

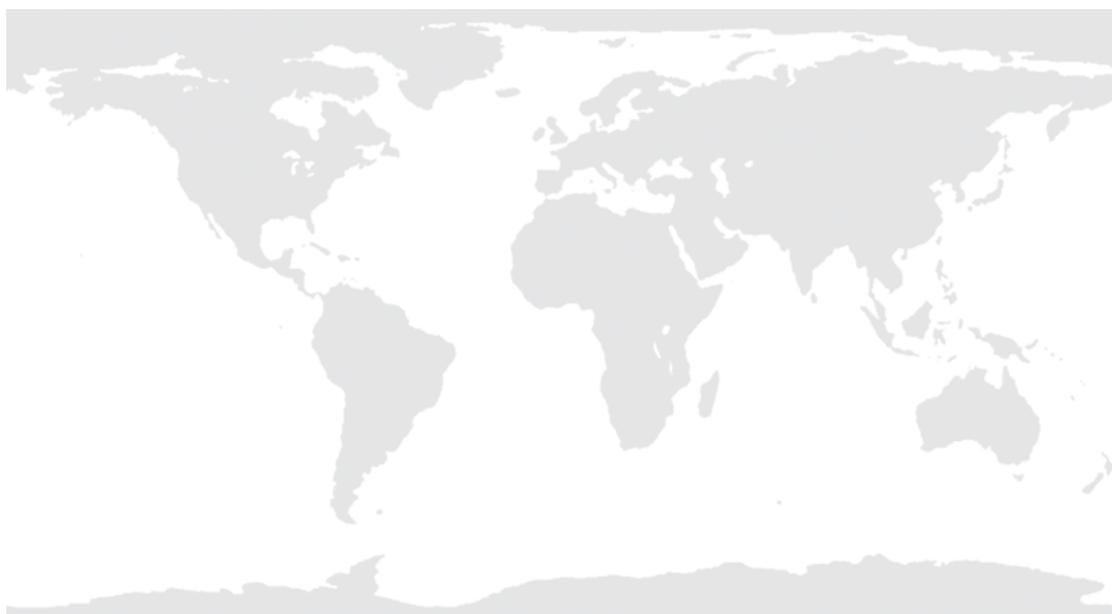


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Principles and general objectives of education

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 Omanis;
- 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).

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 (e.g. the 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.

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**.

The **Royal Decree No. 104/2005** has established the Higher Education Admission Centre, affiliated to the Ministry of Higher Education. The **Ministerial Decree No. 8/2011** issued by the Ministry of Higher Education on 29 January 2011 details the procedures for admission to higher education institutions.

Education is provided free of charge to all children from grade 1 to grade 12 (MOE, 2008).

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 educational policies 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 Higher Education was established in 1994. It supervises post-secondary education in



universities, institutes and colleges. It also supervises scholarships abroad. The **Ministry of Manpower** oversees post-secondary industrial technical colleges and vocational training institutes. While the **Ministry of Social Affairs** supervises kindergartens run by voluntary organizations, all private sector kindergarten providers are supervised by the Ministry of Education. Nurseries are under the responsibility of the **Ministry of Social Development**.

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. Within the Ministry, the **Directorate General of Curriculum** has responsibility for developing the national curricula that is taught in all public schools. Private schools have the option of either implementing the curricula developed by the Ministry or adopting curricula affiliated with international programmes. 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 centers in each local educational authority in order to supervise training activities. These centers are under the direct supervision of the HRDD.

In 2002 the Ministry of Education 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 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 Ministerial Decision No. 2/2006 implemented self management in schools and enabled them to take their own decisions on administrative, financial and technical matters. The main aim of introducing self management in schools is to give a greater role to the school and its employees in planning, implementation and follow up of activities as well as in proposing programmes to improve school performance. (UNESCO, 2008).

Within the Ministry of Higher Education, the **Oman Accreditation Council** (OAC) is charged with assisting in the development of the Omani higher education sector through institutional quality audits and institutional and programme accreditation processes. Additionally, in collaboration with the Ministry of Higher Education, the OAC has responsibilities for establishing academic standards, and providing training and networking opportunities. The **Higher Education Admission Centre**, established in 2005 under the Ministry of Higher Education, has the task to regulate the admission of holders of the general certificate of education at higher education institutions according to their wishes and marks obtained and the admission requirements specified by the higher education institutions.

