Oman

**Principles and general objectives of education**

The Omani philosophy of education is based on the following principles and objectives:

- to integrate the individual’s intellectual, emotional, spiritual and moral development;
- to nurture the capabilities of individuals and groups, and to develop the spirit of co-operation;
- to modernize the Omani society by teaching the required technical skills and the proper intellectual approaches to face the challenges of a changing world where technology and new inventions are widely spreading in all aspects of life;
- to achieve social and economic progress, to increase the national income and to improve the living standards of the Omani;
- to achieve national unity, solidarity and independence through respect for the society’s achievements and cultural heritage;
- to revive the Arabic Islamic heritage.

According to the Basic Statute of State which came into force in November 1996, “Education is a cornerstone for the progress of society which the state fosters and endeavours to spread and make accessible to all. Education aims to raise and develop the general cultural standard, promote scientific thought, kindle the spirit of research, respond to the requirements of economic and social plans, build a generation that is physically and morally strong and takes pride in its nation and heritage and preserves its achievements. The state provides public education, works to combat illiteracy and encourages the establishment of private schools and institutes under its supervision and according to the provisions of the Law.” (Article 13).

**Current educational priorities and concerns**

Since Oman’s modern renaissance in the 1970s, the Government has paid particular attention to education. The Ministry has so far successfully completed all the short-term strategies of the five development plans.

The early stages of development saw the fast provision of schools. The third plan aimed at balancing the quality and the quantity of educational services, by continuing to build schools, and developing the curriculum, producing textbooks, and training Omani teachers. In the fourth five-year Development Plan, (1991-1995), the
Ministry provided basic facilities such as libraries, laboratories and home economics rooms in the new school buildings. The Ministry also tried to ensure the selection of effective teachers through high-quality teacher training. Teaching personnel underwent the in-service training necessary to cope with the innovations in methods of teaching and use of educational media, and student-centred approaches to teaching and learning. In addition, the Ministry overhauled the administrative system and trained administrative personnel, so that professional and administrative educational services would become more efficient and supportive of modern approaches to education. Furthermore, instructional materials were made more attractive to students in order to motivate their learning, and educational media appropriate for the classroom were developed. The Ministry has also focused on other important aspects of education such measurement and evaluation, educational supervision, school administration and educational activities.

In the fifth Development Plan (1995-2000), the Ministry introduced further innovations, with the aim of creating an education system that would match those of advanced countries. The major objective of this plan was the improvement of the quality and efficiency of the general education system in order to match international standards. It also aimed at improving cost-effectiveness, with a view to producing high-quality learners with the knowledge, skills, and competencies necessary for meeting social and economic changes occurring at local and international levels.

As a result of the implementation of the above-mentioned plans, the education sector has witnessed the following developments: a rapid increase in the spread of educational provision, which was not available for all Omanis before 1970; a diversification of education so that opportunities for employment were made available to graduates in the various disciplines such as agriculture, industry, and commerce; and an improvement in the quality of education provided, as well as in the physical facilities, including the laboratories, libraries etc. Major quantitative and qualitative achievements over the past ten years have also included: the development of a new school system, involving ten years of basic education divided into two phases; an increase in the length of the school year and of the school day; the development of the curriculum in line with recent educational trends and national objectives; the establishment of computers and audio-visual equipment in schools; the improvement of teacher training; the development of a diploma programme for school management; and the improvement of school buildings and of administrative efficiency.

Some important features of the new basic education programme include: (i) it is a unified education for boys and girls alike (i.e. co-education), with the same objectives and ambitions; (ii) it is designed to meet the requirements of contemporary life as well as developmental needs; (iii) it is characterized by its overall vision of the need to ensure a balanced development for all learners; (iv) it attempts to: link theory with practice, develop cognitive skills, prepare students for the world of work and for continuing education, and equip the learners with life skills, all in accordance with an integrated learning model; (v) it endeavours to facilitate the acquisition of learning strategies, including autonomous learning; and (vi) it aims at preparing learners to contribute to sustainable social development.

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The most recent national programmes, plans (in particular, the sixth Development Plan 2001-2005) and political declarations on education mainly concerned the following issues:

- Enforcement of decentralization of administration.
- Providing universal education: the Government aims to provide education to all members of the society regardless of gender, both in towns and rural areas. It encourages people to bring their children to schools by providing free education in public schools. It also provides textbooks freely and provides means of transportation to students and teachers. There are also boarding houses attached to some secondary schools for students (boys and girls) from remote areas.
- Planning and programming of facilities: educational planning takes into consideration the economic, cultural and social changes. The planning process takes into account the priorities of providing education according to the circumstances of each region.
- Encouraging the expansion of private education.
- Developing the assessment and evaluation system.
- Providing quality education at all levels.

The main characteristics of the current and future improvements can be summarized as follows:

- **Qualitative improvement**: the Ministry has directed its efforts to improve and develop the quality of education after having made a remarkable improvement in quantity. The new policy aims to improve the outputs of education. This qualitative improvement depends on carrying out many projects, programmes, research and educational studies in different fields, such as curricular, teaching plans and educational innovations.

- **Parent-Teacher Associations**: citizens’ participation in administrative affairs has increased through establishing Parent-Teacher Associations.

- **School administration**: a diploma programme has been designed to improve the quality and efficiency of the candidates to the post of school headmaster. The programme consists of a one-year full-time training course preceded and followed by examinations.

- **Educational supervision and inspection**: the Ministry has issued many decisions which aim to improve performance and output. A guidebook for educational supervision has also been prepared stating the educational objectives of the curriculum and explaining the concept of supervision and its methods. The workload of the supervisors has been decreased and the role of the headmaster redefined. A one-year training course has been developed to

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increase the efficiency of supervisors. School administration supervision has been introduced in order to evaluate the performance of the principal, administrative staff and the situation of school in general.

- **Educational evaluation**: a Higher Committee of Examinations has been created to supervise the evaluation system in all its aspects and to upgrade the standard and efficiency of evaluation.

- **Omanization of teaching staff**: the general policy of the Government states that Omans should replace expatriates in both public and private sectors. Omanization is a vital issue for the Ministry and it is considered of prime importance for its national, educational, social, cultural and economic objectives.

In recent years, educational priorities included:

- developing in-service teacher training;
- providing necessary techniques and equipment for teaching science and mathematics;
- teaching computer science and providing computers and programmes in public schools;
- establishing resource centres in all schools in order to provide students with necessary information and skills;
- developing and modernizing educational planning and organizing training in this field;
- developing and modernizing curricula, especially science and mathematics;
- appointing a senior teacher for each school subject;
- improving the examination system and educational evaluation;
- upgrading the qualifications of Omani elementary teachers who have intermediate diplomas to a university degree level and training these teachers on newly developed curricula;
- revising secondary education in order to prepare secondary graduates to cope with their university or professional lives according to their abilities and interests;
- reviewing the organizational chart of the Ministry to meet the needs of overall education on the basis of new methods aiming at a better clarification of responsibilities and better results;
• organizing the private education sector according to the new regulations prepared. The Ministry is also looking to promote the role of the private sector with its various companies to support educational projects.

Under the sixth Development Plan 2001-2005 the educational priorities were: to continue the expansion of education to make it available to all; to further implement the basic education programme; and to develop quality education services.

Laws and other basic regulations concerning education

Educational policy in the Sultanate of Oman is designed according to the instructions of His Majesty and according to the policies set up by the government. The Ministry of Education undertakes many central functions, such as: designing and executing the educational policies through Ministerial and administrative decrees and circulars, stating the educational goals and setting up the strategies, plans and projects which are necessary for achieving the objectives of education in the country. These decrees and circulars translate the general policy into actions which should be taken by the employees of the different departments of the Ministry. The Ministry is also responsible for supervision, control and follow-up, at both local and school levels, to ensure that the educational policy is properly carried out according to plans.

