skills and knowledge for work. The reference to

the 'National Training Council' in the inaugural education policy document set the stage for the entrance of external quality assurance policy for higher education in Sāmoa a decade later.

### 2.3.3 From National Training Council to National Training Authority

There is evidence of a change in the idea from 'National Training Council' to 'National Training Authority' responsible for aims and policies for the post-secondary education and training sector towards the end of the 1995-2005 Strategic Policies period. In 2002 a United Nations Country Team completed a national assessment of priorities and challenges for Sāmoa, with regard to three topical areas: "governance and economic management, food security and poverty reduction, and social services and human development" (United Nations Country Team Sāmoa, 2002, p. ii). The United Nations Country Team was comprised of members from eight United Nations agencies, with the intention to better coordinate country support from all United Nations bodies. The resulting report indicated that a 'National Training Authority' would be set up in Sāmoa to undertake accreditation and facilitate stronger links between education and labour demands in the country. Furthermore, the report stated that:

Moves towards establishing a National Training Authority to standardize all accredited tertiary level education systems in the country have been started and will lead to a more consolidated linkage between education on labour market demands in the country. (United Nations Country Team Sāmoa, 2002, p. 33).

The report also advised the "development of a policy on nonformal education and establishment of non-formal education centres to enhance life skills of school leavers in collaboration with the national training authority" (United Nations Country Team Sāmoa, 2002, p. 55).

The move to establish a coordinating policy body for post-secondary education and training speeded up in the early 2000s when development partners the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) became involved to provide financial support towards this goal. The support provided by the UNDP and ILO in 2003 was regarded as pre-establishment activities. The

support by the two organisations included a review of Sāmoa's economic outlook, skills training needs in relation to the labour market, national education policies and existing vocational training programmes and curriculum (International Labour Organization, 2019). The involvement of the ILO with the establishment of what would become the external quality assurance body signalled the intentional focus on aligning post-secondary education in Sāmoa to skills needs for the labour market.

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) website information on programmes under the ILO Decent Work Agenda contains two mentions of projects relating to the Sāmoa's external quality assurance body. The first refers to a 2003 project amounting to USD 51,500, funded by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), that made available "preparatory assistance to provide technical services support towards the establishment of a national training council/training qualifications authority in Sāmoa" (International Labour Organisation, n.d.a, Section SAM/03/002). The second seems to have been a follow-up project in 2004, with a costing of USD 252,800 again funded by the United Nations Development Programme. The purpose of the follow-up project is listed as "capacity building, vocational training policies and systems" (International Labour Organization, n.d.b, Section SAM/39/280/01). Further,

This new government agency must develop the recognition of qualifications and skills, on policy advice, coordination and quality assurance on school education and training that meets labour market demands and supports national goals for human resource development. (International Labour Organization, n.d.b, Section SAM/39/280/01).

The collaboration between the UNDP and the ILO in the establishment phase of the Sāmoa Qualifications Authority is mentioned in an ILO Review of Priorities and Programmes in the Pacific (International Labour Organization, 2007). The involvement of the United Nations Development Programme and the International Labour Organization in the establishment phase of what was by now being referred to as a qualifications authority signalled a decidedly economic intent for what had been articulated as an external quality assurance body for post-school education and training in Sāmoa. The scope of the new external quality assurance body would come to include higher education including universities.

### 2.3.4 Shift to the concept of a national qualifications' authority

The concept of the National Training Authority discussed, debated, and planned since the 1990s right up to the pre-establishment activities funded by the ILO and UNDP, changed to the concept of the Sāmoa Qualifications Authority just before the new government entity was launched in 2005. As early as 2004, a Sāmoa country report in a regional review of vocational education policy in the Pacific reported that the Sāmoan government had yet to establish validation and assurance mechanisms for the vocational certifications offered at the country's post-secondary institutions. However the same report went on to refer to the new government body as a qualifications authority when it stated that, "the Sāmoa Qualification Authority is now approved by Government to be established within the next two years and it will take on this role" (Bartram, 2004, p. 15).

The role to which Bartram (2004) referred as the responsibility of the new qualifications body was that of verifying the quality of training and validation of certifications being offered in Sāmoa at the time. The decision on the concept of a qualifications authority or training authority was discussed by the Interim Board/Council that was set up at the time. The Interim Board is mentioned in the 2005 Sector Evaluation report (Government of Sāmoa & PRIDE Project, 2005) which reported that:

An Interim Committee was set up for the Sāmoa Qualifications Authority 2004/2005 assuming such responsibilities [which were to] form a National Training Council consisting of employer organisations, government, unions, and educational institutions to monitor standards of technical and vocational courses, to set policies covering all aspects of post-secondary education and training. (p. 17).

Notably, by the time of the education sector evaluation report, the 'National Training Council' identified for implementation in the Sāmoa Education Sector Policies and Strategies 1995-2005, had somehow re-framed as the Sāmoa Qualifications Authority by 2005.

The available policy documents are silent on why the name of the new organisation was changed from National Training Authority to the Sāmoa Qualifications Authority. However, various participants in this research recalled a study tour to New Zealand that took place in 2005 or 2006 after which it was decided that the new government body would be a qualifications authority and not a training authority. According to research participants, the participants of the study tour to New Zealand included members of what would become the governing board of the new quality assurance body, as well as the Minister of Education at the time.

To inform the pending decision on the direction of the new organisation, officials and members of the Interim Board including the Minister for education travelled to New Zealand to visit the New Zealand Qualifications Authority in 2005. The outcome report of this study tour seems to have been lost to history. However, two talanoa participants spoke on this point, that the decision to establish the organisation as a quality assurance body like the NZQA, was made after the study tour to the NZQA in New Zealand. A research participant, “U.N.” (a senior quality assurance policy official), recalled that,

The external quality assurance body was initially discussed as a national training authority.

But then there was a study tour that went to New Zealand and Australia. It was the Interim Board at the time, and two people from the project, they went along and then they came back, this was their proposal, to establish a qualifications authority.

Another senior policy official had a similar recollection of the decision to set up a qualifications body modelled after the New Zealand Qualifications Authority to externally regulate higher education qualifications in Sāmoa. “O.S.” recalled that,

Prior to the establishment of the national quality assurance entity, there was a study tour where the Minister at the time... they went on the study tour so that’s where it all started from. In addition to that, the name of was advised by the then Director of education and everyone who was involved in education.

The two talanoa participants, “U.N.” and “O.S.”, had slightly different recollections on who made the decision regarding the change of the name and concept for the new entity from a training coordination body to a quality assurance body. Nevertheless, their accounts converge on the influence of the visit to the New Zealand Qualifications Authority and the impression it made on the travelling team, such that the study tour resulted in the recommendation to establish a similar quality assurance body in Sāmoa.

It seems the conversation around the set-up of the new national quality assurance body was seen as a possible solution to issues that occupied the minds of policymakers in the late nineties in anticipation of the new millennium. These questions were related to the direction of technical and vocational education and training, higher education, employment and the future of Sāmoa as a nation-state, its place in the region and the world. As another research participant, “U.V.” remarked,

In 1999, the idea of a national training authority was being mooted to look at what would have been the seminal ideas for quality assurance in higher education. Many forums took place in which many people shared ideas about what higher education should be about including technical vocational education and training. I and many others presented papers in these.

The 2006 Annual Report of the Sāmoa Ministry of Education confirms the name change, reporting that the new external quality assurance body was officially launched on Thursday 29 September 2005, at a ceremony held at the Sogi Millenia Hotel (Ministry of Education, Sports & Culture, 2006, p. 15).

### 2.3.5 The introduction of an external quality assurance policy

The governing board of the new quality assurance body was appointed and commenced their duties in 2006, effective April 12 of the same year (Ministry of Education, Sports & Culture, 2006). The related legislation was passed by the Sāmoan parliament in 2006, after which it duly became law. The gazetting of the Sāmoa Qualifications Authority Act in 2006 was only the first step in enacting higher education quality assurance policy, for there was no policy framework on which to base the activities of the new

organisation in 2006. The governing board of the Authority took steps to obtain funding support to obtain consultants who would write the policy, moved to discuss its regulations with a view to publishing these in the near future, as well as moved to develop a long-term strategic planning document.

Constrained by a perception of limited capacity in the new organisation and its small staff to write and formulate quality assurance policy for the post-secondary education and training sector in Sāmoa, the governing board and management sought assistance from an in-country funding facility. The Public Sector Infrastructure Facility supported by aid from the Governments of Australia and New Zealand for the most part, provided the funds to recruit various consultants. The major work of the first few consultants was the writing of quality assurance policies and procedures. The new organisation while authorised by law to enact quality assurance, did not have the processes and procedures to undertake this work, nor an overarching strategic policy with which to align such processes. Successive consultants were recruited between 2006 and 2010 to write firstly the Sāmoa Quality Assurance Policies (Sāmoa Qualifications Authority, 2009) then the Sāmoa Qualifications Framework Policies (Sāmoa Qualifications Authority, 2012).

The process of policy development involved national-level consultation with as many stakeholders could be identified, starting with existing post-secondary education and training institutions, then representatives of business and professional organisations, non-government organisations as well as government organisations. It was perceived even at this early stage that the scope of the new organisation's work was wide and encompassing. The organisational scope had been pre-empted in the 1995 education plan (Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture, 1995) in the specification of "aims and policies that will encompass all aspects of the post-secondary sector: university, polytechnic and teacher education, vocational, non-formal and on-the-job training" (p. 7). Members of the private sector, public sector and non-government sectors rapidly became part of the new organisation's mailing list for invitations to consultations and advisory groups.

At the same time as the organisation was developing its policies, it was also attempting to formulate regulations. One of the frequent comments of the then drafting consultant was that it was difficult to put something in the draft regulations when there was not an approved policy framework in place. In fact, the work on regulations did not progress for a long time for this reason, and soon other work priorities would supersede the development of regulations.

One of the constraints in the legislation that was soon identified by the organisation was the absence of real power to enact quality assurance policy. For instance, the wording of the 2006 legislation (Sāmoa Qualifications Authority Act 2006) did not make external quality assurance a compulsory requirement for all higher education institutions. One of the first questions raised in the enacting of the new legislation related to the official response if a provider were to disregard the new law and refuse to be registered or to have its programmes accredited by the new quality assurance body. It was perceived that the legislation did not equip the quality assurance body with sufficient power to carry out its legislated functions.

In 2010, the Sāmoa parliament passed what was essentially a new Act which gave the new government entity the power “to regulate” all post-secondary education and training programmes and providers (SQA Act 2010). Not long after the 2010 legislation for external quality assurance was passed, relations between the external quality assurance body and the university soured and the tension heightened to another level. Research participants recalled letters between the two organisations described as ‘nasty.’ Essentially the exchange of letters involved the national university writing to the external quality assurance body to express dissatisfaction with the quality assurance policy, and to state unequivocally that the capacity and authority of the agency to accredit programmes was limited to the university’s non-degree or technical and vocational education and training programmes. The university argued that approval and accreditation of degree programmes would remain the domain of external peer review. In fact the university had undertaken by that time external review of two of its faculties and was planning for the rest to follow. The university’s external review processes were a type of formative evaluation, with the outcome being a set of recommendations for improvement.

The quality assurance body disagreed with the viewpoint of the university, with the result that the disagreement had reached a state of impasse by the time of an external academic audit of the university in 2015. The academic audit report included a recommendation on this issue, urging that “the University seek a rapid conclusion to the current impasse with the Sāmoa Qualifications Authority over accreditation of higher education qualifications” (Academic Quality Agency for New Zealand Universities, 2015, p. 14). The impasse had come about because the university insisted that under its own legislation passed in 1987, the university had the authority to determine and regulate its own programmes. The external quality assurance body stood by its mandate as the quality assurance body and regulator of all post-secondary education and training providers and programmes. The disagreement seemed to have been facilitated by legislative technicalities that could only be decided in a court of law, or so it seemed.

While the university took steps to action the other recommendations of its academic audit, the recommendation pertaining to the ‘impasse’ with the external quality assurance body did not progress much. However, the university took steps to strengthen its position and gain credibility with regards external and internal quality assurance. These actions included the establishment of an internal quality audit unit of the university in 2015, the academic audit that was undertaken by the Academic Quality Agency for New Zealand universities in 2015, for which discussions took place in 2014 and the local accreditation of non-degree qualifications. Other important but related activities that took place immediately after the opening of the Academic Quality Unit of the university was the identification of a Graduate Profile, and set-up of a separate academic subcommittee of Senate, to review proposals for new programmes and courses or changes to such.

Closer to 2017, relations between the two organisations seemed to thaw a little with the head of the university consenting to the discussion of a Memorandum of Agreement on an accreditation protocol for higher education programmes. The suggested protocol would merge the external review process of the university, with the accreditation process of the external quality assurance body. A member of the quality assurance body would be included on an external review panel, with subsequent reporting to be worked

out by the panel members. It was a worthy idea in principle that at least brought something to the table to discuss the way forward for accreditation of higher education programmes. However, misunderstanding and disagreement around the implementation of the accreditation protocol and what it meant for future action undermined any potential usefulness of the Memorandum of Agreement. As of 2019, there was no change to the process for the quality assurance body at least. The Memorandum of Agreement was deemed to have been enacted by the time the external review of the Faculty of Education took place. The fact that the Memorandum of Agreement accreditation protocol was only signed months after the faculty external review was mis-remembered by several participants. Nevertheless, the agreement to accredit higher degree programmes using an external review process convened and managed by the university continued to be controversial right up until leadership changes at both organisations provided opportunity to discuss the policy issues anew.

In 2020, leadership changes at both organisations brought into place a commitment to work together for mutual benefit. The appointment of new leadership at the university was followed shortly by an internal policy directive to have all university programmes, degree or otherwise, submitted for accreditation by the quality assurance body, and this within the next three years. The quality assurance body for its part embraced this commitment and prepared to run the process of accreditation for the twenty-nine degree programmes offered at the university.

#### 2.4 Socio-economic context 1990s-present

This section outlines the major socio-economic events that influenced education developments and set the background for the entrance of external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa. The time period spans 1990s to the present. The influencing events were the natural disasters of the 1990s, public sector reform and national education planning that took place in the decade before the adoption of external quality assurance policy.

### 2.4.1 Natural disasters

The decade before the adoption of external quality assurance policy for Sāmoa was marked by successive natural disasters that severely impacted the livelihoods of Sāmoa's population. Historical accounts of the 1990s in Sāmoa usually point to the devastating double cyclones of 1990 and 1991, as well as the taro leaf blight that decimated taro exports.

Cyclone Ofa that hit Sāmoa and neighbouring Tonga, Wallis and Futuna, Niue, Tokelau, and Tuvalu in the first week of February 1990 remains the worst cyclone to have hit Sāmoa in the hundred years before and since. Every single person among the 170,000 strong population at the time was affected by a powerful force of nature that lasted three long days. In addition to the extensive infrastructural damage caused to communications, water and electricity supply systems, the gale-force winds damaged every single plantation in the country, laying waste to breadfruit, taro and banana crops that were the main source of livelihood for many at the time. My childhood recollections of sheltering our neighbours when their home was flattened during Cyclone Ofa is reminiscent of the experience of the majority of Sāmoans whose homes were completely or partially destroyed. As devastating as it was, the experience of Cyclone Ofa in February 1990 was repeated in December of the following year when Cyclone Val visited Sāmoa with no less intensity. It seemed unbelievable that a duo of tropical cyclones would visit Sāmoa within twenty-two months of each other, and many in predominantly Christian Sāmoa attributed these events to divine wrath.

The damage to the education infrastructure after the two cyclones included destruction of more than 50% of all school buildings, facilities, and resources (World Bank, 2002). Rehabilitation and reconstruction of the education infrastructure was projected to be more than what the government could afford or what development partners could commit (World Bank, 2002). It was not surprising that the World Bank recommended investment and reform to concentrate on primary and secondary education, while for the tertiary level it recommended that "proposals for capital investment or expansion should be judged

strictly on criteria of cost effectiveness in meeting directly the manpower requirements of the economy” (World Bank, 2002, p. vi).

While the Asian Development Bank would eventually step forward with a financing option for rebuilding the education infrastructure in Sāmoa, there were other events that heralded the coming changes to education and heightened attention to educational quality that would later result in the adoption of external quality assurance policy in 2006.

#### 2.4.2 Public sector reform of the 1990s

The 1990s decade in Sāmoa has been described as a “historical turning point in the development of Sāmoa” (Government of Sāmoa, 2001, p. vi) because of the outcome of expansive reforms that transformed and reduced the size of an inefficient and debt-ridden public sector. The goals of the reforms were to transform public sector efficiency and accountability, create an economic environment that supported the growth of businesses, and accelerate economic growth (Government of Sāmoa, 2001). One of the reform programmes was a programme of privatisation that started in 1987 and continued right through the 1990s (Amosa, 2012).

Sāmoan state-owned enterprises in the 1970s were varied and diverse, including things like iron and steel, gas, shipping, agricultural supplies, banking services, soap, meat products, tobacco, and beer (Amosa, 2002). Following the inefficient operation of state-owned enterprises during the 1980s that resulted in the Sāmoan government needing to introduce legislation to write off public losses, the Sāmoan government launched a programme of privatisation in the late 1980s that carried through to the 1990s (Amosa, 2002). The goals of the first privatisation programme that saw twenty-two state-owned enterprises sold off between 1987 and 1993, according to government records, were to “reduce budgetary stress, generate revenue, enhance economic efficiency” (Amosa, 2002, p. 127). A second phase of privatisation from 1994 to 2000 had the objectives of “promoting competition, raising efficiency and

productivity” and “accelerating economic and private sector growth”, including “meeting stated objectives of performance budgeting” (Amosa, 2002, p. 132).

Amosa (2002) attributes the far-reaching programme of public sector reform as an example of a developing country adopting the principles of public-sector management that originated in the UK and gripped the imagination of public sector officials in the countries of the British Commonwealth. While the reforms adopted recommendations of a 1993 World Bank proposal to the Sāmoan government, the reform programme itself was driven by Sāmoan officials. Interestingly, the senior Sāmoan officials in the core ministries driving the reform programme had been socialised into the new public sector management ideal through time spent working in New Zealand and engaging with global financial bodies such as the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank (Amosa, 2003). In fact, a series of World Bank seminars on public sector reform for senior government officials in the early 1990s seems to have been the learning ground for Sāmoa’s economic reform leaders (Amosa, 2003).

Among other things, the phase of public sector reform to improve ‘public sector management’ in Sāmoa during the 1990s was intended to improve the accountability of public services (Amosa, 2003). Amosa (2003) suggests that accountability was a core principle in reforming the processes of the Sāmoan public service in the 1990s.

#### 2.4.3 National planning

One of the outcomes of the public sector reforms was a more streamlined process of national planning, with the first Sāmoa Statement of Economic Strategy issued in 1996, followed by the second for 1998-1999 and the third in 2000 (Asian Development Bank, 2007). The Sāmoa Statement of Economic Strategy for 1998 to 1999 “emphasized vocational and technical training and formally recognized the criteria of equity, quality, relevance and efficiency for the education sector” (Asian Development Bank, 2007, p. 1). The concern in the Sāmoan national policy document with raising the standards of vocational and technical training and improving quality alongside efficiency echoed the earlier World Bank

recommendation to the Sāmoan government to “increase the quality, quantity and relevance of the human capital output of Western Sāmoan post-secondary educational institutions” (World Bank, 1993, p. viii). That the first national planning strategy was an ‘economic strategy’ reflects the overriding concern of the Sāmoan government with economic growth, evident in its call to all areas of the economy to contribute to this process. It is only later that the title of the national planning document was changed to the ‘Strategy for the Development of Sāmoa’ reflecting evolving awareness that national progress was not limited to measures of economic growth. Permeating the 1990s national planning documents were consistent references to improving the ‘efficiency’ of educational institutions in growing ‘human capital’ to support the overriding national goal of ‘economic growth’.

#### *i. Education Strategic Policies and Plan 1995-2005*

The first overarching policy strategy for the education sector in Sāmoa was the Sāmoa Education Policies 1995-2005 document. The development of the education strategy was a response by the Western Sāmoa Department of Education to the World Bank education review of 1992, which noted amongst other concerns that there was no single policy framework to guide education development in Sāmoa (Ministry of Education, Sports & Culture, 1995). In articulating its key concepts as equity, quality, relevancy and efficiency (Ministry of Education, Sports & Culture, 1995, p. 9), the Education Strategic Policies and Plan 1995-2005 echoed the call for improved efficiency that was the focus of public sector reforms at the time (Amosa, 2003), as well as the concern with quality and relevance raised in the World Bank review of education (World Bank, 1992, 1993). The concern with equity reflected awareness of an education system in which resources seemed to be concentrated in urban schools with restrictive access to secondary education. Tellingly, the policy intent for tertiary level education placed equal importance on knowledge and intellectual advancement alongside the development of skills for employment. The 1995-2005 policy statement stated unequivocally that “a national post-secondary system should be concerned with the advance of knowledge, scholarship and intellectual development on the one hand, and employment-related skills development on the other” (Ministry of Education, Sports & Culture, 1995, p. 7).

Two years later, the Department of Education head in Sāmoa would repeat the same message at a regional consultation seminar on the future of the regional university when he suggested that,

USP and the emerging national post-secondary institutions of the region will now have a much bigger role to play in providing university education and they should be prepared to take on non-traditional university roles such as preparing students for the work arena and acquiring employable skills. (University of the South Pacific, 1997, p. 8).

At the turn of the century, Sāmoa government officials spoke of the spirit of optimism and willingness to reform and innovate going into the 2000s (Government of Sāmoa, 2001). Policy documents and reports increasingly outlined the government target of increasing ‘competitiveness’ and for education that ‘meets standards’ in preparation to embrace participation in global economy.

#### *ii. Education Sector Project 2001-2006*

The first education sector strengthening project commenced in January 2001 with financing from the Asian Development Bank (ADB). The goal of the project as articulated by the ADB was to “increase the number of appropriately skilled people to meet the future labour requirements of an increasingly market-oriented and broad-based economy in Sāmoa” (ADB, 2007, p. 2). In its implementation, the project design purposed to finance a ‘time-slice’ of the 1995-2005 education development strategy. It is possible that the impression of Sāmoa education sector projects as being donor-driven and consultant-reliant may have arisen in the duration of the sector strengthening project as the education headquarters rapidly became filled with overseas-sourced consultants. The project completion report noted the necessity of “heavy front-end TA consultant inputs to prepare the policies and procedures” of all project activities (ADB, 2007, p. 8). The consultant-intensive nature of the education strengthening project became a feature of education projects in Sāmoa for the next two decades. At its completion five years later in 2006, the total project cost was just under eleven million U.S. dollars.

## 2.5 Chapter summary

In view of the argument that context is important in analyses of educational policy enactment (Rappleye & Un, 2018; Sanga et al., 2022; Spratt & Coxon, 2020), this chapter has provided a historical summary of events which set the context for the adoption of external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa. Sāmoa's experience with education firstly at the hands of religions missions then secondly at the hands of German and New Zealand colonial administration prepared its people for aspirations to success through education. The early reticence of the New Zealand's colonial administrators to allow Sāmoans to learn the English language or progress beyond primary level schooling can be seen as contributing to the motivation to subsequently expand higher education in Sāmoa. Hence the decades before adoption of external quality assurance policy were characterised by the establishment of a national university and expansion of secondary schooling.

The public sector reforms that commenced in the 90s introduced new public management ideology to Sāmoa's public entities, as part of the drive to improve the management and efficiency of Sāmoa's state-owned organisations. The adoption of new public management principles based on accountability, effectiveness and efficiency among other public sector organisations created the conditions for similar application to higher education institutions through the creation of the external quality assurance body to regulate such application.

The natural disasters of the 1990s heightened awareness of Samoa's vulnerability. Subsequent educational planning focused on how Samoa's education system could help Samoans alleviate such vulnerability as well as support Sāmoa's aspirations for economic growth and development. Subsequent educational planning subsequently focused on how the education system could better drive economic growth, with attention directed to all forms of post-secondary education and training. Hence early policy intentions seemed to focus on how all forms of post-secondary education and training including university education could better prepare Sāmoans to contribute to economic growth through skills development.

In summary, the experience with missions and colonially-administered education, natural disasters, public sector reform and national planning in the decade prior to the adoption of external quality assurance created the unique context for the subsequent acceptance and adoption of external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa.

## CHAPTER THREE: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews relevant literature on external quality assurance policy in relation to the conceptualisation of quality, approaches to external quality assurance policy, influences on quality assurance policy, academics' experiences of external quality assurance policy, and finally, external quality assurance policy in higher education in the developing country settings of the Pacific. The chapter opens with a discussion of the various ways the term 'quality' has been conceptualised within the context of higher education. Then I discuss different approaches to external quality assurance policy and the underpinning principles within the various approaches.

The chapter then moves to a discussion of the influences on external quality assurance policy as noted in the growing literature. This is followed by a discussion of what the literature says about academics' experiences within the enactment of external quality assurance policy. The last section provides a summary of the external quality assurance literature that is emerging from the developing country contexts of the Pacific. The chapter concludes with summary of identified gaps in the literature in relation to the focus of this research.

### 3.2 Conceptualization of quality in higher education

Early attempts to define quality in higher education referred to the relative nature of the term. Vettori (2018) posited that the relative nature of the meaning of quality in higher education accords the term "the rather dubious honour of being one of the most intangible concepts in higher education discourse" (p. 85). Harvey and Green (1993) suggested that quality in higher education was relative to whoever was speaking, the context in which the term was used, and to external absolute "benchmarks" that were often referenced in discussions of quality (p. 10). The notion of a higher education quality benchmark has

increasingly taken on meaning within international competition for higher education students, and rankings according to status (Couch, 2020).

A review of the available literature highlights the diverse ways in which the notion of quality in higher education has been conceptualized and articulated.

### 3.2.1 Quality as the fulfilment of quality standards

Similar to the idea of quality as an absolute benchmark (Harvey & Green, 1993), the traditional approach to the definition of quality in higher education sees quality defined in terms of academic standards (Coates, 2010). Coates (2010, p. 5) suggests that ‘academic standards’ are often articulated in terms of indicators or “shared measures against which comparisons can be made”. That is, a standard of quality could be seen as a measurable statement of a desired state of being, that exists for the sole purpose of measurement. Quality standards in higher education have also been described in terms of “varying levels of quality or performance” that are then categorized into levels such as low, high, and excellent (Coates, 2010, p. 5). The implication of both theorisations of quality, is that an external entity makes the decision on what is the desired state of being (the standard) or what is considered low, high, or excellent (level of quality).

Quality standards form the basis of quality assurance frameworks adopted all over the world. For instance, the Pacific Regional Quality Assurance Framework (PRQAF) has at its core a set of measurable statements for evaluating the quality of qualifications, institutions, and quality assurance agencies (Pacific Community, 2018). The PRQAF contains thirteen standards for evaluating the quality of a higher education institution. The first standard statement relates to the “establishment, organisational focus and structure” of a higher education institution, while the fourth standard states expectations for “teaching and learning” (Pacific Community, 2018, p. 17). Each of the thirteen standards in the PRQAF contain between two and five guideline statements that are clear statements of expectations for a higher education institution.

The Sāmoa Quality Standards (SQA, 2009) sets out expectations of ten thematic areas of a higher education institution's activities. For instance, the Sāmoa Quality Standard (SQA, 2009) specifies the required standard for organisation, programme development and review, programme delivery, financial resources, personnel, learner information, entry, and support, physical and learning resources, assessment, reporting of learner achievement and research.

There is remarkable similarity between the thematic areas in Sāmoa's quality assurance policy document and that of the regional quality assurance policy document. The only differences are that the regional policy document sets out additional standards for information management, processes for appeals, grievances, and complaints resolution. In addition, the regional policy document outlines standards for quality assurance bodies themselves and makes provisions for several types of awards (Pacific Community, 2018, p. 17).

Elsewhere, the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, 2015) outlines a framework of quality standards for higher education that are applicable across the higher education institutions of Europe. The standards specified within the guidelines document for the European Higher Education Area are used to assess internal and external quality of internal quality assurance, external quality assurance, and for the activities of quality assurance agencies. Such documents contain a comprehensive set of standards that are used by institutions and governments to discuss and measure the quality of higher education in their respective jurisdictions.

The existence of specific standards for quality in higher education begs the question of whose standards of quality they represent. Standards that are outlined in various quality assurance frameworks represent a particular point of view and a particular way of seeing the world. Brogger (2019, p. 2) describes quality standards for higher education as "governing technologies" that traverse localities and national borders, and transform social entities, even as "they change that which they seek to govern" at the same time as "they are themselves transformed in the process". Brogger's (2019) reference to quality standards as

technologies that govern refers to the ways in which quality standards often change the way in which people think about higher education, and about each other within higher education. In constructing the analogy of 'governing technologies', Brogger (2019) referred to the wave of external quality assurance that started sweeping through Europe twenty years ago, of which "the full impact... on higher education in Europe remains unknown" (p. 1).

### 3.2.2 Quality as skills and knowledge

There is also a way of thinking about higher education that defines quality in terms of the skills and knowledge attained by students as a result of education (Soudien, 2012). The idea of quality higher education as skills is linked to human capital theory, which views skilled adults as human capital, with the argument that human capital can be increased with quality higher education and training. As Soudien (2012) points out regarding the human capital approach to higher education quality, "quality in this approach is the level of skill that a learner is able to demonstrate" (p. 97).

The view of skills as human capital is the core idea behind the argument that skills are a key driver of economic growth (Hanushek, 2016). Hanushek (2016) argued that the cognitive skills of the adult population were a key determinant of economic growth for both developing and developed countries. Using economic analysis to support their argument, Hanushek and Woessman (2015) posited persuasively that the skills learned, and not the years spent in higher education should be the measure of quality in higher education.

The human capital approach to quality higher education as skills that then drive economic growth, is not without strong criticism. While human capital theory is popular with economists, education scholars in particular are critical of its ideas (Marginson, 2019). Marginson contends that human capital theory fails in three critical areas. Firstly, human capital theory fails to recognise the "non-linear and non-homogeneous" nature of daily incomes and work contexts when it makes general statements based on average income calculations in comparison to higher education outcomes (Marginson, 2019, p. 294).

Secondly, Marginson argues that the human capital approach is unclear on how exactly education improves how people work, which he describes as “a black box” (2019, p. 296). Thirdly, the human capital theory fails to explain the effect of social status and prestige of different occupations on how much individuals earn, even when having the same skills and knowledge outcomes from higher education (Marginson, 2019). Furthermore, the individualistic premise of human capital theory is the focus of criticism from others who contend that such individualistic notions of income linked to individual learning are at odds with the collectivist foundation of non-Western societies (Tikly, 2015) of which Sāmoa is an example.

Nevertheless, many economic growth policies in developing countries are premised on ideas linked to human capital theory, because of the possibility of raising incomes through the skills and knowledge gained from higher education (Hanushek, 2016). In such cases, the definition of higher education quality as the skills and learning outcomes attained by graduates clearly points to the underpinning philosophy of human capital theory.

### 3.2.3 Quality as contribution to reducing social inequality

An alternative view of higher education quality views quality as equity for underrepresented groups and a focus on reducing social inequality. Prisacariu (2014) suggests that the social dimension of higher education is critical to creating equality within higher education spaces and society. The social dimension of higher education according to Prisacariu (2014) includes “access to education, effective participation, and successful course completion, studying and living conditions, student support...financial support, participation of students in governance and student mobility” (p. 134). Such aspects form the social dimension of learning in higher education and are equally important indicators of quality in addition to traditional measures.

Building on Prisacariu’s (2014) argument to include the social dimension of quality higher education, Prisacariu and Shah (2016), extend this idea further by suggesting the inclusion of ethics. Prisacariu and

Shah (2016) contend that there is a need to include the idea of moral values and ethics in a reconceptualization of the notion of 'quality'. They refer to examples of unethical behavior from both students and academic staff within the higher education space and call for attention to moral values in higher education as an alternative definition of quality.

Another theme highlighted in the literature relating to the potential contribution of quality higher education to social justice is that of gender inequality. Benito and Verge (2020) argue that the quality debate in higher education and resulting quality assurance mechanisms ignores the gendered nature of opportunities, work incomes and social relations in higher education institutions. Equally important, Couch (2020) argues for an alternative approach that contributes to addressing social issues in conflict societies where traditional definitions of higher education quality have little meaning (Couch, 2020).

#### 3.2.4 Quality as value for indigenous societies

The fourth way in which quality in higher education is conceptualized relates to its value for indigenous societies and indigenous cultures. Pacific researchers have asserted that quality higher education in the Pacific should emphasize Pacific indigenous notions of education and culture (Thaman, 1997). Cultural democracy in higher education (Thaman, 2014) is achieved when institutional policies on teaching, learning, and research acknowledge and embrace the diversity of students' cultures. In particular, Thaman (2014) urges higher education policymakers to address "the three critical components of language, values and teaching/learning styles" in acknowledgment of the unique ways of knowing and being in each Pacific culture (p. 56).

Others stress that quality in higher education is necessary for building a Pacific research community (Suaalii-Sauni & Fulu-Aiolupotea, 2014) and strengthening Pacific indigenous knowledge in higher education to suit local needs (Fa'avae, 2018a). In New Zealand, indigenous educators advocate for Māori notions of quality in higher education centred on "the inclusion and reproduction of their own language, culture and whakapapa" to be included in a quality assurance framework for evaluating the quality of

wānanga (Walker, 2005, p. 150). These examples suggest that the conceptualisation of quality from an indigenous perspective differs from those presented earlier in this section.

The question of whether the conceptualisation of quality assurance is culturally appropriate has been noted in the literature. Hodson and Thomas (2001) suggest that diverse cultural contexts in different countries will result in different interpretations of quality and quality assurance to which contemporary notions of quality and quality assurance are often indifferent (Ryan, 2015). In research undertaken among academics in Vietnam universities, Pham (2019) asserts that quality assurance processes are considered foreign and incompatible with academics' Confucian values, such as the maintenance of harmony, hierarchy and 'saving face'. Furthermore, the concepts of quality assurance are not easily translated into languages other than English (Adelman, 2009; Marshall, 2016). Research is yet to examine Sāmoan perceptions of quality in higher education and my research aims to contribute to this knowledge space.

### 3.2.5 Other approaches to conceptualising quality higher education

Other notions of quality in higher education are framed by a stakeholder-centred conceptualization of quality, or the particular element being discussed (Watty, 2003). The contextual notion of quality in higher education is defined by specific contexts in higher education such as teaching, assessment, the department as a unit or the university as a whole (Watty, 2003). For instance, Houston, Robertson and Prebble (2008) discuss ideas of quality in higher education in terms of research, teaching at the departmental level and at the level of the university as a whole. Alternatively, Gibbs (2010) discusses quality in terms of factors that exist before the student enters higher education (such as resources and student selection processes), the processes of teaching and learning and the outcomes for the student such as student performance or gains in student knowledge. In comparison, the notion of quality as a stakeholder-determined idea refers to the notion of quality as being relative to the meanings and values ascribed to it by stakeholders. This is further discussed below.

### 3.3 Approaches to academic quality assurance

An early definition of quality assurance by the UNESCO states that quality assurance is:

An all-embracing term referring to an ongoing, continuous process of evaluating (assessing, monitoring, guaranteeing, maintaining, and improving) the quality of a higher education system, institutions or programmes. As a regulatory mechanism, quality assurance focuses on both accountability and improvement, providing information and judgments (not ranking) through an agreed upon and consistent process and well-established criteria. (Vlasceanu, Grunberg & Parlea, 2004, p. 48).

Two implications are apparent in this early UNESCO definition of quality assurance for higher education. The first is that there is no explicit reference in the definition to the quality of the teaching and learning process. Instead, the definition treats higher education as a 'system', arguably with inputs, processes and outputs. Secondly, the definition clearly pinpoints that quality assurance is a 'regulatory' tool to provide information for making judgements. In that sense, quality assurance is not specifically a tool for enhancing quality, but a tool for monitoring higher education quality. Thirdly, the definition states that an explicit focus of quality assurance is 'accountability.' The definition however does not identify to whom higher education is to be accountable or for what purpose the "continuous process of evaluating" is undertaken.

#### 3.3.1 Accountability-centred approach

The external quality assurance of higher education is often understood as being synonymous with accountability (Williams, 2016). Quality assurance for accountability aims to "render an account" for actions in relation to expectations set by those wanting the account (Middlehurst & Woodhouse, 1995, p. 260).

In external quality assurance policy for higher education, universities and other higher education institutions do the rendering of an account for their activities, in response to the government as the main

funder of their existence. Rowlands (2012) posits that government actions to make higher education more accountable are due to two things. Firstly, the government asks for accountability from universities to minimize the risk of universities not achieving the task of supporting national aspirations for a competitive economy in relation to other economies. Secondly, the government demands accountability from universities to minimize the risk of universities not providing expected returns on government investment, through skilled and productive graduates that contribute to economic growth. As Rowlands (2012) suggests, “for the state, governance has become one of the key ways in which this risk is managed, through increased accountability requirements” (p. 98.)

The requirements for demonstrating accountability involve expectations to report on qualitative and quantitative performance measures that “indicate functional qualities of institutional, organizational or individual performance providers” (Leiber, 2019, p. 77). Performance indicators are used in quality assurance policy to specify quality objectives, facilitate measurement of relevant quality features, report to higher education financiers and beneficiaries, as well as enable comparison between institutions and countries (Lieber, 2019). Common performance measures of accountability include graduate and postgraduate numbers and research income, (Yingqiang & Yongjian, 2016), student feedback (Leckey & Neill, 2001), and labour market outcomes such as graduate employability and graduate earnings (Matsudaira, 2016). Accountability is reflective of human capital theory because it requires higher education institutions to show evidence of economic returns for public expenditure on higher education through the achievement of results such as graduate employment (Allais, 2014).

Consistent with increasing government expectations for more accountability from higher education, is the rise of managerial practices that Deem and Brehony (2005) refer to as “new managerialism” or as “new public management” (p. 219). New public management principles focus on improving the governance of universities to better produce the outcomes that are required by the government. Managerialism in universities has been described by Watts (2017) as “a neoliberal imaginary that treats education as a

commodity and universities as part of a market” (p. 12) and uses managerial templates from the corporate world as a model for university governance (Peters, 2013).

### 3.3.2 Stakeholders-centred approach

The term ‘stakeholders’ refers to the distinct groups whose interests, values and ideas of the purpose of higher education drive different definitions of quality standards (Matei & Iwinska, 2016; Schindler et al., 2015; Steinhardt et al., 2017; Vettori, 2018; Yingqiang & Yongjian, 2016). Shanahan and Gerber (2006, p. 166) define stakeholders as “those who have an interest in, an impact on, or are users of” higher education, while an earlier definition refers to stakeholders as “who or what really counts” (Freeman, 1984; cited in Leisyte & Westerheijden, 2014, p. 84). The notion of stakeholders implies that the voices of different groups have more or less influence and are therefore accorded a higher or lower priority according to whether they possess “power, legitimacy and urgency” (Leisyte & Westerheijden, 2014, p. 84). For example, Groen’s list (2017) of stakeholders in higher education includes “students, parents, society and governments” (p. 89); Leisyte and Westerheijden (2014) include only students and employers, and Matei and Iwinska (2016) include the student, employers and the state. Moreover, Marshall (2016) points out that different stakeholders have competing notions of quality and influence quality processes depending on their salience in different contexts.

The importance of the ‘student’ as a stakeholder in the quality discourse is well documented (Hoecht, 2006; Little & Williams, 2010). Despite the presentation of the student perspective as homogeneous (Groen, 2017; Matei & Iwinska, 2016), the research literature indicates otherwise. For instance, research into student perspectives of what is quality higher education shows differing views such as relating to what academics do that help students achieve desirable assessment results (Cheng, 2011) and enable success in the world of work or transforms them into a better person (Bamwesiga, Fejes & Dahlgren, 2013). Other research theorises that students view quality as both continuous improvement of teaching and learning and achievement of student excellence (Zibeniene & Savickiene, 2014).

Similar to the diversity apparent in student perspectives of quality, research also points to academics having different views of quality. For example, while some academics view quality as “excellence in scholarly endeavour” (Anderson, 2006, p. 171), others define quality in terms of enhanced preparation for work performance and graduate employability (Houston, Robertson & Prebble, 2008; Nabaho, Aguti & Oonyu, 2017). This suggests that there is no collective consensus among academics on what is considered quality in higher education (Cheng, 2011).

Finally, governments are a powerful stakeholder that also have differing perspectives on quality in higher education. The view espoused by governments relates to the idea of quality as accountability (Houston & Paewai, 2013; Middlehurst & Woodhouse, 1995; Nicholson, 2011). The demand from governments for higher education institutions to improve accountability is consistent with the emergence of external quality assurance systems in many jurisdictions (Groen, 2017; Hoecht, 2006; Houston & Paewai, 2013; Middlehurst & Woodhouse, 2006; Yingqiang & Yongjian, 2016). The call for improved accountability has been linked to the concern with demonstrating a return on public investment (Alderman, 2016; Blanco-Ramirez & Berger, 2014; Turner, 2010) which is a feature of human capital ideology (Robertson et al., 2007). Exponential growth in student enrolment (Mok & Chan, 2016; Neubauer & Gomes, 2017; Singh, 2010) and concern with regulating cross-border higher education arrangements (Hou, 2012; Stella, 2006; Zwanikken et al., 2013) are additional factors that have directed government attention toward higher education. Equally important is the government’s overriding concern that higher education plays its role in maintaining national competitiveness through participation in the global knowledge economy (Jarvis, 2017). This signals an escalation of concern with the quality of higher education to factors associated with globalisation and neo-liberal ideology, which I will return to later in this section.

Given the concern within the quality assurance literature on stakeholders and their importance in quality assurance policy, it is a little surprising that the question of why the voices of certain stakeholders matter more than others has limited treatment in the literature.

### 3.3.3 Steering at a distance

External quality assurance policy has been described as a tool that the state uses for “steering at a distance,” the journey and activities of universities (Vidovich, 2002, p. 391). Chu and Westerheijden (2018) in their analysis of the phases of quality assurance policy in Western Europe argue that “for many European countries, the establishment of quality assurance mechanisms in the 1980s represented a fundamental change in the relationship between higher education and government” (p. 263). The change in how higher education and government related to each other was evident in the production of a new policy document that outlined the government’s strategy of “steering at a distance” (Chu & Westerheijden, 2018, p. 264). The policy of steering at a distance for the Netherlands specifically, and for Western Europe generally, involved the institution of formal processes for external quality assurance of higher education. External quality assurance “was viewed as a powerful policy instrument to inform the stakeholders that higher education institutions were operating within the parameters set by government” (Chu & Westerheijden, 2018, p. 265).

The idea of steering at a distance has two implications within the context of external quality assurance in higher education. Firstly, there is the implication that the entity doing the steering, namely the government, is attempting to do so at a perceived ‘distance’ from the entity being steered. The question of distance is interesting in that external quality assurance policy has much influence on the work of academics. The assumption is that individuals who make decisions and do the work in higher education institutions engage willingly with the ‘steering’ and go along with the external directives from the government. Secondly, there is the assumption that there is an external rationale for the ‘steering’ in a particular direction and that academics, who are at a distance from the ‘steering,’ have no influence on how or to where they are being ‘steered.’ The examination of responses by academics to the external steering of their work by the government is thus one of the main aims of this research.

### 3.3.4 Types of quality assurance frameworks

Prisacariu (2014) postulates that external quality assurance policy takes the form of four different types of quality assurance frameworks. The first type of quality assurance system looks at how higher education institutions manage the quality of their programmes and teaching. Underlying this first approach to external quality assurance is the “autonomy” of higher education institutions (Prisacariu, 2014, p. 136). Hence the external quality assurance work focuses on the methods and processes the higher education institution uses to maintain the quality of its programmes and teaching. The second type of external quality assurance system in Prisacariu’s (2014) typology reviews quality against standards that are set externally. The standards are usually detailed and organised in terms of organisational infrastructure and financial resources, management and administration, human resources and strategic intent. The underpinning concern in this type of system is “compliance,” evident in the emphasis on evidence that demonstrates adherence to detailed standards (Prisacariu, 2014). The third approach to external quality assurance according to Prisacariu (2014) is underpinned by “results” and looks at the performance of the educational system in the form of student results. In this approach, the evaluation of higher education institutions focuses on student achievement of qualification outcomes that are mapped to a national qualifications’ framework. The fourth and final type of approach focuses on “governance” through the review of the higher education institution’s performance against its own governance principles, mission, and goals.

