

**THE FUTURE OF SCHOOL HOSTELS IN
NAMIBIA: DEVELOPING A MORE COST-
EFFECTIVE SYSTEM FOR THE FUTURE**

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ABSTRACT

The study aims at examining the major factors and causes of the high expenditure in the management of hostels. It became clear through the research that government expenditure towards hostels is enormous and unsustainable, warranting a critical review.

The key findings of the study revealed food provision, personnel and utilities as the major cost drivers. Other factors that contribute to high cost include lack of proper monitoring and control units as well as poor financial control systems that would track on hostel expenditure.

Finally the study offers recommendations on how to best address these current anomalies within the provision of hostel services and the related high expenditure.

Interviews, questionnaires and documentary research were used to collect data. Interviews were conducted with teachers, principals and members of the Executive Management Team as well as the Division Hostels Management at the Ministry of Education, Head Office.

The study revealed and concluded that there is a need for a vigorous effort to put in place policies and actions that would improve the management of hostels in Namibia.

It also emerged from the study that while provision is made for accommodating learners in hostels, it is also essential to have prudent financial policies and procedures in place to facilitate improved cost recovery and ensure increased resident contribution for the services they receive.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this piece of hard won achievement of twenty (20) months' commitment and perseverance to my entire family for their support and understanding.

DECLARATIONS

I, Manfred Verikenda Rukoro, declare hereby that this study is a true reflection of my own research, and that this work, or part thereof has not been submitted for a degree in any other institution of higher education.

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Manfred Verikenda Rukoro

Date

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CBA	Cost Benefit Analysis
EFA	Education for All
EMS	Economic and Management Services
EMT	Executive Management Team
ERO	Education Review Office
GNP	Gross National Product
GRN	Government of the Republic of Namibia
HO	Hostels Officer
IE	Inspector of Education
MoE	Ministry of Education
NDP2	Second National Development Plan
RMT	Regional Management Team
REO	Regional Education Officer
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SP	School Principal
T	Teacher/Supervisor

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides an overview of the research paper and gives an account of the study conducted to explore the current systems of hostel provision in Namibia. The chapter also presents a brief background to the research problem and further outlines the objectives of the study. The history of school hostels and the current systems are discussed and put in context within the research. Definitions and descriptions of key concepts in the study are provided.

1.1 General Background

Namibia covers an area of approximately 825, 000 square kilometres and is sparsely populated. The preliminary report of the 2001 Namibia population and housing census puts the total population at 1.8 million of whom 51% are women. Namibia's annual population growth rate stands at 2.6%. The country is divided into 13 political regions that are characterized by differing stages of development depicting inequities.

In 1990 the World Conference on Education for All (EFA) in Jomtien, Thailand, started a process to achieve universal education for all. Ten years after Jomtien, in the Dakar World Education Forum, Education for All was the promise made by over 180 nations to provide access to education for all by 2015.

The Second National Development Plan (NDP2) identified education as an essential component of economic growth and social development in Namibia. The Ministry of Education (MoE), recognising the dividends of appropriate investment in education, made considerable efforts since the advent of independence in trying to provide education for all, mainly focusing on improved access to basic education by all Namibian children irrespective of their socio-economic background and geographic location. Hence the need for hostels targeting learners who are not in a position to commute on a daily basis to and from school, because of distance. Hostels in the Namibian context are, therefore, conceptualized and established as an integral part of educational institutions, which intends to provide learners with a safe physical and emotional environment that supports their learning and enhances access to education.

The Ministry of Education (MoE) statistics for 2005 indicate that there are 192 government hostels in Namibia housing approximately 40 000 learners from both primary and secondary schools across the whole country. However, while recognizing the need for this vitally essential service, the limited resources in the Treasury are claimed to be unable to sustain it further, thus prompting the Ministry of Education to examine the extent to which the expenditure towards hostels could be reduced or shared.

1.2 Statement of the problem

Available literature about hostels in Namibia reveals that the expenditure on hostel accommodation consumes considerable resources from the overall Ministry of Education budget. The same reports argue that the costs are ever escalating while the opportunities for cost recovery remain minimal. This situation is believed to threaten the affordability and future sustainability of the provision of this vital service, and government is considering parting with this costly but yet essential responsibility.

In light of the above situation there is a call for an alternative, improved and cost effective system for the provision of hostel accommodation to learners who are not within daily walking distance of a school, given the geography of Namibia with its scattered population.

1.3 Research Objectives

The specific objective for undertaking this research is to provide analytic evidence that will guide the adaptation of the current hostel system to a more improved and cost-effective one that is aimed at reducing the ongoing financial burden on the Ministry of Education budget while maintaining a certain level of quality. This brings about the important question of the best way to use public funds to finance hostel provision, which necessitates a cost benefit incidence analysis of government spending on hostels. In

order to achieve this objective with a modicum of success, the specific objectives of this study are as follows:

- i) Examine the current level of government spending on hostels in relation to the existing fee structure compared to the actual contribution made by the occupants.
- ii) Make a cost benefit analysis (CBA), to determine the justification of the current expenditure.
- iii) Attempt to identify the major costs drivers in hostel service provision in order to determine essential and non-essential services and distinguish between core and non-core responsibilities of the Ministry of Education.
- iv) Identify advantages and disadvantages of continuing or increasing existing levels of hostel provision.
- v) Identify possibilities for reducing the Ministry of Education net expenditure on hostels by considering alternative ways to manage hostels without impacting negatively on access to this service by low income or poor families.

The following specific questions will be dealt with through the research:

- The Central Research Question

- The central research question that will guide the investigation can be stated as follows: *Is there an alternative and a more cost-effective management system for hostels, which would ease the ongoing financial burden on the Namibian government and guarantee continued operations and functioning of these vital facilities?*

- The Sub-Research Questions

- *Who are the current beneficiaries of hostel provision? Who should be the intended beneficiaries?*
- *What are the major cost elements in a hostel and to what extent could these be reduced while maintaining the minimum set standards?*

1.4 Research methodology

To achieve the said goals of this research the study to a large extent will rely on the following:

- i) A thorough desk-study of existing literature on hostels both in Namibia and elsewhere, and analyses of secondary data from the Ministry of Education's division of hostels management shall be conducted.
- ii) Visits to a few randomly selected hostels in the different regions of Namibia will be undertaken with the aim to compare the available data with the reality on the ground (in hostels) and to gain first hand view from those directly involved and / or affected.
- iii) Information on the hostel population, cost structures and expenditures will be obtained from the division hostels management in the Ministry of Education.
- iv) Key staff members of the Division Hostels Management at the Ministry of Education head office will be interviewed for triangulation and validation purposes.
- v) In addition to the above, a questionnaire will also be used to gather qualitative information targeting mostly hostel officials at both head office and regional offices, school board members, parents, community leaders and other institutions that may be deemed appropriate and having interest in educational matters. As Erikson (1986) states, qualitative research methods are designed to help researchers understand people and the social contexts in which they live.

