An Investigation into the Application of Quality Customer Service, as a Dimension

of Total Quality Management, at

The Racing and Equestrian Academy, KwaZulu-Natal.

By

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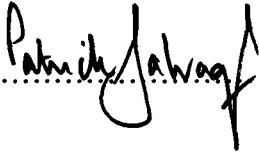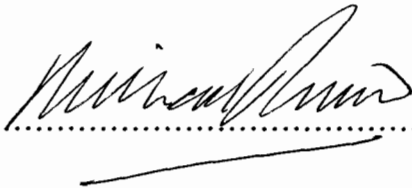
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DECLARATION

I, Patrick Richard Salvage (861 861 619) hereby declare that the study herein presented and entitled *"An investigation into the application of quality customer service, as a dimension of Total Quality Management, at The Racing and Equestrian Academy, KwaZulu-Natal"*, is my own work. Where reference has been made to the work of others it has been appropriately acknowledged. This study represents my own personal views. It does not purport to be the official view of The Racing and Equestrian Academy nor that of any body or individual in the racing industry or other equine related industries.

....

Patrick Salvage (861 861 619)

This study entitled *"An investigation into the application of quality customer service, as a dimension of Total Quality Management, at The Racing and Equestrian Academy, KwaZulu-Natal"*, is submitted with / ~~without~~ my approval.

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Prof. Michael Thurlow

ABSTRACT

This study is based in the concept of 'quality' as an ongoing concern in South African education. It deals with some definitions and views of what 'quality' is and how it is applied to the educational process. In doing this the study concentrates on Total Quality Management, a theory founded in commerce, and in recent years applied to education. Chapter 2 of the study, entitled Associated Literature, finally focuses on the concept of 'customer service' or 'customer care', an important element of Total Quality Management, as practised at The Racing and Equestrian Academy, an independent, co-educational boarding school in KwaZulu-Natal. The basic concept upon which this study relies is that students and parents are customers and that they define for themselves what quality is and whether they are receiving it or not.

The study developed out of a series of questionnaires completed in 2002 that gave rise to critical concerns about the level of customer service offered by the Academy. These questionnaires are a part of the Academy's ongoing interest in 'quality' and the views of its customers in this respect. In order to discover what its customers' views are and to analyse them, this study has employed ethnographic research methods, in that it allows for: the portrayal of the situation in the subjects' (students' and parents') terms, multiple perspectives and the description of the specific situation at The Racing and Equestrian Academy. Questionnaires, observation and content analysis have been used to record and understand the real findings at the Academy in relation to the theoretical perspectives outlined in the related literature.

The findings that are recorded in Chapter 5 of the study reveal an interesting picture in which the parent customers are far more generous in their rating of the Academy than are the student customers. Six specific sectors of the Academy's activities are subject to investigation through the questionnaires and their effectiveness rated. As in all organisations, some sectors received consistently high ratings; others received a spread of opinion, whilst others received consistently low ratings. Chapter 5 reveals the results in detail, whilst Chapter 6 gives extensive recommendations for improvement, founded on the principles of Total Quality Management.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER ONE   INTRODUCTION

Introduction

The concept of education management is a relatively recent development within the philosophy and theory of education. Inherent in most emerging theories and concepts are a range of related responses. In this instance these responses may vary from the notion that management is a function of commerce with no place in education, that it is the cerebral activity of academics with little possibility of application by those at "the coal face". At the opposite end of the spectrum, is the idea that education management is an end in itself, unrelated to the mechanics of classroom activity, with limited reference to the activities of learning and teaching or direct educational outcomes. The task of management in education at this extreme is therefore divorced from the core functions of education, which are to ensure that effective learning and teaching take place. This study and the discussion that follows falls into the context of education management and has as its starting point, the statement made by The Task Team for Education Management Development in their report entitled, *Report on Education Management Development* (1996), that,

> The task of management, at all levels in the education system, is
> ultimately the creation and support of conditions under which teachers
> and their students are able to achieve learning (Department of
> Education 1996, p.27).

A Background to the Study

Regardless of how we may view management in education, it seems fairly clear that the days when education managers were legitimately despotic rulers of their school kingdom

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are gone. Since the official advent of democracy in 1994, South Africa has witnessed widespread, fundamental policy changes in almost every area of public life. Needless to say, the democratic and, at times socialist, rhetoric that has been so popular in South African liberation politics, has found its place within the education system. Tony Bush makes this clear in *Leadership and Strategic Management in South African Schools*, stating that,

> The rhetorical commitment to participation in South African education
> chimes with the wider commitment to democracy in the post-apartheid
> era. The years of struggle were partly to ensure political rights for all
> South Africans and this philosophy also underpins educational governance
> and management (Bush, Coleman and Thurlow 2003, p.8).

Concomitant with this official change in policy, is the trend of stakeholders in education demanding greater input and higher levels of accountability from schools. One of the areas of management that is becoming increasingly important for heads and schools is that of 'quality assurance'. Related to this is the notion of "Total Quality Management", the management of the teaching and learning process in order to achieve the maximum output agreed upon by the stakeholders concerned.

This study will focus on several management issues of 'quality' and Total Quality Management as they are experienced at The Racing and Equestrian Academy in KwaZulu-Natal. The Academy is a unique educational institution, widely regarded as the best of its kind in the world. Since the Academy is not only a school providing an academic education but more importantly, a training centre equipping young men and women with the skills necessary to become professional jockeys, the function of

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management at the Academy is a rather more complex issue than it may be in a mainstream school independent or public school. These issues will be dealt with more fully in Chapter 3, *The Academy as the Contextual Setting.*

The Specific Focus of the Study

As stated this study will focus closely on Total Quality Management as experienced and practised at the Academy. As at other schools, Academy parents and students are increasingly concerned with levels of service in the school. Does the school meet their needs? Does the school include them in decision-making processes? Does the school deliver what it claims to deliver, and is that sufficient and relevant? This aspect of parental and student concern is a major facet of Total Quality Management. It is out of this concern that the questions which form the basis for the research informing this study, arise:

❖ What is implied in the notion of quality customer service?

❖ What is the Academy's policy and current practice in respect of customer service?

❖ What is the extent of customer satisfaction from the learners' perspective?

❖ What is the extent of customer satisfaction from the parents' perspective?

❖ What practical steps, if any, might the Academy undertake to enhance quality customer service?

These are the questions that this study will attempt to answer, and in so doing provide some recommendations that may improve the services offered by the Academy to its stakeholders.

The Research Methods

The research methods that will be employed to investigate the research questions that have been identified are ethnographic in that they will allow for maximum participation and expression by the subjects, allowing for multiple perspectives and extensive description. Information will be gathered through questionnaires using open-ended as well as closed questions, the responses being subjected to qualitative data analysis. This aspect of the study will be discussed in greater detail in a later chapter.

The Limitations of the Study

Some of the questions, around which this study revolves, are difficult to gauge accurately as they are so closely bound up to personal opinion. A question that may be asked is "How well qualified are the students to make statements on the efficacy of school management, a subject that they may not understand? Are their responses going to be tinted by what they want now regardless of how that may affect the school in years to come?" For example: students may wish to have longer paddock hours for their horses. They feel that this would be advantageous to their horses and that management should be sympathetic to the idea. Do they understand however, that by giving longer paddock hours now, the paddocks may become overgrazed, and be reduced to dust bowls which will negatively impact the following years intake? These may be good questions and they may illustrate a limitation of this kind of study, however the reality is that regardless of how short or long term a student's outlook towards the school may be, they have certain perceptions. These perceptions inform their understandings, be they however broad or narrow, of the level of customer service they receive. Consequently, however limited or short sighted a students understanding may seem to management, the fact

remains that in terms of Total Quality Management, those understandings are a vital component in the assessment of customer service in schools.

A further limitation of this study is a far more practical and real one. The Academy, in supplying the South African racing industry with its jockeys, is answerable to a wide range of stakeholders. While mainstream schools are rarely answerable to industry and commerce in any tangible way, the Academy is largely funded by the racing industry and is directly answerable, through its Board of Governors, to a broad spectrum of racing bodies. Clearly to get a more holistic idea of how the Academy is performing with respect to customer service all these bodies would have to be canvassed. For the purposes of this study however, and given the time constraints governing it, it would have been exceptionally difficult to address and collate the responses of bodies representing literally thousands of race horse owners, race horse trainers, race horse breeders, race club officials and jockey club officials and members. It must therefore be clearly noted that this study cannot claim to represent the feelings and opinions of all stakeholders. It is merely a representation of the views of two groups of stakeholders, the primary stakeholders, the students and their parents.

The Structure of the Study

The form that this study will take will be structured around the research questions noted above. The first question *"What is implied in the notion of quality customer service?"*, will be addressed through direct reference to the limited literature (as applied to schools) in Chapter 2, *Associated Literature*. Within the broad context of the principles of TQM, particular attention will be devoted to the definition of 'customer' and the nature of

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'quality customer service'. The second question *"What is the Academy's policy and current practice in respect of customer service?"*, will be addressed through investigating the relevant Academy policy documentation, and through interviews with key individuals at the Academy, as recorded in Chapter 3, *The Academy as the Contextual Setting*. Questions 3 and 4 dealing with levels of student and parent satisfaction will be addressed through questionnaires, the responses being subjected to content analysis, reported in Chapter 5, *Presentation of Findings*. The final question, *"What practical steps, if any, might the Academy undertake to enhance quality customer service?"* will be addressed as part of the concluding chapter and will be included as recommendations.

Conclusion

In providing a springboard for the rest of the study, this chapter has outlined the theoretical and practical areas of the study, how they will be addressed and why. Five research questions have been identified which will form the structure around which the study will be built. Some indication of the research methods that will be employed has been given and will be expanded upon in Chapter 4, *Research Methods*. Several limitations have been mentioned including the possibly incomplete understanding

students may have about school management and the narrow field of stakeholders selected for participation. Finally a brief outline of what each of the chapters will contain has been given.

For many people theory is 'airy-fairy' and unrelated to reality. This study is based on the premise that all good practice is based on good theory, that human beings theorise all the time about all manner of things. Given this theoretical standpoint it is therefore essential

that before any discussion of the situation at the Academy can take place, the theoretical

background must be fully stated and clear.

CHAPTER TWO   ASSOCIATED LITERATURE

Introduction

When considering the concept of 'customer service' it is essential to locate it within its theoretical context. 'Customer service' or 'customer care' is an important element of the larger movement towards Total Quality Management, which in turn is based on the foundation of 'quality'. Trends in education worldwide include a focus on quality and the management of processes intended to assure the quality of the educational product. These inter-related, dependent concepts are becoming the topics of increasing numbers of educationally based studies. In order to clarify the dependency of each concept on the other it may be useful to consider some of the literature that has been published. Since quality is the foundation upon which the superstructure of Total Quality Management and 'customer service' rest, some definitional agreement of what it means must be established at the outset.

Quality

As with all concepts, 'quality' may be viewed from a variety of perspectives. Hawes and Stephen (1991), quoted in Harber and Davies (1997), give an excellent example of this in the context of teacher responses to the subject:

> To the *parent* she will speak of examination results
> To the *inspector* of better general standards of reading or
> handwriting or mathematics
> To the *chairman* of the school board she may emphasise making
> good use of money
> To the *professor* of good teaching and learning practices
> To the *mayor* or *member of parliament*, effective work-orientation

To the *clergyman*, character-building

To the *village elder*, conservation of traditional values

(1997, p.113 original author's italics).

Clearly the teacher in the example quoted above is stressing different areas of quality in a school, according to the interests of the audience that she is addressing. Throughout her different approaches however, there is a clear concern with excellence and its achievement in her school. Most people would agree that quality is to do with the achievement of excellence. Related to this are the concomitant notions of improvement and accountability, which are in turn closely linked to the effectiveness/efficiency debate.

Traditionally, education in South Africa has been neither effective nor efficient. In terms of effectiveness, delivery of service has been heavily biased and ideologically tainted. Efficiency, meaning the achievement of educational goals with as efficient use of resources as possible, has also been seriously compromised by apartheid policy. McLennan (1995) sums this up well:

> The various systems have been managed neither effectively, in the
> sense of ensuring delivery of services, nor efficiently, in the sense
> of saving resources (McLennan 1995, p.527).

McLennan clearly indicates where the problem has arisen in her use of the term 'managed'. Lack of effectiveness and efficiency is not the result of lazy teachers and uninspired students. Teachers do not usually start their careers aiming to be ineffective. Students do not generally begin their first day of school hoping to achieve as little learning as possible. Lazy teachers and poorly educated, uninspired students are the result of poor management. Management lies at the centre of the effectiveness/efficiency

debate, and the quality of that management will determine, to a large extent, the levels of effectiveness and efficiency, and the quality of the educational product achieved in a school or system.

Education, its use as a political tool by previous South African governments and its lack of effectiveness and efficiency, became a feature point in the struggle against apartheid. Since the early 1990s and the resolution of that struggle, a major educational issue has been to address the legacy of the past. Improvement has therefore become a prime component of this issue. This demand for improvement has not only been concerned with academically measurable results, but with such issues as: the participation of stakeholders (including the students themselves) and the broader community, equity, accountability, sharing responsibility and democratisation (McLennan 1995, p.527).

Improvement of education is obviously not a purely South African desire, and has received considerable attention internationally. A major educational feature that has arisen out of the desire for improvement has been a move towards school-based management (SBM) or increased management of schools by internal managers as opposed to the centralised school system. Sackney and Dibski attribute the move to school-based management squarely to the desire for improvement:

> The primary motivation behind all these types of changes is to improve
> school productivity and student learning (Sackney and Dibski 1994, p.105).

As with the effectiveness/efficiency debate, management is also at the centre of school improvement. Management bodies have to either initiate the improvement or take the

'ball and run with it' when suggestions for improvement are presented by other groups within the school. Management bodies are then also responsible for ensuring that processes designed to improve productivity and student learning are not only put into place, but also that they become and remain operational. Good, inclusive management is the key to improvement.

Growing out of the trend towards school-based management has been the need to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of the new system or to account for the quality of the product. With many of the features of school-based management having been drawn from commerce it was virtually inevitable that much of the assessment procedure would also be drawn from the same source. There is a growing trend to move away from quality control, with the quality of output being determined by external bodies (e.g. inspectorate etc), towards quality assurance, and internal, continual monitoring of quality. Thus the concept of Total Quality Management has been suggested by many as an effective and efficient means for education managers to monitor and assure the quality of education provided in schools.

Total Quality Management

Sallis (1991) has given four important reasons for schools to move away from quality control approaches to education management and towards a Total Quality Management approach. These four reasons he calls 'imperatives': the moral, the environmental, the survival and the accountability imperatives. These imperatives 'set the scene' for Total Quality Management.

The moral imperative emphasises the importance of creating opportunities for students to achieve their true potential thereby meeting appropriate educational outcomes. Concomitant with this is the realisation that schools are obliged to meet the needs of their 'customers' by effectively using the skills and knowledge at their disposal. Clearly entrenched within this imperative is the prerequisite that values determine decisions. Customer needs, achieving potential, and meeting appropriate educational outcomes are all aims based on value judgements. The moral imperative therefore requires that the school in consultation with its student and parent customers, creates an environment in which students may achieve certain aspirations and potentials including a reasonable expectation of having their needs met and possibly exceeded.

The environmental imperative is concerned with the relationship between the school and the environment or community in which it is located and which it serves. It is an international trend that communities or 'environments' are increasingly conscious of quality or the lack thereof. Customers are concerned with getting value for their money, which value is in many instances based on the perception of quality. Thus parents of students at an expensive independent school may have far greater expectations of the school than parents of students at a rural school. Having said this, however, it is also apparent through the development of community bodies within schools, like School Governing Bodies, Parent Societies etc., environmental pressure on schools is increasing in all spheres of society. It is imperative that schools become responsive to the needs of 'customers' and to quality related issues. Responsiveness may be a genuine experience or a purely theoretical discussion between groups, with no real improvement resulting

from the experience. Real responsiveness to customer needs demands that schools not only 'talk the talk' but that they also 'walk the talk'.

The survival imperative deals with the survival needs of the school. A school will quite simply not survive if it fails to meet customer expectations. Consequently student and parental satisfaction are a major determinant in this debate, as their support and patronage ultimately determines the viability of the school. This does not mean that all schools should attempt to become what society at large perceives to be the 'best school'. If this were attempted not only would it result in widespread failure as 'Hilton look alikes' would require far more money than is generally available, but differing communities will have differing needs and little Hiltons, while they may be able to meet some of the needs of some communities would certainly not be capable of real responsiveness in every environment. The schools' development and response to community needs must reflect the principle of 'fitness for purpose'.