While Prisacariu’s (2014) analysis and typology of quality assurance policy systems clearly identify the underpinning principle of each approach, it does not account for systems that might be a mixture or have some features of more than one model. It also does not account for changes in how quality assurance policy might be enacted over time, in response to changing circumstances.

To some extent, Winchester and O’Brien (2018) account for such changes in their theorisation of how quality assurance policy systems change. Winchester and O’Brien (2018) posit that in some jurisdictions, quality assurance policy changes over time through a process of “logical incrementalism” (p. 19). Logical

incrementalism refers to the addition of features or elements to existing quality assurance policy over time without changing anything essential in approach or philosophy. Such change is planned and proactive. Alternatively, quality assurance approaches in other jurisdictions change over time through “emergent strategy” (Winchester & O’Brien, 2018, p. 22). The emergent strategic approach sees quality assurance policy changing in response to an event or series of events that are often political and is often adhoc and disruptive (Winchester & O’Brien, 2018). The change in quality assurance approach that resulted in the transition of external quality assurance from the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) to the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) in Australia (Baird, 2013), is an example of an emergent strategic change in quality assurance policy (Winchester & O’Brien, 2018).

Despite the differences in quality assurance approaches and changing policy approaches, there is agreement that quality assurance policies around the world are remarkably similar (Hayward, 2017). As Hayward (2017) concluded from active engagement in quality assurance frameworks across several continents, “processes around the world are remarkably similar with respect to goals, methods and expectations” (p. 22).

### 3.3.5 Quality enhancement

An alternative approach to quality assurance of higher education has gained prominence in the last decade, which seeks to redirect the focus of quality assurance away from regulation and back to enhancing teaching and learning. This approach is known as quality enhancement. Quality enhancement refers to practices aimed at innovation in teaching and learning and the empowerment of the student (Nicholson, 2011) expressed by Harvey and Newton (2010) as “transformation of learners and learning” (p. 158).

Quality enhancement is different from quality assurance in that it seeks a formative approach to improving quality, seeks staff engagement in a learning experience, and involves multiple measures as opposed to standardized measures of quality assurance (Groen, 2017). Quality enhancement seeks to

engage academic staff in a journey of quality improvement that involves discussion, reflection and collaborative decision-making (Groen, 2017).

Williams (2016) suggests that perspectives of quality assurance and quality enhancement can be viewed along a continuum that situates them either as discrete activities with no relationship to each other, as opposing notions, as one leading to the other, or as parts of the same process. Conversely, Nicholson (2011) points out that the notion of quality enhancement is diametrically opposed to notions of quality assurance because quality assurance targets quality monitoring and maintenance while enhancement targets innovation and transformation. Overall, the quality enhancement approach stresses innovation (Nicholson, 2011), the transformation of learners and the learning process (Harvey & Newton, 2010), and emphasises practices that improve teaching and research for improving quality in higher education (Houston & Hood, 2017). Quality enhancement is a key focus of external quality assurance of universities in New Zealand, and is characterised by a “high trust, enabling relationship” that makes room for university independence (Matear, 2018, p. 31).

### 3.4 Influences on quality assurance policy

This section explores influences on higher education quality assurance policy from foreign aid, multilateral organisations’ definitions of quality assurance and policy borrowing.

#### 3.4.1 Policy borrowing

The notion of policy borrowing can be used to explain how policies travel from originating organizations or countries to other countries across the globe. Policy borrowing refers to appropriation in a certain context of a policy that has been previously enacted in another context, a process that is shaped by both indigenous and foreign culture (Tan, 2016). Countries appropriate borrowed policy with reference to external systems through a process of externalization that Steiner-Khamsi (2016) describes as similar to having local decision-makers reaching out and taking hold of whichever element of a global policy aligns with their domestic agenda. This selective borrowing indicates that a global policy will be enacted

differently in different contexts depending on the factors at play (Hsieh, 2016; Lao, 2015; Steiner-Khamsi, 2016, Veselý, 2013). Furthermore, Waldow (2012) maintains that international organizations are increasingly being seen as policy references, compared to reference countries that served as policy models and examples for other countries.

The notion of policy borrowing is also important because it considers the power relations that exist between the adopting country and the policy source, in particular where the policy source is a donor organisation or donor country (McDonald, 2012). Dale (2005) discusses the notion of power and policy borrowing and avers that policy borrowing takes the power to decide away from the nation-state and puts it squarely in the hands of organisations setting the policy agenda. Johnson (2006) asserts that developing countries are disadvantaged by limited research examining critical policy shifts in developing country contexts, which limits their ability to make cognizant policy choices. I aim to consider the influence external voices in the design and delivery of higher education policy and consider who benefits from such policies.

#### 3.4.2 The influence of foreign aid

As previously mentioned, Sāmoa engages with a number of aid organisations, with several that have been influential in the development of external quality assurance policy (Sāmoa Qualifications Authority, 2008b). In an analysis of multilateral and bilateral aid patterns in higher education, Maldonado-Maldonado and Cantwell (2009) are critical of multilateral and bilateral aid, which they assert is more about achieving the aims of donors rather than assisting recipients. Ravuvu and Thornton (2016) support this pessimistic view of aid to Pacific Island countries which they insist is driven by a western model of development premised on neoliberal ideology and which has so far produced minor impact on receiving economies. Such views suggest that aid recipients, like Sāmoa, are at the mercy of neo-colonial aid arrangements that perpetuate strong ties for political and economic gains to donor countries (Collins & Rhoads, 2010; Shahjahan, 2013). Neo-colonialism refers to practices and arrangements which perpetuates

power relationships between previous colonial powers and nation states, after such nation states have achieved political independence and self-determination (Bray, 1993).

In contrast, Ulu (2013) argues that far from being a passive and unwary recipient of foreign aid, Sāmoa (through responsible senior officials) exercises sovereignty in decisions on the form and purposes of development assistance. Ulu (2013) further affirms that aid coordination in Sāmoa is determined by local priorities and that decisions on acceptance of aid assistance depend on whether such assistance supports the local (as opposed to regional or global) priorities. Nonetheless, the characterisation of aid assistance as being successively 'redistributive,' then 'disciplinary,' then 'defensive' and finally 'offensive' in its current approach (Maldonado-Maldonado & Cantwell, 2009) is worth examining in relation to current development in higher education quality assurance in Sāmoa. The research available into the influence of aid relationships on education in the Pacific is limited and does not have a strong focus on foreign aid and higher education policy (Coxon & Munce, 2008; Nabobo-Baba, 2012; Ravuvu & Thornton, 2016; Sanga, 2003; Spratt, 2016). This research will contribute to this gap by examining aid influences on quality assurance policy in Sāmoa.

The expansion of quality assurance policy has been described as a globalising process (Vidovich, 2002) influenced by policy actors considered influential in higher education policy on a global scale (Waldow, 2012). The UNESCO and the OECD are viewed as policy actors who have influenced higher education quality assurance policy in many countries (Amaral & Neave, 2009; Ramirez, 2014; Teferra, 2009).

Quality assurance policy features prominently in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 (UNESCO, 2016). Target 4.3 aims to achieve "equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university" (p. 40). Although the SDG4 framework does not suggest how quality is to be assured, the document underscores the role of universities in fostering critical and innovative thinking, and generation of "knowledge for social, cultural, ecological and economic development" (UNESCO, 2016, p. 41). The UNESCO's recent focus suggests an expansive and

holistic view of quality higher education that facilitates knowledge and innovation, not just for economic growth, but also for social, cultural, and ecological progress.

In comparison, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (2008) definition of quality assurance as the “process of establishing stakeholder confidence that provision (input, process and outcomes) fulfils expectations and measures up to threshold minimum requirements” (p. 261) begs the question of which stakeholder perspective is to be privileged and whose minimum requirements are to be met. These questions are answered in the policy recommendations section of the same document, which refers to stakeholders as “students, graduates and employers” (OECD, 2008, p. 311). In so doing, it is evident that the OECD conception of higher education reflects a neoliberal view of higher education as a product in which universities compete as part of a market (Jarvis, 2017; Watts, 2017). Furthermore, a report on the extent to which OECD countries have implemented the UNESCO/OECD Guidelines for Quality in Cross-Border Higher Education shows thirty out of 32 members and 9 out of 10 non-member affiliated countries report a high degree of compliance with the guidelines (Vincent-Lancrin, Fisher & Pfothenauer, 2015). The extent of quality assurance policy adoption in OECD countries, as well as the expansion to non-OECD countries like Fiji, is evidence of the OECD’s influence on national higher education policies.

### 3.5 Academics’ experiences of quality assurance policy enactment

How academics respond to external quality assurance policy is an expanding element in the quality assurance literature. The literature indicates that there are differing perspectives on how academics respond to external quality assurance policy.

#### 3.5.1 Patterns in academics’ responses to external quality assurance policy

Cardoso, Rosa, and Santos (2013) saw patterns in the way academics perceived and responded to quality assurance policy. In their research, female academics were more accepting of quality assurance which they explained as being due to female academics’ readiness to use engagement in quality assurance as a

way to demonstrate their agency and encourage more equitable practices within higher education institutions (Cardoso, Rosa & Santos, 2013). Cardoso, Rosa, and Santos (2013, p. 107) suggest that “female academics, generically experiencing less power than male academics within academia, appropriate quality assurance as a way to enhance their rights and power”. Two other patterns in academics’ responses to quality assurance were ascribed to disciplinary affiliation and prior experience with enacting quality assurance activities. The influence of educational ideology can be seen in how academics in different disciplines approached their work and responded to external quality assurance measures.

The increased workload with the addition of time to prepare documents and reports to fulfill monitoring purposes has been cited as one of the many reasons for academic resistance to quality assurance policy (Tavares, Sin, Videira & Amaral, 2017). Cardoso, Joao Rosa, and Santos (2013) also noticed from their research that academics in leadership and governance roles or decision-making roles tended to have a more accepting view of quality assurance than other academics who were not in such positions.

On the implementation of quality assurance in Vietnam universities, Pham (2019) argued that quality assurance was viewed with limited credibility among academics for several reasons. The first reason was academics’ belief in the disconnect between quality assurance practices and teaching and learning activities which were the focus of higher education work. The disconnect stemmed from the ministerial approach to quality assurance which was seen by academics as designed in isolation from “internal and organic quality assurance practices at the departmental level” (Pham, 2019, p. 178). The second reason for academics’ resistance to quality assurance is related to the perception of quality assurance staff as having inadequate knowledge and experience in quality assurance (Pham, 2019). Pham (2019) noted that academics were acutely aware of the inconsistency and seemingly ad-hoc approach that characterised the development of external quality assurance tools and standards. Such observations by the academic community did little to foster trust in the quality assurance system in Vietnam (Pham, 2019). The third reason for academics’ lack of trust in the quality assurance system related to the incongruity between the quality assurance approach and the Confucian values which underpinned social relations in Vietnam

(Pham, 2019). Pham (2019, p. 180) argues that “notions of public accountability, open communication and self-criticism associated with quality assurance processes seem incompatible with Confucian philosophy” which is concerned with harmony and places importance on “saving face”. Furthermore, Pham (2019) goes on to assert unequivocally that in the context of Vietnam, “the Confucian notion of interconnectedness... that forms the foundation of all behaviours of those living in this culture ... is at odds with activities that include critical analysis in various forms of evaluation for quality improvements” (p. 180).

In pointing out the tension between the values inherent in quality assurance policy and the cultural values of Vietnamese society, Pham (2019) illustrates by example what Ryan (2015, p. 5) referred to as the “lack of cultural sensitivity” of quality assurance frameworks.

Research by Seema, Udam, and Mattisen (2016) among academics in Estonia suggests that academics’ responses to quality assurance processes are influenced by their level of motivation and sense of competency as academics. According to Seema, Udam, and Mattisen (2016, p. 117), “competent and intrinsically motivated people perceive external evaluation more positively”. However, quality assurance processes such as external evaluation are a source of great stress for academics, regardless of their levels of motivation or sense of professional competency (Seema, Udam & Mattisen, 2016).

With a shifting power balance away from academics and towards managers and administrators, it is perhaps to be expected that associated quality assurance processes such as external audit and course evaluation surveys will be viewed with distrust (Kimber & Ehrich, 2015). Furthermore, discomfort and insecurity on the part of academics who are accustomed to more autonomy and individual accountability (Gallagher, 2014) has led to game-playing on the part of academics (Anderson, 2006) and withdrawal (Cardoso, Rosa & Videira, 2018).

### 3.5.2 Game playing tactics

Academics' ownership of quality assurance processes is identified as one of the factors that influence how academics respond to external quality assurance processes (Cardoso, Rosa & Videira, 2018). Cardoso, Rosa, and Videira (2018) suggest that academics have more ownership of quality assurance processes when they are and feel "actively and willingly engaged in quality assurance processes" (p. 67). Cardoso, Rosa, and Videira add that the absence of authentic engagement and ownership usually results in inconsistent responses and attitudes that resist or contest quality assurance policy enactment. Game-playing tactics are often observed alongside such attitudes when academics resort to "inauthentic compliance" (Cheng, 2010, p. 268) to act out their resistance to quality assurance policy. Within other education sectors, Lingard (2013) points out that teachers turn to game-playing tactics when the focus of quality assurance is seemingly on the achievement of outcomes measures, "rather than working more deeply to change practices" that improve the quality of teaching and learning at the national and institutional level (p. 142).

In looking deeper at the phenomenon of game playing and why it occurs in response to quality assurance processes, the work of Pollard et al. (2013) highlights additional insight. In a review of performance indicators and benchmarks used in higher education in the UK, Pollard et al. (2013) examined how quality performance indicators and benchmarks were used in higher education and noted that such were often used for making internal decisions and managing performance. However, Pollard et al. (2013, p. 57) suggest that the external linking of funding to benchmarks creates conditions for game-playing behaviour by academics when they see that such benchmarks are now used for external "accountability and punitive sanction", as opposed to internal decision making. Elassy (2015) adds another dimension to the factors influencing academics' game-playing in response to external quality assurance, by pointing out that game-playing was also a way for academics to "have more power" in decision making (p. 253).

### 3.5.3 The experience of the University of the South Pacific

Closer to the context of this research, academics at the University of the South Pacific (USP) documented their experiences in engaging with a program of quality assurance activities as part of compliance with the accreditation requirements of an accreditation body based in the United States. The curriculum review and development initiative at the USP “was initiated against the backdrop of an institution-wide accreditation process... in its bid for accreditation from the Western Association of Schools and Colleges Senior College and University Commission (WSCUC)”, (Spiller, Armstrong & Sharma, 2021, p. 7). While there was potential for such an activity to be seen as “yet another minimalistic quality-focused endeavour” (Spiller, Armstrong, and Sharma, 2021, p. 7), the experiences of academics were primarily positive. An entire special issue of the *Directions Journal* (2021) was devoted to academic reflection and critique on the process and experiences of academics in enacting this particular aspect of quality assurance policy. A review of the articles written in the 2021 Special Issue of the *Directions journal* yields particular insight on academics’ responses to a quality assurance initiative that yielded primarily positive responses from academics.

Firstly, it is clear that the individuals leading the process adopted an intentional process of engagement through collaborative inquiry. The collaborative inquiry was initiated at the commencement of the curriculum review by asking questions along the way relating to “whether academics were able to feel connected with the process and distinguish it from what is often perceived as managerial impositions” (Spiller, Armstrong, and Sharma, 2021, p. 7). Alongside the process of curriculum review against the accreditation requirements, the culmination of the collaborative inquiry process was the publication of academics’ reflections and critique in the 2021 Special Issue of the *Directions Journal* (Spiller & Armstrong, 2021).

Secondly, the process involved a particular emphasis on engaging the heart and mind. Such engagement was described by the involved academics as “deeply reflective” involving a process of “re-engagement and the establishment of connective links” with each other while thinking about how their work “speaks

to students through the curriculum (the heart) and the pedagogy (the soul) of education” (Armstrong, Waqailiti, & Sarai, 2021, p. 38). The described process was relational, encouraging collegial connection as well as a deeper connection with the curriculum and pedagogy.

Thirdly, academics were given the opportunity to reflect on and shape their curriculum reform activities using “a culturally relevant learning process informed by Pacific epistemologies” (Kanemasu, Rakuita & Kopf, 2021, p. 18). Critical reflection on needed quality enhancement using a cultural lens translated into powerful learning experiences for academics. What started as “an institutionally-initiated change process” grew into an intense process of “ongoing re-examination and re-imagining” of teaching and learning philosophy and practice informed by cultural epistemologies (Kanemasu, Rakuita & Kopf, 2021, p. 26). Academics appreciated the enabling space to transform course curriculum and their own practice using critical reflection on Pacific ways of knowing and being. They had agency and power over how they engaged with the implementation of the quality assurance policy so that they were able “to see beneath the administrative and recognize a truly valuable and ongoing exercise” (Willans, 2021, p. 26). An already engaging approach to enacting quality assurance activities was further empowered by a contextually relevant and culturally grounded approach to the activity.

Fourthly it is evident that the academics involved in the USP quality assurance and enhancement activity were provided with administrative support and technical support throughout the process (Hayward, 2021). Hayward (2021, p. 70) described the provision of administrative support to academics involved in quality review as “a relief not to be underestimated when deadlines are so many”.

While the experiences discussed in the previous paragraphs point primarily to positive responses as a result of the engaging, relational, and contextually reflective way the quality assurance policy was enacted in the USP context, others did document negative responses. There were indications of pushback attributed to “a men’s club mentality” that might have been a reaction to the commitment and enthusiasm of the primarily female curriculum review leaders (Hayward, 2021, p. 66). The existence of a gendered dimension in how academics respond to quality assurance policy is echoed in the work of

Cardoso, Rosa, and Santos (2013) who suggest that female academics are more likely to respond positively to the enactment of quality assurance policy.

#### 3.5.4 Perception of outcomes of external quality assurance

According to Tavares, Sin, Videira, and Amaral (2017), academics mostly saw quality assurance as “resulting in perceptions of monitoring and control on the part of academics and losses of academic freedom” (p. 1295). Tavares et al. (2017) suggest that academics often see external quality assurance as being primarily for the purpose of control and monitoring and was thus seen as an imposition on academic freedom. The perceived limitation to academic freedom acted as a barrier to academics accepting external quality assurance.

Tavares, Sin, Videira, and Amaral (2017) also posited that while academics were positive about the increased awareness of quality issues as a result of quality assurance, academics regarded the actual effect of quality assurance systems to be increased bureaucracy and control instead of actual enhancements to teaching and learning. Furthermore, academics at universities and other higher education institutions viewed external evaluation as useful for enhancing understanding of areas that needed quality improvement at the same time as they perceived the nature of external quality assurance as being for the purpose of control (Seema, Udam & Mattisen, 2016).

In research with transnational academics working in Oman, Lamers-Reeuwijk et al., (2020) noted that academics did not consider external quality assurance measures sufficient to achieve an international standard of quality. They argued that while such measures were useful, academics expressed a desire for professional development activities to support the development of quality teaching and learning. Lamers-Reeuwijk et al., (2020) advocate for quality enhancement activities to take place alongside quality assurance activities in transnational higher education delivery because “the sole focus on quality assurance by provider universities is not sufficient” (p. 733) to create quality higher education programmes.

Kubuabola (2013) suggests that external quality assurance of higher education in Fiji within the Pacific's regional university has resulted in a "more effective and more standardised approach to quality assurance" (p. 67) in line with international trends. Hayward (2017) argues that for higher education, external quality assurance resulted in improved awareness of quality teaching in addition as well as increased attention to the benefits of higher education for graduates.

Overall the literature highlights the outcomes of external quality assurance policy as being the increased attention to issues relating to the quality of higher education. However, there seems to be limited discussion on who exactly benefits from external quality assurance for higher education, aside from satisfying government requirements for monitoring and accountability.

### 3.6 External academic quality assurance in developing country settings

External academic quality assurance of universities is not a novel phenomenon in the developing countries of the Pacific. In most if not all cases, external academic quality assurance for Pacific universities was undertaken by external agencies outside of Pacific countries, at the request of the Pacific university. The experience of the University of the South Pacific (USP) in going through its first external academic audit is a useful case in point.

In 2005, the University of the South Pacific entered into an agreement with the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) as well as the New Zealand Universities Academic Unit, to support the USP in the implementation of its newly formed quality enhancement strategy (Kubuabola, 2014). The first external academic audit of the USP in 2008 was a joint undertaking by the AUQA and the New Zealand Universities Academic Unit, followed by the second academic audit in 2013, by the renamed Academic Quality Agency (AQA) for New Zealand Universities.

It is apparent from the literature that senior leaders of the University of the South Pacific perceived the benefit of the exercise primarily in terms of improvements to accountability and quality assurance processes. Kubuabola (2014, p. 67) describes the impact of the 2008 academic audit as a "cultural change

towards accountability at all levels of the University” and “a more effective and more standardised approach to quality assurance at the University”. In making such a statement, Kubuabola (2014) suggests that one of the major impacts of the external quality assurance activity for the USP was the increased awareness of the importance of accountability, among university staff. Additionally, Kubuabola (2014) posits that the second major impact was the improvement of the process of quality assurance itself. At no point does Kubuabola (2014) refer to improvements in teaching and learning as a key impact of the quality assurance process.

Similarly, a report by the USP Vice-Chancellor credits the 2008 external academic audit of the USP with “improving cost efficiencies in the University’s academic policies, systems, and processes (USP, 2008, p. 13). There were arguably many structural enhancements to the processes of the University of the South Pacific as a result of the 2008 external academic audit by the Australian and New Zealand quality agencies. However, it is significant that reporting by senior personnel of the regional university on the impact of the external audit exercise, refers to enhancements in the management and governance of the university, and not to actual enhancements in teaching and learning or even research for that matter.

The experience of the University of the South Pacific from its first external academic audit as described by Kubuabola (2014) and in the 2008 USP Annual Report (USP, 2008) supports the argument that external quality assurance enactment improves management and efficiency from a corporate management viewpoint but does not directly and in itself improve the quality of teaching and learning that occurs in universities.

In further support of the previous point, Burnett (2019) was critical of recent external quality assurance activities at the same university. The focus of Greg Burnett’s (2019) critique was the constructive alignment process undertaken by the School of Education at the USP, in response to external quality assurance requirements. Constructive alignment is a process that involves aligning learning outcomes, with teaching and learning activities and assessment, usually with the spotlight on the terminology and verbs used in programme and course documents (Ruge, Tokede & Tivendale, 2019). Burnett (2019) argues

that the singular focus of external quality assurance processes on 'alignment' in documentation imposes a rigidity on teaching and learning that contradicts the university's "significant institutional history of advocacy for change through Pacific pedagogies of cultural difference" (p. 101). Burnett (2019) also critically points out that the unquestioning acceptance of constructive alignment by university management is strongly influenced by external pressure to demonstrate a competitive edge through "obtaining individual program accreditations to stay ahead of other tertiary providers in Fiji" (p. 105). Burnett (2019) argues further that the regional university's relationship with its largest funding source, Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, is the source of additional pressure to conform to external quality assurance as part of funding requirements.

It is evident from the discussion in the previous section that the literature on higher education quality assurance in the Pacific has made a big step forward in recent years. However, the literature on the enactment of external quality assurance policy for higher education in Sāmoa is still negligible (Wright, 2022). This research contributes to that space in its examination of external quality assurance policy enactment in Sāmoa.

### 3.7 Gaps in the literature

There has been extensive discussion of how quality in higher education is defined as well as how quality assurance is undertaken. The link to policy borrowing to explain the spread of external quality assurance policy all over the world has also been clearly made in the literature, along with how academics respond to external quality assurance policy. However, there is a gap in the literature relating to how external quality assurance policy has been enacted in a developing country context such as Sāmoa, where the collective nature of knowing and being is in tension with the individualistic approach of external quality assurance. In a context such as Sāmoa, another pertinent question relates to how external quality assurance policy plays out in a context where the notions of relationality and service underpin social organization and being. The notion of relationality is in direct opposition to the notion of steering at a

distance which underpins traditional approaches to external quality assurance for higher education (Vidovich, 2002).

This research thus contributes to the literature on external quality assurance policy by examining its enactment in Sāmoa's unique context, and in its explicit focus on policy enactment through the lens of principles that are central to the Sāmoan worldview, which is voice, values, relationality and service.

### 3.8 Summary

In summary, this chapter reviewed the literature in relation to the diverse ways that quality in higher education is conceptualised and articulated. The different approaches to external quality assurance have been reviewed, as well as the principle of accountability and the notion of stakeholders which underpin much of external quality assurance policy. The link between policy borrowing, foreign aid and the international spread of external quality assurance has been reviewed as well as how academics respond to external quality assurance policy. A summary of the available literature on the enactment of external quality assurance policy in the Pacific has also been reviewed.

This review indicates gaps in the literature relating to the expansion of higher education quality assurance reform and policy (Steiner-Khamsi, 2016), its adoption by developing countries (Johnson, 2006), and the extent to which its adoption is mediated by cultural notions of quality as well as the definitions put forward by influential organizations. This research contributes to the literature in that it examines the enactment of external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa, how it is determined, what is valued in policy processes and how this influences policy relationships and who or what is served by such policy.

## CHAPTER FOUR: CONCEPTUAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

### 4.1 Overview

The conceptual framework for this research draws firstly on Kabini Sanga's (2004) conceptualisation of indigenous Pacific research as having particularities in terms of ontology, epistemology, axiology and methodology; secondly on aspects of critical realist theory; and subsequently on elements of postcolonial critique and critical policy studies.

### 4.2 Sanga's Indigenous Pacific Research Framework

Sanga's (2004) indigenous Pacific research framework can be understood in terms of four philosophical debates relating to ontology, epistemology, axiology, and methodology. Sanga (2004) suggests that the epistemological, ontological, axiological, and methodological debates, as well as the orientation of indigenous Pacific research, can be understood in terms of usually opposing perspectives as summarised in Table 1.

This research adopts the epistemological, axiological, and methodological positioning of indigenous Pacific research as conceptualised by Sanga (2004) (see Table 1). However, I draw on the conceptual influence of critical realism for the ontological positioning of this research, in recognition of the possibility that reality is more complex than an opposing duality between the two extremes of a completely constructed reality, versus a completely empirical and measurable reality.

**TABLE 1***Kabini Sanga's (2004) conceptualisation of indigenous Pacific research*

	Indigenous Pacific research	Other Research
Ontological positioning (Sanga, 2004, p. 44)	"The social world for people is intangible, soft and internal to their cognition"	"The social world for people is tangible and external to their cognition whether or not they perceive this"
Epistemological positioning (Sanga, 2004, p. 45)	"Looks for insider or particularistic constructions, uniqueness, relativist knowledge, using frames of the participants"	"Looks for universal laws, regularities and causal relationships of realities to explain and predict realities"
Axiological positioning (Sanga, 2004, p. 47)	"The social world and research of that world is value-bound" "Research is value-bound and is therefore influenced by the researcher, the researched, the conceptual framework used, the methodology and the context"	"The social world and research of that world is value-free"
Methodological positioning (Sanga, 2004, p. 48).	"Research methods and strategies are to focus on obtaining contextual details, insider perspectives, particularities, as these unfold during investigation" "Allows for multiple realities to be captured, particularities to be spotlighted and for each voice to be heard"	"Research methods and strategies are to test hypotheses, systematic protocols and techniques"

Note. Own table summarising Sanga's (2004) conceptualisation of indigenous Pacific research.

While I situate myself as a Sāmoan undertaking research in a Sāmoan professional and academic community, my own research ontology does not situate easily within Sanga's Indigenous Pacific Research Framework (2004). For instance, I accept there is a transitive as well as an intransitive domain to reality, and that there is more than one way to explain both domains (Danermark et al., 2002; Scott, 2010). Nevertheless, I am mindful that the worldview and epistemology of my research participants may be different from mine and that Sanga's (2004) theorising of Pacific ontology and epistemology may be closer to that of my research participants.

### 4.3 Ontological positioning

As articulated in the previous section, this research adopts the epistemological, axiological and methodological position of indigenous Pacific research as conceptualised by Sanga (2004). However, the ontological positioning draws on elements of critical realism in its notion of a multi-layered view of reality. This section describes critical realism and how I utilise some of its ontological tools and concepts to frame my research.

#### 4.3.1 Critical Realism

Critical realist research has been described by Easton (2010) as “eclectic realist/interpretivist” (p. 119) due to its merging of assumptions that can be characterised as belonging to the usually polarised positivist and interpretivist traditions. Critical realists accept there is an empirical reality described as ‘intransitive,’ but also accept that our knowledge of that reality is relative (Archer et al., 1998, p. x), constructed (Walsh & Evans, 2014, p. e3), or construed (Easton, 2010). Critical realism acknowledges that reality is more than what can be comprehended, analysed, or typified by human theories. As Fletcher (2017, p. 182) explains, critical realism acknowledges that “ontology (i.e., what is real, the nature of reality) is not reducible to epistemology (i.e., our knowledge of reality).

Critical realism critiques the positivist reduction of reality to what is known empirically, as well as the constructivist claim of reality as what is interpreted (Fletcher, 2017). Critical realists argue against the “epistemic fallacy” (Bhaskar, 2010, p. 10) that suggests that reality is limited to our understanding of it. Hence this research adopts the viewpoint that the reality of external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa can be examined through a critical realist lens to understand what is hidden as well as what is observed.

#### 4.3.2 A layered ontology

Critical realists assert that reality exists in three domains, which are the empirical, the actual and the real (Archer et al., 1998; Easton, 2010; Sayer, 2000). The three domains exist within each other, in that “the

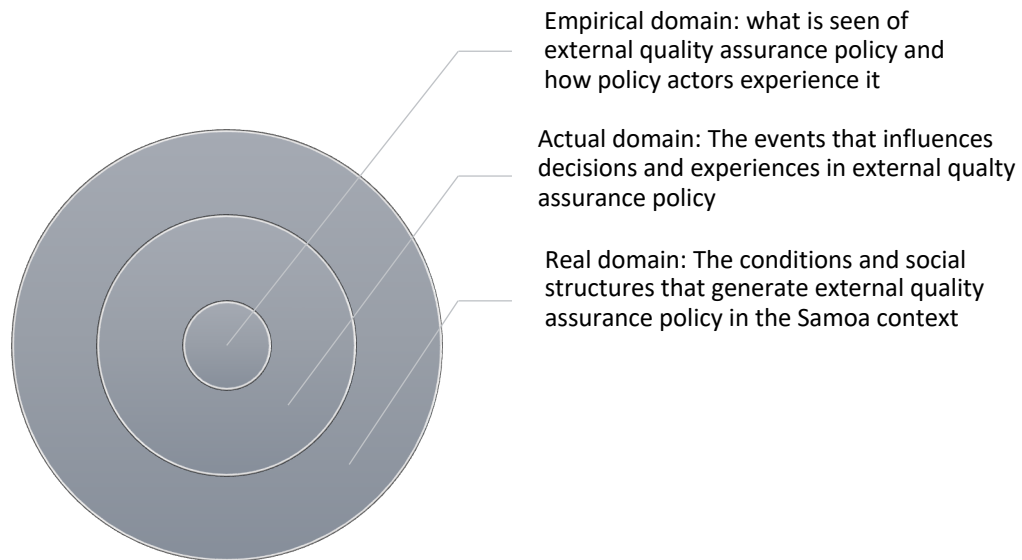
domain of the empirical is part of the domain of the actual, while the domain of the actual is part of the domain of the real” (McAvoy & Butler, 2018, p. 162). The empirical domain refers to the domain of observed and experienced reality, which includes “human actors’ observations, perceptions and sensations of reality” (Hu, 2018, p. 120). The actual domain refers to the domain where social events happen or manifest regardless of whether they are experienced or not (Fletcher, 2017). Hu (2018, p. 120) suggests that such “events are the result of exercised generative mechanisms and causal powers embedded in a structure of entities in the domain of the real”. The ‘real’ domain refers to the unseen domain that generates the observable through “underlying causal mechanisms and structures” (Larsen & Lindkvist, 2014, p. 144) that are also referred to as “generative mechanisms” (Blom & Moren, 2011, p. 1).

Application of a layered ontology to the pursuit of answers to the research questions suggests the following. The *empirical domain* is where the experiencing of external quality assurance policy by academic leaders and other policy actors takes place. The unfolding of external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa over time is explored, through time and space, viewed through the eyes and heard through the words of the research participants. The *actual domain* is where external quality assurance policy is imagined, deliberated and recorded on documentation to be approved by authorities at all levels upon which it becomes experienced by academic leaders and other policy actors. The *‘real’ domain* refers to the influencing structures that generate the demand for external quality assurance policy for higher education and shape how it is enacted, triggering multiple experiential realities and actions for those most closely involved in such policy.

Figure 1 illustrates my application of the critical realist notion of a layered ontology to this research.

**FIGURE 1**

The layered ontology of critical realism and its application to external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa



Note. Own visualization of Bhaskar's (2008) layered domains of reality, with application to external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa.

#### 4.3.3 Agency and structure

The discussion of agency in relation to structure is important in critical realism. According to Bhaskar (2010, p. 62), there is a distinct difference “between the genesis of human actions, lying in the reasons, intentions and plans of human beings, on the one hand; and the structures governing the reproduction and transformation of social activities, on the other”. ‘Structure’ in critical realist theory refers to social preconditions that influence, shape or generate observable events and behaviour (Bhaskar, 2010). Understanding such structures and how they give rise to events and behaviour, is necessary to achieve emancipatory change.

The “reasons, intentions and plans of human beings” to which Bhaskar (2010, p. 62) refers, is the manifestation of human agency. Within this research, attention is directed at the reasons, motivations and actions of policy actors involved in external quality assurance policy for higher education. The agency of academic leaders as a particular group of policy actors, is explored in the way they talk about their responses to the enactment of external quality assurance policy in higher education. On the other hand,

the governing structures to which Bhaskar (2010) refer, are represented by the organisation and policy actors that enact external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa, as well as the ideas and narratives that influence their decisions. This research directs attention to the underpinning values and visible relationships that are enacted by such structures as part of the development and enactment of external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa.

#### 4.3.4 Generative mechanisms

The somewhat mechanically termed notion of “generative mechanisms” in critical realism refers to social structures that influence social events which in turn influence, shape or cause social behaviour (Scott, 2010). Such social structures are ‘generative’ in that they are unseen, but cause or generate events and shape decisions and behaviour (Scott, 2010). In critical realism, the third and deepest domain of reality is the home of ‘generative mechanisms’ (Bhaskar, 2010). Examples include discursive or narrative structures, and systemic or relational social structures (Scott, 2010). Ontologically, critical realists view such transitive structures as the key ‘mechanisms’ shaping the emergence of individual actions and events in the social world. The question of social causality is one of the key concerns of critical realism research as it allows the identification of causal structures influencing individual actions and social events (Danermark et al., 2002). The identification and understanding of such ‘generative mechanisms’ or ‘structures’ is necessary for transformation and change to take place (Bhaskar, 2010). Some of the social events that have been analysed through the lens of critical realism include for example, student learning (Brown, 2009) educational policy frameworks (Tikly, 2015), and business and management research (McAvoy & Butler, 2018).

#### 4.3.5 Why critical realism?

A critical realist ontology underpins my research for three key reasons. The first reason is that its ontological premise aligns with my personal beliefs in a dimensioned reality, part of which is observable or empirical (Collier, 2011). The layered ontology allows the examination of the generative mechanisms

(Blom & Moren, 2015) that influence the development and enactment of external quality assurance, which is the subject of this research.

The second reason relates to the emancipatory potential of critical realism (Lennox & Jurdi-Hage, 2017). Critical realism enables the identification of generative social mechanisms that explain phenomena and in doing so “relations of power and dominance can clearly be seen, and thus can be recognised, challenged and transformed” (Lennox and Jurdi-Hage, 2017, p. 37). Oltmann and Boughey (2012) view this emancipatory potential as the interrogation of assumptions that prevent people from acting or thinking in certain ways. The implication for my research is that I actively seek to examine common assumptions, narratives or generative social mechanisms that influence the actions of individual actors in the higher education quality assurance policy context in Sāmoa. Through the identification of such assumptions, I hope to facilitate a vertexical moment (Scott, 2010) where change becomes possible.

#### 4.4 Epistemological assumptions

The lands and places of the Pacific Ocean is home to multiple languages, cultures and societal ways of being, and is therefore far from homogeneous. Pacific thought is not a homogeneous or clearly defined body of knowledge, at least in the (written) literature (Huffer & Qalo, 2004; Sanga, 2004).

However, Sanga (2004) posited that the knowledge systems of indigenous Pacific peoples have certain philosophical features in common. Drawing on Sanga’s (2004) theorisation of indigenous Pacific thought, he argues that “the social world for people is intangible and internal to their cognition” and that “in research, one looks for insider or particularistic constructions, uniqueness, relativist knowledge, using frames of participants” (pp. 43-45). That is, knowledge is understood within the contextual and social reality of Pacific peoples. The extension of knowledge as Sanga (2016, p. 90) further elaborates, involves the “centering of Pacific voices” and an orientation towards service.

Sanga (2004) theorised that the ontology of indigenous Pacific research is subjective, contextual, experiential, accepting of spiritual and cultural beliefs, spatially and chronologically situated, and above

all, changing and accepting of other realities. In the same paper, Sanga (2004) also submitted that indigenous Pacific epistemology is situated in the lived realities of Pacific peoples, and that ways of knowing reality includes metaphorical constructs drawn from and relevant to the Pacific peoples' everyday lives.

The following sections draw on the ideas of voice, values, relationality and service, that are central in the Sāmoan worldview and explains their relevance for this research. In doing so, this research aligns with the argument for indigenous Pacific research that is informed by "indigenous knowledge protocols, philosophies and principles" (Nabobo-Baba, 2008, p. 141).

#### 4.4.1 Relationality

The Pacific person is a relational being, and among the myriad societies, cultures and languages of the Pacific, "most if not all understandings of personhood in the Pacific are deeply relational (Vaai & Nabobo-Baba, 2017, p. 6). Vaai and Nabobo-Baba (2017) underscore the centrality of understanding the Pacific person as a relational being when they point out that "the self is relational... shaped by relational values and principles whereby the self is part of the whole and the whole is part of the self" (p. 6). In clarifying the relationship between the self and the community as one being part of the other, Vaai and Nabobo-Baba (2017) reject the binary notion of self versus the collective, of the individual versus the community.

The epistemological awareness of the self as being part of the whole, where the whole is also part of the self (Vaai and Nabobo-Baba, 2017) provides one of the conceptual foundations of this research. The second conceptual foundation is provided by the notion of *vā* or relationality in the Sāmoan understanding of the term, referring to the space between social beings as an entity, that connects and relates social beings and provides context for meaning (Wendt, 1996).

Within this framing, research participants are understood to be social beings that recognise themselves as individuals who are part of the collective, as well as understanding the collective to be part of their understanding of self.

The subject of this research, being external quality assurance policy in higher education, is viewed within the relational space into which it is introduced. The contextual relational space is acknowledged and valued. The contextual relational space refers to the social relations between organisations and individuals and the social networks in which they engage. Acceptance of the self as a relational being that is part of the collective allows for a fluid conceptualisation of positionality and self that is dependent on and guided by multiple relationalities (Sanga & Reynolds, 2020).

One of the concepts in the Sāmoan worldview that is helpful for understanding the relationship between the self and other social entities is that of *vā* (Wendt, 1996). *Vā* in the Sāmoan language has been translated as “relational space” by Anae (2016, p. 118), further expanding the definition of *vā* outlined by Wendt (1996) 20 years earlier: “*Vā* is the space between, the betweenness, not empty space, not space that separates but space that relates, that holds separate entities and things together in the Unity-that-is-All, the space that is context, giving meaning to things” (p. 8).

There are three aspects of Wendt’s (1996) definition of the relational space in the Sāmoan lifeworld. The first aspect expresses the space between people as an entity, the ‘*vā*.’ The *vā* or relational space is so important that it has its own name, referring at times to space and at times to distance in the Sāmoan language. The second aspect of *vā* is that it is a relating and connecting space as opposed to a separating space. For instance, the space that is between a researcher and participant is a space of relation and connection, which calls into play the ethics of negotiation and honouring of the relational space (Anae, 2016).

A similar metaphor can be seen in the way Lana Lopesi (2018) describes the Pacific Ocean as a connecting mechanism between the islands and lands of the Pacific, rather than a barrier to connection. Just as the ocean is represented by Lopesi (2018) as the entity that connects the places of the Pacific Ocean, the space between people is understood in the Sāmoan and Pacific lifeworld (Vaai and Nabobo-Baba, 2017) as a relational and connecting space (Wendt, 1996).

The third aspect of Wendt's (1996) theorisation of the *vā* or relational space presents the *vā* as context, and as context the relational space provides the environment that gives meaning to events and interactions. Spratt and Coxon (2020, p. 520) similarly assert that relational spaces as understood through "Oceanian theories of relationality" represent the "context behind the context" or the ways of knowing in the Pacific lifeworld into which education policy is introduced and enacted.

#### 4.4.2 Voice

Sāmoans are a people of rich oral and oratorical traditions. Tupua Tamasese Efi (2005) argues compellingly that "for oral cultures like the traditional Sāmoan culture, rituals, dances, chants, songs, honorifics, family genealogies and names of places, peoples and events" (p. 61) are tools for recording oral knowledge. The oral tools by which Sāmoans recorded and pass on knowledge (Efi, 2005) remain to this day. The importance of oral knowledge is linked to the importance of the art of speaking, the exercise of which is known as 'fofoga' or voice.

The question of who gets to speak or to be the voice, of an event or family gathering is important to Sāmoans. The first question of discerning Sāmoans of any event at which they were not present is to ask – *O ai le fofoga o le aso* – translated as – Who was the voice of the day/event? Voice represents authority and credibility.

Untitled Sāmoans know that they do not have a voice within the decision-making processes of the village or district, for only chiefs have this privilege. Within their extended family gatherings also, the ability to be heard in important family decisions starts firstly with the chiefs, then opportunity may be given to others as the high chief of the family sees fit. The ability to speak in a gathering represents authority and power. There is certainly a hegemony represented by the granting of voice to some and not others within formal Sāmoan gatherings. The power to speak and influence decisions may be corrupted by unscrupulous leaders for selfish gain at the expense of the collective. Nevertheless, Sāmoans recognise that not all voices can speak in decision making.

It is not only important to know who was speaking, but to know for whom they are speaking. Sāmoans acknowledge that speakers at formal events are always speaking on behalf of another and it is important to know who that person is. The identification of the person for whom the speaker is speaking reveals relations of power and authority that are part of the social fabric of life in Sāmoa.

With reference to educational policy, this research takes the stance that the creation and enactment of policy involves the exercise of power and influence through voice. Such influence may be identified through the examination of the decision-making processes in policy, as well as the examination of the influences over such decisions.

#### 4.4.3 Values

In agreement with Sanga (2004) that “the social world and research of that world is value-bound”, this research directs attention to the values that are inherent in external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa. Other research in Sāmoa’s education policy space agree with such a focus (Tuia & Iyer, 2015). Tuia and Iyer (2015) take a postcolonial critical approach to argue that education policy and development in Sāmoa has been shaped by globally accepted neo-colonial values. They argue further (Tuia & Iyer, 2015, p. 125) that it is necessary for education policy to be equally guided by “local Sāmoan values for the education policy to be highly relevant, authentic and applicable to the Sāmoan education context”. The absence of an authentic discussion of values in education policy has been identified as a key concern for policy researchers (Silova et al., 2020, p. 22).

#### 4.4.4 Service

One of the influencing notions in the Sāmoan lifeworld is the notion of ‘tautua’ translated as ‘service.’ The notion of ‘tautua’ in Sāmoan polity and society has been translated as servanthood that is exercised with integrity and love (Apulu, 2010, p. 1). Although the idea of tautua as service often refers to the duty of untitled men to serve their chiefs, servanthood according to Apulu (2010, p. 1) refers to service to God, family, church, village and district. In this sense, the notion of tautua or servanthood in the Sāmoan

understanding of social relations, refers to service in relation to entities that are bigger than the individual or the self, but which are part of the self (Vaai & Nabobo-Baba, 2017). Such entities include a Higher Being, the extended family, and the church, village and district communities within which Sāmoans move and interact.

Anae (2020, p. 220) describes the notion of 'tautua' as "the sacred tenet of Sāmoan faamatai (chiefly) leadership". In Anae's research on transnational Sāmoan chiefs (2020), most participants identified service to one's family and service to one's village as the two most important responsibilities of a chief, or leader. Such service is exercised in the way Sāmoan chiefs maintain the dignity of their families, help family members, and work to maintain harmonious relations within their extended family networks. Anae's (2020) research highlighted the importance that family leaders place on service, as something that family leaders do to benefit the family and the village collective.