1.5 Definitions of concepts

- i) The Education Act (1989) of New Zealand defines a hostel as “a boarding establishment used mainly or solely for the accommodation of students enrolled at a registered school.”
- ii) The Namibian Hostel Administrative Guide¹ defines a hostel as a home-away-from-home that provides learners with a healthy and homely atmosphere and ensures that they have access to effective education.
- iii) The concept cost-effectiveness in this context and for the purpose of this research is used to mean a management system that would provide hostel accommodation at a cost lower than the current by maintaining the same level/standard of service and without reducing on the well being of the occupants.

The current level of expenditure on hostels compared to the limited available resources poses a threat for the future operations and/or existence of these facilities in terms of affordability and sustainability.

¹ An administrative policy document that guides managers of hostels about how to run these facilities efficiently.

1.6 Limitations of the study

Although the study did not lend itself to major limitations, the following few presented constraints:

- i) The lack of adequate literature on related studies as a source of reference was a serious limitation in that no comparisons could be made between the study findings and work of other authors.
- ii) The second limitation is the inadequate financial resources at the disposal of the researcher, compounded by time constraint that did not allow the researcher, given the vastness of the country, to undertake intensive and proper investigation as envisaged.

In spite of the above limitations the researcher managed to obtain information, which, to his conviction, is sufficient and representational of the general situation in hostels and public opinion countrywide. It must, however, be admitted that there are several other important factors which contribute to the high cost in hostels. Given the abovementioned limitations and its limited scope this paper will not be able to analyze all these factors and only concentrates on the fundamental factors.

1.7 Organisation of the research paper

The research paper consists of five chapters. Chapter 1 provides a brief overview of the research paper as well as important aspects of the methodology employed in conducting the research.

Chapter 2 reviews existing literature and lays out the theoretical dimensions of the study with special emphasis on the cost aspects of hostels provision and management.

Chapter 3 describes the methods for data collection and processing and presenting of the research data.

Chapter 4 discusses the research findings and integrates the literature review into the findings.

Chapter 5 draws conclusions and makes recommendations for consideration by relevant policy makers and future researchers.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The main objective of this chapter is to review relevant available theoretical literature on the cost of hostels and the role of the government in the provision of this essential service. The chapter tries to sum up the relevant conceptual perspectives approached from a theoretical and empirical point of view, as discussed by various authors and also draw comparative perspectives of studies undertaken to neighbouring countries. However, as cited under limitations of the study in the previous chapter, the researcher could not lay hands on adequate relevant material for reference purpose on the research topic.

2.2 Conceptual perspectives

It is of paramount importance in any research that key concepts around the subject of enquiry are properly defined not only to avoid semantic confusion but also to ensure proper conceptualization.

The following concepts and issues are addressed:

- a) Management of hostels
- b) Cost of hostels

- c) Benefit incidence
- d) Comparative perspectives

2.3 Management of school hostels

The Education Act (1989) of New Zealand defines a hostel as a boarding establishment used mainly or solely for the accommodation of students enrolled at a registered school. The Namibian Ministry of Education statistics of 2005 indicate that there are 192 school hostels and approximately 40 000 learners stay in hostels. Apart from state school hostels, there are privately owned hostels and a number of unregistered community hostels. However, for the purpose of this research, the researcher confined himself to the investigation of state school hostels. In these types of hostels the management is decentralized to the education directorates in the 13 political regions. The division of hostels at Head Office performs the central role of supervision, quality control and monitoring.

The school principals are the direct custodians of these facilities attached to the schools they are heading and manage them in collaboration with the School Boards. They in turn have delegated the responsibility of governance and management to Hostel Superintendents assisted by supervisory teachers, while they (the principals) remain accountable.

The Education Review Office (ERO) of New Zealand in its education evaluation report *A Review of Student Safety and Welfare in School Hostels*, published in May 2003, states that the parents or guardians of students entrusted the welfare of their children into the care of the managers of school hostels and did so with the expectation that their children would be provided with a safe physical and emotional environment that supports their learning. The researcher found the same argument to be true in the Namibian context, even though the situation in some hostels still leaves much to be desired when it comes to safety and a learning environment.

2.4 Cost of hostels

Since one of the main objectives of the research was to develop or suggest a different system of managing hostels, it is important to know what the different cost drivers or cost elements in the current system are.

According to Berthoud et al (1988:97) hostels provide a variety of services to different types of residents, but they all combine accommodation with at least some care. They further argue that some residential services are provided free of charge to the user, fully subsidized by the authorities. Others charge residents the full cost of the service, without direct subsidy, but a large proportion of residents have their charges met by the social security system. However, neither of these arrangements is considered to be satisfactory.

Berthoud et al (1988:97) ask: “the immediate question for hostels is whether the responsibility for covering the cost element of their operations should lie with government or with the resident?” Berthoud et al (1988) state that before the administration question can be answered it is necessary to decide how charges and subsidies should fit together in a more systematic financial structure for the hostels. The arguments above further emphasize the quest for developing a new system and a new fee structure for hostels in Namibia which is the main focus of this research.

The TREND LINE EMS report on Costs and Financing of Hostels and Boarding of Learners (1999) states that a key objective of the Ministry of Education as stated in the Development Brief of 1993 is to maximize the utilization of available resources (section B, page 42). The report states that “to use some 8.6% of the total resources available for education to accommodate a mere 8.3% of the total learners in hostels does not positively contribute to the achievement of this objective”. The report further argues that in terms of cost-effectiveness the current practice of free lodging and boarding for hostel personnel and their families needs to be revisited.