It may be suggested that performance is enhanced when reporting and inspection procedures are in place. Accountability is therefore vital if a quality product is to be achieved (West-Burnham, 1992, pp. 6 – 7). Clearly the school has to see itself as being a part of the community rather than being apart from the community. When a school genuinely sees itself in this way, the idea of accountability to the community becomes less odious. The days of leaving ones child at a school entrance and creeping away under the baleful glare of an autocratic 'schoolmarm' have gone. In an age known for its vast expanse of information easily accessible to all, the lines between professional teachers, parents and students are becoming blurred and parental/student expectations are taking

centre stage in schools and the processes being employed to manage them. Total Quality Management is receiving increasing support and validity as Heads find in it appropriate means to understand and meet the changing expectations of their customers. Not only is it an appealing theoretical stance, it is also a pragmatic solution to the changing needs of an increasingly demanding 'customer base'. West-Burnham (1992) states this well:

> TQM therefore provides an approach to managing schools which is
> sufficiently pragmatic to meet the changing environment that schools
> are having to operate in whilst being centrally and fundamentally
> concerned with values and moral obligations (1992, p.8).

The concept of quality as it is understood within the parameters of Total Quality Management becomes something more than merely the pursuit of excellence. While dealing intimately with the needs for improvement and accountability leading to effectiveness and efficiency, Total Quality Management goes beyond establishing management processes to assure a quality product. Quality itself becomes a process rather than a product and is understood in terms of relationships rather than goals (*ibid.* p.15). The customer defines what quality is for him in terms of the relationship he has with the provider, in this case the school. Is he heard? Are his needs noted and acted upon by the provider?

Within the parameters of Total Quality Management, Crosby (1986) defines quality as 'conformance to customer requirements' as opposed to innate goodness or assumed excellence. He stresses the importance of prevention over detection in assuring quality and allows for zero defects in the product or service offered. Juran (1979) defines quality

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as 'fitness for purpose' emphasising leadership and teamwork. Bowring-Carr and West-Burnham (1994), stress that Total Quality Management, through teamwork allows for the development of a culture of continuous improvement designed to 'satisfy and delight the customer'. Greenwood and Gaunt (1994) bring the various thoughts together by stating that:

> Our new definition of quality should read: meeting customer
> requirements, fitness for purpose and perhaps even delighting
> our customers (1994, p.26).

Total Quality Management clearly has a number of key features, listed by West-Burnham (1992), which include continuous improvement, teamwork, increased accountability, recognition of the power of human relationships and very importantly the recognition that quality is defined by the customer who has needs and requirements that he expects to be met.

Continuous improvement is an essential ingredient in the survival imperative of any school. The school has to improve in response to customer needs and has to be seen to be improving. No school can really afford, in the increasingly commercial educational environment, to claim that it is performing at its best or as well as can be expected. It has to strive continuously for improvement. This has to be recognised as an important objective by all players within the school 'team'.

Teamwork is a vital element of Total Quality Management and is an important instrument in the achievement of organisational objectives. With the move to school-

based management, School Management Teams take on a more significant role than ever before. For the principles of Total Quality Management to be met however, teamwork has got to be a group meeting of shared values, common missions and commitment to hard work that translates into real action. Lacey and Lomas (1993) state that:

> A well co-ordinated team can, in many cases, lead to better use of
> individual skills and more effective implementation of resources
> especially when there is a danger of duplication or of children
> 'slipping through the net' (1993, p.141).

With clearly defined roles, objectives and values, teams may become an invaluable tool in the drive towards customer service within the context of Total Quality Management.

Earlier in the chapter accountability was addressed, but let it be restated that accountability involves giving an account of behaviours, processes and events in the school to those who may legitimately expect to know about them. A debate exists around this issue as the question arises about who should have access to the information revealed in the accounting process. Within the Total Quality Management framework, the school is clearly responsible to all its partners in the educational process, its partners being broadly defined to include students, parents, community partners, school committees and boards, other educational institutions, industry (or the future employer), as well as the state via its Education Department. Quality is an area of intense interest to most stakeholders and with the recognised legitimacy of these stakeholders, accountability to them becomes a process far deeper and broader than heretofore.

If quality is not at the core of every decision made by the school, it is not quality driven and will at some stage face the prospect of forced attitudinal changes in order to survive.

Customer Service

'The customer is always right' is a phrase often heard. Obviously the customer is not always right, but it has to be understood that the customer is in a better position to know what he wants than the provider and this cannot be questioned. To do so is to disempower him and to set oneself up for failure and frustration. In the commercial world everyone knows who the customer is, but who is the customer in the school? Reponses to this question may vary and various categories of customer exist. It may be argued that the state is a customer as it funds education, industry and commerce may also be classified as customers as these sectors often sponsor education and rely on the human product of the education process to fulfil the sectors' human resources requirements. Most heads of schools would readily agree that the parents are customers since they pay for the service of education for their children. Clearly however, there is another very important category of customer, and that is the student. For some this is an awkward situation, as it may be perceived as a threat to the 'good discipline' of the school to allow students the elevated status that comes with the customer / provider relationship. The belief is widely held that education is a form of banking; that the teacher holds an exclusive body of knowledge that he imparts to the student. As early as the 1970's Paulo Freire was decrying this and emphasising the empowering relationship between student and teacher:

Liberating education consists in acts of cognition, not transferrals of
information ... The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches,
but is himself taught in dialogue with the students ... (1972a, p.53).

The importance of the student as customer cannot be ignored. They are in fact the
primary recipients of the service provided by the school, and while they rarely pay for
this service themselves, their needs are central to the service provision of any school that
has a TQM approach. West-Burnham (1994) opens his chapter on customer satisfaction
with the statement that:

The quality organisation exists for its customers, it has no purpose
other than providing products and services which satisfy customer
needs (*ibid.* p.28).

Once it is understood who the customers are, and that parents and students are arguably
the most important customers, it becomes vital to understand them and their needs. Some
schools, at their peril, claim that they understand their customers. To understand them
however, the school leadership must understand:

❖ customer values

❖ customer attitudes

❖ educational levels

❖ expectations

❖ preferences

❖ social situations and

❖ commitment (*ibid.* p.31).

Customer values are vitally important and should form an integral part of the school's mission and set of values. Customer values refer to their beliefs, opinions, what they hold dear and why these are all important. In all social situations it is necessary to ascertain the values of those with whom one works, lives, does business etc. Imagine the chaos that would ensue if an errant caterer served a tasty pork dish at a Jewish gathering. However good the pork may be it is in conflict with the values of those to whom it is served, it is not considered to be a 'quality' dish and will be rejected. Similarly, if the school does not have a clear understanding of its customers' values it will struggle to deliver the quality outcomes those very customers demand.

West-Burnham (1994) equates customer attitudes with the manifestation of customer values. A difficult lesson for any school or head to learn is that in trying to understand the attitude of students some introspection is required. Often the attitude of students is a result of their perceptions of what they receive by being enrolled at the school. West-Burnham puts it most aptly when he states that:

> The school that aspires to provide a quality service to its customers
> looks to itself first as the cause of behaviour on the part of its
> clients. Attitudes change and develop in response to the service
> provided (1994, p.33).

Simply put, student attitudes are often determined by what they see as the schools attitude to them. A quality service provided by professional and caring staff will invariably result in a positive attitude amongst the customer base / students.

To understand the customer and his requirements, it is essential to understand his educational level. In many ways the generally higher standard of education of the teacher may create a lopsided power relationship. Teachers have always to remember that their language of operation may be unclear to students. A great deal of Freire's work revolved around eradicating illiteracy in order to allow the masses to liberate themselves from dominating ideologies. For Freire, real dialogue cannot be easily or authentically entered into when one party is linguistically and 'literally' shackled. (People You Should Know: Freire, http://nlu.nl.edu/ace/Resources/Freire.html, March 2003). When this situation remains, an unequal relationship develops in which the customer is often sidelined through supposed ignorance or disinterest. It is in precisely the same way that many teachers find that they have had work done on their vehicles that was perhaps not necessary. Does this mean that everything should be simplified to the point that very little of value remains? Not at all! Communication must be effective and appropriate wherever it occurs and at whichever level it occurs.

Customer expectations are closely linked to customer requirements. Presumably parents send their children to specific schools for various reasons. One of these reasons is because for whatever reason, they have certain expectations of that specific school. Even when parents do not have a choice of school, they have expectations of the school to which they do send their children. Meeting these expectations is an important aspect of quality:

> Meeting customer expectations is the hallmark of quality –
> exceeding them is the key of total quality (*ibid.* p. 34).

Expectations are so vitally important that meeting them should form a major component of any schools mission. Exceeding these expectations, allowing the customer to feel that they were 'right all along' and providing them with 'more than they bargained for' or added value lays the foundation for 'delighting the customer'. To delight the customer should be the aim of all schools hoping for a long and happy future.

When providing a service it is normal for organisations to try to attract the largest possible group of customers by offering them choices. These choices should be based on the preferences of the customer base. It may be wonderful for a school to offer its students a choice of 6 summer sports, but it is ineffective if the choice is not based on what the students would like to play. Therefore in a boys school a variety of winter sports may be offered, but if rugby were omitted, yet remained the favourite of the students, the school, while offering choices would not have based them on the preferences of their customers and would most likely experience a good deal of negative feedback as a result. Other issues that may arise in this respect may include religion, gender issues, uniforms etc. If a school wishes to be a quality based institution it must understand, through consultation, the preferences of its customers.

The social context of the school is an important factor in the way that it responds to its customers. In order to provide a quality service the school must operate within the context of its customers. It would be foolish for a school in an impoverished community to attempt to introduce costly extra mural activities, based on the assumption that parents will cover the expenses. Many schools understand this, but on what basis do they know what they know? Is it based on teacher assumptions or actual student responses? To rely

on the voices of the teachers or those in authority without hearing the students is to create what Freire calls a 'culture of silence'. He places great importance on making a clear distinction between whose voices are heard and whose are not, in any dialogue. Invariably those who are not heard are the 'weak', the disempowered, or the oppressed. No place illustrates this more clearly than South Africa under the shadow of apartheid. The curriculum of the day legitimised the voice of Afrikaner Nationalism, giving full sway to the needs of that powerful minority, whilst the voices of the majority, the oppressed, went unheard and unacknowledged. Freire (1972b) gives the horror of this full meaning, when he states that:

> In the culture of silence the masses are 'mute', that is, they are prohibited
> from creatively taking part in the transformations of their society and
> therefore *prohibited from being* (italics added) (1972b, p. 30).

When a school relies on reports from teachers rather than students' responses, it is effectively disempowering the student and treads on very dangerous ground. It cannot locate itself within the framework of Total Quality Management and have any serious customer service policy without a real understanding of the context within which it operates, a context that gives the student/parent customer a voice.

It is imperative for any school to understand their customers' views on education. Like any business, a school has to 'recruit and retain' its customers. It has to inspire within its customers a commitment to itself, sufficient to ensure its own survival. No school can hope to achieve this without an understanding of each of the factors highlighted above.

Unless the school has this kind of information about each of its student and parent customers it cannot, with any authenticity claim to know its customers. If it does not know its customers it cannot possibly claim to know what it is that they need.

West-Burnham (1994) has isolated a range of factors that are appropriate to schools with respect to customer service. These include:

- ❖ conformance to requirements
- ❖ continuous improvement
- ❖ responsiveness
- ❖ integration
- ❖ focus on delivery and
- ❖ listening to the customer (pp.36-39).

Conformance to requirements is central to customer service as it is concerned with ensuring that the service provided is 'fit for the purpose' intended. Greenwood and Gaunt (1994) list customer requirements as: availability (the service must be available when the customer needs it), delivery (the service must be delivered at a time and place convenient to the customer), reliability (the service cannot let the customer down), cost effectiveness (it must be both reasonable and affordable to the customer) and performance (the service must do what the customer requires it to do). When applied to a school, conformance to requirements is not very different to a commercial enterprise. Learning must be organised in such a way as to fulfil the customers' needs. This may be done in a variety of ways but:

> ...a quality approach to managing learning is not a matter of
> prescribing the 'one best way' but rather diagnosing and

identifying needs and relating learning strategies to them
(West-Burnham, 1994, p. 36).

Learning should not be managed purely for administrative convenience however, but rather to further the ends of improvement and quality provision.

Continuous improvement allows no room for complacency and insists that the school continually and actively seek out ways to improve the learning and teaching process, which is after all the core function of a school. The school should constantly seek out new ways to add value to their service. This will benefit both the student/customer and the school itself. The student will be exposed to new ideas, concepts and experiences while the school in moving closer to 'delighting the customer' strengthens its own basis for continued survival. There can be no acceptance of the status quo. The school must constantly look forward and upward.

Responsiveness is vital and is one way that a school can practically demonstrate that it takes the needs of its customers seriously. It requires transparent dialogue and quick response on the part of the school to complaints, suggestions and requests. If the school responds to suggestions, complaints and requests quickly and comprehensively the message is sent to the customer base that they are taken seriously and that their thoughts are valued.

The importance of integration is becoming increasingly clear in schools as the customers become part of the decision making bodies that both determine policy and implement it within the school community. In a South Africa shedding the shackles of the past,

transparency is an important concept and one gaining acceptance in education. Customer response must become a vital factor in every decision made in the school. Most importantly for integration to be genuine rather than fancy window dressing, the customers must see the real results of their involvement. This means that effective and the maximum possible communication between supplier and customer is required. When this is in place, mutual respect and the readiness to listen are indicators that true integration is taking place and that quality is prized.

As with other organisations TQM schools must focus on delivery. It is crucial to good delivery that the provider closest to the customer is both respected in and valued by the organisation. Along with this aspect of delivery, it is also essential for the managers to be visible and in touch with the students and parents. In this respect the notions of 'management by walking about' and 'management by doing the job' are becoming highly valued. A relationship of respect must exist between the management team and the teaching staff if effective delivery is to take place. If teachers, as internal customers of the school, are respected and feel respected, their readiness to walk the extra mile becomes apparent in the quality of the delivery process.

The importance of listening to the customers is pivotal to the success of a school and can be achieved through suggestion cards, interviews, surveys, team meetings etc. School managers and teachers must take every opportunity possible to listen to their customers, to allow them to have voices of their own and to celebrate with them in the exercising of those voices. Customer voices are a constant reminder that South Africa as a nation is moving forward. All the voices must be heard if schools hope to understand their

customers and through understanding, provide a quality outcome that delights the customer.

Finally, all the best intentions in the world will do nothing but pave the way to hell unless they are acted upon. The TQM school concerned with fulfilling the needs of the customer will take the feedback received from the customers and act upon it appropriately and timeously. In short in the words of Greenwood and Gaunt, we must,

> Seek to design and create a SYSTEM or PROCESS through which
> we can transform inputs into outputs in such a way as totally to
> satisfy all customer requirements. Better, still we, must seek to
> delight our customers by giving them *more* than they anticipated.
> This may sound impossible, unless we remember that we are
> talking about a JOURNEY, not a destination (1994, p.31).

Summary

The preceding pages have dealt with a number of theoretical issues related to notions of Quality, Total Quality Management and Customer Service. To use a commercial phrase, since these notions were initially explored in commercial terms and serve commercial ends, the 'bottom line' is that quality is what the customer says it is. Total Quality Management is both a theoretical and practically applicable management system designed to help organisations achieve maximum levels of quality at all levels. It rests on the foundation of quality and the 4 principles Sallis (1991) calls imperatives:

❖ the moral imperative

❖ the environmental imperative

❖ the survival imperative

❖ the accountability imperative

The key factors that will allow the imperatives to be met and surpassed, and which all organisations, including schools, must subscribe to if they claim to be TQM organisations are:

❖ continuous improvement

❖ teamwork

❖ increased accountability

❖ recognition of the power of human relationships

❖ the recognition that quality is defined by the customer who has needs and requirements that he expects to be met.

True customer service is the vital element of Total Quality Management and is an integral management function,; one that must be carefully monitored at all times. In order to be 'in touch' with the needs of their customers (students and parents), the school leadership must understand:

❖ customer values

❖ customer attitudes

❖ customer educational levels

❖ customer expectations

❖ customer preferences

❖ social situations

❖ customer commitment.

A school principal that does not know his/her customers cannot know their needs and will ultimately fail to lead the school in the achievement of its mission.

One of the major difficulties of any theory is measuring it in reality, and how this was to be achieved at The Racing and Equestrian Academy is outlined in the following chapters.