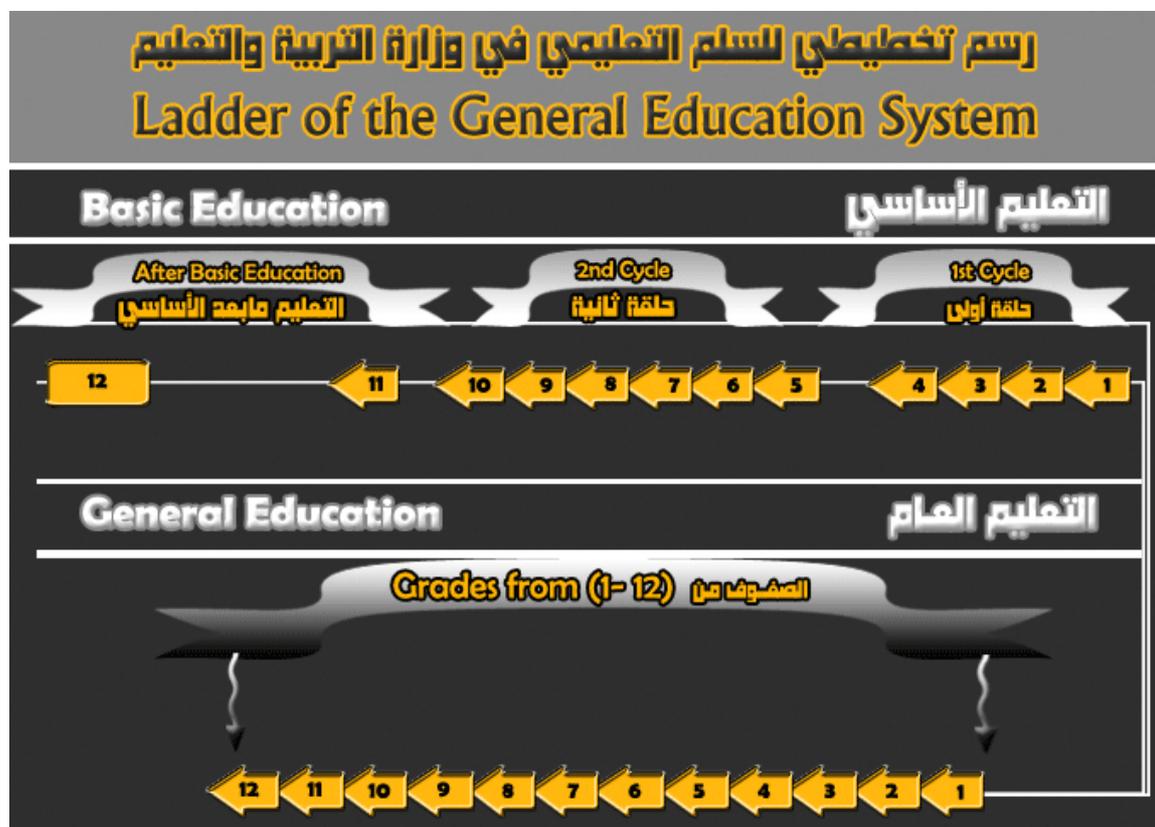
Some ministries and other bodies have their own institutes, such as the Institute of Health, the Institute of Judicature and the Institute of Public Administration. The Central Bank of Oman supervises the Banking Institute, and the Royal Guard has one technical college of the secondary level. A limited 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 1998/99, the Ministry introduced a new ten-year school system which operates concurrently with the existing three-level general education 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.

Pre-school education

Until recent years, only private institutions, some government agencies and voluntary organizations provided preschool education. Five different types of early childhood care and education services exist, namely nurseries, daycare centers, home care centers, Madrassas or Qur'anic schools and kindergartens. Nurseries cater to children aged between 3 months and 3.5 years. Daycare centers cater to children aged between 6 months and 3 years, with 3-year-olds and above receiving kindergarten classes. Qur'anic schools provide services to children aged between 3 and 6. Kindergartens



which cater to children in the age range 3.5 years and 5.5 years are the most formal of preschool services.

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 1 to 4 and the second consisting of grades 5 to 10. Basic education is provided free of charge.