2.5 Benefit incidence analysis

The findings in the TREND LINE Report on Cost and Financing of Hostels and Boarding of Learners (1999), raises the issue of benefit incidence. According to Demery (2000), benefit incidence shows who are benefiting from public services and describe

how government spending affects the welfare of different groups of people. It does this by combining information about the *costs* of providing those services with information on the use of these services.

Demery (2000) highlighted three premises that guide the analysis in determining the benefit incidence:

- i) Public expenditures can be effective only when the policy setting is right.
- ii) The public expenditure process is based on outcomes and impacts and not just on line items and inputs.
- iii) Public policy in general and public expenditure decisions in particular, must be based on a sound understanding of the needs and preferences of the population at large.

The World Bank Report No.05/05/03 (2003)² suggests that young nations with limited resources, such as Namibia, must pursue optimal efficiency in resource allocation and use. In terms of good governance, this translates into a requirement to have prioritized and strategically selected expenditures.

Tlhase (1995)³ indicates that ‘Theory and experience suggest that efficiency is greatest when an enterprise strives to maximize profits in a competitive market, under managers with autonomy, motivation and capability to respond to the challenge of competition.

Inefficient enterprises would be allowed to go bankrupt and be liquidated. However, education as a social service is expected to achieve non-commercial goals that might

² World Bank Report on Human Capital and Knowledge Development for Economic Growth with Equity.

³ Unpublished, draft report on the cost of hostels in Namibia by Irene Tlhase, Moono Mupotola and Issaskar Hiakaere (NEPRU)

conflict with profit maximization'. Therefore, while investigating the reduction of the enormous government expenditure on hostels, and placing emphasis on cost effectiveness, one has to guard against the substitution of the profitability criteria for the social criterion in this vital area, which may result in the majority of the population not being able to access these basic facilities and/or services.

Though cognizant of the fact that accommodation of learners forms part of education, the Ministry of Education needs to rationalize the extent to which it should divert the limited available resources to hostels at the expense of education itself. In search for a solution to this problem the Government of Namibia (2002: 143)⁴ recommends that consideration be given to outsourcing hostel provision or raising the fees charged in hostels to a level where recovery of the recurrent cost is optimized.

2.6 Comparative Perspectives

As a basis for comparative perspectives, a report on a visit undertaken by officials from the Ministry of Education to hostels in two approximate neighbours and also members of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), namely Botswana and South Africa was examined.

⁴ Report of the Presidential Commission on Education, Culture and Sport, commissioned by the founding president of the Republic of Namibia.

There are quite a number of valuable lessons that can be drawn from these comparisons and the two countries also share important similarities with Namibia in terms of hostels management issues and other historic realities such as of racial segregation especially in South Africa.

A brief comparative summary of hostels management in the two above-mentioned countries is, therefore, given below:

2.6.1. Republic of Botswana

In the case of the Republic of Botswana, the system of managing hostels has been separated between primary and secondary hostels, and is both centralised and decentralised. The primary school hostels resort under the Ministry of Regional Government and Housing, while the secondary school hostels resort under the Ministry of Education at central level. A set menu is provided by the Ministry of Health and the central government provides a budget to every hostel and food supplies are sourced locally by the localised management structure.

Contrary to the part-time superintendent in Namibian hostels a full-time boarding house master/matron is appointed, with a two year tertiary qualification as a requirement. Unlike in Namibia there are no formal staffing norms in existence for hostels in Botswana, and all appointments are need driven. For instance, secondary school

learners are expected to clean their own dormitories and ablution facilities and only a few workers are appointed for food preparation and cleaning of the kitchen. However all the other supplies and the maintenance of the buildings remain the responsibility of the central government. Although the visiting group could detect sporadic traces of vandalism having taken its toll, this is not comparable to what is seen in Namibian hostels. There are no formal inspections of hostels by the officers of the Ministry of Education as is the case in Namibia. However staff members from the Local government responsible for construction and maintenance do inspect the buildings on a regular basis. The above seems to be the reason why the hostel facilities in Botswana are in a much better condition than those in Namibia and present good lessons for the Government of the Republic of Namibia (GRN).

2.6.2. Republic of South Africa

In the Republic of South Africa, unlike Botswana, the government hostels are only administered by the Ministry of Education very similar to the Namibian system. The system seems, given the historic realities of colonialism, to have been replicated to Namibia during that period.

However, the government in South Africa have started to part with some responsibilities in hostels and a localised management structure at school level has started to take over certain functions. The government have also taken a stand not to appoint hostel staff but to leave that function over to localised structures for both their appointment and remuneration. The staff members currently on the establishments of hostels who are still on the pay roll of the government will be done away with through natural attrition or absorption in other government departments. The government continue to take care of supplies but boarders are also required to pay the full cost, which at the time of the visit stood at between R 4 500 and R 4 800 per learner per year. Through these contributions the school takes responsibility for the supply of certain items with which the government has parted.

On comparing these three SADC countries and with the similarities already indicated under comparative perspectives, the Government of the Republic of Namibia (GRN) only stand to benefit from the experiences of both countries. This is further outlined in the final chapters of this study dealing with findings and recommendations.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY, DATA COLLECTION AND PRESENTATION

3.1. Introduction

This chapter describes the methodology selected, instruments used and data collected, to be used as a basis for inference and interpretation, for explanation and prediction. The chapter also presents the results of the research conducted to investigate an alternative cost effective system for hostels in Namibia. The main purpose was to identify the major cost drivers within the provision of hostel accommodation and to explore to what extent this cost could be streamlined.

As suggested by Kaplan (1973) the aim of methodology is to help us understand, in the broadest possible terms, not the products of scientific inquiry, but the process itself. In further support of the above thinking, Mouly (1978) as cited in Cohen and Manion (1989: 42) writes, “Research is best conceived as the process of arriving at dependable solutions to problems through the planned and systematic collection of data.”

The research methodology adopted for this research is qualitative, based on the claim by Strauss and Corbin (1990) that qualitative methods can be used to better understand any phenomenon about which little is known.

They can also be used to gain new perspectives on things about which much is already known, or to gain more in-depth information that may be difficult to convey quantitatively. The researcher is trying to maintain the three features of qualitative method throughout the research as highlighted by Eisner (1991), namely:

Coherence: Does the content make sense?