CHAPTER THREE   THE ACADEMY AS THE CONTEXTUAL SETTING

Introduction

Before moving to the research procedures followed to determine the levels of customer satisfaction at the Racing and Equestrian Academy, it is essential to discuss the context of the study. The Academy is not a mainstream school and has specific educational as well as training objectives. Students at the Academy have roughly half the classroom hours that any other high school student would expect to have (16 as opposed to 30), but are still expected to write and pass their matriculation examinations. They are also expected to receive riding instruction and exercise racehorses for 29 hours a week. On top of this they attend two full race meetings every week. The academic staff has an exceptionally difficult task fulfilling the requirements of the various syllabi in far less time than they would have at any other school. To complicate the matter, since there is only one class per grade, they have higher grade and standard grade students together, with at least four different home languages in any given class. The riding masters are also expected to take children who have never touched a horse before and have them ready to exercise currently competing race horses within six months. For these reasons it is necessary to give more extensive contextual background information on the institution in which the study was conducted than might normally be included in a work of this nature. This chapter will therefore include a brief overview of the following:

- ❖ The Origins and Purpose of the Academy
- ❖ Official Academy Policy on Quality and Customer Service.

The Origins and Purpose of the Academy

The Racing and Equestrian Academy was established in 1958 and was known as the Natal Jockeys' Academy. In 1960 it moved to Mariannhill and was renamed the South African Jockeys' Academy. The Academy from that time onwards has been responsible for the training of all Southern Africa's professional jockeys. The apprentices receive formal schooling for their Grades 10 – 12 years as well as practical riding training. In 1971 the Academy relocated to its present location at Summerveld. The Academy has trained some of the best jockeys in the world, including greats like Muis Roberts, Basil Marcus, Felix Coetzee and Douglas Whyte. In 1976 the Academy became the first school in South Africa to accept students of all race groups, a policy that it has pursued ever since. In 1998 the Academy accepted its first class of equestrian students, who came to study the specifically equine subjects offered and to receive specialised riding instruction. After yet another name change the final name was approved by racing in 2002, and the Academy is now known as The Racing and Equestrian Academy.

Official Academy Policy on Quality and Customer Service

The staff and governors of the Academy have always been proud of the excellent riding training that has been offered for over 40 years. They are also proud of the Academy's position as the premier jockey training academy in the world. All official and unofficial policies at the Academy are therefore aimed at maintaining this position through constantly striving for excellence. The Chairman of the Board of Governors, Mr Ben Jonsson, has brought into the Academy a sense of the importance of quality, a notion that has been exported from his long involvement in the commercial sector. The *Mission Statement* adopted by the Academy in 1998, states that the Academy is:

'dedicated to providing the best vocational equine education available to school age students in South Africa ... and will supply the various equine industries with graduates equipped with substantial academic understanding and practical ability sufficient to fulfil any range of roles required of them (1998, p. 1).

The goals outlined in the *Mission Statement* are unanimously accepted by the staff and the governors, with both bodies, and the students having been involved in establishing the goals of the school in 1998. Clearly in order to fulfil these goals great emphasis has to be placed on quality, quality instruction and a quality learning and teaching environment. In its efforts to ensure that quality instruction takes place and that the students are prepared for life in the equine industries (incl. racing, breeding, training, and the various equestrian disciplines of show jumping, dressage etc) the Academy management and Board stress:

1. Developing an environment that will promote learning and reward effort
2. Maintaining the virtues of justice, honour, integrity and loyalty as enunciated in the School Song
3. Employing teaching staff of the highest calibre
4. Ensuring that the teaching staff are well supported and that they maintain exemplary personal and academic standards
5. Employing management and administrative staff of the highest calibre
6. Building relationships of trust between student and staff
7. Providing students with up to date instruction in all fields necessary to their successful transition into the working world
8. Developing a set of integrity / work based ethics in all students and staff

    (*Mission Statement*, 1998, p. 1).

Conclusion

This purpose of this chapter has been to contextualise the setting of the study and to illustrate the areas of commonality with and difference to other schools. In order to achieve this purpose background and policies of the Academy have been discussed isolating the following main points:

- ❖ The Academy is not a mainstream school, but is highly regarded internationally

- ❖ The primary objective of the Academy stresses its sports training programme rather than its academic programme

- ❖ The Academy has emerged from a period of several years of redefining its roles, which has been seen in the name changes

- ❖ The Academy, like other schools, has a set of objectives to be achieved in the form of a Mission Statement

- ❖ The Academy claims to be serious about achieving the goals set out in the Mission Statement

In light of what has been discussed in this chapter and the preceding one, and the Academy's stand on quality, this study may now move on to how closely the Academy is achieving good customer service, and if by doing so they fulfil the goals outlined in the *Mission Statement*. The chapter that follows will outline the procedures used to determine how effectively the Academy is functioning with respect to quality and customer service.

CHAPTER FOUR   RESEARCH PROCEDURES

Introduction

This study did not begin with a decision to find a topic to research, but rather grew out of previous observations and accounts. It was imperative however, that a suitable research design be developed that would make this important issue at the Academy a feasible, operational and legitimate study. It was important that student participation be facilitated so as to maintain anonymity, particularly as they would be called upon to record their impressions about a variety of issues including amongst others, the levels of riding instruction, academic instruction, and the efficacy of the principal's leadership. With a strictly followed ethical code of confidentiality and discretion, data could be collected, analysed and recorded, without negative consequences to the student participants, who form at the end of the day the customer group of most importance in a school.

Research Design

The research model adopted to facilitate this study within ethically acceptable parameters was ethnographic, in that it would allow for: the portrayal of the situation in the subjects' (students') terms, multiple perspectives and the description of the specific situation at the Academy. It would also be longitudinal, as this situation would be studied and recorded over a period of several months. The design of this research has also allowed for certain aspects of trend studies to come into play as selected factors would be studied continuously over a period of time.

Data Collection Procedures

The next major decision was the method of collecting data. This would be achieved with the use of questionnaires and observation sessions. The Academy is a small school and the sampling would have to be done very carefully. Sampling thus became a vital issue in ensuring the validity of any possible results that were to come from the study. Using the table of Krejcie and Morgan (1970) illustrated in *Research Methods in Education, 5th Ed,* (Cohen, L., Manion, L. and Morrison, K., 1999, p.94) as Box 4.1, the sample size from a total student population of 45 may have been set at 38. In order to allow for the smallest possible sampling error and the highest confidence level, however, it was necessary that all students were selected to participate in the data collection process. As a result a probability sample was taken and all 45 of the students were included in the study.

The data collected would be subjected to qualitative data analysis with the observations being coded onto grids, as well as the questionnaires being scrutinised and recorded by means of content analysis procedures. All 45 students voluntarily participated by answering the first questionnaire (see Appendix 1). In order to avoid collaboration, these questionnaires were all conducted simultaneously during a single class period, and gathered at the end of the period. Since any discussion between students was prohibited, the responses could be accepted as representing the views of the respondents, rather than becoming a group effort or response. The questions themselves were very open ended with no leading questions being asked and the anonymity of the respondents was assured. During the month after analysis of the contents of the first questionnaire, 2 formal sessions of observation were conducted and the observations recorded on observation

grids (Appendix 2 is an example of the type of grid used). These observation sessions were used to verify in practice the allegations made by the students in response to the questions presented to them in the first questionnaire.

Two months after the first questionnaire was administered a second far more specific questionnaire was given to the students. The second questionnaire was wholly concerned with levels of customer service offered by the Academy, allowing for student customers to record their impressions, feelings and suggestions. Once again the questionnaire was given to the students without warning and simultaneously so as to avoid collaboration and to allow for maximum individual expression. The students were given the option of not participating. Nobody chose to exercise this option and all 45 students responded.

During the weeks prior to the questionnaire being given to the students the parents, also a major customer group, were given the same questionnaire on customer service and asked to return it. Since the bulk of these were done via email the researcher was able to keep track of which parents had responded and which had not. Those who did not initially respond were telephoned and all agreed to answer the questionnaire telephonically. Since 2 students are brothers, 44 parent responses were obtained which represents the entire parent body. As with the first questionnaire and the second administered to the students, the results of the questionnaire given to parents were subject to content analysis and recorded on grids.

Summary

The overall design of this research study may be illustrated in the form of a flow chart as shown over the page:

Figure 1


```
                    ┌──────────────────────┐
              ┌────→│ Initial Informal     │←──────┐
              │     │ Student Accounts     │       │
              │     └──────────────────────┘       │
              │              │                      │
              │              ▼                      │
              │     ┌──────────────────────┐        │
              │     │ Informal Observation │        │
              │     │ and Confirmation of  │        │
              │     │ Student Accounts     │        │
              │     └──────────────────────┘        │
   ┌────────┐ │              │         ┌────────┐   │
   │Confirms│ │              ▼         │Confirms│   │
   └────────┘ │     ┌──────────────────────┐        │
              │     │ Research Problem and │        │
 ┌────────┐   │     │ Development of       │   ┌──────────┐
 │Confirms│───┼────→│ Hypothesis           │←──│ Tends to │
 └────────┘   │     └──────────────────────┘   │ Confirm  │
              │              │                  │ Validity │
              │              ▼                  └──────────┘
              │     ┌──────────────────────┐
              │     │ Consideration of     │
              │     │ Planning, Design and │
              │     │ Ethics               │
              │     └──────────────────────┘
              │              │
              │              ▼
              │     ┌──────────────────────┐
              │     │ Questionnaire 1 and  │────→
              │     │ Content Analysis     │
              │     └──────────────────────┘
              │              │
              │              ▼
              │     ┌──────────────────────┐
         ←────┤     │ Observation,         │────→
              │     │ Questionnaire 2 and  │
              │     │ Content Analysis of  │
              │     │ both                 │
              │     └──────────────────────┘
              │              │
              │              ▼
              │     ┌──────────────────────┐
         ←────┴─────│ Final Results        │
                    └──────────────────────┘
```
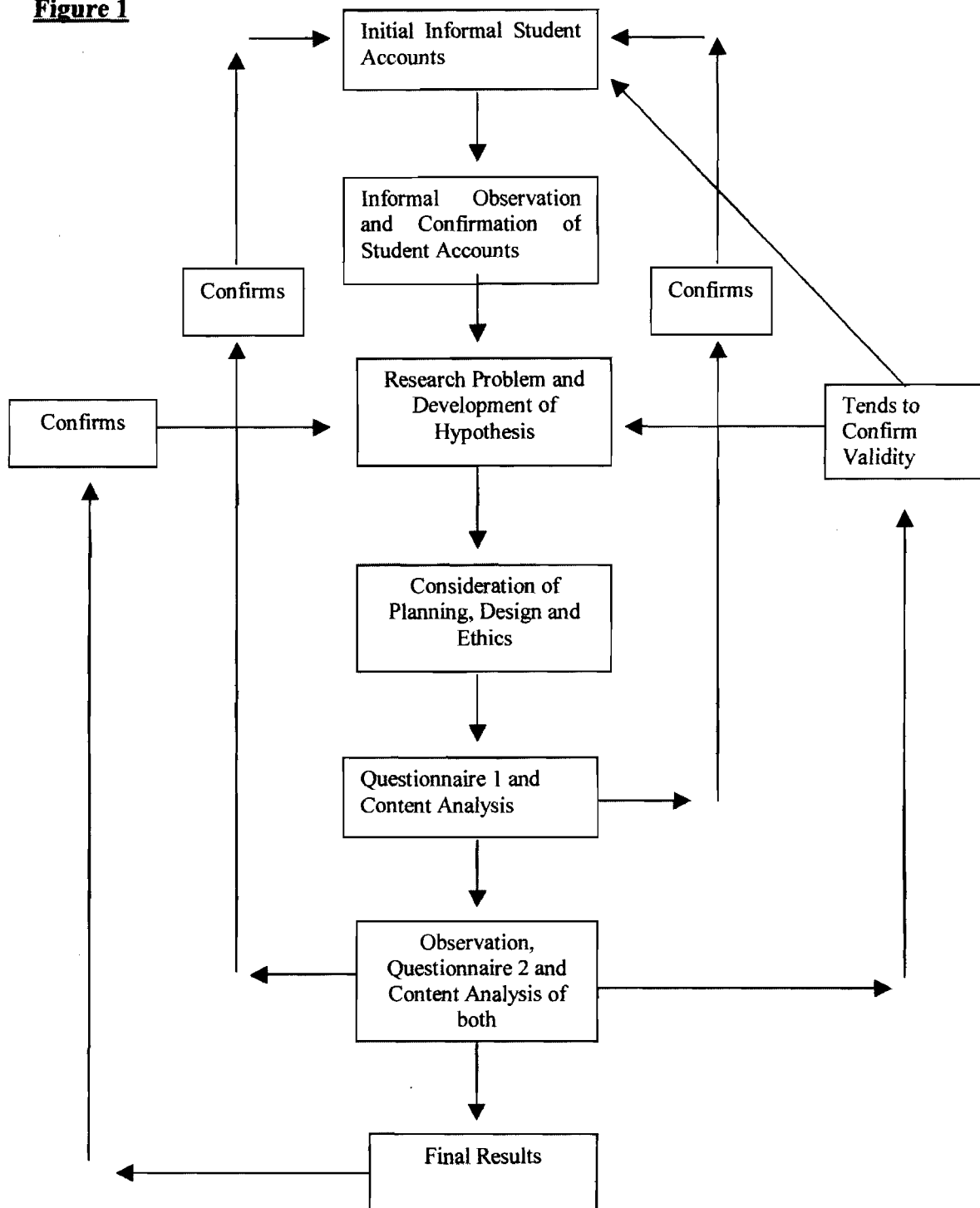
Illustration of Overall Research Design for the Study

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Conclusion

In attempting to ensure that the integrity of the study is maintained and that the results will be legitimate and meaningful, the integrity of the research design and underlying ethics must of necessity be above reproach. All of the procedures outlined above have been implemented with that governing principle. Confidentiality has been maintained, as well as anonymity up until the point when the respondents were prepared to shed that security. The open-ended questionnaires, the impartial observations and the final very specific questionnaire have allowed student responses to be both genuine and mature over time. It is therefore with confidence that the results may be tabulated and analysed and the research questions addressed.

CHAPTER FIVE   PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Introduction

The initial impetus that began this study was a desire on the part of the Head to understand some of the concerns and criticisms that the students may have had about the Academy in order to improve in the areas that they felt needed improving, since they are the primary recipients of the schools services. It was also important to understand the areas that the students felt were good and beneficial to them. Consequently a brief but open-ended questionnaire was given to all of the students and their responses subjected to content analysis. This chapter will outline the findings that were revealed by this initial questionnaire to the students as well as the results of the second questionnaire that was given to both students and parents.

The Results

Results of the Initial Questionnaire

The first questionnaire was given to the students during the final week of April 2003 (see Appendix 1). Of the three questions asked only Question 1 (What I like about the Academy) and 2 (What I dislike about the Academy) are of real relevance to this study, the third (What is the meaning of life?) being given as a foil to deflect the students from concentrating solely on their likes and dislikes of the Academy. A content analysis of what they "like about the Academy" reveals a very predictable picture. Table (pg. 40) shows that of the 45 respondents, 33 gave horse riding or the riding training that they

received as the thing they liked most about the Academy. 73% of the students made positive statements about the horse riding and the riding training. The other most common responses were the teachers receiving 27 positive responses, giving a percentage of 60%. The students also stated that the 'matric privileges' were well-liked (presumably by the current matrics more than anyone else) receiving 11 positive comments or 24%. 9 respondents (20%) also mentioned school as something they liked. All the other 'likes' mentioned received only between 1 and 4 responses each. This was a very encouraging set of responses as training; those giving the training and the venue in which the training is received were all frequently mentioned.

The responses to what they "dislike about the Academy" were also widely dispersed with three factors receiving far more responses than any of the others. These negative factors include 22 responses (49%) about the food, 17 (38%) responses about the weekend rule and 16 (36%) about the state of the boys' dormitory. The negative comments about the food ranged from it being greasy and badly prepared to simply being wholesome but monotonous. The major areas of concern regarding the boys' dormitory were the aging bathrooms, peeling paint and lack of privacy in the open dormitory. The weekend rule that the students do not like states that Gr 10 – 11 students may only sign out for 1 weekend a month. The responses clearly showed that they wished to be allowed out more regularly. 7 (16%) students mentioned various teachers negatively, although no teacher received more than 2 negative comments individually. 6 (14%) students spoke out about how they disliked wearing jodhpurs as they revealed their bottoms (girls) or

thin legs (boys). Table 2 over the page gives a content analysis of this question and the factors brought up in response to it.