The concept of service also extends to others that may not be in the Sāmoan's immediate collective network. For example, Sio (2020, p. 18) reflected that part of his socialisation as a Sāmoan involved being "taught that service to others is the basic principle o le faaSāmoa [sic]". Fully translated into English, the phrase makes the point that service to others is the basic principle of the Sāmoan way (Sio, 2020, p. 18). In Sio's articulation of the notion of service, the application to almost anyone within the Sāmoan's sphere of interaction brings home the point that acting for the benefit of others and not just self, is a fundamental principle of how Sāmoans view the world. It is possible to be selfless in this sense of acting for the benefit of others, because "the self is part of the whole and the whole is part of the self" as Vaai and Nabobo-Baba (2017, p. 6) aptly explain.

Latu (2017) extends the articulation of the notion of service in the Sāmoan worldview, by ascribing to it the characteristic of reciprocal caring. According to Latu (2017, p. 28) "the Sāmoan understanding of fetausia'i or 'reciprocal caring'" is within "a reality wherein both the matai and his family perform tautua (service) and tausi (caring) for each other". The ideation of service as Latu (2017) explains, has the additional layer of reciprocity, where 'tautua' is exemplified by leaders and their communities acting in

mutual service and caring for each other. The understanding that the self and the whole are part of each other (Vaai & Nabobo-Baba, 2017) makes it possible to serve with reciprocal caring as part of a family, church, village, and other communities.

Fa'aea and Enari (2021) add to the conceptualisation of the notion of tautua/ service when they suggest that tautua/service can be understood in terms of a cycle through which the Sāmoan progresses as they grow older. The first phase in the tautua life cycle involves Sāmoan young people learning to serve for the purpose of serving. As they grow older and become parents, they learn to serve for the purpose of leading. The third phase in the cycle is when Sāmoans learn to lead for the purpose of serving, usually when they have become leaders in their families and villages.

This research adopts the principle of tautua/service as an organising concept to help examine the question of: Who does external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa serve? The premise is that external quality assurance policy is developed and enacted primarily in service to something or someone. Hence one of the objectives of this research is to examine the question of service, with regard to external quality assurance policy.

#### 4.4.5 Metaphorical representation

In the Pacific lifeworld, knowledge is explained and understood by using “constructs, frames and metaphors that are intelligible to that knowledge” (Sanga, 2004, p. 45).

A recent summary of documented Pacific research by Tualalelei and McCaffery (2019) shows that the body of research literature drawing on Pacific ontology and epistemology has increased in recent years. Research methods and methodological frameworks based on indigenous Pacific ways of knowing range from ‘Kakala’ (Thaman, 1993); Kaupapa Maori (Smith, 1999); ‘Talanoa’ (Vaiolleti, 2006, 2011), and ‘Vanua’ (Nabobo-Baba, 2008) including those with a distinctly Sāmoan origin such as ‘Faafaletui’ (Tamasese et al., 2005); ‘Tofa’anolasi’ (Galuvao, 2018); ‘Teu le Va’ (Anae, 2010, 2016), and ‘Ula’ (Sauni, 2011) among others.

One of the commonalities in the Pacific research literature mentioned above is the use of metaphor to conceptualise the research process and research tools. For instance, 'Faafaletui' research (Tamasese et al., 2005) draws on the metaphors of weaving and house, 'Kakala' (Thaman, 1993) draws on the metaphor of flower garlands (preparation and giving away); and 'Ola' (McDonald & Tufue-Dolgoy, 2013) uses the metaphor of a woven basket. Such metaphors might seem simplistic out of their cultural context, but within the cultural, social and intellectual context in which they were constructed, such metaphors have powerful meanings and applicability beyond their physical depictions. The relevance for my research is the understanding that use of metaphorical language is accepted and even preferred at times in Sāmoan and Pacific societies. For instance, in addition to the metaphorical references in the previous paragraph, Duranti (1981) in his sociolinguistic study of Sāmoan society and culture noted the frequent use of metaphors in Sāmoans' formal and informal speech. The use of metaphors drawn from material and contextual realities and experiences helped participants in an oral culture make meaning of events and add on to existing knowledge for posterity.

#### 4.5 Postcolonial Critique

The third theoretical tool that I utilise in this research is the critiquing lens of postcolonial theory. Sāmoa's experience with colonial rule by firstly Germany then Britain by way of New Zealand administration is documented elsewhere (Meleisea, 1987). Despite Sāmoa's colonial experience having a comparatively brief history, the legacy of such a time for Sāmoa's education structures and systems is pervasive and long lasting (Coxon, 2007).

This research looks to postcolonial critique to integrate the element of historical analysis and critique. As expressed by Young (2016), postcolonial thought is rooted in historical analysis as well as the expression of "contemporary culture" (p. 61). One of the key concerns of postcolonial theory is to "understand and resist colonial influences" (Burke, 2018, p. 459). A postcolonial lens is woven into this research in the acknowledgement of hegemonic influence on education policy in Sāmoa, with reference to external

quality assurance policy. A postcolonial lens enables the examination of critical questions such as whose voice determines external quality assurance policy for Sāmoa.

Postcolonial critique is not limited to the examination of relationships of dominance between imperial powers and their current and former colonies (Burke, 2018). As Burke (2018) posits, postcolonial critique includes the examination of “more recent global ideologies which are likewise dominant, and can and do sweep across nations” (p. 459). The critiquing lens thus extends beyond colonial legacies of education policy processes and ideas in Sāmoa to the influence of global policy hegemonies (Martin & Griffiths, 2012).

An example of a global ideology is neoliberalism. Neoliberalism is a philosophy that manifests itself in the privileging of free market competition as the highest ideal for societies to achieve (Martin & Griffiths, 2012). From a cultural studies perspective, Wilson (2017, p. 2) defines neoliberalism as “a set of social, cultural and political-economic forces that puts competition at the centre of social life”. Kumashiro (2010) aptly describes the difference between ‘classic liberalism’ and neoliberalism as thus:

Classic liberalism places value on the agency of individuals and on freedom from social and structural restrictions in the pursuit of self-expression and self-actualization, neoliberalism situates such concepts in a market-like economy, asserting that individuals can reach their highest potential when put into competition with one another. (p. 59).

Postcolonial critique also offers further support to the emancipatory goal of this research in that such critique aims “to seek out if not produce new and different sorts of knowledge to help decolonize consciousness” (Go, 2018, p. 441). In terms of this research, postcolonial critique offers potential for the creation of new heuristic tools to make sense of external quality assurance policy in higher education in Sāmoa. Such heuristic tools would need to be embedded in the principles and notions considered important in the Sāmoan worldview, in order to fulfil the emancipatory purpose of postcolonial critique (Young, 2016).

#### 4.6 Critical policy studies

The shaping of the research questions for this research has been largely influenced by critical policy studies. Young & Diem (2018, p. 82) assert that critical policy research probes “the roots and development of educational policy” as well as “examines the distribution of power, resources and knowledge” in educational policy. Elsewhere the same authors (Diem et al., 2019, p. 6) posit that critical policy scholars “engage in critique, interrogate the policy process, and the epistemological roots of policy work, examine the players involved in the policy process and reveal policy constructions”. Hence this research aims to examine the root of external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa, and the distribution of power, resources and knowledge that manifest in the enactment of such policy.

Furthermore, this research agrees with Apple (2019) that policy reforms have particular histories and are driven by often unquestioned ideological visions of what education should do and the purposes it should serve. Although Apple (2019) was referring to school reform, this research suggests that the same consideration applies to higher education. External quality assurance policy in higher education in Sāmoa has a particular history, driven by political, cultural, social and economic influences, and as this thesis will show, a particular ideological vision of the purpose of higher education and equality assurance policy.

#### 4.7 Axiological assumptions

This research accepts the proposition that values, whether hidden or explicit, influence how social actors make sense of reality (Sanga, 2004). Researchers have been increasingly called to reflect on the values that inform their work and be intentional about their scholarship (Silova, Rappleye & Auld, 2020). Hence this research is intentional about examining the values inherent in external quality assurance policy while remaining reflective of the values that should underpin research with Sāmoan people. The values which underpin this research are those informed by a Sāmoan understanding of the relational space between researcher and research participants. These are the values of respect, reciprocity, collective responsibility and service (Anae, 2020; Koya-Vaka’uta, 2017).

## 4.8 Methodological applications

The importance of relationality and negotiation of the relational space between researcher and research participants has been underscored as a critical aspect of Pacific research methodology (Anae, 2010, 2016; Fa'avae, 2018b; Muliaina, 2018). Research that involves interaction with Sāmoan and/or Pacific participants must be cognizant of the 'charged' relational space between researcher and research participant, where the researcher has the responsibility "to value, cherish, nurture, and take care of the 'vā,' the relationship" (Anae, 2010, p. 2). The presence of the participant is valued not just for the insight and data contributed to the research, but is also intentionally valued as an individual, as a contributor to the research process. However, while several researchers agree on the necessity of using 'teu le vā' as a methodological tool in research with Pacific or Sāmoan participants, Tuafuti (2011) expressed strong reservations about its benefit for research. Tuafuti (2011) suggested that since 'teu le vā' implies being mindful of good relations, the research participant may be deferential to the researcher to the point that they do not say what they really think, thereby limiting the research outcomes.

The relevance of the concept of relationality to my research is that I was cognizant of the importance of the shared space between I as the researcher and the research participant, and actively took steps to show that I actively valued the relational space. In view of the potential limitation identified by Tuafuti (2011), I took steps to minimise the chance of hesitance occurring by identifying potential research participants who would either be my cultural equal or cultural elder and who therefore were less likely to be reserved during data collection.

### 4.8.1 Respectful directionality

As outlined in the previous paragraphs, the importance and value of the relational space between researcher and research participant has been extensively discussed by Pacific researchers (Anae, 2010, 2016; Faavae, 2018b; Muliaina, 2018). Respectful directionality is a suggested English translation and extension of the Sāmoan term 'fa'aaloalo' and its application to research. 'Fa'aaloalo' is translated as

'deference' (Vaai, 2014) or 'respect' (Sauni, 2011). Vaai's (2014) explanation of the term includes a third element which I believe may be missing from the discussion to date, but which is relevant for this research. In addition to the notion of respectful relations, Vaai (2014) explains that fa'aaloalo refers to firstly, being the face of, for example, yourself, your family, your culture and your God; this implies the notion of representation. Secondly, the term implies directionality in that one faces a particular direction or represents a certain point of view. According to Vaai (2014),

In this sense, fa'aaloalo refers to two faces – two individuals, families, or communities – facing or meeting each other in the spirit of respect. This positioning of faces (face-to-face) implies the potential interaction, where both parties get an opportunity to look into each other's eyes, thoughts, souls. The meeting assumes a responsibility to be mindful not only of who one may be seeing, but also of the direction in which they see, and the potential that all this 'seeing' can enable. (The legacy of fa'aaloalo, tagata and tuatagata, paragraph 3).

Vaai (2014) suggests that researchers must be respectful not only of the research participant, but of the direction in which the research participant is looking. Vaai (2014) directs attention to the immense potential of understanding and respecting the contribution of the participation, as well as the particular gaze from which that participation arrives. The concept of fa'aaloalo when fully applied to talanoa research with Sāmoan participants is powerful. The 'potential' of the 'seeing' and purposeful focus that occurs when two people face or meet each other in the spirit of respect/deference is especially pertinent for my research concerned as it is with finding out the (unseen) generative ideas and social structures shaping action and intention in higher education quality assurance policy enactment in Sāmoa.

Application of this concept in practice occurs when the research participant out of respect to the researcher agrees to engage in a conversation initiated by the researcher. In return, the researcher, out of respect to the participant, acknowledges the participant as the holder of the insight sought by the researcher. The researcher while being focused (directionality) on the activity at hand, which is the

research project, is also focused on the research participant to ensure his or her wellbeing in the research relationship.

The respectful directionality continues when the researcher invites the participant to be a partner in the construction of the knowledge that will come out of the shared insight, and also obliges the researcher to share the physical transcript and its translation for participant checking. The respectful directionality in the research relationship in the final instance requires that there be opportunity to follow-up and corroborate important emerging themes and ideas with the participant, so that the researcher is not seen to fly in, take all that the participant has to offer, then fly out never to be heard from again.

#### 4.8.2 Methodological tensions

The proposed blending of critical realism and a Pacific research paradigm in my research project is not a seamless fusion. On the one hand, critical realism asserts that reality has both a transitive and intransitive dimension (Bhaskar, 2008), that “it must be acknowledged that reality is what it is and continues to be so independently of the transitive theories or knowledges we may have of it” (Lopez, 2003, p. 76). On the other hand, the ontology of indigenous Pacific research assumes that “the social world and hence the phenomenon under investigation is intangible, soft and internal to people’s cognition” (Sanga, 2004, p. 44). It would seem the ontological premise of critical realism and Pacific research are at odds.

The second point of tension, at least from my perspective, lies in the purpose of research. In commenting on a synthesis of Pacific research to date, Tualaulelei and McCaffery (2019) note that Pacific research approaches are predominantly interpretive and use Pacific linguistic nomenclature and metaphors from every-day life in the Pacific. Burnett (2012) made a similar observation regarding Pacific postgraduate research and noted that Pacific postgraduate research over the previous four decades sought mostly to explore and understand rather than to challenge and change, and the little that was emancipatory and deconstructivist tended to be anti-colonial instead of postcolonial. According to Burnett (2012),

“postcolonial forms of critique tend to affirm cultural discontinuity and hybridity rather than anxiously seeking to preserve essentialised Pacific culture considered to be at risk” (p. 488).

As a researcher, I am attuned to the ongoing advocacy to use research methodologies that are relevant to Pacific participants’ worldviews, ontology and epistemology (Nabobo-Baba, 2008; Sanga, 2004; Thaman, 2006). I also recognise that higher education in Sāmoa and the Pacific is still in the process of resolving a colonial legacy of ontological and epistemological displacement (Fa’avae, 2018a; Thaman, 2006). I am somewhat apprehensive of the dilemma experienced by another researcher (Tuafuti, 2011) who mentioned being challenged by fellow educators regarding the appropriateness of a research methodology that was not ‘pure Sāmoan methodology’ (p. 36). Nonetheless, as I reflect on the purpose of my research which aims ultimately to empower and change the status quo in higher education quality assurance in Sāmoa, I am reminded that the Pacific way of doing things seeks first to understand before seeking to change.

My tentative solution at this point was to resist situating myself within a framing of Pacific or Sāmoan versus Western, or indigenous versus outsider, colonized versus colonizer (Burnett, 2012). As Tualalelei and McCaffery (2019) rightly point out, “to research contemporary contexts is to welcome multiple perspectives of knowledge and to acknowledge that no one approach, even within the Pacific research paradigm, has the monopoly on truth and knowledge” (p. 197). Hence, I choose to apply the concept of respectful directionality and orient myself to the task at hand using a critical realist lens while grounding myself within a Pacific research methodology premised on Pacific ways of knowing and being.

#### 4.9 Chapter Summary

This chapter outlines the conceptual framework that I have used to approach the examination of external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa. This research draws on Kabini Sanga’s (2004) characterisation of indigenous Pacific research in four philosophical domains, which are the ontological, epistemological, axiological, and methodological domains. Secondly, this research is informed by a critical realist ontology

to better examine the layered reality of policy enactment in Sāmoa's context. A critical realist lens also allows examination of multiple interpretations of policy enactment, as well as the identification of generative ideas that give rise to external quality assurance policy in higher education in Sāmoa. Epistemological assumptions about relationality, voice, value, service and metaphorical representation are drawn from understanding of the Sāmoan worldview to inform not just the approach, but also the subject of this research.

The critiquing lens of postcolonial theory is woven into data analysis to allow critique of colonial and hegemonic influences on education policy in Sāmoa, within the context of higher education quality assurance. Equally important, the weaving of postcolonial critique allows for the emergence of a heuristic tool embedded in the Sāmoan ways of knowing for data analysis. The focus of emergent critical policy studies on the hidden roots of educational policy and the resulting manifestation of knowledge, power and resources informed the shaping of my research questions.

Attention to axiological assumptions about the values underpinning this research as well as the values espoused by social actors and policy represent the sixth part of the conceptual framework for this research. Finally, a summary of methodological applications draws on the notions of respectful directionality informed by Vaai's (2014) articulation of the notion of respect or *fa'aaloalo* before closing with a brief discussion of the two methodological tensions I experienced in this research, as well as the approach I took to resolve such tensions.

## CHAPTER FIVE: RESEARCH DESIGN

This chapter provides a description and discussion of the research design adopted in this research. The chapter begins by explaining the concept of a vertical study popularised by Vavrus and Bartlett (2006) before a summary of how research data was collected and analysed for this research. The chapter closes with a discussion of the ethical considerations that informed this research.

### 5.1 Vertical case study

The term ‘vertical case study’ was coined by Vavrus and Bartlett (2006) to describe multi-level case study research that examined the enactment or experience of a policy, entity or phenomenon at global, national and local level. The vertical case study examines an issue in terms of its historical, political and cultural aspects at individual or local level as part of national or global policy structures. Bartlett and Vavrus (2014) in clarifying the three-dimensional design of vertical case study research, explained that it includes horizontal comparison of policy enactment in different local settings, vertical analysis across macro, meso and micro scales, and a transversal domain of analysis which looks at causality across a historical frame.

Since its initial conceptualisation by Vavrus and Bartlett (2006), other researchers have adopted vertical case study methodology to examine educational policy and related issues (e.g., Bellino, 2015; Carroll & Mazak, 2017; Henne, 2017; Meehan, 2013; Millei & Imre, 2010; Nana, 2013; Renn, 2014; Schuelka, 2015).

The aspects they have in common include a focus on policy enactment at different localities, analysis of the global and national political and historical contexts in which reform takes place and exploration of experiences, perspectives and relationships across micro-, meso- and macro-scales. Interestingly, all of the studies mentioned in the previous list also express an emancipatory or transformational agenda.

Applied to this research, the multi-level analysis of a vertical case study allows examination of the global and national historical and political context in which external quality assurance policy took place in Sāmoa.

### 5.1.1 Application of vertical, horizontal, and transversal axes

The vertical aspect of my research will examine higher education quality assurance policy enactment at the distinct but interrelated levels of academics (micro), institutional governance (meso) and national policy appropriation (macro). Practically, this means I will gather data on higher education quality assurance policy enactment at national and institutional level. Equally important, I will explore the content, use and function of higher education quality assurance policy (and related) documents at national, institutional, and individual level to provide data on the role such documents play within policy enactment in Sāmoa. In totality, this constitutes the vertical axis.

Through the transversal axis of my case study, I will examine higher education quality assurance in Sāmoa as a whole within the context of global and regional education policy narratives, tracing the historical, political and cultural structures and influences that helped shape policy enactment in Sāmoa. This scale of investigation constitutes the transversal and possibly the most complex axis of my study. The horizontal dimension of my research will be applied in the exploration of discursive and other types of structures that inhibit or facilitate individual agency within higher education quality assurance policy enactment. I will also make use of the literature on examples of policy enactment in other developing country contexts for comparison with Sāmoa's experience.

### 5.1.2 Why a vertical case study design?

Vertical case study design allowed the utilization of a critical lens in the examination of power, agency and structure within the context of higher education quality assurance policy enactment in Sāmoa (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017; Scott, 2010). Secondly, its conceptualisation of multi-level exploration and investigation avoided the weakness of single-dimension analysis from a case study that is bounded by space, time and context (Bray & Thomas, 1995). The inclusion of a transversal dimension in the case study allowed me to look beyond spatial and time boundaries to trace the influence of external and global policy narratives on higher education quality assurance policy in Sāmoa. Finally, I continue to be conscious of the ultimately

emancipatory and transformational purpose of my research and vertical case study design has shown itself to be suited to such research purposes (Meehan, 2013; Millei & Imre, 2010; Schuelka, 2015).

## 5.2 Talanoa data collection

The data for this research was collected using the contextually situated method of 'talanoa' as well as research. These research methods are discussed in the sections that follow.

### 5.2.1 Talanoa

One of the priorities in designing this research was selecting a data collection tool that was contextually appropriate to Sāmoa as well as appropriate for answering my research questions. The paragraphs that follow introduce the meaning of talanoa as defined by other researchers, before an articulation of how I have used talanoa in this research.

The use of talanoa in educational research can be attributed to Vaioleti (2006) who initially defined talanoa as "talking about nothing in particular and interacting without a rigid framework" (p. 23). Vaioleti (2014) later expanded this definition into a typology of eight different types of conversations or dialogue, which differ according to the purpose and context of the talanoa. Although Vaioleti (2014) acknowledged that his "talanoa research methodology was developed using Tongan concepts and cultural values" (p. 209), he argued that it "is a culturally appropriate means through which Pacific peoples can describe their own experiences in research" (p. 193) as it "was better aligned to Pacific worldviews" (2006, p. 192). Talanoa as a research method has since gained popularity with Pacific researchers (Johnston, 2015; Otunuku, 2011; Stewart-Withers, Sewabu & Richardson, 2017).

There are differing interpretations of what 'talanoa' refers to in the Sāmoan context. For instance, Vaioleti (2014) referenced a Sāmoan chief in his definition of talanoa as "an ancient multi-level and multi-layered critical discussion, or free conversation" (p. 192). Suaalii-Sauni and Fulu-Aiolupotea (2014) also commented that in Sāmoa, talanoa "refers to loose, casual conversation where there is no view from the

outset to come together to discuss anything of serious importance” (p. 341). In contrast, Tunufai (2016) observed that “generally, the word talanoa is a verb but in the Tokelauan and Sāmoan languages, it has one noun form, talanoaga, which refers to a formal gathering to discuss specific familial and community matters” (p. 230).

In response to Vaioleti’s (2014) claim that talanoa, despite its Tongan conceptualisation, is applicable in all Pacific contexts, Tunufai (2016) contends that the term talanoa “does not resonate with epistemological processes of most Melanesian and Micronesian cultures” (p. 234) and should therefore not be articulated as a pan-Pacific research method. Tunufai’s (2016) disagreement on the applicability of the talanoa method across the Pacific supports an earlier observation by Anae et al. (2001) that Pacific peoples are diverse with diverse cultures and languages. Tunufai (2016) also argued that talanoa is a research method as opposed to a research methodology, as it had not yet developed the philosophical logic that was evident in other indigenous research approaches such as Kakala (Thaman, 1993) and Vanua (Nabobo-Baba, 2008). Support for Tunufai’s argument is evident in Nabobo-Baba’s (2008) exposition of the Vanua research framework, which situates talanoa as a research method within the Vanua framework.

In view of the debate summarised above, I have chosen to adopt ‘talanoa’ as a culturally appropriate research method that refers to a conversation (Suaalii-Sauni & Fulu-Aiolupotea, 2014) or dialogue (Halapua, 2003), characterised by empathy (Farrelly & Nabobo-Baba, 2012), reciprocal respect and deference (Vaai, 2014) and valuing of the relational space (Anae, 2010, 2016). Moreover, Halapua (2003) provided a different iteration of talanoa that is relevant to my research, in the use of ‘talanoa’ as a conflict resolution tool. In Halapua’s (2003) application of talanoa, he refers to the facilitation of a constructive relationship between individuals with conflicting perspectives and stories. Halapua’s application of talanoa in Pacific settings is relevant for my research as I aim to discuss what are potentially conflicting perspectives and ideas in higher education quality assurance policy in Sāmoa. As a reflective researcher, I acknowledge that I was initially apprehensive about using talanoa as a research method because I felt the open-ended nature of a talanoa conversation might take me down unfamiliar or unanticipated paths.

Paradoxically, acknowledging this initial apprehension placed me in a better position of preparation to undertake my research into unknown territory and prepared to co-construct new knowledge with my research participants.

### 5.2.2 Research participants

There were 26 talanoa participants from organisations and groups currently or previously engaged in higher education quality assurance policy enactment in Sāmoa. They were selected because of their direct involvement with external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa.

Talanoa conversations with all 26 participants took place during 2020 between the months of February and September. I had an additional talanoa conversation with 15 research participants, to follow up on the themes discussed in our first talanoa.

Consequently, I was able to have 40 talanoa research conversations in total, which included 15 second talanoa conversations with selected participants. The second talanoa conversation had been flagged as a possibility in the consent letter sent to participants. The holding of the second talanoa depended on whether there were themes in the first talanoa that necessitated revisiting in a second talanoa. However, two talanoa conversations were lost due to a corrupted audio file, and unfortunately therefore could not be used in this research.

The following section summarises the groups of research participants. The identity of the organisations is not disclosed in accordance with the consent form that was sent to potential participants. The consent form informed participants that they had the right to confidentiality and anonymity which they could choose to waive at any time. As none of the participants chose to waive their right to anonymity through unidentifiable references, this dissertation omits identifiable data such as names of individuals and organisations for whom they worked.

*i. The university (15 participants)*

Participants were invited from higher education governance as well as academic staff from the six degree-offering faculties of a university in Sāmoa. 16 staff were invited to participate; 4 from university governance and 12 academic staff. 15 university staff consented to participate in the research. One proposed participant was not able to participate due to time constraints and personal illness.

While in the field, I realised that it was culturally appropriate to invite senior academic leaders to participate in the research before academic staff. The invitation of academic staff without a prior invitation to academic leaders of the same faculty would have been culturally inappropriate and not representative of cultural protocols. Hence my original list of potential participants was revised in the field such that the 15 university staff that consented to participate were all at the level of university or academic leadership.

*ii. The external quality assurance body (7 participants)*

Participants were invited from the senior leadership of the external quality assurance body as the key decision-makers for external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa. All seven potential participants accepted the invitation to participate in this research. Unfortunately, I was not able to use the talanoa conversation data for one of the single-talanoa participants and one of the dual-talanoa participants, due to file corruption during the data analysis process. Due to the limitations of the Covid-19 pandemic lockdowns, there was no opportunity to re-engage the two research participants for a repeat talanoa. I have been taught a valuable lesson in fieldwork from this experience and am not likely to forget this for a long while.

*iii. Ministry responsible for education in Sāmoa (1 participant)*

The Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture is responsible for primary and secondary schooling policy as well as sector coordination including development partner funding coordination. Although there were repeated requests made to the head of the ministry, directly and through delegates, there was no

response from the ministry regarding my request. As this research fieldwork started one month before the Covid-19 gripped the world, it is possible that the demands of dealing with the pandemic made it impossible for ministry leadership to allow time for this research. However, this researcher was privileged to receive consent from a senior education official external to the ministry, but in an overseeing role; of this I remain ever grateful.

*iv. National quality assurance advisory group (2 participants)*

This group in the past served as advisory group to the national quality assurance body during the period of development of national quality assurance policies. Two past members were invited to participate in my research, as their knowledge was valuable to answering the research questions.

*v. Development aid programmes (1 participant)*

A number of aid organisations have been active in supporting the development and implementation of external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa. Individually and together, such organisations have invested a considerable amount of funds in the development and enactment of higher education quality assurance policy in Sāmoa. Hence the development aid programme perspective was sought as part of this research. Two potential participants were invited from this group; only one was able to take up the invitation and granted their consent to participate in this research.

### 5.2.3 Participant engagement

The process for engaging research participants for this research happened in two stages. The engagement at two levels was necessary in order to honour the vā or relational space with university leadership, and to ensure the observation of institutional protocol.

*i. Level 1: High level institutional approval*

The first step in the process involved obtaining institutional approval from the senior leadership of the selected organisations, to approach their staff for research engagement. Due to the institutional processes of the selected university, this involved an additional submission to the university's research ethics committee. The university were welcoming of the research and approved engagement of their staff for participation in the research. The identities of the selected staff participants were not made known in the submission to the university for the high level institutional approval.

High level institutional approval was also granted by the other selected organisations with the exception of the ministry responsible for education in Sāmoa.

*ii. Level 2: Individual approval*

After receiving approval from the university to involve their staff as research participants, I then approached selected university staff individually, to request their consent to participate in the research. The official information letters with the university letterhead were sent firstly via email, following the relational protocols for addressing senior staff of the selected organisations. I then followed this up with a phone call to the respective offices, to ascertain whether the potential participants had had a chance to review my request. I then offered an initial meeting to share further information about the research, its purpose and process, and to provide opportunity for the potential participant to ask questions of me as the researcher.

While most of the potential participants gave their verbal consent straight away during the phone conversation or via email, some did not give consent until they had had the opportunity to ask questions and receive answers of me in the initial meeting. After these important preliminary conversations, it was noted that the majority of participants preferred to communicate informally via phone call to organise or reschedule dates and times to meet, once the preliminary official contact had been made.

#### 5.2.4 Informed consent

Indigenous populations are vulnerable populations who have often been subjected to unethical research practices from the perspective of indigenous culture (Fitzpatrick et al., 2016). Hence this research within the indigenous Sāmoan community in Sāmoa took care to exercise the 'teu le vā' (Anae, 2010, p. 24) ethical principles for researching with Sāmoan people. 'Teu le vā' or nurturing the relational space (Anae, 2010) involves being respectful of the research participant as well as their views. Hence as the researcher, I took care to explain to participants the following rights as outlined on the consent form. These participant rights were:

- The right to decline to participate in the research or any part of the research.
- The right to withdraw from the research and/or withdraw their data at any point.
- The right to access and correct the talanoa transcripts.
- The right to confidentiality and anonymity.
- The right to receive information about the research and its results.

Informed consent was then confirmed upon further review by the participant of the information letter and the participant consent form. The information letter and participant consent form provided information on the rights of the research participant in line with the ethical requirements of the University of Waikato Research Ethics Guidelines. Several of the potential participants discussed the purpose of the research and took the opportunity to ask me questions at an initial meeting, before they gave their consent to participate in this research.

#### 5.2.5 Talanoa sessions

All participants were invited to participate in two separate one-on-one talanoa sessions with the researcher. The talanoa sessions ranged from forty-five minutes to just over two hours. In accordance

with the principle of flexibility with the talanoa I did not put a time limitation on the talanoa but allowed the participant to lead the timing and duration of the talanoa. The venues of the talanoa were also organised at the convenience and preference of the participant. In recognition of the fact that some participants preferred a venue outside of their home and office, many of the talanoa conversations were held at quiet cafes a short distance from their place of work. Three talanoa were held on zoom as three participants travelled overseas after giving their consent to participate in the research. The same ethical requirements for face-to-face talanoa were also observed for the zoom talanoa. The list of guiding questions was also made available to the research participants prior to the talanoa session taking place.

The talanoa sessions were bilingual, to account for the preference and fluency of each participant. Most of the research participants were equally fluent in English as in the Sāmoan mother tongue. The extent of the mixing of languages in the talanoa session is an interesting topic for further research as most participants switched freely between the English and Sāmoan languages, depending on what they were talking about at the time. Regardless, some talanoa sessions were carried out almost completely in the English language while some were carried out almost solely in the Sāmoan language. Most talanoa sessions, however, occupied a space along a continuum from predominantly Sāmoan to predominantly English.

A second talanoa session was held with selected and willing participants and served three purposes. Firstly, provided an opportunity to corroborate emerging themes and ideas with each participant and helped to co-construct meaning with the participant, which is a feature of talanoa. Secondly, this session was used to follow-up conversation points in the first talanoa that needed further discussion or clarification. Thirdly, this session provided an opportunity for each participant to have 'closure' with some of the issues that were raised in the first talanoa, as some of the talanoa conversations did touch on matters that were quite personal to talanoa participants. The opportunity to have closure was especially important in such cases, so that the research engagement for the participant could end on a hopeful and positive note.

### 5.2.6 Transcript checking

All talanoa participants were provided with a copy of their talanoa transcript and asked to give their consent either verbally or via email for use of the data in this research. The generosity of the research participants was such that they all consented to use of their talanoa data in entirety, as long as identifiable references were removed. For talanoa data that had been transcribed in Sāmoan, but quoted in this research report in English, the English translation was also provided to research participants for checking.

### 5.3 Document research

This research drew on policy documents as a form of data. The documents that informed the findings of this research included policy documents, strategic plans, reports and official website pages.

Gibton (2016) maintains that documents enable the researcher to find out the story, ideology and values behind government intentions and plans. As Gibton (2016) articulated,

Documents tell the formal story of what an organization or government plans and attempts to do. Plans include not only the prospective change but also information on timetables and budgets. Plans tell about the order of stages and of priorities. Plans tell of vision and declared values, of hidden or covert intentions. The analysis of plans allows the uncovering of the ideology. (p. 63).

The analysis of documents as a source of data, akin to being an informant (Prior, 2008), thus allowed the uncovering of values and ideologies that informed the development and implementation of external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa.

Prior (2003, 2008) alternatively advocated for the use of document research to examine how documents function for instance to organise and justify individual actions, generate facts about the world and stabilise events. Prior's (2008) conceptual approach sees documents as social agents with the power to influence

and shape interactions and events. While I agreed with Prior's (2008) assertion that there was a need to use documents in research as more than 'informants' (p. 822) and that we should look beyond this to the use and function of documents, I hesitated to use documents as objects with agency and inherent power within social interactions for the following reason. Sāmoan society and perhaps most if not, all Pacific societies have been until recently, predominantly oral societies, relying on oral forms such as stories, songs, chants and dance for the transmission and recording of knowledge (Efi, 2005; Ferris-Leary, 2013; Mercer, 1979). Sāmoa's experience with the written word is relatively recent and it is the spoken word that holds power, over action and intention in Sāmoan ontology. With this frame of mind, this research used documents as informants, on the development and implementation of external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa, alongside talanoa data as the primary data source.

The analysis of documentary data for this research thus focused on the production of policy documents in terms of who was involved and how decisions were made regarding content, and consumption in terms of who was involved in 'enrolling' the documents into business-as-usual, and to what extent the intentions and actions of academics and other policy actors were influenced by policy and related documents.

### 5.3.1 Document selection and analysis

The documents that were selected for document research were chosen according to two broad criteria as follows. The first category of documents included organisational and national level documents that outlined policy intentions and policy processes for external quality assurance of higher education in Sāmoa. The second category of documents included those that were not specifically policy documents per se, but still contained information relevant to the development and enactment of higher education quality assurance policy in Sāmoa.

### 5.4 Data analysis

The process of data analysis took place in two phases.

The first phase involved the thematic analysis of all talanoa data. Thematic analysis refers to the process of searching through every transcript “to find repeated patterns of meaning” which may then be categorised as semantic or latent themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 86). The identified themes were then used to code the data during this first phase of data analysis with the aid of NVivo software. The reviewing and refinement of initial themes was an iterative, recursive process to ensure the resulting list of themes were valid not just for the coded sections but for the data set as a whole (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The second phase involved the abductive and retroductive analysis of the data with regards to the initial themes identified in phase one. Abductive induction refers to the process of interpreting data “within a conceptual framework or set of ideas” (Tikly, 2015, p. 247) in a way that explained the data. This step is similar to a “redescription or theoretical reinterpretation” (Blom & Moren, 2011, p. 75) of themes with reference to existing concepts or ideas. Retroductive induction then goes further and asks the question of “why” with reference to the emerging ideas from the abduction process (Blom & Moren, 2015; Tikly, 2015; Vincent & Wapshott, 2014).

During the abductive analysis, an analytical tool was developed to inform the analytical process. The analytical tool was developed during the research analysis phase informed by emerging themes from the data, the research questions and ideas drawn from policy research in the Pacific. Retroductive analysis then involved the identification of ideas that could be interpreted as “generative mechanisms” (Blom & Moren, 2015, p. 75) for external quality assurance policy. Generative mechanisms are a term in critical realism that refers to underlying discursive, narrative and relational structures (Saka-Helmhout, 2014) that answer the ‘why’ question behind the phenomenon being investigated (Tikly, 2015). The analytical tool that informed the abductive and retroductive analysis for this research is explained in detail in Chapter Seven of this thesis.

## 5.5 Ethical Considerations

Certain ethical considerations guided my research in addition to the ethical guidelines of the University of Waikato. As a researcher, I was reminded of the need to be cognizant of the power balance between the research participant and I (Finlay, 2002). In that respect, I foresaw two possible sources of risk for the potential participants; these are briefly outlined below, as well as how I addressed such risks.

Firstly, I was cognizant that participants may be threatened by the fact I was previously in a role in university administration in Sāmoa and thus may still have been in a position of power. To address this perception of a power relationship, I took the time to explain that the aim for this research was to contribute to possible change in the way quality assurance is implemented for higher education in Sāmoa; hence any feedback they might have thought was contrary was in fact useful for the research and for the improvement of current policy and practice.

Secondly, I explained my commitment to sincere and ethical research and hence would take all measures to minimise potential harm to participants. An additional measure I took in my research design was to identify only senior level staff within the university as participants, to ensure they were less likely to feel disadvantaged by a potential power relationship.

Thirdly, I was aware that the subject of this research may have been viewed as sensitive by staff who may have feared repercussion from university governance. I mitigated this by taking time to explain that staff and organisational units would not be identifiable, and that the data was confidential to my supervisors and myself until the completed dissertation was published. In addition, I appealed to the professional sensibilities of participants in the sense that this research was needed for policies and practices to be critiqued and improved and that this critique could not be done without their valuable participant input. The process for ensuring care of the relational space between myself as the researcher and the university in first requesting high level institutional approval was also a measure to protect individual participants

from possible harm from the university. The establishment of warm and accepting relations through the adoption of the talanoa method also helped participants feel at ease in their contribution.

Equally importantly, attention to cultural respect-based protocols (Galuvao, 2018) was critical to the success of my research. Accordingly, two other related aspects were paid particular attention throughout this research. They are outlined in the sections that follow.

#### 5.5.1 Importance of chiefly status

Etiquette and social relationships in Sāmoa are knit together by a system of chiefly titles and networks. Most if not all the potential participants for my research have chiefly titles, hence I demonstrated respect by requesting a meeting in person as well as sending an official letter with information via email. I continued to show the required respect by holding talanoa sessions at venues that the participant nominated and with which the participant felt comfortable. I ensured practice of the cultural greeting that was appropriate for each research participant, according to their chiefly title and status.

#### 5.5.2 The importance of reciprocity

The principle of reciprocity underpins Sāmoan social relationships and serves the purpose of maintaining connections whether it be extended family or professional connections. A request to participate in research is a request to the participant to 'give' information to the researcher and there is an expectation that the researcher will 'give' something in return to the participant. Although the research can be seen as serving the greater good by contributing to knowledge and providing a basis for improving an aspect of education in Sāmoa, it is important to respect the cultural value of reciprocity through a gift or koha. Such gifts are not 'payment' as really there is no price that can be set for information shared through talanoa. They are and would be considered as 'gifts' shared in reciprocal giving of the gift of talanoa. Hence the invitation to a research talanoa conversation also included the invitation to partake in a morning or afternoon meal.

By extension of the principle of reciprocity, this research aims to give back to the collegial community which made this research possible by disseminating the research findings in an abbreviated format once the results are approved for dissemination. As the researcher, I am also critically aware of the need to use this research to support my community both now and in the future. This will be the subject of further reflection upon completion of this doctoral research.

## CHAPTER SIX: FINDINGS

### 6.1. Who determines how external quality assurance policy is decided and enacted in Sāmoa?

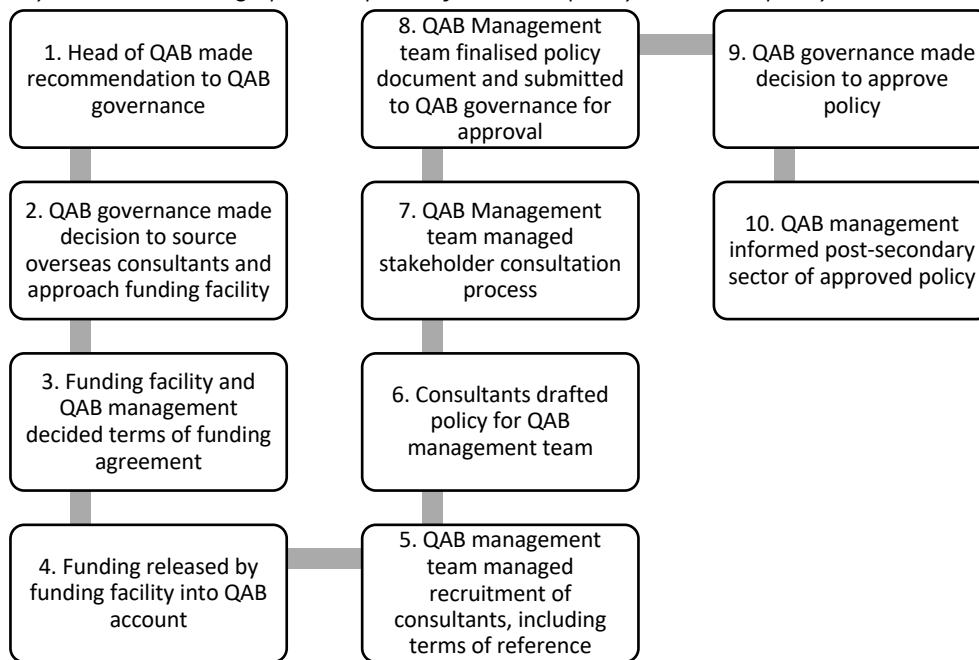
#### 6.1.1 Local policy officials

The decision to adopt higher education quality assurance policy was made by local policy officials, in the processes leading up to its adoption and afterwards. The development of external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa took place over a period of four to five years, with key decisions made at each step of the journey. The decision to initiate external quality assurance policy was made by the governance of the external quality assurance body at the recommendation of its head official. Talanoa with participants revealed that key decisions were made by local policy officials at every step of the subsequent series of events culminating in policy adoption in 2006. Figure 2 illustrates the chain of events leading up to policy adoption in 2006.

As shown in Figure 2, the policy development process was initiated when the head of the quality assurance body recommended to the governance board to seek overseas expertise to draft Sāmoa's quality assurance framework. Recognising that the quality assurance body did not have adequate funds at its disposal to recruit overseas consultants, the governance board made the decision to submit a project proposal to funding partners. At the time of the funding request (2006/2007), Sāmoa's funding partners – Australia and New Zealand – supported public sector requests for technical assistance through a coordinating unit within the Ministry of Finance called the Public Service Infrastructure Facility (PSIF). Funding terms were discussed and agreed with the quality assurance body's management team, who then coordinated the recruitment of consultants. This step was a key stage as it set the scope, consultants' terms of reference and selection criteria for consultants.

FIGURE 2

*Series of key decisions leading up to adoption of external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa*



Note. Own illustration of the process of policy development of external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa.

Key documents relating to the recruitment of international consultants were approved by the quality assurance body's governance board. However, as illustrated in Step 5 of Figure 2, the preparation of important documents such as consultant terms of reference, the wording of the call for proposals, the consultant's payment schedule and recruitment criteria was entirely managed and controlled by the responsible senior official within the management team.

Thus, the management team enacted their first role as policy decision makers when they decided through the preparation of the terms for reference and issuing the call for proposals, who was likely to apply to undertake the work of policy writing and the criteria by which they will be selected.

### 6.1.2 International consultants

Although local quality assurance officials had a lot of voice in the decision to adopt a quality assurance policy for Sāmoa's post-secondary sector, another group of actors were more influential in determining the shape and form that the policy framework eventually took.

The influence of international consultants over the shape and form of external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa is pervasive and far-reaching. The overarching quality standards framework and policies for Sāmoa (SQA, 2009) were drafted by consultants who had experience with quality assurance systems overseas. New Zealand was the primary source country for the quality assurance policy consultants, although there were some from Australia who worked on the linked qualifications framework policies. As many as four to five consultants worked on the operational and strategic policies for quality assurance in the early days of policy development. There were three primary reasons cited by participants for sourcing consultants from overseas to write the quality assurance policies.

#### *i. Avoid re-inventing the wheel*

The first reason is that policymakers saw little reason to develop policy from scratch, when there were other countries in the region who had developed quality assurance systems to regulate their own tertiary education and training sectors. In the words of one quality assurance official,

We had those discussions in the beginning, we really don't need to reinvent the wheel... we have those other international countries that have done this before why not go with their policies and the way they were doing it. ("O.N.")

As a new entity established by and directed by legislation to "develop criteria and processes for the accreditation and quality audit of all post-school education and training providers" (Sāmoa Qualifications Authority Act 2006, s 4), the quality assurance body perceived no other option but to look outside Sāmoa for policy writing expertise.

Underpinning the decision to look to overseas sources of policy models was an assumption of trust that the solutions adopted in overseas contexts would also work in Sāmoa with some adaptation and contextualisation. The trusting gaze is illustrated in the following comment by one policy official.