Consensus: Does the reader concur with the findings and interpretation of the reporter?

Instrumental utility: Is the study useful?

The chapter is arranged in five sections:

Section 3.1 provides an introduction to the chapter; Section 3.2 explains the methods and techniques applied for collection of data during this study; Section 3.3 presents the data processing techniques used; Section 3.4 presents the data and information collected through questionnaires and Section 3.5 provides background information on hostels and the current management system as obtained from existing literature, and also touches on the cost aspects of the current system and how it compares with the recovery of these costs, and also identifying the major cost elements within the current system.

3.2. Data collection techniques

The main research methods employed were face-to-face interviews undertaken during September and October 2006. This method was particularly selected because it offers a degree of flexibility and interaction between the researcher and the respondent which is not always possible in the case of a questionnaire. The advantage is that this method provided an opportunity for the interviewees to give more detailed responses and as this was done in person, the data collected is rich and full of contextual information. Bell (1999: 135) states in support of the above statement that, “a major advantage of the interview is adaptability. A skilful interviewer can follow up ideas, probe responses and investigate motives and feelings, which a questionnaire can never do.”

The second method used by the researcher was questionnaires which were administered to various respondents, targeting mainly hostel officials at both Head Office and regional offices of the Ministry of Education, school principals, School Board members, teachers (supervisors) and boarders as most of the questions deal with information that only hostel officials can provide. Therefore, hostel officials were interviewed in all thirteen regions. Thus, inevitably, they formed the largest proportion of the respondents.

The questionnaires, as appearing in appendixes 1 and 2, are structured in such a way that they are open-ended, with very broad questions designed to elicit respondents' own views rather than their responses to a pre-specified range of answers. This method was very useful in getting data from a relatively large number of people across the thirteen regions in the shortest possible time and with minimal resources.

Interviews were conducted with all members of the Executive Management Team (EMT) of the Ministry of Education (MoE) at head office and Regional Education Officers (REO) at regional offices in six of the thirteen regions. The rest of the targeted group members could not be reached due to both limited resources and also their unavailability because of other prior engagements.

The variety of respondents, though not necessarily representative of the population, should provide enough information to get a reasonable insight into the management of hostels and the desired future.

3.3. Data processing techniques

The researcher took a qualitative approach, maintaining what Patton (1990: 55) calls an empathic neutrality, in analysing the data. The responses from both the interviews and questionnaires were thoroughly edited to identify and eliminate

errors and ensure correctness of the material in order to give credence to the interpretation.

A questionnaire response sheet was developed to capture the responses from the questionnaires. Conceptual and descriptive categories which form a preliminary framework for analysis was created on the questionnaire response sheet.

3.4. Presentation of data

3.4.1 Analysis of documentary evidence

The bulk of the information pertaining to this study was obtained through a comprehensive desk-study of existing literature and available documentation on hostels in Namibia and an analysis of primary data gathered from the Division Inspectorate and Hostels Management at the Ministry of Education (MoE), Head Office. This was done to obtain comprehensive and historical information that would enable the researcher to investigate the background and context of the situation and the specific problem as outlined in chapter one. It is also used to supplement information obtained through other methods as outlined in previous sections of this chapter, such as interviews and questionnaires.

The following information emerged from this documentary search:

3.4.2 Classification of hostels

Although cognisant of the existence of private and community hostels, the study confined itself to government hostels only. Currently the government operates 192 hostels across the thirteen political regions of Namibia. They are classified into different categories A-E on the basis of their quality, state and condition. An A classification represents those with basic and bare minimum facilities; the B hostels are moderately equipped; C hostels are moderately equipped and have much better facilities while D and E represent hostels with facilities above general standards. Most of the D and E hostels are those that were formerly white-only hostels because facilities in these hostels were much better than the others. Table 1 below provides the current classification of hostels in Namibia in each region. The information on the table portray a level of disparity and inequitable distribution of resources in that very few or in some cases no category D and E hostels are found in certain regions, while in other cases some regions are having the majority of their hostels if not all, in categories A and B.

Table 1: Current classification of hostels in Namibia.

Region	Classification					
	A	B	C	D	E	TOTAL
Caprivi	6	1	0	0	0	7
Hardap	0	3	10	4	0	17
Karas	0	1	8	8	2	19
Erongo	0	7	1	0	7	15
Kunene	1	14	2	2	2	21
Oshikoto	0	1	6	1	0	8
Ohangwena	0	2	3	0	0	5
Oshana	0	3	2	0	0	5
Omusati	2	8	2	0	0	12
Kavango	5	2	5	0	0	12
Khomas	0	2	4	5	6	17
Omaheke	8	6	2	1	3	20
Otjozondjupa	5	8	4	6	3	26
Spec. Edu	0	1	3	4	0	8
TOTAL	27	59	52	31	23	192

Source: MoE, Division of Hostels Statistics 2005

3.4.3 Current fee structure of government hostels

The hostel fee structure is determined by the government. The current fee structure as contained in Table 2 was last reviewed in 2002. The fees are determined and implemented on the basis of the classification of a hostel and reduced on a sliding scale for families with more than one child, resulting in a 10% decrease for each additional child to the maximum of five (5) children per family. Table 2 below presents a full

picture of the current approved fee structure. The data reflects a huge disparity between the actual costs of hostels and the fees paid by boarders. The actual cost requires that category A fees be N\$ 1980; B N\$ 2480; C N\$ 2980; D N\$ 3095 and E N\$ 4125. However, the fees paid by boarders are far below these levels which represent a subsidy to hostels by government of between 80% and 90% of the actual costs and further confirm the complete absence of any relationship between the cost incurred by the Ministry in providing hostel services to boarders and the fees charged. Therefore in its current form, the fee structure does not pose any real monetary deterrent to parents to place their children in hostels, but rather presents an incentive for them to do so, as it appears to be much cheaper to keep children in a hostel compared to keeping them at home. The lowest fee paid for a category A hostel per year is N\$ 198 or N\$ 16-50 per month, while the highest fee paid for a category E hostel is N\$ 825 per year or N\$ 69-00 per month.