The organizational regulations for public schools issued by Ministerial decision No. 21 of 1993 are considered the basis on which the work of the schools is organized, where the administration of the school finds the organizational and guiding tool for the operations and foundations of the educational system.

Education policies in the Sultanate also proceed from the Basic Statute of State issued by Decree No. 101/96. The Ministry is working in accordance with the educational guidelines stipulated in these regulations stating, inter alia, that education is the fundamental basis for social progress sponsored by the State; which seeks to disseminate and expand education; raise the general cultural level; develop scientific thought; promote the spirit of research; respond to the needs of social and economic plans; and create a new generation, strong in its structure and morality and proud of its nation, its country, its heritage and willing to preserve its accomplishments.

In addition, other regulations and guidelines are issued by specialized departments of the Ministry complementing the organizational regulations, such as the regulations concerning: libraries, and the laboratory, the social specialist and the educational activities guidelines.

Within the framework of the new structure of the Ministry of Education, a new department (Department of Regulations and Performance Evaluation) was created. Its functions are to study, propose and follow-up the enforcement of rules, regulations and decisions organizing the work of schools in the public sector, to supervise guidance counsellors in educational regions, and to evaluate the performance of schools. This Department is currently studying the regulations governing schools in the public sector, in order to modernize them according to the Ministry’s commitments in the field of education.

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Amendments have recently been completed on the regulations regarding Parent Councils in order to improve their role in the developments being implemented by the Ministry, the objective being to extend co-operation between the school, parents and society. These amendments have been issued by Ministerial decision No. 10/99.

Regulations regarding co-operative associations are currently under review, in order to take into account the remarks made by educational regions and other departments of the Ministry. It should be mentioned that the objectives of the co-operative associations are to develop social relations among students, facilitate their access to educational materials, and train them to participate and invest in funds of public and private benefit.

The Department is also amending the regulations regarding student affairs and school discipline in the light of the remarks received from educational regions and the findings of the field visits made by the department, in order to take advantage of the innovations in that domain and to benefit from the experience of other countries. It should be noted that the new regulations insist on preventive educational methods that could help school administrators in guiding student behaviour and organizing relations in order to prepare a sound educational climate to fulfil the mission of the school.

The Administrative Orientation and Student Affairs Section was created in every educational region of the Sultanate with the aim of supervising the formulation of laws and regulations, and monitoring their enforcement, in co-ordination with the concerned departments in the Ministry.

There is no compulsory education in Oman, but education is provided free of charge to all children from the age of 6.

**Administration and management of the education system**

The **Ministry of Education** and the **Ministry of Higher Education and Sultan Qaboos University** are responsible for setting up, designing and executing the policies of education in the Sultanate. The Ministry of Education is formed of three vertical levels: the central level, the local level represented by the regional educational directorates, and the school level. The school is considered as an independent administrative unit which comes under direct local supervision.

The Ministry of Education carries out several central tasks such as educational policy planning, specifying educational objectives and drawing strategies, plans and projects through which objectives are achieved. The Ministry of Education also supervises and controls at both local and school levels so as to assure that the educational policies are carried out according to plans. The organizational structure of the Ministry incorporates three key areas: an executive body, concerned with the implementation of major activities, a consultative and monitoring body, and a body of support, undertaking the tasks assigned. Recently, a central Human Resource Development Department (HRDD) has been established in order to plan, implement and follow-up in-service training opportunities according to the reform plan. At the
local level, the Ministry has established training centres in each local educational authority in order to supervise training activities. These centres are under the direct supervision of the HRDD.

In 2002 the Ministry has decided to establish the Educational Evaluation Department (EED). The main responsibility of the EED is to evaluate the various dimensions of the educational system so as to provide the Ministry with feedback on its performance at various levels. Special emphasis is placed upon assessing students’ achievement. The Ministry also established a department for Educational Supervision (ESD) which provides technical support to teachers through a mechanism of continuous follow-up. This includes organizing the activities of teacher supervision, assuring that curricula are properly implemented, issuing relevant publications, analyzing field reports and identifying training needs of teachers and teacher supervisors.

The Ministry supports decentralization in administration and it encourages decision-making at the local level in order to improve performance and to ensure a rapid response and immediate action rather than waiting for central directives. In this respect, Regional Directorates of Education have been established in the eleven different regions. They have the authority to manage the implementation of the education system. The Ministry has also formed an Education Council consisting of regional and ministry-based Directors-General. This Council is responsible for studying issues related to the process of education in the country. Its functions are mainly of an executive and administrative nature. An Inter-regional Council of Parents has also been established. This Council takes part, at the central level, in studying education policies and issues. At the local level, parents' councils are involved in matters relating to the process of education within their regions.

In 1993, the Ministry delegated responsibility of school management to the local education administrative bodies and school staff. School administration is formed of a school head, an assistant school head, and teachers, administrators, and non-specialized workers. In order to confirm a commitment to the principles of participation in school management, the school charter has stipulated that support councils, consisting of the school board, student councils and parent teacher associations, shall assist the school head in running the school and in achieving educational objectives.

The school board is formed under the chairmanship of the school headmaster and it includes the assistant headmaster as vice-chairman, plus three teachers and the social worker as members. The social worker is the secretary of the council. This council has educational functions and it helps in the fulfilment of the objectives of education at the school level. Regulations indicate the method and timing of the meetings of the council.

The student councils are elected by students from the fourth grade of elementary education. The organization is formed of four students. Each student is responsible for one of the social, sports, cultural and arts activities.

Parent-Teacher Associations are formed to encourage parents' participation in the school administration. The regulations invite parents to co-operate, participate

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and become more involved in educational matters. These parent-teacher associations exist at the regional and central levels, as well as at the school level, where a parent assumes the association chairmanship. The association members discuss all matters relevant to educational service and submit their remarks and suggestions at all educational levels.

The Ministry of Higher Education was established in 1994. It supervises post-secondary education in universities, institutes and colleges. It also supervises scholarships abroad.

The **Vocational Training Authority** supervises post-secondary Industrial Technical Colleges. There are also other vocational training institutes which belong to this Authority.

Some ministries and other bodies have their own institutes, such as the Institute of Health, the Institute of Judicature and the Institute of Public Administration. The Central Bank of Oman supervises the Banking Institute, and the Royal Guard has one technical college of the secondary level. A limited number of schools, Islamic institutes and mosque schools belong to the Diwan of the Royal Court. Finally, the Omani Women’s Association has established several kindergartens.

**Structure and organization of the education system**

In the academic year 1998/99, the Ministry introduced a new ten-year school system which operates concurrently with the existing three-level system (primary, preparatory or lower secondary, and upper secondary.) The two systems will run concurrently until the three-level system is phased out and gives way to the two cycle basic education system, followed by a two-year post-basic education programme. The Ministerial Decree No. 5/2004 was issued to consolidate the three educational levels in schools that are not implementing basic education into one educational level called general education, composed of all grades from one to twelve.
Oman: structure of the general education system

Source: Ministry of Education Website (November 2006).

Compiled by UNESCO-IBE (http://www.ibe.unesco.org/)
Oman: structure of the qualifications framework at the postsecondary level

### Undergraduate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Credit Points</th>
<th>Credit Hours</th>
<th>Normal Minimum Time</th>
<th>Award Title</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 1</td>
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<td>30</td>
<td>1 Year</td>
<td>(Certificate)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Level 2</td>
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<td>Diploma (Includes Associate Degree)</td>
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<td>3 Years</td>
<td>Advanced Diploma (Includes Scottish Degree)</td>
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<td>1 Year at Level 4</td>
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### Postgraduate

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<td>30-45</td>
<td>1–2 yrs after Bachelor’s</td>
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<td>Level 6</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>2 – 4 Yrs after Master’s</td>
<td>Doctorate</td>
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(*) A duration of 180 credit points (45 credit hours) is the norm for the master’s degree. However, students who have completed a bachelor’s programme in the same discipline may be allowed to reduce their master’s programme to 150 credit points (30 credit hours).