Table 1

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	Total 45
Riding/Training	xx	xx	xx	xx	xx	xx	xx	xx	xx	xx	xx	xx	xx	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	33
Sports Afternoon	x	x	x	x																	4
The new bus	x																				1
School	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x												9
Teachers	xx	xx	xx	xx	xx	xx	xx	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	27
Friends	x	x	x	x																	4
The Rules	x	x																			2
Matric Priveleges	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x										11

Content Analysis   Questionnaire 1   What I Like about the Academy

Table 2

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	Total 45
The Food	xx	xx	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	22
Insufficient Time	x																				1
Stealing	x	x	x																		3
Boys' Dormitories	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x					16
Wearing Jodhpurs	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x													8
Weekend Rule	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x				17
Boys Rude to Girls	x																				1
Teachers	X	X	X	X	X	X	X														7

Content Analysis   Questionnaire 1   What I Dislike about the Academy

These content analysis tables replicate the actual ones developed from the student responses and may be illustrated as graphs, which will clearly highlight the areas of delight and concern for the students. The graphs in Figures 2 and 3 over the page illustrate the results of the content analyses for questions 1 and 2 of the first questionnaire shown in the tables above.

Figure 2
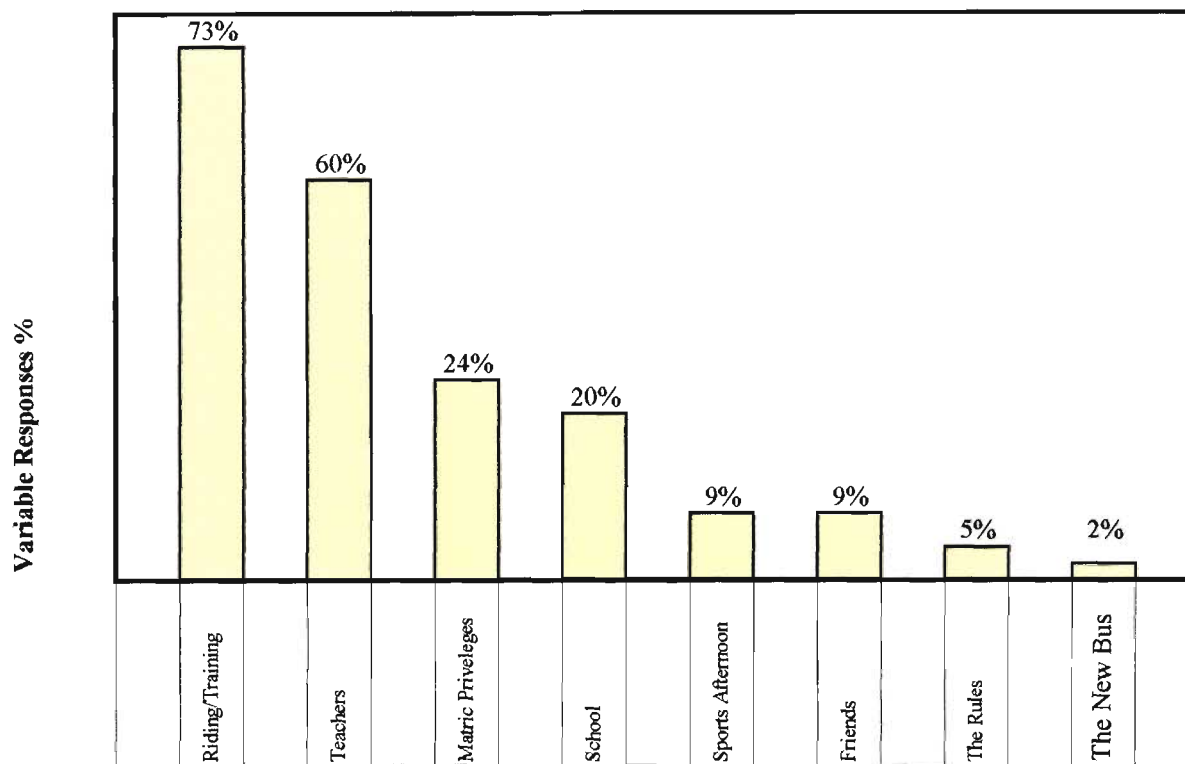
73%
60%
24%
20%
9% **9%**
5%
2%

Variable Responses %

Riding/Training
Teachers
Matric Priveleges
School
Sports Afternoon
Friends
The Rules
The New Bus

Variables in Descending Order

Content Analysis Graph   Questionnaire 1   What I Like about the Academy

Figure 3

49%
38%
36%
16%
14%
7%
2% **2%**

Variable Responses %

The Food
Weekend Rules
Boys' Dormitories
Teachers
Wearing Jodhpurs
Stealing
Insufficient Time
Rude Boys

Variables in Descending Order

Content Analysis Graph   Questionnaire 1   What I Dislike about the Academy

41
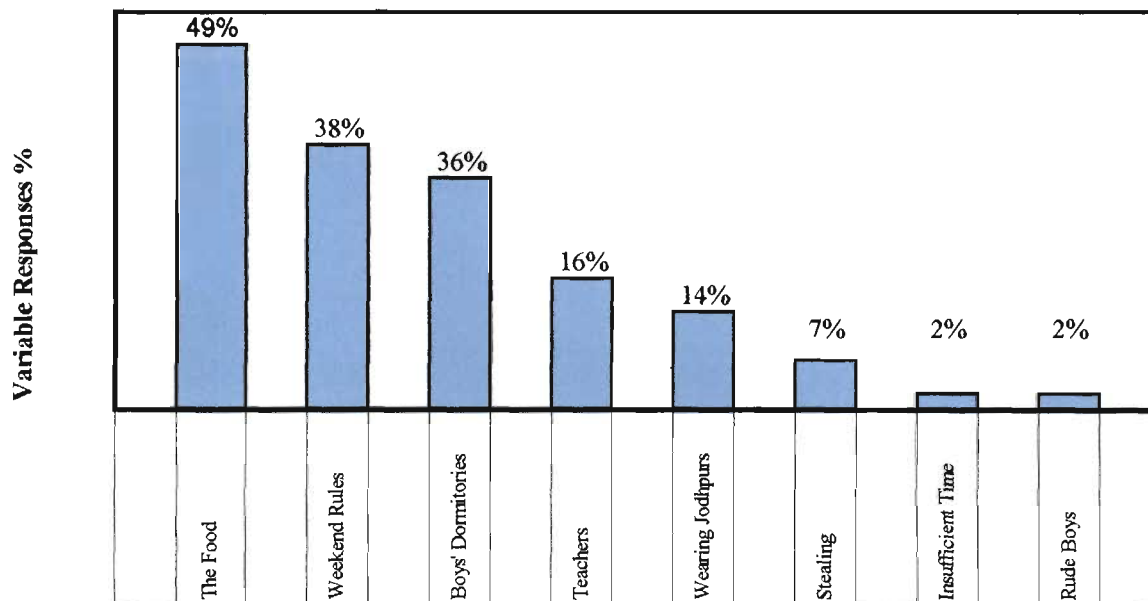
The expression of the statistics are interesting as they give the first indicators of what the students like, or where they feel they are being well served, and what they dislike, or where they feel they are not being well served. Clearly the management of the Academy was pleased with the positive commentary and it was decided that in order to ascertain how accurately the students perceived the problem areas, a formal programme of observation and inspection was implemented during the following month, May 2003.

The Results of the Observation and Inspection Processes

In the student responses about the food and the dormitory, they recorded such comments as:

- ❖ The food is terrible especially the mince

- ❖ The food is not nice, we struggle to eat it, the salad is pap (sic)

- ❖ Most of the time the food is not cooked

- ❖ The dormitory leaks when it rains

- ❖ The dormitory smells

- ❖ I dislike the dorms because there isn't privicy (sic)

One of the tasks of the observation process was to record the accuracy with which the students had described the state of the boys' dormitories. It was already known to management that these dormitories were shabby, but closer inspection revealed that:

- ❖ The roofs were in fact leaking

- ❖ The leaks had left the carpets smelling

- ❖ Several wall had areas of peeling paint, and

- ❖ The bathrooms were outdated and plagued with aging plumbing.

The other major tasks resulting from this initial questionnaire and content analysis was to ascertain the frequency with which poorly prepared food was served. This was achieved by recording the quality of the food served during the course of a week on an observation grid. Table 3 records the frequency with which poorly prepared food was served during the week of May 11 – 16, 2003.

Table 3

	Sun 11th			Mon 12th			Tues 13th			Wed 14th			Thur 15th			Fri 16th			
	B	L	S	B	L	S	B	L	S	B	L	S	B	L	S	B	L	S	Total
Greasy Food	x					x							x						3
Poorly Prepared Mince								x											1
Wilted Salad							x												1
Insufficient food															x				1
Total																			6

Observation Grid on Food Quality for the week 11 - 16 May 2003

From this rudimentary observation process it was clear that there was truth in what the students had reported about the food. On five of the six observation days, there was at least one instance of poorly prepared food. 6 of the 18 meals served during the period were poorly prepared, whilst the other 12 were acceptable or well prepared. This translates into a 'quality mark' of 66%.

It was clear from this questionnaire, the content analysis thereof, and the subsequent inspection and observation period that the students had made some salient points about the dormitories and the food. These results are clearly unacceptable when Total Quality Management requires a constant striving for excellence which Kanter in her book *The Change Masters (1984)* reduces to the capacity to change. The Academy and its management's ability to change and improve would be tested by these results. The most

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important starting point would involve gathering far more comprehensive information from the students about various aspects of the Academy and particularly how they and there parents viewed its level of customer service or customer care.

The Results of the Customer Care Questionnaire

The Customer Care Questionnaire took some time to be formulated and approved by the Chairman for dissemination, but this was achieved by the end of June. All students were given the questionnaire at the same time on the day after they returned to the Academy for the third term. It was administered without warning in a joint sitting to avoid any kind of preparation by the students. At the same time the same questionnaire was emailed, faxed and posted to parents. Whereas the students were all able to return it to their respective class teachers within an hour, it took some weeks to obtain the questionnaires from all the parents. Ultimately some of the parents responded telephonically in order to complete it. In this way responses were gathered from all 45 students as well as all 44 parents. The responses of both customer groups to each question will be dealt with and graphed together in the pages that will follow.

The first question dealt once again with the likes and dislikes of the two customer groups. Predictably the results of the students were very similar to those received in the initial questionnaire administered two months previously. The parents however had never been polled and their responses are quite different to those of their children. Both sets of responses are tabled over the page in Figures 4 and 5.

Figure 4
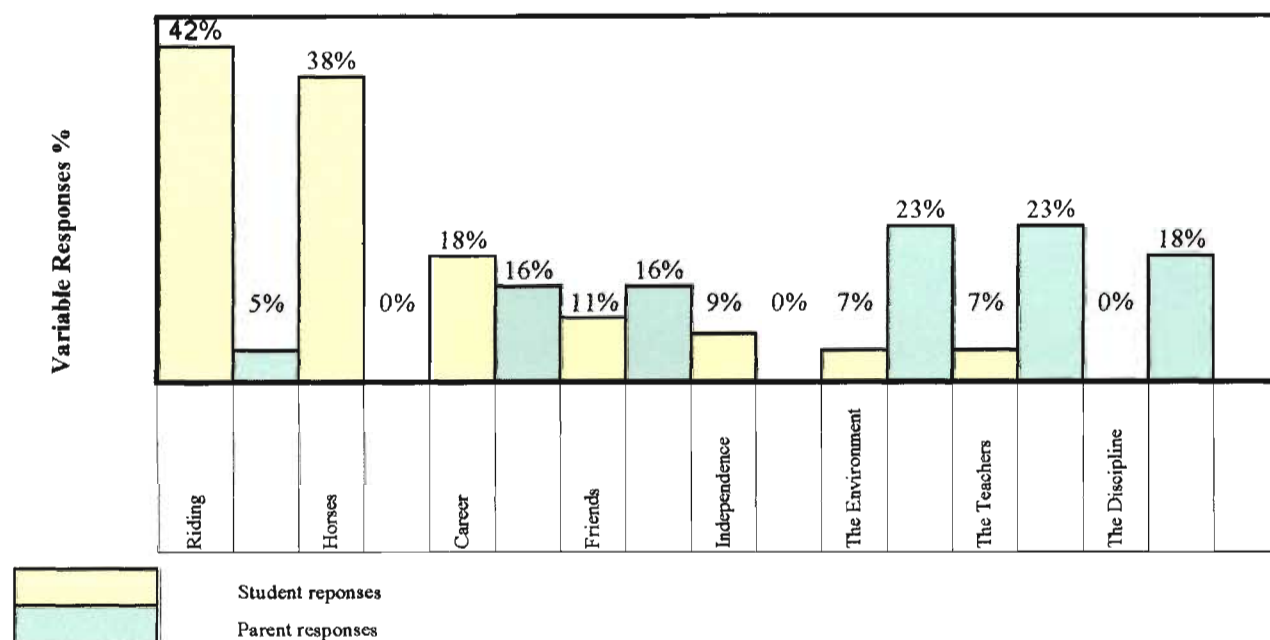
Figure 4 bar chart data (Variable Responses %):

Variable	Student responses	Parent responses
Riding	42%	5%
Horses	38%	0%
Career	18%	16%
Friends	11%	16%
Independence	9%	0%
The Environment	7%	23%
The Teachers	7%	23%
The Discipline	0%	18%

Variables in Descending Order (based on student responses)

Content Analysis Graph   Questionnaire 2   What I Like about the Academy

Figure 5

Figure 5 bar chart data (Variable Responses %):

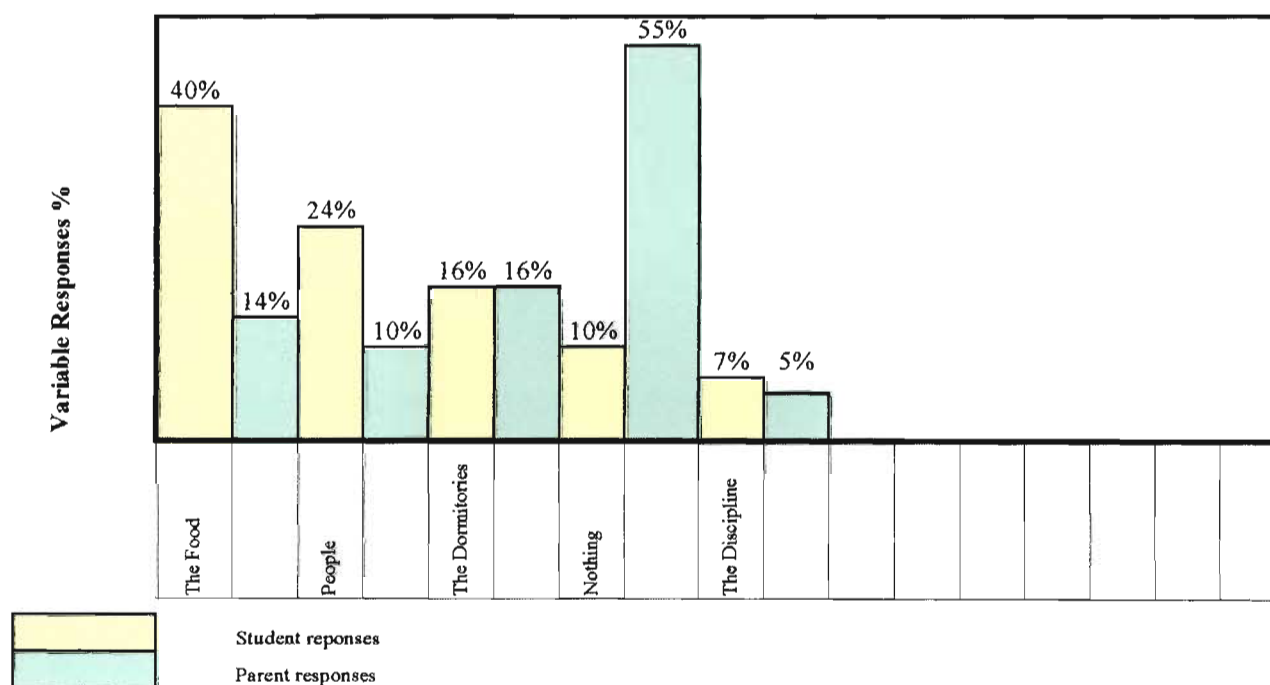| Variable	Student responses	Parent responses
The Food	40%	14%
People	24%	10%
The Dormitories	16%	16%
Nothing	10%	55%
The Discipline	7%	5%

Variables in Descending Order (based on student responses)

Content Analysis Graph   Questionnaire 2   What I Dislike about the Academy

45

The student responses to the question "What is the one thing you like most about the Academy?" are again grouped around the riding, horses and training aspects of the Academy. Noticeably the teachers got far fewer positive responses than previously, whilst this was one of the most common responses from the parents. As in the initial questionnaire, 'friends' was a factor for 11% of the students, whilst 'friends' or 'friendliness' was another important factor for parents receiving 7 positive responses (16%). An interesting answer given by 18% of the parents was the discipline at the Academy, which they perceived to be good, whilst for the students, the only comments made about the discipline were negative ones suggesting that it was too strict.

