

Ministry of Education, in cooperation with Sultan Qaboos University, set up an educational committee of specialists in the Arabic Language programme and its teaching methods to address reading difficulties, to understand its causes and propose appropriate solutions.

In view of the importance of reading, and to encourage students to engage in research and be informed, the Ministry has adopted a Junior Reader Project. This project seeks to provide students with a sound educational environment likely to give them the opportunity to develop their reading skills in order to improve the learning process.

In addition to many positive developments initiated at the national level, there are numerous outstanding projects at regional levels. One such project involves special instruction in Arabic language to children whose first language is not Arabic (e.g. the Jabali people in Dhofar region).

- **Reforming student assessment and evaluation methods**

New assessment and evaluation and promotion policies have directly and considerably reduced the problem of grade-level repetition, and indirectly, the drop-out rates. Continuous and formative assessment seeks to identify and meet students' needs.

- **Developing social programmes in schools**

Since poor social conditions have an impact on drop-outs rates and repetition, the development of social care in the school represents a part of the solution. The role of the school social worker is being redefined to more effectively meet the students' needs.

- **Assistance to low-income families**

In recognition of the needs of economically and socially disadvantaged families, both the government and the private sector offer assistance (such as buying school uniforms) to low income families.

- **Nutrition project**

The Ministry of Education is aware of the importance of proper nutrition and the role it plays in students' good acquisition, specially the breakfast that a student takes at home before coming to school in the morning or during staying at school. The Ministry has carried out a field study on the status of school nutrition and awareness among students of proper food. As result of this study and other previous studies, a workshop was

organized in Muscat in cooperation with the Ministry of Health on 16-18 February 2004 . The title of that workshop was ( Nutrition is health and good learning) . The school year 2003/2004 has witnessed, in cooperation with the Ministry of Health, the implementation of a project aiming at making students and parents aware of the importance of proper nutrition. The project focuses on the importance of students having a complete and nutritious breakfast before coming to school and to develop the habit of bringing nutritious food from home for the first morning break period. For the second break, nutritious snacks are available at the schools for students whose parents are willing to pay a modest sum to cover costs. On the other hand, the Ministry, through regional educational directorates, has made initiatives to make parents aware of the importance of provision of proper nutrition to students, or in some cases the Ministry, in coordination with parents' associations, provides nutritious meal to students consists of dates and milk.

- **Health programme**

In conjunction with the Ministry of Health, all schools in the country have the regular services of a school nurse and, on occasion, a doctor to provide medical assistance and information on student health issues. Nurses are assigned on the basis of one nurse for every 2,500 students, while doctors are assigned on the basis of one per 5,000 students. Emphasis is on hygiene, nutrition, life facts (including for older students, sexually transmitted diseases), basic medical tests and immunisation, as well as treatment of simple illnesses and provision of first aid.

### ***Literacy Education and Adult Education***

Special emphasis on literacy and adult education in Oman has yielded some positive results. Since the inception of the literacy programmes in 1973, more than 55,000 adults have completed the programme and are now literate.

Table 3: The number of adults who have completed literacy programmes (1999/2000 and 2002/2003)

School Year	Males	Females	Total
1999/2000	97	1,219	1,316
2002/2003	94	1,518	1,675

The number of centres charged with the literacy task reached 117 in the 2003-2004 school year, with a total of 444 classes delivering programmes to more than 6,600 students. In order to increase participation and open as many literacy sections in remote areas as possible, male and female grade 12 school 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. With support from both UNESCO and the government of Oman, the literacy programme continues to be renewed and updated.

The low numbers of males enrolling in adult literacy centres is a matter of some concern. The major reason for the low male enrolment figures, however, appears to be linked to the predominant culturally-held view that males have primary financial responsibility for the family. The majority of literacy programmes are concentrated in rural areas and are well-attended by females who tend to stay in the villages. Males, on the other hand, are less well represented in the villages since most of those of working age have moved to the larger urban centres or outside the country in search of employment.