### Pre-school education

Kindergartens are available in all private schools. Day nurseries are also available as independent institutions. There is an increasing need for such services. The majority of children are enrolled in kindergartens within private schools. In addition to its responsibilities towards primary, preparatory and secondary education, the Ministry supervises pre-school education. These are kindergartens established largely by the private business sector.

### Primary education

Elementary education lasts six years and children are accepted from the age of 6. According to the new system, which runs in parallel to the old one, basic education lasts ten years and is organized into two cycles—the first cycle covering Grades I–IV and the second consisting of Grades V–X.
Secondary education

Preparatory education lasts three years and is an intermediate level between elementary and secondary school. At the end of this level, students sit an examination which entitles them, if successful, to enter the first course of secondary education. Islamic Institutes are similar to preparatory schools and the students follow the same preparatory courses. The main focus is on Islamic studies and the Arabic language. General secondary education lasts three years. At the end of this level, students sit a national examination to obtain the General Secondary Certificate. Technical and artistic education is parallel to the secondary level and lasts three years. Only male students are accepted to technical schools. In addition, there are two commercial schools and one industrial school. According to the new system, the ten-year basic education programme is followed by two years of secondary (post-basic) education.

Higher education comprises the Sultan Qaboos University and several post-secondary specialized colleges and institutes: colleges of education (four-year course); technical industrial colleges (two-year course); higher Islamic institutes; health institutes; and a banking institute.

In the case of the new basic education programme, the school year consists of about thirty-six working weeks (180 working days), not including examination periods. The school year is divided into two semesters separated by a mid-year vacation period. With regards to the traditional system, the school year consists of about thirty-two working weeks.

The financing of education

The Sultanate provides free education for all, at all levels of public education. It also provides supporting facilities, such as boarding houses, transportation and teachers hostels. The following table shows the State’s educational expenditure in Omani rials (OR). The table also shows the total budget of the Sultanate in recent years. The percentage of the education budget to the general budget is also shown (data refer to general education only).

Education budget, 1994-1996 and 2005

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Education budget</th>
<th>State budget</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>188,992,000</td>
<td>1,054,000,000</td>
<td>17.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>189,545,000</td>
<td>1,092,000,000</td>
<td>17.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>184,394,000</td>
<td>1,002,000,000</td>
<td>18.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>448,983,429</td>
<td>1,735,000,000</td>
<td>25.88</td>
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</table>

The Government is the main financing source. The Ministry designs future plans and sets budgets for the execution of these plans provided that expenditure should be made on major central issues, such as training, curriculum and research. Execution of regional policies is made according to the local circumstances of each
region. In 2005, the education budget represented 14.3\% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

Private education in Oman is run by Omani citizens. Fees of private education are approved by the Ministry, on condition that private schools provide an education which is at least equal in quality to that provided by public schools. The Ministry provides private schools with circulars, textbooks and administrative and educational instructions. Teachers supervision and inspection is offered freely to private schools. The Ministry also provides training to the teaching staff of private schools.

Private higher education institutions fix the fees which they charge without the interference of the government.

**The educational process**

The Directorate General for Curriculum and Training has recently been established, grouping together departments for each of the different school subjects as well as the departments of Information Technology, Educational Media and Instructional Materials Production. The Directorate General is responsible for developing curricula, producing and evaluating instructional materials, and carrying out other curriculum and training related matters.

Decision making for curriculum development involves many ministerial bodies working in close coordination on planning and policy-making. These bodies include: the Supreme Committee for the Development of Education; the Technical Office for Studies and Development; the Education Council; the Curriculum, Assessment and Training Development Committee; and curriculum subject committees.

The Supreme Committee for the Development of Education is chaired by the Minister of Education. Its scope and mandate is to design policy and to approve the steps necessary for ensuring successful policy implementation. The Technical Office for Studies and Development carries out studies in order to provide the data and information necessary for decision-making. This Committee issues central ministerial decisions which address the improvement of quality and quantity of education throughout the Sultanate. It has the mandate to supervise all educational matters. The decisions made by this committee on policy, planning, textbooks and materials, training needs, assessment and evaluation matters and all aspects of administration are final and binding.

The Education Council focuses on practical matters concerning the implementation of educational policy in the field. Decisions of this Council are mandatory for all executive bodies who should abide by them when carrying out their functions.

The Curriculum, Assessment and Training Development Committee considers and reviews curriculum implementation matters, as well as other issues related to examinations and training. It submits its conclusions and recommendations to the Supreme Development Committee for decision-making.

Curriculum subject committees develop instructional materials and evaluate these materials as they are used in schools, in light of the objectives and directives formulated by the Ministry. These committees include specialists in the different subject areas as well as some teachers and school supervisors. Each committee reviews, writes, and amends curriculum objectives and the teaching and learning materials for their respective subject. Completed tasks (i.e. from specification of objectives to units of instructional material) are submitted to the various curriculum departments. Each curriculum department studies what has been completed by the subject specialisation committee and discusses the amended version with the Curriculum, Assessment and Training Development Committee. Eventually, an agreed final version is submitted to the Supreme Committee which then makes the final decision.

The implementation of decisions on the school curriculum is carried out at the departmental level, subject by subject, in coordination with the individual subject committee. One section in each department has the responsibility of monitoring the implementation of decisions. After using a set of instructional materials for two years, the department concerned organizes workshops involving both the teachers who taught the materials and supervisors in order to review and discuss evaluative feedback received from schools on the materials, and to draw up recommendations for submission to the appropriate curriculum subject committee. The final document gets submitted to the Curriculum, Assessment and Training Development Committee.

The content of the instructional materials takes account of international trends at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the needs of Omani society and the overall educational development objectives, such as establishing the need for understanding and co-existence with others, emphasizing individual rights, maintaining the values and positive traditions of Omani society, and linking education outcomes with labour market demands. Recent curricular reforms have focused on: (i) introducing new subjects such as information technology, environmental life skills and computer studies; (ii) teaching English language from Grade I of the new basic education programme; (iii) introducing appropriate instructional methodology in all subjects in general, and in science and mathematics in particular: (iv) modifying curricular content in order to limit theoretical content so that it does not dominate the practical component; (v) ensuring the transfer of skills and knowledge into the students' practical world; (vi) laying emphasis on competencies and linking them with the local environment; (vii) avoiding an emphasis on rote learning and putting a greater emphasis on experiential learning; (viii) reducing dependence on textbooks as a source for knowledge; (ix) adopting student-centred learning approaches; and (x) applying a system of co-operative education. Furthermore, the concept of a final exam has been abolished. Students sit for a number of tests during the school year.

The curriculum content is specified and organized for each individual subject according to the educational aims in general and the objectives of each level of education in particular. Consideration should always be given to the needs and the age of the students. Topics are selected for each subject taking into account the need for cross-curricular links. The levels of competencies that students are expected to achieve are specified. These competencies are specified in the light of the subject matter, concepts, attitudes, skills, methodology and assessment. Other considerations such as adherence to Islamic beliefs and to Arabic identity are also borne in mind, in
addition to developments in information technology, international trends, globalization, intellectual rights and cultural diversity. The writers of instructional materials use the curriculum content and objectives to develop the syllabus, the topics and the lessons, all of which reflect the agreed philosophy of and approach to education.

As a result, students in basic education now have opportunities to learn through a variety of teaching and learning approaches, including activities involving individual, pair, small group, whole class and out-of-school work. The strategies employed by teachers aim to develop skills and attitudes such as autonomous and cooperative learning, communication, critical thinking, problem solving, research and investigative techniques, creativeness, innovation and the development of an aesthetic sense. The overall aim is to provide students with the required tools for lifelong learning. The basic education reform is being phased-in and, by the beginning of the academic year 2004/05, the programme had been developed for Grades I to VIII. From an initial figure of 17 basic education schools opened in 1998, the figure has risen rapidly and, by 2003/04, 352 basic education schools were in operation. Projected plans are in place to generalize the programme to all schools and students as rapidly as is economically and practically feasible.