The responses to the question "What is the one thing you dislike most about the Academy?" had shifted somewhat since the initial questionnaire. Most notably was the boys' dormitories which had dropped from 36% negative responses to 16%. This was possibly due to the complete replacement of the roof that was affected during the July holiday. One of the key factors in Total Quality Management theory and practice is the concept of responsiveness. It is vital that an organisation responds quickly to criticism from its customers. The replacement of the roof was evidence of this, yet was still clearly not enough as 7/45 students (and 7/23 boys) still spoke of the dormitories negatively. In the other area of intense criticism however, insufficient responsiveness by the Academy management was evident in the negative commentary about the food. 40% of the students stated that they did not like the food for one reason or another and 14 % of parents made the same point. Whilst this was down from the first questionnaire, it was clearly still a problem and would need urgent attention. One of the most heartening

aspects of this section of Question 1 was the number of respondents stating that there was nothing they disliked about the Academy. This was the 4th most common response of students and the most common response from parents, receiving more than 3 times the number of responses from parents than any other point.

Question 2 of the questionnaire asked two very specific questions, one open ended (Why did you enrol / enrol your child at the Academy?) and one requiring a grading of how far their expectations had been met. Student and parental responses were very similar and are shown in Table 4 below:

Table 4

	Students /45	Students %	Parents /44	Parents %
Career	29	65%	33	75%
To learn about horses	15	33%	11	25%
To make a difference	1	2%	0	0%

Table of Results Reasons for Enrolment

Both parents and students state by overwhelming majorities that the primary reason for enrolment at the Academy was to pursue a career either as a jockey or in the equine industry in a variety of capacities. What is more interesting however, are the responses on the ordinal scale from 'fully' to 'not at all'. These responses are recorded on the bar graph (Figure 6) over the page:

Figure 6
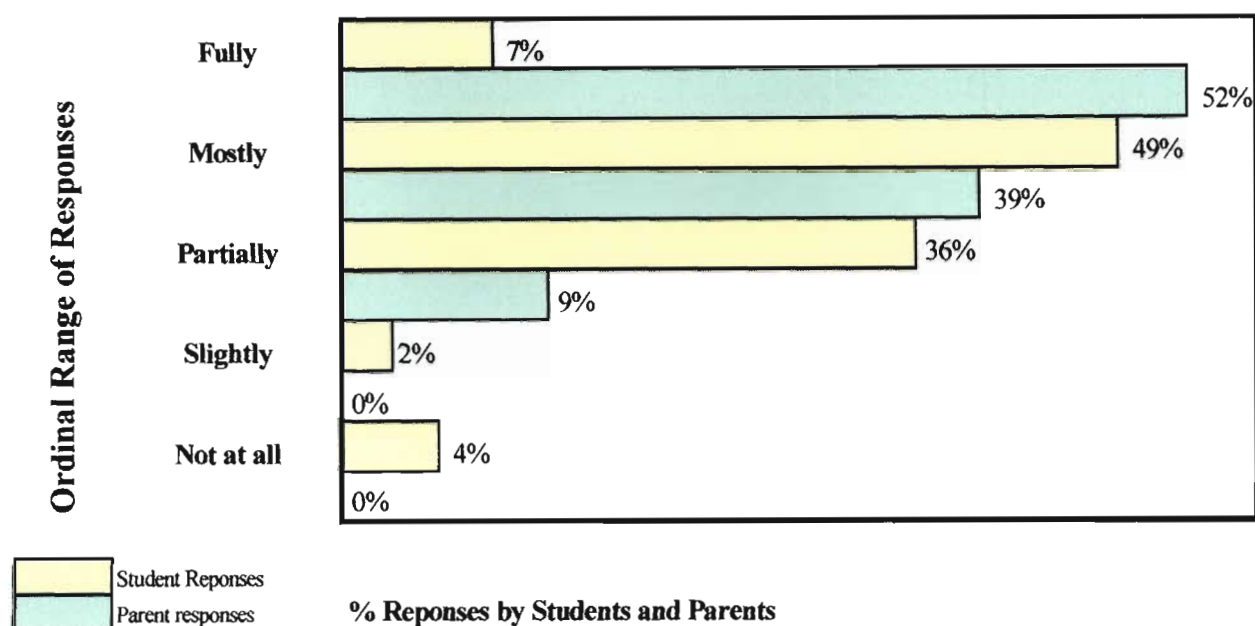
Graph of Responses Question 2   How far have expectations been met?

Whilst the reasons for enrolment stated by the two customer groups correlate closely, how far there various expectations have been met are not as closely related. Whilst 91% of the parent body felt that their expectations had been met fully or mostly, only 56% of the students responded in the same way. Perhaps a large part of this difference is due to more 'realistic' expectations of the parents, tempered by years of experience. What is worrying is that 36% of the students felt that their expectations had only been partially met. Reasons for their feeling this way are not called for in this questionnaire, which is perhaps a limitation of the instrument. The trend that is already becoming clear from these early questions however, is that the parents are more favourably disposed to the efforts of the Academy than are the student customers. This was to become increasingly clear in their responses to the questions that followed.

Question 3 is a complex question and provides an ordinal scale of responses for 5 sub-questions. The scale of responses called for range include:

A score of 1 = unacceptable

A score of 2 = poor

A score of 3 = satisfactory

A score of 4 = good

A score of 5 = excellent.

The student and parent customers were asked to score the following areas from the options above: The level of riding instruction, the provision of horse care, the level of educational instruction, the academy administration and leadership, care provision for students, and the physical facilities (dormitories, stables, classrooms etc). Their various responses are tabulated in Table 5 over the page. Figure 7, (p, 51), outlines the percentage of responses from students and parents that rate the areas covered in this question as 'good' or 'excellent'.

In every respect the parents were more positive about the levels of service delivery at the academy than the students were. This could be the result of several factors. Perhaps the parents are more positive about the Academy because they are not directly subjected to the negative aspects of life at a boarding school. After all the parents are not subject to discipline, nor do they have to eat food they may not like. Neither do they have to live in a dormitory that is shabby. This however, may be a little harsh towards the parents, as one would assume that they would want at least what they perceived to be the best for their children. Perhaps having come through school themselves, mainly being in their

Table 5

Sub-questions	Range of Scores per Sub-question	Student and Parent Responses			
		Student /45	Student %	Parent /44	Parent %
The Level of Riding Instruction	1	2	4%	0	0%
	2	0	0%	0	0%
	3	5	11%	6	13%
	4	23	52%	13	30%
	5	15	33%	25	57%
Provision of Horse Care	1	0	0%	0	0%
	2	6	13%	0	0%
	3	14	31%	4	10%
	4	20	44%	20	45%
	5	5	11%	2	45%
Level of Educational Instruction	1	0	0%	0	0%
	2	3	7%	1	2%
	3	8	18%	3	7%
	4	25	56%	15	34%
	5	8	18%	24	55%
Administration and Leadership	1	0	0%	0	0%
	2	4	9%	0	0%
	3	14	31%	0	0%
	4	23	51%	14	32%
	5	4	9%	30	68%
Care Provision for Students	1	1	2%	0	0%
	2	5	11%	1	2%
	3	19	42%	1	2%
	4	15	33%	18	41%
	5	5	11%	24	55%
The Physical Facilities	1	4	9%	0	0%
	2	9	20%	4	9%
	3	17	38%	8	18%
	4	14	31%	17	39%
	5	1	2%	15	34%

Table of Responses Question 3

40s and having worked for 20 years or more, they have sufficient experience to put the Academy, its positive and negative aspects, into the wider perspective of life beyond the immediate demands of the teenage years.

Figure 7
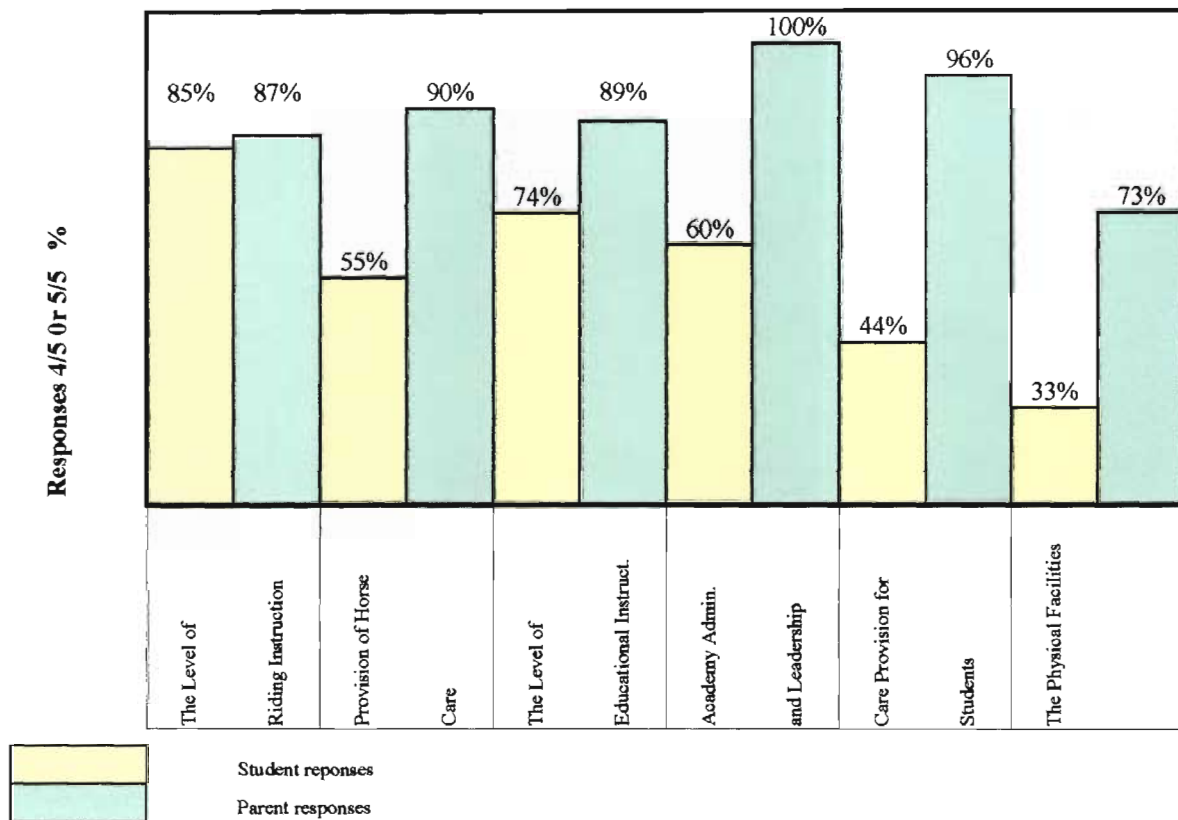
Sub-questions 1 to 6
Ordinal Graph Question 3 'Good' and 'excellent' ratings to aspects of student life

Questions 4 – 9 which followed, all delved a little more deeply into the brief responses given to the sub-questions above.

Question 4 examined a little more closely the responses to the level of riding instruction at the Academy. This is a vital area as it is really the core function of the Academy. The students as shown by their response to Question 2, enrol to receive career based training,

rather than an academic education. Customer responses to this sector of the Academy's activities are therefore of critical importance. Question 4.2 called for an opinion of how closely related student riding success was to the level of riding instruction and followed up in Question 4.3 with an opinion on how well student and parent customers felt the students were doing. Of the 45 students who participated in this project, 20 (44%) felt that the level of student success was 'closely related' to the level of riding instruction, 21 (47%) felt that the two factors were 'somewhat related' while only 4 (9%) felt there was nor relation at all. Parental opinion leaned much more heavily towards a close relationship with 33 / 44 (75%) responses. 10 (23%) parents felt that the two were somewhat related and only 1 parent (2%) felt that there was no correlation between the two factors whatever. What was perhaps more important than this question was the follow up question which called for an opinion from those who had said that there was a close correlation, on how well the students were performing. This question was an important one because it called for an opinion from those who felt that the level of riding instruction was in fact affecting negatively or positively the levels of student riding success at races and in shows. The responses are illustrated in Table 6 below:

Table 6

	Performance Rating of Students %				
	Excellent	Good	Satisfactory	Erratic/Poor	Unacceptable
Student Opinion	15%	80%	5%	0%	0%
Parent Opinion	36%	55%	9%	0%	0%

Table illustrating performance rating Oquestionnaire 2 Question 4.3

It is encouraging to note that over 90% of both parent and student customers were of the opinion that the students were achieving 'good' or 'excellent' results as a consequence of their riding instruction. As previously stressed in Chapter 2, quality is defined by the customer rather than the provider and must conform to customer requirements. It would appear from these scores that the majority of students and parents were pleased with the level of riding instruction (as seen in Question 3) and that those who linked student performance to their instruction received were also pleased with the results. However, as also stated previously there must always be a plan for improvement, which ultimately will allow for "zero defects" (Crosby quoted in West-Burnham 1992, p. 17).

The level of educational instruction as ascertained through Question 5 was judged by 78% of students and 86% of parents to be good or excellent. Whilst this is a positive response there were 20% of the students and 14% of parents who felt that the level of educational instruction given was only satisfactory or poor. This is too high a percentage to be glossed over and students and parents made several suggestions for improvement. Table 7 below is a content analysis of these suggestions:

Table 7

Sugestions for Improvement	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total
Teach more creatively	xx	xx	xx	xx	xx	x	x	x	x	x	15
Teachers too soft	x	x	x	x							4
Students lazy	x	x									2
Give extra lessons	x	x									2
Insufficient time/ Need more time	x	x	x	x	x						5

Content Analysis   Student and Parent suggestions to improve educational instruction

It is interesting to note that all the responses stating that the teachers were too soft and that there were lazy students were student responses. Since no students complained that the teachers were too hard, it may be suggested that a little more firmness on the part of the teachers with respect to lazy students may not go amiss. More disturbing than this however was the number of responses calling for more creative teaching. This is an area of grave concern, as the Academy students have far fewer classroom hours than students in mainstream schools, although they have to get through the same amount of work. Add to this the fatigue that so many of the students experience after 3 or 4 hours stable work and riding prior to the commencement of the school day, and it becomes imperative that the teachers must use the most innovative and effective teaching methods at their disposal. This is clearly an area in which improvement is necessary.

A fascinating aspect of this study would be the analysis of responses to Question 6 dealing with the administration and leadership of the Academy. In discussing the role of management in quality assurance and improvement, West-Burnham (1992) states that:

> The key process of improving work processes is to add value, to make the process and thereby its product closer to customer requirements and so of higher quality (p. 43).

Since it is the task of school leadership to motivate the cause for continual improvement and Total Quality Management, it would be interesting to see how parents and students rated the customer service offered by the administrative and leadership staff of the Academy.