Table 2: Approved fee structure for government school hostels

		SUBSIDISED TARRIFS				
CATEGORY	ACTUAL COST	1 CHILD	2 CHILDREN	3 CHILDREN	4 CHILDREN	5 CHILDREN
A	1 980	198	356	475	554	594
B	2 480	248	446	595	694	744

C	2 980	298	536	715	834	894
D	3 095	619	1114	1486	1733	1857
E	4 125	825	1486	1980	2310	2475

Source: Ministry of Education, Hostels Division Statistics, 2005

3.4.4. Occupation of hostels

The occupation of hostels is a major determinant of the cost aspects of a hostel in any given region.

Table 3 combines information pertaining to both occupation of hostels and expenditure per region as obtained from the Ministry's (MoE) Division of Hostels Management at Head Office.

Table 3: Occupation and expenditure of hostels.

<i>Region</i>	<i>learners</i>	<i>Registered capacity</i>	<i>Over populated</i>		<i>under populated</i>			<i>Total cost</i>
			<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Unit cost</i>	
Caprivi	1.571	1483	88	5.93	-	-	19.75	8 222 711
Hardap	2.228	2884	-	-	659	22.85	22.82	12 870 110
Karas	3.976	4948	-	-	972	19.64	24.00	14 486 708

Erongo	1.996	8392	-	-	6396	76.20	30.08	15 423 044
Kunene	4660	5412	-	-	758	14.00	17.58	23 008 485
Oshikoto	2476	2377	99	4.20	-	-	14.50	9 512 861
Ohangwena	2232	1848	384	20.80	-	-	12.12	7 052 069
Oshana	3054	3131	-	-	77	2.46	13.35	10 748 193
Omusati	5226	4756	470	9.88	-	-	13.44	18 290 440
Kavango	3824	3922	-	-	98	2.50	13.22	13 571 469
Khomas	2756	3148	-	-	392	12.45	11.71	8 553 344
Omaheke	4791	5665	-	-	874	15.43		17 521 565
Otjozondjupa	6002	6876	-	-	874	13.00		23 423 053
Spec. Edu	819	910	-	-	91	10.00		7 589 942
TOTAL	45611	55752	1041	1087	11 191	20.07		191 127 131

Source: MoE, Head Office Statistics 2003

3.5 The current situation in hostels

3.5.1 Cost of hostels

As defined by Greville Rumble (1986: 21) cost is the actual or notional expenditure of money incurred on, or attributable to a specific activity. This activity-based costing helps managers in identifying activities that provide value for the customers and those that are non-value adding. He however warns that this does not imply that all non-value adding activities should be eliminated.

Hostel costs or running costs therefore refer to those direct cash expenditures incurred in the process of running hostels. The information in Annex A which shows the distribution of the total expenditure in hostels, as obtained from documentary analysis,

provides sufficient detail for a distinction to be made between the main elements of running costs.

It was necessary and useful to summarise the costs of running hostels by presenting a complete statement of expenditure for a better understanding and pragmatic validation of the inquiry. As one of the main objectives of this research was to identify the major cost drivers in the provision of hostels, there is a need to further analyse this information in order to arrive at the proportions of every cost element in relation to the overall expenditure. These will be used to illustrate a likely order of the magnitude of the cost of each element. It is however emerging from the information in Annex A that food provision is predominantly one single cost element which represents an average cost of approximately 60% of the total expenditure. The second highest being personnel, followed by utilities (water, electricity and other supplies). In the case of the latter expenditure the cost is believed to be inflated by lack of proper control of the utilization of these resources and non-maintenance of the infra-structure resulting in water and electricity running throughout day and night or tapped by adjacent communities.

Table 4: Cost and financing of hostels in Namibia

	2002	2003	2004	2005
Total school enrolment	544 550	553 017	550 545	555 096
Total no. of learners in hostels	42 314	43 342	43 925	44 964
% of hostel enrolment	7.8%	7.8%	7.9%	8.0%
Total expenditure	204,030,916	221,973,816	227,858,180	203,537,834
Total revenue from hostel fees	9, 459,974	10,472,367	10,270,848	11,163,887
% of total expenditure	4.6%	4.7%	4.5%	5.5%
Revenue outstanding	1,010,266	2,240,873	1,641,246	1,942,347
Revenue written off / exemptions	220,115	260,709	220,385	573,107

Source: Annual Statements and Accounts
Auditor General Report
2002, 2003, 2004 and 2005

Table 4 is outlining the general structure of cost within the provision of hostels with specific consideration on the following aspects:

- Analysis of the hostel expenditure;
- Revenue from hostel fees and cost recovery;
- Utilisation of hostel facilities and rate of occupation; and
- Cost saving measures

This analysis is aimed at drawing a clear comparison between expenditure and revenue in government hostels, and to eventually provide guidelines for saving measures and increased cost recovery. In doing so the table reflects the total

expenditure, total revenue from hostel fees and also draws a comparison between the total school enrolment and the number accommodated in hostel. What is quite evident from this table is that, the financing of hostels by government is substantial. The overall cost recovery rate (i.e. revenue from hostel fees as a % of the total expenditure on hostels) for the whole of Namibia in 2005 was 5.5%. This means that only 5.5% of total expenditure incurred by the Ministry of Education for the running of hostels was carried by the parents. Over the period between 2002 and 2005 the cost recovery rate varied between 4.5% and 5.5%.

It also emerged from Table 4 that despite the availability of a facility for discounts and exemptions for parents with insufficient means to pay for hostel fees, there is seemingly a high rate of non-payment and an amount of between N\$1.0 million and N\$ 2.2 million is annually registered as outstanding. These suggest that many parents are not aware of the existence of this facility and the procedures for application, seem not to have been formalised. This absence of formal procedures in most hostels is said to be due to the fear that too many applications would be received if the practice was to be institutionalised through formal procedures. Therefore, in many instances the exemptions are granted discretely without arousing any attention from other parents.

3.5.2 Questionnaire responses

Table 5 below presents the responses of the questionnaire. The questionnaire was completed by twenty six (26) hostel staff; fourteen (14) school principals, thirteen (13) regional office staff, eighteen (18) Inspectors of Education and thirty five (35) teachers (supervisors). The members of the regional management team were interviewed.

On close analysis, the questionnaire responses in most respects confirm the results of the interview responses with very minor variations.

In this case, only the aspects of divergence will be highlighted to avoid repeating unnecessary detail that has already been dealt with under the interview response.