Plans are also nearing completion for the implementation of a new Grades XI and XII programme. This programme will be operational in time for students who complete the ten-year basic education programme at the end of 2006/07. The basic education reform and the reform of post-basic education will mean that students in all twelve years of the school education cycle will benefit from new and more relevant curriculum and assessment systems.

Pre-primary education

Kindergartens are available in all private schools. Nurseries and kindergartens are available in some public establishments. Nurseries are under the responsibility of the Ministry of Social Development. Nurseries are a new phenomenon in the Sultanate. They are few in number and enrolment and limited to the big cities. In 2003/04 there were 33 nurseries in the country, of which 28 were located in the Muscat area; the total enrolment was about 1,400 children. The main objectives and aims of pre-school education can be summarized as follows:

- promoting a balanced intellectual, spiritual, emotional, social and moral development of the child’s personality;
- strengthening the Islamic principles, consolidating the Arabic language and developing the children’s sentiments towards their country and its various symbols and traditions;
- teaching the child to adopt positive attitudes and behaviour and enhancing the spirit of co-operation among children;
- developing the child’s attitude towards the arts;

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acquainting the children with certain aspects, activities and social events characteristic of the Sultanate of Oman, and giving them the opportunity to participate therein;

• giving the child the opportunity to exercise intellectual and social processes and skills that are supposed to be developed through the kindergarten curriculum, such as the ability to classify, compare and establish chronology;

• giving the children the opportunity to exercise the maximum amount of activity and allowing them to express their sentiments, ideas and questions;

• preparing children for school education.

The curriculum at the kindergarten level is based on five modules: Who am I?; My Kindergarten; My health and safety; People at work; Communication. In addition, there is a sixth module entitled: My country Oman. Each module is linked to a teacher’s guide containing activities appropriate to children’s needs. The Ministry of Education, within the framework of its efforts to develop education and improve its output, is in the process of finalizing the advanced curriculum for the kindergarten level, based on self-learning as a method and centred on the Omani child and on his/her environment, cultural heritage and civilization.

The notion of teaching periods, as understood in general education, does not apply at the pre-school level. Attendance extends from 8:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., the teacher being free to organize this period as she deems appropriate between school skills and artistic and leisure activities.

According to the private school guide, the maximum number of pupils for the two classes included at the pre-school level (kindergarten and preparatory class) is 20 children. In 2000/01 the average children-teacher ratio was 18.7:1. In 2003/04 the gross enrolment ratio was 6.5%. In 2005/06 there were 529 kindergarten classes in the private sector with 9,429 children enrolled (of whom 2,768 in KG1 and 6,661 in KG2) and 529 teachers.

The gross enrolment ratio is steadily increasing due to the will of Omani citizens to enrol their children in private schools or other teaching institutions specializing in educational services for pre-school children.

Children’s performance is evaluated through monitoring their growth in the physical, social, emotional, intellectual and linguistic fields, each field being divided into various subsections. On the basis of this monitoring, a report on the performance of each child is prepared twice a year, at the end of the first semester and at the end of the school year. It is sent to the child's tutor for information.

Primary and preparatory education

The elementary level aims at helping children to develop in a healthy and integrative manner, to acquire skills, competencies, knowledge and attitudes which will enable them to understand and appreciate social, environmental and economic relations within their community. The elementary level also prepares students to continue their
education at that next level. The preparatory level aims to develop and direct students' aptitudes and abilities, to provide them with the appropriate knowledge, skills and key competencies and to assist them to progress to secondary education. As mentioned, the new basic education programme lasts ten years and is organized into two cycles—the first cycle covering Grades I–IV and the second consisting of Grades V–X.

The weekly lesson timetables for the elementary and the preparatory levels, as well as for the new basic education programme, are presented in the tables below:

**Elementary education: weekly lesson timetable**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Number of weekly periods in each grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islamic education</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arabic language</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English language</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General science</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social studies (*)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical education</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art education</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music education</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational activities (*)</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practical activities</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total weekly periods** 30 30 30 30 30 30

*Source: Information provided by the Gulf Arab States Educational Research Center (GASERC), November 2004. Each teaching period lasts 40 minutes.

(*) Social studies include geography, history and civics. Vocational activities include home science for girls and agricultural activities for boys.

**Preparatory education (lower secondary): weekly lesson timetable**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Number of weekly periods in each form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islamic education</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arabic language</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English language</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General science</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social studies</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical education</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art education</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music education</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational activities</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total weekly periods** 30 30 30

*Source: Ibid. Each teaching period lasts 40 minutes.*
Arabic is the approved language of instruction for all subjects, except for the English language classes. The system of examinations and tests is as follows:

- Grades 1-3 (elementary): four terminal written and oral tests are held at the school level. Marks are also given to students according to their daily participation in class. No tests are held at the end of the year. Annual marks are based on the term tests and daily works.

- Grade 4-6 (elementary): There are four terminal written tests and one written exam at the end of the school year. All tests and exams are conducted at the school level. Marks are added to the students’ results according to the standards of their written work, home work and participation in class.

- Preparatory level: The two-semester system is applied at this level. There is a written terminal test (and sometimes also an oral test) which is conducted in the middle of the semester. Marks are also given for the daily work of the student. A written exam is held at the end of each semester. All these tests and exams are held at the school level. The average of the two semesters is taken as the final mark at the end of the school year. Students who pass the examinations at the end of the third year preparatory can enter the first course of secondary education.

The following tables show the drop-out rate and the percentage of repeaters:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Number of weekly periods in each grade</th>
<th>Source: Information provided by the Gulf Arab States Educational Research Center (GASERC), November 2004. Each teaching period lasts 40 minutes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>First cycle</td>
<td>Second cycle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I</td>
<td>II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islamic education</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arabic language</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English language</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sciences</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social studies</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical education</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fine arts</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental life skills</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information technology</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Total weekly periods          | 40  | 40  | 40  | 40  | 40  | 40  | 40  | 40    | 40  | 40 |

Compiled by UNESCO-IBE (http://www.ibe.unesco.org/)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Males and females</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>1995/96</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1996/97</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1997/98</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparatory</td>
<td>1995/96</td>
<td>9.4%</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1996/97</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1997/98</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Percentage of repeaters (1997/98)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Males and females</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st elementary</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd elementary</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd elementary</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th elementary</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>10.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5th elementary</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6th elementary</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st preparatory</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>20.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd preparatory</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>9.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd preparatory</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>12.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Repetition rates decreased significantly between 1995 and 2005. A large decrease occurred in Grades I-VI in 2001/02, which can be explained by the decision to allow all pupils to progress through Grades I-IV. Drop-out rates have also been decreasing, albeit more gradually than repetition rates. Despite these improvements, in Grades VII-XII the drop-out rates for boys continue to be approximately twice as high as those for girls. The rates of promotion from one level to the higher level for the school year 1998/99 are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Males and females</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>From elementary to preparatory</td>
<td>91.1%</td>
<td>96.6%</td>
<td>93.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From preparatory to secondary</td>
<td>93.0%</td>
<td>96.0%</td>
<td>94.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Compiled by UNESCO-IBE (http://www.ibe.unesco.org/)
In 1995/96, the average number of pupils per class was 34 for the elementary level and 31 for the preparatory level. The teacher-pupil ratio was 1:26 for the elementary level and 1:19 for the preparatory. In 2000/2001 the teacher-pupil ratio was 23.7.