It was fitting for us to get external people to assist because it was a new venture developing policies in QA and it was also good because where these people came from had QA polices and processes. So, I think importantly although we did it from scratch because there was nothing existing but the people that came to assist us had the experience. (“E.G.”)

*ii. Follow example of Australia and New Zealand*

The decision to choose consultants from Australia and New Zealand to work with the quality assurance body in putting together its operational policies and procedures was a deliberate and strategic one, based on the future advantages of having a quality assurance framework that was similar to these two countries. Australia and New Zealand had the distinction of being Sāmoa’s closest developed neighbours and trading partners as well as being the major migration destinations for employment or study. The argument was that setting up a similar system of quality assurance should make it easier in the future for travelling students and migrants to have Sāmoan qualifications recognised in New Zealand and Australia for the purpose of further education and training or employment.

A participant that was actively involved in the policy development processes explained the attraction of consultants from Australia and New Zealand in the following way.

These two were the main recipients of Sāmoans going out of the country for further education, and also job opportunities. At the time as well around the Pacific, around the small Pacific Island countries, there weren't any other countries to look at, at how they do things at the time... so they looked at New Zealand and Australia in how to run the whole process. (“O.S.”)

The clearest rationale for adopting similar standards to Australia and New Zealand was tied to employment. Several participants echoed the sentiment that Sāmoa needed to have similar education standards to Australia and New Zealand to make it easier for Sāmoans to travel to those countries to find employment. One participant explained this point making a clear link between overseas employment and local quality standards.

If your students are hoping to be employed across the region and across New Zealand and Australia, then we need to have the quality of our programmes that meet the expectations not only of the employers and the educators in those countries. (“A.F.”)

*iii. Lack of confidence in local ability to develop external quality assurance policy*

Local policy makers had little belief in their own capacity to develop quality assurance policies from the ground level up. While knowledge and understanding were important, there seemed to be an unspoken consensus that experience was superior, in determining the right way to write quality assurance policy. One senior policy official commented that,

We don’t have the top quality... the skills to do it, that’s why we’re relying on technical assistance... A lot of our work we need the technical assistance to start the work... that’s one thing with our human resources, with Sāmoa being a very small place. (“U.T.”)

Another senior policy official recalled that,

When the quality assurance body was already established, then the board asked for assistance. So, these guys came in with their experience in quality assurance matters, they came and established our quality assurance policies. So those guys were the ones who came and said we need policies and guidelines. (“U.N.”)

The above quotes from senior policy officials indicate that there was little belief within the quality assurance organisation regarding its internal capacity to write external quality assurance policy. Secondly,

the reference to “those guys” telling the senior quality assurance officials that they “need policies and guidelines” implies that policy officials followed the guidance of international consultants and trusted their expertise.

### 6.1.3 University leaders

University leaders determined how external quality assurance policy was enacted or not at all, within the university. The decisions they made and the messages they communicated to university staff determined the extent to which external quality assurance policy was implemented within the university.

Since the formalization of Sāmoa’s external quality assurance policy by legislation in 2006, the official stance of university leaders toward the external quality assurance body had been one of resistance. Although some concessions were communicated by university leaders in 2010, the first real signs of thawing in the official university position on external quality assurance by the local accrediting body did not occur until 2017. In 2020, the university’s position on external quality assurance completely reversed, opening the way for full engagement with external quality assurance policy. Interestingly, academic leaders had been part of consultations on external quality assurance policy since its inception from 2006 onwards, at the invitation of the local quality assurance body. The university leadership had also been part of the governance board of the local quality assurance body since its establishment in 2006.

Table 2 summarises the time period and key decisions made by university leaders regarding the implementation of external quality assurance policy, as well as related actions initiated by university leaders.

**TABLE 2**

*Key decisions by university leaders regarding the implementation of external quality assurance policy*

<i>Indicative time period</i>	<i>Decisions by university leaders</i>	<i>Related actions by university leaders</i>
2006-2010	Accepted invitations to policy consultations	Openness to discussion of external quality assurance policy
2010-2017	Limited accreditation by local quality assurance body to non-degree programmes only	Refusal to submit degree programmes for accreditation by the local quality assurance body Established an internal unit for the coordination of academic quality processes
2017-2020	Explored options for compromise without submitting fully to quality assurance by the local quality assurance body	Signed Memorandum of Understanding with local quality assurance body for a modified accrediting process that combined both external quality assurance policy process as well as university external review process
2020	Fully embrace external quality assurance of all university programmes by the local quality assurance body	Change in university leadership All university faculties are directed to submit programmes for accreditation by the local quality assurance body.

The key decisions and related actions by university leaders relating to the implementation of external quality assurance policy for the university are further detailed in the sections that follow.

*i. 2006-2010 Openness to discussion*

University leadership during the period from 2006 to 2010 seemed to agree with the idea of external quality assurance in principle and supported the participation of academic leaders at national policy consultations. During this time, membership of the governance board of the local quality assurance body was formalized and it included the Vice-Chancellor of the university.

One of the academic leaders of the university confirmed the participation of academic leaders in policy consultations saying of this time that “the local quality assurance body always consults... we were there” (“I.N.”).

*ii. 2010-2017 Refusal to submit*

In 2010, changes to the external quality assurance legislation saw key terminology added to the legislation to give the local quality assurance body more power to impose quality assurance requirements on higher education programmes. The major change in the legislation was the addition of the power to “regulate qualifications and quality standards for all the Post School Education and Training (PSET) providers in Sāmoa” (Sāmoa Qualifications Authority Act 2010, s 4).

At around the same time, university leadership made the decision to limit the implementation of external quality assurance for university programmes to non-degree programmes only (Academic Quality Agency for New Zealand Universities, 2015). This decision was not received very well by the local quality assurance body. A comment by a senior university official recalls the elevated level of tension accompanying such decisions by the university leadership.

I was caught in a very difficult situation. On one hand I was supposed to uphold university values in relation to higher education...and then with this external measure... I wanted that to be a discussion or at least agree to disagree. (“O.M.”).

Another senior university staff member commented that the decision to completely halt the engagement of degree programmes with the local quality assurance body was a sudden change in the perspective of university leadership.

“O.M” decided, and this is why our subcommittee’s work halted, “O.M.” decided a complete about-face that the university will not be engaging with accreditation at the quality assurance body, that it will be just the TVET courses. (“I.N.”).

The above quote, referencing the work of an internal subcommittee, implies that the university leadership may have been spearheading internal activities to engage with external quality assurance policy on its own terms before changes in the quality assurance legislation prompted stronger resistance from the university leadership.

Furthermore, during this period the university leadership made the decision to establish an internal unit for the coordination of academic quality initiatives and processes at the university (Academic Quality Agency for New Zealand Universities, 2015). Not long after its inception in 2015, the internal unit produced a university quality assurance framework document for the purpose of assuring the university “community and stakeholders” of “continuous improvement in the quality of education and training offered” at the university (National University of Sāmoa, 2016, p. 2). The institutional quality assurance framework document listed all the activities the university was doing at the time to manage the quality of its programmes. The internal processes included programme approval, programme review, student assessment, student course evaluation, international academic audit and accreditation. The university’s quality assurance framework document was more of a heuristic tool for knowledge of how the university conducted its quality ‘assurance’ activities, rather than a document of intent.

The stance by university leaders to refuse to submit to external quality assurance policy was documented in an external academic audit report by the Academic Quality Agency for New Zealand Universities (2015). The report mentioned the “impasse” that had emerged between the university and the external quality assurance body, in the refusal of the university to accept the quality assurance body’s “obligation” to accredit the university’s degree programmes and qualifications (Academic Quality Agency for New Zealand Universities, 2015, p. 13).

### *iii. 2017-2020 Exploration of a compromise*

The discussion and agreement on a Memorandum of Understanding between the university and the quality assurance body between 2017 and 2020 signified a change in the stance of university leadership towards external quality assurance policy. The Memorandum of Understanding was described as a “compromise” and “a halfway house sort of thing” by “O.M.”, a senior university official, in its combination of university and external quality assurance processes in a modified accreditation process.

#### *iv. 2020 Full acceptance*

In 2020 a change in university leadership was followed by a decision to fully embrace external quality assurance policy for all university programmes. The new university leadership communicated the intention to have all university programmes accredited by the local quality assurance body via a meeting with all academic leaders.

The new university leadership “was really set” even before commencing in the senior leadership role that “all programmes will be accredited with the local quality assurance body” having “articulated that well from the start” (“A.F.”). A senior academic leader was receptive to the decision by university leadership to fully comply with the external quality assurance policy but was rather hesitant about the timing. This receptiveness is apparent in the following excerpt from a talanoa conversation with “I.L.”.

I said to myself ok I'm gonna start working on doing all this so that we can have this before the end of this year. My only problem with it is the timing, the timeline they gave us...by the 27th of this month... I said oh my gosh there are a lot of programmes as well as courses we need to go through.

Despite the apprehension about the expected timing of the activity, the conversation excerpt illustrates the general willingness of academic leaders to agree with the university leadership’s decision to fully accept external quality assurance policy in 2020.

#### 6.1.4 External influences

This research found that in addition to the influence of local and international voices on external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa, there were also indications of external transnational influences.

*i. Aid relationships*

The initiation, establishment, and continuing enactment of the external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa went hand in hand with a series of aid-supported projects that commenced as early as 2003. Table 3 provides an overview of aid projects that informed the establishment and implementation of external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa.

**TABLE 3**

*Timeline of external quality assurance policy aid projects in Sāmoa*

Year	Aid Organisation	Purpose
2003	United Nations Development Programme International Labour Organisation	Scoped the establishment of a national training council to coordinate post school education and training <sup>1</sup>
2004-2006	United Nations Development Programme International Labour Organisation	Supported setup of a national quality assurance body for qualifications <sup>2</sup>
2006-2008	Australian Aid New Zealand Aid	Supported initial drafting of external quality assurance policies
2011-2015	Australian Aid	Supported writing of additional policies that expanded the scope of external quality assurance policy <sup>3</sup>
2016 onwards	Australian Aid New Zealand Aid	Support implementation of external quality assurance policy <sup>4</sup>

Note. Summary of external quality assurance policy projects that were supported by aid arrangements since 2003.

Table 3 illustrates that aid arrangements were active in the scoping, development and implementation of external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa. The United Nations Development Programme and International Labour Organization supported the scoping and initial establishment of the external quality assurance body (International Labour Organization, 2007). After the initial scoping and organisational

<sup>1</sup> International Labour Organization, 2007.

<sup>2</sup> International Labour Organization, 2007.

<sup>3</sup> Sāmoa Qualifications Authority, 2016b.

<sup>4</sup> Sāmoa Education Sector Support Program, 2015.

establishment was completed, the aid departments of the governments of Australia and New Zealand (SQA, 2016b) supported the policy writing and implementation.

*ii. Funding priorities set by local officials*

The priorities for aid-supported activities were set in existing strategic plans and communicated by local policy officials through terms of reference documents. As participants explained,

When these people came, we already had our PSET Strategic Plan, so they provided their assistance based on what we already put in place. (“U.N.”).

We now have budget support; the donors are encouraged to pool together their funds. Then it is up to the sector what sector priorities will be funded, where the funds go. (“A.G.”).

The above quotes highlight that although aid organisations provided the funding, local policy officials set the funding priorities.

*iii. Funding as ‘leverage’ for aid organisations*

The focus of aid projects for education in Sāmoa was determined by rationale outlined in strategic documents since the 1990s. Despite this, there was acknowledgement that aid organisations used funding as a way to leverage their influence in policy discussions. A talanoa participant commented that,

This country also has their own objectives and policies that it would like to see implemented, sort of having that influence on the education system in Sāmoa. And they use that funding as a way to leverage that... our involvement in higher discussions was sort of limited by their tagging their funding on specific areas... we weren’t engaged on other issues during high-level talks because our funding was not involved in those areas. So that’s

why we wanted to broaden the support so that it also broadens our engagement in policy dialogue. (“A.L.”).

As described above, the aid organisation saw funding as a way to “leverage” their influence on Sāmoa’s education policy discussions. It is apparent that such a concern stemmed from the perceived “limited” involvement of the aid organisation in higher level discussions.

#### 6.1.5 Transnational organisations

There was also evidence of the influence of international organisations and networks on the shape and form of external quality assurance in Sāmoa. Several participants mentioned international quality assurance networks such as the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) and the Asia Pacific Quality Network (APQN). There was also acknowledgement and reference to the work of the UNESCO in promoting quality assurance frameworks.

An understanding of a growing confluence of policy adopted around the world was apparent in the reflection of one research participant.

There is a lot of copy and paste... I mean you know if you read our policies, read Fiji’s policies, read Tonga’s policies, then you go to TNQAB, you go to Vanuatu you read these things and they are very much the same. And then you go read the things from UNESCO, there are standards from UNESCO that are very close to ours with only a few words removed. From INQAAHE and APQN, Europe... very little difference. That is the attempt to make it all the same across the board, the only difference between us and the developed nations is that they are fast because they have more resources to carry out their policies and the human resources. (“U.T.”)

The description of policies as ‘copy and paste’ documents points to the acceptance with which policy actors regarded the development of external quality assurance policies, as being policy frameworks that

were primarily sourced from overseas, 'copied' and 'pasted' not just on to their documents but also into their country context. It was accepted knowledge that consultants would lean heavily on the policy frameworks from their own countries in the drafting of the external quality assurance policy for Sāmoa. The appearance of 'cut and paste' policies is even viewed with some humour, pointing to familiarity with its occurrence, as another participant, "O.N.", commented laughingly, "some of the policies you can see the mistype in there because it was a cut and paste".

The influence of international organisations such as INQAAHE on the thinking of local policy officials was seen as a desirable thing because quality assurance policy was still a new concept to many. A research participant, "U.V.", commented that "quality assurance as an educational discipline is still relatively new and Sāmoa has had to acquire a lot of information mainly from institutions overseas."

The quality assurance body sought membership of and engagement with the global quality assurance network INQAAHE and regionally centred APQN. An astute participant identified membership with international quality assurance networks as an influence on local policy development, as reflected in the following talanoa excerpt.

The local quality assurance body has been proactive in joining similar agencies overseas like INQAAHE and has had to liaise with agencies such as the Commonwealth of Learning, and the Commonwealth Secretariat... AQA in NZ and others in order to obtain information to help support quality assurance policies and initiatives in Sāmoa. The policies that have been developed therefore have been greatly influenced by what is happening internationally. ("U.V.")

As participants saw it, engagement with international quality assurance networks and the enactment of a policy framework in Sāmoa based on similar principles helped achieve the goal of worker mobility.

We have to be mindful of global issues and globalisation especially when it comes to... mobility of work... so we have to be on par with other quality assurance systems that are in the world. And I think that's why it's important that we are part of the ... bigger quality assurance bodies. ("E.C.").

While the thinking and conversation of local policy officials were influenced by engagement with international quality assurance networks, the articulation of policy intentions in strategic documents was influenced by international development goals such as those promoted by the United Nations. For instance, the strategic policy document for post-school education and training in Sāmoa specifically stated its "alignment to the goals and priorities in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals 2016 – 2030" (SQA, 2017, p. i).

#### 6.1.6 Summary of findings against the first research question

The first research question asked who determines how external quality assurance policy is decided and enacted in Sāmoa. As outlined in this section, the findings indicate that various policy actors are involved in the decision making on how external quality assurance policy is decided and enacted in Sāmoa.

At the macro level, local policy officials chose who was involved in writing policy through the decisions they made on who wrote policy and whose perspectives informed written policy. International consultants were particularly influential in the writing of Sāmoa's external quality assurance policy because their policy drafts were accepted by Sāmoa's policy officials, with few modifications. Local policy officials chose to recruit international consultants to write Sāmoa's external quality assurance policy for three reasons. These reasons were to avoid reinventing the wheel and purposefully align Sāmoa's policy with the policy models used in New Zealand and Australia. Furthermore, local policy officials did not have confidence in their own ability to write and articulate external quality assurance policy.

At the meso and micro level, university leaders determined whether external quality assurance policy was enacted within the university and the extent to which it was enacted. The findings indicate that there

were four discernible phases in the decision-making by university leaders regarding acceptance and implementation of external quality assurance policy. The first phase was from 2006 to 2010, characterised by the openness of university leaders to discuss external quality assurance policy with policy officials from the external quality assurance body. The second phase from 2010 to 2017 was characterised by a refusal of university leadership to submit to external quality assurance policy. This same period was marked by noteworthy events such as the passing of amendments to the external quality assurance legislation which gave the quality assurance body additional power to regulate Sāmoa's qualifications and quality standards. Also of significance during the second phase was the decision by the university to set up its own internal unit responsible for the coordination of university academic quality assurance activities.

The third phase of decision making by university leaders regarding the enactment of external quality assurance policy occurred from 2017 to 2020, characterised by the exploration of a compromise between the university and the external quality assurance body, regarding the accreditation of the university's degree programmes. The final phase of university decision making commenced in 2020, with the full acceptance of external quality assurance policy for the university by university leaders. The findings indicate that university leaders had the most influence over whether external quality assurance was implemented within the university, and to what extent it was implemented. The findings also indicate that university leaders' decisions whether to accept external quality assurance policy progressed through distinct stages over time.

Beyond the macro level, external influences in the form of aid relationships and international organisations comprise the fourth influence over how external quality assurance in Sāmoa was decided and enacted. The findings indicate that the United Nations Development Programme and the International Labour Organisation were influential during the initial stages of scoping and establishing the external quality assurance body. Subsequently, the aid programmes of the New Zealand and Australian government were influential in the policy development and implementation stages. Additionally, international organisations and quality assurance networks exert considerable influence over how policy

officials think of external quality assurance policy. The International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education and the Asia Pacific Quality Network were particularly influential in the thinking of policy officials regarding appropriate models of external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa.

## 6.2. What is valued in external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa and how does this determine policy relationships?

### 6.2.1 What is valued

The consideration of what is valued in quality assurance policy is important because it allows a discussion of who benefits from the ‘valuing.’ The questions of what values and whose values underpin education policy have been discussed by Sāmoan researchers practitioners such as Tuia (Tuia & Iyer, 2015) and Afamasaga (2001).

#### *i. Compliance*

The notion of compliance is an important part of the national quality assurance policy framework, with its own section in the policy document (SQA, 2009, pp. 16-17). The policy makes it possible to issue a ‘compliance notice’ to any post-secondary education and training provider regarding the policy processes of “registration, programme accreditation or registration of any of its qualifications on the Sāmoa Qualifications Framework” (SQA, 2009, p. 17).

The focus on compliance meant that there was little room for interpretation or flexibility with the application of the policy framework, as acknowledged by a key policy official. As “E.G.” acknowledges, the quality assurance criteria offered no other option for universities, except to comply with the set standards.

Quality assurance was new to us and because we had the standards, they either had to meet the standards or not... perhaps the standards are too prescriptive, so I think there was no other option other than meeting the standards. ...I’m not saying you know that the

quality assurance body is higher, but I will always stand that they need to meet the quality assurance standards there are.

The management of quality through quality assurance policy is seen as being about a sense of rules that all have to follow. Academic leaders saw quality assurance as being mostly about compliance, using words such as “police force,” “monitor” and “rules” to refer to external quality assurance policy, as illustrated in the following talanoa excerpts.

The fact is the quality assurance body was set up, the policy was set up... in fact there were a lot of criminals and everyone just ran and do your own thing. And then they decided to put up this police force for education to make sure that everyone is compliant... At the end of the day what I am doing must be compliant with this framework first. It needs to be compliant here... and out there with colleagues, my peers across the other universities. (“E.N.”).

Because now you have the monitor, and you know the monitor that's always been the hard worker to make sure that people follow the rules of the game. And within a bigger framework nationally and internationally. (“I.P.”).

#### *ii. Effectiveness and efficiency*

The terms ‘effectiveness’ and ‘efficiency’ dominate the definition of quality in the university’s quality assurance policy document (NUS, 2016). According to the institutional policy document, quality higher education,

Consists of effective and sufficient inputs (student attributes, curriculum, staff attributes, physical & learning resources, student support services, research, governance) and effective and efficient processes (pedagogy/andragogy, assessment, student engagement, staff professional development, faculty management). (NUS, 2016, p. 2).

The quality assurance policy framework for the university was produced by its internal unit responsible for the coordination of quality assurance activities, itself a recent addition to the university's organizational structure. The internal unit was responsible for coordinating quality assurance activities for the university and advising on some of the internal processes.

The definition of quality assurance in this policy document representing university governance, has used the words 'effective' and 'efficient' to describe the ideal qualities of what is taught and how it is taught at the university. The word 'inputs' refers to staff and student attributes, physical learning resources and learning support services while the word 'processes' describes the actual work of teaching, assessment, and management. Overall, the definition of quality described in the university's quality assurance framework reflects a production-oriented view of higher education, where the main purpose is to produce an acceptable product (the graduate).

Similarly, the national quality assurance policy framework values 'effectiveness' and 'efficiency' in education when it defines quality assurance as:

All activity which ensures that the educational services of an organisation are being delivered effectively and efficiently and are in line with published goals and objectives... verifying that the education services are meeting prescribed standards (SQA, 2009, p. 4).

It is evident that 'what is valued' by the quality assurance framework policy is how effectively and efficiently an organisation's educational services meet its own goals as well as the 'prescribed standards' (SQA, 2009, p. 4). A local policy official added to the above definition by explaining that "the employability of graduates is a good indicator of the relevance and effectiveness of programmes delivered by a provider. ("U.V.")

The preceding statement by "U.V." reflects the association of the idea of higher education with the expectation to produce graduates that will find jobs, as a mark of quality. Another policy official was of the view that quality assurance made it possible to focus on effectiveness and efficiency, evident in the

assertion that “we are so used to doing things the same way they’ve always been done... But they should be thinking about quality assurance because it involves the effectiveness and efficiency of how things are done.” (“O.N.”). The ‘they’ in the participant’s talanoa referred to people who resisted the idea of external quality assurance.

### *iii. International recognition*

Of the nine legislated functions of the quality assurance body stated in the policy document, four included the term ‘international,’ indicating a preoccupation with comparison at an international level. The stated functions of the quality assurance body were to:

Ensure and maintain the national and international credibility of qualifications and the good standing of... institutions... ensure qualifications meet or exceed international standards... achieve international recognition for qualifications in Sāmoa... provide assurance that post school education and training in Sāmoa maintains international comparability. (SQA, 2009, p. 3).

The concern with the international standing of qualifications offered by the university and elsewhere in Sāmoa is shared by both policy officials and academics. For both groups, international recognition of Sāmoa qualifications facilitated the movement of Sāmoans to other countries to work or pursue further studies.

There are several mentions in the talanoa conversations of experiences of graduates from Sāmoa not having their qualification recognised in neighbouring New Zealand and Australia. This seemed to be a matter of great concern among research participants.

This has to be done because otherwise we will not progress with this thing of having someone go to New Zealand with their qualifications and its recognised... also for Australia. (“O.N.”).

One thing I know is that in trying to promote quality assurance policies and processes we've always been saying that for Sāmoans where do they go for work or for further education, it's always New Zealand and Australia. We were trying to have that recognition whenever the graduates from Sāmoa with their qualifications go over, that dream hasn't been realised yet. ("O.S.").

Quality assurance officials frequently expressed their role as the main way to get that international recognition, through participation and engagement in quality assurance practices like registration and accreditation. As one research participant who also worked in external quality assurance policy candidly shared, "quality education and training, employability status and international recognition, that's my three sentence song that I sing ("U.N."). The reference to the rationale for external quality assurance policy as being a three-sentence song implies that the reasons for the policy had attained the status of a narrative that guided the thinking and responses of the senior policy official.

The standing of qualifications locally as well as internationally, was also a key concern for academics. Academics were concerned with how the Sāmoan public viewed local qualifications, and some referred to how the public viewed qualifications from the university as being of a lower quality than expected.

Well as I said before, a main focus of the university should be on the quality of the programmes offered. Otherwise, the public still has that perception, continues to have that perception of our qualifications being not recognised anywhere else but here. ("O.M.").

I guess at the higher level it would be... the ultimate outcome of this... would be even the local recognition is a big thing. People still don't think much of the NUS, and I'm not blind to that. So even to gain local recognition is going to be a big thing.... And then international recognition. Sometimes I think the international recognition might be easier to achieve than the local. ("I.N.").

*iv. Skills and employment*

The value placed on the skills and knowledge gained through higher education is evident in strategic policy documents that set out the rationale for external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa. This emphasis is evident in the following quotes from key strategic documents that guide the implementation of external quality assurance in Sāmoa.

Post-School Education and Training Strategic Plan 2008-2016 (SQA, 2008a, p. 9).

Development across PSET must be grounded on principles based on quality and continuing improvement... through opening new learning pathways and employment opportunities...The Government of Sāmoa has acknowledged that Sāmoa's development vision... is very strongly tied to knowledge, skills, and capability development for the Sāmoan community as a whole.

Sāmoa Qualifications Authority Corporate Plan 2008-2012 (SQA, 2008b, p. i).

The prosperity of our nation depends to a great extent on the skills and abilities of every Sāmoan.

Sāmoa Quality Assurance Policies (SQA, 2009, p. 2).

The Government's intention is for Sāmoa to have a post school education and training sector... meets the needs of society and individuals, through the development of the necessary skills and knowledge to improve national economic and social development.

Post-School Education and Training Strategic Plan 2020-2024 (SQA, 2021, p. 5).

High-quality post school education and training will lead to improved value for money for PSET investment...better choices and options for quality education, and better employment opportunities. These certainly promote lifelong learning and an enhanced quality of life for our people.

The above quotes from the key policy documents for quality assurance in Sāmoa show strong adherence to the idea that skills and knowledge are the main driver of employment and economic growth. The policy documents create strong linkages between the words “skills” and “knowledge,” and the projected benefits of “employment,” “prosperity,” “development” and “economic growth.”

*v. Absence of cultural values*

Of equal significance to what is emphasised in external quality assurance policy documents is what is missing from such documents. The national quality assurance policy document does not articulate the values and principles that underpin the policy statements, a significant omission considering the contextual realities of Sāmoa (SQA, 2009).

There is a nod to the context in the policy intent to work with non-formal learning providers “so as to apply the Quality Standard and associated criteria in contextually and culturally appropriate ways” (SQA, 2009, p. 13). There is also some acknowledgement of contextual culture in the statement that the quality assurance body “encourages organisations to apply the Standard in ways that suit their unique values, culture and style” (SQA, 2009, p. 6). However, the policy document provides no examples or guidance on how “culturally appropriate” application might take place, or what it might look like. The implication is that “culturally appropriate” application is not important or not necessary for organisations other than ‘non-formal learning providers,’ including higher education institutions.

The omission of specific identification of the values that underpin external quality assurance policy implies the contextual and cultural context of Sāmoa is not considered to be of relevance in the implementation of external quality assurance policy.

### 6.2.2 Policy relationships

Relationships and relating are important concepts in the Sāmoan worldview. The space between people is seen as a 'charged' space (Wendt, 1996), not an empty space and the acknowledgement of relationship is important to any social activity in Sāmoa.

The adoption of external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa created a new organisation in the education landscape. The implication of the existence of a new organisation meant that a new relationship was created between the national quality assurance body and other organisations in the education sector. This section outlines what types of relationships were created.

#### *i. Accountability relationship*

The adoption of external quality assurance policy created a new accountability relationship for universities, which had not existed previously. External quality assurance policy required universities to be accountable to the government through the external quality assurance body specifically set up for the purpose of external quality assurance. Prior to this, universities were responsible solely to their university council or highest internal governing committee.

In existence since 1984, the university had not been accountable since inception to any organisation or office save for its own governance Council and the Minister of Education. The university was considered autonomous and free to follow the principles of academic freedom. The 2006 NUS Act specified that the principle of academic freedom meant "the freedom of the University to regulate the courses and the subject-matter of courses taught at the University and the freedom of the University to teach and assess students in the manner it considers best promotes learning" (NUS Act 2006, s 6). University governance at the time considered the inclusion of this statement in their legislation as evidence of their autonomous status and power to regulate courses as they saw fit.

The university had its own processes for internal quality assurance that involved external review by academic peers usually from overseas universities. Periodic external review of university programmes

took place to inform improvements to the university's programmes and courses with the first being a 2005 external review of the Faculty of Education. The university's process for external review was initiated by the relevant faculty and resulted in a report of recommendations for enhancing the quality of a faculty's programmes and courses. In addition, as part of the external review process, faculties were required to report back to university academic committees on the progress of recommendations of their external review.

An additional process of internal quality assurance was evident in an internal process of course and programme approval by the university committee responsible for academic decisions. The highest approval body was the Council of the university, which had the final say in approving new programmes and courses.

#### *ii. Academic freedom*

The establishment of a national quality assurance body to be the regulator for all post-school education and training in Sāmoa disturbed the autonomous existence of the university. New legislation passed by Parliament in 2006, provided for the establishment of a new entity with the authority to "develop criteria and processes for the registration... accreditation and quality audit of all post-school education and training providers" (SQA Act 2006, s 4). Two years later, this piece of legislation was replaced by a new Act that gave the new government body power to "regulate qualifications and quality standards for all the Post School Education and Training (PSET) providers in Sāmoa" (SQA Act 2010, s 4).

The question of academic freedom and whether the university should in fact be subject to the external quality assurance policy framework was an important topic to both the quality assurance body and the university. The inclusion of a section titled 'Academic freedom and the rights of universities' in Sāmoa's quality assurance policy document, as well as an appendix titled 'Relationship between the external quality assurance body and universities' is evidence of this importance (SQA, 2009, p. 19).

Within the policy document, in the section titled 'Academic freedom and the rights of universities' the statement includes the following:

Guided by their legislations, universities have the right to regulate their programmes and their courses and to teach and assess in a manner that the university considers best promotes learning (SQA, 2009, p. 19).

This statement is shortly followed by,

Universities are under obligation to take all steps necessary to ensure that the international academic community accepts their standards in education, training and research. This includes registering their qualifications on the Sāmoa Qualifications Framework (SQA, 2009, p. 20).

The policy reference above makes three points. Firstly, the quality assurance policy framework acknowledges that universities do have the right to regulate or manage the quality of their programmes and courses by whatever means they see fit. Secondly, the policy framework places universities "under obligation," to ensure the university's "standards in education, training and research" are acceptable to the "international academic community" (SQA, 2009, p. 20). The document does not specify 'to whom' universities are obliged to undertake this activity. Thirdly, the ensuring of international acceptance very clearly includes obtaining "programme accreditation" from the national quality assurance body.

In other words, a new accountability relationship is mapped out which creates further accountability for the university to groups that are external of the university. According to the quality assurance policy framework, the university was now accountable for the quality of its programmes and courses to the national quality assurance body, as well as the international academic community.

Figure 3 and Figure 4 illustrate the difference in accountability for the university before and after the adoption of external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa.

**FIGURE 3**

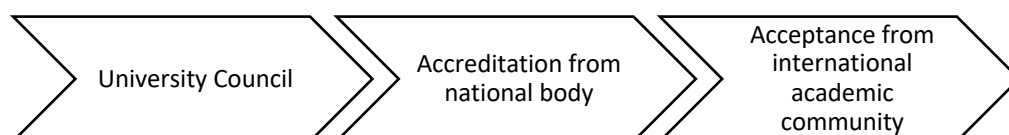
*Accountability of the university before adoption of external quality assurance policy*



Note. This diagram shows the levels of accountability of the university prior to the adoption of external quality assurance policy.

**FIGURE 4**

*Accountability of the university after adoption of external quality assurance policy*



Note. The levels of accountability of the university after the adoption of external quality assurance policy.

External quality assurance policy in Sāmoa resulted in changes to the levels of accountability for the university. Prior to the policy being adopted, the highest level of accountability for the university was to the Minister responsible for Education, through the university's governing council. However, the adoption of external quality assurance policy resulted in extra layers being added, with the university being accountable to accreditation from a national body and to acceptance from the international academic community via such national accreditation.

### *iii. Funding relationship*

New funding relationships were created by the existence of an external quality assurance policy framework. The establishment of quality assurance policy contributed to the development of a new funding relationship for bodies in the education sector. The intent to establish a funding mechanism to

support quality for the tertiary sector in Sāmoa had been expressed as early as 2008 and was still very much a policy priority some years later (SQA, 2017).

The quality assurance policy framework, in addition to responsibility for coordination and strengthening of the post-school sector, provided the opportunity to tie funding to the new quality standards and quality assurance policy framework. Table 4 shows the amounts of development aid between 2011 and 2018 that were tied to 'quality' or 'quality assurance'.

**TABLE 4**

*Funding tagged to 'Quality' and 'Quality Assurance' after adoption of quality assurance policy*

<b>Programme/Project</b>	<b>Amount</b>	<b>Funding Source</b>	<b>Objective</b>
TVET Roadmap 1 May 2011 – June 2013 <sup>5</sup>	\$680,000 SAT	Australian Aid (Sāmoa-Australian Partnership for Development)	Quality
TVET Roadmap 2 July 2013 – June 2015 <sup>6</sup>	\$1,357,000 SAT	Australia Aid (Sāmoa- Australian Partnership for Development)	Quality
Education Sector Support Programme July 2015 – June 2018 <sup>7</sup>	2,300,000 SAT	Coordinated aid funding from NZ MFAT and Australia DFAT	PSET Quality Assurance Strengthening quality and relevance of NUS Education programmes

As shown in Table 4, the amount of aid funding that was aligned to the objective quality for the post-secondary sector came from Australian and New Zealand aid agencies. The majority of this funding was tied to alignment with national quality assurance policy and criteria. The involvement of development partners in directly supporting education sector planning in Sāmoa provides development partners with

<sup>5</sup> Sāmoa Qualifications Authority, 2016b, p. vi.

<sup>6</sup> Sāmoa Qualifications Authority, 2016b, p. vi.

<sup>7</sup> Sāmoa Education Sector Support Program, 2015, p. 71.

opportunity to leverage funding and policy priorities. Development partners saw this funding as a leverage to achieve their own objectives for development funding.

The Education Sector Support Programme for 2008-2015 was implemented with strategic objectives, one of which was to “increase... the employment rate of graduates of post-secondary education and training” (Haggland et al., 2018, p. 6). Aid funding for the tertiary sector was unapologetically focused on employment and economic outcomes from higher education. During the 2015-2018 Education Sector Support Programme, 30 percent of continued funding for the tertiary sector was conditional on improvement in two key performance indicators. These indicators were: “percentage of PSET graduates finding employment within six months” and “number of accredited courses provided by PSET providers” (Haggland et al., p. 67).

As a research participant commented, development partners such as Australia and New Zealand have “their own objectives and policies that they would like to see being implemented and sort of have that influence on the education system in Sāmoa. And they use that funding as a way to leverage that”. The participant elaborated further by explaining that, “usually from the point of view of donors it's result-based... donors expect results from the money that is given” (“A.L.”).

#### *iv. Incentive to engage with quality assurance processes*

At institutional level, the availability of external funding both to support quality assurance and improvements in quality provided an incentive to engage with national quality assurance processes. The development funding made available to institutions for the purpose of improving quality was conditional on institutions submitting their programmes for accreditation. Staff of the university saw the quality-tagged funding as sufficient incentive to submit their programmes for accreditation with the national quality assurance body. The viewing of funding as incentive is evident in the following quotes from academic leaders of the university.

I said look, we can work together, the external quality assurance body can pay for the accreditation panel, saves the university their money, and once the programmes have been accredited, then we ask the quality assurance body for funding. (“I.P.”).

In the end it will be win-win, they tick their boxes, we tick our boxes, and quality is assured. The thing is, they have the money to do it, so why spend our budget on overseas experts when they should be doing that, there will be a lot of savings that we can then mobilise to do other things that we need to do. (“O.P.”).

Quality assurance policy officials saw the new funding relationship as a way to leverage engagement of tertiary education institutions with the quality assurance policy framework. This is evident in the following quote from the talanoa with a senior quality assurance policy official.

Post-school education and training providers are striving to meet the national quality assurance processes by improving their institutional policies, especially quality assurance policies. The budget support funding has been used mainly... to provide this support to providers. (“U.V.”).

Overall, the adoption of external quality assurance policy opened up the opportunity for a new relationship based on funding between the quality assurance body and the university, between the development partners and the quality assurance body, and between development partners and both entities. The funding was tied to quality assurance and provided an incentive for the university to have its programmes accredited by the local quality assurance body. The funding relationship also provided an opportunity for the development partners to leverage funding to achieve their own priorities for development aid.

*v. Tension-filled relationality*

As previously mentioned, university leaders disputed the obligation of the quality assurance body to regulate the university's degree programmes. As a senior academic reflected, "anything regulatory you will always have that pressure between who enforces the policy and the person on the other side. So that element was there and will always be there." ("O.M.").

The perspective described by "O.M." refers to tension or pressure between the policy represented by the policy enforcer and the person who is on the other side, meaning the university. The tension or pressure to which "O.M." refers was evident in escalating tension between the university and the quality assurance body in 2010.

From 2010, the university's refusal to accept external quality assurance policy for its degree programmes escalated into tension on both sides, involving a flurry of letters sent back and forth between the two organisations, and from the Office of the Minister to both entities. One or more of the letters were described by participants privy to the information as "very nasty," "lengthy" and "condescending." Another participant, a senior academic, agreed with this observation, commenting that,

During a particular point in time the quality assurance body representative said that without their stamp on your programmes, there is no quality in what the university is doing...That was what they were saying at the time. ("O.P.").

"O.P." recalled the general feeling of hostility that resonated throughout the university community at the news of the disagreeable letters from a senior official of the quality assurance body. OP described the anger felt by academic leaders in saying:

All the academics that were there were angry because it was actually saying that there was no quality in our work prior to 2006 when the quality assurance body was set up...And because of those statements and the reactions from the university leadership, it soured

relations and we ended up in the situation where the power of the legislation was used to force us. (“O.P.”).

The same senior academic went on to suggest that both sides were guilty of causing the tension in the comment that, “I think there were things that the university and the quality assurance body were both guilty of in contributing to the souring of relations. (“O.P.”).

Wright (2022) suggests that the tension between the university and the quality assurance body was due to “mutual distrust, uneven and unnegotiated power relationships, personality clashes at the decision-making level and disagreement on policy ideas” (p. 151). It was evident in the talanoa with research participants that there was very clearly a divide between “us” and “them,” premised on much misunderstanding and disagreement on how external quality assurance policy should be enacted and for what purpose.

### 6.2.3 Summary of findings against the second research question

The second research question asked what is valued in external quality assurance policy and how does this determine policy relationships in external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa.

The findings that are described in this section highlight that external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa values or places significant importance on compliance with the standards and criteria of the policy, the effectiveness and efficiency with which the university operates and the achievement of international recognition of Sāmoa’s qualifications. Notably, the limited reference to cultural values related to Sāmoa’s unique cultural context indicates that cultural values are not important or relevant to external quality assurance policy.

The value placed on the ideas of compliance, effectiveness, efficiency and international recognition, in conjunction with an absence of cultural values, happens alongside policy relationships that are accountability based, transactional based on funding arrangements, and characterised by tension.

Accountability-based relationships imply an uneven power relationship where one entity is in the position of rendering an account to the other. Funding relationships imply that one entity is positioned with the ability to use funding support as an incentive to engage another entity in external quality assurance policy. The tension that is apparent in the relationship between the university and the external quality assurance body is due to disagreement on who should have the power to regulate university programmes and qualifications.

### 6.3. How do academic leaders respond to external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa?

This section provides evidence to show how academic leaders responded to external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa. Academic leaders' responses to external quality assurance policy included resistance, resignation, acceptance and affirmation. Some academic leaders changed their response over time, some had mixed responses, and some retained a static or unchanging response throughout the enactment of external quality assurance policy.

#### 6.3.1 The types of responses

Academic leaders responded to external quality assurance policy in different ways, at different times. Participant talanoa indicated that academic leaders' responses to external quality assurance policy included, resistance, resignation, acceptance, and affirmation.

##### *i. Resistance*

This response is characterised by overt or spoken disagreement with external quality assurance policy. There is a feeling of displeasure and deep disagreement with external quality assurance policy.

I think there's a lot of frustration coming from the university about their role and not really understanding the university system... For example, for our external review there will be a quality assurance body representative on that panel apparently, which will be new. You

know for me, ok what is their role on the panel, you know they're not content experts...so what kind of feedback will they give us. ("I.S.").

The above talanoa excerpt illustrates deep disagreement by an academic regarding a modified accreditation process as part of a compromise reached by the university and the quality assurance body in 2017. The modified process attempted to combine the accreditation process outlined by external quality assurance policy and the university process of external review. The particular point of disagreement for the academic quoted in the previous talanoa excerpt, was the inclusion of a quality assurance body representative on the accreditation committee for a university programme. As the quote illustrates, the senior academic was unhappy with the inclusion of someone who was not a content expert on the accreditation committee.

One academic resisted external quality assurance policy due to the perceived lack of acknowledgement by the quality assurance body of university internal quality activities. As "O.P.", a senior academic stated,

The quality assurance body needs to acknowledge the work that we do here because it's not that we are trying to stop them from their work. They need to acknowledge and appreciate the quality assurance role that we do here at the university, which is being acknowledged overseas. So, they need to look at the work we do, and modify their processes to accommodate what we do here. ("O.P.").

Evident in the previous quote is the perspective of OP that external quality assurance policy needed to be modified to accommodate the work that was done within to the university to quality assure its own programmes.

A senior academic, "E.N.", took exception to what some academics perceived as a "surveillance sort of attitude" to the way that external quality assurance staff engaged with the universities. "E.N." shared that "you know I don't like this surveillance sort of attitude that comes through... are you doing things right... you're not allowed to do this; you're not allowed to do that". What is evident from the preceding quote

is that “E.N.” felt controlled and hemmed in by external quality assurance policy, which “E.N.” considered to be inflexible.

### *ii. Resignation*

The response of resignation was characterised by some disagreement with the policy, but with a feeling that there was no other option but to agree with external quality assurance policy. This response was usually accompanied by hesitance to do more than what was required to satisfy the minimum requirement to meet the policy.

The following conversation excerpt highlights feelings of resignation and unwilling acceptance in the perceived absence of any other choice from “E.P.”, a senior academic.

Our faculty is a guinea pig... I feel for the staff as well, when they come and give me the report, I tell the staff do this. They say, oh, why are we doing this why are we doing this? Here we have to do it again. You know with the external review they were under so much stress in terms of doing the documents. Now it's very hard I feel for the staff because they're redoing, they are repeating the work.

It is apparent that “E.P.” feels stuck between the feedback from academic staff regarding the perceived duplication of work as a result of external quality assurance policy processes and the requirement to implement the quality assurance process.

Other words used by academic leaders to describe their feelings of resignation were “inevitability” and “reluctant.” “I.L.”, a senior academic summed up the illustration of a resigned response to external quality assurance policy in the following comment.

In the first place I was kind of reluctant to get involved with it and then I thought, oh I have no choice you know; we just have to move with it... the law stands firmly that the quality

assurance body is the only way for any educational institution before it is recognised... overseas.

The resignation that is illustrated in the previous quote is justified at least in the speaker's mind, by reference to the legislation, for which there is no other option but compliance. In the words of "I.L.", they "just have to move with it."

### *iii. Acceptance*

The response of acceptance was characterised by acknowledgement of the reason for and process of external quality assurance policy. Academic leaders who displayed acceptance of external quality assurance policy communicated a feeling of willingness to engage with and enact quality assurance policy. A participant quote that summarises the acceptance response follows.

We just assumed that this is a good thing, that quality is what we needed in our courses, and we thought it was timely at that point that we look at some form of quality assurance and how to benchmark our courses against a certain framework. I remember at that time we worked... in trying to align our courses with the framework at the time. ("I.N.").

"I.N.", a senior academic, acknowledges that some senior academics had already considered the implications of external quality assurance policy on their work and decided that it was in line with their expectations. As illustrated in the above quote, the emphasis on what senior academics thought, "we thought," "we...assumed," "we worked," highlights the agency of academic leaders who have responded to external quality assurance policy with acceptance.

Some academic leaders chose acceptance after seeing the process of accreditation by the local quality assurance body in action, as illustrated by the following quote.

I think the accreditation process is...meticulous...They go right down to the level of the course descriptors for assessment. I think for me after the accreditation of our two TVET

programmes and seeing the benefits of the accreditation process, I am now supportive of our higher ed programmes being accredited with the external quality assurance body. (“O.T.”).

Another academic leader was aware of the negative perceptions of other colleagues toward external quality assurance policy, but chose to adopt a different response, evident in the following quote.