On the questionnaire 'administration' was defined as financial and secretarial staff. Students and parents lodged the following results:

Figure 8

Range of Responses

Student reponses
Parent responses
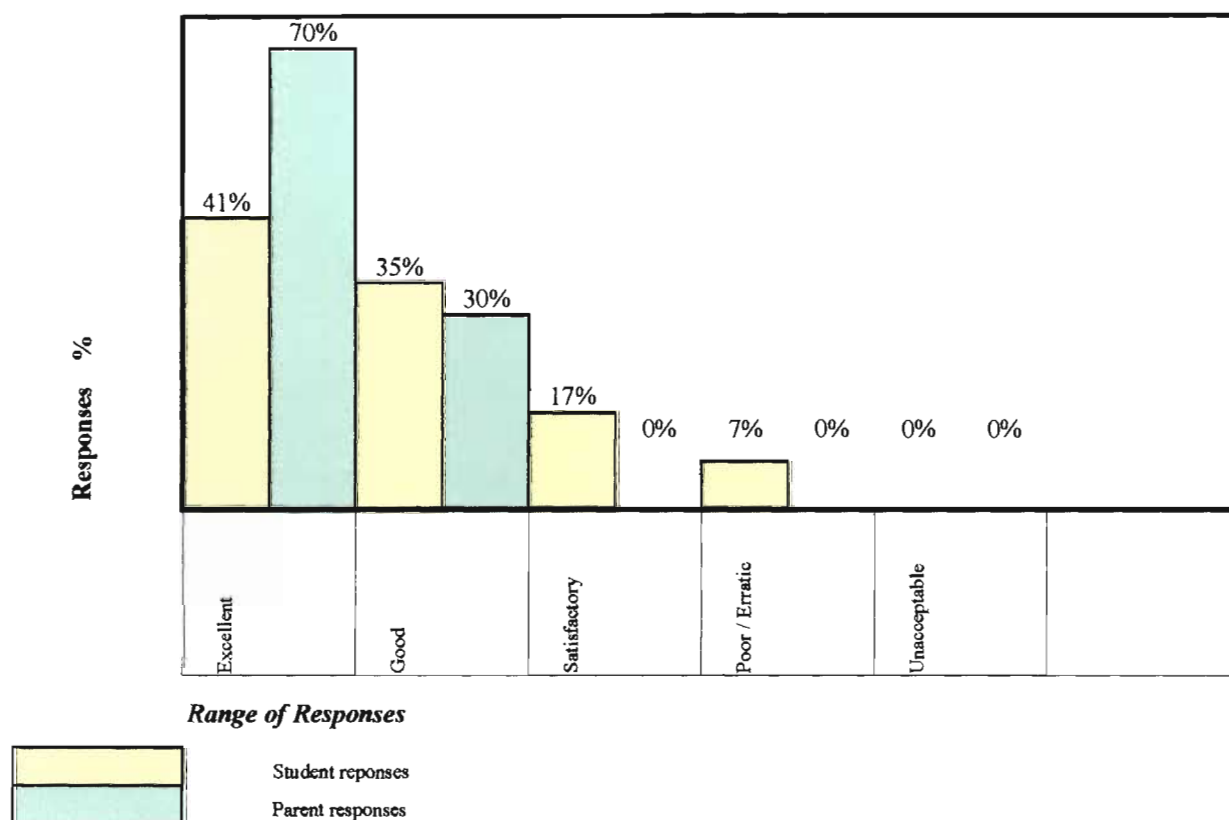
Ordinal Graph Question 6 How efficiently do you think the Academy is being administered?

All of the parents felt that the administration of the Academy was either 'good' or 'excellent', which is most encouraging considering they are for the most part, working people who have considerable experience in dealing with administrative staff and processes in industry and in other schools that their children have attended. The students however, were not as enthusiastic and only 73% rated the Academy's administrative capability as good or excellent. Very little advice was offered in Question 6.2, but of the

9 pieces given, 5 (all student responses) felt that the administrative staff could be more helpful.

Leadership was defined as the 'principal' and this gave the students and parents the opportunity of rating the Head as well as giving him advice to improve his job performance and therefore his levels of customer service. Figure 9, the graph below, records the ordinal ratings given:

Figure 9

Range of Responses

☐ Student reponses
☐ Parent responses

Ordinal Graph Question 6 How efficiently do you think the Academy is being led?
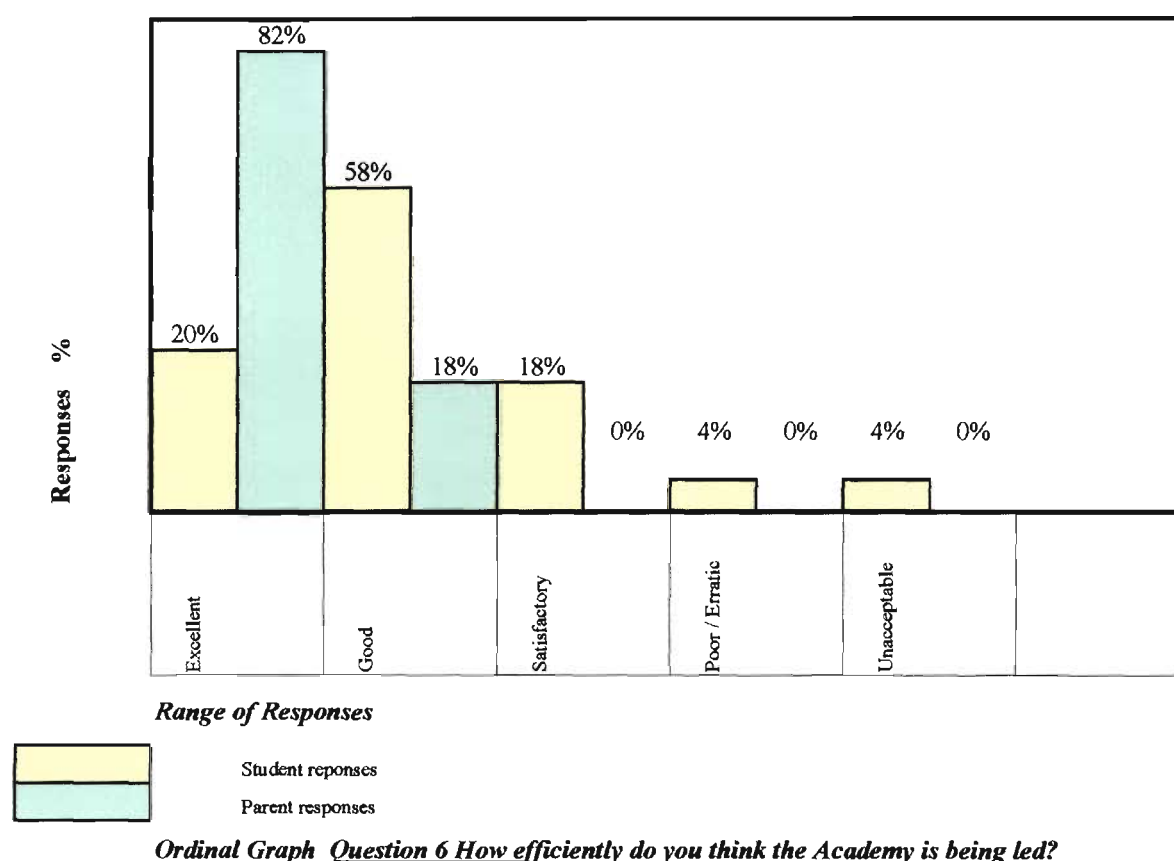
A content analysis of the advice given highlighted some very interesting perceptions. The most frequently mentioned piece of advice for the Head from the students was to

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become stricter. 18% of the student body mentioned this point, while 11% felt that he was too strict and should relax a little! The only other advice given that received more than 1 response was to create more time in the days for students to relax. The most commonly mentioned piece of advice (4 responses or 9%) from the parents was that more school – parent communication was necessary. The only other piece of advice from parents to the Head was to be stricter with the students (3 responses or 7%). Because the 2 student responses that rated the Head's performance as poor or unacceptable did not give any advice one is left to guess at what he had done or not done to upset those particular students.

On the whole Question 6 revealed a healthy picture of good administration and leadership. While pleasing, there is room for improvement particularly where the student customers are concerned.

Care provision is an important aspect of any school but especially of a boarding school where parents rely heavily on the staff to guide and see to the welfare and happiness of their children. The students also, whether they wish to recognise it or not need a responsible adult to guide and advise them through an oftentimes confusing period of life. Thus health care and pastoral care is an essential part of any quality conscious school. The students and parents rated these aspects of the Academy's approach to customer service as part of Question 7.

The provision of health care received a very mixed response from students, but an overwhelmingly positive one from the parents. Figure 10, the graph below, gives a breakdown of student and parent responses to the health care provision given at the Academy.

Figure10

Range of Responses

Student reponses
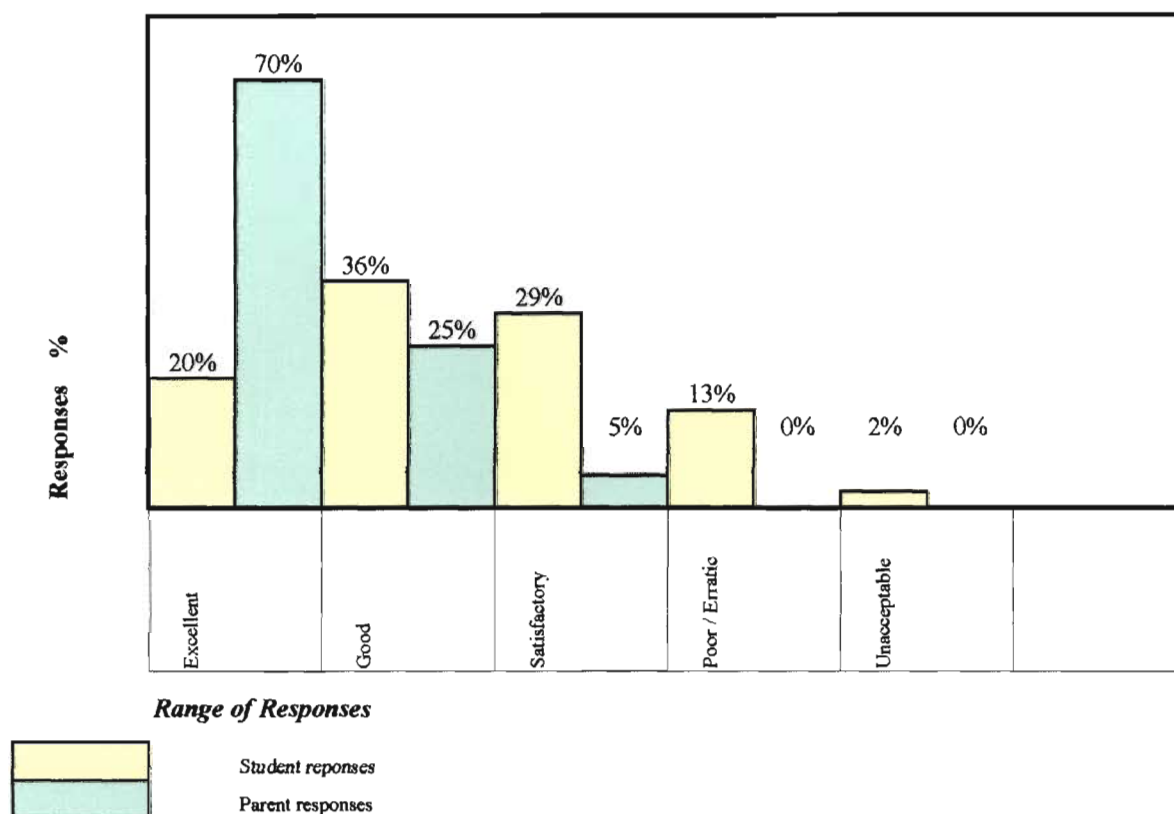
Parent responses

Ordinal Graph Question 7 How would you rate the health care provided by the Academy?

Question 7.2 calls for an explanation of why the health care was rated as it was by individual students and parents. Of the 30 responses, 14 were very supportive of the matron and included many examples of how she had helped students. The other 16 responses were made up of complaints about always being administered 'purple pills' regardless of the condition and how the matron did not take students to the doctor on

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demand. It is interesting to note that no complaints were noted by the parent in response to Question 7.2.

Questions 7.3 and 7.4 dealt with the pastoral care provided by the Academy. Obviously this is an important service that a school, particularly a boarding school offers its students when they are far from home and the security of the family. Figure 11 below provides a graphic representation of student and parent responses to this issue.

Figure 11

Student reponses
Parent responses

Ordinal Graph Question 7 How would you rate the pastoral care proided by the Academy?
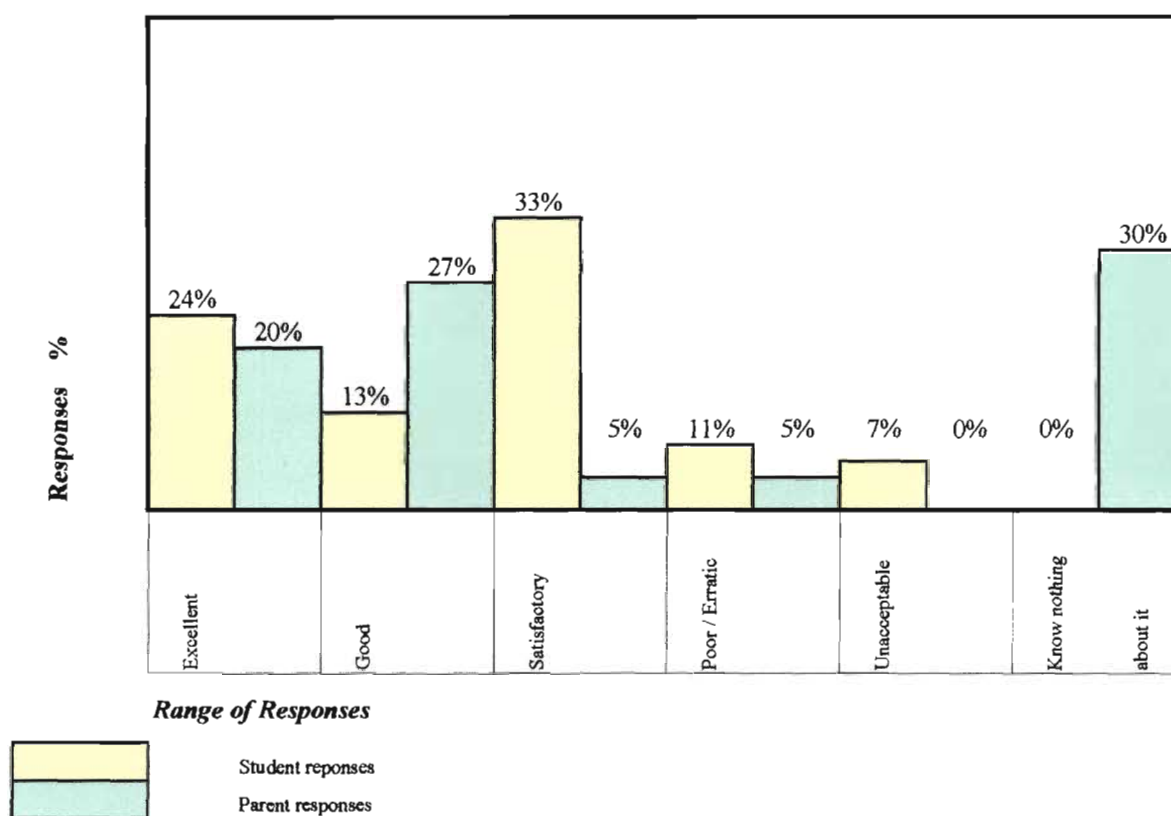
While 'know nothing about it' was not a response option, 14 parents wrote this on the questionnaire sheet next to this question. This is a concern as it may mean two things:

either the pastoral care is perceived as non-existent, hence they know nothing about it, or it is not of any interest to them. Although this category was the first category in which the students, the primary recipients of the Academy's services gave it more 'excellent' ratings than the parents did, the majority only scored it as 'satisfactory'. The overwhelming advice given by both students and parents about improving this aspect of school life was to:

- ❖ Re-establish the SCA (10 student and 6 parent responses)
- ❖ Have more non-religious guidance counselling (9 student and 2 parent responses)
- ❖ Increase church attendance (6 parent responses)

Evidently this is an area that the students and parents both have some common advice to give, namely re-establish the Students' Christian Association, and provide more guidance counselling during school time. Since these are such important aspects of life when students are far away from home, are fairly easy to institute and cost nothing, they may be pieces of advice that should be speedily instituted.

In a school that is limited in size by the number of horses that can be stabled and paddocked rather than the number of students that can be accommodated, it is fairly reasonable to assume that the care provision for horses is an important characteristic. Once again the student and parent customers have diverging views about how the Academy rates in this respect. 98% of the parents rate the Academy's service in this regard as 'good' or 'excellent', whilst only 69% of the students share this view. 31% of the students rated the Academy as satisfactory (27%) or poor (4%) with respect to horse care provision. Two possible reasons for this may be suggested:

❖ The students, being more hands on are more aware of problems than their parents would be, and

❖ The students love their horses and see them as pets, where many of the parents and riding staff view them as working animals, not to be pampered.

Either one of these suggestions, or an amalgam of the two, may be possible, but while only 7 negative comments about the stable employees, feed, veterinary processes and horse transportation policies were aired by parents, 49 such responses were made by the students. The graph below illustrates the spread of responses across the variables given in Question 8.2.