Secondary education

Preparatory education lasts three years and is an intermediate level between elementary and secondary school. Upon completion of this level, students sit an examination which entitles them, if successful, to enter the first year 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. Vocational training centers offer three-year programmes to grade 9 graduates; upon successful completion of the training programme, trainees are awarded a certificate which specifies the specialization and vocational level attained. 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 boys 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 post-basic secondary education.

Higher education

Higher education is offered at the Sultan Qaboos University and several post-secondary specialized colleges and institutes. On the basis of the Oman National Qualifications Framework (approved in 2005 and under review in 2008), at the undergraduate level one-year programmes lead to a certificate, two-year programmes to a diploma (including associate degree), and three-year programmes lead to an advanced diploma. The duration of bachelor's degree programmes is normally four years (five years in the case of architecture and engineering; a minimum of five and a half years in the case of medicine). At the postgraduate level, a postgraduate diploma requires one year of study, and a master's degree normally takes two years to complete. The duration of doctoral degree programmes is two to four years.

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 educational process

The Directorate General of Curriculum 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 specialization 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 1 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-centered learning approaches; and (x) applying a system of cooperative 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. By the beginning of the academic year 2004/05, the programme had been developed for grades 1 to 8. 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 (a total of 661 schools in 2007/08). The post-basic curricula (grades 11 and 12) were almost complete in 2008/09.

The Ministry of Education defines the curriculum as a series of processes, skills and attitudes that transcends the prescribed teaching curricula and is disseminated through classroom activities and out of class activities. The new curriculum concept is distinguished by two key characteristics: (a) it is learner-centered with the expectation that students will be active learners who construct knowledge based on prior knowledge, experiences and attitudes; and (b) it is comprehensive in nature, is not limited to textbook knowledge, and encompasses experiences relevant to the learner. Care was taken to ensure that the basic education curriculum was relevant to the present and future needs of students. Although it will always be important for students to acquire factual knowledge, the body of knowledge in most subject areas is changing rapidly. Consequently, rather than merely remembering information, it is now more important for students to be able to find and use the information. The revision of curricular materials represents a shift away from content overloaded with theory and abstract concepts. Learning materials being developed today are based on practical and real-life contexts and applications, and provide students with opportunities for experiential learning. The emphasis is on the acquisition of transferable skills.

Teacher-centered approaches had been dominant in the general education system. The Ministry of Education feels that over-reliance on such methods often encourages students to become passive learners, who are too dependent on the teacher to tell them what and when to learn. Research has suggested that teaching and learning approaches that allow students to merely read, listen and watch are not particularly effective in getting them to learn. The Ministry has, therefore, encouraged a shift away from teacher- to student-centered learning. Teachers have been trained in the new teaching methods and in how to adapt their classroom management techniques in line with current worldwide developments. Along with whole class teaching, teachers are now expected to use a variety of other teaching and learning methods, such as individual, pair, small group and out-of-school work. The strategies employed by teachers aim to develop skills and attitudes that encourage 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. (MOE, 2008).

Pre-primary education

Kindergartens are available in all private schools. Nurseries and kindergartens are available in some public establishments. The main objectives and aims of preschool 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;
- acquainting the children with certain aspects, activities and social events characteristic of the Sultanate of Oman, and giving them the opportunity to participate therein;
- providing the child with 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;
- providing the children with the opportunity to exercise the maximum amount of activity and allowing them to express their sentiments, ideas and questions;
- preparing children for school education.

Until recently, only private institutions, some government agencies and voluntary organizations, such as the Royal Omani Police, Oman Women's Association, and Women's Development Centers, provided preschool education in the Sultanate. Five different types of early childhood care and education services are now provided, namely nurseries, daycare centers, home care centers, Madrassas or Qur'anic schools and kindergartens.

Nurseries cater to children aged between 3 months and 3.5 years. In 2003/04, there were 33 nurseries in Oman, 28 of which were located in the Muscat area, with a total enrolment of 1,400 children. The Ministry of Social Development provides technical support in the form of rules, regulations, standards and advice. Monitoring of the nurseries by the Ministry is done two or three times per year. In addition, there are 30 low-cost childhood daycare centers which also fall under the responsibility of the Ministry of Social Development. Care assistants attend to children aged between 6 months and 3 years, with 3-year-olds and above receiving kindergarten classes. There are also 36 'children's corners', of which 21 are run by Oman Women's Associations and 15 are affiliated with Women Rehabilitation Centers. Government units that provide preschool facilities for the children of their employees include the Royal Oman Police and the Royal Navy of Oman. In some areas where there are no Women's Associations, houses are turned into home care centers in order to provide some preschool education services. A total of 39 home care centers were in existence in 2005, some of which were linked to Women's Development Centers.