The enrolment ratios for the elementary and preparatory levels in the school years 1995/96 and 1996/97 were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>School year</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Males</td>
<td>Females</td>
<td>Males and</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>1995/96</td>
<td>97.0</td>
<td>93.0</td>
<td>95.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1996/97</td>
<td>98.0</td>
<td>93.0</td>
<td>95.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparatory</td>
<td>1995/96</td>
<td>86.0</td>
<td>77.0</td>
<td>82.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1996/97</td>
<td>85.4</td>
<td>78.0</td>
<td>81.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In 2004, the gross enrolment ratio for primary education (Grades I-VI) was 87%.

**Secondary education**

The function of secondary school is to reinforce the intellectual, social and spiritual development of the students. It aims to refine their skills of scientific thinking and their ability of self-learning. It also prepares them for professional life and good citizenship or to continue at the higher education level.

Although Arabic is the approved language of instruction, some private schools use the English language for teaching some subjects (science and mathematics) at the secondary level. Using English as the medium of instruction is subject to the approval of the Ministry of Education. In the second and third years of secondary school, the students are divided into two streams (science or arts) according to their interests and abilities. The students study the same subjects as in the preparatory level, but in more detail. Science students concentrate on science and mathematics. Art students concentrate on languages and other theoretical studies. The tables below show the weekly lesson timetables for the secondary level (the traditional and the draft new programme).
Until 1988/89 when the two-semester system was introduced, the assessment system emphasized end-of-year examinations. Currently, assessment for promotion to the next class at the end of each year of the preparatory and the secondary levels is done through four tests: two mid-semester and two at the end of the semester.

The average drop-out rates at this level are as follows:

Compiled by UNESCO-IBE (http://www.ibe.unesco.org/)
Percentage of drop-out, 1995-1997

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School year</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Males and females</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1995/96</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996/97</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997/98</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table below shows the percentage of repeaters:

Percentage of repeaters, 1997/98

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade and level</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st secondary</td>
<td>13.4%</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd secondary</td>
<td>7.9%</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd secondary</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In 1995/96, the average number of students per class was 31 and the average teacher-student ratio was 1:16. In 2000/2001, the teacher-student ratio was 17.6:1. The enrolment ratio at the secondary level is shown in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School year</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Males and females</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1995/96</td>
<td>52.0</td>
<td>57.0</td>
<td>54.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996/97</td>
<td>52.5</td>
<td>58.6</td>
<td>55.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In 2005/06, the gross enrolment ratio for Grades X-XII was estimated at 83.8%. Work on the new post-basic education system (Grades XI and XII) is being finalized, with implementation in schools scheduled for beginning in the 2007/08 academic year.

Assessing learning achievement nationwide

Several steps have been taken by the Ministry in the field of evaluation and examinations, including the creation of a Higher Committee of Examinations formed to supervise the evaluation system in all its aspects. The aim of this committee is to upgrade the standard and the efficiency of evaluation. The committee consists of several specialists from Sultan Qaboos University and the Teacher Training Colleges, beside experts from the Ministry of Education.

Within the framework of this committee, other specialized committees for different school subjects have been formed. These specialized committees have studied the contents of the curricula during the period 1993-1996. They have also revised the educational objectives and have designed the behavioural objectives and the objectives of evaluation of the third year of secondary education. The committees

Compiled by UNESCO-IBE (http://www.ibe.unesco.org/)
have also set up specifications for examination questions. Local technical committees have been formed in the regions to be concerned with procedural and technical aspects of evaluation.

Between 1993 and 2001 the country participated in four UNESCO/UNICEF-sponsored Monitoring Learning Achievement (MLA) studies, one each for Grades IV, VI, IX and X. In Grades IV, VI and IX achievement levels were tested in Arabic, mathematics, science and life skills, while in Grade X students were evaluated in Arabic, mathematics, physics, chemistry and biology. The findings indicated low students’ achievement levels in all four of the subjects considered—particularly mathematics in Grade VI.

Another study has been carried out in 2003/04 at the level of the first cycle of basic education (Grade IV pupils). Tests were administered in Arabic, English, mathematics and science to some 7,700 Grade IV pupils in all regions. The results indicated that pupils were on average approximately one year behind international standards. Compared to international norms, there were approximately three times as many pupils with difficulties in reading. Furthermore, there was a significant difference between the performance of boys and girls, with girls doing much better, especially in Arabic. Oman agreed to participate in the fourth cycle of the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) in 2007. (Ministry of Education, 2006).

**Higher education**

Higher education in the Sultanate of Oman is under the supervision of the Ministry of Higher Education. The Ministry operates six Teacher Training Colleges and the College of Sharia and Law. The Vocational Training Authority supervises and operates the technical colleges. The Ministry of Health runs its specialized institutes. There are also other specialized institutes, such as: the Banking Institute which trains bank employees; the Institute of Sharia Judges, Preaching and Guidance; the Institute of Telecommunications, etc. All these institutes, as well as others, belong to different ministries and they have their own budgets. They follow the policies designed by the ministries to which they belong. In addition to these institutes, there are other specialized colleges and institutes which belong to some individuals and private companies. These colleges and institutes are also financially independent; thus, all higher education institutions are administratively, technically or financially independent and are under the supervision of the Ministry of Higher Education.

The Sultan Qaboos University was established in 1986 with five specialized colleges: Medicine, Science, Engineering, Agriculture and Education. The University Teaching Hospital with 500 beds, was opened in 1988. In 1992, two additional colleges were established (Arts and Commerce, and Economics) to meet the increasing demand of graduates in these fields. The College of Sharia and Law is operational since 1997/98.

The table below shows the number of students in the different colleges of the Sultan Qaboos University in the academic year 1997/98:
Number of students in the different colleges, 1997/98

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>College</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts</td>
<td>244</td>
<td>329</td>
<td>573</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commerce and Economics</td>
<td>449</td>
<td>302</td>
<td>751</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education and Islamic studies</td>
<td>785</td>
<td>1,621</td>
<td>2,406</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>614</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>614</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medicine</td>
<td>257</td>
<td>327</td>
<td>584</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>273</td>
<td>484</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>2,759</strong></td>
<td><strong>2,873</strong></td>
<td><strong>5,632</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The University has also started its M.Sc. programmes in almost all colleges. A total of 5,061 students had graduated from the different colleges as of the academic year 1997/98. A total of 41 Master’s degrees had been awarded as of 1996/97.

Higher education policy in the Sultanate of Oman was developed to attain various objectives, of which the following are among the priorities:

- to prepare national human resources and train them at the required technical level in the fields of agriculture, industry and services, in order to fill the needs of the local labour market and the prerequisites of development;
- to promote the scientific level of students in the domains of theoretical and applied knowledge in response to their desire to pursue their studies and develop their personal and social abilities;
- to encourage scientific research and studies and national consultancies, in order to promote them and enhance their value;
- to contribute to serving Omani society by giving its various component members the opportunity to continue their studies.

In order to achieve these objectives, the State has encouraged the creation of numerous higher education institutions. Besides Sultan Qaboos University, there are six Colleges of Education. They award Bachelor of Education degrees in: Islamic education, the Arabic language, life skills, area teaching (primary school teachers) and different specialties in the fields of geography, history, chemistry, physics, mathematics, and information technology (IT).

Study programmes in these colleges aim at filling the needs of the Ministry of Education for teachers of various subjects.

The colleges apply the system of credit hours, totalling 132 credit hours spread over eight terms (four years). The number of students is steadily increasing yearly. In
1997/98, total enrolment was 2,182 and it reached 2,523 in 1998/99. The colleges also offer training programmes in education to graduates from science, literature and other disciplines wishing to join the teaching profession. This programme includes 30 credit hours spread over two terms, of which 21 credit hours are for the professional component and nine credit hours for practical education.

Technical Industrial Colleges are two-year post-secondary institutions which belong to the Vocational Training Authority. The number of students registered in Technical Industrial Colleges in 1995 was 2,005 students (1,437 males and 568 females). They take courses in mechanical engineering, electrical engineering, civil engineering, laboratory sciences, accountancy and business administration.