Figure 12

Range of Responses

Student reponses

Parent responses
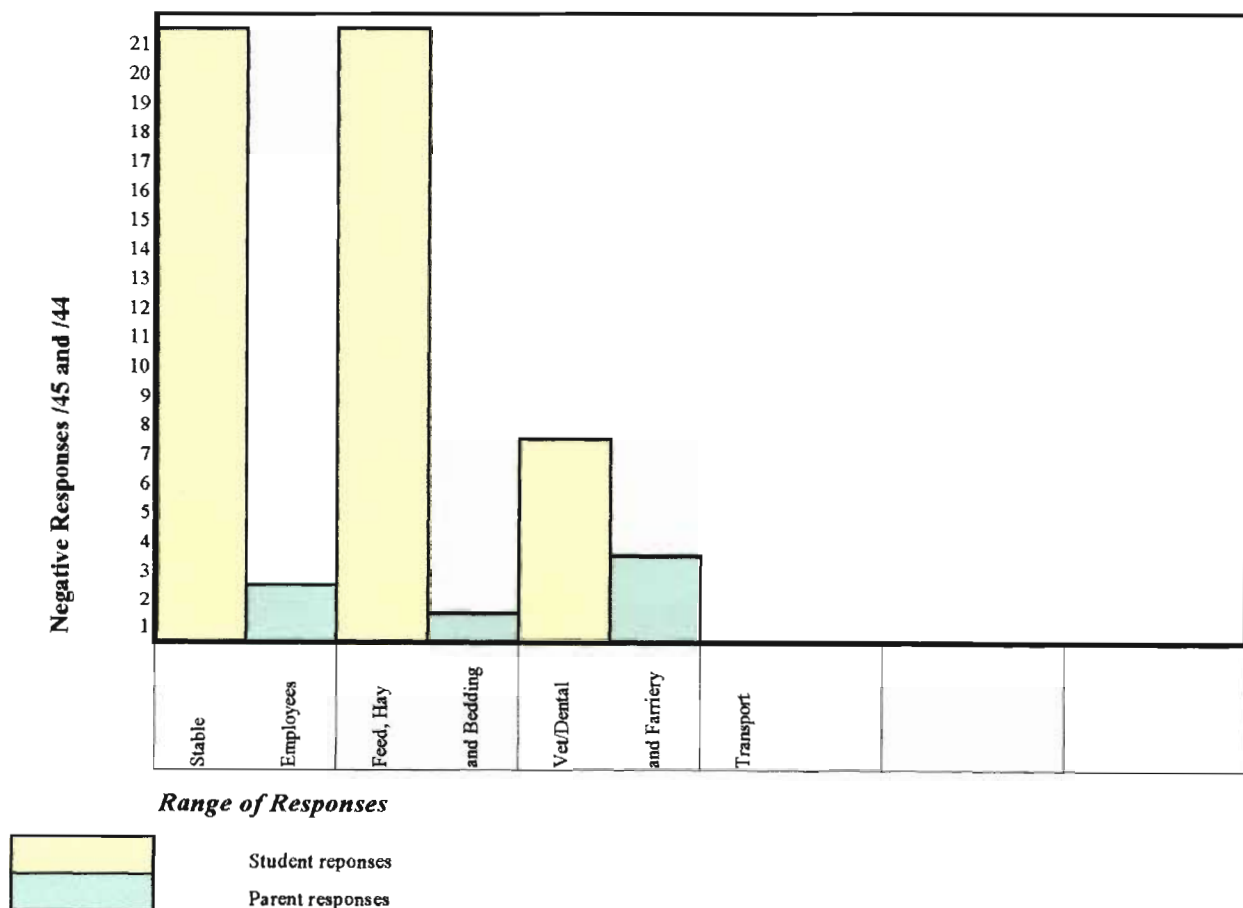
Ordinal Graph Question 7 How would you rate the horse care proided by the Academy?

Clearly there is unhappiness amongst the students about the level of horse care provided by the Academy, although the parents do not generally share this view. The dichotomy between student and parent responses to this question may be an interesting study to pursue in order to ensure that a quality product is being or will be provided, and which pleases or will please both parties. The most common comment from the students about the stable employees is that they are lazy on the weekend and do not groom the horses well enough. This is an obvious area where the stable manager can investigate the allegations and make the necessary changes if the allegations are found to be accurate. Similarly with the complaints about the feed, hay and bedding, ascertaining the validity of the statements is a simple task which must be undertaken to fulfil the requirements of Total Quality Management and deliver the service required by the customers. On a positive note however, all 9 responses regarding transportation of horses were encouraging. This was particularly pleasing since poor transport provision to shows had been a common complaint during the course of 2002 and a driver had been employed specifically for this purpose. These 9 positive comments are evidence of customer appreciation of organisational responsiveness, a key factor in Total Quality Management.

The physical facilities are very often seen as part of the public face of the school. It is essential therefore that they are well presented and maintained as they speak volumes about management priorities. However, more important than their outward appearance is their 'fitness for purpose'. Do they provide adequately for the needs of the students and their horses? Do they help to create an environment that is conducive to effective teaching and learning? Question 9 called for student and parent ratings of the

classrooms, dormitories, stable yards and paddocks in order to ascertain how well the Academy facilities were contributing to the educational and living environment. The bar graph below (Figure 13) illustrates the responses to this set of questions.

Figure 13
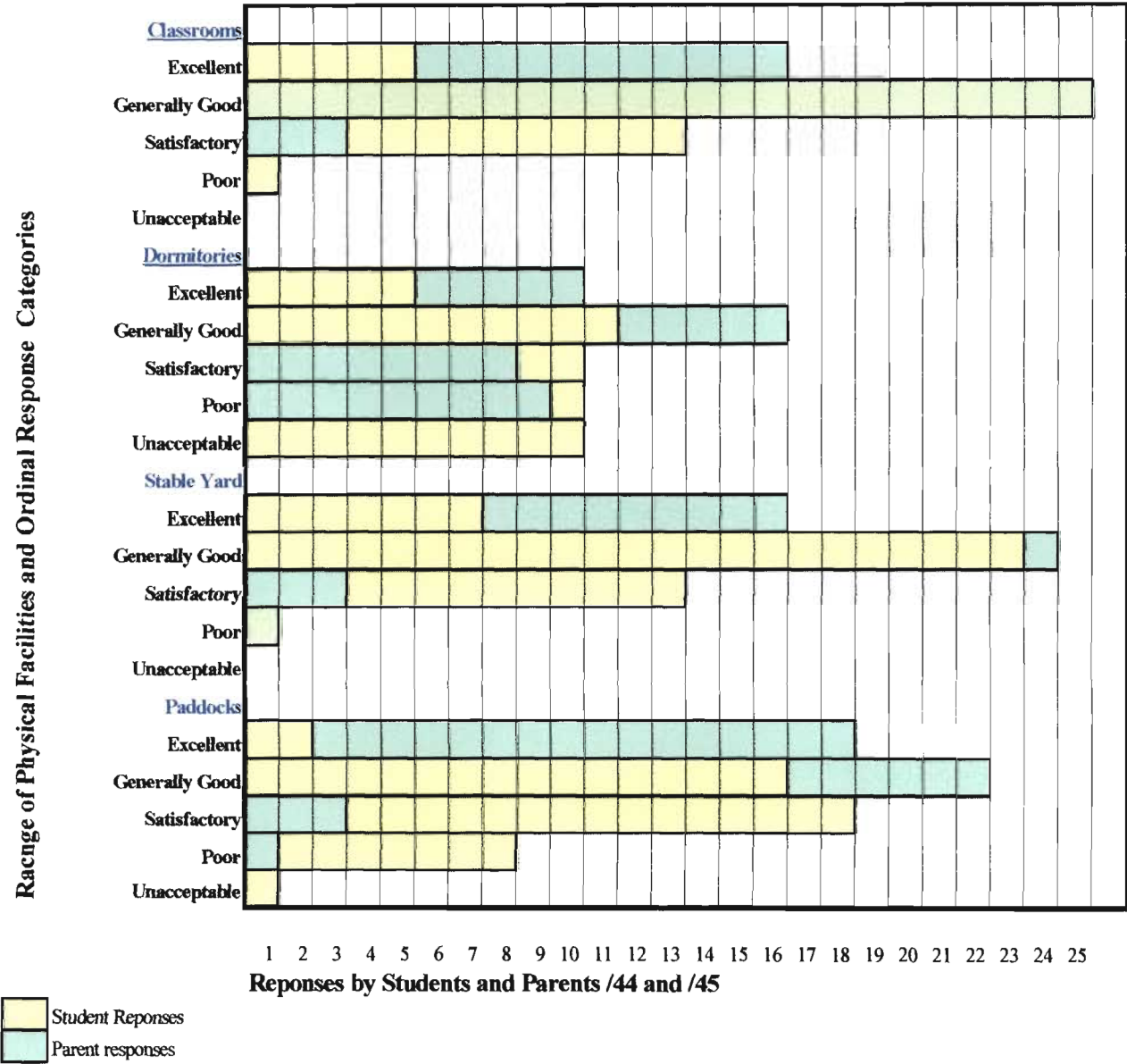
Graph of Responses Question 9   How would you rate the Physical Facilities?

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As in the other aspects of this study the parents have consistently rated the Academy higher than the students have. In all areas the parents give more 'excellent' or 'generally good' responses than the students except with respect to classrooms where they give an equal number of 'generally good' responses. It is interesting to note that for some time the teachers had complained about the condition of the classrooms and felt that they needed upgrading. 93% of the parents and 67% of the students felt that these facilities were either 'generally good' or 'excellent'. These were the highest 'generally good' or 'excellent' scores that the respondents gave. This may indicate that these facilities are either of low priority to the respondents or that they need the least attention or improvement. The areas with the widest spread of responses from both groups was the dormitories. The ratings that are recorded as 'good' or 'excellent' are almost certainly those given by girls or parents of girls since the girls dormitory is far more comfortable than the boys' dormitories are. While noted in the responses to Question 1 "What is the one thing I dislike most about the Academy?" that the percentage of negative responses had dropped since the first initial questionnaire, it was again made evident that more than reroofing was required in order to address the situation. The earlier complaints of 'peeling paint' and 'lack of privacy' would need urgent management response if any authentic claim to being guided by the principles of Total Quality Management was to be made.

At this point in the study one may well ask 'What does this all mean?' or 'How does it relate to customer service at the Academy?' Clearly the areas that have been covered in the questionnaire on customer service all reflect on the attitudes of the schools

management team. They also indicate the perceptions of the parent and student customers to the school and they all relate to the areas in which the Academy serves its customers, both student and parent. Question 10 was the final question and called for an ordinal rating of the Academy's customer care provision from 1- 10, with 1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest. An important question that was included in this final section was whether the respondents felt that this type of questionnaire was useful or not. In both sets of respondents only one in each group felt that it was not useful. The other 87 respondents felt that it was, although 3 added the proviso 'if it acted upon' or 'if something is done'. Again responsiveness was being tested, and quite rightly so. Why waste time answering a lot of questions if they are not acted upon? To do this would be worse than not asking for student and parent opinions, as non-responsiveness would tend to indicate that the Academy management does not value the responses of their customers.

What was the final word of the students and parents about the level of customer service at the Academy? Figure 14 over the page illustrates the range of responses to the request to rate the Academy's customer service out of 10. The most common rating given by both parents and students was 8/10, although the average for students was 7/10 and the average score given by parents was 9/10. Whilst these scores leave definite room for improvement it seems fairly clear that generally both students and parents rate the Academy's level of customer care fairly highly. Since the Academy management is striving to move the school into the Total Quality Management framework, it is testament

to a general state of satisfaction that the scores for the final question were as high as they were.

Figure 14

Range of Responses

Student reponses
Parent responses
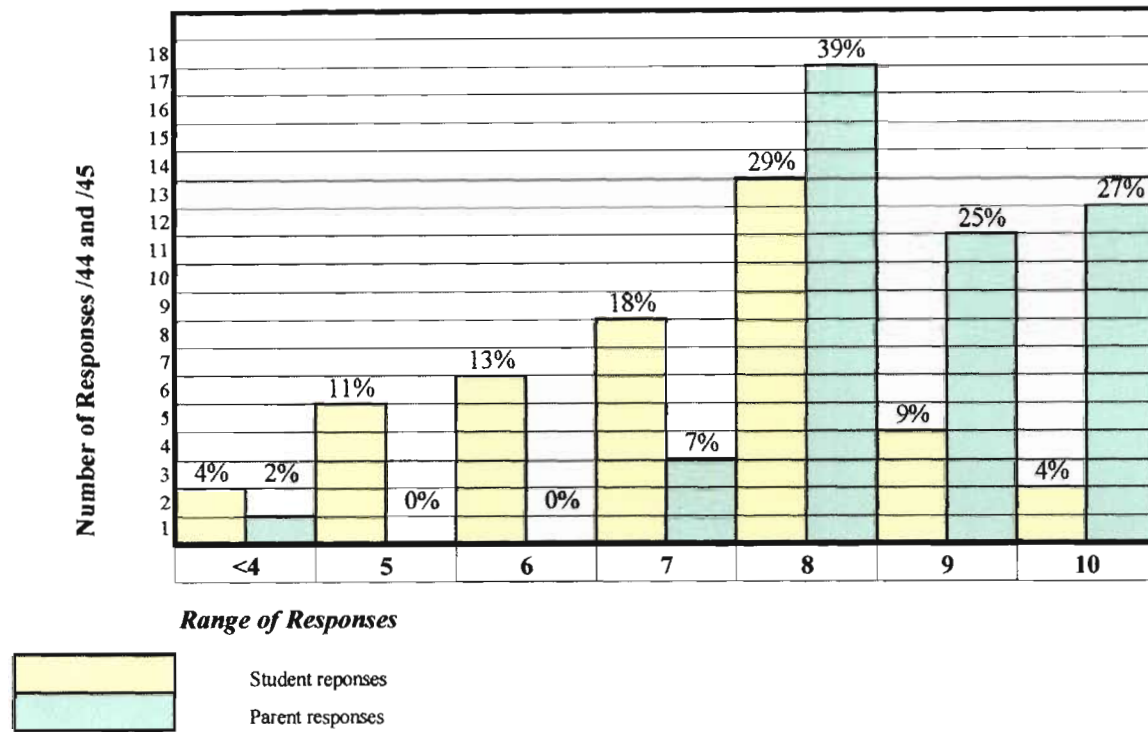
Ordinal Graph Question 10 Rate the general level of customer care at the Academy.

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to record and comment briefly on the responses from its primary customers to two questionnaires. The initial questionnaire revealed some worrying problems that would need to be dealt with if shown to be accurate. Following a period of observation, it was shown clearly that there was truth to the allegations made by the students. It was clear that there were problems with the food and the boys' dormitories. Some renovations were made to the boys dormitories during the July holidays to alleviate the main problem of the leaking roof. On the students' return to school in the third term a comprehensive questionnaire on customer service was given to all the students as well as

to their parents. The results showed a clear disparity in opinion between the parents and the students, with parental responses being consistently more generous. Possible reasons for this might include:

- ❖ Greater student knowledge of problems since they are 'on the scene'
- ❖ Higher student expectations and consequently more bitter responses when their expectations have only been partially met
- ❖ More realistic expectations from parents based on life experience
- ❖ More objective responses from parents who have not been recently punished and are not subject to 'restrictive' school rules.

The final result of all these research instruments is that despite their being a general level of happiness with the Academy based on an average score of 7/10 from students and 9/10 from parents, there are areas that clearly need to be improved. The most urgent of these include:

- ❖ The food
- ❖ The boys' dormitories
- ❖ The paddocks
- ❖ The pastoral care.

The final comments and more detailed recommendations will be made in the following chapter.

CHAPTER SIX   CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Anybody who has ever been to a nightclub will know that were the lights turned on, the 'romantic' or 'stimulating' atmosphere would be changed instantly as the floor strewn with cigarette butts, empty cans and broken glass, and the tables covered with overturned ashtrays and spilt drinks were revealed. Light in fact may change all kinds of perceptions and understandings. In the light of the preceding chapters the importance of customer service as an aspect of Total Quality Management has emerged more powerful and more significant than ever.

Summary

The Theory – What is implied in the notion of quality customer service?

The study began by presenting 5 research questions all to do with quality, Total Quality Management, customer satisfaction and how these are applied and perceived by parents and students at the Racing and Equestrian Academy in KwaZulu-Natal. Chapter 2 laid down the theoretical framework upon which the study was based and by so doing answered the first research question. It became clear that in a rapidly changing South Africa, concepts of quality might differ between various stakeholders in a school. What was acceptable 10 years ago may well be unacceptable today. Similarly what is acceptable today may be perceived as nonsensical 10 years from now. Total Quality Management theories and skills are the tools that will allow a school to survive the change, because at its roots it is about dealing with change. Changing standards,

changing student and parent demands, changing power bases within schools and the educational milieu, and the changing status of the customer within the decision-making structures of the school. Quality is what attracts customers to important products, and it the customer who will determine what quality is. It is the customer's needs that must be met, it the customer who must be delighted, it is the customer who must feel that they have experienced excellence in which ever way they had hoped to.