Those who do not wish to continue their education in adult education centres are given the opportunity to continue their learning by themselves and are provided with a free set of 30 books designed for adult self-study to help them to remain literate.

Every year, the Ministry of Education commemorates the Arab and International Days for the eradication of illiteracy, with the view to raise citizens' awareness of the negative impact of illiteracy on individuals and society as a whole. In 1997, the Sultanate of Oman was awarded a prize by the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organisation for ranking first in illiteracy eradication activities in the Arab world.

Additionally, the expansion and extension of the Basic Education programme in Oman is seen as an effective strategy to "dry up" the sources of illiteracy in the country and confine it to groups other than those of school age.

In order to give the opportunity to pursue schooling for those who have succeeded in overcoming illiteracy, as well as to those who have dropped-out of

formal education, the Ministry has set up centres for adult education (see table for the increase in the number of learners in these centres).

Table 4: Increase in number of learners in Adult Education Centres from 1998/99 to 2002/03.

Year	Classes 1-6			Classes 7-9			Classes 10-12			Grand Total
	M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total	
1998/99	210	197	407	1894	477	2371	4649	3750	8399	11177
2002/03	541	2341	2882	3435	2224	5659	12255	10521	22776	31317

## 2.3 Education and competencies for life

Several years ago, the Ministry of Education began a study on the status of secondary education in the Sultanate. The aim of the study was to identify suitable curricula and assessment options for post-Basic Education grades 11 and 12. The options identified by the Ministry were to be consistent with the outcomes of the Basic Education reform programme. The intention is to implement the new model in time for the first cohort to complete grade 10 of Basic Education, i.e. at the beginning of the school year 2007/2008.

Although the Ministry is still at the planning stage with regard to this study, some important decisions have already been agreed upon and these can be summarised as follows:

- Entry into grade 11 will be open to all students who wish it and who have successfully completed grade 10 of Basic Education.
- The aim of the programmes will be to prepare individual students for life after school, whether for entry to higher or further education or for direct entry into the labour market.
- The curricular model will be one which emphasises the learning of essential skills. In this model, all students will be expected to acquire and develop a set of key skills, or fundamental competencies, which will enable them to operate effectively in a wide range of contexts.

- The curriculum will be organised on a core plus options model. The essential skills will be delivered through integrating the skills into core subject-based courses taken by all students. The options will give students the opportunity to choose programmes that are appropriate for their varying abilities and interests.

As stated in section 1.2d, the Basic Education and post-Basic Education grades 11 and 12 reforms are being phased-in gradually. As a result, the General Education system and the Basic Education system will be operating simultaneously for several years to come. The Ministry of Education has, therefore, made attempts to upgrade the current system by introducing a number of reforms. The reforms made to the existing General Education grades 11 and 12 system can be summarised as follows:

- The Arts and Science streams in grades 11 and 12 have been replaced with a unified core and options model.
- To make the curriculum more relevant for the needs of students, the options include courses in pure and applied Mathematics with the latter containing units of study related to practical economics.
- Computers are being issued to all schools teaching grade 11 students and the subject Computing Studies will begin to be taught to these students in September 2004.

The Ministry has always been keen to encourage students to develop life skills beyond those taught in the traditional curricula. As a result, it has promoted a number of local, regional and national level competitions which students are actively encouraged to participate in. For example, there are well-established school competitions on speech-making, journalism, theatre, art, social activities, health and cleanliness.

## 2.4 Quality education and the key role of teachers

The successful implementation of any reform initiative depends on a well trained, well informed and highly motivated staff. Devising an appropriate model for the delivery of high quality professional development was, therefore, considered as an essential component of the reform process.

In recent years, the Ministry has placed particular emphasis on its 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 Ministry's Human Resource Development Department (HRDD) has increased considerably in recent years as has the number of trainees attending these programmes. As can be seen from the table below, the figures reached a peak in 2001 and have now begun to plateau out.