Health Institutes are under the responsibility of the Ministry of Health. In 1995, the students enrolled in different public Health Institutes were 1,384 throughout the country. They receive courses in nursing education, laboratory science, dental surgery, diagnostic X-rays, physical therapy, pharmacy assistance, general health supervision and health culture.

The Banking Institute is affiliated to the Central Bank of Oman. The students of this Institute are trained to work in banks and other financial institutions.

It is one of the priorities of the Ministry of Higher Education and Sultan Qaboos University to produce efficient and well-qualified graduates in different fields. Evaluation methods for the performance of the colleges of education for teachers and for Sultan Qaboos University are based on internal and external assessments. Internal evaluation makes use of the feedback of all sectors of education. This feedback is collected at fixed times during the academic year. The efficiency of the academic sector is assessed through the teaching performance reports and through the results of the students during the academic year. The performance of the sections is also assessed through feedback from the various departments in different colleges. The same method could be used to evaluate the performance of other sectors, such as the financial and administrative sectors. The relationship between the efficiency of these two sectors and the efficiency of the academic sector could also be traced and checked. External evaluation requires specialized external expertise to evaluate the efficiency of new scientific projects or programmes, after a certain period of field testing.

Each institution follows its own method of evaluation. In some cases, the responsible Ministry designs the evaluation policy for the institutes which it supervises. Evaluation of the students’ performance is done through written, practical and oral examinations. Field training during years of study is also evaluated. Regulations of the institutes determine teaching hours, courses, examinations and other relevant academic issues.

The Vocational Training Authority evaluates both the vocational training system and the financial and administrative performance of its colleges. The system of the colleges is evaluated technically and from an academic point of view. It depends on special conditions and professional standards of the National Professional Qualifications of the United Kingdom, as these technical colleges have a direct relationship with Manchester College for Arts and Technology (MANCAT). The

Compiled by UNESCO-IBE (http://www.ibe.unesco.org/)
programmes, curricula and evaluation methods of these colleges are approved by the Royal Society of Arts (RSA) of the United Kingdom.

The internal certificates and diplomas are recognized by the Ministry of Higher Education. There is a special committee which evaluates certificates awarded abroad. The evaluation is done according to agreements between the Sultanate of Oman and the countries which give the certificates.

**Special education**

The Ministry of Education supervises three special education schools: the Al-Amal School for the Deaf, the school for mentally retarded students, and the institute for the blind. Blind students who complete their preparatory education are allowed to join mainstream secondary schools.

The Al-Amal School provides special courses for deaf students. The duration of study is eleven years covering the elementary and the preparatory levels. In the preparatory school, the students are given vocational training in carpentry, typing or tailoring and needlework for girls. New students are enrolled according to vacancies and abilities of the school. Around 20 students are admitted each year. The size of the class ranges between eight and ten. In 1998/99 there were 251 students enrolled, both male and female.

The school for mentally handicapped students provides education for students suffering from a simple mental handicap and who are able to follow their studies in this school. The duration of study is eleven years distributed as follows: two years for preparing the student, six years for elementary courses, and three years for vocational training. Students are trained in carpentry and weaving. About 20 students join the school annually as new students and 10 students join the elementary level every year. These students are transferred from general education schools. The average size of the class is up to 14 students (males and females). In 1998/99 there were 175 students enrolled.

The courses are taken from general education. The topics selected are suitable for the handicapped students and they meet their educational needs. The curriculum is divided into three categories: a) cultural subjects: Islamic studies, Arabic language, mathematics, general science and social studies; b) practical subjects: typing, carpentry, weaving, needlework and industrial security (for the deaf); c) educational activities: sports, art education, music, agriculture education and home science.

A new institute for the blind was established in 1999. Its annual intake is about 30 students and the duration of study is eleven years (one year of preparatory and ten years of basic education).

The Ministry has also provided opportunities to students with special needs to get educated outside the Sultanate of Oman. Some of these students have been sent to other Gulf countries such as Kuwait where 50 students were studying in 2005/06. In the same school year, the total enrolment in special education schools in Oman was 681 students. The total number of teachers was 161.

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**Private education**

The private sector in Oman plays a supportive role to the Ministry in extending elementary education to all school age children. Kindergartens and nurseries are mainly privately-owned. Private schools also offer education at the elementary, preparatory and secondary levels. The establishment of private schools started two decades ago in Muscat, the capital. Nowadays, these private schools are to be found all over the country. The number of students in private school is too low to compare with the number of students in public schools. However, it is expected that the number of private schools and their students will increase in the future as the Ministry intends that private schools play a more important role in education.

Private schools are under the technical and administrative supervision of the Ministry of Education, through the Department of Private Education and sections of private education in the regions. The Ministry of Education has issued special regulations to control the work of private schools, as well as a guidebook containing laws, regulations, standards and conditions in force. The regulations and the guidebook were issued to assure that the quality of education provided by private schools is at least equivalent to that offered by public schools. Regulations also assure that private schools are not established on a commercial basis and that they are run according to proper educational guidelines.

The regulations for private schools indicate that:

- private schools are committed to teach Omani programmes and textbooks adopted by the Ministry. They may add, upon approval of the Ministry, certain educational programmes and activities. These schools may also use their own English textbooks for the teaching of the English language. Since Arabic is the basic teaching language in private schools, the Ministry may authorize these schools, by means of a special license, to teach mathematics, science and information technology in English;

- teaching staff and other supervising staff should be appointed upon approval of the Ministry of Education;

- qualifications and previous experience of the staff in private schools should not be lower than that of the staff of public schools;

- transfer of students is allowed between public and private schools.

In 2005/06 there were 529 kindergarten classes in the private sector with 9,429 children enrolled (of whom 2,768 in KG1 and 6,661 in KG2) and 529 teachers. There were also 884 private classes at the basic education level, with 15,768 students enrolled and 1,721 teachers. The number of private schools grew from 106 schools in 1996/97 to 132 schools in 2002/03, of which 25 were preparatory and 10 secondary schools. A total of 23,553 students were enrolled in private schools in 2003/04 (in 2005, the total enrolment was 28,183 students in 158 schools). Providing opportunities for the private sector to expand its role in education is considered to be one of the major challenges facing the government.

Means of instruction, equipment and infrastructure

The Ministry of Education provides all textbooks freely to all students. The Ministry also provides teaching aids, equipment, tools and necessary materials for teaching science. The Curricula Development Department carries out, through its experts and specialists, the tasks of revising, modernizing and developing the contents of textbooks and all other relevant elements of curricula. The textbooks are printed by local printers.

Until recent years, the production of learning materials was the concern of two separate departments, the Textbook Department and the Education Technologies Department. The Ministry felt, however, that there was an increasing overlap in the responsibilities of these two departments and, therefore, in 2003 it took the decision to amalgamate them into one centre. The centre consists of six organizational sections, namely: textbook design and editing; textbook production and follow-up; technical support; educational aids; learning resources; and educational technologies.

Classrooms are in sufficient number. The Ministry provides free transportation for both teachers and students. Cafeterias are available in schools as part of the school building, or as attached units built with fixed or movable materials. Boarding houses are available to accommodate students (boys and girls) who come from remote areas. Most of these boarding houses are for secondary students. The number of double-shift schools has been reduced from 344 in 1997 to 184 schools in 2003 (i.e. by 46.5 %) and to 149 in 2005. This was accomplished through establishing new schools and/or extending existing buildings to make them large enough to absorb evening class students.

One of the major recent trends has been the introduction of resource-based learning. This philosophy stresses a shift from the use of a single resource in the classroom, i.e. the textbook, to the use of a wide variety of print and non-print resources. The aim is to encourage students to learn how to use a variety of technologies, demonstrate an understanding of technological applications and apply appropriate technologies to solve different problems. All subject areas now have a range of teaching aids and students are able to get hands-on experience in the classroom with real equipment. For example, in science students work individually and in groups to carry out experiments. Moreover, traditional book-based libraries have been replaced by learning resource centres in all basic education schools. These centres are equipped with 15 computers and a range of audio visual aids and print materials. In the basic education second cycle schools (i.e. Grade V upwards), a separate computer laboratory equipped with 20 additional computers has also been provided.