Total Quality Management may be based on the foundation of Sallis' 4 imperatives namely:

- ❖ The moral imperative – creating opportunities for students to achieve their true potential
- ❖ The environmental imperative – maintaining excellent symbiotic relationships between schools and the community that they serve
- ❖ The survival imperative – surviving a more commercially competitive education milieu through meeting customer expectations
- ❖ Accountability – being accountable to the community of which it is a part, never apart

Quality therefore becomes a process towards which one constantly moves rather than a static destination. Ultimately quality in the Total Quality Management framework is centred on:

- ❖ Conformance to customer requirements
- ❖ Fitness for purpose
- ❖ Delighting the customer

The customer is therefore a central feature in any Total Quality Management scenario. In order to deliver a product that the customer will consider to be a quality product, the school leadership must understand the customer's values, attitudes, level of education, expectations, preferences, social institutions and commitment. Once understanding these factors the leadership must be responsive to the changing requirements of its customers, that there is a "tangible and personal response on the customers' terms" (West-Burnham 1994, p. 38).

The Context – What is the Academy's policy and current practice in respect of customer service?

Chapter 3, *The Academy as the Contextual Setting*, gave some insight into both the historical background of the Academy and the policy it has with respect to customer service and quality. The second research question was therefore answered. It was evident that there was a great deal of concern with quality and delivering quality training in order to send skilled, highly competent graduates into the racing and equine industries. How well this is being achieved however, was the real question and Chapter 5 supplied some insight into this question.

The Findings – What is the extent of customer satisfaction from the learners' perspective? What is the extent of customer satisfaction from the parents' perspective?

After administering two ethnographic questionnaires, subjecting the responses to qualitative data analysis and setting aside a period of observation, this study produced

some interesting and some surprising results. The most obvious of these was that the students appreciated the horse riding and the training they received, but dislike the food, and the boys dormitories. After a period of observation that confirmed the complaints made by the students a second questionnaire was administered. It became clear quite quickly that the parents were more generous in their rating of the customer service supplied by the Academy than were the students. In every aspect of the school that was covered in the second questionnaire, sub-titled *Customer Care* (see Appendix 3), the parents rated the Academy more highly than did the students. Table 8 below, compares the average of rating responses received from students and parents to each question.

Table 8

Question	Student Responses /10	Parent Reponses /10	Average /10	Rank
Rate the Level of Riding Instruction	8.2	8.9	8.60	1st
Rate the Provision of Horse Care	7.0	8.7	7.85	5th
Rate the Level of Educational Instruction	7.6	8.5	8.05	3rd
Rate the Administration and Leadership	7.2	9.4	8.30	2nd
Rate the Care Provision for Students	6.8	9.0	7.90	4th
Rate the Physical Facilities	3.0	7.8	5.40	6th
Average of Individual Question Ratings	**6.6**	**8.7**	7.70	
Rate the Overall Level of Customer Care	7.0	9.0	8.00	

Table of Average Responses illustrating the differential between student and parent reponses to questions on customer service at the Academy

The table above clearly identifies the extent to which learners and parents are satisfied with the level of customer care provided by the Academy and provides an answer to the third and fourth research questions. It is evident that the students are satisfied about

many aspects of life and training at the Academy and rate the customer service as 7/10. The parents, it may be said are generally 'delighted' with what they perceive their children to be getting from the academy in almost all aspects. As stated above however, there are areas which need attention and where improvement is not only possible but advisable.

Idioms and clichés are often spoken of with derision, but the reason that something may become idiomatic is because over long periods of time the basic common sense or even truth of the phrase has been demonstrated. One such idiom that is important to remember at this point of the study is that 'Rome was not built in a day'. Thus it is important before making any recommendations based on these finding to prioritise where improvement is most urgently needed and how it may be most quickly affected. From Table 8 above, it is clear that the most important areas requiring attention are the physical facilities, followed by the provision of horse care and then, the provision of care (health and pastoral) to the students. The educational instruction should also receive attention, although it would not appear to be as urgently required as the factors mentioned above. Finally the administration, leadership and riding instruction would appear to be fairly healthy, although specific areas may also be improved in order to reach the 'zero defects' requirements of Total Quality Management. With these priorities in place recommendations may now be made to conclude this study and to initiate the required changes and improvement.

Recommendations – What practical steps, if any, might the Academy undertake to enhance quality customer service?

In keeping with the findings above and the subsequent prioritisation suggestions the recommendations will be divided into those requiring urgent attention immediately, those that will need some careful thought and concomitant improvement though it may be less urgently required, and finally those aspects that would appear to be healthy but may need some fine tuning. In doing this the study will answer the final and perhaps the most important research question posed in the introduction.

It is evident from the questionnaires and the responses gained that both students and parents are sending a clear message to the school leadership about the physical facilities of the school. The results of Question 9 show that the facility that require immediate improvement are the boys' dormitories. Although the roofs were replaced after the initial questionnaire, which in itself attests to the responsiveness of the school's management team, this was not enough. It is therefore recommended (including costs quoted by relevant contractors) that:

- ❖ The open junior dormitory be partitioned and 'two-man cubicles created (R35, 000)
- ❖ The 'smelly' carpets be lifted and replaced with tiles which are easier to keep clean and will give a more modern atmosphere to the dormitories (R10, 000)
- ❖ The walls should be repainted (R4, 000)
- ❖ The bathrooms should be gutted and refitted (R32, 000).

This specific facility of the Academy has received such widespread condemnation that its improvement is vital to the maintenance of good customer service. The acrimony that may develop should it not be attended to may in the long run cost far more than the estimated cost of improvement.

Although it is noted that parent respondents gave all other physical facilities ratings over 90%, those facilities pertaining specifically to horses, the paddocks and the stables, must be improved in order to satisfy the needs of the Academy's student customers. To the students, the horses are more than working animals, they are pets and friends. While they will have to realise at some stage that in the industry this view will be impossible to maintain, some accommodation of it now, at school, is required in order that they have faith in the good intentions of the Academy toward their particular horse, pet, friend. In keeping with their comments regarding the paddocks and the stable yards, it is recommended that:

- ❖ The Academy approach Tongaat-Huletts and Gold Circle, its neighbours, about acquiring the use of some of their land as paddocks. This may be in the form of a leasehold (as is one of the two acre paddocks currently leased from Tongaat-Huletts) or if possible to negotiate the donation of a piece of land. Since the Academy has PBO status either company may receive tax relief through a land donation and therefore possibly receive real consideration. A further leasehold paddock at current lease and development costs would require an initial input of approximately R10, 000 in fencing and grassing and an annual lease cost of

± R2, 000pa. This is a small price to pay for a great amount of goodwill from the students.

❖ If it is not possible to obtain additional land as recommended above, some form of paddock rotation may be considered in order to allow for maximum time out for the horses and the least damage to the paddocks possible.

❖ Whilst the stable yard is large and the boxes spacious, it is shabby and needs some upgrading. Repainting the yard and interior of each box may cost in labour and materials in the region of R5, 000.

❖ It is further recommended that the entire yard be scrubbed down fortnightly. This may be achieved by employing 5 casual labourers for two days every month. At R50 / day / labourer a cost of R500 would result.

All of these recommendations relate to the upgrading of physical facilities and there are Rand costs attached to them. Altogether it is a considerable sum of money but budgeting for its expenditure immediately, will be a most tangible display of responsiveness on the part of management, which would most likely:

❖ Improve the living conditions of students and horses

❖ Improve the attitude of the student customers to the school in areas other than purely physical facilities (e.g. student ratings of administration and leadership may improve when they experience the positive benefits of management responsiveness to their requirements).

With respect to the provision of horse care, the aspect of the Academy that received the second lowest rating on average from the combined student / parent scores, it is recommended that:

❖ The grooms, the most common source of complaint, receive regular in-house training and workshops from the Stable Manager and riding staff. Those who have received insufficient basic training may be sent to The Groom School, funded by Gold Circle to receive the three-month training course. The costs of this training would be easily covered by the grants to which the Academy is entitled through its Skills Development Plan and Levy. In the event of this type of external and internal training not visibly improving the level of horse care offered, the Academy management may need to consider formal disciplinary procedures and replacement by more committed staff.

❖ The food is another major source of complaint. Other feed suppliers should be approached and the quality of their product tested. If the quality offered by alternative feed suppliers is better than the Academy should consider changing its supplier. If no better quality feed is sourced, the students should be informed and shown samples of the other feeds or hay. If the process is transparent the students will appreciate the responsiveness of the school and either get better feed for their horses as a result or come to the realisation that the feed supplied is the best available. Either scenario will have positive outcomes for the Academy and its customer care policy will be enhanced.

Care provision for students is easily remedied. Some of the students feel that they do not always have access to doctors and that the matron is at times slow to react to their perceived need to consult a doctor. If a student expresses the wish to see a doctor, make an appointment and take them. If nothing is wrong with them the doctor will tell them so and if they are suffering from some illness or another, they will be attended to. In this way the matron will be seen as caring by those who do not currently feel that she is. It must be noted however, that the matron received a great deal of positive commentary as well and she must be acknowledged for this. The other area of complaint was that there was insufficient attention paid to worship and counselling. It is therefore recommended that the Students' Christian Association be re-established and that a religiously minded staff member who is also respected by the student body be appointed to run it. It is further recommended that the guidance counsellor have an hour or two every week scheduled into her timetable to be made available to students with specific needs in this regard. These are not onerous tasks and should be treated with urgency.

The level of educational instruction received some share of negative commentary although it was perceived to be 'generally good' or 'excellent' by a substantial majority of respondents. This is obviously a vital area of the Academy's operation and cannot be compromised in any way. It may be very useful for the academic staff to meet together in order to sift through the comments and come up with a way of teaching more creatively as requested. Improved planning and the inclusion of more practical work may be necessary to improve this function of the school. The Academy teachers are all well-qualified, experienced professionals who may have fallen into a rut. A gentle shake or

prod which will result from exposure to the questionnaire results, may be sufficient to take this sector of the schools activities to the next level, and by so doing improve the service offered to its customers.

The level of riding instruction and the quality of Academy administration and leadership were both highly rated and may not need any urgent attention at this time. However, in keeping with the practices of Total Quality Management, it is recommended that the members of staff in these sectors of the school also meet, discuss the results of the questionnaires and assess ways of maintaining their success. In doing this they should take note of the few negative comments that were made and act upon them. Rather than patting themselves on the back which some respondents felt they were entitled to do, they should be grateful for the pats they have received by the respondents themselves and look for small ways to improve even further in order to retain the same levels of customer confidence.

These recommendations will take time. They are not all achievable over night. Some will require money and labour. Others will require some soul searching on the part of staff members. Ignoring these recommendations could result in a gradual decline as customer dissatisfaction spreads its tentacles through the industry at home and abroad. Put together and worked towards over a period of time however, they may have in them the power to lift the level of service provision offered by the Academy and ensure that it retains its international pre-eminence in its field. How? Plan the walk. Walk the walk. Do it!

Conclusion

The recommendations made above are the ultimate products of several months of consultation with customers and analysis of results. They may appear endless to those who will adopt them, however, they are designed to improve the services offered by the Academy in all its areas of activity, both primary (riding instruction and education) and support sectors (the rest). Improvement of service provision is the basic tenet of Total Quality Management and as West-Burnham suggests:

> Schools are the most natural organisations for this culture as they are
> already expert in managing the most complex improvement process of all:
> the moral, intellectual, social and personal development of children
> (1994, p. 147).

In a culture of improvement a positive attitude becomes the norm. With a positive attitude adopted by all, the very simplistic, yet undoubtedly TQM-based philosophy of Anne Currie, long-time Head of Fulton School for the Deaf, may be realised at the Racing and Equestrian Academy that:

> A good school is a happy school (1998).

16, 984 words

APPENDICES

Appendix 1

Questionnaire

What I like about the Academy
What I dislike about the Academy
What is the Meaning of Life

Appendix 2

Observation Grid

Behaviour / Factors Observed	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	Total

Appendix 3

Questionnaire to Students

Customer Care

Keeping in touch with the needs and perceptions of the students is an important part of the Academy's management function. In many ways the students are the Academy's clients and your feelings are therefore important to us.

Over the last 18 months, a number of questionnaires have been presented to the students of the Academy. Some important issues have arisen out of these and some policy changes have been implemented as a result. This questionnaire is based on some of the issues that have been brought up in these previous questionnaires and obviously requires your considered and honest opinion.

Your opinions and stated needs as reflected in your responses to the questions below may be used as a starting point for staff discussions on quality assurance and management. Therefore do not put your name on any of the sheets. Likewise if you prefer not to complete this questionnaire, return it blank.

Question 1   Like and Dislike

1.1.   What is the one thing you like most about the Academy?

....

1.2.   What is the one thing you dislike most about the Academy?

....

Question 2   General Reasons for enrolment

2.1.   Why did you enrol / enrol your child at the Academy?

....

....

2.2.   To what extent have your expectations been met?
        (Tick the appropriate box)

Fully	Mostly	Partially	Slightly	Not at all

Question 3   **Student Life at the Academy**

Give a rating of 1 to 5 for each of the aspects of Academy life mentioned below:

1 = unacceptable
2 = poor
3 = satisfactory
4 = good
5 = excellent

3.1.   The Level of Riding Instruction

....

3.2.   Provision of Horse Care

....

(That provided by the Academy)

3.3.   The Level of Educational Instruction

....

3.4.   Academy Administration and Leadership

....

3.5.   Care Provision for Students

....

3.6.   The Physical Facilities (dormitories, stables, classrooms etc)
....

Question 4   Riding Instruction

4.1.   What are your impressions of the level of riding instruction?
(Tick the appropriate box)

Excellent	Generally Good	Satisfactory	Erratic / Poor	Unacceptable

4.2.   How closely related is student success in races and shows to the level of their
instruction at the Academy?
(Tick the appropriate box)

Closely related	Somewhat related	Not related at all

4.3. If you responded to 4.2. with "closely related" then please answer the following question. If you chose one of the other two options then ignore this question.

Rate the performance of Academy students/apprentices in shows/races.
(Tick the appropriate box)

Excellent	Generally Good	Satisfactory	Erratic / Poor	Unacceptable

---

Question 5 Educational (Classroom) Instruction

5.1. In my opinion the classroom instruction given by the academic staff is:

Excellent	Generally Good	Satisfactory	Erratic / Poor	Unacceptable

5.2. If your response was anything other than "excellent" please specify where and how you feel the level of education and instruction may be improved.

....

....

Question 6 Academy Administration and Leadership

6.1. How efficiently do you think the Academy is administered (secretarial, financial etc)?

Excellent	Generally Good	Satisfactory	Erratic / Poor	Unacceptable

6.2. If your response was anything other than 'excellent' please specify where and how you feel the Academy may be better administered:

....

....

6.3. How well do you think the Academy is being led (management)?

Excellent	Generally Good	Satisfactory	Erratic / Poor	Unacceptable

6.4. Were you called on to give advice to the Principal about the running of the Academy what would it be?

....

....

Question 7 Care Provision for Students

7.1. How would you rate the health care provided by the Academy through the Matron?

Excellent	Generally Good	Satisfactory	Erratic / Poor	Unacceptable

7.2. Why do you feel this way?

....

....

7.3 Is the level of pastoral care (spiritual guidance, counselling etc):

Excellent	Generally Good	Satisfactory	Erratic / Poor	Unacceptable

7.4 If your response was anything other than "excellent" please specify why you think this and how it may be improved.

....

....

Question 8 Provision of Care for Horses

8.1. How would you rate the provision of care for horses?

Excellent	Generally Good	Satisfactory	Erratic / Poor	Unacceptable

8.2.   If your response was anything but "excellent", please specify in which area improvement is needed, giving suggestions for this.

Stable Employees ....

....

Feed, Hay and Bedding ....

....

Veterinary/Dental/Farriery ....

....

Transport to Shows ....

....

Question 9   Physical Facilities

9.1.   How would you rate the following physical facilities:

9.1.1.   Classroom/Educational Facilities

Excellent	Generally Good	Satisfactory	Poor	Unacceptable

9.1.2.   Dormitory/Living Areas

Excellent	Generally Good	Satisfactory	Poor	Unacceptable

9.1.3.   Stable yard/Arenas/Track

Excellent	Generally Good	Satisfactory	Poor	Unacceptable

9.1.4. Paddocks

Excellent	Generally Good	Satisfactory	Poor	Unacceptable

Question 10   Concluding Questions

10.1   Using a score out of 10 (1 being lowest and 10 highest), rate the general level of customer care at the Racing and Equestrian Academy.

....

10.2   Do you think that this kind of questionnaire is useful?

Yes	No

10.2.   What other questions do you think may be useful to include?

....

....

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