The Qur'anic schools cater to children aged between 3 and 6. These fall into two categories, one supervised by the Ministry of Auqaf and Religious Affairs and the other by the private sector. In 2004, it was estimated that there were 105 schools supervised by the Ministry and that over 7,300 students were enrolled in these schools.

Kindergartens, which cater to children aged between 3.5 years and 5.5 years, provide formal preschool services. Between 1995 and 2005, the rise in enrolments in kindergartens made this the fastest growing sector of the education system, achieving an average annual growth rate of 7.3%. While the Ministry of Social Affairs supervises kindergartens run by voluntary organizations, all private sector kindergarten providers are supervised by the Ministry of Education. The Ministry regulates the quality and standards for facilities, equipment, materials, training of teachers and supervisors. Kindergartens follow a curriculum designed by the ministry with UNICEF support and all materials are provided to the kindergartens at production cost. In order to provide preschool teachers with the training they need, the Ministry of Education convened a training workshop for a core group of kindergarten teachers. UNICEF provided technical support secured through Sultan Qaboos University. These teachers, in their capacity as Resource Team Trainers, were then given the responsibility of training other teachers. The Ministry has also begun the process of developing minimum standards for preschool education.

A recent report recommended that the Ministry of Education should assume responsibility for the supervision of all early childhood education in order to ensure consistency of policy, the setting of minimum standards for provision, including qualifications of teachers, student ratios, hours of operation, quality of curriculum and resources, as well as standards for equipment and facilities. Starting from 2008/09 year, all the Qur'anic schools, children's corners and programmes supervised by the Royal Oman Police and the Army have come under the administrative and technical supervision of the Ministry of Education. (MOE, 2008).

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 centered 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 preschool 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. 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.



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.

In 2006/07 there were 37,469 children enrolled in preschool institutions, representing 28.4% of the total eligible population in the age group 3.5-5.5 years. (UNESCO, 2008). According to the Ministry of National Economy, in 2009/10 a total of 24,432 children were enrolled at the kindergarten level in private schools. (MONE, 2010).

Primary and preparatory education (basic 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 1 to 4 and the second consisting of grades 5 to 10.

Basic education (ten-year programme) aims at the development of various aspects of the personality of the learner in a comprehensive and integrated framework of the principles of the Islamic faith and cultural identity Omani constituents. The main objectives of the curriculum (grades 1 to 10) are the following:

- developing the personality of the learner in the Omani integrity and balance physically, mentally, socially, spiritually and emotionally, according to the characteristics of growth;
- consolidating the principles of the Islamic faith in the minds of learners, and raising the practice of worship and commitment to the correct Islamic behavior;
- raising the learners' pride in Arabic, and the development of his/her ability to use it diligently;
- instilling pride and the development of viable and elements of the cultural identity of the Omani learner;
- developing awareness of the importance of social controls, and respect public and private property;
- developing students' communication skills using a foreign language (English);
- developing the skills of the learner towards continuous self-learning;
- developing the use of the scientific method of thinking;
- providing the learner with basic skills needed to deal with contemporary science and technology;
- fostering the ability to develop creativity and innovation and deal with the future;
- providing the learner with basic skills necessary for life, and preparing him/her for work;

- teaching the learners the values and practices of preserving the environment;
- developing awareness of contemporary problems;
- developing learners' habits and behaviors of savings, consumption good;
- developing awareness of the importance of leisure time, and how to organize it;
- developing creativity and aesthetic taste;
- fostering the values of tolerance, understanding, peace and coexistence with others.
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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

Subject	Number of weekly periods in each grade					
	I	II	III	IV	V	VI
Islamic education	6	6	6	5	5	5
Arabic language	11	11	9	6	6	6
English language	–	–	–	4	4	4
Mathematics	5	5	5	5	5	5
General science	2	2	3	3	3	3
Social studies (*)	1	1	2	2	2	2
Physical education	2	2	2	2	2	2
Art education	1	1	1	1	1	1
Music education	1	1	1	1	1	1
Vocational activities (*)	–	–	1	1	1	1
Practical activities	1	1	–	–	–	–
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

Subject	Number of weekly periods in each form		
	I	II	III
Islamic education	4	4	4
Arabic language	6	6	6
English language	4	4	4
Mathematics	5	5	5
General science	4	4	4
Social studies	3	3	3
Physical education	1	1	1
Art education	1	1	1
Music education	1	1	1
Vocational activities	1	1	1
Total weekly periods	30	30	30

Source: *Ibid.* Each teaching period lasts 40 minutes.