Adult and non-formal education

The Ministry of Education pays great attention to non-formal education. Non-formal education is run according to the major principles of Omani education to modernize society and develop its members, and it notably focuses on women. Non-formal education takes place in literacy centres, special education centres, and through society development programmes. Adult education and literacy campaign centres use

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school buildings in the evenings. Teachers of normal schools teach in these centres and they are paid for such extra work. These centres continue teaching adults up to the secondary level. Activities of non-formal education consist of the following programmes:

- **Literacy programmes**: a special curriculum has been prepared for literacy. It aims to develop learners physically, intellectually, spiritually, emotionally and socially. The duration of the programme is two years, at the end of which learners are awarded a literacy certificate. The certificate is equal to grade 4 elementary. Learners can follow their elementary studies as from grade 5 in adult education centres. Literacy programmes are designed for people who are more than ten years old and who have not received formal education. In 1993/94, a total of 8,417 learners (of whom 7,499 were females) joined literacy centres. In 1998/99, the number of learners amounted to 4,305 (of whom 4,039 were females).

- **Adult Education Programmes**: these programmes start from fifth elementary and continue until third secondary. Courses in adult education centres are similar to the courses taught in public schools. Regulations of examinations for adult education are also similar to those of general education. Adult education is divided into regular adult education and home study. In the former type, the learner joins an adult education centre and attends regular classes taught by public school teachers. The learner also sits final examinations and is promoted to the upper level according to his or her results. In the latter type, the learner does not attend regular classes, but studies on his/her own at home. The learner sits examinations at any centre he or she chooses. In 1998/99, a total of 6,252 learners (of whom 4,446 females) were enrolled in regular adult education programmes and a total of 11,117 learners (of whom 4,424 females) followed home study.

The 1993 Census indicated that the illiteracy rate in the age group 15-45 was as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total number of persons in the age group 15-45</th>
<th>Number of illiterates</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Females Both sexes</td>
<td>Females Both sexes Females Both sexes</td>
<td>35.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

277,550 559,923 99,095 135,676

Reaffirming the goal to achieve a fully literate population in a more rapid manner, the Ministry of Education set up a national committee in 1998 and developed a national plan with the goal to eradicate illiteracy among 108,000 male and female citizens in the aged group 15-44 within the period covered by the sixth and seventh Development Plans (2001-2005 and 2006-2010 respectively). The literacy programmes take learners to the equivalent level of Grade IV in the subjects of Arabic language, Islamic studies and mathematics.

Since the inception of the literacy programmes in 1973, more than 55,000 adults have completed the programme and are now literate. In 2002/03 a total of 1,675

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adults (of whom 1,518 were females) completed the literacy programme. The number of centres charged with the literacy task reached 117 in 2003/04, with a total of 444 classes delivering programmes to more than 6,600 learners. In order to increase participation and open as many literacy sections in remote areas as possible, Grade XII graduates have been recruited to teach in these classes under the supervision of Ministry of Education staff after being trained with suitable training courses. Blind people are now accepted into literacy classes.

In 2003 the overall literacy rate was estimated at 78% (males 85.4% and females 70.6%). Wide regional variations persist. The region of Wusta, for example, continues to show far higher illiteracy rates (e.g. 51.7%) than the country as a whole.

**Teaching staff**

The social status of the teacher in Oman is very good and distinguished. Teachers enjoy the respect of parents and students. There were 24,093 teachers (males and females) working at all levels of public education in the year 1998/99. This number includes 11,447 elementary school teachers and 12,646 teachers in preparatory and secondary schools. Elementary teachers must have obtained an intermediate educational qualification. Both preparatory and secondary teachers must have a university educational qualification or a general university degree plus an educational diploma.

In order to improve the teachers social and professional standards, the Ministry of Education has decided that, beginning in the year 1996/97, only university graduates will be recruited to work as teachers in all levels. Thus, beginning 1995/96, all intermediate teacher training colleges were replaced by colleges of education. These colleges train teachers for four years and offer academic and educational courses.

From the year 1995/96, teacher training has been carried out in the following types of institutions:

*The Faculty of Education and Islamic Studies (Sultan Qaboos University)*: it admits students for courses which lead to the Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) in different specializations. Graduates of this college work in preparatory schools to teach their subjects of specialization for two years after which good teachers will be promoted to teach in secondary schools.

*Colleges of Education*: there are six colleges of this type in different regions of Oman. The work in these new colleges started in the year 1995/96. They are similar to the Faculty of Education of Sultan Qaboos University in admission requirements and subjects taught (except for English language and educational activities, e.g. sports, music, etc.). Trainees who pass the exams are awarded the Bachelor of Education degree. These colleges train teachers for all levels of education.

Only candidates who have been trained in education are accepted to work as teachers. The Ministry of Education requires, at least, the following qualifications for the appointment of teachers:

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Elementary teachers: a post-secondary educational certificate after a two-year course, or a five-year course after obtaining the General Preparatory Certificate. The same qualifications are required for teachers of sports, music, arts, etc. According to the new requirements, the qualification for elementary teachers is a university degree in education.

Preparatory and secondary teachers: a university degree in education or a post-graduate diploma in education of at least one year after graduation.

Elements of the pre-service teacher training curriculum include: thorough acquaintance with the subject he/she teaches; teaching and professional skills; qualities for human relationships; and elements of programmes which correspond to new aspirations (multicultural education, values education, environment, health, population, new techniques, arts, information and development, etc.).

Training programmes aim to acquaint teachers with the philosophy and objectives of education in the Sultanate of Oman and the basis and approaches on which the curricula have been designed. Teachers should also be acquainted with the general objectives of each level and each curriculum. The training programmes adopt a professional approach and are of a university standard. The teacher receives behavioural training through integrated courses in education and psychology to develop his/her teaching and educational abilities.

The programme is designed according to the system of credit hours and semesters. The courses are designed on the basis of units. Each unit is constructed of several groups of concepts, including: educational objectives, scientific concepts, self-learning, extra-curricular activities and reading tasks, teaching aids and self-evaluation in learning. The programme is concerned with reinforcing the efficiency of the trainees.

The teacher training programme consists of 75 credit hours distributed over two years (four semesters). Each semester is 18 to 21 credit hours, plus some other hours for practical lessons in laboratories and other sports and arts activities. The programme consists of three major groups of courses divided into minor groups as follows:

- **General culture programme**: it consists of several theoretical and practical courses which are required from all students who join these colleges. This programme is common for all higher education students. The length of the programme is 20 credit hours. It consists of the following two minor groups of courses: a) General culture courses (15 credit hours), distributed as follows: Islamic culture (three credit hours), Arabic Language (three credit hours), Oman and Islamic civilization (three credit hours), English language (three credit hours), and computer (three credit hours); b) courses of practical activities and laboratories (four credit hours), distributed as follows: sports (one credit hour), art (one credit hour), vocational training (males, one credit hour), home science (females, one credit hour), environmental education (one credit hour).
• **Behavioural culture programme:** this is a general requirement in the teacher training programme. All trainees should pass the courses of this programme. The courses consist of educational and psychological studies and of theoretical and practical units. All courses help the trainee to teach efficiently in the future. This programme covers 22 credit hours. It covers different courses in psychology, education, curricula and methods of teaching.