Table 5: The number of training programmes and trainees (1997 to 2002)

Year	Programmes	Trainees
1997	46	614
1998	96	2,316
1999	112	3,884
2000	145	4,328
2001	239	6,851
2002	239	6,437
<b>Total</b>	<b>887</b>	<b>24,430</b>

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 focussing their lessons in order to get their students to think, reflect and solve problems.

In addition to a top-down approach, the Ministry has been keen to introduce a model which also allows teachers to be actively involved in their own professional development. As a result, schools have been encouraged to organise their own in-service workshops and to contribute to the planning and implementation of regional courses.

Moreover, as mentioned in section 1.3, the Ministry has promoted the idea of involving staff in "reflective practice" and collaborative action in schools. This programme was started in 30 schools in the school year 2002-2003 and it is intended to increase the number to 60 schools in the following school year. These schools have been instructed to provide opportunities for their staff to work together to analyse, discuss, reflect on, plan and do something to improve the effectiveness of teaching and learning in their classrooms. Headmasters and headmistresses, senior teachers, teachers and supervisors have been encouraged to collaborate to carry out research, to develop their ideas, to put them into practice in the field and to report back their findings to the Ministry.

The Ministry has facilitated this process by publishing monthly bulletins containing the reports of practitioners and by organising regional and national conferences aimed at the sharing of ideas and experiences. The Ministry's website and the forum developed in it are also used as a channel for discussion and learning. The Ministry has also organised and funded visits to other countries from Ministry staff, including teachers, in order to encourage the generation of new ideas.

In another major Ministry of Education initiative, in cooperation with the University of Leeds in the United Kingdom, Omani English Language teachers are being provided with the opportunity to upgrade their diploma qualifications to a Bachelor of Arts (BA) in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). The aim of this "BA TESOL Project" is to allow Omani teachers of English to develop knowledge and higher skills in order to promote more effective English language teaching in schools. The majority of the teachers involved in the project teach grades 1-4 in schools, although others teach more senior grades. This project began in 1998 and is expected to continue until 2008. The programme is aiming to qualify around 1,060 teachers and the first BA degrees were awarded to 285 successful students in May 2003. By December 2005 it is expected that a further 380 will have done so.

Similarly, the Ministry is taking active steps to ensure that teachers in subjects other than English Language upgrade their two-year teaching diplomas to a BA. The Ministry is cooperating with the Ministry of Higher Education and the Sultan Qaboos University to provide opportunities for teachers to continue their studies at higher education institutes.

## 2.5 Education for Sustainable Development

The preamble to the United Nations Resolution on the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development 2005-2014 includes the following key themes:

- Overcoming Poverty
- Gender Equality
- Intercultural Peace and Understanding
- Cultural and Linguistic Diversity
- Sustainable Production and Consumption
- Information and Communication Technologies

The Ministry of Education in the Sultanate of Oman has made major strides in addressing these key themes in education for sustainable development. Ongoing revisions to the Omani curricula and textbooks in both Basic Education and General Education address each of these key themes. Students are being equipped with knowledge, skills and values that will assist them to increase their understanding of social, economic and environmental sustainability and to allow them to participate in solutions to sustainable development.

Issues of *overcoming poverty* are addressed through the Islamic Studies, Social Studies, Information Technology and the Environmental Life Skills programmes, as well as through the new secondary courses in Economics and Administrative Sciences. A high-quality education is seen as the vehicle for enabling young Omanis to overcome poverty and in preparing the country for a sustainable future.

Integration of *gender perspectives* into all educational activities has been enhanced through the introduction of programmes that serve the two sexes. Both male and female specialists are involved equally in curricula writing. Topics covered in courses of all subjects are varied in a way that covers the interests of both sexes. The Ministry's policy in providing education equally for boys and girls is another indicator for enhancement of the principle of equity between the two sexes. In addition to that, and as mentioned in section 2.2, both boys and girls study the same courses in schools.