You know sometimes you feel that people are policing you. But I don’t feel like that because I’m familiar with this work... There should be something to maintain the quality of education...it’s not something that I feel like I should be scared of, but I like it. (“U.S.”).

Yet another academic leader chose to respond to external quality assurance policy with acceptance, for pragmatic reasons. “O.T.”, a senior academic pragmatically accepted that a coordination body was needed in Sāmoa to ensure the quality of higher education programmes. Acceptance of external quality assurance policy is reflected in “O.T.”’s sharing, “I said of course, how can you ensure the quality of programmes across the nation if there is no coordinating body to do that?”.

#### *iv. Affirmation*

Some academic leaders responded with the affirmation of external quality assurance, characterised by acceptance as well as enjoyment in engaging in the external quality assurance policy process. Academic leaders who described this response also describe a feeling of power and ownership. The feeling of ownership stemmed from seeing how external quality assurance policy could be utilised to serve the individual and collective purposes. The following quote demonstrates the response of affirmation by a senior academic.

I'm enjoying myself doing it because not only that I'm working... on the course descriptors and on the programme design of the different programmes that we have, not only in terms

of rewriting some of these... but it's also my first time to see external quality assurance criteria in different things that we have. ("I.L.").

Another academic leader embraced external quality assurance because of perceived benefits regarding the increased status of an accredited programme, as well as access to funding for quality assurance programmes. The following talanoa excerpt highlights an affirmation response in response to external quality assurance policy.

I really wanted to see that our programmes are not a joke, that they can be accredited. So, my role was to review the programmes that we were offering and see what needs to be done in order for them to be quality assured and accredited... One question that I asked was, if they were to accredit degree and higher degree programmes, where do they get their panel members from. And they said that they recruit from overseas, and then I said OK so... what are we worried about in terms of quality of the people to come and accredit the programme? ("I.P.").

Another academic leader affirmed the need for external quality assurance because some people needed an external measure to motivate them to do the right thing. The following quote highlights this affirmation response from "I.N.", a senior academic.

But the thing is, what's wrong with being accredited? Why not if you can get some brownie points somewhere, why not? This is how I view things here. If you do not put up certain things that you have to comply with, if you don't put those sorts of measures or yardsticks in place, some of the people just don't do it.

The previous quote highlights the perception held by some academic leaders that it was necessary to have external quality assurance policy for the purpose of motivating some to adhere to expectations of quality programmes and quality teaching at university.

### 6.3.2 Consistency of responses

Academic leaders experienced different responses to external quality assurance policies at different times and with regard to different aspects of policy. For example, some academic leaders talked about maintaining their stance of ‘resistance’ over time, while others spoke of moving from a stance of ‘resistance’ to ‘resignation.’ Such a change was usually accompanied by the realisation that resistance was futile and that the only way forward was to comply with external quality assurance policy. Others moved from a place of ‘resistance’ to a place of ‘acceptance’ and even ‘affirmation.’ Such a change usually came after having experienced external quality assurance first-hand, either by participating in the process, or by working with the policy documentation to consider implications for university programmes and courses.

The nature of changing responses is further discussed in the following section.

#### *i. Changing responses*

It is evident that some participants changed their response to external quality policy over time as they became more involved with external quality assurance processes. Table 5 and Table 6 show two examples from the talanoa conversations indicating such changes in their response.

**TABLE 5.**

*Example 1 of a changing response from resistance to affirmation (“I.L.”)*

Resistance	Resignation	Acceptance	Affirmation
To be honest... I have to admit this to you, I never liked the quality assurance body accrediting our programmes... in the first place I was kind of reluctant to get involved with it	And then I thought, oh I have no choice you know, we just have to move with it, so yeah.	But now I understand, the reason it was difficult, was because we didn’t understand what the quality assurance body was communicating... so now I understand it well, the policies and all that	I’m enjoying myself doing it ... working ... on the programme design ... it’s also my first time to see external quality assurance criteria in different things that we have

**TABLE 6**

*Example 2 of a changing response from resistance to affirmation (“O.M.”)*

Resistance	Affirmation
- I think the first time it was flagged I wasn't supportive of it.	I am now supportive of our higher ed programmes being accredited with the external quality assurance body

The second example of a changing response as illustrated in Table 6 highlights a changing response from resistance to affirmation, the latter response highlighted by being “supportive” of external quality assurance policy.

#### *ii. Mixed Responses*

There were also mixed responses from some academic leaders, who disagreed with some aspects, while agreeing with other aspects of external quality assurance policy. For instance, some agreed on aspects of external quality assurance policy such the principle of external evaluation by peers, or alignment with national strategic directions, while at the same time disagreeing with how such principles were implemented in practice.

Tables 7, 8 and 9 highlight examples of mixed responses evident in the talanoa with some academic leaders. The conversation of such research participants seemed to fluctuate between acceptance and resistance, (“O.P.”), (“I.N.”), and even resignation (E.N.”).

The appearance of mixed responses indicates that some academic leaders did have mixed feelings and a mixed response to external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa, especially where it related to their work as academics within a university.

**TABLE 7***Example 1 of a mixed response ("O.P.")*

<b>Acceptance</b>	<b>Resistance</b>
My position has always been, we need to align to national policies ... we can always get whatever programmes accredited nationally by the local quality assurance body, and then we go overseas.	They need to acknowledge and appreciate the quality assurance role that we do here at the university, which is being acknowledged overseas. They need to look at the work we do, and modify their processes to accommodate what we do here

**TABLE 8***Example 2 of a mixed response ("E.N.")*

<b>Acceptance</b>	<b>Resistance</b>	<b>Resignation</b>
At the end of the day, what I'm doing needs to be compliant with this framework first, here, then with my peers in other universities	you know I don't like this surveillance sort of attitude that comes through... are you doing things right... you're not allowed to do this; you're not allowed to do that	I always see it as a monitor - and I think if you see it as a monitor then the frame changes. But if you see it in a negative light, there is a gap - them and us... But being intrusive is a perception. But if you see it as part of the ladder to go up then it becomes less intrusive.

**TABLE 9***Example 3 of a mixed response ("I.N.")*

<b>Acceptance</b>	<b>Resistance</b>
at that point in time, where we were involved, we never asked the question. We just assumed that this is a good thing... and we thought it was timely at that point that we look at some form of quality assurance and how to benchmark our courses against a certain framework	And the other thing I don't like, I don't like SQA thinking that because they are the benchmarkers and the upholder of quality, that they are quality themselves. I could be wrong but I'm getting that attitude from the staff. You know they facilitate, but that doesn't mean they have quality

### *iii. Static responses*

In contrast to academic leaders whose mixed responses or changing responses were evident in their talanoa, some academic leaders spoke of a consistent response to external quality assurance policy, based on personal convictions or philosophy of how things should be done. Static responses seemed to be experienced by academic leaders who resisted, as well as accepted, external quality assurance policy.

#### Acceptance

The following participant quotes illustrates the responses of academic leaders who communicated their unchanging response of acceptance in response to external quality assurance policy. Their decisions to accept external quality assurance policy were due to personal beliefs about the benefit of acceptance (“I.P.”), about the right way to do things (“A.F.”) and a belief about what was needed (“U.S.”).

I’m all for improvement and for you know... improving the quality of things, and if we can work together...to lift that why should we resist? And especially when the quality assurance body can fund the process? Why not? (“I.P.”).

I was really set before I started that all programmes will be accredited with the local quality assurance body. And I articulated that well from the start (“A.F.”).

You know sometimes you feel that people are policing you. But I don’t feel like that because I’m familiar with this work... There should be something to maintain the quality of education...it’s not something that I feel like I should be scared of, but I like it. (“U.S.”).

The above quotes highlight findings that academic leaders chose to maintain a consistent response to external quality assurance policy due to personal beliefs about what was the right thing to do or in view of the perceived benefits of the external quality assurance process.

#### Resistance

The following participant quotes highlight the response of academic leaders who communicated their unchanging response of resistance to external quality assurance policy.

The first quote from “I.S.” highlights a personal response of resistance based on a personal conviction and experience of higher education in another context. The resistance is also based on the questioning of the benefit that would result from external quality assurance policy.

I always understood that the university accredits their own courses. That’s where I’ve come from... for me, what kind of feedback will they give us. It’s quite different here at the university from other institutions. (“I.S.”).

The second quote from “O.M.”, a senior academic, highlights strong resistance to external quality assurance policy based on personal beliefs about the role of a university as a creator of knowledge, a role seen as unique and different from the role of other organisations. “O.M.”’s reference to feeling “constrained” with “no chance to develop our independent ideas” explains some of the reasoning behind a consistent response of resistance.

The university for me, their key role is to create knowledge, that's not the purpose of other sectors of education... One of my arguments... is that we stand back at arm's length from the politics of the day, in a neutral situation where we create knowledge to a level where we gain the respect of our politicians. So that they ask us for advice, to put out their knowledge that they will use to help them formulate policies. At the moment so far, it's not getting better, it's more the government telling university what to do... It's like we were constrained, we were more focused on doing things and there was no chance to develop our independent ideas. (“O.M.”).

For academic leaders who maintained a response of ‘resistance’, there were deep reasons for choosing this response and for maintaining it over time.

### 6.3.3 Reasons for acceptance

The reasons for acceptance of external quality assurance policy included the attraction of funding support tied to accreditation, the local and international recognition from having been accredited with the local quality assurance body, the marketability of an ‘accredited’ status, and a sincere desire to improve the quality of their own work within the university. The passages from participant talanoa illustrates alignment with each reason for the acceptance of external quality assurance policy by academic leaders.

#### *i. Funding support*

The following quotes from academic leaders who indicated they supported external quality assurance policy refers to the increased access to funding as the primary reason for acceptance.

I said look, we can work together, the quality assurance body can pay for the Panel, saves the university their money, and once the programmes have been accredited, then ask the quality assurance body for funding. (“I.P.”).

When we got this directive, I called a meeting of our faculty management team, the heads of departments and everyone was supportive of it, we talked about the benefits of the accreditation process not only to the university but also to the students when they go to employers, and they see a certificate that is recognised. (“O.T.”).

In the above quotes by “I.P.” and “O.T.”, both senior academic leaders, the benefit of funding is highlighted as a reason to accept external quality assurance policy.

I know the quality assurance body wants all programmes to be accredited, but in terms of power relationships, they cannot force the university to accredit its programs. But I think they have one useful weapon that they have to get the university to accredit its programs. And that is the funding support that comes with the accreditation of programs. (“A.L.”).

In the above quote, “A.L.”, a senior policy official, refers to funding resources as a “useful weapon” that can be used by the quality assurance body to persuade the university to engage in the external quality assurance of its programmes.

## *ii. Recognition*

Another reason for acceptance related to the local and international recognition of university qualifications, which was important for some academic leaders.

People still don't think much of the university, and I'm not blind to that. So even to gain local recognition is going to be a big thing. For me it will be a big thing. And then international recognition. Sometimes I think the international recognition might be easier to achieve than the local. (“I.N.”).

We are not the only university, there are many other universities and there is competition. When our students go out there, we must be recognised. (“U.S.”).

You've got to have quality assurance because that's the benchmark to measure all of this. And you have to have this sort of framework for this. So that we are in line, similar to what is happening around the world. If you want to be a global citizen, we have to play the global citizen's game. And this is it, this is one of the reasons why this is set up... Because we can just do our own thing, and stay here, and not be recognised anywhere else. (“E.N.”).

The international recognition of university qualifications was the overriding reason for acceptance of external quality assurance policy for the academics quoted in the above passages. “I.N.”, a senior academic refers to negative public perception of the university, indicating that local recognition of university qualifications is important. “U.S.”, refers to the need to be recognised among the many other universities so that their students would not be disadvantaged in competition with others. “E.N.”, expands

on the same idea of graduates being in competition with graduates of other universities and the importance of playing the “game” in order to be recognised internationally.

*iii. Marketability of accredited status*

Other academics referred to the benefit of marketability of qualifications to attract more students and so that graduates can have a stronger position when competing for jobs internationally.

I think it's really important for sustainability and growth of the university to have quality programmes. Because we can use it as a marketing tool, such to say that our courses are quality assured by external agencies like SQA and other agencies overseas. And that we can use that to market our courses so that we get more students. (“A.F.”).

In the above talanoa excerpt, “A.F.” refers to accreditation as a “marketing tool” to be used to “market” university qualifications in order to attract more students.

*iv. Desire to improve quality*

Yet another academic leader sincerely wanted to improve the quality of programmes for the purpose of benefiting the students. “I.P.” articulated this desire in the following quote.

Because I wanted things to improve for the students coming out of the university... when I first joined the faculty, a presentation that was done by a CEO of a public organisation... thrashing the quality of the students coming out of the university. I had just joined the faculty ... So that was one of the major influencers that really pushed me to change things for the better... And thirdly it's my own desire wherever I go to try and improve things. I've always been someone who likes improving things, that sort of attitude.

“I.P.” referred to negative public perception as a motivating factor to accept external quality assurance policy as a way of improving the quality of programmes at the university.

#### 6.3.4 Reasons for resistance

Academic leaders had varied reasons for resisting external quality assurance policy.

##### *i. Being reviewed by people who are not 'peers'*

Academic leaders did not see much credibility in an accreditation process that involved decision-making by people whom they did not consider to be their academic peers. The accreditation process by the external quality assurance body involved quality assurance officials making decisions throughout the entire accreditation process, such as timing, recruitment, and selection of the accreditation panel as well as the standards and criteria used to assure the quality of higher education programmes. Academic leaders considered it of paramount importance to be evaluated by academic peers. As talanoa participants comment in the following excerpts, the importance of evaluation by academic peers comes through very strongly.

The national regional and international accreditation that's the backbone of everything that we do in academic is to be accepted that we have standards of quality in what we do, by our peers. So basically, that's how I see accreditation as an academic is to be accepted by a community of practice within our peer groups. ("O.P.").

For example, for our external review there will be an external quality assurance member on that panel apparently, which will be new. You know for me, ok what is their role on the panel, you know they're not content experts...so what kind of feedback will they give us. ("I.S.").

I have to admit this to you, I never liked the quality assurance body accrediting our programmes. I was always thinking, are they qualified to accredit, because I kind of look at the people that work there and all that and I thought, oh my gosh. ("I.L.").

And the other thing I don't like, I don't like the quality assurance body thinking that because they are the benchmarkers and the upholder of quality, that they are quality themselves. You know... I could be wrong but I'm getting that attitude from the staff. You know they facilitate, but that doesn't mean they have quality. They have to get the content experts to do it. ("I.N.").

The above quotes indicate that academic leaders disagreed with an external quality assurance process that involved someone who was not considered a "peer," or part of a "community of practice," not a "content expert," and therefore not "qualified" to make decisions on the quality evaluation process.

#### *ii. Feeling disrespected*

The perception of feeling disrespected was also one of the factors that influenced academic leaders to resist external quality assurance policy. Academic leaders reflected on events and actions that they considered disrespectful recalling written communications that are referenced in more than one talanoa. The written communication in question was described as "nasty," "condescending" and "offensive," as described by the following participant.

This person wrote a very nasty letter, it's still in me that letter I don't know when it will go away. It was a very nasty, unnecessary condescending letter...from the offensive. I thought you know just have a discussion at least... It was so nasty and unnecessary coming from someone that I expected would have a more open mind. But the attitude was, this is it, do it. So, I also have my pride. ("O.M.").

Academic leaders were also sensitive to the attitude of quality assurance officials who were perceived to be disrespectful because of their attitude, described as acting like a 'know-it-all' (fiapoto). The description of a person as a know-it-all or 'fiapoto' in the Sāmoan language is particularly meaningful because it implies an attitude of arrogance and unwillingness to consider other points of view. The following talanoa

excerpts provide insight of the extent to which academic leaders were offended by the manner and communication of quality assurance officials who were perceived to have the attitude of 'fiapoto' or 'know-it-all.'

Yes. That is the impression they give, like know-it-all. They are not respecting the experience and the professionalism of the quality assurance processes of the university. Because believe me they are inexperienced with accreditation of higher education programmes. But they present themselves like they are the experts... and that's the attitude that many are not happy with. ("O.P.").

And there was always this anger, you know, who are they? ("E.N.").

Especially from the university perspective in terms of we've been teaching these for how long, we are professors, and who are you to be questioning what we're doing... ("I.P.")

Another part of the reaction of feeling disrespected is evident in the reference to "who are you to be questioning" ("I.P.") the work of academics who had been doing such work for years. The implication is that academic leaders felt their work and their expertise was not recognised or valued by quality assurance officials.

### *iii. Unclear or irrelevant theoretical basis of quality assurance policy*

The absence of a clear theoretical basis of quality assurance policy was also a sore point for several academic leaders. One participant described a meeting during which she received unsatisfactory answers to her questions regarding this concern.

I keep asking questions to justify to us, where is the theory of these things. What is the reason? When they reply I am not satisfied. But I was only given a short amount of time... to ask questions. ("E.N.").

Another participant disagreed with quality assurance criteria, which from the participant's perspective was not suitable for higher education course and programmes, as the following excerpt shows.

What I've noticed with the matrix attached to the accreditation report, these are the things that are pursued in a TVET area... Bloom's taxonomy and every word is pitched to a level, that's not done in higher education, that's not how it's done. So, they do not understand that... the difference is that you need to understand the literature and the background of outcome-based curriculum, all of that theory is based around TVET programmes. ("O.P.").

Yet another participant noticed the absence of a clearly communicated rationale for 'standardising' and expressed strong disagreement with "standardizing for the sake of standardizing" as in the following quote.

You know I thought that's really not on, you cannot ask us to do that. I don't like the idea of standardising for the sake of standardising. There has to be a really good rationale behind it. ("I.N.").

#### *iv. Imposition on academic freedom and independence*

The principle of academic freedom was mentioned by one participant as the reason for ongoing resistance to external quality assurance policy. Commitment to upholding academic freedom was a deep motivator to the extent that the participant saw the erosion of academic independence as a personal failure, as highlighted in the following talanoa passage.

One of my arguments... is that we stand back at arm's length from the politics of the day, in a neutral situation where we create knowledge... So that they ask us for advice, ... that they will use to help them formulate policies. At the moment so far, it's not getting better, it's more the government telling the university what to do... Over here we initiate something, and we are told off, it's not done that way it's done this way... So that for me

has always been the dream. If we can't live up to that then we'll fail ourselves as staff members of the higher institution of our nation, might as well be a Ministry... We are supposed to be sitting back, creating knowledge, ... It shouldn't be the other way around we shouldn't be told we should be putting our thoughts on the table. ("O.M.").

The previous quote highlights disagreement with external quality assurance policy that directed what academics should do, and how they should do it, acting as a barrier to initiative, independent research and thinking. Similarly, the disagreement with what was seen as the "surveillance" attitude of external quality assurance policy was evident in the conversation by one participant

Rather than to say that you know I don't like this surveillance sort of attitude that comes through. That the... are you doing things right... you're not allowed to do this, you're not allowed to do that. ("E.N.").

#### *v. Absence of opportunity to discuss alternatives*

The perceived absence of opportunities to debate and discuss what external quality assurance policy should look like and how it should be implemented, was mentioned by two participants. One participant saw the situation as an "us against them" situation.

But I did want to have our conversations, I wanted it to be about us... it's like if they come to see the university and then they think ugh, we're going to see the university today... but it shouldn't be like that... It defeats the purpose of the exercise which is to learn from each other. Because I can see that it's us against them. It should be us, period. All of us. ("E.N.").

"O.M.", a senior university staff member interpreted the situation as a reluctance on the part of the quality assurance body to listen to other views and consider other ideas about quality assurance.

I wanted that to be a discussion or at least agree to disagree...They are not prepared to discuss things in a neutral way and an open way. There is no point of coming with a mind already made up. ("O.M.").

The previous quote highlights the perception of several academic leaders who saw external quality assurance policy as an inflexible policy option that was not open to alternative ways of thinking about quality. With reference to meetings with quality assurance policy officials, the participant referred to them as coming to meetings with "a mind already made up."

*vi. Disregard for internal quality assurance processes*

Academic leaders also expressed dissatisfaction and deep-seated disagreement with the way the external quality assurance body seemed to disregard the internal quality processes of the university.

The quality assurance body need to acknowledge the work that we do here because it's not that we are trying to stop them from their work. They need to acknowledge and appreciate the quality assurance role that we do here at the university, which is being acknowledged overseas. ("O.P.").

*vii. Not understanding external quality assurance terminology*

One of the reasons for initial resistance was the confusion with policy terminology. OT and US, both senior academics talked about the terminology associated with external quality assurance policy and its complicated nature. They described it as a "new vocabulary" and "complicated," therefore requiring more time to read and understand. The following quotes illustrates this perspective.

I think the first time it was flagged I wasn't supportive of it. I think it came down to... it was a new vocabulary for us here at the university. ("O.T.").

Sometimes the communications by the external quality assurance body are very complicated. To me it is very complicated, I have to read it many times. I think that's why people take their time to respond. ("U.S.").

*viii. Extra workload and demand on academics' time*

One of the reasons for resistance to externally imposed quality assurance requirements was the time-consuming nature of the extra work needed to prepare documentation for external quality assurance processes. A senior academic, "E.P.", felt that quality assurance officials were not really aware of the time needed to make programme changes that looked minor on paper but in reality, involved many steps to implement and the engagement of many academics to make it a "valid" programme change. The following quotes from "E.P." and "I.N.", who are both senior academics, illustrate the time-consuming nature of enacting external quality assurance requirements.

They give us so much work, but they're not really looking at the processes that are actually taking place. They're not considering that there is a step one, and below step one, there is a one A, one B, one C, in order to complete one. Those are invisible components of the process... And often these processes do not involve just one person. It's more than one people involved in order to be valid. ("E.P.").

Well... it's a lot more work. I have to devote a lot of time to the course outlines... So, there's the cost in terms of doing that and compliance. I see that as a negative aspect of quality assurance. ("I.N.").

*ix. Fear of coming up short*

The fear of not meeting the standard was also mentioned by talanoa participants, as one of the reasons for resisting external quality assurance policy.

People don't like anything where there's benchmarking and where there's some evaluation process, I think will meet some resentment and some negativity. People don't like to... there's the fear of coming up short. And we all go through that. When we went through the external review, you know, what are they going to say about our courses? You know, is it good enough? There's almost a sense of defensiveness. (“I.N.”).

And again, not everyone is on that wavelength. But it's, it's just getting people to that space, to not be afraid, because I think there is a lot of fear around sharing information. People feel vulnerable. And feel judged? And that's understandable in this kind of environment? ... And the fear that people have, you know, that someone is reviewing their course. (“I.S.”).

Senior academics “I.N.” and “I.S.” commented on their experiences in leading teams that were preparing for or had already gone through an external quality assurance process. The feelings of fear they observed among academics related to academics feeling “vulnerable,” and “judged,” associated with feelings of “defensiveness,” “resentment” and “negativity” from being placed in such a situation.

#### 6.3.5 Summary of findings against the third research question

The third research question asked: How do academic leaders respond to external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa?

The findings outlined in this section indicates that academic leaders in Sāmoa responded in four ways, through resistance, resignation, acceptance, and affirmation of external quality assurance policy. There was diversity in how academics responded, as some academics changed their response and moved from one type of response to the other, while others experienced mixed responses at the same time. Yet the response of other academic leaders, whether to resist or accept external quality assurance policy,

remained static over time. Such strong responses were influenced by personal beliefs about the work and the value of external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa.

The reasons for acceptance of external quality assurance policy by academic leaders included the perception of benefits gained from external quality assurance policy such as greater access to funding support for programmes and teaching, local and international recognition of qualifications, the marketability of accredited courses as well as a personal desire to improve quality.

The reasons for resistance to external quality assurance policy by academic leaders can be seen as falling within two categories. The first category consists of the relational aspects of implementing external quality assurance policy that prompted negative feelings on the part of academic leaders. The second category consists of how academic leaders perceived the value of the external quality assurance activity. The table below summarises the distinct reasons for resistance identified by academic leaders, into either of these two categories.

**TABLE 10**

*Reasons for resistance by academic leaders to external quality assurance policy*

<b>Reasons for resistance pertaining to relationships in the enacting of external quality assurance</b>	<b>Reasons for resistance pertaining to the perceived value of external quality assurance</b>
Feeling disrespected by external quality assurance staff	Being reviewed by people who are not academic peers or content experts – irrelevance
Imposition on academic freedom and independence	Unclear or irrelevant theoretical basis of external quality assurance policy
Fear of coming up short, feeling of vulnerability	Disregard for internal quality assurance processes
Feeling unheard in the absence of opportunity to discuss policy options	Not understanding quality assurance terminology

## 6.4 Who does external quality assurance policy for higher education in Sāmoa serve and who benefits?

This section presents findings relevant to the question of who benefits from external quality assurance policy, and whom does it serve. The findings outline the perceived benefits from external quality assurance policy from the perspective of university and academic leaders as well as quality assurance policy officials.

### 6.4.1 University and academic leaders

#### *i. Mixed perceptions regarding the benefit for university teaching and learning*

There were mixed perspectives from academic leaders regarding the actual benefits of external quality assurance policy for university teaching and learning. From the perspective of some academic leaders, the implementation of external quality assurance policy resulted in internal tidying up of programme and internal programme documentation, because it was required by the accreditation process. For instance, a senior academic, “I.N.”, referred to the benefit of having improved documentation and a better structure for university programmes within a consistent “framework”, as quoted below.

The main outcomes, I think formalising and putting all the programmes and courses within a framework so there is some kind of relativity...That to me is a good thing that gives structure. It's easier to assess. So to have that structured approach to things and improving the quality of the documentation. (“I.N.”).

The perspective of another academic referred to the thinking process behind filling out quality assurance templates, describing it as “positive”, in the way that it made staff reflect on content, learning outcomes and assessment, as reflected in the following talanoa excerpt.

The new template that we have to use, I think that's a positive, because it helps us look, ok let's reflect on what this course is about, how it aligns with the framework, the outcomes. So I think it's really positive in that way... it's caused us to review content and made us look at the assessment again, look at the learning outcomes, so it's quite good in that way to be reflective of what we're trying to achieve. ("O.T.").

"O.T." added that external quality assurance processes provided the in-depth critique and critical review needed of the faculty's programmes and courses, evident in the following talanoa extract.

When our programmes were accredited through the accreditation process, I noticed the level of details and scrutiny of the programmes and courses that the accreditation panel goes through. ("O.T.").

However other academic leaders were not so convinced of the benefits of external quality assurance policy for quality teaching and learning, suggesting instead that its main outcome was to ensure standards were met. The following quote provides evidence of such perspective.

I guess the outcomes that we are now trying for is to satisfy the quality assurance standards and practices of the university but at the same time satisfy the requirements of the external quality assurance body". ("O.P.").

Other academic leaders like "E.P." and "I.S.", did not see any benefit in implementing external quality assurance policy at all. The following excerpts from their talanoa sessions illustrate this view.

Once you have that quality element in there, in your teaching, in your practice, the people out there, and the outcome of your quality teaching, will be seen, will be observed. But what's happening now, this is what the quality assurance policy people want, that is not what we do here, we're doing it differently, how come you're not looking at that, how come you don't consider that quality involved in our teaching... but that's your lens from

your quality assurance point of view, we have our lenses down here as the implementers. (“E.P.”).

So there just seems to be miscommunication you know what are the mandates of these agencies, how do we coordinate... so were not duplicating work, and what is the outcome, what are we all trying to achieve? So those are the sorts of issues that I get frustrated about. (“I.S.”).

The above quotes reflect frustration with the seeming pointlessness of some aspects of external quality assurance policy. The words of the academic leaders quoted above imply that they were already fulfilling the internal expectations of the university, and therefore external requirements were making them repeat the work already completed. In addition, from “E.P.”’s perspective, the lens of external quality assurance policy was not able to capture the actual quality of their teaching. From “I.S.” and “E.P.”’s perspectives, external quality assurance policy did not seem to benefit university teaching and learning at all. “I.P.” further commented that, “we had to do it. And we had to find out the process, and just do the hard work. There's no short circuiting it or whatever you call it, you just had to go through the process”.

It could be surmised then that academic leaders accepted and even embraced external quality assurance policy in large part because it partly fulfilled their own goals whether it be to obtain an in-depth critique of programmes and courses, or as a way of changing public perception of their programmes.

#### *ii. Affirmation of academics’ work as quality*

One of the benefits of external quality assurance policy for some academic leaders was the affirmation of their work as quality which was needed to improve credibility with the public. Within a context where there was often criticism from the public regarding the quality of programmes and courses offered at the university, accreditation by the external quality assurance body provided the affirmation that their work

met the public's expectations. The affirmation provided by an 'accreditation tick' is illustrated in the quote below.

Because if you or your programmes are accredited it means that your programmes are at the level, that quality level that is expected of the programmes. I think that it is an indicator of the programmes that we offer if they get that accreditation tick. ("O.T.").

The affirmation of quality provided by an accreditation status was perceived as a benefit of external quality assurance policy, within a context where there was often criticism from the public or parents about the quality of university programmes. Academic leaders who had this perspective saw benefit in the opportunity to "change the perception of our people about our programmes and the quality of the programmes that we had." ("I.P.")

To illustrate the importance of changing negative public perception about their programmes, some academic leaders refer to anecdotal criticisms expressed by members of the public regarding the question of whether university qualifications were of adequate quality. One participant remembers that, "you know the stakeholders have not been happy with the quality of our graduates, they're saying that they're not work-ready, they are not fit for purpose. Which are harsh criticisms." ("A.F.").

Another participant reflected that,

The ultimate outcome of this... would be even the local recognition is a big thing. People still don't think much of the NUS, and I'm not blind to that. So even to gain local recognition is going to be a big thing. For me it will be a big thing. ("I.N.").

Academic leaders were aware of the perception by some members of the Sāmoan public that university qualifications were below par and did not adequately prepare graduates for work in the Sāmoan context. Such awareness was likely fuelled by public sentiments such as that expressed by a senior government official who expressed deep doubts about the quality of a particular programme of the university, in the following quote.

The big question that I have about the quality of these graduates, they are being qualified with their degrees as bachelor's degrees. This means that they have the minimum qualification to do their work. But the outcome that we have it is not. With the results that we're having and the quality of their work, this means that they are not sufficiently prepared for work. ("E.L.").

Academic leaders thus saw external quality assurance accreditation with the national quality assurance body as a way to confirm for the public and the community, that their work manifested in taught courses and awarded qualifications, was good and of quality. The benefit of external quality assurance for such academic leaders was on the status and affirmation of quality that would come with the 'accreditation tick' of external quality assurance and not actual improvements in quality. The resulting improved credibility of university programmes and courses in the face of public criticism was seen as a benefit by some university and academic leaders.

### *iii. Funding access*

Access to funding to support their work also had recurring mention as a benefit of external quality assurance policy for academic leaders. Access to funding was particularly important to academic leaders as resourcing to support their teaching was often mentioned as a constraint in achieving quality outcomes in their work.

It is one thing to set standards but actioning it is important. The intent may be to set high standards but in practice, the application or the delivery that's done is something else can be impacted by resources. ("O.P.").

As one academic leader pointed out, the constraints on resources available to the university had a direct link to their ability to meet the quality standards set in external quality assurance policy. "U.S." argued

that “constrained resources are one thing I know is the reason the standards can’t be met, then you can’t get the quality that the standard requires.

Resource limitations was thus a factor of great concern to academic leaders who were responsible for making financial and administrative decisions regarding the courses and programmes offered through their respective faculties and departments. It is no surprise then that when the external quality assurance body attached funding incentives to its accreditation processes, academic leaders saw the funding as a primary benefit for engaging with external quality assurance policy. Several academic leaders expressed their views on funding access through external quality assurance thus:

I said look, we can work together, they can pay for the Panel, saves us our money, and once the programmes have been accredited, then we ask them for funding. (“I.P.”).

We've just scored a major win in the sense that we've got ... funding... to fund 220 places in our accredited programme. (“A.F.”).

One academic leader in particular recognised the advantage held by the external quality assurance body because of their access to sources of funding that could be channelled to higher education.

They have one useful weapon that they have to get the university to submit its programmes for accreditation. And that is the funding support that comes with the accreditation of programs. (“A.N.”).

It is evident that access to funding was one of the benefits of external quality assurance policy that was particularly valuable to academic leaders. The funding channelled through the external quality assurance body made it possible to link funding as an incentive to engage with external quality assurance processes such as accreditation. The connection of funding to external quality assurance also made it more palatable for academic leaders to engage in external quality assurance processes. In all these conversations, again it seems that the encouragement offered by the access to funding was of primary importance to academic

leaders rather than any actual perceived improvements to quality teaching and learning that might arise as a result of engaging in external quality assurance.

However, from the perspective of the quality assurance body, using funding incentives as “carrots” to encourage engagement with external quality assurance, produced limited results. External quality assurance policy officials had reservations on the success of the funding access model, evident in the quote below.

We reached out with the funding access, what we wanted is not there... we're nearly running out of carrots and still providers are not submitting programmes for accreditation. The question I ask myself is what else is there? We've done the talking through meetings, workshops, everything, the commitment is still not there... we hold out the law no one cares...if we give funds, they just run here to take it and then we face difficulty in following up. (“U.N.”).

The concerns voiced by this quality assurance policy official refers to the scenario where access to funding was possible with the initial submission of programmes for accreditation. From the perspective of this policy official, some higher education agents seemed to fulfil initial processes as a means of getting access to the funding, then did not follow through on the initial intention, leaving external quality assurance processes in limbo. It was often difficult then for quality assurance policy officials to bring processes to a closure through the completion of an accreditation process.

#### *iv. Marketability*

It is clear that the benefits of external quality assurance for some academic leaders are tied to the marketability of programmes and courses to potential students, and secondly to the resulting accountability that is then demanded from university staff in relation to the content and enrolment of their courses.

The marketability of its programmes and qualifications to potential and continuing students are a concern for higher education governance in Sāmoa. Within a comparatively smaller population from which to draw its enrolment base, the university has to take a pragmatic approach to attracting potential students. As a senior academic leader iterated,

I think it's really important for sustainability and growth of the university to have quality programmes. Because we can use it as a marketing tool, such to say that our courses are quality assured by external agencies like the external quality assurance body and other agencies overseas. And we can use that to market our courses so that we get more students. We get more students, we get more enrolments, we get more income. (“A.F.”).

From the point of view of this academic leader, having a mark of quality assurance on the university’s programmes is an advantage that can be used to raise the attractiveness of the university’s courses to potential students. The mark of quality assurance provides evidence for the public that the qualifications offered at the university has been subjected to and met the quality standards. Attracting students to the university is a survival issue for the university and even the different faculties and departments within the university. The matter of student enrolment is important to academic leaders because the staff positions depend to some extent to having students to teach. The other contributing factor to this concern is observed reduction in student enrolment in previous years as one academic leader commented that “at the moment, we’ve had a reduction in the number of students” (“A.F.”).

#### 6.4.2 External quality assurance policy officials

##### *i. Graduate employment*

One of the prevailing messages communicated by external quality assurance policy officials and policy documents is the resulting benefit to Sāmoa in the form of employed graduates. A senior quality assurance official was of the view that,

The employability of graduates is a good indicator of the relevance and effectiveness of programmes delivered by a provider, and that, a higher education institution that denies this loses credibility and relevance to the education of people and the development of society as a whole. (“U.V.”).

“U.V.”’s view on the important of graduate employability was echoed by other quality assurance officials who spoke of graduate employability as being an important benefit of Sāmoa’s external quality assurance policy.

Another research participant pointed out that external quality assurance policy needed to look beyond graduate employment as merely finding a job, in a country where the scarcity of employment opportunities meant that there were cases of “tourism graduates driving a taxi or having a textile printing business” or similar (“U.N.”). The same research participant mentioned a high level meeting where they found out that “the government is not just looking at local employment opportunities... they want to build people to export” (“U.N.”).

Another research participant working for one of the aid organisations in the early years of external quality assurance policy adoption, but who had since moved to work for a government ministry recalls that one of the compelling reasons for the establishment of the external quality assurance body “was the whole discussion around the employability issue... to facilitate the pathway to be employable” (“O.S.”).

Interestingly, the idea of graduate employability as a compelling reason for the enactment of external quality assurance policy was not just in reference to university graduates finding jobs. “A.G.” suggested that the benefit of employability was that it enabled graduates “to be self-sufficient, when they know they are well prepared to live in society and look after themselves”. The idea of self-sufficiency and sustainable living was echoed by another research participant who spoke of graduate employability as being “not so much... formal employment but also looking at self-employment and self-sustainability and lifelong skills”

("U.N."). Even one of the academic leaders who opposed many aspects of external quality assurance policy valued "the impact on the learners and the impact at the end on the graduates and their employability," describing such impacts as "key considerations" for his own work ("O.P.").

As a future priority, the goal of graduate employment continues to occupy the minds of external quality assurance policy makers. The current and future policy strategy for the Sāmoa tertiary sector makes the goal of graduate employability in the following statement.

Across the PSET sub-sector of education, we need to continuously work to... equip our graduates with better skills and knowledge to meet the needs of employers and obtain employment. (SQA, 2021, p. 4).

#### *ii. Economic development*

The link between economic development and external quality assurance policy is evident in an early strategic plan document from 2008 which stated that, "the purpose of the new authority was to strengthen... and to implement an integrated approach to post-secondary education and training planning and development on behalf of the government of Sāmoa" (SQA, 2008b, p. 8). The document continues on to advocate that, "meeting the needs of the wider community, Government, employers and of learners has become urgent for both social and economic development." (SQA, 2008b, p. 8).

It was always clear that the initiation of external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa was supported by political will in the establishment of an external quality assurance body followed by the adoption of an external quality assurance policy framework. It is no accident that the body set up to establish and implement external quality assurance policy was also responsible for the coordination of tertiary education in Sāmoa, referred to as Post-Secondary Education and Training (PSET). The intention was that coordination to better align the sector with economic growth goals would be accompanied by quality assurance policy to ensure fulfilment of such purpose. The goal of economic development premised on a

skilled workforce to drive economic productivity and growth is echoed in more than one strategic document produced by the external quality assurance entity through the years.

Table 11 provides evidence of the consistency in the messaging and advocacy regarding external quality assurance policy for the purpose of contributing to national economic growth.

**TABLE 11**

*Examples of policy intentions linking external quality assurance policy and economic development*

<i>Year</i>	<i>Policy intention</i>	<i>Strategic/ document</i>	<i>policy</i>
2009	“The focus on human resource development to ensure a sufficiently well qualified population... It has always been the Government’s belief that economic prosperity is premised upon a well-educated population”	SQA, 2009. Quality Policies, p. 2.	Sāmoa Assurance
2016	Meeting the needs of the wider community, Government, employers and of learners has become urgent for both social and economic development.	SQA, 2016a. Statement of Corporate Objectives 2017-2020, p. 6	Sāmoa Authority
2020	“The goals, strategies and indicators have been identified for the planning period that will maximize the contribution of the post-secondary education and training sub-sector of education to the achievement of national, economic and social development goals.”	SQA, 2021. Strategic-Plan 2024, p. 4.	PSET 2020-

Note. Summary of references to economic development in Sāmoa’s external quality assurance policy documents.

As Table 11 shows, the strategic documents produced by the national entity responsible for external quality assurance policy consistently refer to the idea of economic development through the development of an educated population. The contribution of the tertiary sector to the goal of economic growth has been echoed throughout the last two decades, alongside the implementation and advocacy for external quality assurance policy.

The recurrent mention of economic growth or economic development as the strategic outcome of external quality assurance policy is also echoed in participant talanoa. The following excerpts from

participant talanoa provides evidence of the link in the minds of participants, between external quality assurance policy, skills development and economic development.

I suppose if the employees are not productive with what they're coming out of the institutions with in terms of skills and knowledge, they will not be productive... it's all towards boosting and improving national economic development. ("U.T.").

Higher education quality assurance policy exists for the continuous development of a higher education institution because programmes and courses offered and delivered by a provider or higher education institution must be relevant and respond to the skills needs of the country. ("U.V.").

As one academic leader reflected somewhat matter-of-factly, "politicians will only look at grades and look at economics and numbers and all that." ("E.N."). The preceding reflections indicate a deep awareness of the influence of political goals for economic development, in the implementation of external quality assurance policy.

#### 6.4.3 Summary of findings against the fourth research question

University and academic leaders had contrasting views on the benefit of external quality assurance policy for university teaching and learning. Some university and academic leaders saw benefits in engaging with external quality assurance policy. These benefits were: improved programme documentation; the opportunity to reflect on course content, assessment and learning outcomes as a result of having to align their programmes and course with external quality criteria; an affirmation that their programmes and courses were of quality; improved access to funding support; and improved marketability of programmes and courses. However other academic leaders perceived no benefits from engaging with external quality assurance policy, maintaining that it only duplicated the work they had already completed as part of internal university processes.

External quality assurance policy officials also saw benefits in implementing external quality assurance. These benefits were improved opportunities for graduate employment and improved contribution of the higher education sector to the country's goals of economic growth. The benefits discussed by quality assurance policy officials seem to not have an evidence base, as there is little in existing policy and organisational reports to indicate improving employment outcomes for graduates. Hence the benefits of external quality assurance policy for higher education graduates and the country, are assumed. The assumptions represent 'a song' or narrative that is used to justify and advocate for the implementation of external quality assurance policy.

## 6.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter outlined the findings of the four research questions which were:

1. Who determines how external quality assurance policy is decided and enacted in Sāmoa?
2. What is valued in external quality assurance policy and how does this determine policy relationships?
3. How do academics respond to external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa?
4. Who does external quality assurance policy for higher education in Sāmoa serve and who benefits?

The findings summarised in each section of this chapter represent research findings in the first domain of critical realism, which is the domain of the "empirical" (Bhaskar, 2008, p. xi). The findings represent how research participants viewed and experienced external quality assurance policy, as well as how policy was represented in policy documents. As Hu (2018, p. 120) suggests, the empirical domain of reality according to a critical realist lens, includes "human actors' observations, perceptions and sensations of reality". The findings in this chapter represent how external quality assurance policy officials and university and academic leaders experienced and perceived the enactment of external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa.

The next chapter will use an analytical framework to analyse the empirical findings in terms of the notions of voice, values, relationships and service. In doing so, the next chapter will help the reader arrive at an understanding of the main research question which is: Whom does external quality assurance policy serve, and whom does it benefit?

## CHAPTER SEVEN: ANALYSIS OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

### 7.1 Introduction: The matafā analytical tool

I have chosen to use a self-developed analytical tool to analyse the research findings using culturally relevant notions from the Sāmoan context. The elements of voice, values, relationship and service represent the 'context behind the context' (Sanga, et al, 2022) of higher education quality assurance policy in Sāmoa.

The aspect of 'voice' draws on the centrality of the concern with who is speaking on behalf of whom in policy (Abawi and Brady, 2017), who gets to make policy decisions and why, as well as the questions of who is consulted in policy processes and whose perspective informs policy (Huffer, 2006). The element of 'voice' looks at who is speaking and for whom are they speaking, and who makes and influences decisions.

The aspect of 'values' draws on the work of Tuia and Iyer (2015), Afamasaga (2001) and Taufe'ulungaki (2001) when they question whose values and what values influence education policy in the Pacific. The element of 'values' looks at what values and whose values underpin policy and whether they reflect indigenous and contextual values.