It is interesting to note from the responses that all the interviewees are aware of the existence of hostels in Namibia and 62% of them have been hostel residents in their school career. This will give a better understanding of the situation in hostels. Sixty two percent (62%) of the interviewees regard food provision in hostels as essential while 9% regard laundry services as important. Only thirty percent (30%) of this group says hostel provision is a government responsibility. In terms of necessity 67% of the interviewees indicated that hostel provision is a necessity and 15% says it is a luxurious arrangement. Personnel and supplies were rated high as services that could be done away without impacting on the well-being of the residents and 64% of the respondents indicated the increase of hostel fees as a means to improve on the cost-effective management of hostels. However all the respondents could not answer question 8.4 that relates to what is happening in their respective regions.

Table 5: Questionnaire response sheet

		T	SP	I/E	HO	RMT	TOTAL
7.1	Yes	35	14	18	26	13	106
7.1	No						
7.2	Yes	21	5	15	19	6	66
7.2	No	14	9	3	7	7	40
7.3	Food	29	9	15		9	62
	Laundry	4	3	2		1	10
	Cleaning	3	2	1		3	8
7.4	Government	19	3	4	4	2	32
	Private Sector	4	4	6	12	4	28
	Parents	3	3	5	2	3	16
	GRN / Parent	9	4	3	8	4	28
8.1	Luxurious	5	3	2	5	1	16
	Necessity	27	7	11	18	9	72
	Access	2	4	2	3	3	14
	Accommodation	1		3			4
	Others						
8.3	All learners	7	8	3	3		21
	5 km away	13	2	9	5	7	36
	OVCs	15	4	6	18	6	49
8.4	Yes						
	No						
8.5	Food	14	5	10	9	4	42
	Utility	11	3	2	5	3	25
	Personnel	5	3	3	7	4	20
	Supplies	2	1	2	2		7
	Maintenance	3	3	1	3	2	12
8.6	Yes	29	8	15	17	11	80
	No	6	6	3	7	2	24
8.7	Yes	8	5	3	7	7	30
	No	27	9	15	19	6	76
8.8	Yes	23	9	12	17	8	69
	No	3	3	3	2	1	12
8.9	Food	3	3	3			9
	Utility	3	3	3	2	1	12
	Personnel	12	2	5	15	5	39
	Supplies	17	6	7	9	7	46
8.10	Privatise	9	3	2	3	2	19
	Increase fees	23	7	11	19	8	68
	Reduce staff	3	4	5	4	3	19

T = Teacher / Supervisor SP = School Principal

I/E = Inspector of Education HO = Hostels Officer

RMT = Regional Management Team

Questionnaire responses

3.5.3 Executive Management Team (EMT)

The five (5) members of the Ministry of Education Executive Management Team at Head Office interviewed were in agreement that expenditure towards hostels consume enormous resources from the Ministry budget and threaten the future sustainability of this service in view of the declining resources, but they all expressed the need to continue with hostels.

The majority, 90% of the members cautioned that should it be the case to continue with hostels, then this must be for those who really need them the most. Only 10% expressed the need to continue with hostels in general or in the current form.

Eighty percent (80%) of the members indicated that they are not convinced that the government has to continue with the current centralised system of managing hostels at both head office and regional offices. They instead favour decentralising hostels to become self-financing units of the school to which they are attached, run in such a way that they cover their own cost through an economical fee structure. The rest (20%) were sceptical and feared that this type of system might render hostels expensive and inaccessible for the poor.

One of the interviewees suggested as remedy to the question of affordability, that a government subsidy be introduced for those who cannot afford hostel fees. He however indicated that whether this subsidy should come from the Ministry of Education remains debatable, as this becomes a social responsibility, which is not a core function of the Ministry of Education and may warrant the involvement of other Ministries, such as the Ministries of Gender Equality and Child Welfare and Labour and Social Welfare.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the key findings along the main themes elaborated in the first chapter, under the research problems, objectives and research questions. The specific purpose of this analysis is to provide further analytic evidence that can guide any envisaged change in the current hostel system and to better support such transition.

The analysis was undertaken against the background of general acceptance of the pivotal role that hostels play in facilitating access to education and creating a conducive environment that supports learning.

Although consuming a substantial amount of the resources available to education, the current need and pivotal role played by hostels in Namibia cannot be over-emphasised. This is said to be attributable to the current disparity that exists between regions with regard to availability of schools and the needed resources, which necessitate children to attend schools a long distance away from the parental home.

The findings further revealed that in spite of the clearly expressed need for hostel provision, there is a need to curtail the current spending if this service is to continue for a longer period. To this effect many of the interviewees were very outspoken and made quite a number of suggestions, such as:

- The current occupation of hostels should be reduced to make provision only for the intended target group.
- Fee structures should be revised to raise the fees to the actual cost and as such improve cost recovery.

In an effort to improve the management of hostels and to contribute towards a more efficient provision of this service, decentralisation featured prominently as one of the strongly debated alternatives. Various forms of decentralisation have been suggested during the interviews, each of which has unique management implications. Some examples suggested were:

- Transferring the responsibility and management of hostels to Regional Councils and eventually to constituency level. This does not differ from the current arrangement where the Regional Education officers are the immediate custodian of these facilities in terms of budgeting and management.

- Outsourcing to local communities for management by School Boards. This arrangement presents a better option because of the proximity of the managing body, but may also be hampered by the capacity and management skills of the incumbent school board members at various schools.

In most instances, the overarching assumption was that decentralisation, given the proximity may encourage stakeholder involvement, and contribute to efficiency and increased financial responsibility of all the relevant stakeholders. The researcher to a greater extent concurs with the suggestion of decentralising hostels to become self-financing entities under the care and management of the schools to which they belong. This refers to administrative decentralisation or de-concentration defined by Adamolekun (1999: 49) as the transfer of management responsibilities and resources to agents of the central government located outside the head office at one or more levels.

The sentiments expressed by Lockheed and Verspoor (1991:99) that decentralisation is strongly dependent on efficient local management, are shared by some members of the Ministry of Education Executive Management Team (EMT). They expressed a desire for the development of a strong managerial and institutional capacity at school level so that the management of these facilities could be localised. It is being argued that this would promote efficiency, as locally financed and produced services might have reduced cost effect.