New basic education programme: weekly lesson timetable

Subject	Number of weekly periods in each grade									
	First cycle				Second cycle					
	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX	X
Islamic education	6	6	6	5	5	5	4	4	4	4
Arabic language	12	12	10	7	7	7	7	7	7	7
English language	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
Mathematics	7	7	7	7	7	7	8	8	8	8
Sciences	3	3	3	5	5	5	6	6	6	8
Social studies	–	–	2	3	4	4	4	4	4	4
Physical education	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	1
Fine arts	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1
Music	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	–
Environmental life skills	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Information technology	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	1
Total weekly periods	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40

Source: Information provided by the Gulf Arab States Educational Research Center (GASERC), November 2004. 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.

Repetition rates decreased significantly between 1995 and 2005. A large decrease occurred in grades 1-6 in 2001/02, which can be explained by the decision to allow all pupils to progress through grades 1 to 4. Drop-out rates have also been decreasing, albeit more gradually than repetition rates. Despite these improvements, in grades 7 to 12 the drop-out rates for boys continue to be approximately twice as high as those for girls.

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 2000/01 the teacher-pupil ratio was 23.7. In 2006/07, the net enrolment ratio for primary education (grades 1 to 6) was estimated at 89.7%, and the proportion of grade 1 pupils reaching grade 6 was 98.4% (UNESCO, 2008). In 2005/06, the gross enrolment ratio in grades 7-9 was estimated at 96.7% (99.8% for boys and 93.5% for girls), and the net enrolment ratio at 74.8% (73.9% for boys and 75.6% for girls). (MOE, 2008).

According to the Ministry of National Economy, in 2009/10 there were 802 basic education schools (of which 430 co-educational) and 238 general education schools (of which 56 co-educational) in the government sector. The total enrolment in basic education schools (grades 1-10) was 331,262 students; as regards general education schools (grades 1-12), the total enrolment was 200,131 students, of whom 28,628 in grades 1-6, 48,382 in grades 7-9 and 123,121 students in grades 10-12. There were 30,856 teachers (including 2,884 expatriate teachers) in basic education schools (of whom 21,206 were female teachers) and 5,685 administrative staff. In general education schools there were 13,650 teachers (including 1,935 expatriate teachers; the number of female teachers was 6,595), of whom 1,108 in grades 1-6, 2,560 in grades 7-9 and 9,982 teachers in grades 10-12. There were three special education schools with 214 teachers and 643 students enrolled; some 542 students were enrolled in 71 special education classes in 65 regular education schools. In the same year, there were 342 private schools with a total enrolment of 56,204 students, of whom 24,432 children at the kindergarten level, 30,070 students in grades 1-10 and 1,702 students in grades 10-12. There were 4,489 teachers (including 2,509 expatriate teachers) in private schools and 1,087 administrative staff. Finally, there were 33 foreign community schools in the Sultanate, with a total enrolment of 41,113 students (including kindergarten) and 1,620 teachers. (MONE, 2010).

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.

As mentioned, under the new system the ten-year basic education programme is followed by two years of secondary, post-basic education (grades 11 and 12). In addition to build upon and complete the achievement of the objectives for grades 1-10, the main objectives of post-basic education are the following:

- promoting loyalty to the homeland and to His Majesty Sultan Glorious;
- consolidating the feeling of belonging to the community and the Gulf Arab and Islamic world;
- reaffirming the faith in the principles of the Islamic religion, creed and the consolidation of spiritual values in the minds of learners;
- developing pride in Arabic and expansion in education, arts mastery, with the adequate skills in a language of international communication;
- developing awareness of global trends in all aspects of the utilization of the experiences of others in the light of Islamic values;
- developing intellectual and cognitive skills, and the ability to solve problems, and employing science in practical life, and the related decision-making;
- developing positive attitudes towards productive work all types, levels and volunteer work, saving and maintaining the property;
- using active learning skills for self and continuous learning and the search for knowledge;
- developing the ability to interact with others peacefully, and social participation based on an enlightened awareness of the rights and social obligations and the spirit of high responsibility;
- raising awareness of health, population, and environmental issues, the formation of positive attitudes towards the environment, and the capacity of recognizing the artistic and aesthetic value.