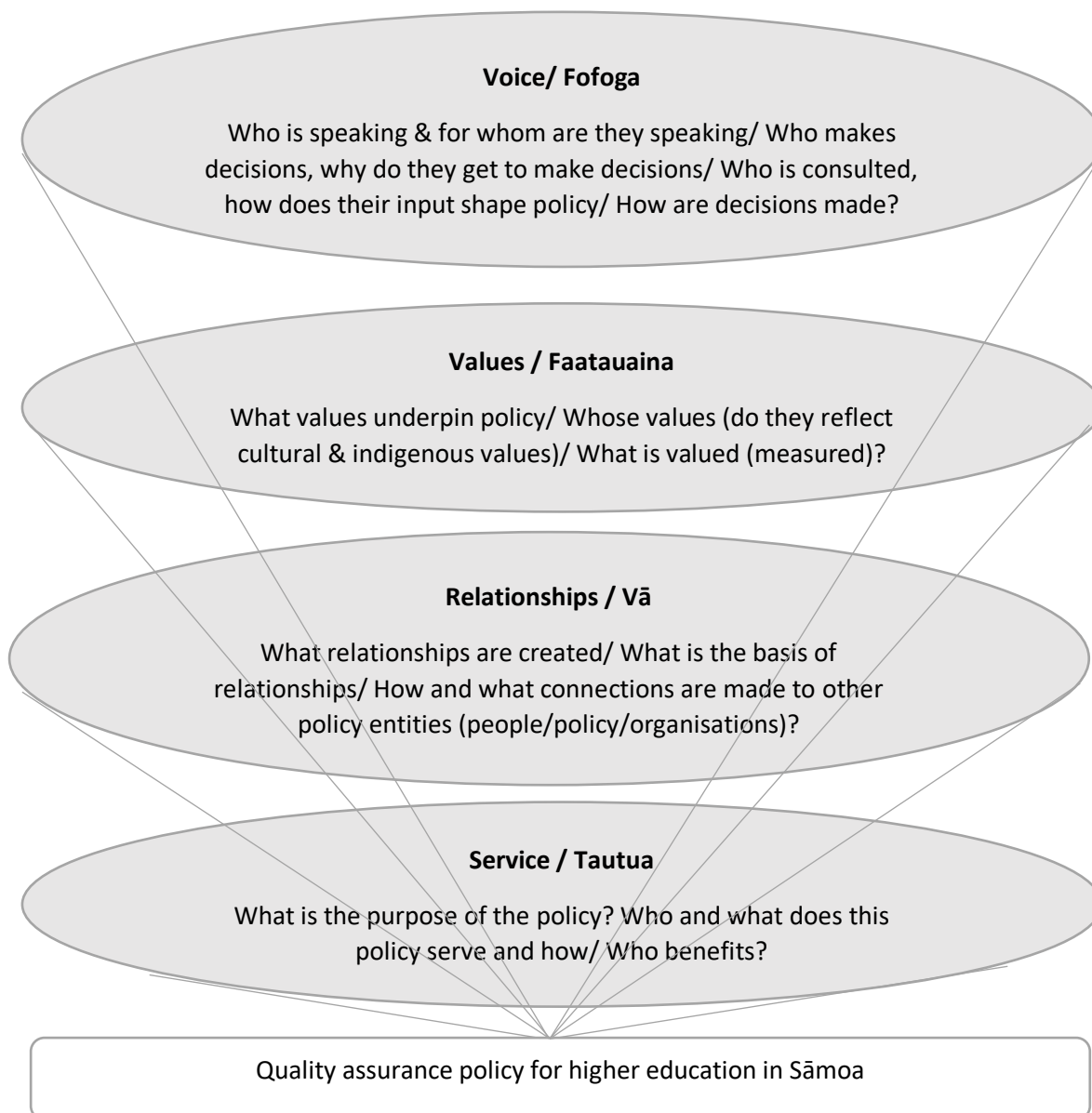
The third aspect, relationships, and relationality, draws on the concept of relationality in indigenous Pacific thought which places importance on how relationships are created and negotiated and how people respond within such relationships (Anae, 2019; Fa'avae, 2021). The element of 'relationships' analyses the relationships that are created as a result of external quality assurance policy, the basis of such relationships, and how relationships are made with other policy entities. Relationalities occupy a place of importance in the 'context behind the context' of education policy in Oceania (Sanga et al., 2022).

The fourth and final aspect of this analytical tool is 'service,' drawing on the work of Heine (2001) who questions the benefit or service of education policy in the Pacific for whom. The inclusion of the concept of 'service' in the matafā analytical tool reflects the importance placed on 'service' in the Sāmoan

worldview (Apulu, 2010). Analysis of higher education quality assurance policy in Sāmoa through the lens of 'service' allows an analysis of the benefits of external quality assurance policy, for whom (see Figure 5). Taken together, the four elements of 'voice,' 'values,' 'relationship' and 'service' make up the 'matafā' analytical tool. 'Matafā' literally means four-eyes in the Sāmoan language, and the meaning is to look at something through not just one or two eyes but four. Although the analysis of each element is presented separately in relation to external quality assurance policy, in reality they overlap and often interact with each other, as this analysis will show. I suggest that use of the matafā analytical tool enables a "vertexical moment" (Scott, 2010, p. 210) of analysis in the relationship between structure and agency in external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa. As illustrated in Figure 5, the four elements of the matafā analytical tool allow the analysis of external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa using concepts that are central to the Sāmoan worldview.

**FIGURE 5**

*The matafā analytical tool*



## 7.2 Voice

The findings show that there are many voices in the determination and enactment of external quality assurance policy. The various voices are made up of the voices of local policy officials as representatives of government, international consultants, university and academic leaders and transnational quality assurance networks. All voices wielded different degrees of influence at different times in the enactment of external quality assurance policy.

### 7.2.1 Local voices: Government policy officials

Local policy officials had the most influence in choosing the future direction of external quality assurance policy, when they chose how the policy-writing expertise would be sought, as well as the overseas country models to emulate. In making the decision to source international consultants to write Sāmoa's external quality assurance policy, local policy officials effectively made a second policy decision. The second decision arising from the choice to select international consultants to write policy, was that Sāmoa's external quality assurance policy would be written by people with policy expertise in the overseas country of origin and not Sāmoa's local context. Consequently, contextual knowledge and expertise were not considered important in the selection of international consultants to write Sāmoa's external quality assurance policy.

### 7.2.2 Local voices: Academic and university leaders

The voices of academic leaders were most influential in the decision-making within the site where external quality assurance policy was enacted. As agents in the relationship between policy structure and policy actors, academic leaders at the university are invariably involved with the enactment of external quality assurance policy. How academic leaders respond to policy determines the extent to which policy is implemented within higher education settings. This section presents an analytical summary of how

academics responded to external quality assurance policy, within the accountability and power relationship imposed by the adoption of external quality assurance policy.


The findings show that academic leaders at the university in this case study responded to the enactment of external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa, in different ways at different times. As policy actors, academic leaders demonstrated their agency by resisting policy, being resigned to policy, accepting policy and even by affirming policy. The findings also show that how academic leaders demonstrated these four responses also varied between policy actors. Some academic leaders kept up a consistent response over the years, while others had altered responses over time, and still others seemed to experience a mixed or fragmented response. Academics who experienced a fragmented response accepted some aspects of policy enactment, while actively resisting other aspects, seemingly at the same time.

Academic leaders' responses to external quality assurance policy may be understood as being on a continuum with 'resistance' at one end of the continuum, and 'affirmation' at the other hand, as in the diagram below. Each response could be described in terms of 'characteristics' of the response to the policy, 'feelings' about the policy and 'inclination to action' to implement the policy.

As shown in Figure 6, the distinctive characteristics, feelings, and inclination to action described and experienced by academic leaders can be understood as being at different places on a continuum of responses. The findings show that there was resistance to external quality assurance policy at the highest level of university leadership for more than a decade. This resistance was evident in overt or spoken disagreement with policy and expression of feelings of frustration, displeasure and disagreement in relation to the enactment of policy. Any action to enact quality assurance policy within the sphere of influence of 'resisting' individuals, was actively resisted. Examples of active resistance include non-attendance at requested meetings with external policy officials, non-response to communications or communication of disagreement via letters or emails to policy officers.

FIGURE 6

*Continuum of academic leaders' responses to external quality assurance policy*



Resistance	Resignation		Acceptance	Affirmation
Overt or spoken disagreement with policy	Starts acting in line with policy Hesitant to do more than what is necessary to satisfy criteria	<i>Characteristics</i>	Agrees with merits of policy Supports policy engagement	Proactive in starting processes to enact policy Advocates for the policy to others
Frustration Displeasure Disagreement	Unwilling acceptance Helplessness	<i>Feelings</i>	Positivity about policy outcomes Willingness to comply with and enact policy	Optimism Imagines how policy can support individual and collective aims
Resists action	Pushed to action	<i>Inclination to action</i>	Supports action	Initiates action

The relaxation of the university's official stance of resistance in 2020 (refer to section 6.1.3), driven largely by a leadership transition, provided the opportunity for academic leaders to reconsider their original stances. At the same time, the external quality assurance body stepped up its efforts to bring all higher education programmes under its scrutiny. Faced with these two forces, one internal and one external, some academic leaders responded with resignation, which was distinct from resistance in that there was now acceptance, albeit unwillingly, to do what was needed to comply with external quality assurance policy. Participants mentioned feelings of 'helpless' and being 'caught in the middle,' and not being able to do much about it. Academic leaders in this category took steps to comply with policy, however there was a hesitancy to do more than what was necessary. Possibly as a result of this hesitancy on the part of 'resigned' academic leaders, the externally imposed timeline to comply with quality assurance policy, was often not met and there was a sense of having to be 'pushed to action'.

Interestingly, while some academic leaders chose to resist, others chose to accept external quality assurance policy. These participants talked of thinking about the benefits of engagement with external quality assurance policy and decided that such benefits were worth having. They were positive about the expected outcomes of policy and were willing to work with external policy officials to enact policy processes. They often exuded a sense of pragmatism, in moving beyond resistance to accepting the introduction of external quality assurance policy, so that they could take advantage of 'benefits' such as improved status and recognition in the local and international community, as well as funding to support their teaching and research activities. Academic leaders who displayed acceptance supported the enactment of external quality assurance policy by willingness to subject university programmes and courses to the local QA body processes.

The last group of academic leaders were not just accepting of external quality assurance policy, they were also affirming of engagement with the policy. They saw policy enactment as an opportunity to take advantage of possibilities to support their work within the university. This group openly advocated for engagement with external quality policy, going as far as to initiate and plan for enactment within their faculties and departments. Such academic leaders initiated action and were optimistic about the possibilities for external quality assurance policy to support their individual and collective aims.

The continuum of responses illustrated in the previous table and analytically summarised in the preceding paragraphs, indicate that academic leaders demonstrated agency in different ways, in how they responded to the introduced relational connection with an external quality assurance body and external quality assurance policy processes. Although the responses were different, the choices made to engage such responses speak to the agency of academic leaders within the context of enactment of a new external quality assurance policy framework.

### 7.2.3 International voices: Consultants

The international consultants recruited to write Sāmoa's external quality assurance policy were mostly from the neighbouring countries of Australia and New Zealand. Although they are developed countries with vastly different resources available to their tertiary education systems, the quality assurance policy frameworks of Australia and New Zealand were considered suitable examples to follow. Sāmoa's closest developed neighbours are also the main travel destinations for Sāmoans wanting to travel overseas for leisure, work or study. In the minds of local policy officials, adopting similar external quality assurance policy frameworks to these two countries would help the recognition of Sāmoa qualifications overseas. The recognition of qualifications gained in Sāmoa was desirable in that it would help Sāmoans find work opportunities or be accepted into institutions for further study within Australia and New Zealand in particular.

Consultants were the other dominant voice in the adoption of external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa. As sources of expertise and trusted advice on what was considered a 'new' idea in Sāmoa at the time, what consultants considered appropriate for Sāmoa heavily influenced the shape of policy. Local policy officials have indicated that there were negligible changes made to the draft policy framework written by consultants. Consultants may have been soft-spoken but their voices of expertise and familiarity with external quality assurance policy overseas ensured their voices were listened to in Sāmoa, thus shaping external quality assurance policy for Sāmoa. Consultants decided what the standards would be, how assessment would take place against the standards and the processes that would take place.

With the conditions for acceptance created by the decision of local policy officials, consultants had the field to influence the actual shape and form of external quality assurance policy for Sāmoa. Consultants wrote proposed policy that was similar to policy frameworks they had worked within in New Zealand and Australia. The consideration that these two countries were vastly different in scope and magnitude did not come into discussion. Little in the proposed policy written by consultants was changed in the final framework except for a few key items such as the outcome of accreditation decisions for example, and

the enacting of penalties for non-compliance such as closure of providers. The censure and shutdown of providers that did not immediately comply with external quality assurance policies was not enacted at any point. Local policy officials trusted the expertise and advice from international consultants that their experience mostly superseded any concerns some might have had privately. The time spent with consultants also influenced the thinking of their local counterparts, who bought in to the ideas and policy proposed by consultants. If consultants had any private reservations that what they were proposing might not be relevant to Sāmoa's context, these reservations were not voiced. Consultants might also have been constrained by the terms of their contract from cautioning against adopting a standards framework that might not be immediately relevant for Sāmoa. Consultants' contracts bound consultants to produce a certain set of deliverables within a specific period, and some contracts specified not only the 'what' to be produced but also the 'how' it would be produced. To fulfil their contract, consultants had to go with the flow even if they might have had concerns about the suitability of the policy framework being proposed. Despite all the above, the fact remains that consultants were a dominant voice in deciding external quality assurance policy for Sāmoa.

#### 7.2.4 Transnational voices: Quality assurance networks

International and regional quality assurance networks were also very influential in in shaping the thinking of local policy officials about the external quality assurance policy for Sāmoa. Networks such as the INQAAHE – International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education, and the APQN – Asia Pacific Quality Network – provided opportunities for policy officials in Sāmoa to find out about external quality assurance policy developments in other countries. Preoccupied with the concern of gaining recognition of Sāmoa's qualification overseas, policy officials in Sāmoa saw it as desirable to strive for comparability with overseas policy frameworks and willingly looked to overseas models for adoption in Sāmoa. When recruited consultants suggested an external quality assurance policy framework for Sāmoa that was similar to overseas frameworks, local policy officials saw such similarity as an advantage. The similarity could be seen in the adoption of similar processes such as accreditation, registration or

external evaluation against a set of standards grouped into a quality standards framework. The quality standards framework was usually grouped in criteria for eight to ten elements comprising of organisation, management, assessment, teaching staff, teaching delivery, physical resources, financial resources, research or similar.

With regards the first research question which examined who determines how external quality assurance policy is decided and enacted, it is clear that local policy officials made the decisions that would influence the trajectory of external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa. Local policy officials made the decision to look to New Zealand and Australian models of the time for comparison, and they made the decision to recruit consultants from the above countries to write the draft policies. Local policy officials also made the decision on how much of the draft policy was adopted as elements of the final policy framework for Sāmoa. The agency of local policy officials must be underscored as their decisions set in motion the journey of external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa.

International and regional networks provided the fourth, and arguably the strongest, voice in deciding external quality assurance policy for Sāmoa. Their voices were consistent in advocating for comparability, and similarity, with their message disseminated through regular conferences and the use of communication tools. The International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) is the source of 'Good Practice Guidelines for Quality Assurance Agencies' (Morse, 2006), which Sāmoa's quality assurance body aspires to adhere to, a process which has its own recognition activity. Sāmoa's policy officials were regular attendees at INQAAHE and APQN conferences and workshops and were therefore socialised into the ways of knowing quality popularised by such networks. In combination with consultant voices, the voices of regional and international networks were the loudest in shaping the thinking of local policy officials about how external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa should be written and enacted.

## 7.3 Values

This section presents an analysis of what is valued in external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa, drawing on the summary of findings in section 6.2.1.

### 7.3.1 Valuing international recognition

The first overriding concern that is evident in both the conversations with local policy officials as well as higher education officials and academics, is the pursuit of international recognition of qualifications obtained in Sāmoa. National policy officials are concerned with international recognition of Sāmoa's qualifications and its perceived role in facilitating economic aspirations for Sāmoa's people through education and employment in overseas countries. Higher education officials and academics are concerned with international recognition because it confirms what they are doing is 'quality.' International recognition is also a concern of Sāmoa's people and therefore Sāmoa's government.

The pursuit of international recognition of Sāmoa's qualifications overseas has been a constant feature of the quality assurance body's strategic plans since inception, with mutual recognition broached with at least one overseas quality assurance body in the first five years of existence of the quality assurance body. The strategy for international recognition of Sāmoa's qualification is an actual document, which has been discussed by local policy officials for more than a decade, with limited success. Part of the strategy for international recognition includes discussions with overseas quality assurance bodies and equivalence exercises with overseas qualifications frameworks to determine the extent of 'equivalence.' Such strategies do not consider the fact that employment decisions are made by employers and powerful professional associations such as the Medical Council of New Zealand for medical graduates for example. Furthermore, acceptance into overseas programmes of study are made by the relevant admissions departments in higher education institutions. The misrecognition of strategies to achieve international recognition of Sāmoa's qualifications possibly is due to the pursuit of international recognition being at

its very core, an emotional goal. It is an emotional goal that has been rationalised by logical sounding arguments but is nevertheless about the pursuit of equality of regard and acknowledgement.

There is a word in the Sāmoan language that refers to the acknowledgement of a human being by another – ‘amanaia.’ Being acknowledged or ‘amanaia’ creates reassurance that one is valuable in the universe, and important enough to be acknowledged. The opposite of being acknowledged is being invisible which is worse than being considered unimportant.

External quality assurance policy is how Sāmoa’s policy officials thought they might achieve international recognition of Sāmoa’s qualifications, or acknowledgement of Sāmoa in the educational space, by its neighbouring countries. The pursuit of international recognition of Sāmoa’s qualifications is part of the drive to be acknowledged not just as a country but as human beings who are as equally valued and acknowledged as their peers in other countries. It is at its core an expression of the need to be acknowledged as equally important and equally valuable as another human being in the universe.

### 7.3.2 Valuing public management principles

Analysis of the external policy framework documents shows the influence of the public management principles of effectiveness, efficiency, compliance and alignment popularised in the public management literature. These terms appear in university documents as well as national and regional quality assurance policy documents.

The terms ‘effective’ or ‘effectiveness’ appear in the university quality assurance framework policy document (NUS, 2016), the national quality assurance policies (SQA, 2009), as well as the regional quality assurance policy framework produced by the Educational Quality and Assessment Programme: Pacific Community (Pacific Community, 2018). Effectiveness refers to the extent to which an organisation is able to achieve its stated goals. For the National University of Sāmoa, its goals are stated in a list of strategic priorities such as “safeguarding Sāmoa’s cultural heritage; upholding excellence in teaching and learning; strengthening research relevant to national needs; commitment to partnership and engagement; and

creating universal design for a digital environment” (NUS, 2020, p. 8). Effectiveness in the light of the above strategic priorities refers to the extent to which the university is successful in achieving its stated goals.

However, effectiveness is almost always mentioned together with the concept of efficiency. Efficiency refers to the extent to which an organisation is able to achieve its stated goals, with the best use of resources that are available to it. In the world of higher education, efficiency refers to the extent to which the university is able to achieve its publicly stated strategic priorities, with the best use of resources that are available to it. In the context of the university, resources include staff the university which are referred to as ‘human’ resources, the physical facilities and learning resources available, and most importantly the financial resources available to the university. Government funding of the university in the form of an annual grant are a particular point of attention for the government. Of equal importance are the donor funds, or development partner funding that is made available to the university and other institutions of higher education, to support its teaching and learning activities.

The principle of efficiency makes it possible for an interested party such as the government to demand that the university demonstrates how it is utilising the public funds as well as the development partner funds available to it, and to demonstrate that it is using these funds ‘efficiently.’ However, the idea of scrutiny of higher education by an interested external party such as the government also opens up the idea of there being other interested parties in the activities of the university, such as students, parents, and employers. The term ‘stakeholders’ has been coined to refer to the interest of students, parents, and employers in higher education activities, following the idea that such groups have a ‘stake’ or an ‘interest’ in how efficiently and how effectively the university is doing its work.

Accepting that students, parents, employers and government have a valid ‘stake’ in the operations of a university and how effectively and efficiently it does its work then raises the question of what is important to such groups, and whether the answer to that question is the same for the university. As local policy officials have often expressed, there is a perception that what external stakeholders want from the

university is not always the same as what the university wants of itself, as stated in its strategic goals. The overriding concern of students, parents, and employers, and to a different extent, the government, is that university education should result in employment for graduates. Bringing in the idea of efficiency then leads to the point that stakeholders expect the university to be effective and efficient in delivering on the goal of 'employment' and employability for graduates. A perusal of the university's strategic goals reveals that 'employment' is not stated as an explicit goal of the university. However, the university's 2020 Annual Report accepts the university's responsibility to contribute to the government's strategy for post-school education and training which includes to "promote pathways for employment and further study" (NUS, 2020, p. 20).

The inclusion of effectiveness and efficiency as goals of the external quality assurance policy framework sends a clear message that the government wants higher education institutions to demonstrate that not only are they successful in achieving stated goals, but that they are efficient in doing so. The discussion of which goals the university is required to be effective and efficient in achieving, is not specifically discussed in the policy documents. Given then that the goals of government and the goals of the university are not necessarily the same, the point could be made that external quality assurance policy values effectiveness and efficiency in the fulfilment of goals that the government considers important. While the subject of efficiency and effectiveness in external quality assurance policy is achievement of "educational services in line with stated goals and objectives," which we might suppose are the university's goals and objectives, the talanoa conversations with Sāmoa policy actors reveals that it is actually the government's goals of employment for economic development that the university is being judged upon. The accountability of the university for graduate employment contributing to economic development is not explicitly stated in policy documents as a purpose of policy or purpose of higher education. Nevertheless, the employability of graduates to support the government's aspirations for economic development is an expectation of the government, expressed in conversations with local policy officials. Within the lens of higher education for economic development, external quality assurance policy is a way for the government to influence the

direction of higher education toward this goal, through the valuing of effectiveness and efficiency in the fulfilment of such goal.

## 7.4 Relationships

This section presents an analysis of the relationships created by the adoption of external quality assurance policy and how agents responded to and navigate this relationship.

### 7.4.1 Internal relationalities: characteristics of the external quality assurance vā

The adoption of external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa resulted in the creation of a new power relationship between the university and the new quality assurance body. There were three elements to the new power relationship. Firstly, the new quality assurance body and the quality assurance policy framework had access to contestable resources that were made available to tertiary institutions on the basis of compliance with the new quality assurance policy framework. Secondly, the new quality assurance body and policy framework became the new source of authority on what was considered 'quality' in higher education in Sāmoa. Thirdly, the adoption of external quality assurance policy entailed the introduction of new accountability measures for higher education institutions in Sāmoa. Taken together, these three elements can be seen as the characteristics of the relationship between the higher education institution and the external quality assurance body, upon the adoption of external quality assurance policy. Access to resources, authority to determine 'quality' and accountability and reporting mechanisms are discussed in the paragraphs that follow.

#### *i. Power relationality: access to resources*

Not long after the setup of the external quality assurance body by legislation in 2006, the entity became the key agency in development projects that were targeted at improving technical and vocational education and training in Sāmoa (SQA, 2016b). This programme made funds available for improving the quality of vocational education and training, which was a large part of what was offered at Sāmoa's higher

education institutions. Access to funds under this programme was only possible upon application to the external quality assurance body, with evidence of alignment or engagement with the quality assurance policy framework.

One research participant described the control of resources as a “useful weapon” in saying that there was “one useful weapon” that would compel the university to submit its programmes for accreditation by the local quality assurance body, “and that is the funding support that comes with the accreditation of programs”. (“O.T.”).

*ii. Power relationality: authority to determine ‘quality’*

The external quality assurance policy framework also created a new source of authority on what is considered quality higher education, something that was previously solely the remit of academics and decision-makers in higher education. The new source of authority was the framework of quality standards and indicators that formed part of the external quality assurance policy framework and which was governed by the external quality assurance body. The framework of quality standards was a set of statements that defined ‘quality’ for higher education programmes of learning, teaching, physical and learning resources, assessment, as well as research. The governance and maintenance of the quality standards by the external quality assurance body effectively distanced the governance of quality in higher education from the people who worked in higher education on a daily basis. The staff of the university were responsible for teaching and learning in higher education but were effectively stripped of their power to decide what was ‘quality’ in their work. Moreover, staff of the university had to take the journey to learn about the external quality assurance policy framework and learn to adapt their thinking and work within the external policy construct and definitions specified by the external quality assurance body.

It is clear that there had been a period of consultation prior to the policy framework standards becoming effective in 2009. The Sāmoa quality standards framework had been the subject of consultation with members of the higher education community and other stakeholders before they were published in 2009. Nevertheless, this consultation process was undertaken only once since the enactment of the quality

assurance legislation, without a subsequent follow-up or periodic review during its implementation. Furthermore, academic staff had differing recollections of the consultation process, with some recalling close involvement and others recalling an absence of robust discussion on the proposed policy. However, the limited engagement by academics in the early policy discussions might have been due to the fact that the consultation was really on a policy agenda that had already been made into law in 2006 and was therefore already decided.

*iii. Power relationality: accountability and reporting*

The adoption of external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa resulted in the enactment of a new policy relationship for the university in relation to the government and in relation to donor organisations. The new policy relationship is based on accountability to the government for quality of the university programmes and operations, in relation to the funding received both from government and donor organisations. The funding received from development partners to support university activities are tied to 'quality' indicators such as "percentage of PSET graduates finding employment within six months of completion" and "number of accredited courses" (SQA, 2016b, pp. 56-61). These indicators closely reflect targets set out under external quality assurance policy and recorded in the strategic planning documents of the external quality assurance body. External quality assurance policy makes the university directly accountable to the government through the external quality assurance body and indirectly accountable to external donor organisations. What this shows is that external quality assurance policy has resulted in making the university accountable to external bodies for the quality of its teaching and courses.

The new external quality assurance policy was an accountability mechanism that made the university report not just to its university Council, but to an external body staffed by individuals who were not academics. Although quality assurance officials attempted to minimise their role in the determination of higher education quality by referring to their organisational role as merely a 'facilitation and coordination' role, the new entity was effectively a regulator of quality. As the new regulator and decision-maker of quality higher education, it was an imposition on the previously established quality assurance processes

of the university. The complete set of policy, processes and implementing body meant that there was now a new accountability mechanism determined and implemented by non-academics, which made decisions on what was previously the domain of higher education specialists or academics.

#### 7.4.2 Relations with other policy entities

Of significance to the idea of relationships created in response to quality assurance policy in Sāmoa is the rise of the relational connections sought and maintained by policy actors to overseas and international entities and policy organisations. The findings show that the advent of external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa was accompanied by the initiation or strengthening of international relational connections at three levels. Firstly, external quality assurance policy officials sought connections to regional and international quality assurance networks for the purpose of networking and connection to the latest ideas in higher education quality assurance. Secondly, university leaders sought connection to overseas university governance groups in an attempt to institute a separate system of university to university quality assurance, as well as to maintain their independence and academic freedom. Thirdly academic leaders sought to strengthen their connections peers in overseas universities as a source of expert feedback on new courses. The initiation and strengthening of these international connections in particular at a time when the local quality assurance body was reaching out to regulate higher education with the country, indicates that policy actors at all levels actively sought international connections to strengthen their position and gain credibility in their approach to quality assurance.

The findings (see section 6.1.5) indicate that the external quality assurance body in Sāmoa initiated relational connections with networks active in the global and regional dissemination of ideas on higher education quality assurance. The International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) is one such network. INQAAHE currently has a membership of more than three hundred quality assurance agencies and institutions worldwide and holds member forums every two years in different countries of the globe. The external quality assurance body sought INQAAHE membership not long after the quality assurance legislation was passed in 2006. Senior officials of the quality assurance

body subsequently kept a regular schedule of attendance at INQAAAHE conferences and meetings. The INQAAHE Guidelines of Good Practice (Morse, 2006) served as a guide to established international practice in external quality assurance, and the local quality assurance body sought to achieve recognition for alignment against this Guidelines document. Furthermore, the INQAAHE website (INQAAHE, 2022) publishes the names of quality assurance agencies that have certified their 'alignment' with the INQAAHE Guidelines of Good practice, a status that has a five-year validity period.

In effect the INQAAHE has created a powerful membership bloc of quality assurance agencies that have demonstrated their commitment to a common way of doing higher education quality assurance. Membership of this organisation and achieving 'alignment' lends strength to the argument for a quality assurance body as the authority and source of credence on what is 'quality' higher education. In this way, similar policy ideas and similar policy frameworks and ways of enacting quality assurance policy are adopted by quality assurance agencies such as the entity in this case study, through the use of a tool such as the INQAAHE 'Guidelines for Good Practice' to disseminate and promote the same approach and philosophy of higher education quality assurance. The efforts of the external quality assurance body to align itself with the INQAAHE Guidelines of Good Practice points to the extent to which the connection to INQAAHE influenced the thinking and work of quality assurance policy officials in Sāmoa.

The local quality assurance body also reached out to the Asia Pacific Network for Quality (APQN) and became a regular attendee at biennial conferences and events. The extent of Sāmoa's connection with the Asia-Pacific Quality Network was such that the quality assurance body's most senior official was co-opted on to the APQN governing board, and the quality assurance body itself became a full member of the network in 2009 (Asia Pacific Quality Network, 2009). Senior staff of the quality assurance body are regular attendees at the INQAAHE biennial global conferences and the APQN regional conferences. Nevertheless, despite involvement by the Sāmoa and Fiji higher education quality assurance bodies with APQN over the years, the island countries and territories of Oceania are for the most part invisible in the governance and events of the APQN. After a brief appearance on the APQN governance board and hosting

of an APQN conference in Fiji, APQN's board membership and database of consultants remain empty of representation from Oceania's island states and have been so for a while.

As well as quality assurance officials seeking relational connections with overseas and international quality assurance bodies and networks, the university also sought to strengthen its position through various international connections in the years after 2010. In 2014, the university discussed a voluntary academic audit with the Agency for Quality Audit for New Zealand Universities (AQA), the committee responsible for monitoring and reporting on quality benchmarks for the New Zealand universities. The purpose of the academic audit was to seek external quality assurance for the university's academic processes, policy and governance by an overseas entity that was doing the same thing for other universities. The fact that the AQA fulfilled its regulatory role in New Zealand in response to legislation enacted in that country, did not factor into the desire of the Sāmoan university to seek an academic audit with AQA. The academic audit was duly carried out in 2015 and was subsequently held up by senior university officials as evidence that the university did not need quality assurance by a local body with limited expertise in higher education, when it had already been subject to quality assurance by a specialist quality assurance body for overseas universities.

Senior university officials followed up the university's engagement with the New Zealand Universities AQA through a visit in 2017 to the New Zealand Qualifications Authority, to find out for themselves how external quality assurance works for universities in New Zealand. Presumably, the thinking was that it would be acceptable for the local accrediting body in Sāmoa to impose its external quality assurance policy framework on the university, if that was also the way it was done in New Zealand. The university's visit to the NZQA perhaps confirmed for senior university officials that their disagreement with being made subject to local external quality assurance, had a solid foundation supported by overseas practice.

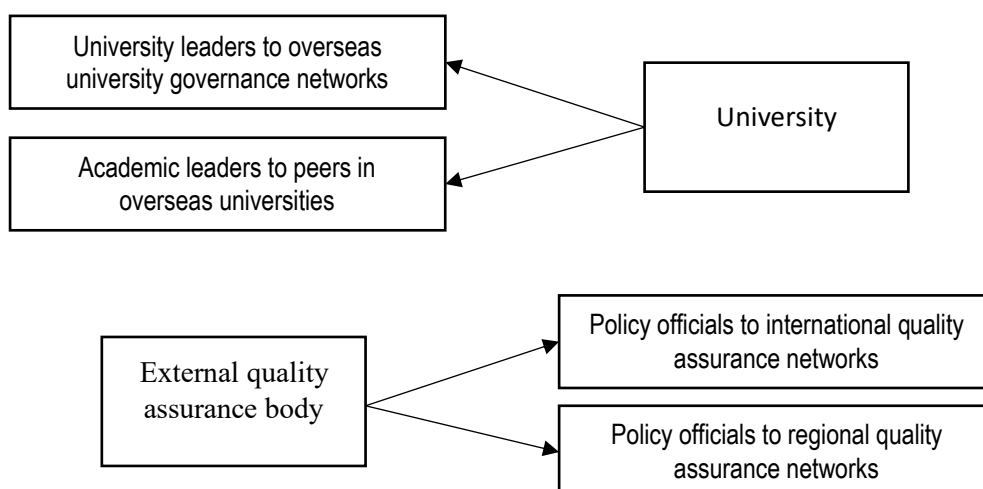
A final example supporting the trend of seeking international connections and relationships can be seen in the resumption and strengthening of the university's external review processes after 2010. External reviews were significant in that it involved the review of a faculty's programmes and courses by a team of

at least three to four overseas academics. Almost all academic faculties and departments undertook an external review between 2014 and 2019, in comparison to only one external review prior to that point. When questioned by external policy officials, academics were able to refer to their external review involving a panel of overseas experts as an example of the robustness of the university's own quality assurance processes. The following figure summarises the international relational connections sought and made by the university and the external quality assurance body, to strengthen their stances regarding quality assurance policy.

As shown in Figure 7, policy actors at all levels sought to strengthen their position by seeking a relational connection with overseas entities or networks and by initiating an activity that represented that connection. The seeking of an academic audit from the Academic Quality Agency for New Zealand Universities, in addition to the resumption of external review processes, and the visit to the NZQA by senior university officials, points to the response of the university to external quality assurance policy.

#### FIGURE 7

*Illustration of the international relational connections sought by the university and the external quality assurance body to strengthen their position*



Note. Drawn illustration of the international relational connections sought by the university and the external quality assurance body to strengthen their position, based on talanoa data.

Figure 7 illustrates how the university responded to policy by seeking relational connections with overseas entities for the purpose of strengthening its claim to being exempt from local external quality assurance, by virtue of academic freedom and adherence to the review-by-peers principle.

The Sāmoan concept of *vā* referring to the relational space between people or social agents, can be utilised to understand policy relationalities. Prior to the entrance of external quality assurance policy in the higher education space in Sāmoa, policy agents, academics and academic leaders in higher education already had a well-established web of social relations within which they worked. The entrance into Sāmoa's higher education space of external quality assurance policy and all that it brought with it – people, authority, policy requirements, and a very visible entity – resulted in the creation of a new web of social relationships and subsequently necessitated the negotiation of new *vā* relationalities.

## 7.5 Service

This section presents findings and an analysis of the findings in response to the question of 'who does external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa serve?'

The concept of 'service' is important to the "lifeworld" (Vaai & Nabobo-Baba, 2017, p. 2) of the Sāmoan. The Sāmoan is socialised into a web of social relations where service or contribution to the community. The community starts from the immediate and extended family and extends out to social groups such as the village, parish, district and family networks that extend across national boundaries. Service is particularly important to Sāmoans and is one of the powerful ideas that influences the way Sāmoans think about themselves and others.

The benefits of external quality assurance policy can be viewed from the perspective of university and academic leaders and quality assurance policy officials.

### 7.5.1 University and academic leaders

From the perspective of university and academic leaders, the benefits were expressed in terms of factors related to the management of university teaching and learning and to a lesser extent, awareness of quality issues with programmes and courses. Table 12 illustrates the preceding points.

**TABLE 12**

*Benefits of external quality assurance policy from university and academic leaders' point of view*

<i>Benefits related to the management of university teaching and learning</i>	<i>Benefits related to the quality of programme documentation</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Affirmation of quality to improve credibility with the public</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved programme documentation</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved marketability of programmes and courses to future students</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prompted reflection on the alignment of content, assessment and learning outcomes</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved access to funding support</li> </ul>	

Note. Table showing themes from talanoa sessions with university and academic leaders regarding the benefits of external quality assurance policy

In speaking of the benefit of external quality assurance policy, university and academic leaders spoke mostly of benefits related to higher education teaching and learning management. The management-related benefits for the university and academic leaders were improved access to funding, the affirmation of quality to improve credibility with the public and the improved marketability of programmes and courses to future students. These three factors are not directly related to university teaching and learning but were more closely associated with the university's management of teaching and learning. From the perspective of university and academic leaders, the affirmation gained from having accreditation status with the external quality assurance body gave them credibility with the public regarding the quality of programmes and courses. This credibility was needed in view of criticism from the public and senior officials within the education sector related to the qualifications offered at the university.

Access to funding support was critical and a significant incentive for university and academic leaders to engage with external quality assurance processes. As managers of people and resources, university and academic leaders saw the benefit of engaging with external quality assurance to gain access to linked funding. The extra funding was available from the external quality assurance body to support the teaching of programmes that were submitted for and granted accreditation. Hence university and academic leaders saw improved access to funding as one of the benefits of external quality assurance policy to assist with the management of teaching and learning within the university.

The third benefit related to the management of teaching and learning was the improved marketability of programmes and courses to future students. The marketability of programmes and courses is linked directly to student enrolment from the point of view of university leaders. Senior university leadership spoke of the importance of maintaining acceptable student enrolment levels to sustain university income. Engaging with external quality assurance and receiving the status of being accredited or quality assured provided a boost for attracting students to the university.

The second way university and academic leaders spoke of the benefits of external quality assurance policy, and on which other academic leaders disagreed, related to the quality of programmes and courses. University and academic leaders spoke of the improved documentation and the opportunity to critically reflect on course coherence from aligning their programmes and courses with the quality assurance policy framework. However, this was a matter on which other academic leaders disagreed, pointing instead to the unnecessary duplication of work they had already completed as part of internal university processes for programme approval.

#### 7.5.2 External quality assurance policy staff

For external quality assurance policy officials, the benefits they most often spoke about were graduate employment and economic development as a result of the improved quality of higher education. For policy officials and senior education sector officials, the tangible benefit they wanted to see from higher

education was the improved employability of university graduates. External quality assurance policy officials advocated for quality assurance policy, with the rationale that it would bring about enhanced employability of higher education graduates and therefore increased income levels for graduates and their families.

The benefits of graduate employment can be described as 'projected' or 'assumed' benefits, and not actual benefits. In all the policy and reporting documentation collected and analysed for this research, there was little evidence to suggest that external quality assurance policy had contributed to improved graduate employment or graduate incomes. Hence policy officials spoke of graduate jobs and economic growth as a benefit that would eventuate in the future, but which was yet to materialise.

Nevertheless, the narrative of improved employment outcomes for university graduates and the resulting contribution to Sāmoa's economic growth was a compelling assumed benefit of external quality assurance policy for Sāmoa's external quality assurance policy officials. From this perspective, it can be seen that external quality assurance policy was adopted to improve the employment of higher education graduates. In so doing, external quality assurance policy was projected to contribute to Sāmoa's development and economic growth.

## 7.6 Chapter summary

In summary, this chapter presents an analysis of voice, values, relationality or *vā* and service in external quality assurance policy. The various voices that engaged in the determination and enactment of external quality assurance policy included local policy officials, international consultants, academic leaders in higher education and transnational voices in the form of international quality assurance policy networks. All voices wielded different degrees of influence at different times in the enactment of external quality assurance policy. Consultant voices were particularly influential in the design of external quality assurance policy. However, the door to international consultants was opened by local policy officials who made decisions regarding who would write policy and from where to source external policy writing expertise.

Academic leaders in higher education then acted as gate keepers for the entrance of external quality assurance policy into the university. International and regional networks provided the fourth, and possibly the strongest voice in deciding external quality assurance policy for Sāmoa. Their voices were insistent in advocating for comparability and similarity, with their message disseminated through regular conferences attended by Sāmoa's external quality assurance policy officials.

In analysing the findings regarding values and what is valued in external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa, the central importance of the idea of 'recognition' comes to the fore. Academic leaders place significant importance on the local and international recognition of the qualifications and programmes within which they teach and work. The importance of recognition as a public affirmation of the value of academics' work is a recurrent theme in the participant talanoa. The value placed on 'recognition' is not limited to academic leaders however, as it is also a central concern for external quality assurance policy officials. Policy officials' value international recognition because it contributes to the aspirational goals of labour mobility to support economic growth. International recognition of Sāmoa's programmes and qualifications is one of the arguments used by policy officials to enact local external quality assurance as they consider this to be the pathway for Sāmoa qualifications to achieve credibility beyond national borders.

Analysis of the findings from document research indicates that public management principles such as efficiency, effectiveness and accountability dominate the rationale for external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa. These ideas are visible in quality assurance policy at both national level and institutional level.

Relationships and relationality are important to every Sāmoan, hence the application of the idea of relationality in the analysis of findings from this research. The findings show that the adoption of external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa resulted in the enactment of a new policy relationship for the university in relation to the government and donor organisations. The external quality assurance policy framework also created a new source of authority on what is considered quality higher education, something that was previously solely the remit of academics and decision-makers in higher education.

The findings show that academic leaders at the university in this case study responded to the enactment of external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa in different ways at different times. As policy actors, academic leaders demonstrated their agency by resisting policy, being resigned to policy, accepting policy and even by affirming policy. The findings also show that how academic leaders demonstrated these four responses also varied between policy actors. Some academic leaders kept up a consistent response over the years, while others had altered responses over time, and still others seemed to experience a mixed or fragmented response. Academics who experienced a fragmented response accepted some aspects of policy enactment, while actively resisting other aspects seemingly at the same time.

The advent of external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa was accompanied by the initiation or strengthening of relational connections at three levels. Firstly, external quality assurance policy officials sought relationships with regional and international quality assurance networks to strengthen their policy position by demonstrating alignment to with overseas models. Secondly, university governance sought connections to overseas university governance groups in an attempt to institute a separate system of university-to-university quality assurance, as well as to maintain their independence and academic freedom. Thirdly academics sought to strengthen their connections with colleagues in overseas universities as an alternative form of 'external quality assurance' to strengthen their agency in decisions on the quality of their programmes and courses.

Finally, the analysis of external quality policy enactment in relation to service indicates that external quality assurance policy serves the purpose of academic leaders through the recognition of their work as quality, improving access to funding and improving the marketability of their courses. However, it is evident that external quality assurance policy was enacted primarily in service to the political aims of economic growth through influence over the Sāmoa post-secondary education and training sector. The messaging on the importance of skills development to economic growth resonates throughout strategic documents produced by the external quality assurance body over the years and is echoed in the conversations of participants in this research.

## CHAPTER EIGHT: DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

### 8.1 Research questions and summary of findings

The intention of the research was to answer the overarching question: Whom does higher education quality assurance policy serve, and whom does it benefit? To unpack the overarching research question, four supplementary questions were developed:

8.1.1 Research Question 1. Who determines how higher education quality assurance policy is decided and enacted in Sāmoa?

Four groups of policy actors determined how external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa is decided and enacted. The four groups are quality assurance policy officials as agents of government, international consultants, and university and academic leaders. Transnational quality assurance networks are the fourth group of policy actors that influenced external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa through their influence on the thinking of quality assurance policy officials.

8.1.2 Research Question 2. What is valued in higher education quality assurance policy in Sāmoa, and how does this determine policy relationships in Sāmoa's context?

There are four key findings relating to the second research question. Firstly, this research found that external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa is driven by the value of local and international recognition to policy officials and university academic leaders. Secondly, external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa is underpinned by the managerial values of efficiency, effectiveness, accountability and alignment of higher education with Sāmoa's development goals. These principles are reflective of what Amosa (2003, p. 39) refers to as "new public management principles". Thirdly, Sāmoan cultural and contextual values are largely absent and in no way inform external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa. The fourth finding with respect to the second research question is that external policy relationships in Sāmoa are accountability

based, transactional based on funding arrangements and characterised by tension. At the heart of such relational characteristics is an uneven power relationship in favour of the external quality assurance body.

### 8.1.3 Research Question 3. How do academic leaders respond to external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa?

There are four findings linked to the third research question. Firstly, this research found that academic leaders in Sāmoa responded to external quality assurance policy in four ways, through resistance, resignation, acceptance and affirmation. Secondly, there was diversity in how academics leaders responded, as some academics transitioned from one type of response to the other, while others experienced mixed responses at the same time. Other academic leaders maintained a static and consistent response over time; this was experienced by academic leaders who resisted as well as accepted external quality assurance policy. The response of academic leaders who maintained a static response were influenced by personal beliefs about the work and the value of external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa. Thirdly, for academic leaders who accepted and affirmed external quality assurance policy, the research findings indicate four influencing reasons. These were the perception of benefits gained from external quality assurance policy such as greater access to funding support for programmes and teaching, local and international recognition of qualifications, the marketability of accredited courses as well as a personal desire to improve quality.

Fourthly, the reasons for resistance to external quality assurance policy by academic leaders can be seen as falling within two categories. The first category consists of the relational aspects of implementing external quality assurance policy that prompted negative feelings on the part of academic leaders. This category of reasons included feeling disrespected by quality assurance staff, feeling imposed on by external quality assurance policy, feeling fearful and vulnerable in the face of external evaluation and feeling unheard on policy matters. The second category of reasons for resistance consists of how academic leaders perceived the value of the external quality assurance activity. This category of reasons included the perception of being reviewed by people who were not academic peers or context experts as irrelevant

and of little value, the unclear or irrelevant theoretical basis of external quality assurance policy, the disregard for internal university quality assurance processes as well as absence of clarity on policy terminology.

8.1.4 Research Question 4. Who does external quality assurance policy for higher education in Sāmoa serve and who benefits?