Such a model resembles the system that is already operational in Botswana and South Africa, as it emerged from the report of the visit by officials of the Ministry of Education to the two neighbouring countries respectively. Both the Botswana and South African models emphasize the element of decentralised functioning of hostels to school level and increased resident contribution, resulting in learners paying the actual cost of hostel accommodation. These offer some good lessons and experiences for the Government of the Republic of Namibia (GRN) such as:

- a) The decentralised management and operation of hostels serve as an immediate incentive for the collection of revenue as they are utilised locally and not paid over to the State Revenue Fund as is the case in Namibia;
- b) The reduced staff complement and appointment of only a skeleton staff to be responsible for the cleaning of the kitchen and facilities for the junior boarders and the increased responsibility of senior boarders to clean their own dormitories and ablution facilities is a good cost saving measure; and
- c) The raising of hostel fees to a level where learners are expected to pay the actual cost needs to be investigated. Although their system does not make provision for discount or exemption, this facility can always be maintained for parents with insufficient means to pay for the hostel fees.

4.2. Are hostels economically sustainable?

The research revealed that there are many factors that influence the cost of hostels and the sustainability thereof and until these factors are properly addressed and the cost streamlined, hostel provision will remain an intensive burden on government resources and unsustainable. Some of these factors that influence cost in hostels are the perception and belief that every school-going child should be accommodated in hostel; that hostel provision forms part of the provision of free education and is the sole responsibility of government; that boarders be subsidised irrespective their economic background as is currently the case in Namibian hostels.

The financial structure of catering services as the largest cost component has come under scrutiny during the interviews with all the interviewees. Specific reference was made to a previous system whereby government procured and supplied each hostel with the needed food stuffs for preparation at the hostel by the kitchen staff, which most of the interviewees believe to be a cheaper way of providing food to hostel boarders.

It emerged from the analysis that the current delivery system of hostels consumes enormous resources from the Ministry of Education (MoE) budget and is neither cost-effective nor economically sustainable. As the main aim with this study was to contribute to an improved financial management of hostels and an increased cost-effectiveness of expenditure on these educational institutions, it also emerged from the

study that there is greater need to formulate hostel policies which will address this matter and suggest a different system.

4.3. Occupancy of hostels

The occupancy level of hostels was regarded as critical factor that influences the cost in hostels, because the more learners in a hostel the higher the cost. The flexible entry criteria to hostels is believed to carry the real risk of creating the undesired situation whereby many children currently accommodated in hostels should in fact not be there. Instead they could and should in fact be raised in their own homes and attend a school in the vicinity of the parents' home. The reduction of hostel intake to include only those learners who are really in need, has been suggested as a saving measure during the interviews. A further argument was advanced that schools in urban areas are fully utilised in terms of enrolment and occupation, without necessarily relying on hostel provision. As such it was suggested that the capacities of hostels in urban areas be reduced to levels where provision is only reserved for those learners who are genuinely in need of such services.

Hostels which were closed down and converted into classrooms or extended for curriculum purposes without the need for hostels being felt, in spite of the fact that they were full at the time of their closure, were cited as classical examples and clear evidence

in support of that notion, which questions the genuine need for hostel provision, particularly in urban areas.

Interviews with the senior officials of the Ministry clearly revealed that most of them, if not all, were positive about the provision of hostels as a support mechanism to enhance access to education for those who might not be fortunate to attend school from the parental home. However, they cautioned that one needs to be extra careful and to ensure that hostels are there only for those who need it the most, and to guard against the tendency of utilising hostels as a cheap arrangement that is available to everyone irrespective of their socio-economic status.

The interviewees cited as a serious dilemma in the current management of hostels that: if government continues with the current high subsidy to hostel boarders, it might end-up subsidising people who are not really in need of subsidy and who regard hostel accommodation as something cheap and easily accessible. On the other hand, if fees are raised to meet the actual cost, hostels might become unaffordable and exclude those genuinely in need of them.

The example of closing of hostels in urban areas that was cited above, confirms this fear very well as immediately after the closure, that apparent need for hostel accommodation subsided and schools remained full without being adversely affected, including those newly converted classrooms and/or extensions to the existing infrastructure.

Another area that was found wanting and lagging and which was strongly suggested to be implemented during the interviews, is the regular conducting of a proper expenditure tracking or benefit incidence of hostel expenditure.

The next chapter presents the conclusions of the study and makes some recommendations for further in-depth investigation.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 **Introduction**

This chapter provides conclusions and recommendations on the subject under investigation. The overall objective of this study was to establish the current level of government spending on hostels in view of the declining economic trends and to recommend possible alternatives that would help to overcome the problem.

Specific objectives of the study include to:

- i) Examine the current level of government spending on hostels in relation to the existing fee structure compared to the actual contribution made by the occupants.
- ii) Make a cost benefit analysis (CBA), to determine the justification of the current expenditure.
- iii) Attempt to identify the major costs drivers in hostel service provision in order to determine essential and non-essential services and distinguish between core and non-core responsibilities of the Ministry of Education.

- iv) Identify advantages and disadvantages of continuing or increasing existing levels of hostel provision.
- v) Identify possibilities for reducing the Ministry of Education net expenditure on hostels by considering alternative ways to manage hostels without impacting negatively on access to this service by low income or poor families.

5.2 Conclusions

The findings, together with the relevant theoretical information used in the study, have led the researcher into the following conclusions:

- i) The government expenditure towards hostels is enormous and remains unsustainable in view of the declining revenues. The use of some 8.6% of the total resources allocated to education for accommodating a mere 8.3% of the total learners in hostels does also not positively contribute to the attainment of the Ministry of Education objective to maximise the utilization of available resources, as contained in the Development Brief of 1993.
- ii) It is further indicated in the World Bank Report no. 05/05/03 (2003) that the total spending on education in Namibia is represented by 8.7 percent of the

GNP, ranking Namibia in terms of efficiency at 2.4 (21/8.7) If compared to other neighbouring countries the level of efficiency in resource use in Namibia is relatively low – this statistics is 4.2 in Botswana, 8.3 in Mauritius, 4.7 in South Africa and 3.3 in Zimbabwe. Therefore it is imperative that the government and in particular the Ministry of Education seriously reconsider the extent to which these limited resources are diverted to other activities then education provision itself.