The tables below show the weekly lesson timetables for the secondary level (the traditional programme and the draft new post-basic programme).

General secondary education: weekly lesson timetable

Subject	Number of weekly periods in each form				
	I	II		III	
		Arts	Science	Arts	Science
Islamic studies	4	4	4	4	4
Arabic language	7	9	5	9	5
English language	5	6	6	6	6
Mathematics	5	2	7	2	7
Chemistry	2	–	3	–	3
Physics	2	–	4	–	4
Biology	2	–	3	–	3
General science	–	2	–	2	–
History	2	3	–	3	–
Geography	2	4	–	4	–
Civics	1	–	–	–	–
Economics	–	2	–	2	–
Physical education	1	1	1	1	1
Fine arts	1	1	1	1	1
Home science (for girls)	1	1	1	1	1
Total weekly periods	35	35	35	35	35

Source: Information provided by the Gulf Arab States Educational Research Center (GASERC), November 2004. Each teaching period lasts 45 minutes.

New general secondary education programme: weekly lesson timetable (draft)

Subject	Number of weekly periods in each grade			
	XI		XII	
	Arts	Science	Arts	Science
Islamic education	4	4	4	4
Arabic language	10	6	10	6
English language	7	7	7	7
Mathematics	3	8	3	8
Sciences	2	12	2	12
Social studies	9	–	9	–
Physical education	1	1	1	1
Economics/administrative sciences	2	–	2	–
Art education	1	1	1	1
Environmental life skills	1	1	1	1
Total weekly periods	40	40	40	40

Source: Ministry of Education, 2001. Each teaching period lasts 40 minutes.

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 tests and two at the end of the semester.

In 1995/96, the average number of students per class was 31 and the average teacher-student ratio was 1:16. In 2000/01, the teacher-student ratio was 17.6:1. In 2005/06, the gross enrolment ratio for grades 10 to 12 was estimated at 83.7%, and the net enrolment ratio at 62.9% (62.4% for boys and 63.6% for girls). (MOE, 2008).



According to the Ministry of National Economy, in 2009/10 in the government sector the total enrolment in grades 10-12 of general education schools was 123,121 students. There were 9,982 teachers (including 1,431 expatriate teachers) in grades 10-12 of government general education schools. In 342 private schools, out of a total enrolment of 56,204 students (including 24,243 children at the kindergarten level) 1,702 students were enrolled in grades 10-12. (MONE, 2010).

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 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 4, 6, 9 and 10. In grades 4, 6 and 9 achievement levels were tested in Arabic, mathematics, science and life skills, while in grade 10 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 6.

Another study has been carried out in 2003/04 at the level of the first cycle of basic education (grade 4 pupils). Tests were administered in Arabic, English, mathematics and science to some 7,700 grade 4 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. Concerning the Year 8 mathematics test, the Oman score (372) was significantly low; as regards the Year 8 science test, the Oman score (423) also was below the average.

In addition to international testing the Ministry of Education adopted national tests in four main subjects: Arabic, English, mathematics and science. The implementation started in the academic year 2006/07 and targets students in grades 4, 7, and 10. (MOE, 2006 and 2008).

Teaching staff

The social status of the teacher in Oman is very good and distinguished. Teachers enjoy the respect of parents and students. 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 decided that, beginning in the year 1996/97, only university graduates will be recruited to work as teachers in all levels. Therefore, all intermediate teacher training colleges were replaced by colleges of education. These colleges train teachers for four years and offer academic and educational courses.

Since 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 the Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) programme 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:

- 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, namely: 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. The Ministry consults with educational supervisors to follow-up the teachers during their first two years of work. The Ministry also gives supervisors 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; and 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 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 organized 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-centered techniques by focusing their lessons in order to get their students to think, reflect and solve problems.

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For updated links, consult the Web page of the International Bureau of Education of UNESCO: <http://www.ibe.unesco.org/links.htm>