The ways in which quality assurance policy serves university and academic leaders relate primarily to management aspects, and to a lesser extent, and with some disagreement, the quality of programme documentation. External quality assurance policy serves managerial purposes in that it affirms that programmes and courses are of quality; improves access to external funding support; and improves the marketability of programmes and courses. External quality assurance policy arguably also serves to direct attention to the quality of programme documentation, through the scrutiny and reflection needed to align documentation with external policy criteria. The benefit for programme documentation quality was disputed however, as some academic leaders regarded such work as unnecessary and misaligned from what should count as quality university teaching and learning.

External quality assurance policy also serves the purpose of external quality assurance policy officials, who refer to the benefits of graduate employability and contribution to economic growth as sufficient rationale for such policy. Graduate employability and economic growth were regarded as a benefit for everyone, hence it represented a compelling and aspirational narrative for enacting external quality assurance policy.

This research found no clear link at least in the policy documents, policy reporting or in the perceptions and experiences of research participants, between external quality assurance policy and real improvement in the quality of teaching and learning at university, or even in the commonly cited rationale for policy, graduate employability and contribution to economic growth. The rationale of graduate employability and economic growth can be seen as aspirational goals, as there was as yet no reference to

such being achieved as a result of external quality assurance policy since the 2006 adoption of policy legislation.

## 8.2 Discussion of findings

The next section presents a thematic discussion of the findings from this research, using the matafā analytical tool developed during this research. The matafā analytical tool enabled analysis of my research findings in terms of the powerful voices in policy, what is valued, relationality, and whom policy serves or benefits. This thesis argues that viewing external quality assurance policy through the lens of voice, values, relationality, and service, enables a clearer understanding of who such policy serves and benefits, in the Sāmoa context.

### 8.2.1 Voice

This research found that various voices determined how higher education quality assurance policy is decided and enacted in Sāmoa. At the local level, these voices included those of government policy officials on the side of government and university and academic leaders on the side of the university. The voices of consultants represent international voices, informed by their experiences and perceptions gained in contexts other than Sāmoa. Multinational quality assurance networks are the third level of voices that influenced external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa, through their influence on the thinking and understanding of quality assurance policy officials.

This section starts with a discussion of a comparative case of lifelong learning policy in St Lucia, to provide a comparative perspective on similarities and contrasts with external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa. The section continues with the discussion of findings in terms of policy sovereignty and the notion of global epistemic community that influences policy.

*i. A comparative discussion*

The development of a lifelong learning education policy for higher education in St Lucia, an island state located in the Caribbean Ocean, provides a valuable point of comparison with the development of external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa. St Lucia shares several similarities with Sāmoa in that they are both members of the UNESCO Small Islands Developing States group and have similar populations and developmental challenges.

Lingard and Jn Pierre's (2006) identification of the policy writing exercise completely done by consultants is similar to Sāmoa's experience with external quality assurance policy. Lingard and Jn Pierre (2006) do note that there were extensive consultations undertaken in St Lucia on the proposed lifelong learning policy as an "attempt to mediate the impact of such discourse and the influence of donor agencies" (p. 310). However, Lingard and Jn Pierre's (2006) discussion is silent on the influence of such nationwide consultations on the final policy framework adopted in St Lucia. The similarity with Sāmoa's case is that participants did mention that consultation processes took place for the proposed external quality assurance policy. However, what was evident in Sāmoa's case is that such consultation processes did little to inform any changes in the proposed external quality assurance policy framework. As one participant mentioned, the discussion on the proposed policy seemed to be on matters where the "mind" of the external quality assurance body was "already made up" ("O.M.").

The second similarity between the development processes for St Lucia's lifelong learning policy and Sāmoa's external quality assurance policy is the involvement of multiple international organisations. For instance, the development of education policy in St Lucia was influenced by a myriad of international organisations, including the World Bank, UNESCO, and CARICOM (Lingard & Jn Pierre, 2006). In Sāmoa's case, the development of external quality assurance policy involved the United Nations Development Programme and the International Labour Organization in the preliminary stages, then the foreign aid departments of the New Zealand and Australian governments. Lingard and Jn Pierre (2006) suggested that aid agencies drove St Lucia's lifelong learning policy agenda due to the absence of a national strategic

direction for education. This was not the case for Sāmoa, as it was evident from early policy documents that the concept of a coordination body to monitor standards for further education and training had been identified in Sāmoa's long-term education planning from 1995 (Ministry of Education, Sports & Culture, 1995). The existence of the concept in early education planning might explain why Sāmoa's policy officials had more agency over the purpose of setting up an external quality assurance policy, which this research suggests was primarily for international recognition of Sāmoa's qualifications as a way to boost economic development.

### *ii. Policy sovereignty*

As previously outlined, government officials made the decision to develop external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa in response to strategic intentions that were outlined in education planning documents from 1995 (Ministry of Education, Sports & Culture, 1995). Government policy officials then made the decision to develop policy through the mode of consultant recruitment to write Sāmoa's external quality assurance policy. Policy officials were also purposeful in selecting consultants from New Zealand and Australia, as part of their intent to develop a policy that was similar to the quality assurance policy frameworks enacted in these two countries.

The concept of externalization in the work of Gita Steiner-Khamsi (2014, 2016) provides a valuable point of reference for discussing local agency and policy sovereignty in determining external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa. Steiner-Khamsi (2016) uses the metaphor of an 'octopus to explain how national policy actors choose policy frameworks to adapt to local contexts. The octopus represents a global policy idea, and "local actors reach out and grab the arm of the octopus that is closest to their particular policy agenda, and thereby attach (local) meaning to a (global) policy" (Steiner-Khamsi, 2014, p. 155). Applied to the enactment of quality assurance policy in Sāmoa, the agency of national policy actors can be seen in choosing to develop a national policy framework that closely resembled the standards and indicators used in New Zealand and Australia. As already explained in previous chapters, policy officials in Sāmoa had a clear preference for alignment of Sāmoa's external quality assurance policy with the frameworks of New

Zealand and Australia. Such alignment was seen in the use of recognisable processes such as accreditation, registration and quality audit and in the institution of quality criteria for elements such as institutional and academic governance, programme design and delivery, teaching staff and research (SQA, 2009). The policy idea that appealed to policymakers at the time in Sāmoa was the perceived advantage to Sāmoans should they decide to travel to New Zealand and Australia for work or further study opportunities. Policy officials projected that having a recognisably similar quality assurance framework for higher education in Sāmoa would facilitate the recognition of Sāmoa's qualifications held by Sāmoan travellers to its closest developed neighbouring countries.

Steiner-Khamsi (2016, 2014) suggests that local policy leaders need to be cognizant of policy models in other national jurisdictions for policy externalization to occur. As outlined in the findings of this research (see sections 6.1.5 and 7.4.2), the local quality assurance body was a member of several international quality assurance networks. As part of such membership, external quality assurance policy officials were regular attendees at international conferences and workshops run by bodies such as the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) and the Asia Pacific Quality Network (APQN). Transnational quality assurance networks such as the INQAAHE and APQN arguably advocate for comparability and commonality in the quality assurance frameworks adopted by their member countries, thus influencing the understanding and preferences of Sāmoa's quality assurance policy officials.

Gunter and Mills (2017) shine further light on the role that consultants play in shaping policy through their definition of consultants as "a particular community of knowledge actors who variously develop, identify, carry, retail and legitimize ideas and practices" (p. 2). The consultants who drafted and wrote Sāmoa's external quality assurance policy presented a policy framework that was based in large part on the policy frameworks in their own country of origin (New Zealand and Australia), which was itself similar to external quality assurance policy frameworks adopted by other OECD countries.

University and academic leaders acted as gatekeepers in the enactment of external quality assurance policy within the university. This can be seen in the fact that although legislation was passed in 2006 and amended in 2010 to better articulate the mandate of the external quality assurance body to regulate qualifications and standards in Sāmoa, university leadership resisted such legislation and policy until 2020. The ability of university and academic leaders to resist external quality assurance policy for a period spanning a decade highlights their policy sovereignty in making decisions pertaining to the university.

### *iii. The global epistemic community*

The idea of a “global epistemic community” (Lingard & Sellar, 2016, p. 370) can be used to understand the influence of transnational quality assurance networks on external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa. The picture of a global community of individuals and information networks spreading a standard message of acceptable policy, in this case, for external quality assurance for higher education, aids understanding of the scope of influence wielded by global policy networks on developing countries such as Sāmoa.

In Sāmoa, the ‘global epistemic community’ that influenced the thinking of policy leaders regarding external quality assurance policy includes international bodies such as the INQAAHE and APQN, development organisations such as the UNDP and ILO, and the consultants affiliated with the work of such organisations. The International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) was initially comprised of quality assurance agencies from within the OECD countries. However, it has expanded from its inaugural membership of eight to over 250 (Trifiro, 2018). Trifiro (2018) suggests that INQAAHE is to be largely credited with the development of a shared understanding of quality assurance and the spread of common quality assurance practices among its extensive membership network. The INQAAHE Guidelines of Good Practice in Quality Assurance (INQAAHE, 2018) continues to be an example for quality assurance agencies to follow worldwide, demonstrating the extensive sway the INQAAHE holds over how external quality assurance is conceptualised and enacted by government quality assurance agencies. The external review of Sāmoa’s national external quality assurance agency against the INQAAHE Guidelines of Good Practice has been a long-standing intention after a self-review against the same was

undertaken by the external quality body (SQA, 2016a). A recent submission by the INQAAHE to the UNESCO World Higher Education Conference held in May 2022 to disseminate the INQAAHE International Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Tertiary Education (INQAAHE, 2022) is a clear indication that INQAAHE's global policy leadership for external quality assurance policy in higher education, will continue into the near future.

The Asia-Pacific Quality Network or APQN is part of the 'global epistemic community' of external quality assurance policy governance with influence over policy enactment in Sāmoa. As a regional iteration of INQAAHE, the APQN confers its signal of recognition and status through the Asia-Pacific Quality Register of approved quality assurance agencies. Sāmoa's external quality assurance agency has been actively engaged with APQN activities since 2006, with a former agency head representing Pacific Ocean states on the APQN governance board in 2007 and regular attendance of senior officials at APQN conferences. The intensity of engagement of Sāmoa's external quality assurance body with the regional quality assurance network is such that Sāmoa's external quality assurance body was recently inducted into the Asia Pacific Quality Register of approved accrediting agencies (APQN, 2022). Again, the engagement of Sāmoa's external quality assurance body with regional coordination entities such as the APQN further entrenches the understanding of Sāmoa's quality assurance policy officials in the regional and global narrative supporting a particular type of external quality assurance.

Given the preceding discussion on voice, and in answer to the first research question, the findings of this research suggest that external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa was initiated by local quality assurance policy officials, determined by international consultants, mediated by local university and academic leaders, and shaped by transnational quality assurance networks.

*iv. Local agency*

In view of external influence from the global epistemic community and international consultants, it might be reasonable to ask – just how much agency then do local policy actors have in the choices they make regarding external quality assurance policy?

Nima Sobhani's (2016) policy research in Sāmoa provides insight into the responses of local policy leaders juxtaposed against this backdrop of global policy activities and the agents and networks that readily spread policy solutions designed and implemented in developed economies. Sobhani (2016) suggests that Sāmoa's local policy officials did not see themselves as the victim of "global designs" (p. 485) or even that global policy narratives were something they were angry with and wanted to resist. Sobhani (2016) furthermore posits that policy actors took a pragmatic view of globally influenced policy design and "mostly expressed a willingness and desire to engage in productive dialogue with these global designs, acknowledging that they could not be completely avoided" (p. 485). This pragmatic acceptance of a global policy narrative explains the view of policy actors who thought it no problem to utilise a "cut and paste" ("O.N.") policy solution to Sāmoa's higher education context.

From Sobhani's view, Sāmoan policy actors accepted that it was inevitable for global conversations and education policy solutions lauded around the world would find their way into Sāmoa, but that the local policy actors took this in stride and desired "productive dialogue" that considered indigenous points of view and the contextual reality of Sāmoa (2016, p. 486). The "productive dialogue" to which Sobhani (2016, p. 486) refers seems to not have occurred for university and academic leaders in the context of Sāmoa's external quality assurance policy. As outlined previously, university leadership in particular felt that there had been an absence of authentic dialogue with academics, and that discussions were usually with policy officials whose "minds" were "already made up" ("O.M.").

Sobhani (2016) also referred to contrasting findings of policy officials who believed that indigenous ideas and values were of limited utility in Sāmoa's current educational policy and development. This perhaps explains why Sāmoa's cultural values are largely absent in external quality assurance policy.

*v. Agency of academic leaders*

The findings show that academic leaders at the university in this case study responded to the enactment of external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa, in different ways at different times. As policy actors, academic leaders demonstrated their agency by resisting policy, being resigned to policy, accepting policy and even by affirming policy. The findings also show that how academic leaders demonstrated these four responses also varied between policy actors. Some academic leaders described themselves as keeping up a consistent response over the years, while others had altered responses over time, and still others seemed to experience a mixed or fragmented response. Academics who experienced a fragmented response accepted some aspects of policy enactment, while actively resisting other aspects, seemingly at the same time.

The reasons for acceptance of external quality assurance policy by academic leaders included the perception of benefits gained from external quality assurance policy such as greater access to funding support for programmes and teaching, local and international recognition of qualifications, the marketability of accredited courses as well as a personal desire to improve quality.

The reasons for resistance to external quality assurance policy by academic leaders can be seen as falling within two categories. The first category consists of the relational aspects of implementing external quality assurance policy that prompted negative feelings on the part of academic leaders. The second category consists of how academic leaders perceived the value of the external quality assurance activity.

### 8.2.2 What is valued?

The findings regarding what is valued in external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa indicates that the first idea of central importance is that of 'recognition.' Academic leaders place significant importance on the local and international recognition of the qualifications and programmes within which they teach and work. The importance of recognition as a public affirmation of the value of academics' work is a recurrent theme in the participant talanoa. The value placed on 'recognition' is not limited to academic leaders, however, as it is also a central concern for external quality assurance policy officials. Policy officials value international recognition because it contributes to the aspirational goals of labour mobility to support economic growth. International recognition of Sāmoa's programmes and qualifications is one of the arguments used by policy officials to enact local external quality assurance, as they consider this to be the pathway for Sāmoa qualifications to achieve credibility beyond national borders.

The concern with international recognition is interesting against the background of Sāmoa's colonial past and development journey. Having been subject to first German and then New Zealand rule and administration, Sāmoa's people had had experience with being treated and known as second-class citizens on paper as well as in interactions with foreigners. Although self-determination was achieved in 1962, Sāmoa's educated people received secondary and tertiary education in the systems of overseas countries, countries that were also going through their own development journey and reckoning with the relationship with their indigenous peoples. The desire for Sāmoa's qualifications to be recognised overseas and especially in the neighbouring countries of New Zealand and Australia is also a desire for the education received in Sāmoa to be recognised as comparable to the education received in its neighbouring countries. At its core is the desire for Sāmoans to be acknowledged as the equal of other peoples in its neighbouring countries. The desire of recognition of qualifications for the purpose of employment and further study in overseas countries is seen as the upper layer of reality, where beneath it, is the very human motivation for one person to be acknowledged as the equal of another. The desire to be

acknowledged as equal to other human beings regardless of colour or place of origin or education is central to the desire for international recognition of Sāmoa's qualifications.

There is some contention with the view that engagement in external quality assurance whether national or international influences the recognition of national qualifications in overseas countries. Hou et al. (2021) argue that accreditation does not necessarily equate to recognition of qualifications in overseas jurisdictions. This is because professional and national interests mediate the question of international recognition of qualifications even as networks like the INQAAHE, APQN, and UNESCO work to overcome the barriers to qualification recognition. Hou et al. (2021) contend that the existence of regulations for professionals and concerns with protecting citizens' access to in-country employment results in a situation where "professional qualification recognition is heavily restricted by governments due to nationalism and protectionism within the job market" (p. 373). Therefore, the idea that engaging in external quality assurance policy would improve international qualification recognition may be, at best mistaken and at worst misleading. Nevertheless, the narrative of external quality assurance policy includes the power to enable international recognition of Sāmoa's qualifications and graduates who hold such qualifications, in other countries.

#### *i. The politics of recognition*

The work of Glen Sean Coulthard (2014) on the politics of recognition offers useful perspective for understanding the abiding preoccupation with local and international recognition of Sāmoa's qualifications in Sāmoa's external quality assurance policy.

Set in the context of indigenous peoples versus the state relations in Canada and drawing on Fanon's (1952) critique of relations of domination, Coulthard (2014) argues that the contemporary reproduction of colonial relations works through a politics of recognition narrative. The recognition narrative encourages "Indigenous peoples to identify either implicitly or explicitly with the profoundly asymmetrical and nonreciprocal forms of recognition either imposed on or granted to them by the settler state and

society” (Coulthard, 2014, p. 25). Applied to the context of external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa, the recognition narrative encourages the alignment of Sāmoa’s policy and quality standards to its closest neighbours New Zealand and Australia, and to that of transnational quality assurance networks such as the APQN and INQAAHE. The purpose of this desire for recognition is to achieve equal status for Sāmoa’s higher education system and its qualifications and for the graduates that hold such qualifications. The power to grant recognition of course is in the hands of organisations in New Zealand and Australia and in the hands of governing bodies of the transnational quality assurance networks. Put simply, the sense of affirmation and sense of self linked to the local and international recognition of Sāmoa’s qualifications is in the hands of external entities which may not necessarily have the interests of Sāmoa’s people at heart. As Coulthard (2014) aptly summed up, “our senses of self are thus dependent on and shaped through our complex relations with others” (p. 28).

Balaton-Chrimes and Stead (2017) add to the discussion in their argument that the struggle of one entity to be acknowledged as equal and have recognition from another entity is primarily a struggle for equality within a world system where there is unequal access to power and resources. In the context of Sāmoa’s external quality assurance policy, New Zealand and Australia are viewed as desirable migration destinations to live, work and study because of the higher income and wage levels and access to a better standard of living. Hence the desire for international recognition of Sāmoa’s qualifications at least by its closest developed country neighbours is also a direct response to the unequal economic power relationship and access to resources that currently exist across nations.

As Coulthard (2014, p. 17) articulates, “recognition” is a “field of power through which colonial relations are produced and maintained”. Viewed through the lens of Coulthard’s (2014) critique, the attraction of international recognition of Sāmoa’s qualifications through adoption of an internationally referenced external quality assurance framework can be seen to perpetuate colonial relations with New Zealand, Sāmoa’s former colonial ruler. By the same principle, the international recognition narrative driven by membership with transnational quality assurance networks such as the International Network for Quality

Assurance in Higher Education (INQAAHE) and the Asia Pacific Quality Network (APQN) can be seen to preserve the same hegemony, where multinational networks hold the power to grant the status of quality to its members.

*ii. Neoliberal managerialism in external quality assurance policy*

This research found that Sāmoa's external quality assurance policy is guided by the neoliberal values of accountability, effectiveness, efficiency and alignment. Watts (2017) posits that such principles are part of the model of corporate governance that flourished in universities in the United Kingdom, America and Australia and which has now spread to universities around the world. Watts (2017) further postulates that the type of governance exemplified by 'new public management' or NPM is part of "a neoliberal imaginary that treats education as a 'commodity' and universities as part of a 'market' (p. 12). This research found that research participants were acutely aware of the university as one player in the market for higher education not just in the country but in the region.

The valorization of neoliberal principles in external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa follows the trend of public sector reform that took place in Sāmoa around the same time as the establishment of the external quality assurance agency. A series of Sāmoa public sector reforms that started in the late 1980s and continued into the 1990s and 2000s was described as "a new epoch of public management, dominated by 'new public management principles'" (Amosa, 2003, p. 39). The Sāmoa government's drive to raise public sector performance and economic growth was a response to policy recommendations "advocated by key international financial institutions – the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF)" (Amosa, 2003, p. 39). At the same time as reforms were being rolled out in Sāmoa's public sector, attention was increasingly directed to the role of post-secondary education in achieving economic growth (Amosa, 2012). It is no coincidence then that the establishment of an external quality assurance body to regulate the quality and standards for post-school education and training in Sāmoa adopted policy principles in line with the neoliberal ethos guiding public reform in Sāmoa's other public bodies.

There is a need to confront the underlying assumptions of the 'new public management' principles that guide the enactment of external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa. This is because as Jarvis (2017) suggests, "quality assurance regimes are not benign managerial instruments" (p. 164). Instead, quality assurance policy frameworks can be seen as "part of a broader series of agendas associated with neoliberal policy prescriptions" that promote and encourage market capitalism (Jarvis, 2017). The ethos of neoliberal managerialism treats higher education as a pure commodity, which has to be 'produced' and sold to the student consumer, for a profit. The implication is that the consumers of university education must be able and willing to pay for that commodity.

The integration of market logic in external quality assurance policy is concerning because it introduces implications for the goal of equitable access to higher education for all Sāmoans, regardless of income level and ability. If universities are to be accountable for the efficient use of resources, minimising activities that do not return a profit or break even with costs, what implication does this have on students who are not able to pay university fees or for the offering of courses that are seen as indirectly linked to economic productivity, like in the arts? (Barbour, 2016). Emphasis on the principle of market efficiency necessarily detracts from the goal of equitable access to higher education that is identified as a priority in the current strategic policy for education in Sāmoa. The Post-School Education and Training Strategic Plan 2020-2024 (SQA, 2021, p. 8) states the strategic intent to "provide everyone with access to quality education and training opportunities". The provision of access to all who desire higher education opportunities necessarily means that there should be enabling mechanisms in the form of scholarships and subsidies, to name two examples. The enactment of enabling financial mechanisms to support access to higher education mechanisms is an antithesis to the principle of 'efficiency' based on market principles which underpins external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa.

Furthermore, that external quality assurance policy for higher education rests on neoliberal market principles is in direct opposition to the call by indigenous Pacific educators for higher education that is culturally democratic and supportive of self-determination (Thaman, 2014). Sobhani (2016) does note

findings of apprehension from participants who reflected that always looking outward for “best practice” results in “local histories, indigenous voice, and contextualized responses... pushed to the margins” (p. 480).

Another criticism of corporate governance exercised in the quality assurance of universities relates to the resulting rise in performativity within universities (Kalfa & Taksa, 2017). Such performativity is evident in the way universities focus on the identification and achievement of performance indicators, thereby compelling “academic staff to provide evidence as to how their courses addressed externally set targets, indicators and evaluations” (p. 697). The behaviour of academic staff in response to targets and indicators that are set externally and which are part of external quality assurance processes is a type of ‘performativity’ as Kalfa and Taksa (2017) explain, that is a consequence of “the current fixation on efficiency and the concern to objectively test the worth of higher education” (p. 689).

In Sāmoa’s external quality assurance policy, there are elements of performativity in the way assessment focuses on the achievement of detailed criteria and standards. Some academic leaders expressed resistance to having to conform to such criteria and expressed disagreement with “standardising for the sake of standardising” (“I.N.”). The expression of disagreement with conformity to detailed criteria for no discernible purpose other than standardising demonstrates the disagreement of some academic leaders with the neoliberal managerial principles evident in external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa.

### 8.2.3 The relationality (vā) of external quality assurance policy

This section discusses relationality or the vā in external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa, arguing that the valorisation of neoliberal market principles in external quality assurance policy resulted in policy relationships being hegemonic, disconnected and transactional. The role of university leadership is also discussed, as an important influence on how external quality assurance policy is enacted within the university.

*i. Hegemony*

The hegemonic nature of external quality assurance policy relationships can be seen firstly in the relationship between the government, represented by the external quality assurance body on one hand, and the university on the other.

The external quality assurance policy framework in Sāmoa is hegemonic in that it exerts government control over higher education through the use of quality standards and quality assurance processes. The exertion of government or state control over higher education through the use of external quality assurance policy is not a new thing in other jurisdictions. Referring to the Netherlands context, Chu and Westerheijden (2018) argue that “the establishment of quality assurance mechanisms in the 1980s represented a fundamental change in the relationship between higher education and government” (p. 263). The change to which Chu and Westerheijden (2018) referred was the production of a policy document that outlined the government’s strategy of “steering at a distance” (Chu & Westerheijden, 2018, p. 264). The policy of steering at a distance for the Netherlands specifically, and for Western Europe generally, involved the institution of formal processes for external quality assurance of higher education. External quality assurance “was viewed as a powerful policy instrument to inform the stakeholders that higher education institutions were operating within the parameters set by government” (Chu & Westerheijden, 2018, p. 265). Quality assurance policy was instituted as a policy to influence and control the priorities of higher education institutions.

In Sāmoa, one of the key reasons for ongoing resistance to external quality assurance policy by university leadership was due to the perception that policy discussions were not open to alternative ways of thinking about quality in higher education. As one academic leader, “O.M.”, indicated, a lot of their “frustration” related to the “absence of any discussion and the unwillingness to discuss.” It seemed to this participant that “the matter was being forced without discussion” (“O.M.”). Although there had been some consultation with academics, evident in the acknowledgement by “I.L.” that “the quality assurance body always consults,” it is clear that the proposed policy framework for external quality assurance did not

always consider the views of academics and university leaders. The element of control is apparent in the way external quality assurance policy only flows in one direction from the government-sanctioned quality assurance body to the university. In fact, more than one policy official referred to quality assurance measures as “controls.”

A similar critique has been levelled at the quality assurance of higher education in Australia. McTaggart (2013) was critical of reform relating to quality assurance of higher education in Australia, describing the move to more prescriptive standards for quality as being more in the interest of the quality assurance body rather than of enhancing quality in higher education. Such changes were seen as “government attempts at business-style corporate management and monitoring” leading to the “domination of one value domain over all others,” (McTaggart, 2013, p. 16). The argument put forward by McTaggart (2013) was that a system of quality assurance was set up that was more to facilitate the external management of higher education according to the values of the market domain and principles of market enterprise rather than the enhancement of higher education.

The idea of the government’s hegemonic influence over higher education in Sāmoa through the use of external quality assurance policy brings into light the question of by what principles should higher education be governed. There is ideological hegemony over the principles underpinning external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa, in the alignment of policy with neoliberal market-centred principles. The ideological adherence to the idea of relevance to the economic development goals of the nation is underpinned by the idea that the purpose of higher education is to produce employable graduates that will support Sāmoa’s development aspirations. There does not seem to have been an opportunity at least in Sāmoa’s context, to explore other ways of interpreting how higher education quality should be defined and for what purpose. The hegemony of external quality assurance policy is that it rests on one way of defining higher education quality and one purpose of higher education – to the exclusion of other views.

Daun (2021) argues that the idea of education as being for the sole purpose of driving national economic growth is a “globalized meta-ideology”. A globalized meta-ideology is a pattern of thinking that is “taken

for granted by politicians and policymakers around the world” (Daun, 2021, p. 9). The unquestioning acceptance by local policy officials of the idea of higher education as being for the sole purpose of fuelling economic growth is an example of a globalized meta-ideology in action. What is concerning however is that the root of this meta-ideology is the neoliberal assumption that everything can be bought and sold and that “human beings are driven by their needs and desire to maximise their own needs and utility regardless of time and place” (Daun, 2021, p. 99). Along with the associated ideas of materialism and consumption for its own sake (Daun, 2021), such ideology is antithetical to Sāmoan societal values of collective regard, generosity and reciprocity (Vaai, 2022). The enactment of an external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa that rests on values and principles that do not reflect Sāmoa’s societal values, but which are nevertheless accepted without question, illustrates the hegemonic nature of external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa.

#### *ii. Disconnection*

The enactment of external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa involved the determination of meanings, standards and processes for assuring quality in higher education, by parties external to the work of teaching and learning in higher education. The determination of definitions, standards and decisions of higher education external quality by individuals and entities external to higher education presents an issue of disconnect between those who determine what quality means in higher education and those who provide higher education in Sāmoa.

The work of Tavares et al. (2017) helps explain why this disconnect resulted in resistance to external quality assurance from some university and academic leaders in Sāmoa. Tavares et al (2017) argued that academics resist external quality assurance processes because they perceive them to be disconnected from their work as academics. According to Tavares et al. (2017, p. 1296), “quality assurance is seen by academics as an artificial process” associated with “administrative and cost burden, with bureaucracy, with time-consuming processes”. The academic leaders in this research experienced similar paperwork and administrative responsibilities, which presented a burden for academic leaders who consider this part

of their work as irrelevant to the real work of facilitating meaningful and worthwhile learning for higher education students. The perception that there is no real value in completing such processes except to fulfill bureaucratic intentions highlights the disconnect between the purpose of external quality assurance policy for higher education and the purpose of higher education itself. The administrative work of aligning programme documentation with the requirements of external quality assurance policy was seen as necessary and something over which some academic leaders felt they had no choice. The disconnect between those who set the quality standards and whose work is most closely impacted by such standards in Sāmoa's context is not just at the level of the institution.

One of the primary purposes for establishing the Asia Pacific Quality Register for the Asia Pacific Quality Network, of which Sāmoa's external quality assurance body is a member, is to grant recognition that evaluation undertaken by the external quality assurance body meets external standards. The Asia Pacific Quality Network confers a mark of acceptance that states "the quality assurance agencies who have been registered and accepted onto APQR by the on-site review panel can accredit international higher education institutions/programs in guidance/cooperation along with APQN" (Asia Pacific Quality Network, 2016, p. 2).

In other words, the purpose of the Asia-Pacific Quality Register is to provide assurance and recognition that members who have attained inclusion on the APQR, have the credibility to accredit higher education institutions such as the university in this case study. Put simply, the logic of external quality assurance grants an organisation external to Sāmoa the wherewithal and authority to decide whether Sāmoa's quality assurance body meets the requirements to accredit a university within Sāmoa. In this case, decisions made by networks such as the APQN and the INQAAHE, as to which agency fulfils the requirements to undertake external quality assurance of higher education, are deliberated and decided at a distance from the work of higher education and the people responsible for teaching and learning in higher education. This discrepancy is not discussed at any point in the conversation on the activities of

the INQAAHE and the APQN in relation to higher education. Distance is assumed to be advantageous and uncritically accepted as the right way to go about external quality assurance of higher education.

The last point to be made about the disconnect in the relational spaces of external quality assurance policy relates to the cultural disconnect between the principles and processes of external quality assurance policy and the contextual principles which guide social relations in Sāmoa. The guiding principle for enacting social relationships in the Sāmoan worldview is called the *vā* (Wendt, 1996, p. 8), which has been translated as “relationality” (Spratt & Coxon, 2020, p. 520). The principle of the *vā* implies that the spaces between people are charged with meaning and relational connections that must be discovered, nurtured, and maintained for social harmony (Anae, 2010). The *vā* applies to all contexts of social interaction between Sāmoans whether it be at home, in the workplace or among strangers.

The enactment of external quality assurance policy replaces the social *vā* that determines relationships between Sāmoans, with a relational space that is governed by the principles of external quality assurance. External quality assurance policy assumes an unequal positioning between the individual doing the quality evaluation and the individual being evaluated. The positioning is determined by who holds the power to enact a decision that influences the other. In the case of external quality assurance policy, the power is in the hands of the external evaluator, as the maker of decisions regarding the other’s work. The relationship flows in one direction, which is from the maker of the decision regarding quality assurance to the receiver of the decision regarding their work.

The one-sided nature of the external quality assurance policy relationship is disconnected from the reciprocal nature of social relationships in the Sāmoan worldview, in which there is a flow of energy and giving in two directions. This dual flow of energy, giving and receiving in two directions is the principle of reciprocity which underpins Sāmoan relationality. Although the notion of reciprocity as an element of relationality or *vā* in the Sāmoan culture is most often discussed within the context of ceremonial events (Tuia, 2019) or research (Anae, 2010), I submit that it is equally applicable within the context of external quality assurance for higher education in Sāmoa.

*iii. Transactionality*

External quality assurance policy in Sāmoa involved the use of funding incentives to encourage the university to submit their programmes for accreditation by the national external quality assurance body. This method attracted some academic leaders who saw access to funding support for their faculties and programmes as sufficient incentive to engage with external quality assurance policy, through submitting their programmes for national accreditation. The extent to which the use of funding arrangements as an incentive to submit to external quality assurance policy processes can be seen as the transactional nature of external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa. The reward for submitting to the criteria and requirements of external quality assurance policy for Sāmoa's university leaders was that it opened up avenues for funding to which they previously did not have access.

The notion of transactional leadership can be adapted to understand the transactional nature of external quality assurance policy. Arenas (2019) posits that a transactional approach to the relationship between leaders and followers characterises transactional leadership. A transactional approach involves the use of inducements to encourage and motivate others to act in a certain way. Transactional leadership involves "setting goals and granting rewards," and "monitoring performance and taking immediate action in case of deviations" (Berkovich & Eyal, 2019, p. 131). To further explain the notion of transactional leadership, Arenas (2019) offers the example of rewards that are given to employees in return for better performance or a politician's promise to reward electorates in return for their vote. The underpinning principle is that a reward is offered for certain behaviour.

The offering of access to more funding support in return for compliance with external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa is transactional in that financial reward is offered for presenting programmes for accreditation with the external quality assurance body. It has been argued that a transactional approach to leadership engenders a low-trust, contract-based relationship that results in the adoption of decisions for self-interest (Harrison, 2017). Applying this understanding to external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa, the existence of a low-trust relationship can be seen between the external quality assurance body

and the university, where there is little trust in each other's intentions to improve higher education quality. The external quality assurance body had little trust in the university's capability to manage the quality of the programmes and qualifications they offer, and the university had little trust in the quality assurance body's capability to manage the quality assurance of higher education in general. Hence interactions between the two bodies took place within the terms of the policy framework, which as this research shows, is underpinned by principles that are at odds with Sāmoan principles of relationality.

Although the notion of transactional leadership is situated within the literature on educational leadership, there is applicability for understanding external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa, as discussed in the preceding paragraphs. The implication is the question of what happens when the financial reward is removed and whether the existence of financial incentives actually improves higher education quality in the long run.

#### *iv. Gatekeeping role of university leadership*

As outlined in Chapter Six, university leadership made key decisions regarding the enactment of external quality assurance policy within the university. Summarised in Table 2, this response can be seen in the successive phases characterised by initial openness to discussion on policy, followed by refusal to submit degree programmes for local quality assurance, then a period of exploration of options before fully embracing external quality assurance with the local body in 2020. The decisions made by university leadership guided how the university as an entity interacting with the external quality assurance body. In its influence on the university's response to external policy, university leadership can be seen as gatekeepers to the enactment of external policy within the university's internal processes.

The changes in academic leaders' responses to external quality assurance policy may be viewed as following the guidance of university leadership. For instance, some academic leaders spoke of changes in the way they viewed external quality assurance policy over time. This mirroring of the senior leadership's response to external quality assurance policy can be understood in terms of the Sāmoan value of deference to leadership. Respect for leadership and deference to authority are core values of Sāmoan

social relations. The idea of every person having their 'place' that they must know and move within, is evident in the Sāmoan proverb – O Sāmoa ua uma ona tofi – meaning, Sāmoa as a collective group of Sāmoans, has been 'ordered' that is, every person in Sāmoa has a place in society. Taua'a (2014) suggests that this ordering of Sāmoa social relations is most evident in the workings of the village-based system of political and social administration in Sāmoa underpinned by chiefly relationships and authority. Applied to the context of external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa, deference to university leadership may be seen as deference to the chief of the university. Such deference may explain the changing responses to quality assurance policy as described by some participants, alongside the decision-making of university leadership.

However, the notion of deference to chiefly authority and leadership does not explain the responses of some academic leaders, who spoke of their consistent response since the first introduction of external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa. Such leaders indicated that they had always viewed external quality assurance policy positively despite the negative responses from their university colleagues. Baird and Kula Semos (2018) indicated similar findings in their discussion of leadership of universities in Papua New Guinea. Baird and Kula Semos (2018) suggested that the Melanesian cultural valuing of deference to authority and hierarchy lies behind the hesitance of Papua New Guinean academics to resist policy solutions that are promoted and applauded by their leaders.

#### 8.2.4 The service (tautua) of external quality assurance policy

External quality assurance policy was enacted primarily in service to the political aims of economic growth through influence over the Sāmoa post-secondary education and training sector. The messaging on the importance of skills development to economic growth resonates throughout strategic documents produced by the external quality assurance body over the years and is echoed in the conversations of participants in this research. External quality assurance policy also served the purpose of some academic leaders through the recognition of their work as quality, improving access to funding, and improving the marketability of their courses.

In Sāmoa, the case could be made that the external quality assurance policy framework has certainly facilitated external oversight of higher education, through the use of evaluation processes against prescribed quality standards and criteria (SQA, 2009). The enactment of the external quality assurance policy has made it possible for an external government entity to open up the documentation of university programmes, to see what is taught and how, and by whom. However, it is not clear that doing so has improved student success in terms of achievement or employment or by whatever measure that could be identified. What is clear however, is that the university in this research has been compelled to be more transparent about what is taught, how, why and by whom.

*i. In service to economic growth*

One of the findings of this research is that external quality assurance policy was enacted primarily in service of the political aims of economic growth through influence over the Sāmoa post-secondary education and training sector. The messaging on the importance of skills development to economic growth resonates throughout the strategic documents produced by the external quality assurance body over the years and is echoed in the conversations of participants in this research.

Tuia and Schoeffel (2016) suggest that Sāmoans have always made decisions that they perceived to be in the best interest of themselves and their people. According to Tuia and Schoeffel (2016, p. 49), “Since the 1960s the educational aspirations of most Sāmoans have been to harness what they perceive to be the empowering outcomes of ‘Western’ education for their children”. The aim to empower Sāmoans through education has been a consistent theme in Sāmoan engagement with Western ideas of education since Sāmoa’s first contact with colonial authority. For instance, in the 1920s, barely five years into New Zealand’s colonial administration of Sāmoa, a delegation of Sāmoan leaders sought an audience with the New Zealand authorities to present their request for the education of the Sāmoan people. Concerned with what they saw as the exclusion of Sāmoans from the public service including teaching and medical services due to inadequate training or qualifications, the delegation of Sāmoan leaders presented an official request to the colonial administration “to send Sāmoan young men to New Zealand for training to work

in the public service and as teachers [and] to send some Sāmoan young men and women to be trained as medical professionals, in which professions they would work upon return to Sāmoa (New Zealand Parliament, 1920, p. 26). The presentation of their request for higher education that would empower their young people to become leaders in the colonially influenced public service at the time represents the aspiration of early Sāmoan leaders to utilise western education to empower Sāmoan people.

The desire to use education as a way to empower the Sāmoan people can be extended to the desire to use education policy such as external quality assurance policy to also empower and make lives better for Sāmoans. External quality assurance policy in Sāmoa can be described as aspirational, due to the rationale underpinning policy decision-making. As already outlined in the previous chapters on the findings of this research, decisions to adopt and enact an external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa had an aspirational rationale relating to the recognition of qualifications in overseas jurisdictions. Sāmoan policy leaders intentionally decided to recruit consultants from New Zealand and Australia to write a policy framework influenced by the external quality assurance framework at the time in those two countries. The reason for wholeheartedly accepting such influence was the possibility of making it easier for Sāmoan higher education graduates to find work and further study opportunities in New Zealand and Australia, without the barrier of non-recognition of Sāmoan qualifications in those two countries. The decision to adopt a foreign-influenced policy for Sāmoa's higher education qualifications was tied to the aspirations of the Sāmoan policy makers, representing the collective interest of the Sāmoan people, to make it easier for Sāmoans to find better work, education and training opportunities in their developed country neighbours.

#### *ii. In service to national aspirations*

This research suggests that Sāmoa's external quality assurance policy is aspirational in that it is driven by the idea of achieving comparability with foreign qualifications and would result in Sāmoa's qualifications being recognized on the regional if not international stage. Despite having no clear proof that instituting a framework of external quality assurance policy for higher education would result in improved international recognition of Sāmoa's qualifications, the promise of international recognition was adopted

as an official rationale for such policy. One of the policy leaders in Sāmoa, a research participant, spoke often of the promise of international recognition as a strong rationale for enacting external quality assurance policy informed by overseas policy, in Sāmoa.

Aiafi (2017, p. 462) argues that contemporary approaches to public policy analysis in the Pacific Islands assume rationality, defined as “reasoning and evidence-based policy”, to be an underpinning principle of good policymaking. Aiafi’s (2017, p. 461) research on public policy decision-making in four Pacific Island countries found that there was “limited evidence-based policy and that policy, in reality, is not rational as orthodoxy insists”. Nevertheless, Aiafi (2017, p. 464) points out that the notion of rationality needs to consider how people in different contexts make sense of policy problems when she argues for “a more concerted effort to appreciate and take into account local philosophies.”

This research agrees with Aiafi (2017) and argues that ‘rationality’, if there is such a thing, (Popper & Notturmo, 1994) is contextual when applied to policy decision-making. Different decisions make sense in different contexts and the ‘rationality’ of different decisions depends on the unique ways of thinking of people in different contexts. Hence, the decision of Sāmoan policy leaders to recruit consultants from preferred policy reference contexts such as New Zealand and Australia may not be logical to a contemporary policy analyst. However, in the exploration of the reasoning behind such decisions to accept and even welcome overseas and international influence in the shaping of external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa, a distinct ‘rationality’ is observed, a certain process of logic that is only understood within the context of Sāmoa and the Sāmoan way of thinking. As discussed previously, such policy decisions were aspirational and influenced by the promise of benefits to the Sāmoan people, in the form of expanded opportunities for education and employment accessed through internationally recognized qualifications. The aspirational nature of Sāmoa’s external quality assurance policy makes sense when considered in light of decision-making for the collective benefit and empowerment of Sāmoa’s people.

It could then be argued that the foreign authors of Sāmoa’s external quality assurance policy had a limited application of ‘rationality’ in their supposition that policy frameworks that seemed to work well at the

time in longer established higher education systems, within market enterprise societies, would work well in Sāmoa's context. In view of the preceding discussion, it could even be said that while Sāmoan policy leaders were being completely 'rational' in their adoption of a policy model that was still being tested in overseas countries, the consultants and international organisations that supported the adoption of such policy, were not.

The notion of a policy as being aspirational is the focus of Strating's work (2018) in her analytical discussion of foreign policy in Timor Leste. Strating (2018) documents particular elements of Timor Leste's foreign policy since 2002, which had the main goal of "guaranteeing survival and asserting political independence" (p. 123). Strating (2018) furthermore argues that Timor Leste's foreign policy was aspirational in that it was "driven by ideational ambitions that are motivated by identity goals of achieving social prestige... revealed in the ways leaders seek recognition of its preferred self-image as a development success story" (p. 125). Of further relevance to this research, Strating (2018) suggested that Timor Leste's foreign policy approach may not have been fully cognizant of the limited resources available for implementation.

### 8.3 Contextually responsive policy

This section argues that quality assurance should have as its purpose the improvement of higher education for social justice and thorough attention to the contextual reality of where policy is enacted.

The "paradigm shift" advocated for higher education in the Pacific by Pacific educators such as Taufe'ulungaki (2001), Thaman (2006, 2014) and Nabobo-Baba (2012) involves a shift from solely privileging western ways of knowing and knowledge toward teaching and learning approaches that involve "bringing together the best of Western and Pacific values and ways of knowing" (Thaman, 2007, p. 3). Thaman (2014) in particular has argued for culturally democratic higher education that acknowledges the different socialization experiences and ways of knowing of Pacific peoples. Thaman (2014) acknowledges that advancing culturally democratic practices in higher education in the Pacific has been difficult and "largely ignored mainly because of the way university curricula is influenced by the

experiences and ideologies of European cultures". Thaman's (2014) call for culturally democratic higher education is relevant to all aspects of higher education policy, including external quality assurance. As Thaman (2014, p. 56) explains, culturally democratic policies for higher education would be reflected in policies that embrace and value "the home cultures of our students, especially in relation to the three critical components of language, values and teaching and learning styles".

The argument for education policy that is culturally relevant and situated within the cultural context is also echoed by Armstrong, Johansson-Fua, and Armstrong (2021), and McDonald and Tufue-Dolgoy (2013). Armstrong, Johansson-Fua, and Armstrong (2021) refer to the policy borrowing of inclusive education policy from donor organization contexts when they point out that such practices lead to "policy in the Pacific...based on western donor policies which often have no cultural relevance to the local contexts" (p. 11). Similarly, McDonald and Tufue-Dolgoy refer to inclusive education policy in Sāmoa when they contend that "inclusive education is regarded as a borrowed policy that has overlooked cultural issues and ownership" (p. 270).