- iii) It emerged clearly from the literature and data that despite the noticeable pivotal role which hostels currently play in enhancing access to education, the ever increasing high costs will compel the government to take drastic action in order to curtail this expenditure and increase cost recovery.

- iv) It is also evident from the findings that all the respondents strongly believe that there is a need for the government to find alternative ways of addressing the unsustainable levels of this public expenditure, especially the huge proportion of this expenditure consumed by food and personnel. There is therefore a need for government to express itself on this and communicate to parents, the necessity for them to contribute substantially to feeding and maintaining their children while in hostel.

v) It also emerged from the study that privatisation was not a preferred route as everyone tends to believe that the commercialisation of these entities will result in them becoming expensive and unaffordable and lose their purpose and the component of social responsibility of the government built into it and become home for the children of the few well-to-do members of society. Therefore as already stated in previous chapters it is imperative that while investigating the reduction of the enormous government expenditure on hostels and placing emphasis on cost effectiveness, one has to also guard against the substitution of the profitability criteria for the social criterion in the provision of this vital service.

5.3 Recommendations

It must first be pointed out that the recommendations that follow are put forward in the hope that policy makers and all those involved in the management and budgetary allocation in hostels will find them useful in their decision making. It must, however, be borne in mind that while this study provides suggestions and recommendations towards a more cost-effective hostel accommodation system in the Ministry of Education, it does not serve as a detailed business plan to effect the required improvements and envisaged changes. Such plans or road maps need to be drawn up once the principles on which a new, improved system is to be based have been established. It is also important to note that:

- i) Any envisaged change within an existing system must be accepted, internalised, understood and carried by all the stakeholders and beneficiaries in order for it to be effective.
- ii) Capacity building is paramount to any reform process, to ensure that people are properly equipped with the right technical competencies, commitment and that institutional strength is created, to further support and strengthen the implementation process of any envisaged change.

In an attempt to bring about improvement in the management of hostels and at the same time curtail the high recurrent expenditure and based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

- i) The role and purpose of hostel provision need to be critically reviewed and its role and purpose with regard to the target beneficiaries need to be clearly redefined and supported by clear policy guidelines. If policy exists, such as the 5 km radius range arrangement, its implementation must be strengthened and closely monitored. This supports the notion that hostels should be only for those who are really in need of them and not because they are cheap and easily available.

- ii) Although most of the interviewees were sceptical to support, it is imperative that the centralised management of hostels be looked into and a possible decentralisation of this function to school level, to be managed by School Boards, be seriously investigated and explored for implementation. In this way the communities will develop a sense of belonging and ownership and result in increased contribution levels that will eventually reduce the financial burden on the government. The suggested model is similar to both the Botswana and South African systems as explained in the previous chapters.
- iii) Capacities of hostels should be reduced to make provision for only those who need it the most in order to cut on the cost. Stringent admission requirements should be put in place and existing policies to that effect must be implemented consistently to address this problem as a matter of urgency.
- iv) There is a need for extensive awareness campaigns to inform and educate parents about the need and importance for their full contribution to the cost of food provision to their children in hostels. Hostel fees should then be raised to the actual cost, especially in the D and E hostels, as a matter of urgency in order to ensure maximised cost recovery. The Ministry of Education should however negotiate a shared subsidy, between the Ministries of Labour and Social Welfare and Gender Equality and Child Welfare, for those learners who cannot afford to pay the increased hostel fees because of the economic status of their parents.

- v) Finally the lessons learned from the study undertaken by officials of the Ministry of Education to Botswana and South Africa respectively, should be analysed and conceptualised to the Namibian context. Good examples of cost-effective systems of managing hostels are likely to emerge from this study which can be emulated and/or replicated to Namibia with few adjustments.

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Appendix 1

INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

(For research purpose only)

THE FUTURE OF HOSTELS IN NAMIBIA: DEVELOPING A MORE COST EFFECTIVE SYSTEM FOR THE FUTURE

- 1. Name of the institution/school/hostel/Office: Region:
- 2. Locality: Urban / Rural:
- 3. Position held:
- 4. Age of responded:
- 5. Academic qualification:
- 6. Gender: Male Female

7. General views on hostels.

7.1 Are you aware of the existence of school hostels in Namibia? Yes No

7.2 Have you, in your school career, been a hostel boarder? Yes No

7.3 Which services in a hostel do you regard as essential and must be provided?
.....
.....
.....

7.4 In your view whose responsibility is it to provide hostels?

.....
.....

8. Specific views on hostels

8.1 Do you regard hostel provision as necessity or luxurious? Give reasons for your answer.

.....
.....

8.2 What is the main purpose of hostel provision?

.....
.....

8.3 Who in your view should be the actual beneficiaries of hostels in Namibia?

.....
.....

8.4 Is this the case in your region currently? If not, what contribute to the current situation?

.....
.....
.....

8.5 In your view, which aspect(s) in hostel can be regarded as the major cost driver(s)? List at least three (3) and indicate next to each the estimated percentage (%) of the total hostel budget it takes.

.....
.....
.....

8.6 Do hostel boarders pay for these services?

.....
.....

8.7 Does the payment match with the quality and amount of services provided? Give reasons for your answer.

.....
.....

8.8 In your view, should government continue to operate hostel and why?

.....
.....

8.9 If given the chance to do so, which services in a hostel will you relinquish without impacting negatively on the quality of life in the hostel?

.....
.....
.....
.....

8.10 If government has to continue with hostel provision, what do you see/suggest as the most cost effective way to manage hostels?

.....
.....
.....
.....

QUESTIONS TO MEMBERS OF THE EXECUTIVE MANAGEMENT TEAM

(For research purpose only)

RESEARCH TOPIC: THE FUTURE OF HOSTELS IN NAMIBIA DEVELOPING A
MORE COST EFFECTIVE SYSTEM FOR THE FUTURE.

1. Do you view hostel provision as a necessity in Namibian education?

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2. Hostels are believed to consume a considerable part of the resources available to education. What alternative do you suggest for the cost effective management of hostel?

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3. What role do you expect to be played by the private sector as partners in education provision?

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4. Should government continue to provide this service? Why?

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5. What in your view are the major cost drivers in a hostel? Which of these can be done away with, without impacting negatively on the standard and quality of the service?

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