Values relating to *intercultural peace and understanding* have had a prominent position in the curriculum since the very start of formal education in Oman.

While aiming to reinforce among students a strong and proud belief in Islamic principles and behaviour and pride in their country, it has also focussed on encouraging students to feel pride in their Gulf and Arab heritage and an appreciation of being a world citizen.

The content of the curricula is under constant review and update in order to ensure that it is adequately fulfilling these objectives. The emphasis given in the recent educational reforms in Oman to the teaching of English and Information Technology is likely to create additional opportunities for cross-cultural communication.

The student-centred philosophy and practices of the new Basic Education programme are also helping to encourage value related to intercultural understanding. The new programme stresses the right of each child to an education according to his/her abilities and needs. The emphasis on activity-based and collaborative approaches to learning involves students in activities, games and problem-solving in pairs and groups using cooperative learning strategies. These techniques encourage students to work together, to cooperate, to share responsibilities, to resolve conflicts and to assist each other in the learning process. These approaches promote attitudes and values of respect for the opinions, rights and responsibilities of self and others.

The Ministry also regularly organises cross-curricular workshops and seminars on issues such as human rights and international understanding. Moreover, those schools in Oman that are a part of the UNESCO Associated Schools Net make use of the UNESCO materials and strategies known as the "peace package" to promote tolerance, peace and non-violence.

An important way that *cultural and linguistic diversity* has been encouraged in Omani schools for many years has been through the teaching of English language from grades 4-12 for all students in all General Education schools of Oman. It has been further enhanced in recent years with the introduction of English language from the grade one level in the new Basic Education programme. Some private schools in Oman offer an even wider programme of language learning with numerous different languages being taught, in addition to Arabic and English. Learning about other languages and cultures encourages awareness, appreciation and value for other cultures and their beliefs among students.

The Environmental Life Skills programme, which is taught in all Basic Education schools in Oman, contributes effectively in addressing two of the key themes of education for sustainable development - *intercultural peace and understanding* and *cultural and linguistic diversity*. This uniquely Omani programme includes themes on national and global education and explores issues such as elections, public service, and respect for other cultures (dealing with foreigners, visitors and tourists to Oman), with emphases on communication, behaviour and conflict resolution.

Oman has achieved world-wide recognition for its efforts in placing strong emphases on *conservation and protection of its natural resources*. Environmental education units in Science and Social Studies programmes address the issues of *sustainable production and consumption*. Grades 11 and 12 courses in Economics and Administrative Sciences explore economic growth, employment, life skills, financial skills and management and contribute to understanding the need for *sustainable production and consumption*. Similarly, new programmes in information and communication technologies (ICTs) are greatly increasing the awareness of students and their access to information on these crucial matters.