The work of Konai Helu Thaman (2014); Armstrong, Johansson-Fua, and Armstrong (2021), and McDonald and Tufue-Dolgoy (2013) have bearing on this research in that they point to the cultural irrelevance of higher education and inclusive education policy in the Pacific. This research makes a similar contention in relation to the external quality assurance policy for higher education in Sāmoa. As outlined previously, external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa is informed by neoliberal public management principles such as 'fitness for purpose,' 'effectiveness and efficiency' and 'alignment.' At the same time, references to cultural values are largely absent from Sāmoa's external quality assurance policy, save for passing mention of "culturally appropriate" application and this mostly for "non-formal learning" or learning activities that do not lead to a formal qualification (SQA, 2009). The rationale for external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa reflects the commitment to the advancement of market-based economic growth through the contribution of skilled and knowledgeable higher education graduates. Consideration of culturally

democratic and culturally relevant external quality assurance policy for higher education is important for higher education that acknowledges and values the cultural context within which it is located.

Tuia and Schoeffel (2016) argue that 'mimicry' in Sāmoa's education system can be seen in the shaping of Sāmoa education policy since the 1990s "by a utilitarian neoliberal agenda aiming to shape children into individuals, as 'human resources' for economic development, rather than as junior members of a hierarchical kin-based collective" (p. 49). They refer to Bhabha's (1994) concept of mimicry which refers to the imperfect imitation of colonial ideas and practices, so that it is "almost the same, but not quite" (p. 127). Tuia and Schoeffel (2016) contend that the inflow of ideas from aid organisations and other international agencies has shaped Sāmoa's educational system over the years. Within this context of education development in Sāmoa, there seems to have been the assumption that policy solutions suggested by international bodies were superior and should not be questioned (Tuia & Schoeffel, 2016). Afamasaga (2001) agrees with this observation, in criticism directed at education leadership in Sāmoa because "we have blithely sat back and accepted into our schooling systems the current institutional strengthening projects that are going on in our public service systems because we believe that the agents of the market know best" (p. 143).

Bhabha's notion of mimicry helps then to make sense of how external quality assurance policy was enacted in Sāmoa, following closely the standards, principles and processes adopted in other countries. The imperfect imitation of global policy is present. On one hand, the principles of 'fitness for purpose' (SQA, 2009), external assessment and separation of quality assurance from the people who undertake the education in higher education are a feature of Sāmoa's external quality assurance policy. On the other hand, the reference countries for such policies, namely New Zealand and Australia have since then had multiple reworkings and reconceptualization of their higher education quality assurance systems. For example, in New Zealand, quality assurance has moved away from a compliance-centred approach, toward an enhancement-centred approach that places more agency in the hands of New Zealand's universities (Matear, 2021).

The later changes to the educational quality assurance policies in Sāmoa's policy reference countries are not reflected in any changes to Sāmoa's external quality assurance policy. Such then is the imperfect imitation of overseas policy models that is evident in Sāmoa's external quality assurance policy. However, the notion of mimicry does not fully account for the agency evident in the responses of policy actors such as academic leaders, in their choices to resist, resign, accept, and even embrace, introduced external quality assurance policy.

The importance of relationships and relationality in Pacific education is underscored in the work of Pacific education researchers such as Armstrong, Johansson-Fua and Armstrong (2021), Jim et al. (2021), Sanga et al. (2020) and Tuia and Cobb (2021). Armstrong, Johansson-Fua, and Armstrong (2021, p. 8) posit that "an appreciation of relationality enables interrogation of external models and approaches" in education policy and an enhanced understanding of "Pacific values, beliefs, and philosophies". For education policy initiatives in the Solomon Islands, Sanga et al. (2020) agree with the singular importance of "a relational approach based on Solomon Island communal culture" to ensure local ownership (p. 22). Similarly, recent work on a conceptual framework for education and leadership in the Marshall Islands draws on indigenous notions of respect, reciprocity and kindness to frame "education as a collective partnership" that allows "confronting and challenging conversations that should be mediated and negotiated" to move education forward (Jim et al., 2021, p. 142).

While the importance of relationality in the Pacific lifeworlds is often discussed within the context of education initiatives for education leadership (Jim et al., 2021; Sanga et al., 2020), and education research methods (Fasavalu & Reynolds, 2021; Johansson-Fua, 2016; Tuia & Cobb, 2021), there has been limited application of relationality within external quality assurance policy for higher education (Wright, 2022). External quality assurance policy for higher education in Sāmoa is enacted within the contextual and lived reality of the Sāmoan people, within which relationality, or the *vā*, is a determining factor. This research argues for connection between policy that aims to enhance quality in higher education and the relationality that is at the centre of the Sāmoan lifeworld.

## 8.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter discussed the research findings in relation to contemporary research in external quality assurance policy, in the Pacific and the world. The voices of different policy actors were discussed in relation to a comparative case study from St Lucia, the ideas of policy sovereignty and the global epistemic community that influences the thinking of policy officials. The agency of policy actors including academics was also discussed, in how they respond to external quality assurance policy. The values of recognition and neoliberal managerialism were discussed in terms of how they influenced policy relationships that are hegemonic, disconnected and transactional. The connection is made between external quality assurance policy and managerialist practices in higher education influenced by neoliberal reforms that took place in Sāmoa during the 1980s and the 1990s. Further connections were made to similar trends in quality assurance in overseas higher education jurisdictions. The chapter closes with a discussion of the findings relating to the notion of 'service', highlighting how external quality assurance policy in Samoa can be seen as serving the ideal of economic growth as well as national aspirations for success.

## CHAPTER NINE: CONCLUSIONS

### 9.1 Purpose of this research

The purpose of this research was to examine external quality assurance policy for higher education in Sāmoa from a critical realist perspective, informed by indigenous Sāmoan notions of voice, value, relationality and service. Driving this research was awareness of unexamined assumptions regarding the suitability of external quality assurance policy for Sāmoa's higher education context and a sense of dissatisfaction with how such policy seems to have produced little influence on the actual quality of higher education in Sāmoa.

This research thus set out to critically examine the question of who is served by external quality assurance policy through examining the voices and values that determine policy, how this shapes policy relationships and how academics respond to policy. In doing so, the research focused on the following:

- The roles and influence of various policy actors in shaping external quality assurance policy for higher education quality assurance in Sāmoa.
- The values that underpin external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa, what influences such values, and how such values influence relationality between policy actors.
- Who or what does external quality assurance policy serve, and who benefits from its enactment in Sāmoa?

## 9.2 Research questions and conclusions

1. Who determines how higher education quality assurance policy is decided and enacted in Sāmoa?

This research concludes that four groups of policy actors determined how external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa is decided and enacted. These groups include quality assurance policy officials as agents of the government, international consultants and university and academic leaders. Transnational quality assurance networks were the fourth group of policy actors that influenced external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa through their influence on how quality assurance policy officials think about policy.

As agents of the state, local quality assurance policy officials decided whether external quality assurance entered the Sāmoan education context and by whom it was written. Local policy officials also determined the overseas policy models that informed external quality assurance policy through their choices of consultants and the countries from where the consultants were sourced. Local policy officials preferred to source international consultants to avoid reinventing the wheel, follow the example of New Zealand and Australia and address a perceived deficit in their own ability to write external quality assurance policy.

Although local policy officials made all critical decisions regarding what was finally approved as Sāmoa's external quality assurance policy, they were influenced by international consultants and transnational quality assurance networks. International consultants wielded significant influence due to the criteria, process and quality assurance model they proposed and advocated for. Furthermore, global quality assurance networks influenced the thinking of policy officials through their advocacy of network membership and adherence to standard criteria, definitions, processes and models of good practice. Together, international consultants and transnational quality assurance networks comprised the epistemic community that influenced the thinking of local policy decision-makers regarding external quality assurance policy for Sāmoa.

At the institutional level, university leaders acted as gatekeepers when they exercised their agency through decisions on whether to accept or resist external quality assurance policy set by the external quality assurance body. In particular, university leadership exercised their agency in deciding to be open to policy discussions from 2006 to 2010, their refusal to submit to policy between 2010 and 2017, their exploration of options for compromise from 2017, and their full acceptance of external quality assurance policy in 2020. In making the above-mentioned decisions over almost one and a half decades since the introduction of external quality assurance policy to Sāmoa, university leaders exercised their policy sovereignty within their sphere of influence, which was the university.

## 2. What is valued in external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa and how does this determine policy relationships?

This research indicates that external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa is marked by an absence of Sāmoa's cultural values. The ideal of international recognition and neoliberal management principles such as effectiveness, efficiency, compliance and accountability underpin Sāmoa's external quality assurance policy. The close connection to skills and employment as a driver of neoliberal economic growth is apparent in Sāmoa's external quality assurance policy documents.

The abiding preoccupation with international recognition of Sāmoa's qualifications arguably relates to the human need to be acknowledged as an equal among others. This research argues that the desire to be recognised as equal to other human beings, regardless of colour or place of origin or education, is central to the desire for international recognition of Sāmoa's qualifications. Within the context of a brief colonial past, Sāmoa's preoccupation with securing international recognition of local qualifications makes it subject to the "politics of recognition" (Coulthard, 2014), where there is dependence on external systems and networks for acceptance and validation that Sāmoa's higher education system is of good quality.

In this research, the valorisation of the neoliberal values of effectiveness, efficiency, compliance and accountability in Sāmoa's external quality assurance policy results in a hegemonic, disconnected and

transactional relationship between the government and the university. The hegemony is seen in how external quality assurance policy places control of definitions of quality and quality criteria in the hands of the government acting through the external quality assurance body. At the same time, there has been little authentic opportunity to engage with such definitions with the people whose work it most closely impacts, those who do the daily work of facilitating teaching and learning in higher education in Sāmoa, which are academic staff and university leaders. Furthermore, at all levels, there has been no engagement with the economic imperative underpinning policy, with the assumption that there is only one right way to do external quality assurance policy for Sāmoa.

External quality assurance policy in Sāmoa has also been characterised by disconnection. The disconnect can be seen in the determination of meanings, standards and processes for assuring quality in higher education by parties external to the work of teaching and learning in the university. The disconnect at the national and institutional level is interestingly mirrored at the international level, where the Asia Pacific Quality Network purports to define the standards of how an external quality assurance body should enact quality assurance for a university in the Sāmoan context. Such external quality assurance arrangements rest on the assumption that the same standards, criteria and definitions work in all settings regardless of contextual differences. Furthermore, there is a relational disconnection in the enactment of quality assurance where the power relationship flows in only one direction from the maker of the quality assurance decision to the receiver of the decision regarding their work. This one-way flow of power and relational authority is at odds with the principle of reciprocity which underpins Sāmoan relationality.

The transactional nature of external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa can be seen in how funding incentives have been used to encourage the university to submit its programmes for accreditation by the national external quality assurance body. The transactional nature of the relationship between the government and the university via the external quality assurance body engenders a low-trust and contract-based approach to managing this relationship. The two parties communicate with each other through the lens of the quality assurance policy framework instead of seeking a partnership that is

grounded in authentic dialogue and contextually relevant values. It is, therefore, unsurprising that the relationship between the university and the external quality assurance body as the government's representative has at times been fraught with tension.

### 3. How do academic leaders respond to external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa?

At the individual level, academics responded in various ways in their relationship with external quality assurance policy. Their responses ranged from resistance to resignation to acceptance and affirmation. The reasons for acceptance by academics included the attraction of funding support, local and international recognition of qualifications, the perceived marketability of quality-assured status and a sincere desire to improve the quality of their work. The reasons for resistance were influenced by factors that can be categorised into relational aspects and value factors. Relational factors included feeling disrespected, feeling imposed upon, feelings of vulnerability and feeling unheard in the relational interactions between academics and policy officials. Value factors included seeing little value in being evaluated by people who were not academic peers, the unclear theoretical basis of policy, disregard by policy officials of internal university policy and not understanding quality assurance terminology.

### 4. Who does external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa serve and who benefits?

This research adopted the understanding of service or 'tautua', as it is known in the Sāmoan language, to suggest that external quality assurance policy is always enacted in service to something or someone. At the individual level, external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa serves the purpose of academics who see advantages in gaining quality assurance status from submitting their programmes for accreditation by the local quality assurance body. Achieving accreditation with the local quality assurance body enables academic leaders to obtain access to funding or increase the marketability of their courses to students. The attraction of having their work recognised as of quality by meeting the external quality assurance body quality standard also serves the purpose of some leaders who want to send a message to the public that their qualifications and courses are high quality. To a lesser and more disputed extent, academic

leaders in Sāmoa see external quality assurance as serving the purpose of enhancing the quality of programme documentation.

This research found that external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa primarily serves political ambitions for driving economic growth by applying neoliberal principles to evaluating higher education. The messaging on the importance of skills development to economic growth resonates throughout strategic documents produced by the external quality assurance body over the years and is echoed in the conversations of participants in this research. The narrative driving external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa is there are future benefits for graduates in the form of expanded employment opportunities, which then results in a future benefit for the country, in the form of economic growth. Thus external quality assurance policy can be seen to serve Sāmoa's national aspirations as articulated in government policy documents. These national aspirations are to access expanded opportunities for education and employment through internationally recognised qualifications.

However, the deceptive narrative of international recognition is such that it perpetuates hegemonic relationships with overseas education and employment systems and transnational membership networks, through dependence on recognition by external entities. Furthermore, external quality assurance policy places market-based economic growth squarely at the centre of higher education policy. Market-driven economic growth does not pay attention to principles of social justice such as equitable access to higher education opportunities for all Sāmoans and should therefore be interrogated before it is allowed to shape higher education in Sāmoa's context.

Overall, it is not evident from this research that external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa serves the purpose of enhancing teaching and learning in higher education. What is evident is that external quality assurance policy for higher education in Sāmoa has been primarily enacted to serve the political purposes of driving economic growth through efficient and effective skills development, and the aspirational purposes of obtaining a better life for Sāmoan people through recognised qualifications.

### 9.3 Limitations of this research

The limitations of the research may be understood in terms of conceptual and methodological limitations.

Conceptually, this research has attempted to combine the layered ontology of a critical realist lens and an analytical framework informed by the notions of voice, values, relationality and service as understood in the Sāmoan lifeworld. While I feel this has been largely achieved for this dissertation, there is room for a more sophisticated exploration of such notions in terms of critical policy research. It is possible that the conceptual foundation of this research may not seem as robust in the absence of a strong connection to more established and well-articulated literature such as that within postcolonial theory. While the use of a conceptual framework based on the Sāmoan understanding of voice, values, relationality, and service allows the nuanced exploration outlined in this dissertation, there is currently, limited theorisation of such notions and how they influence social behaviour in Sāmoa. Relatedly, their application to diverse cultural and societal contexts may be limited due simply to their contextual basis.

This research is also limited methodologically by its analysis of external quality assurance policy enacted in relation to a single university. An analytical comparison with another university may have yielded different findings. However, such a comparison was largely constrained by there being only one university that was truly national in the sense of operating completely within Sāmoa's borders. As such, there is limited comparison. Nevertheless, the analysis includes historical and transnational elements, and the findings illustrate the internationally connected nature of higher education even from within a small (population-wise) Oceanic state such as Sāmoa.

There is also a limitation in the selection of participants who were all in leadership roles within higher education and within external quality assurance policy. Such a participant profile was not the initial intention. The decision to select participants from those in leadership both within the university and the policy organization was made in the field to minimize the ethical and cultural repercussions of excluding some leaders from the research in favour of junior academics. The choice was a logistical one, due to time

constraints and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic lockdowns across the country, one month into the fieldwork. An expansion of the research agenda outlined in the previous section would yield richer findings with the inclusion of the perspective and experience of academics and policy actors at all levels of higher education, not just those in leadership.

#### 9.4 Significance of this research

The primary contribution of this research is with regard to the impact of externally influenced education policy on higher education in Sāmoa, as an example of an island state's higher education system. Previous research on policy in Sāmoa is mostly concentrated on analyses of public policy (Aiafi, 2017; Amosa, 2003, 2012; Luaiufi-Moli, 1995) with some work in inclusive education policy (McDonald & Tufue-Dolgoy, 2013). This research contributes to the area of policy for higher education in Sāmoa, in two main ways. Firstly, this case study illustrates how the decision-making on education policy is influenced by international and global narratives and practices, which are sought and even welcomed by local policy leaders. Secondly, this research shows how academic leaders respond to external quality assurance policy in higher education in a developing country context like Sāmoa. The context of Sāmoa offers a unique perspective on the enactment of external quality assurance policy because of the contextual elements that influence policy decisions among which are cultural and, societal values, and educational and political aspirations for higher education.

The primary contribution of this research to the impact of externally influenced education policy on higher education in Sāmoa is also a contribution to the body of research on education policy in the emerging states of the Pacific. This research adds to the recent work on external quality assurance policy enactment in higher education in the regional university (Kubuabola, 2013; Spiller, Armstrong & Sharma, 2021; Hayward, 2021) through an analysis of Sāmoa's experience.

The secondary contribution of this research is with regard to critical research on external quality assurance policy for higher education. In a way, this research is timely given Lee Harvey's (2022) recent call for more

critically reflexive research into the idea of quality in higher education. According to Harvey (2022, p. 145), “it is time for a more critical examination of the notion of quality in higher education”. The critical lens adopted in this research allows a critical examination of policy that has thus far been enacted to manage quality in higher education. As such, this work joins that of researchers doing critical research on quality in higher education in other parts of the world.

This research also contributes to Pacific research methods through the introduction of the matafā analytical tool for education policy analysis. The matafā analytical tool is informed by ideas that are central to the Sāmoan lifeworld such as the importance of voice, values, relationality and service. The analytical framework is based on notions that are important to Sāmoans and asks questions to arrive at a deeper understanding of the proposed policy. As such, this research follows the work of Pacific education leaders who laid the challenge at the turn of the century to consider the way forward for sustainable education in the region, starting with taking ownership of education research methods (Thaman, 2007). Analysis of external quality assurance policy enactment using an analytical tool informed by organising concepts in the Sāmoan worldview is a hopeful extension of the work of Pacific education thought leaders such as Konai Helu Thaman (1997, 2006, 2014); Kabini Sanga (2004, 2016), Afamasaga (2001) and others. Such leaders laid the foundation for the articulation of the ways of knowing and knowledge unique to the oceanic peoples of the Pacific, and it is to that body of knowledge this research makes its hopeful contribution.

### 9.5 Implications for further research

While this research has revealed a nuanced response in relation to questions of voice, values, relationality and benefits of external quality assurance policy in Sāmoa, other questions have come to the fore. For instance, if local policy leaders are responsible for opening the door to regional and global influence over local policy, how much of this decision has been determined by a sense of their self-efficacy, and how much has been determined by the perceived future benefits? Furthermore, is the phenomenon of reliance on international expertise for policy particular to the education sector or is it experienced within other

fields such as health and social development? Deeper still, to what extent are governments self-reflective about the implications of borrowed policy on the sustainable future of a country like Sāmoa, and how could an alternative contextually informed approach be adopted for policy design and enactment in education? It will take bravery to envision a policy approach for higher education that does not place market-based economic growth at the centre. At the same time, such an approach might be liberating and lead policy leaders down a different but perhaps more sustainable pathway for the future of Sāmoa and other Oceanic states. There is also scope for a deeper exploration of policy as a catalytic influence in creating new and distinct types of relationality in Sāmoan society and other Oceanic contexts that has for years valued the notions of respect, reciprocity, love and relationality.

An equally important set of implications could be posited for the future of higher education itself in Sāmoa. This research has illuminated the all-important need demonstrated at various levels for recognition of Sāmoa's capability in higher education. The desire for recognition is catalytic, influential and transformative, at the individual, organisational as well as national level within the context of higher education in Sāmoa. The implications for further research lie in questions such as: what kind of futures do Sāmoa's higher education leaders imagine for themselves and their work and are such visions driven by convictions of individual or collective benefit or both? More importantly, what role do Sāmoa's higher education institutions currently play in the pursuit of social justice for Sāmoa's people, particularly given the neoliberal steering of Sāmoa's public organisations and economy? Furthermore, how should policy to enhance the quality of higher education respond to the rationale of higher education for social justice?

A third implication for future research lies in the need to expand the theorisation and knowledge of higher education in Oceanic contexts. The world of academic literature on higher education abounds with contributions from research situated within the lifeworlds of the East and the West, and it is most certainly time for contributions from Oceania to extend the conversation on quality higher education. There is certainly scope for comparative studies to extend the work done in this research as well as extend recent

research on external quality assurance policy enactment in Pacific higher education institutions (Baird & Kula-Semos, 2018; Burnett, 2019; Spiller, Armstrong & Sharma, 2021).

In relation to policy itself as a tool of government to steer public institutions and national change in a certain direction, there is scope to explore related and as yet unexplored questions. For instance, how does education policy as a catalytic agent influence change in how Sāmoans view themselves within the collective, and are societies like Sāmoa undergoing a cultural transformation, because of the introduction of certain types of policy based on individual advancement and market-defined progress? How should higher education systems respond to the cultural, societal, and economic challenges of their contexts even as they consider adherence to the notions of academic freedom and academic autonomy? Are the notions of academic freedom and autonomy relevant for higher education in all contexts?

Closer to home, the critical issues on which I would like to focus future research activities are:

- How will/should the question of quality for higher education in Sāmoa and Oceania continue to be addressed and by whom, for a sustainable future?
- How could the notion of quality in higher education be transformed to support sustainable futures for Sāmoa and the oceanic states of the Pacific?

## 9.6 Policy recommendations

This research makes three recommendations for higher education policy in Sāmoa. The first recommendation relates to the need to conceptualise quality higher education in policy in a way that is contextually relevant and informed by relational and cultural values. This research indicates that the framing of quality in higher education in Samoa has been driven by market-centered, neoliberal ideology which has as its underlying purpose the pursuit of market riven economic growth. Such an approach has resulted in quality assurance policy relationships that perpetuate hegemony, enders low trust interactions and creates disconnection between policy actors in higher education.

While the goal of quality higher education is shared by everyone, it is important to reflect on the purpose of higher education for Sāmoa, in view of its unique context and aspirations. Is the purpose of higher education in Sāmoa solely to provide employment-ready individuals as seems to be the focus of current external quality assurance policy? The ideation of the role of higher education in shaping sustainable development for Sāmoa needs to be authentically engaged with, in order to fully demonstrate local policy sovereignty over policy intentions and actions. The alternative is to continue pursuing an adopted policy model without full cognizance of the implications for current and future higher education in Sāmoa. There is opportunity to take full ownership of the development of higher education in Sāmoa through full engagement with the question of what should be the purpose of Sāmoa's higher education?

Relatedly, the third recommendation relates to the policy approach for 'assuring' the quality of higher education in Sāmoa. As this research has shown, Sāmoa's experience with external quality assurance has been at times fraught with tension between the state and the university. The responses and experiences of academic leaders at the individual level speak of varying degrees of stress and uncertainty affecting their work. Considerable time and resources have been expended on the enactment of an external quality assurance policy framework with which Sāmoa's premier higher education institution has only recently fully engaged. The delayed enactment alongside the difficulties and tension reflected in this research suggests that an alternative approach to quality higher education is timely. Such an approach must be focused on support and enhancement, rather than compliance and regulation. The potential of a relational approach to improving quality in higher education in Sāmoa is unexplored but holds much promise for a collaborative as opposed to a regulatory approach to driving quality in higher education.

## 9.7 Final reflections

### *Research*

Sometimes transparent

Sometimes opaque

Sometimes a mirror

The lens of research turns towards

me as often as it turns away

from me, toward others

Does what is real matter

What is 'why'

Why is 'what'

The more I learn the less I know

All that remains is what for

*F. T. A. Wright.*

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## Appendix 1: Ethics approval from the University of Waikato

*Te Kura Toi Tangata*  
**Division of Education**  
The University of Waikato  
Private Bag 3105  
Hamilton, New Zealand, 3240

DivEd Ethics Committee  
fedu.ethics@waikato.ac.nz  
07 8384500 ext. 7870  
www.waikato.ac.nz/education



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**WAIKATO**  
*Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato*

10/10/2019

Dear FARITA TEPORA AFAMASAGA WRIGHT

### **Division of Education Ethics Application Approved FEDU073/19**

I am pleased to advise you that your ethics application for the project entitled “A critique of higher education quality assurance policy enactment in Samoa” was approved by Te Kura Toi Tangata Division of Education Ethics Committee on October 10th, 2019.

Please be aware that the Te Kura Toi Tangata Division of Education Ethics Committee must be advised (by memo) of any changes to the details recorded in your ethics application. Please send any such advice to fedu.ethics@waikato.ac.nz. You will receive a memo of approval once the change(s) has been considered.

Kind regards

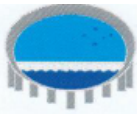

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nicola Daly'.

Nicola Daly

Co-chair

Te Kura Toi Tangata Division of Education Ethics Committee

## Appendix 2: National University of Samoa research clearance

 <b>"IA AO SAMOA"</b>	<b>LE IUNIVESITE AOA O SAMOA</b> <b>NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SAMOA</b>
<b>National University of Samoa</b> <b>Le Iunivesite Aoa o Samoa</b>	<b>UNIVERSITY RESEARCH &amp; ETHICS COMMITTEE</b> <b>Letter of Ethical Clearance</b>
First Floor, Taputo'i Building,  T: +685 20072 x 103 E: <a href="mailto:urecsecretariat@nus.edu.ws">urecsecretariat@nus.edu.ws</a> W: <a href="http://www.nus.edu.ws">www.nus.edu.ws</a>	25 February 2020 <span style="float: right;"><i>Application Number: 2020-1</i></span>  <b>Principal Researcher:</b> Ms Tea Tepora A. Wright <b>Supervisors:</b> Prof Don Klinger and Dr Donella Cobb, Division of Education, University of Waikato, New Zealand  <b>Institution:</b> University of Waikato, New Zealand  <b>Project Title:</b> 'Higher education quality assurance policy in Samoa'
PO Box 1622 Lepapaigalagala Campus Toomatagi SAMOA	Dear Ms Wright  The above referenced project was reviewed and approved by UREC in accordance with the University Research and Ethics Guidelines. This approval applies to the conditions, and procedures described in your research application. The UREC approval period is based on the degree of risk and the timeframe provided in your research application. Ethical Approval for your study expires twelve months from the date of issue.  <b>Important:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research is to be conducted according to the proposal approved by the UREC.</li> <li>• Participants must all receive a copy of the consent form before partaking.</li> <li>• Changes to the protocol or related documents are to be reviewed and approved before any changes are implemented. In the event that changes are ratified for the safety of research participants without prior UREC approval, you must promptly notify UREC within 5 working days.</li> <li>• Unanticipated problems, procedure deviations or adverse events are to be reported to UREC within 5 days of occurrence. Serious adverse events must be reported within 48 hours of the event.</li> </ul> <p>For questions related to this correspondence, please contact the University Research and Ethics Committee Secretariat at <a href="mailto:urecsecretariat@nus.edu.ws">urecsecretariat@nus.edu.ws</a></p> <p>Yours sincerely,</p> <div style="text-align: center;">   <b>Dr Tutisone Salevao</b>            Secretary            University Research and Ethics Committee            National University of Samoa  <b>SAMOA</b> </div>

## Appendix 3: Letter to the university requesting permission to access participants

[Insert letterhead]

[Insert Date]

[Insert Name and Title]

Afioga e, (Salutation)

### **REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO INVITE STAFF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS**

Talofa lava, malo le soifua. (Greetings)

I am Tea Tepora Wright and I am undertaking PhD research on “*Higher education quality assurance in Samoa*” at the University of Waikato, New Zealand. The design of my research involves Talanoa with individuals involved in higher education quality assurance within Samoa’s education sector, and specifically within the National University of Samoa as the higher education institution in my case study.

It is with great respect that I write to request permission to invite staff research participants from the National University of Samoa. Specifically I will be inviting potential participants’ consent to:

- Two Talanoa sessions lasting approximately 1.5 hours each. The purpose of each talanoa session is to have an informal conversation around a list of suggested themes relating to the research topic.
- Check the transcript of each Talanoa session, which will take approximately thirty minutes each. The purpose of this activity is give the participant the opportunity to check the accuracy of my record of the Talanoa session, and amend if necessary.
- Allow me to audio-record the Talanoa sessions. Participants may choose to consent/ not give consent, and they may have the recording turned off at any time.

### **Ethical Guidelines**

In line with ethical requirements of the University of Waikato, the following information will be provided to all potential participants in this research. The researcher is bound by the University of Waikato Ethical Research Regulations as outlined in the following points.

1. *Participants’ right to decline to participate in the research or any part of the research.*  
Participants have the right to decline to participate in this research or any part of it.
2. *Participants’ right to withdraw from the research and/or withdraw data*

Participants may withdraw from participation at any time, up until they have approved the final transcripts. Any information they have contributed prior to that point may be withdrawn from the research at their request.

3. *Participants' right to access and correct personal information*

Participants have the right to access, amend and approve information they provide to me for this research.

4. *Participants' right to confidentiality and anonymity*

Participants will not be identified or identifiable in the publication or dissemination of any findings arising from this research, without their express consent. However, while every effort will be made to protect anonymity of all participants, this can not be guaranteed.

5. *How participants will be informed about the research and/or its results*

Participants will have the opportunity to review, amend and approve the final Talanoa transcript. Upon completion of my study, they will be provided with a one-page summary of approved research findings. The complete dissertation will also be available through an online link that I will share upon approval of the research findings.

6. *How the information will be used*

The information provided will be used in my PhD dissertation and scholarly publications or conference presentations arising from my dissertation. The data may also be used for publications including journal articles, books, book chapters and conference presentations.

### **Supervisory Team**

The contact details of my supervisory team are provided below, should you wish to contact them directly regarding this request.

**Chief Supervisor**

Prof. Don Klinger  
Pro-Vice Chancellor  
Division of Education  
University of Waikato  
Email address: [dklinger@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:dklinger@waikato.ac.nz)  
Work phone: +6478384466 ext 4281

**Associate Supervisor**

Dr Donella Cobb  
Senior Lecturer  
Division of Education  
University of Waikato  
Email address: [dcobb@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:dcobb@waikato.ac.nz)  
Work phone: +6478384466 ext 8385

Should you wish to discuss this request further, I am more than happy to meet with you in person and answer any of your questions.

I look forward to hearing from you soon and thank you for your kind consideration of my request.

Sincerely,

Tea Tepora Wright, PhD Candidate, University of Waikato.

Email: [fa103@students.waikato.ac.nz](mailto:fa103@students.waikato.ac.nz); [pora.wright@gmail.com](mailto:pora.wright@gmail.com)

Phone: +64 225147358; [insert Samoa phone number]

## Appendix 4: Letter to Organisations Requesting Permission to Access Participants

[Insert letterhead]

[Insert Date]

[Insert Name and Title]

Afioga e, (Salutation)

### REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO INVITE RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Talofa lava, malo le soifua. (Greetings)

I am Tea Tepora Wright and I am undertaking PhD research on “*Higher education quality assurance in Samoa*” at the University of Waikato, New Zealand. The design of my research involves Talanoa with individuals involved in higher education quality assurance within Samoa’s education sector.

It is with great respect that I write to request permission to invite some/a member of your staff to participate in my research. Specifically I will be inviting potential participants’ consent to:

- Two Talanoa sessions lasting approximately 1.5 hours each. The purpose of each talanoa session is to have an informal conversation around a list of suggested themes relating to the research topic.
- Check the transcript of each Talanoa session, which will take approximately thirty minutes each. The purpose of this activity is give the participant the opportunity to check the accuracy of my record of the Talanoa session, and amend if necessary.
- Allow me to audio-record the Talanoa sessions. Participants may choose to consent/ not give consent, and they may have the recording turned off at any time.

### Ethical Guidelines

In line with ethical requirements of the University of Waikato, the following information will be provided to all potential participants in this research. The researcher is bound by the University of Waikato Ethical Research Regulations as outlined in the following points.

1. *Participants’ right to decline to participate in the research or any part of the research.*

Participants have the right to decline to participate in this research or any part of it.

2. *Participants’ right to withdraw from the research and/or withdraw data*

Participants may withdraw from participation at any time, up until they have approved the final transcripts. Any information they have contributed prior to that point may be withdrawn from the research at their request.

3. *Participants' right to access and correct personal information*

Participants have the right to access, amend and approve information they provide to me for this research.

4. *Participants' right to confidentiality and anonymity*

Participants will not be identified or identifiable in the publication or dissemination of any findings arising from this research, without their express consent. However, while every effort will be made to protect anonymity of all participants, this can not be guaranteed.

5. *How participants will be informed about the research and/or its results*

Participants will have the opportunity to review, amend and approve the final Talanoa transcript. Upon completion of my study, they will be provided with a one-page summary of approved research findings. The complete dissertation will also be available through an online link that I will share upon approval of the research findings.

6. *How the information will be used*

The information provided will be used in my PhD dissertation and scholarly publications or conference presentations arising from my dissertation. The data may also be used for publications including journal articles, books, book chapters and conference presentations.

### **Supervisory Team**

The contact details of my supervisory team are provided below, should you wish to contact them directly regarding this request.

**Chief Supervisor**

Prof. Don Klinger  
Pro-Vice Chancellor  
Division of Education  
University of Waikato  
Email address: [dklinger@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:dklinger@waikato.ac.nz)  
Work phone: +6478384466 ext 4281

**Associate Supervisor**

Dr Donella Cobb  
Senior Lecturer  
Division of Education  
University of Waikato  
Email address: [dcobb@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:dcobb@waikato.ac.nz)  
Work phone: +6478384466 ext 8385

Should you wish to discuss this request further, I am more than happy to meet with you in person and answer any of your questions.

I look forward to hearing from you soon and thank you for your kind consideration of my request.

Sincerely,

Tea Tepora Wright, PhD Candidate, University of Waikato.

Email: [fa103@students.waikato.ac.nz](mailto:fa103@students.waikato.ac.nz); [pora.wright@gmail.com](mailto:pورا.wright@gmail.com)

Phone: +64 225147358; [insert Samoa phone number]

## Appendix 5: Information Letter for All Participants

[Insert letterhead]

[Insert Date]

[Insert Name & Designation]

Afioga e, (Salutation)

### REQUEST FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPATION

Talofa lava, malo le soifua. (Greetings)

I am Tepora Wright and I am undertaking PhD research on “*Higher education quality assurance in Samoa*” at the University of Waikato, New Zealand. The design of my research involves Talanoa with individuals involved in higher education quality assurance within Samoa’s education sector, and specifically within the National University of Samoa as the higher education institution in my case study.

It is with great respect that I invite you to participate in my research project.

#### Participant Activities

I am inviting your participation in:

- Two Talanoa sessions lasting approximately 1.5 hours each. The purpose of each talanoa session is to have an informal conversation around a list of suggested themes relating to the research topic. Talanoa session 1 will be an informal conversation centred on the research topic, more or less following a list of prepared questions for discussion, while Talanoa session 2 will follow up conversation points from the first session in greater depth and corroborate emerging ideas.
- Checking the transcript of each Talanoa session, which will take approximately thirty minutes each. The purpose of this activity is give you the opportunity to check the accuracy of my record of the Talanoa session, and amend if necessary.

I am also requesting permission to audio-record the Talanoa sessions. You may choose to consent/ not give your consent, and you may have the recording turned off at any time.

#### Important Information for Research Participants

In line with ethical requirements of the University of Waikato, the following information may be important for you as you consider whether to participate in this research. The researcher is bound by the University of Waikato Ethical Research Regulations as outlined in the following points.

1. *Your right to decline to participate in the research or any part of the research.*

You have the right to decline to participate in this research or any part of it. Your decision not to participate will not impact our relationship in any way.

2. *Your right to withdraw from the research and/or withdraw data*

After you consent to participate in the research, you may withdraw from participation at any time, up until you have approved the final transcripts. Any information you have contributed prior to that point may be withdrawn from the research at your request.

3. *Your right to access and correct personal information*

You have the right to access, amend and approve information you have provided to me for this research. I will provide you with a transcript of all our Talanoa sessions for your viewing and checking within 2-3 weeks of the Talanoa session. Checking of Talanoa transcripts will take approximately 30 minutes each.

4. *Your right to confidentiality and anonymity*

Participants will not be identified or identifiable in the publication or dissemination of any findings arising from this research. However while every effort will be made to protect anonymity of all participants, this cannot be guaranteed.

5. *How you will be informed about the research and/or its results*

As a participant, you will get the opportunity to review, amend and approve the final Talanoa transcript. Upon completion of my study, you will be provided with a one-page summary of approved research findings. The complete dissertation will also be available through an online link that I will share upon its approval.

6. *Minimising harm to you the participant*

As the researcher, I will make every effort to minimise physical, psychological, social, economic and cultural harm to participants. You will also have the opportunity during our initial meeting to identify any concerns you might have so that we can discuss together how these might be minimised.

7. *How the information will be used*

The information you provide will be used in my PhD dissertation and scholarly publications or conference presentations arising from my dissertation. The data may also be used for publications including journal articles, books, book chapters and conference presentations.

8. *Resolution of disputes*

As a research participant, please do not hesitate to discuss any matters of concern with me at any time. If these concerns are not addressed to your satisfaction, you are more than welcome to raise them with my PhD supervisors, whose contact addresses are provided below.

**Chief Supervisor**

Prof. Don Klinger  
Pro-Vice Chancellor, Division of Education  
University of Waikato  
Email address: [dklinger@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:dklinger@waikato.ac.nz)  
Work phone: +6478384466 ext. 4281

**Associate Supervisor**

Dr Donella Cobb  
Senior Lecturer  
Division of Education  
University of Waikato  
Email address: [dcobb@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:dcobb@waikato.ac.nz)  
Work phone: +6478384466 ext. 8385

Should you wish to discuss the details of this research project prior to making a decision, I am more than happy to discuss further in person and answer any of your questions.

I look forward to hearing from you soon, and thank you for your kind consideration of my request.

Sincerely,

Tea Tepora Wright, PhD Candidate, University of Waikato.

Email: [fa103@students.waikato.ac.nz](mailto:fa103@students.waikato.ac.nz); [pora.wright@gmail.com](mailto:pورا.wright@gmail.com)

Phone: +64 225147358; [insert Samoa phone number]

## Appendix 6. Participant Consent Form

### CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS

I acknowledge that I understand and have been given the opportunity to discuss my participation in the research titled “*Higher Education Quality Assurance in Samoa*” undertaken by the researcher (Tea) Farita Tepora Afamasaga Wright also known as Tepora Wright.

**1. I understand that I have been invited to participate in:**

- Two Talanoa sessions of approximately 1.5 hours each
- Checking of two Talanoa transcripts, which will take approximately 30 minutes each

**2. I also understand that I have the following rights (please tick):**

- **Right to decline to participate in the research or any part of the research.**

I have the right to decline to participate in this research or any part of it.

- **Right to withdraw from the research and/or withdraw data**

I may withdraw from participation at any time. I may also withdraw information at any time up until I approve the final transcripts.

- **Right to access and correct the Talanoa transcripts**

I have the right to access, amend and approve information provided for this research.

- **Right to confidentiality and anonymity**

I will not be identified or identifiable in the publication or dissemination of any findings arising from this research, without my express consent.

- **Right to receive information about the research and/or its results**

I will be provided with a one-page summary of approved research findings.

**3. CONSENT (please circle)**

- a) I consent / do not consent to participate in this research.
- b) I consent / do not consent to audio recording of my Talanoa sessions.

Full Name \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 7: Guiding questions for talanoa with university & academic leaders

### ***Professional role & understanding of HEQA***

- Could you share a little bit about your professional background leading up to your current role?
- Could you please share with me what you understand of HEQA?

### ***HEQA policy enactment at the university***

- Could you tell me about the process of decision-making on QA-related matters at the university?
- Who is involved, what roles do they play, how were the decisions made?
- Regarding QA policy at the university – who decides this, and what is the usual process.
- To what extent has this remained the same over the years? i.e. has this process changed over time and in what way?
- Of all the different activities that could have been selected/adopted, why do you think these QA processes and activities were selected/adopted by the university?
- How would you describe your role in university QA activities?
- Could you tell me about your experience with university QA processes?
- For university QA decisions that you have influenced (if any) what were the most important considerations for you?
- To what extent has university or national HEQA policy influenced your own work?
- To what extent do you think HEQA policy at the NUS been influenced by international policy/international partnerships? Could you provide examples?
- How would you define/describe the benefits (if any) of HEQA policy for the university?
- How would you define/describe the limitations (if any) of HEQA policy for the university?

### ***HEQA policy enactment in Sāmoa***

- Could you please tell me what you know of the decision-making process for national HEQA policy in Samoa?
- Who was involved, and what was the role of each group/stakeholder, how were the decisions made?
- To what extent do you think this (decision-making on national HEQA processes) has changed over the years?
- Could you tell me about your experience (if any) with national HEQA processes?
- From your perspective, how do the different QA processes and activities at national and institutional level work together (if at all)?
- Regarding the relationship between different QA stakeholders in Samoa, how would you describe the nature of their interactions?
- How does this type of interaction influence the outcome (if at all) of HEQA activities?
- To what extent do you think HEQA policy in Samoa has been influenced by international policy/international partnerships?
- How would you define/describe the benefits (if any) of HEQA policy for Samoa?
- How would you define/describe the limitations (if any) of HEQA policy for Samoa?
- What would you say were the outcomes of HEQA policy in Samoa?

## Appendix 8: Guiding questions for talanoa with external quality assurance policy officials

### ***Professional role & understanding of HEQA***

- Could you share a little bit about your professional background leading up to your current role?
- Could you please share with me what you understand of HEQA and SQA's role in HEQA in Samoa?

### ***National HEQA policy enactment***

- How would you describe the decision-making processes for deciding and enacting HEQA policy in Samoa?
- To what extent has the process of deciding national HEQA policy stayed the same or changed over the years?
- From your point of view, how do the different HEQA processes and activities work together?
- Of all the different activities that could have been selected/adopted, why do you think these QA processes and activities were selected/adopted for Samoa?
- How would you describe your role (if any) in HEQA activities?
- Could you tell me about your experience with HEQA processes?
- For HEQA decisions that you have influenced (if any) what were the most important considerations for you?
- To what extent has HEQA policy influenced your own work?
- To your knowledge, to what extent has HEQA policy in Samoa been influenced by international policy/international partnerships/aid partnerships? Could you provide examples?
- How would you define/describe the benefits (if any) of HEQA policy for Samoa?
- How would you define/describe the limitations (if any) of HEQA policy for the Samoa?

### ***Institutional HEQA policy enactment***

- To what extent is SQA involved/interested in HEQA policy enactment at institutional or provider level?
- Could you tell me about your experience with institutional HEQA activities?
- How do the different QA processes and activities at national and institutional level work together (if at all)?
- Regarding the relationship between the different QA stakeholders in Samoa, how would you describe the nature of their interactions?
- How does this type of interaction influence the outcome (if at all) of HEQA activities?
- To what extent do you think institutional HEQA policy in Samoa has been influenced by international policy/international partnerships?
- How would you define/describe the benefits (if any) of HEQA policy for HE institutions?
- How would you define/describe the limitations (if any) of HEQA policy for HE institutions?
- What would you say were the outcomes of HEQA policy in Samoa?

## Appendix 9. Guiding questions for talanoa with other participants

### ***Professional role in HEQA & understanding of HEQA***

- Could you share a little bit about your professional background leading up to your current role?
- Could you please share with me what you understand of HEQA and how you have been involved with HEQA activities to date?
- How would you describe how policy decisions were made from the beginning up to now?
- Could you share about your current role and involvement with higher education in Samoa?
- Could you share with me what you understand of HEQA and how it works in Samoa?
- Could you tell me about how you see the roles of the different HEQA stakeholders and how they interact?
- From your point of view how would you describe the ‘benefits’ and ‘limitations’ of HEQA for institutions and for Samoa as a whole?
- How do you see the different HEQA processes at national and institutional level working together (if at all)?
- How would you describe the nature of their interactions in terms of HEQA?
- How would you describe your experience with HEQA activities?
- To what extent do you think HEQA policy in Samoa has been influenced by international policy/ international partnerships/ aid partnerships? Could you provide some examples?
- To what extent do you think your organisation’s support of HEQA activities in Samoa is influenced by HEQA policy dialogue in your country/organisation? (Specific examples?)
- To what extent has your organisation been involved with supporting HEQA policy in Samoa in the past? Could you provide examples?
- What major considerations would you/your organisation look at if deciding whether to continue this level of support in the future?
- What were some of the major considerations for you/your organisation when deciding whether to support HEQA activities in the past? (Specific examples?)
- What were some of the major considerations from your point of view in developing and deciding HEQA policy? Could you describe specific examples?
- From your point of view how would you define/describe the benefits and outcomes of HEQA:
  - For institutions
  - For Samoa as a whole