• **Specialization programme:** this programme trains the student teacher in two different specializations: a) Elementary education specialization: this specialization prepares trainees to teach all subjects in the first three grades of elementary school. The courses of this specialization are taught in 12 credit hours. The English language department and the agricultural studies department are exceptions to this programme because they train students in their relevant subjects. The specialization programme includes courses in developmental psychology (two credit hours), psychology of play (two credit hours), psychological counselling (two credit hours), elementary methods of teaching (two credit hours), a course for the teacher of all subjects (two credit hours), and classroom management (two credit hours); b) One subject specialization: the student teacher is specialized in one subject of the upper elementary classes. The duration of the courses is 21 hours and they are taught in the last three semesters at the rate of seven hours per semester.

At the Faculty of Education of the Sultan Qaboos University, students should complete 132 credit hours to obtain the B.Ed. The B.Ed. programme consists of three main components, which are: general culture courses (comprehensive requirements); behavioural culture programme, and specialized courses (specialization requirements). Specialization takes different forms, such as single and dual (major and minor). Only five specializations are provided in the fields of mathematics and science.

The Ministry of Education has fixed the numbers of periods which should be taught by teachers in different levels. According to the School Regulations, a teacher of the first three grades of the elementary level should teach between 25-26 periods per week; a teacher who teaches in grades 4-6 should teach between 22 and 26 periods per week; a preparatory teacher should teach between 20 and 24 periods per week; and a secondary teacher should teach between 18 and 22 periods per week. The length of the period at the elementary and preparatory levels is 40 minutes. For the secondary level the period is 45 minutes.

Teachers are employed in the Ministry schools under conditions similar to those of other government employees who hold the same qualifications and have the same experience. Teachers’ gross salaries, including allowances, are even higher than other employees’ salaries because they receive teaching allowance and school administration allowance for headmasters. Male and female teachers are equal in salaries, employment conditions and other facilities offered by the Ministry.

Chances for promotion are available to all teachers. Teachers are promoted according to their experience or to their performance which is stated in their annual reports of performance. In-service training is a right for all teachers. They should attend either innovation courses or special courses in school administration and inspection (supervision).
The Ministry is keen on providing professional support to teachers. It recruits qualified supervisors to help teachers in performing their duties. It also makes available the references and guidebooks for all subjects. The Ministry organizes workshops and seminars to develop teachers’ skills and abilities.

The Ministry is equally paying great attention to the efficiency and evaluation of the teacher. Notably, it recruits a training specialist in every educational region. He/she consults with educational supervisors to follow-up the teachers during their first two years of work. He/she also gives them necessary help and assistance in order to improve their professional efficiency and to decide their training needs. The Ministry is also implementing a new system of a senior teacher for each subject in schools. The senior teacher is supposed to teach fewer periods per week and help his/her colleagues in order to develop their performance skills. Furthermore, the Ministry has revised evaluation methods, so as to be more objective and scientific. Three forms have been prepared: the classroom observation form (filled out by the headmaster); the supervision visit form (filled out by the supervisor); and the evaluation form (filled out conjointly by the headmaster and the supervisor).

The in-service training policy of the Ministry can be summarized as follows:

- updating the teacher’s professional standard to fulfil the objectives of each educational level;
- completion of training of teachers who have not completed their training in the past;
- qualifying teachers, through educational training, to be able to meet the students’ needs in their different stages of development and also through the provision of intensive theoretical and practical studies of these stages;
- updating the teachers’ knowledge in their specialization to prepare them to face modern challenges and to be acquainted with the latest innovations;
- training teachers on the preparation of field and procedural researches and on textbook writing;
- training teachers theoretically and practically in educational leadership;
- acquainting teachers with the general objectives and policies in his or her field of specialization;
- training the teachers on using methods of scientific research and self-development in his or her field of specialization.

The Continuing Training Section updates teachers’ information and it develops their professional methods and approaches. This section concentrates on new ideas in the field of education which will help the teaching/learning process. The objectives of continuous training are: to refresh the educational background of teachers through workshops, seminars and innovation courses; to help teachers

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acquire the ability of using teaching and learning aids; to enable them to connect contents of courses with the principles of the modern Omani curricula and their objectives; and to acquaint them with all innovations in the field of education.

The Ministry is carrying out different in-service training programmes such as:

- **Short programmes**: these include innovation courses, workshops and seminars of one week’s duration.

- **Mid-term programmes**: one of these programmes is conducted for elementary teachers who obtain a university degree during their service as a teacher. The programmes aim to prepare teachers to teach in the preparatory level.

- **Specialized courses**: organized to meet the training needs of directors, deputy directors, teachers, librarians, laboratory technicians and other Ministry employees.

The training of headmasters, supervisors, education specialists and other employees who are connected with schools is done through:

- **The School Administration Diploma**: school headmasters and their deputies are trained through an in-service course. This course is designed according to the regular integrated approach which mixes direct and indirect learning. The course aims to help the trainees to acquire technical and administrative efficiency to enable them to carry out the tasks relevant to their jobs. The duration of the course is one year after which successful trainees are awarded the School Administration Diploma. This diploma is approved by the University of Sultan Qaboos.

- **The Advanced Educational Supervision Course**: this is an in-service training course given to supervisors of the three levels. This course aims to help the trainees acquire administrative, technical and supervision efficiencies in order to be able to properly carry out their tasks as supervisors. This general objective has been translated into several procedural objectives which are relevant to the topics of the course. The duration of the course is one year. At the end of the course, the trainee is awarded the Educational Supervision Certificate when he/she meets all requirements of the course. This course consists of workshops, seminars and practical activities in the field.

Different departments of the Ministry also organize many workshops and seminars in co-operation with regional directorates. In recent years, the Ministry has placed particular emphasis on the professional development programme with staff involved in the Basic Education reforms and in the schools implementing the Examinations Reform Project. In both of these reform initiatives, trainers situated in all regions in the country were identified, trained centrally in the Ministry and then asked to carry out the training programmes with all teachers, headmasters and subject supervisors involved in these reforms. The number of training programmes organised by the Human Resource Development Department (HRDD) has increased considerably in recent years as has the number of trainees attending these programmes. During the period 1997-2002, a total of 886 programmes have been
delivered to 24,430 trainees. The main aim of these in-service training programmes is both to help prepare teachers before they begin teaching to the new reformed arrangements and to offer on-going support when they are involved in the process. The training courses, therefore, concentrate on practical issues such as assisting teachers to adopt more student-centred techniques by focusing their lessons in order to get their students to think, reflect and solve problems.

**Educational research and information**

The organizational chart of the Ministry of Education includes a Technical Office for Studies and Development. Work is coordinated between this department and the Educational Research Centre in Sultan Qaboos University, in order to undertake joint research, if necessary, and avoid duplication in studies. Research carried out by the Ministry is financed from the department’s budget.

Research carried out by the Ministry is centred on improving, developing and promoting the education system and its aims. As it is stated in the general regulations of the Ministry of Education, educational research (both practical and theoretical) aims at developing methods of educational evaluation and assessment, providing necessary references for the education staff and facilitating usage of these references for all parties. Many studies have been completed on various issues such as: assessment and evaluation methods; evaluation of examinations; present programmes and promotion policies at the elementary level; education management systems and methods; educational guidance methods and personnel; school laboratories; homework of lower-grade pupils at the elementary level; use of micro-calculators in schools.

Studies and research are usually at the disposal of users. They are normally distributed in the Ministry, the educational regions and to other users, within the framework of co-operation and expertise exchange. They are also included in library documents to be placed at users’ disposal. Indicators most frequently used by decision-makers and executors refer to: internal and external quality of education systems; school buildings; financing of education; demographic distribution of the population; quality of teacher training; educational statistics.

The organizational chart of the Ministry also includes a Directorate-General for Education Relations and Information, entrusted with providing educational information within the framework of bilateral, regional and international co-operation.

Among the duties of the Human Resource Development Department (HRDD) is to study the Ministry’s needs for different training programmes and to provide training for teachers and other Ministry staff. HRDD’s in-service training programmes and its promotion of the idea of involving staff in “reflective practice” and collaborative action aim at encouraging schools to become learning organizations.
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