# References and Appendices



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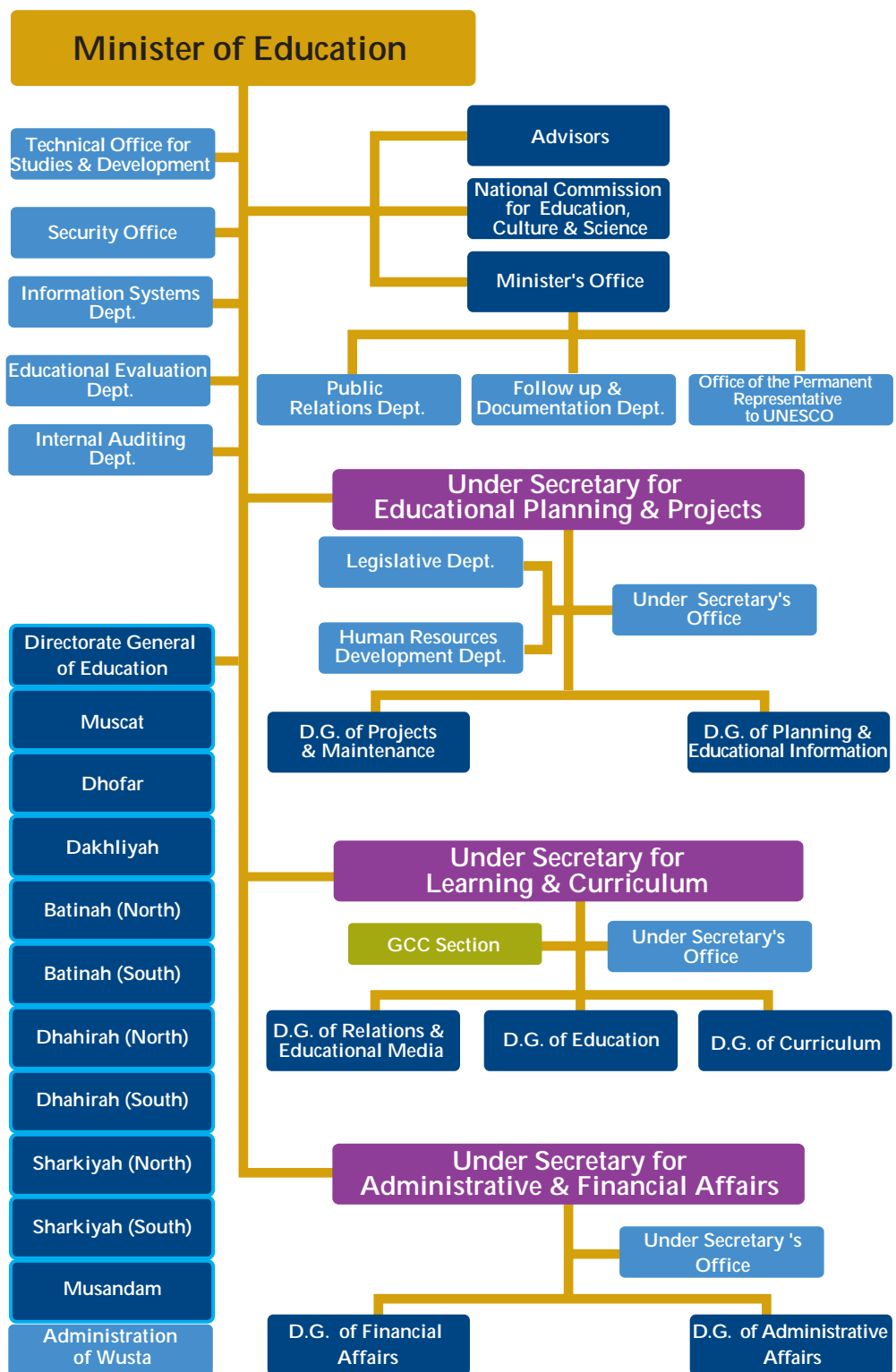
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## Appendix 1 Organisation of the Ministry of Education



## Appendix 2 Statistical Review

Table 6: The number of Basic Education schools per region in 2003-2004

Region	Number of schools
Muscat	51
Batinah North	51
Batinah South	40
Dakhliyah	49
Sharkiyah North	31
Sharkiyah South	35
Dhahirah North	11
Dhahirah South	28
Dhofar	36
Wusta	7
Musandam	13
<b>Total</b>	<b>352</b>

Table 7: Location of Examinations Reform Project Pilot Schools

Region	Phase 1	Phase 2	Total
Muscat	2	10	12
Batinah North	2	10	12
Batinah South	2	10	12
Dakhliyah	2	10	12
Sharkiyah North	2	8	10
Sharkiyah South	2	10	12
Dhofar	-	4	4
Dhahirah	-	4	4
Wusta	-	2	2
Musandam	-	2	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>82</b>



A Basic Education School  
Cycle one (Grades 1-4)



مدرسة تعليم أساسي  
حلقة أولى (الصفوف ١-٤)